

## **Elise Boulding: An Integrated Life for Peace**

April 28, 2014

Bridget Moix

CONF 900

### **A Dip into the Boulding Archives**

I met Carew Boulding at the University of Colorado archives on a beautiful day spring day in Boulder after a morning hike with my kids beneath the Flat Irons. When she arrived I was in the library entryway caught on a lengthy phone call with a State Department colleague, who was also a good friend from our “women peacemakers” group in graduate school. She wanted advice on our work with the US government’s new interagency Atrocities Prevention Board before a meeting that was about to take place back in Washington. I was struggling to focus on bureaucratic government politics hundreds of miles away that were suppose to be improving the US’s ability to help prevent mass violence against civilians, while watching the sun glint off the mountains above campus.

“Hey!” we signaled to each other s we both broke into smiles, excited about our joint project that lay ahead.

“Sorry, I’m late,” she said, “my daughter has been sick and its been a crazy day, got caught up in a faculty meeting.”

“No worries,” I replied, “let me finish this call and I’ll be right down.”

Carew and I would spend the next few hours together in our first foray into the hundreds of boxes of papers, stories, images, and recordings that make up the Kenneth and Elise Boulding special archives at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Carew, political science faculty for seven years now at the same university

where her grandparents spent years helping build the field of peace studies, had never explored the archives despite generous invitations from the staff to do so. She needed to get her own academic feet on the ground first. With the publishing of her book on the role of NGOs and political protest in Latin America just completed, the timing seemed right. My spiritual path, career, and academic pursuits had been deeply shaped by Elise and Kenneth, and felt “way opening”, as Quakers say, when Carew and I met during an all-women 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for a mutual friend the previous fall in the Colorado mountains, connected instantly on multiple levels, and struck up conversation about the archives and what they might hold for each of us. We’d been plotting the joint exploration into the hundreds of boxes of Boulding files for months, performing our own individual, yet similar, intensive juggling acts of motherhood, academia, spouse, career, friends, community, and spiritual searching that many women now embrace as day-to-day life.

We weren’t disappointed. We only had time to dip our toes into Elise’s files, drawn to her life and story because Carew was closest to her, particularly after her own mother died when she was twelve, and I was intrigued to try to understand how she did everything she did in her life, and seemed to do it with such constant joy and vision. But even a dip into Elise’s waters was like a swim in a cool mountain lake – invigorating yet stilling. She was as amazing a person – peacemaker, scholar, activist, mother, spouse, Quaker – as I had come to believe she was. And she was also just a person, with struggles and mishaps and hopes not realized, just like us.

## **A Pioneer of Integration**

Elise Boulding carried through her life with such steady joy and such lasting impact because of who she was as a person, but also because of how remarkably she integrated all aspects of her life. She was an integrator before integration was cool. Her theory, research, and practice were not only a continuum of learning, inquiry, and experience, they were also intentionally connected with her spiritual life as a Quaker, her struggles and insights as a mother and grandmother, and her lifelong partnership with Kenneth. She made these connections at a time when women were still struggling to be fully accepted in academic and policy circles and when issues of family, children, and peace were often not considered serious pursuits. Looking back at her pioneering research on women's history, family and children, peace and visioning for the future, one imagines she must have faced considerable sniggering and raised eyebrows as she presented to sociologists and political scientists, as well as foreign policy elites, in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. But in fact, she broke through. Elise Boulding's contributions to women's studies, peace studies, and family sociology have become well recognized even beyond these fields today, and were in fact well-received by her contemporaries. She served as editor and contributed articles to a slew of academic journals, acted as president of the International Peace Research Association, traveled extensively to participate in international academic and activist conferences, was the only woman invited to be part of the founding committee of the US Institute of Peace, and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990. Through all this time, she was also birthing and raising five children, supporting her husband's own extensive academic career,

playing an active leadership role in her local Quaker meeting, including teaching First Day School (Sunday school) for years running, and serving on the boards of multiple non-governmental organizations in her community and at the national level.

In addition, she became a central node for a growing global network and movement of peace scholars, practitioners, and activists. Before the age of computers, Elise carefully kept files of all the individuals whom she met or knew of in countries around the world who were working on aspects of peace. Her archives hold extensive files labeled Mexico, South Africa, Venezuela, Cuba, Soviet Union, Japan, etc, with pencil-written or typed lists of names and contact information. Letters from people around the world to her request any information she might have of people working in country X on issues of peace so that connections could be made. Old carbon copies of her typed letters accompany the files, revealing her simple and encouraging replies that helped weave together a new global network. It is no wonder that Elise's theoretical work focused so much on the role of civil society networks and development of peace. She was often at the center of international networks advocating for nuclear disarmament, working to bring more civil society voices into the UN, or building new conflict resolution and peace studies programs in universities around the world.

Elise's work I was most interested in exploring in this first look into the archives was her theoretical and practical contributions to visioning, or in her words "imaging", for peace. This work began with her translation of Norwegian scholar Fred Polak's book on imaging the future in 1956. Elise's family had

immigrated to the US from Norway when she was young, but she had to relearn Norwegian in order to translate Polak's lengthy, academic work. (Letters exchanged with the publisher speak of the need to shorten it for an American audience which is "not inclined toward lengthy academic writing.") She and Ken spent "a wonderful time" with Polak at a lake house, and over time they helped develop a small but committed network of academics and practitioners working around the concepts of "futures" and "imaging", which focused on how people need to vision, or imagine, the future in order to be able to create it. For building peace, that capacity to imagine – or image – a different future than the present reality is critical for breaking out of cycles and systems of violence and establishing new and positive relationships and realities. Elise developed and conducted workshops around "Imaging a World Without Weapons" for years as a means for applying this concept to her work with the peace movement in the United States and internationally. In the workshops, participants would collectively create an image – literally in picture and word form – of the world they wanted to create in 20 years, and then move step by step backward in time to the present day planning what steps might be taken at 5 year intervals to reach that new future.

Elise's work on imaging peace is highly relevant to my own interests in understanding how some people within situations of violence are able to act for peace as an intentional choice. My hunch, call it a hypothesis if you like, is that the capacity to imagine a different future is part of what can motivate and sustain people in choosing peace. That image of another reality – unrealized but possible – provides the critical element of hope amid suffering and despair. Finding practical

steps to take toward that reality provides the method by which that hope can be put into practice and sustained. And it is that *integration* of vision, hope, and practical action that I believe is the work of peace.

### **What Exists Is Possible**

Elise and Kenneth liked to say that “what exists is possible.” Peace exists. People choosing peace, every day, all around the world, amid violence, suffering, and despair – exists. And so it is always a possibility waiting to be realized, waiting to be uncovered. Integration for me is the work of that uncovering, in our own lives and in the process of relating to and working with others. Can I be a Quaker peace scholar, practitioner, mother, advocate, activist, spouse? Elise’s life exists as an example that it is possible. Will it be simple? Will I do it all well? Surely not. But approaching it as an integrated process of becoming who I may already be somehow, rather than a list of things to be and do and achieve, may help.

Visiting with Carew and her family over dinner after our archives exploration, she shared with me the most inspiring and comforting example of integration from Elise and Kenneth’s life among all the papers we’d examined. A collection, bound with a simple plastic cover over a hand drawn title page, of Elise and Ken’s annual Christmas letters to their friends and family from 1942-1985. Reading them provides a remarkable history of these remarkable people, in a simple yet remarkably integrated narrative. Their many significant travels, the birth and growth of their children, their academic and activist achievements (and failures), their spiritual life with their Quaker meeting, the loss of loved ones, their retreats

and time taken away from the rush of their life to restore themselves and dive back in again. All told as letters to the hundreds of friends and family, the many many lives they touched and shaped in small and big ways, spread over the globe, over four decades of significant world events in matters of war and peace. Seeing history – and their story – through these stories grounded in family, friends, and their deep personal commitments to peace as a spiritual calling and professional pursuit offered a glimpse into how peace agency and structures of time and place interact. It also felt like an honor and gift to be invited by Carew into the story of her family, as a family, and her relationship with Elise – a part of the experience I felt myself wanting to somehow protect and honor outside of the harsh light of an academic examination.

### **A New Path in the Journey**

In true Quaker fashion, Elise sought to live each day fully in the Light and with integrity to all the callings that she felt in her life. She didn't always succeed, but she did not shy from the effort, and she did not compartmentalize who she was or what she did into neat boxes, switching hats from mother to professional to academic to person of faith as we tend to be trained to do, and I so often feel myself doing. To me, Elise Boulding led a life of integration. As I mark another step in my own journey of being a mother, Quaker, peace scholar, and policy advocate, I am inspired by her witness and encouraged by her legacy. I look forward to more refreshing dips into the Boulding archives with Carew (an annual exploration we have committed to), and to visioning where the future might lead.

The Image of the Future

by Fred Polak

Translated and Abridged

by Elise Boulding



## Image Before Action

by Elise Boulding

It was at a WILPF Summer Institute on disarmament in Denmark back in the 1960s that I first realized that none of us, neither the experts who were our speakers nor we WILPFers, really had a clear picture of what kind of world a disarmed world would be, how it would function, what institutions would keep it viable over time. I knew from my work in translating Fred Polak's *Image of the Future* from Dutch into English that it was a society's image of the future which acted as the key dynamic to guide its behavior toward that future. Without an image of a possible, positive future, societies tend to drift. World War II left Europe in despair, and the old positive images from the nineteenth century were gone.

Could we begin visualizing positive futures again? In fact, how could we go on working for a disarmed future if we didn't really believe that such a world would come about? We all are empowered in our personal lives when we have positive images of possible futures for ourselves, our families, the communities we work in. Could we not redevelop this capacity—that oldest of all human capacities, to dream of a different and better future—for our society and our world again?

The opportunity to act on those intuitions came in 1980 when I was able to persuade Warren Ziegler to apply the workshop format he had developed to help communities envision futures in which their most pressing problems

*Elise Boulding, scholar and activist in the fields of international peace research and futures studies, was international WILPF president from 1968-71. She is the author of The Underside of History: A View of Women Through Time, and other works.*



were solved, to envisioning a world without weapons. Since then, the 'Imaging a World Without Weapons Project' has become a small but significant part of the international peace movement. It has also been able to conduct workshops for diplomats, soldiers, scholars and policymakers, all of whom have difficulty in picturing a disarmed world.

Since no one can work seriously for an outcome that seems inherently impossible, the unimaginability of a world secured by other social arrangements than those of military establishments has stood in the way of serious political moves toward arms reduction, let alone disarmament. Fear of nuclear holocaust, the primary motivator of arms control efforts to date, is a poor stimulus for creative problem solving because fear rigidifies search behavior. Hope, on the other hand, provides an excellent stimulus for problem solving, and extends the capacity for search behavior. What is achieved by the activity of imaging futures in which one's wishes for society have been realized, is to provide hope to people.

The workshops can be done in a mini-version of three hours, or a full-length version of two and a half days. They draw on a combination of fantasy and analysis, first fantasizing what the wished-for world might be like, then constructing the institutions that could maintain that world. The

workshops involve seven steps: the goal statement (set aside ordinary notions of the possible to write a statement about what you would like to see 30 years from now); childhood memories; moving into the future (spend 20 minutes in the future, in a weaponless world); clarification (explain your imagery to others); consequence mapping and world construction (what kind of world is it? what institutions function? how is conflict managed?); futures history (starting in the future and working back in 5-year periods, how did the new world come about?); and action planning in the present.

What do people see when they step into the future? A more localist world, where problems of scale, size and complexity are handled differently than in the present. Computer networking keeps local communities connected. It is a world without age and gender segregation, a 'clean green' world which gives much attention to sharing of resources and management of conflicts. People look happier, are more relaxed. These themes are common, although the specifics of the future vary as much as the individuals engaged in imaging.

The contribution these workshops can make is not to create blueprints for disarmament, but to make vivid the possibility that people can actually live under different and more peaceful social arrangements, to stimulate more analytic thinking about the kinds of institutions we need in the future, and to tap a wider range of ideas about how to work in the present to bring such institutions about.

*A number of WILPF members have been in imaging workshops, and they always add a special element of creativity to the imaging work of the groups they are in. The WILPF National Board has also experienced a mini-version of the workshop. If local WILPF branches are interested in using this tool in their local work, I will be glad to hear from them. Elise Boulding, 624 Pearl St., #206, Boulder, CO 80302.*



## IMAGING A WORLD WITHOUT WEAPONS



"Only when we can in some sense visualize a world without weapons can we find the path to it... What happens as the result of this kind of work is that we perceive connections that we normally do not see. We develop images of strategies we have never thought of."

Elise Boulding

