

ELIZABETH EGBERT: A REMINISCENCE

By Anne Alexander Marshall

First of all, thank you for the honor of saying a few words about Elizabeth – a beloved friend who enriched my life in many ways.

She led a life of discovery, imagination, creativity and intellectual rigor in every aspect – as an artist, as a wife and mother, as a leader of cultural institutions. Being around her was just plain fun and always interesting whether we were talking about art, politics, or the various dramas of our lives. She combined perfectly the artistic and scientific perspectives. She was always looking at the world as a creative artist yet also always interpreting events and phenomena around her with a scientific, analytic approach – a characteristic she inherited from her father Robert Egbert.

In all her professional activities over the years, she was one of the most brilliant strategic thinkers I have ever known – with a tremendous practical business sense but always focusing on the heart of the matter: the mission to educate and to bring new understanding to her public audiences. She was herself a natural and brilliant teacher as well as a distinguished artist. All these characteristics are why she was the perfect person to head the Staten Island Museum with its combined mission of art, science and history. She was the perfect person to work with her board to create AND execute a twenty-first century vision for the Museum. And she was always in tune with the wider implications of that mission for Snug Harbor, for Staten Island and the entire City. Her impact will be felt for years to come.

As we grew professionally over the years, in ways we never anticipated as young women, we looked to each other for counsel as we worked through complex issues we were managing at our various nonprofit institutions.

We met in 1966 in Florence, Italy just as we were turning 21 and we were studying Art History. She was at Mount Holyoke and I was at Vassar. Our course in Florence and a trip following that to Greece and then to Paris were powerful experiences. After studying the great monuments, paintings, and sculpture in school, it was overwhelming to see them in reality – and especially to see the quality of light -- the golden glow in Italy and the stark elemental landscape of Greece which helped us understand the art that had emerged there.

It was a summer of discovery about the world and about ourselves. It was full of pratfalls and adventures for young women on their first trip abroad, adventures too numerous to tell here. Just one example was that our ship from Athens to Mykonos was listing so much we could not get on it and had to find alternatives. Another was our unexpectedly finding her sister Louise walking down a side street in Paris.

The strong bond of that summer grew into sharing an apartment in Greenwich Village after college .and then a lifelong friendship, wherever we were -- including our many times in Deer Isle, Maine, overlooking Stonington Harbor with its brisk sea air, hundreds of islands, lobster boats, and haunting foghorns. Elizabeth was always rejuvenated in Maine, and she and Carl

have actively supported the local visual and performing arts. The way they converted an old church in Stonington into a warm house is just another example of her clarity of vision for any project she undertook.

The backdrop to her life after she married Carl was always the beautiful music in their house and the Michaelsons' wonderful hospitality to their friends and family as Charlie and Ingrid grew up.

Another vital backdrop to her life was her sisterhood: Elizabeth is one of 4 formidable Egbert sisters – Elizabeth, Louise, Diane and Peggy, an extraordinary group of strong women. As you probably know, when you marry one of such a group of sisters, you really marry all 4. Carl, himself an only child, has brilliantly managed all these profound relationships! Along with Ingrid and Charlie, they all made an incredible team supporting Elizabeth in the last year with a web of love and care even as she continued to lead the museum forward while battling her illness.

She was so proud of Ingrid and Charlie and their accomplishments – Ingrid's music career and Charlie's math teaching career – each reflecting important sides of Elizabeth – artistic and scientific. She was also proud of them as citizens and people who care about their community and of their spouses Greg and Lauren.

Several people have commented on what a light Elizabeth was in her community. Indeed, she was. She is a great example to all of us, and I urge all of us to honor her by taking that light she brought to us and making it part of our own lives – first to help complete her vision for the Staten Island Museum and then to energize all of us in our own work and lives.