



Praise for Don and Eloise Bosch

by S. Peter Dance

On the 11th day of April, 1942, with World War II in full swing, something happened in the USA that would ultimately lead to a development significant in the history of conchology in Eastern Arabia. On that



Eloise Bosch is clearly delighted to receive a fine example of the Eloise, the beautiful seashell named after her, from two lads at Marsirah, W. Masirah. Author photo, 24 November 1991.

day Donald Takoe Bosch, then aged 25, and Eloise Boynton, two years his junior, became man and wife. For each of them it was truly a partnership made in heaven, for they were both committed Christians, prepared to devote their working lives to helping others less fortunate than themselves. Shortly after their marriage Don played a distinguished part in the war effort, exercising his skills as a newly trained doctor in Europe. Eloise, meanwhile, was showing signs of becoming an inspirational teacher. The seed of their life together had been planted in the lush soil of the USA, but it would blossom and flourish in the dry and barren soil of a foreign land.

They were both members of the Reformed Church in America, a Protestant denomination with a long history of providing services throughout the world. Its department designated 'World Ministries' places professionals where they are most needed. Don and Eloise had the necessary kind of skills and the desire to go where they could best employ those skills. The destination chosen for them was The Sultanate of Oman. After a

long training period, during which they became fluent in Arabic, they set sail for Muscat. Together with their very young family, daughter Bonnie and two sons, Paul and David, they reached Muscat harbour in January 1955. They knew they would be denied many of the amenities they had enjoyed in the USA. In particular it would be virtually impossible to escape from the searing heat, day or night, without air conditioning. They knew also that the ways of the predominantly Moslem people they had come to serve were not their ways. These two devout Christians would have to learn to adjust. That they did so superbly is made clear in the 63-page book they co-authored about their working life in Oman (*The Doctor and the Teacher*, Apex Publishing, Muscat, 2000).

Fortunately for them and for us they discovered an enjoyable way to fill their limited spare time: shell collecting. The countryside around them may have been barren, but the nearby beaches and offshore waters abounded in treasures waiting to be discovered. With the occasional help of native Omanis, they soon amassed a sizeable collection of seashells. What had begun as a distraction from their arduous duties soon became a passion and they extended their collecting to other parts of Oman, including Masirah, the small island south of Muscat. Don was in a shell collector's paradise, but it was some time before he made contact with experts who could help identify his specimens.

He received some early help with identifications from, among others, Bill Old of the American Museum of



The magnificent Bosch residence by the sea at Haramel, near Muscat. There are not only interesting seashells here, but insects, too. The author netted many tiny shore flies by the steps leading down to the shore. Among them were at least five new species! Author photo, November 1991.



At Marsis, W. Masirah, Eloise and Don Bosch, left, and the author, right, pose with the bearded figure of Mubarak, a fisherman from Masirah who regularly brought interesting seashells to Don, including many examples of The Eloise. Photo by Una Dance, 24 November 1991.

Natural History in New York. He also contacted Robert Tucker Abbott, then and for many years after widely acknowledged as a leading authority on marine molluscs. That contact resulted in the description of a new species, *Cymatium (Ranularia) boschi* Abbott & Lewis, 1970. This was the first of a series of species that would carry the name of the family or one of its members. Regrettably, the name of the second to be described, *Conus boschi* Clover, 1972, is no longer in use because the species had been described, almost a century earlier (as *Conus melvilli* G. B. Sowerby, 1879). In 1973 Tucker Abbott described a third species and named it after Eloise. Small but strikingly beautiful, *Acteon eloiseae* (now often called *Punctacteon eloiseae*) is found only along a small part of the western coast of Masirah. Having achieved iconic status among collectors because of its beauty and increasing rarity, the seashell that came to be known as The Eloise deserves the attention it receives in the supplementary part of this article.

Don, who had officially retired from the medical profession before The Eloise was described, now hoped to realise another ambition: authorship. With a large shell collection at his disposal and in collaboration with Eloise, he wrote his first book. Published in 1982, *Seashells of Oman*, edited by the late Kathie Smythe and with a Foreword by Tucker Abbott, was a valuable addition to conchological literature. Dividing their time between their residences in Oman and their native land, Don and Eloise could meet collectors and dealers in the USA and elsewhere, usually at shell club meetings or COA conventions. They soon became and remained celebrities in the shell world.

I may have first met them at a COA convention in the 1980s, but I got to know them really well in the UK and, during a meeting in London in 1988, Don told me he wanted to write a larger, more comprehensive book that would supersede *Seashells of Oman*. Furthermore, he asked me if I would help him create it. I said I would be happy to do so. Thus began an enterprise that would eventually involve four authors and a band of supporters and benefactors. One of

the two specialists Don invited to collaborate with us was Dr Graham Oliver, curator of molluscs at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff. He would be responsible for the bivalve section of the book. The other was Dr Robert Moolenbeek, curator of molluscs at the Zoological Museum of the University of Amsterdam. He would take responsibility for most of the gastropods, including virtually all of the micromolluscs. Don, of course, was the prime mover and the principal fundraiser. I was to act as editor. This was the beginning of what became a six-year project. The four of us and the entire Bosch family breathed a collective sigh of relief and were delighted when *Seashells of Eastern Arabia* was brought out by Motivate Publishing of Dubai in 1995.

I have happy memories of my time in the company of Don and Eloise. They enjoyed travelling around the UK and sampling some of its recreational and cultural delights with my wife Una and me. I saw them at various conchological venues in the USA and they were gracious hosts when I visited them in their home at Lake Wylie in South Carolina. Most vivid, however, are my memories of the times my colleagues and I spent with them shelling in various locations around the coasts of Oman and neighbouring parts of the UAE. The several trips to Masirah never failed to bring moments of joy, especially when we picked up seashells that could be new to science. Memorable, too, was an expedition in 1995, after the book was published, to the Kuria Muria Islands, the group now known as Juzor Al Halaaniyaat. For this we were granted the use of a landing craft owned by the Royal Navy of Oman. We were privileged to set foot on these tiny islands for the sole purpose of investigating their molluscan fauna. Memorable too, were moments exploring rock pools a stone's throw from the palatial residence at Haramel, near Muscat, that Sultan Qaboos bin Said had given to Don and Eloise to enjoy for their lifetime – and what a long



Don Bosch, right, R. Tucker Abbott, left, and the author, chatting during a break at the COA convention held at Melbourne, Florida, in 1990.

lifetime it would prove to be!

My life has been so enriched by my friendship with this remarkable couple that it is not easy for me to convey the extent of their warmth, kindness and humanity. They and members of their extended family deserve to be remembered, if only because of the impressive list of molluscs bearing their names, but I am happy to say there is now a Bosch Award. Instituted by The North Carolina Shell Club, it shall be

awarded annually for an outstanding contribution to conchology. On 14 October 2017, at a banquet organised by that club during its Shell Show held in Wilmington, NC, Jeanette Tysor and Ed Shuller became joint winners of the first Bosch Award, given for their exhibit entitled 'Malacologists important in describing North Carolina mollusks'. They received an attractive trophy, incorporating an image of The Eloise. On this occasion, too, a student from the University of North Carolina, Madison Lytle, received the first Bosch Scholarship Award, given to help her continue her studies on the theme of 'How to use oysters to clean up the water ways'.

I had been invited to contribute something about Don and Eloise that, with other contributions, would be circulated among those attending the banquet. My contribution included a copy of my poem 'The Eloise' which had been published in 2009. Eloise was on my mind when I wrote it, so I was pleased she could read it. She died in 2016, aged 97, having outlived Don, who had died in 2012, aged 95. Together they left the Sultanate of Oman a better place than they found it and together they added a new chapter to conchological history. Married for 70 years and as united in death as they were in life, Don and Eloise Bosch have bequeathed an enduring legacy. For me and I suspect for many others it is a legacy symbolised appropriately by a rare and beautiful seashell.

The following poem was read out by Jean Newell, and copies distributed at the Shell Show Banquet. It is one of a dozen poems about seashells I wrote and illustrated under the title *Seashells on my Mind* (published in 2009 by Shell Island Resources, Algona, Iowa):

THE ELOISE

The Eloise is seldom inclined
to put on its unique display
of colour and pattern combined
before the end of the day.

Then ghostly Arab dhows I see
circling around and around
and their billowing sails decree
they shall soon be outward bound.

Sometimes it plays strange tricks on me
watching it in evening light
but it will always guarantee
moments of deepest delight.



Jeanette Tysor and Ed Shuller in front of the First Bosch Award and their winning exhibit, at a North Carolina Shell Club meeting, Wilmington, 14 October 2017.

