

**Pages for All Ages:**

# A Safe Place on Earth

by Mary Klein

## Some words and phrases to know before you read

- |                                   |                        |                             |                    |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| • Norway                          | • Nazi                 | • pacifist                  | • PhD              |
| • World War One,<br>World War Two | • invaded,<br>invasion | • economist,<br>sociologist | • field [academic] |
| • religion                        | • captured             | • research                  | • Congress         |
| • war broke out                   | • turning point        | • conflict                  | • candidates       |
|                                   |                        |                             | • talent           |

Elise Boulding was born in Norway in 1920, a year and a half after the end of World War One. Elise's parents were Birgit and Joseph Biörn-Hansen. Even though Norway didn't fight in World War One, other European countries all around Norway did fight, and it became hard to live there. When Elise was three years old, her parents moved with her to the United States. They wanted a better life for their children, even though they were sad to leave Norway. While Elise was growing up, she got the idea that if she ever wanted to live someplace really peaceful and wonderful, she would move back to Norway.

Elise's parents taught her to be a good person. Sometimes, her father read Bible stories to Elise and her sisters. Their mother told stories about marching in peace parades back in Norway. But Elise wanted more than stories. She started going to church when she was nine, even though her parents didn't go. She felt strongly that she wanted to know god. However, by the time she was a teenager, Elise began to think that no church could help her. She thought she might need to start her own religion.

After high school, Elise went to the New Jersey College for Women. At the start of her senior year in college, war broke out in Europe again. This was World War Two. Elise graduated from college with



a degree in English in May of 1940. Then something awful happened. In June of 1940, the Nazi army invaded Norway and captured it.

This moment was a turning point for Elise. All the rest of her life, she would say again and again, "The invasion of Norway was when I realized that there was



no safe place on earth. This made me see I had found my life's mission." She saw that if she wanted some "safe places" to exist on earth, she would have to work for them.

Elise became a pacifist and started attending Quaker meeting. In May of 1941, she met Kenneth Boulding, who was already a well-known Quaker and a respected economist and poet. Later that year, Elise and Kenneth married, and they stayed married for more than fifty years.



For the first eighteen years of the marriage, Elise raised five children and called herself a "homemaker." She also became an important peace activist. She joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and started publishing a peace newsletter.

The Boulding family lived in many different cities while the children were growing up. This was because Kenneth Boulding was invited to teach and research in many different universities. In 1963, when the family was living in Japan, Elise saw that her children were getting bigger and were needing her less. "I had some time, so I decided to find out how things work," she said. She began studying the different ways that families live in different places, and how they handle conflict.

When the Boulding family moved back to the U.S., and the children were all grown up, Elise went back to school and earned a PhD in Sociology from the University of Michigan. She studied the ways that women have been treated by men throughout human history, how women have usually been treated unfairly, and how women are especially good at peace-making. She put all her studies into a book, *The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time*, which was published in 1976. This was one of the very first books in the brand-new field of "Women's Studies." Boulding was at the start of another brand-new

field as well, "Peace and Conflict Studies." Before Boulding's work, very few people thought that it was possible to do serious research on women or peace or conflict. Elise Boulding studied these subjects for the rest of her life. She published eleven books and over 300 shorter works about her studies.

Boulding didn't just study. She also went out and tried to make the world better. She even ran for Congress once, during the Vietnam War, so she could make the other candidates talk about how wrong the war was.

For Boulding, "peace" wasn't something quiet and boring. She thought that "peace" was something exciting and creative. She understood that people will always want different things and that people will always have conflicts. Because of these conflicts,



Boulding believed that everyone needs to learn "peaceableness." This is a talent for thinking up new ideas and actions to make everyone in a conflict feel as happy as possible. Boulding's last book, *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side*

*of History*, talks about the many ways that people make peace in everyday life all over the world.

Elise Boulding died in 2010 at the age of 89, after devoting her life to trying to make the world into a place where children can feel safe. ❀

- Think of a time when you got some bad news. How did that news make the world seem different?
- When you want to learn something new, or think up a new idea, how do you do it?
- How could more people learn to be peace-makers?

*Photo on page 20 of an anonymous family fleeing Norway in 1940 is from the National Archives of Norway; photo of Elise Boulding, circa 1990, is from the International Peace Research institute; Elise Boulding campaign button is from 1966. All images are in the public domain.*

