

Chapter 2

Milestones (1995)

This article appeared in Friendly Woman when Elise was 75 years old, several years after Kenneth's died in 1993. It describes 8 major milestones in her life. The only other published autobiographical piece that she wrote was "Reflections on Activism in One's Eighties", written when she was 81 (PAHSEP 06: Chapter 8).¹

There are so many markers on life's journey. Which to choose? Here is what comes to mind today:

1939: I am 19, a senior in college, and Norway has just been invaded, shattering my safe world. As a child I was terrified by war stories from World War I, and always comforted myself that should there be another war I would somehow get back to Norway (a country we left when I was three), because this would be a safe place. Working through pain and disbelief, I finally confront the old childhood fantasy and realize it must be rejected. 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.

1947: Finally, a pregnancy, after six years of frustrated trying. My whole identity depended on not only being Kenneth Boulding's wife, but the mother of his (our) children. Six years of being an incomplete woman. And now, the difference! I joyfully sweep into motherhood. Now, the big question: how do we raise our children to be peacemakers? Eager debates in our Ann Arbor circle of Quaker women, great plans, a continuous hum of family activity, and a deep spiritual centering, fed by daily family worship. This is what God wants for me.²

1955: Carrying Number 5, poignantly aware that this will be the last, cherishing even the heaviness. As the childbearing years come to an end, I find another role already evolving even before William is out of the womb: I am translating the

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²Elise has compressed a few years into this entry. I was born, June, 1947 when Kenneth taught at Iowa State University in Ames. The move to Ann Arbor took place in 1949.

Council of Europe Award-winning two-volume book, *The Image of the Future*, from the Dutch. We are sharing a house with its author and his wife, and I am so captivated by Fred Polak's idea that humans have always shaped their future by how they think about it that I draw on my knowledge of Norwegian and German to learn Dutch and plunge into what is to be a two-year task, and a life-changing one. Why life-changing? Up until now I have been organizer, arranger, home and community nurturer, but the big thoughts come from Kenneth. Now I am wrestling with big thoughts, learning how humans over the long historical sweep have defined themselves and the human journey. The big discovery: I am an intellectual too! God wants me to use my mind!

1961: I am volunteer seminar-organizer and note-taker at the Center for Conflict Resolution founded by Kenneth at the University of Michigan. Just as the intellectual work of peace research opens up for me, I am also, as a WILPF activist, swept up in the Women's Strike for Peace this year, as thousands of women demonstrate for an end to nuclear testing. The old networker in me is busy—I edit a newsletter for Women's Strike for Peace at the same time that I am starting a professional newsletter for the international peace research community and nurturing the Ann Arbor Meeting First Day School. The children, praises be, are all great peaceniks! And how we love to travel as a family! Is all this too much? I feel led, every step of the way.

1967: The previous six years have been quite a journey, including a year in Japan when it becomes clear to me that I should go back to school to get more knowledge and skill for peacemaking. Kenneth and all five children help "put me through," and here I am beginning university teaching in our new home in Boulder, Colorado. Organizing skills are very much needed on the college campus and so much to do—I help start women's studies, peace studies and future studies, and as the nest begins to empty, the house fills with students.

1974: I have outrun my guide. I am burned out, empty. The youngest is off to college. Spiritual unease is spreading through my mind and heart. I negotiate with a puzzled but supportive Kenneth to take a year's sabbatical—a year of solitude, in a hermitage I've had built behind our family cabin in the foothills of the Rockies. Wonderful solitude! I strip myself of everything, and God is there, to fill the empty heart, and heal the fuse-blown mind.

1985: The spiritual centering has held steady through the last phase of my teaching life, seven deeply satisfying years at Dartmouth College, with "modern" commuting arrangement with Kenneth, who chooses to remain in Boulder. Now I am 65 and repatterning to a quieter rhythm with Kenneth back in Colorado. Time for writing, for taking on new tasks as I feel called (like being Secretary General of the International Peace Research Association I helped found 25 years ago). Time for the hermitage. Time for being with Kenneth, reflecting, arguing, partnering in wonderful

ways. Time for our growing extended family, five happily married children, five wonderful grandchildren. Deep centering and yet, somehow, also high energy.

1993: One is never ready. We receive the warning that Kenneth's prostate cancer, earlier operated on, is now slowly going out of control. We have nine precious months together, knowing it is our special time. He is very weak, but writing beautiful sonnets almost to the very end. Now we are ready, and he must go, after the gentle joy of holding our sixteenth just-born grandchild in his frail arms. Then blackness. An empty hole. And then, wonder of wonders, Kenneth is with me! He is with me now as I write these words. I know that I am what is left of us, and God is helping me carry on. A slower, quieter rhythm, but there is still a path ahead.



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