



## Elizabeth May Biography (in detail)

### Childhood

Elizabeth May was born in 1954 to a British father and American mother in Connecticut. She is the older of two children, with a younger brother, Geoffrey.

She was raised in the same house for 18 years, until a summer vacation took the family to Nova Scotia. It was love at first sight. The May family decided to move to Nova Scotia permanently.

### Moving to Nova Scotia (1973)

Her father, John May, left his position of Assistant Vice President to Aetna Life and Casualty and invested over a quarter of a million dollars (no government loans involved!) into a restaurant and gift shop at Margaree Harbour on the Cabot Trail. The restaurant, on board an old Bluenose fishing schooner ("The Marion Elizabeth," named after the wife and daughter of the first captain) had been closed for a number of years by the provincial health department. The Mays built a complete sewage treatment plant to fix the restaurant's problems, plus massive renovations of the gift shop, so that the tourism complex could be re-opened and provide a major boost to employment in the Margaree area. From 1974 until 2002, when the restaurant and gift shop were expropriated to make room for a new bridge across the Margaree River, the May's business was a real landmark on the Cabot Trail.



Her mother, a pianist and sculptor, Stephanie May passed away in 2003. John May, Geoffrey and his wife Rebecca-Lynne MacDonald May still live in Margaree Harbour. They are very active in the promotion of the Gaelic language and preservation of Gaelic culture (see [www.ceilidhculture.com](http://www.ceilidhculture.com)).

Elizabeth was unable to finish undergraduate studies due to initial difficult years financially in the restaurant business. She was very involved in running the family business and worked as both waitress and cook for nearly a decade.

## Early environmental work (1975-1979)

It was in the fall of 1975 that Elizabeth joined in the local effort to stop the proposed aerial insecticide spraying by aircraft of the forests of Eastern Nova Scotia. The chemical being proposed at the time (fenitrothion) has since been banned.

Fortunately, after many years of steady volunteer work (1975-1979), the group known as "Cape Breton Landowners Against the Spray" was successful and the forests were never sprayed. Elizabeth wrote her first book about that campaign (Budworm Battles, published by Four East Publications, Tantallon, N.S. 1981).

As soon as she had sufficient residency, in 1978 Elizabeth was very proud to be granted Canadian citizenship.



## First political campaign (1980)

In the federal election campaign of 1980, Elizabeth started a new political party. It was called "the small party" and she organized candidates in six provinces to run as independents to raise critical issues of environment and energy. The name the "small party" worked on two levels: it was clearly a very small party, and it drew its inspiration from British economist E.F. Schumacher and the book Small is Beautiful. When Elizabeth ran against the then-Deputy Prime Minister Allan J. MacEachern, she certainly didn't expect to win! The riding, Cape Breton Highlands Canso stretched from Western Cape Breton to Antigonish County. The long term future of the small party was not what she imagined. Some of those who worked in the 1980 campaign went on to form The Green Party from the early seeds of the small party.

## Law School and practicing law (1980-1985)

Right after the 1980 federal election, Elizabeth learned it was possible to apply to law school without an undergraduate degree if you met certain other criteria. She had always wanted to be a lawyer, so she applied to Dalhousie University School of Law and was accepted, starting in September 1980. An old family friend, then the Governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton wrote her letter of recommendation.

While at law school, she worked in a successful campaign to prevent uranium mining in Nova Scotia, volunteered as the lawyer for anti-nuclear groups in the National Energy Board hearings on exports of nuclear generated electricity from Point Lepreau, as well as leading one of Canada's major court challenges to toxic contamination. In that historic case, the Nova Scotia government approved permits to spray Agent Orange to kill hardwood trees. Once again, Elizabeth worked at the grassroots level with dozens of other volunteers to stop the planned spray programmes. The so-called "Herbicide Case" (1982-1984) in which seventeen plaintiffs obtained a temporary injunction to prevent the spraying of forests with Agent Orange (the 50-50 mixture of 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T) in Antigonish, Inverness and Victoria Counties was a difficult and stressful time. In the end,

the temporary injunction held off spraying for two years until the chemicals could be removed from use by U.S. regulatory decisions. This effort prevented eastern Nova Scotia from being the last place in North America legally sprayed with Agent Orange.

She graduated from Dalhousie Law School in 1983, was admitted to the bar in Nova Scotia in 1984 and practiced with the firm of Kitz, Matheson, Green and MacIsaac in Halifax.

In 1985, she moved to Ottawa to accept the position of Associate General Counsel to the Public Interest Advocacy Centre. In Ottawa she worked towards admission to the Law Society of Upper Canada (admitted to that bar in 1989), while appearing before the Federal Court (trial and appeal divisions), as well as the CRTC and other regulatory tribunals.

## Working in Government (1986-1988)

In the summer of 1986, then Minister of Environment, the Hon. Tom McMillan, asked her to join his staff as Senior Policy Advisor. She held that position until 1988. In those two years, Elizabeth May played a role in the creation of five new national parks, developing and implementing legislation (Canadian Environmental Protection Act and launch the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act), obtaining the first approval of funds for the clean up of the Sydney Tar Ponds, negotiating the Montreal Protocol to protect the Ozone Layer, securing agreements to reduce acid rain, organizing the first global scientific conference on climate change, among hundreds of other issues, successes and some failures. Her second book, *Paradise Won: The Struggle to Save South Moresby* (McClelland and Stewart, 1990) tells the story of the successful effort to create a national park on the Queen Charlotte Islands.



Sadly, in June 1988, the minister agreed to illegally grant permits to the Saskatchewan government to build the Rafferty and Alameda dams. It was part of a larger convoluted political trade-off, involving getting Saskatchewan to translate its statutes into French and complete the Grasslands National Park. On discovering the deal, Elizabeth resigned on principle. Subsequently, the Federal Court, in a court challenge brought by Canadian Wildlife Federation, ruled the permits had violated federal law.

## Sierra Club of Canada

In 1989, Elizabeth became the first national staff person for the Sierra Club of Canada and served as its Executive Director until 2006. While at Sierra Club of Canada, Elizabeth oversaw the growth from two chapters across Canada to five with a national youth arm, Sierra Youth Coalition. She participated in numerous victories from coast to coast to coast. In 2003, Elizabeth took a leave in order to protest the ongoing contamination of the neighbourhoods around the Sydney Tar Ponds. She took the serious step of going on a hunger strike, sitting in front of Parliament Hill every day for seventeen days, demanding the relocation of families at risk. The

hunger strike ended when Health Minister Alan Rock pledged to move people away from toxic contamination. The promise was not honoured. Elizabeth continues to work toward the safe clean up of the tar ponds and the relocation of contaminated neighbourhoods. While at Sierra Club of Canada, Elizabeth wrote four more books: *At the Cutting Edge: The Crisis in Canada's Forests* (Key Porter, 1998), *Frederick Street: Life and Death on Canada's Love Canal* (Harper Collins, 2000, co-authored with Maude Barlow), a substantially expanded and updated second edition of *At the Cutting Edge: The Crisis in Canada's Forests* (Key Porter, 2005), and *How to save the world in your spare time* (Key Porter, 2006). She is currently working with co-author Zoe Caron on a book in the official "for Dummies" series: *Global Warming for Dummies*.

## Working with fishermen

From 2000-2006, Elizabeth worked closely with the Save our Seas and Shores Coalition, including with Area 19 Crab fishermen, the multi-species license holders on the Southern Gulf and the Maritime Fishermens Union, to oppose the loss of fisheries to allow oil and gas development in near shore areas.

## Teaching

When Dalhousie University created a permanent chair in her name, as a result of an anonymous donation to the university of over one million dollars, the university asked Elizabeth to be the first chair holder. From 1999-2000, she was an associate professor at Dalhousie University in the Faculty of Health Professions, teaching courses on "women's health and the environment" at both the under-graduate and graduate levels. She is a frequent lecturer at law schools and environmental faculties across Canada, and in spring 2006 cotaught a course at the master's level at the School for Policy Studies at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario.

## Family and faith

Elizabeth has one daughter, Victoria Cate May Burton, born in July 1991. As well, she remains close to her three older stepchildren from Victoria Cate's dad, their spouses, and loves spending time with her six step-grandchildren! Although she is a single mother, Elizabeth has worked hard to keep all the family links intact.

She is active in the Anglican church, works through the church in Lesotho to help children orphaned by AIDS, and volunteers for a number of community groups. Elizabeth calls both St. George's in New Glasgow and St. Bartholomew's in New Edinburgh her home parishes. Elizabeth has been a student of theology on a part-time basis since 2003 at St. Paul University. Elizabeth and Victoria Cate divide their time between Ottawa, where Elizabeth works as Leader of the federal Green Party and on Parliament Hill, and New Glasgow, where she owns a home within walking distance of the Central Nova Green Party Office. She has received numerous honours and awards, listed below, but nothing comes close to the honour of becoming an Officer of the Order of Canada.



## Green Party Leadership

In the spring of 2006, concerned with the threat to core Canadian values of the newly elected minority government of Stephen Harper, Elizabeth May resigned her position to run for leader of the Green Party. She was elected at the party's August 2006 convention with 66% of the vote. In the fall of 2006, she followed a Parliamentary tradition and ran at her first opportunity in the London North Centre by-election. She came in second, ahead of the Conservatives and the New Democrats, with 26% of the vote. It was the best result for the Green Party in its history. Despite the attraction of running again in London, it is not home.



Elizabeth made her decision on March 18, 2007, announcing her intention to run in Central Nova, to provide a strong voice for Nova Scotia as the only federal leader representing an Atlantic Canadian riding. The next day, Minister Flaherty brought in a budget that broke a contractual commitment to Nova Scotians under the Atlantic Accord. Elizabeth feels confident that as your Member of Parliament she can put things right in Ottawa. Even a few Green seats in a minority government can make a world of difference. (Just look at what the courage of one MP, such as Bill Casey, can do!)

## Honours and Awards

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| <b>Spring 2007</b>    | Honourary doctorate from Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick.  |
| <b>Spring 2006</b>    | Chair at Dalhousie University in the Department of Science, "Elizabeth May Chair in Sustainability and Environment" created, shifting the previous Chair in women's health. |
| <b>November 2005</b>  | Appointment as an Officer of the Order of Canada  |
| <b>April 2004</b>     | Creation of "Elizabeth May Award for Citizenship" granted annually to a graduate of Dalhousie University School of Law  |
| <b>May 2003</b>       | Award of Honourary Doctor of Humane Letters, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick  |
| <b>September 2002</b> | Recipient of the 2002 Sierra Club's International Earthcare Award.  |
| <b>September 2002</b> | "Best Activist Award," Coast Magazine, Best of Halifax Readers' Poll  |
| <b>May 2002</b>       | Recipient of the 2002 Harkin Award from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) for her lifetime achievement in promoting the protection of Canada's wilderness.  |

# VOTE FOR TOMORROW.



**May 2000**

Award of Honourary Doctor of Humane Letters, Mount St. Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

**October 1998**

Recipient of the Evan Burger Donaldson Achievement Award, in recognition of exemplary service to others from Miss Porters School, Farmington, Connecticut.

**September 1998**

Honoured with creation of permanent chair, "Elizabeth May Chair in Women's Health and the Environment," since renamed the "Elizabeth May Chair in Sustainable Development," Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S.

**May 1994**

Appointment by Order in Council to the National Round Table on Environment and Economy, serving as Vice-Chair (1994-2001)

**1993**

Commemorative Medal for the 125th Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada, in recognition of significant contribution to compatriots, community and to Canada.

**June 1990**

Recipient of the United Nations Environment Programme, Global 500 Role of Honour for Environmental Achievement

**1989**

"Eco-Hero" from "Harrowsmith" magazine

**1989**

Award for Outstanding Achievement from the Sierra Club of Western Canada

**1985**

International Conservation Award from Friends of Nature

**1979**

Sunshine Award from the Ecology Action Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia

