

Elise Boulding *speaks*

In her remarkable and creative life, Elise Marie Biorn-Hansen Boulding (1920-) has played many significant roles—as a daughter, the wife of the eminent economist Kenneth Boulding, the mother of five children, and the grandmother of ten. In addition, she has been a prominent Quaker, engaged in many of the creative aspects of that faith. Moreover, she has been a research worker, writer, speaker, and a leader locally, nationally, and internationally in such movements as women's rights, conflict resolution and peace, development, and futurism.

Born in Oslo, Norway, she came to the United States as a child, with her parents. After attending public schools in Hillside and Maplewood, New Jersey, she obtained her A.B. degree from Douglas College in English, her M.A. from Iowa State in sociology, and her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in sociology.

Elise Boulding has travelled widely and lived in Jamaica and Japan.

Among her many publications are pamphlets on *The Family As a Way Into the Future*, *The Personhood of Children*, *Children and Solitude*, *Born Remembering*, *The Joy That Is Set Before Us*, *My Part in the Quaker Adventure*, and *Women: The Fifth World*. Her books include *The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time*, and *Children's Rights and the Wheel of Life*.

In recent years she has been a professor of sociology at the University of Colorado and member of its Institute of Behavioral Science, and chairperson of the sociology department at Dartmouth College.

The following quotations reveal some of her insights and interpretations as she speaks:

ON THE FAMILY AS A WAY INTO THE FUTURE...

"The family is an ancient social invention that provides support for the individuation process...."

"As a futurist I have long been convinced that families are the primary agents of social change in any society. It is in this setting that individuals first become aware that the passage of time means growth and change, that tomorrow is never like yesterday. It is in this setting that one's first daydreams about a different future take place. I have come to find the phrase 'the Tao of family' meaningful because it reflects the special nature of the family as directioned movement. Tao means the way and the Tao of family is the Way of family into the future. In this view the family is not a barrier between us and a better society, but a path to that better society."

"What makes the household a family is that each member will care about each other member and be available in time of need with no expiration date on that availability. This includes a commitment to sharing the experience of facing death, something we do not talk enough about as a family commitment. In the case of divorced or remarried combinations, the concept of continued availability to past spouses and children now living in other families to meet the crises of life and death, still holds in principle. While the bitterness surrounding divorce sometimes makes this impossible, in fact most divorced persons do continue to be helpful to one another. Single-person households can also be included under the rubric 'family,' particularly if the individual makes home a center for a network of nonresident friends and relatives and defines these relationships in terms of long-run commitment."

"We expect parents to nurture children, but forget that children also nurture parents."

ON ENRICHED FAMILY LIVING...

"There are some very real obstacles to the achievement of a harmonious home which can be a training ground in love and reconciliation for all its members. Some of these obstacles lie outside ourselves in the mind of the society in which we live; others lie within ourselves...."

"It makes me sad when I hear discussions about not introducing children to 'God' until they are old enough to understand. I grew into the Lord's prayer and I am still growing into it. All religious language, devotional books, and particularly the Bible, provide growing room for young minds and spirits. Because they have sometimes been used as straightjackets by adults who did not understand, does not mean that they *are* straightjackets."

"Every home which is built on love and understanding works out certain ways of coming to decisions and in dealing with apparently conflicting desires on the part of different family members."

"Since non-conformity does bring with it real burdens, particularly to young children, who are least able to bear them, it is important...to consider prayerfully (one's) testimonies and make sure that they are always testifying to essentials."

"For the great majority of people the geographical community is the community of identification. For non-conformists it often is not. The community to which the nonconformist looks for support is a community of like-minded people who may be scattered all over the earth....The important thing is that everyone needs the feeling of belonging to a community of like-minded people."

ON SOLITUDE AND CREATIVITY...

"It is possible to drown children and adults in a constant flow of stimuli, forcing them to spend so much energy responding to the outside world that inward life and the creative imagination which flowers from it becomes stunted or atrophied."

"There have to be large chunks of uninterrupted time available for creative activity. We are accustomed to the demand for solitude as a foible of the creative artist or an ascetic craving of the saint, but we have not realized what an indispensable condition it is for all mental and spiritual development. It is in these chunks of time that the great interior machinery of the brain has the opportunity to work (both at the conscious and unconscious levels) with all the impressions from the outside world."

"Each of us has our own recollections of solitary childhood joy, hidden away deep in our minds for safekeeping."

"These, then, are the fruits of solitude for children: A sense of who and what they are, whence they came, their place in God's world. And out of this positive and secure relationship with the universe comes the freedom to 'play' with creation in the best sense of that word. The things which they see and hear can tumble around inside their finely-tuned minds, interweaving with their inward store of knowledge to produce further creation."

"... our children must have solitude in order to do the kind of inward growing which we cannot plan for them."

"It is an odd thing to say, but solitude can be shared. In a family where inward solitude is prized, individuals may skip easily into and out of each other's solitude."

ON MY PART IN THE QUAKER ADVENTURE* ...

"The heart of (George) Fox's message, that 'God has come to teach His people by His Spirit,' has come to be known as the doctrine of the Inward Light. This Inward Light is God speaking to the heart of each of us; and if we look into our hearts to see what the Light shows us, we shall find what God's will for us is"

"The equality of the women with the men was established among them (the early Quakers) before women were given equal rights before the law The testimony on equality also led Friends to oppose slavery long before most people were aware of its evils The testimony of community was an expression of the Quaker belief that the whole world was part of God's family."

"The testimony of simplicity was a result of the effort not only to speak but to *live* the truth."

"The meeting for worship revealed to the group what God's will was, and the meeting for business helped the group to plan how to do God's will."

"Building for peace is a job in which every man, woman, and child everywhere should want to help Quakers, because of their historic peace testimony, have a special responsibility to continue to work for peace It is a job for everyone, even very small children. We can build for peace at home, in school, and in our play. All our daily actions count and help to make the kind of world we live in. Are you helping to build for peace?"

"Try to rediscover the meaning of the term 'God's family' in your own family circle."

* From a book for teen-age Quakers.

ON SOME HUMAN RIGHTS...

"No country...embodies in its laws the range of rights established in principle by the United Nations Declaration. The Declaration represents the aspirations of the world community for a baseline of freedom, justice, and welfare of human beings."

"Every human being who lives long enough experiences two minority statuses—the first of being a child, and the second of being old. Each has its own socially assigned limitations of opportunity. These limitations may be mitigated by membership in a favored gender, race, ethnic group or class, but they do not disappear."

"As the world moves toward population equilibrium with declining resources, an aging society will need the fuller participation and wisdom of its elders, as well as the awareness, inventiveness, and energy of its young."

"The prolongation of childhood and dependency that the extension of school years has brought about in industrialized countries has led to a gradual forgetting on the part of adults about the roles that children and youth have always played in social change."

"Society has few expectations of this age group (youth), and therefore they generally have few expectations of themselves."

"The right to remain in the labor force as long as an individual desires is an important human right now generally acknowledged."

"The need for retirement clinics set up to serve the elderly...is great"

"If the 'adopt-a-grandparent' movement is any indication, we can also expect new associations which join the young and the old."

ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE WORLD...

"We (of the Western World) have created a myth called the 'Evolution of Mankind.' ... One of the many strange things about this myth is that it does not include women. The history of humankind has been written as if it were the history of Western man."

"The elimination of most of the human race from the historical record shrinks our human identity. We don't know fully who we are. We know even less about what we might become."

"Perhaps the timid fifties were not so timid after all. The women turned full-time homemakers were breeding a set of revolutionaries who powered the anti-war movement, the civil rights movement, the black liberation movement, and ... in the very late sixties the women's liberation movement."

"... the sufferings and perils of humanity in our time cannot be relieved unless the predicament of the female half of the human race is perceived and understood far better than has been the case up to the present. As that awareness and understanding increase, not one half but both halves of the people of the world cannot fail to benefit."

"Women's movements in the twentieth century encompass the entire range of human experience. It is almost beyond us to grasp their richness and complexity, but it is crucial that we try."

"If there really is a fifth world, a global community of women sharing each other's concerns, then to bring that community to life and make it function for the common good is going to require immense new efforts of understanding and action—especially on the part of the more privileged women of the first world."

ON OUR WORLD FAMILY OR PEACEABLE GARDEN...

"There are lots of data, many sets of numbers about human beings...but the words 'world family' carry a great deal of meaning in themselves. Another metaphor that is very important to us is that of the world as a peaceable garden or the peaceable kingdom.... The fact that every civilization has that kind of vision, I find enormously comforting. I think there is something about the way we think and dream as human beings that keeps generating the peaceable garden vision."

ON NURTURING THE PROCESSES OF PEACE...

"Nurturing the processes of peace takes more than an intention to redistribute....it takes the skills of arbitration, mediation, and conflict resolution in the context of the practice of community, of neighboring. We must develop these skills. Another very important skill that we haven't given enough attention to in the Christian community is what I can best call prophetic listening."

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Pendle Hill Publications for quotations taken from BORN REMEMBERING, CHILDREN AND SOLITUDE, and THE FAMILY AS A WAY INTO THE FUTURE, to the Religious Education Committee of Friends General Conference for material from MY PART IN THE QUAKER ADVENTURE, to Transaction Books for quotations from CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND THE WHEEL OF LIFE, and to Westview Press for material from THE UNDERSIDE OF HISTORY: A VIEW OF WOMEN THROUGH TIME.

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