

Remarks on the occasion of Richard Erdoe's ninetieth birthday celebration
"To a Life Richly Lived, a Letter of Thanks"
July 7, 2002

My Dear Richard,

It has been more than a decade since we were first introduced and it is easy to suspect our invisible energies have overlapped in unimaginable ways. In honor of this most auspicious occasion I have unpacked, sorted through, and with a careful eye chosen a gift for you from a group of pottery collected by my father. This particular piece ("bowl in the form of a feline head") is from the southern coast of Peru, and is dated somewhere between 250 BC and AD 123. Its mischievous face, particularly the eyes, looked up at me in a most expressive way and told me your home is her home.

In researching my father's thoughts on the ancients of South America, and their art, I found and excerpted the following from a preface he wrote in 1983 for a catalogue on the art of the Andes:

We must note the baneful influence of some who throughout history have loudly proclaimed the virtues of their "civilization." Spain, at one of the peaks of its history, not only engaged in the Inquisition of people on its own soil but also deployed its power in sending forth explorers to other continents. Then, in one of the worst examples of imperial exploitative savagery, an "advanced" European nation brought down the indigenous ancient civilizations of Peru and Mexico. There is a lesson to be learned from both the submissiveness of the victims and the brutality of their conquerors . . . the Inca who, despite their political and social

organizational skills, became the victims of just 168 soldiers, several score horses, and four cannon. The incredible military achievement of the conquerors was matched only by their gross cupidity—the thoughtless greed . . . and the brutality with which, in the name of faith, they destroyed the culture of other peoples seven to eight thousand miles from their own country. . . .

For the preservation of Homo sapiens . . . at a time when the accumulated nuclear arsenals deriving from the most brilliant minds of science and technology can destroy the world, when the responsibility for the ultimate decision of a nuclear Armageddon devolves upon the decision not of 168 men but on far fewer, we need more than ever to build links of understanding and mutual interest between peoples of different civilizations. All, in our mutual interest, must seek to reach a goal which can best be fulfilled through the building of the most important bridges between civilized men and women of culture, of all cultures—the arts, the sciences, and the humanities.

I share this with you, dear Richard, because you have locked horns with those 168 or fewer men and have challenged them, dedicating your life's energy and your brilliance to building bridges between cultures, between peoples, to benefit all men and all women. For this, and much more, I kiss you with deep gratitude.

Wishing you a very happy ninetieth birthday, I am your friend forever,

Elizabeth