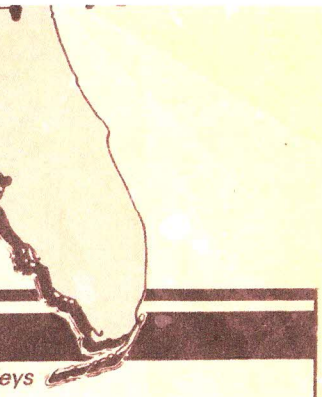
Al Burt's Florida



The Keys

A Disarming Woman

Anne Eaton, 35 and crippled, married a 74-year-old billionaire and together they fought against nuclear arms. For that, she has been vilified by some as a Communist and praised by others as a saint.

In the Florida Keys, where the unusual is commonplace, there lives a lovely, gentle, strong woman whose experience and convictions make all the other individualists seem merely quaint.

Mrs. Cyrus Eaton is a modern woman who combines the demeanor of an old-fashioned lady with the courage of a campaigning heretic. She daringly built philosophical fires in official hallways, and did her best to thrust the feet of international politicians into them.

She deliberately shunned a conventional life that could have made her royally popular. She enthusiastically enlisted as a full partner with her late husband, a billionaire and self-described incurable capitalist who was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize, in a crusade for world peace.

For that, she has been vilified as a Communist and also praised in saint-like terms, but not often recognized simply as a woman who insists on describing the world as she sees it, no matter how different that view may be.

One evening not long ago, while sea gulls and pelicans squealed and squawked loudly enough to evoke memories of a United Nations general assembly, she sat on the breezy porch of her home in the Keys and talked. It is an old Bahamas-type house, constructed 60 years ago of sturdy Dade pine, designed to make the most of an island setting.

"Cyrus and I had a great time," she said. "I peculiar beginning, Eaton in time became a friend of Khrushchev, Kosygin, Mikoyan. He and Anne would become welcome in Moscow and other Socialist capitals of the world, including Hanoi in 1969 and Havana several times. She would travel with him and study Russian to improve communication. They would become outspoken and controversial critics of U.S. foreign policy.

But before all that, in 1955, Eaton had read a newspaper item about a group of scientists, including Albert Einstein (who died later that year) and Nobel Prize winner Bertrand Russell. My feeling was that everybody would say, why, of course."

From that beginning, grew a sophisticated grasp of the arguments and hypocrisies involved in curbing nuclear arms and war. In addition to her travels with Cyrus, her development included the range of active political dissent — picketing the White House, making speeches, writing letters, becoming a delegate to two Democratic conventions.

"I still think — perhaps it is my naivete — that if the average citizen understood, he'd do something about it," she said. "I believe that."

The ambitions of her life have not come to any neat conclusions, but she knows that rarely happens for anyone. Even without Cyrus, who died in 1979, she remains convinced though less active.

She finds mixed satisfaction in assessing how the world has changed since 1957. The nuclear dilemma has intensified, but there has been progress in understanding. "Now there is this great body of respectable, established people saying the same thing. It isn't just the nuts, anymore, like the Eatons and Linus Pauling and Benjamin Spock. These are really solid citizens," she said, ironically.

Anne Eaton has not won, but she has not lost. She and her husband were patrons of world peace the way that some of the wealthy are patrons of art. Their exhibit, the world, is still on display. As she savors that lovely Keys sweep of water and sky from her front porch, it is a thought she enjoys.

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"Cyrus and I had a great time," she said. "I loved it. If you think you're right, the fight's kind of fun. He was an extraordinary man."

In 1957, Anne Kindner Jones married Cyrus Eaton — a wide-ranging tycoon involved in railroads, steel, coal and electrical power, a man who began his career as a protege of John D. Rockefeller Sr. He had been a widower 20 years, had seven children, was a few days short of 74. She was a divorcee, 35, with a daughter. Ten years earlier, polio had confined her permanently to a wheelchair.

"I had known Cyrus for many, many years," she said. "He was my father's age. His daughter and I were classmates at a girls' school. Father (a Cleveland lawyer) and he were friends. I used to visit their farm outside Cleveland when I was a child."

In the mid-'50s, when the U.S. State Department wanted to introduce a group of touring Soviet Union journalists to a capitalist, it picked Eaton. That was his first direct encounter with Soviets.

After that, Eaton became the capitalist that Soviet visitors regularly saw. As a result of this

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But before all that, in 1955, Eaton had read a newspaper item about a group of scientists, including Albert Einstein (who died later that year) and Nobel Prize winner Bertrand Russell, warning that nuclear arms threatened "the existence of mankind" and calling on all nations to outlaw war.

Eaton offered to sponsor a conference of world leaders on this subject at his ancestral home in Pugwash, Nova Scotia. It was held in 1957, the year of their marriage. That first Pugwash Conference (the 25th is scheduled for Poland this summer) was Mrs. Eaton's introduction to international politics.

"I was naive, no question," she recalled. "I said to one delegate, 'Isn't this wonderful that these men may not trust each other's governments but they trust each other.' He looked at me as though I were an idiot. 'Who trusts his *own* government, let alone somebody else's?' That was a novel thought to me then. It seemed to me that this (the Pugwash Movement) was such an obviously rational thing.

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Mrs. Cyrus Eaton