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No regrets for Betty Royon

by MICHELE LESIE
TAFF WRITER

There are no "what ifs" in Betty Royon's life, and that's the only way to say it.

As blanket descriptions go, "successful" is too broad and too often mistaken for financial prosperity. Words like "dynamic" and "brilliant" fit, but the former has more to do with force than accomplishment, and Royon would probably grin and raise an eyebrow at the latter.

"What ifs" are those flashes of hindsight tied to fate, not mistakes; the kind that come in handy for wishing things could have been different — the kind Betty Royon doesn't have.

"I did what I wanted to do, what I was interested in," she said. It's that simple, or at least Royon makes it sound simple.

Royon, who describes herself as a business executive, scientist, agriculturalist, preservationist, writer and speaker, was assistant to the late Cleveland industrialist Cyrus Eaton or more than four decades.

During that time, she was a staff assistant for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway Co., and assistant secretary-treasurer of Portsmouth Steel Corp. and Detroit Steel Corp. That was the

Cyrus Eaton's top aide was always her own woman

industrial side of her work.

Royon also was vice president of Eaton's Acadia Farms in Northfield, and Deep Cove Farms in Upper Blandford, Nova Scotia. She traveled worldwide to buy Shorthorn cattle for the farms; that was her job's agrarian side.

On the academic side, Royon was director of the annual Pugwash Conferences, which began in 1957 in Pugwash, N.S. At Pugwash, Eaton's old family home, nuclear scientists, college presidents and deans, international educators and other "thinkers" met for discussion. Royon arranged these meetings and published many of the proceedings.

Steel rails and iron ore, soft green pastures and lowing bulls, stacks of books and reams of paper, all strung together by Betty Royon's telephone, her precision, talent and an enviable ability to develop a real interest in all facets of Eaton's enterprises.

Instead, he went on tour in a special railroad car (and sometimes by plane) to exhibitions all over the United States and Canada. He was seen by 50 million people live, on television and in the newsreels of 85,000 movie theaters.

Celebrities attended his second birthday celebration, and singer Johnnie Ray sang "Happy Birthday" to him, said Royon, who traveled with Troubadour as often as her work would allow.

"He loved it," Royon recalled fondly. A painting of the stately steer, knee deep in pasture grass, hangs above her fireplace. "He turned into the biggest ham there ever was. He loved to have his picture taken, and when people would come to look at him, he'd get up and walk over to them."

Troubadour retired to Acadia, where he died.

Royon went on to become the first woman to address the 150-year-old Streatham Agricultural Society, and the first woman elected director of the American Shorthorn Breeders Association, among other Shorthorn-related honors.

There are those who would call Royon herself a paragon — one 1950s newspaper story referred to her as a "pioneering careerist" — for getting as far as she did in what the story termed "a man's world."

She enjoyed the diversity, shifted from one realm to the other easily and gave equal devotion to each. That devotion gave her a career with no regrets to look back on; that career gave her the momentum to keep on doing after her retirement six years ago.

Royon has lived in Hudson since 1958, in a comfortable home hidden from the road by trees and shrubs and a steep grade. A bird feeder is outside the back window, inches away from the glass; inside, nooks harbor trophies in the shape of Shorthorns.

"Any creative thing I've done in association with Mr. Eaton, I've done in the seclusion of my home," Royon said. "Our office was like a boiler factory. You have to have some solitude."

How did Betty Royon make it to the C&O offices on the Terminal Tower's 36th floor, in those years when almost all bosses' right hands were men?

"I was very fortunate," she said. "I did what I wanted to do and was encouraged to do it. I got along well with the people I was associated with, and I had Mr. Eaton's full support."

Cyrus Eaton's first glimpse of Betty Royon was hardly a prediction of their future association. Royon was 8 years

The press she received in those days backed into her own story by way of Eaton and Troubadour; the headlines seem archaic by today's standards — "That's a woman for you," above a subhead which read "Cyrus Eaton's 'stand-in' is full of surprises for dignitaries." According to the story, visiting dignitaries were surprised by her knowledge.

Eaton left breeding stock purchases to Royon's judgment. One interviewer asked if she wouldn't rather spend the money on hats.

"It's nice to buy hats," Royon answered. "But hats don't produce little hats."

She vaguely recalls these old stories, she said, shrugging. "That's what people expected to read back then."

In October, Royon received the annual award of the Woman's Equity Action League, a nationwide women's rights organization founded, with her help, in Cleveland.

It is less of an uphill climb for women now, Royon acknowledged. "But don't kid yourself. The fight still goes on."

And so does Royon.

old and swinging a baseball bat at an Acadia Farms picnic. She and Eaton's daughter attended Hathaway Brown School together in Cleveland.

They remained friends throughout their college years, when Royon left her native Cleveland to attend Smith College in Massachusetts. She graduated magna cum laude in 1935 and went on to receive a master's degree in nuclear physics the next year — despite a flood that swept away the school's atomic chamber in the midst of her thesis preparation.

Few women entered the physics field then. There were seldom more than two or three students in Royon's advanced classes. Students had to blow their own glass tubing for lab work in those days, too, she recalled. "And I was not the world's best glass blower."

But by that time, she said, "I had made up my mind to be in the business world rather than stay in the academic world."

Royon turned down an instructorship that would have eventually led to a professorship at a Connecticut college, sold her raccoon coat for \$25 and returned to Cleveland.



BETTY ROYON
Former ACRW President

"Retirement is not being turned out to pasture." She smiled. "Like Troubadour was."

The Hudson Library and Historical Society will observe its 75th anniversary next year, and Betty Royon is president of the board of trustees. She is also active in the Hudson Heritage Association, putting out 11 issues of its newsletter per year and working to stave off threats to the community's historical landmarks.

The 50-year reunion of Smith College's Class of 1935 is also coming up, and Royon, as a class officer, will be involved in that.

And then there is the biography Eaton had told her he hoped she would write someday. She is aware of a cur-

"Then I found you have to have skill to get a job," Royon said. "Finding a job in 1936 was like pulling teeth."

She attended business classes and practiced stenography by taking down the Franklin D. Roosevelt-Alf Lando presidential debates as they came over the radio.

A newspaper ad seeking someone with scientific knowledge and editorial expertise — Royon was editor of the Smith College paper — drew her to New York, where she worked for counseling and investment firm.

She kept in touch with Eaton's daughter, and Eaton kept up with Royon's budding business career. In 1937, he hired her to work in his New York City firm; then called her to the C&O office in Cleveland.

Industry boomed during the war years. Royon remembers working hard to help develop Eaton's Steel Rock Iron Mines. This was part of the war effort, she said, adding that it was more "constructive" than what she may have been doing had she answered wartime pleas to return to the nuclear science field.

"Nobody knew what was going on," said Royon, who at the time she le

rent attempt by a "would-be biographer" to chronicle the life of her former boss; the writer has contacted her as a source.

"Why spend my time being interviewed when I'd like to try my hand at myself?" she asked. Eaton had requested his biography not be a "conventional" one, she said. "I'd like to see it done my way."

So, what if Betty Royon had never met Cyrus Eaton? What if he were the kind of man who picked assistants by gender, not talent? What if Royon had stayed in nuclear science?

Royon doesn't think about those things. She said she would have made it anyway.