



Claudio Elia
1943–1996

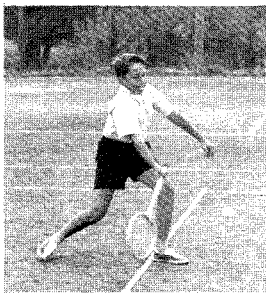
Memorialized by the
Claudio Elia Memorial Fund in
The New York Community Trust
909 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022



*Claudio in 1944
with his parents,
Ennio and Bianca.*

He was a natural choice to accompany Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown and 11 other business leaders on a mission to rebuild war-torn Bosnia and Croatia. As he boarded the U.S. Air Force plane in Tuzla, Bosnia, he was looking forward, with an enthusiasm for facing difficult challenges, to another stop on a trip that would enhance his international business connections. But this was one opportunity Claudio Elia never got to face.

He was born during World War II on January 27, 1943, in the northern Italian town of Varese. After the war ended, the Elias moved back to Milan where Claudio attended a state elementary school until age 11, when he was enrolled in a Jesuit liceo known for its high academic standards. Claudio chose the “classico” curriculum, which emphasized mastery of



Claudio in the 1950s.

French, English, Latin, and classical Greek, in addition to math, science, and history. Upon graduation in 1961, Claudio Elia was one of 12 students to receive the Gillette

Award, presented to Milan's top scholars. He was accepted at the Politecnico di Milano, Italy's most prestigious technical university, despite his classical, rather than scientific, liceo program. Nonetheless, Claudio graduated at the top of his class with a Dottore Ingegnere degree in electrical engineering in 1966.

Following a mandatory one-year stint in Italy's military service as a lieutenant in the Air Force, Claudio had to decide what direction his life should take. Although trained as an engineer, he was more interested in pursuing a business career. He soon found a post in Brussels as a trainee for the INA Insurance Company. Claudio quickly mastered his job and used his excess energy to take flying lessons and earn a pilot's license.

The next year, in 1969, he decided to pursue an MBA at INSEAD in Fontainebleau, France—one of the best business schools in the world. The entrance exam was difficult and the school required competency in French, English, and German, the last a language in which Claudio had very little training. After a brief summer course in Berlin, he learned enough not only to pass the language test, but to make Germanic puns.

One of a handful of Italians in the program, Claudio was intrigued by INSEAD's diverse international faculty and student body of Britons, Swedes, Germans, French, Austrians, Colombians, Dutch, and Americans. Here his ability to transcend language and cultural barriers

led to lifelong friendships that spanned continents. Here, too, his highly developed sense of humor was honed with bits of language and cultural references.

With an INSEAD diploma and stellar academic credentials, Claudio was able to secure a coveted position with Boston Consulting Group's Milan office. An American firm specializing in business strategies, BCG had just started to develop an international presence and



Fontainebleau, 1968.

Claudio was one of several young consultants who were trained to work on international projects and with multinational firms. He appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the American style of business and management.

The following year, in 1972, Claudio was invited by BCG's Boston Director to come to the United States. "I'd have come over with the Pilgrims," Claudio was later fond of saying, "but I missed the boat." He quickly became involved in projects for some of America's largest multinational corporations. Determined to fit into his new surroundings, Claudio purchased a used Mustang convertible and worked stolidly on perfecting his idiomatic English and developing his wit in a way understandable to Americans.

In addition to serving as the site of his first job in the United States, Boston held a special place in Claudio's heart for another reason. It was where he met, at a BCG party, a graduate student in art history who had studied for two years in Florence, Italy. Her name was Susan and, after a brief romantic courtship, they married in August 1972.

Claudio accepted a position with General Electric in 1973, necessitating a move to Fairfield County, Connecticut. After searching high and low for just the right house that was affordable, the Elias bought an 1820 farmhouse. Claudio was ecstatic about owning his own home in the States. "I own grass!" he exclaimed repeatedly the first night he and his wife sat on their very own lawn.

In 1974, Claudio and Susan became the parents of a girl, Christine Elisabetta. A striking image of her father, Chris adored him, and the two were extremely close. "My father was always supportive of me, no matter what I did," Chris says. "He would write me notes saying how proud he was of me, even for the littlest things." Two years later, Claudio's son Marc William Ennio was born. Their relationship was also extremely close.

While Susan was raising two young children, Claudio was using his engineering and business background, fluency in languages, and international experience in a variety of positions at General Electric. Then, in 1982, he left GE to become vice president with IFINT-

USA, the U.S. holding company of the Agnelli Group, based in Torino, Italy. A year later, he was appointed president of IFINT's Incom International, a multidivisional company located in Pittsburgh that, in just under two years, was turned to profitability under Claudio's hand.

In 1988, Claudio was asked to head the U.S. operations of Compagnie Générale des Eaux (CGE), a French conglomerate that was determined to get Claudio Elia for the job because of his ability to turn around ailing companies, as well as his skill at bridging the cultural gap between American and European business people. Claudio's new position gave him oversight of the bulk of CGE's U.S. operations. He served as chief executive officer and president of CGE's North American holding company, Anjou International, which owned water, water distribution, construction, and waste water remediation companies. When Claudio took over the company in 1988, Anjou had sales of \$370 million and a slight loss. One year later, Claudio had restored the company's profits and, by 1995, increased sales by an even wider margin.

*At Malta for CGE,
circa 1990.*





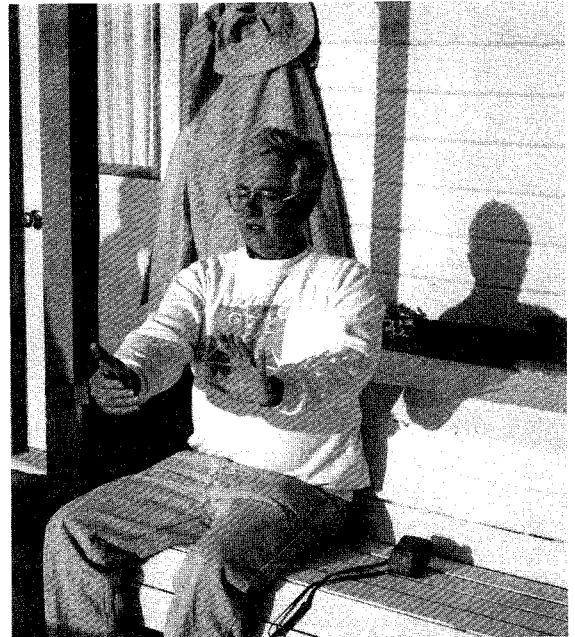
At desalinization plant at Malta, circa 1990.

In 1994, CGE appointed Claudio chairman and CEO of Air & Water Technologies (AWT), an environmental company in which he had previously encouraged CGE to invest. AWT was seen by several seasoned businessmen as an insurmountable challenge—but not by Claudio. With careful and systematic reorganization, he brought the company back to life. Twelve months later, AWT's annual report noted that “under the leadership of Claudio Elia . . . AWT's turnaround [has been] spectacular.” At the end of 1995, AWT reported its first operating profit in eight quarters.

In Susan's estimation, Claudio's decision-making ability came from his capacity to consider all facets of a problem. This ability was not limited to business decisions, according to Claudio's daughter. “I could go to my father with any kind of problem—dating, school, life—and he would always—100 percent of the time—have the right answers.” “Simply put,” said a colleague, “Claudio had a logic that worked.”

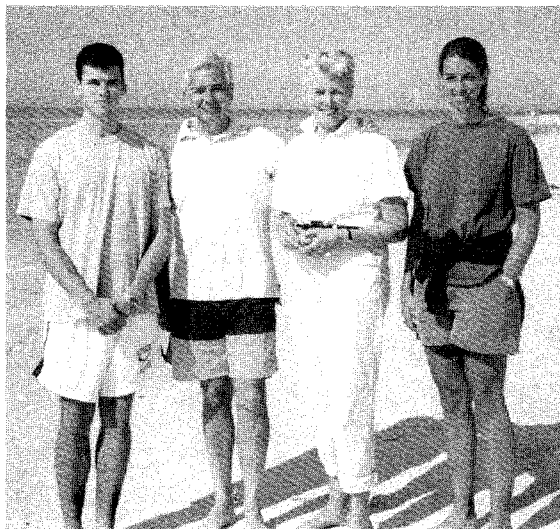
To Guy Dejouany, chairman of the board and chief executive of Compagnie Générale des Eaux, Claudio's facility for making connections with people from all walks of life was the result of his background, which embodied the best of both Europe and America. “Claudio was not a European turned American,” Dejouany said. “He was European *and* American, combining the qualities of both continents and alert to the faults of both. He had an acute sense of management, with an efficient, direct and simple style—the hallmarks of American values. But his sense of humor, education, culture, and diplomacy, his sensitivity, and innate sense of hospitality belonged to the best in Mediterranean values.”

On a fishing trip to Alaska, 1992.



Because of his experience with water distribution and waste water remediation, Commerce Secretary Ron Brown selected Claudio Elia as a member of the committee headed for Bosnia and Croatia. Their Air Force plane never reached its second destination. On April 3, 1996, it crashed in Dubrovnik. Word of the tragic accident spread throughout the world, and in Claudio's sphere hundreds mourned the loss of their friend and colleague.

On April 10, 1996, approximately 700 people gathered in Greenwich, Connecticut, to honor Claudio Elia. At the service, a friend noted in his eulogy that



*The Elia family, November 1995:
Marc, Claudio, Susan, and Christine.*

although Claudio had experienced many proud moments, "one of his proudest came in 1993 when he became a citizen

of the United States of America. As a United States citizen, he would have been proud to die on a peace and business mission for his country."



*Claudio, fourth from left,
in Tuzla, Bosnia, April 3, 1996.*

His family set up the Claudio Elia Memorial Fund at The New York Community Trust, with donations from Compagnie Générale des Eaux through the Anjou group of companies and from Air & Water Technologies, as well as gifts from business colleagues and friends.

*New York Community Trust
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for charitable funds.*

*The Claudio Elia Memorial Fund is managed by
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