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Works of Elise Boulding Book Review

Neil H. Katz, Ph.D.

Four Volume Set from Springer Publishers, 2017, edited by J. Russell Boulding. Volumes are numbered sequentially from Volumes 6-9 as they are included in a Springer series on *Pioneers in Arts, Humanities, Science, Engineering, Practice.*

Vol. 6: Elise Boulding: A Pioneer in Peace Research, Peacemaking, Feminism, Future Studies and the Family

Vol. 7: Elise Boulding: Writings on Peace Research, Peacemaking and the Future

Vol. 8: Elise Boulding: Writings on Feminism, the Family, and Quakerism

Vol. 9: Elise Boulding: Autobiographical Writings and Selections from Unpublished Journals and Letters

I first met Elise Boulding when I attended my initial conference of the Consortium on Peace Research, Education, and Development (COPRED) in the early 1970's. In this conference, attended by several hundred peace researchers, educators, and peace activists, one of the highlights was the keynote address by Kenneth Boulding, who was already an accomplished economist and peace researcher widely recognized by attendees as a superstar of the young field. When I met Elise, she was introduced as Ken Boulding's wife. At the time, I was too new to the field and too naïve to know that she merited an introduction much more substantial than "the wife of Kenneth Boulding." In fact, she was already contributing significantly to the field and, in ensuing years, would play a critical role in the legitimization and expansion of peace research, education, and action, and an influential role in my professional career as well as the careers of so many others. As her son and editor, J. Russell Boulding noted, among her many talents she had exceptional skills as a "networker and facilitator to bring out the best in people" (Volume 9, p. x), and seemed to have "planted seeds every microsecond" (Volume 9, p. xiv), many of which have sprouted to contribute to efforts to a more peaceful and better world.

What a wonderful gift Elise and Kenneth's eldest son, J. Russell, has given us by compiling in four (4) beautiful volumes much of what this extraordinary woman contributed to the field of peace and conflict studies. The range of material presented in the four (4) volumes

attests to the breadth and depth of Elise's interests, and captures at least some of her bountiful spirit and optimism. Within the four (4) books are moving tributes by leading researchers and peacemakers who worked closely with her, lists of her numerous awards and accolades, references of her 373 publications—including 23 books and edited volumes—sonnets to her and to the peace movement by husband Kenneth, autobiographical writings and selections from unpublished journals and personal letters, numerous photographs of Elise and her robust family (5 children, 16 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren!!) and some of her colleagues and activities, and finally, many selections of what are considered some of her most influential publications on peace research, peacemaking, future studies, feminism, sociology of the family, and Quakerism. Even if interested peace researchers, educators, and activists only have a chance to read chosen selections from each of the volumes, I feel confident they will be in awe of the vastness and richness of her interests and contributions, and they will recognize why the title of the first volume identifies her as a “Pioneer” in the many areas in which she works. She was very worthy of her 1990 nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Though I read and gained many insights from selected pieces from her many publications on internationalism, security, disarmament, violence, nonviolence and other traditional themes in peace and conflict studies, much of my attention was focused on her writings on non-traditional subjects. For instance, one selection addresses “Islamic Contributions to Peace Dialogue Among Faiths” (Volume 7), while another describes “Imagining a Nonviolent World” for inmates at Norfolk Prison (Volume 7), while yet another addresses “the Challenge of Non-conformity: Reweaving the Web of Family Life for Gays and Lesbians” (Volume 8). Another unusual entry describes a workshop on “World Security and the Future from a Jr. High School Perspective” and contains many profound thoughts and feelings about peace and justice issues from seventh grade students (Volume 7).

Two other sets of writings particularly caught my attention. One set described Elise's critical role in the launching and development of many important peace research and peacemaking organizations, such as being one of the founders and chair of The Consortium of Peace Research, Education and Development (COPRED), serving many years as editor of the Newsletter and later as Secretary General of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), working as a board member of the National Peace Academy (later to become the United States Institute of Peace (USIP)), functioning as the international chair of the Women's

International league for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), serving as a member of the Council of the United Nations University, and operating as lead person of several committees of the Peace/Conflict section of the American Sociological Association. In addition, she performed on numerous editorial boards of the leading journals in the field and was awarded Lifetime Achievement Awards from several of the organizations in which she was active.

The other set of writings that were most significant and impactful for me revealed her life from her own unpublished journals and letters, as well as poignant observations from her son and editor, J. Russell. We learn about her challenges in managing the “tug of war” between a strong desire to retreat internally to her quest for a deeply spiritual life, and the magnetic pull that drove her to heavy involvement in more external activist pursuits to enhance causes of peace and justice. Her spiritual life, founded on Quaker values, infused heart, faith, and compassion into all her activities. Alternatively, the drive for activism can be somewhat traced to a defining moment when Norway was invaded by the Nazi’s, and, as a young college student Elise realized “There can be no place to hide. If I want a safe world, I am going to have to help make it so. God can’t do it for me” (Volume 9, p. 27). And through her son we learn some very intimate details of her periodic battles with physical and mental exhaustion (even moved to depression at times), yet her over-riding faith in the goodness of people, ability to envision a better future, grounding in the tenets of Quakerism, and modesty of always going back to the “family as a model of a small society and maker of the future” (Volume 8). Indeed, it seems the uniqueness and the gifts brought forth by this remarkable woman were her extraordinary marriage of the personal and the global, summarized by her devotion to the rights of children and the family as agents of social change, and her belief that “reweaving the web of relationships is our main business in life” (Volume 8, p. 121).

My hope is that young scholars, in particular, will read parts of this exceptional effort by J. Russell Boulding and Springer Publishers. Although Peace and Conflict Studies is widely accepted and now popular in academia and scholarship, it wasn’t always the case as recently as 50 years ago. Extraordinary pioneers like Elise Boulding paved the way, with brilliant, unique, and courageous contributions. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to take advantage of her propensity to “plant seeds every microsecond” and allow them to continue to take hold and grow in the legacy she left us.

Reference

Boulding, J. R. (Ed.). (2017). *Pioneers in Arts, Humanities, Science, Engineering, Practice* (Vols. 6-9). New York, NY: Springer International Publishing.