

Introductory Comments: Elisabeth Mann Borgese Lecture 2008

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Dr. Elisabeth Mann Borgese was a key architect of the critically important Law of the Sea. She developed a pioneering international conference series on "Peace in the Oceans" that has been running for almost 40 years. And of course, she was the Founder and chief advocate of the International Ocean Institute.

Long before the words "sustainable development" became popular, Elisabeth understood deeply the need to balance our use of the ocean and its conservation. Elisabeth cared deeply about oceans, but also about people, whether the poor in developing countries or the fishers trying to make a living near her home in Sambro, just outside of Halifax. Elisabeth loved and cared about the world's ocean. But she also loved skiing, and she loved dogs, and she loved people. She was a humanist. We don't seem to use that word much anymore, but it still has real meaning – someone who devotes their life to bettering humanity.

Some items in the life of Elisabeth are often noted. She was the daughter of author and Nobel Laureate, Thomas Mann. She was born in Germany, and lived in Switzerland, Italy and the United States before settling in Canada. She married in 1939, moved to Chicago, and worked there on a World Constitution. She moved to Italy in 1952, and eventually back to the U.S. in 1964, to work at the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions – on topics of human rights and disarmament.

That was, in a sense, her pre-ocean life. Then her life shifted. In 1967, Ambassador Arvid Pardo of Malta made what has become a famous proposal: that the oceans be considered the common heritage of mankind. That same year, Elisabeth had a vision [and I quote]:

"The oceans are a great laboratory for the making of a new world order, based on new forms of international co-operation and organization, on a new economic theory, on a new philosophy."

What a perfect match of these two thinkers! With support from Pardo, Elisabeth took the lead in organizing the first Peace in the Oceans conference, exploring questions of ocean development and governance. The theme resonated, and the conference became a series that continues ever since.

That success led Elisabeth to establish the International Ocean Institute – the very organization that is hosting this event tonight. Elisabeth recognized that the level of knowledge needed to deal with oceans meant that developing countries would be at a big disadvantage. She got the idea of running training programs, including a particular course on how to manage a nation's exclusive economic zone. Some in this audience are taking that course now, right here in Halifax. Elisabeth was heavily involved in the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III), and is seen very much as an architect of the Law of the Sea.

In 1979 she moved to Canada, coming here to Dalhousie University. Elisabeth continued – right through into her eighties – with a wide range of ocean projects.

Elisabeth died on February 7th, 2002, at age 83, while on a skiing trip in the mountains of Switzerland - a place, and an activity, she loved. It seemed so fitting.

Elisabeth was nominated for the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize. The nomination read:

“she has been called the Mother of the Oceans... and has been instrumental in encouraging world leaders to rethink our relationship with the oceans and our management of marine resources.”

What a life she had!

Now if you'll bear with me, I'm going to take a few moments for a brief personal story that links Elisabeth and tonight's speaker. First, you may have noticed that one of the sponsors of tonight's event is the Ocean Management Research Network. Back in the year 2000, Michael Butler and myself and others across Canada set out to build a network that connects all those researching or policymaking on Canada's oceans. We formed the Ocean Management Research Network, the OMRN, a network which has grown over the years to a cross-country membership of over 700.

The OMRN supports Canadians trying to use our ocean sustainably and trying to understand how to govern the ocean. Let me note here that you too can join the OMRN. There's no cost. Just go to the website www.omrn-rrgo.ca anytime.

Now I mention the OMRN partly because that is one of my tasks here, but also because back in the year 2000, when we were developing that network, it turns out that Elisabeth Mann Borgese was serving as a nominator for an international

oceans award called the Pew Fellowship in Marine Conservation. Her task was to propose individuals for that award, and I am always grateful to her that – for whatever reason – she put my name forward. I was lucky enough to receive the award, and that gave me the chance to meet other fellowship holders around the world. And that, finally, is the connection with tonight’s speaker, because one of those Pew Fellows is Elliott Norse.

For his entire career, Elliott Norse has connected conservation science and public policy. He has worked at the US Environmental Protection Agency, the President’s Council on Environmental Quality, the Ecological Society of America, The Wilderness Society and The Ocean Conservancy, before founding the Marine Conservation Biology Institute in 1996. Elliott is now President of MCBI, an international science and conservation advocacy organization that deals with a wide range of marine issues, such as ocean zoning, marine reserves, and destructive fishing methods – all toward the protection and sustainable use of the sea. Elisabeth would be proud.

Elliott’s expertise is wide ranging – from marine conservation biology to fisheries and the damage of bottom trawling, from ecosystem protection to climate change, from the connections of religion and environment, to the connections of forests and the sea. He is an Adjunct Professor of Marine Conservation Science and Policy at Duke University, and a recipient of the Nancy Foster Award for Habitat Conservation from the US government.

Elliott believes in drawing on scientific evidence to improve the state of the world. He has over 140 publications to his credit. That includes the books “Global Marine Biological Diversity: A Strategy for Building Conservation into Decision Making” (1993) and “Marine Conservation Biology: The Science of

Maintaining the Sea's Biodiversity" (2005). He has recently published a paper "Resolving Mismatches in U.S. Ocean Governance" with a whole range of co-authors, in the prestigious journal Science. He has also written on 'marine environmental ethics' and co-authored, with our own Ratana Chuenpagdee, a major report called "Shifting gears: Assessing collateral impacts of fishing methods in US waters".

Elliott has endless energy. He will pump you up with enthusiasm and keep you there. He is a wonderful human, on at least 2 fronts. First, of course, he is doing great work, helping the planet in a profound way. Second, and just as important or more so, is his humanity.

Sure, he's a global player on the environmental front, but Elliott is truly down to earth. He gives his time freely and while he himself is a well known individual, he freely gives credit to others who contribute to the cause. As but one example, I've often heard him on various international stages, giving credit to Nova Scotia's own Ecology Action Centre for the truly world-changing work at the EAC on deep sea coral conservation, ocean habitat protection, and other issues.

It's an honour to be able to interact regularly with this wonderful human. Please join me in welcoming this year's Elisabeth Mann Borgese lecturer, Dr. Elliott Norse...