

# *Georgie Anne Geyer, Foreign Correspondent and Columnist, Dies at 84*

By Neil Genzlinger

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Georgie Anne Geyer, a reporter and syndicated columnist who, at a time when most foreign correspondents were men, interviewed Fidel Castro and Saddam Hussein, was embedded with leftist guerrillas in Guatemala and covered trouble spots all over the globe, died on Wednesday in Washington. She was 84.

Andrews McMeel Syndication, which distributed her column to hundreds of newspapers and digital outlets, announced her death but did not give a cause. Ms. Geyer had had surgery for tongue cancer more than a decade ago.

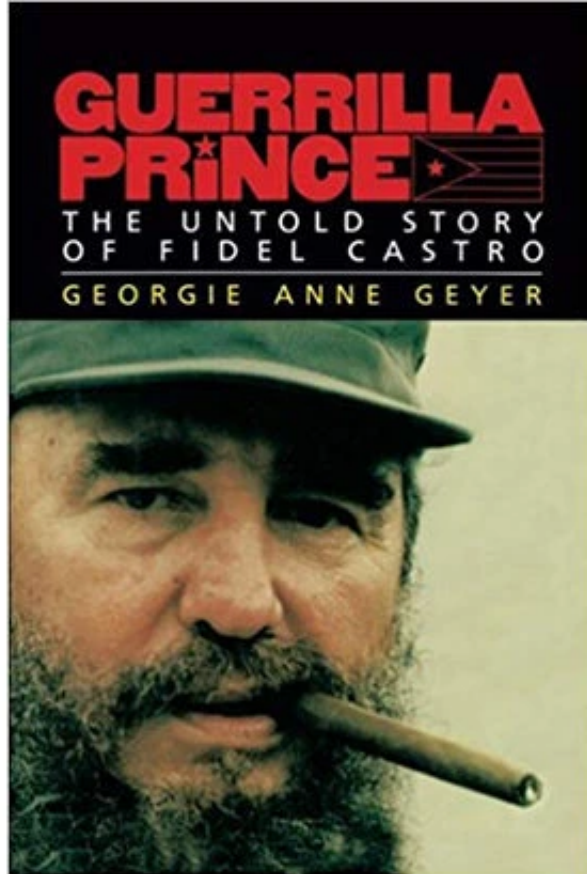
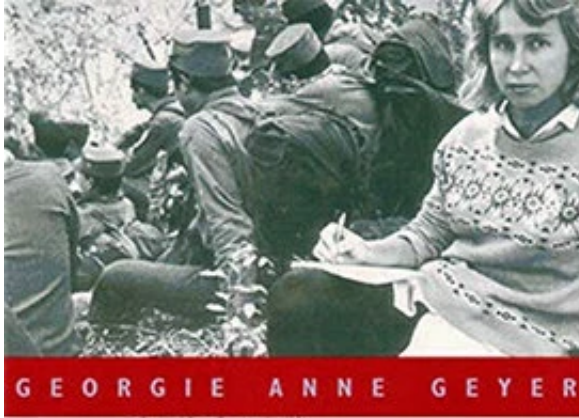
Early in her career she joined The Chicago Daily News, where one colleague sitting near her was Mike Royko, soon to be a famed columnist. As Mr. Royko noted in his introduction to Ms. Geyer's "Buying the Night Flight: The Autobiography of a Woman Foreign Correspondent" (1983), it was a time when a woman in the reporting ranks was likely to be called "our gal" and assigned to the society or education beats.

"This was the man's world into which Gee Gee somehow elbowed her way more than two decades ago," Mr. Royko wrote, using her nickname, "emerging from the women's pages a tough, determined, brilliant young reporter."

Colleagues laughed when she first expressed a desire to report from overseas. But, Mr. Royko wrote, "after a while we began taking for granted the Geyer exclusive from this or that Latin American country."

"As the years passed," he added, "Latin America wasn't big enough to hold her, and she became one of those genuine, and rare, globe-hopping correspondents."

Ms. Geyer left The Daily News in 1974 and established herself as a syndicated columnist based in Washington. She continued to write her column until a few weeks ago.



Ms. Geyer's books included a biography of Fidel Castro, whom she first met in 1966, and an autobiography, in which she described herself as "extremely willful and often blindly determined."

She also wrote books, including "Guerrilla Prince: The Untold Story of Fidel Castro" (1991) and "Americans No More" (1996), which laid out her conservative views on immigration, a frequent subject of her column. In a lighter vein was "When Cats Reigned Like Kings: On the Trail of the Sacred Cats" (2004), a look at feline history and influence.

Ms. Geyer often turned up on public-affairs programs, like PBS's "Washington Week in Review," as well as on the college lecture circuit. In 2000, writing a new preface for a reissue of her autobiography, she noted that young people would often ask her how she "controls" her interviews with notable figures.

"I have to tell them that the way you control your interviews (or any other part of your work) is to know more about the subject than the other person does," she wrote. "This advice, as you can well imagine, is seldom greeted with deafening applause."

Georgie Anne Geyer was born on April 2, 1935, in Chicago, to Robert and Georgie Hazel Geyer (acquiring her nickname from the way she pronounced her first name as a baby).

Her father ran a dairy business. Her mother had taught her to read and write by the time she was 4 and, as she wrote, "laid the foundation for the curiosity that drove me to Siberia, up the Tapajoz and down to Abu Dhabi."

A formative experience came in 1956 when, after graduating from Northwestern University with a journalism degree, she went to Vienna on a Fulbright scholarship. She was there when revolution broke out in neighboring Hungary. She and other students went by bus to the border. "The people fleeing across those

snowy hills,” she wrote, “had the empty, searching faces of refugees everywhere.”

Returning to Chicago, she worked at The Southtown Economist in Chicago before moving to The Daily News in 1960. An early assignment there, she wrote, involved infiltrating a Mafia wedding disguised as a waitress.

Ms. Geyer was given a chance to report from Latin America in 1964. It was the beginning of a string of assignments that took her to Peru, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala — where she spent a week with leftist guerrillas in the midst of a civil war — and, in 1966, Cuba, where few outside reporters had been admitted. She had her first of several meetings with Castro.

“What surprised me then,” she wrote, “and all the times I saw him, was the strange mixture of almost abnormal sweetness, like a favorite uncle’s overly affectionate attitude toward his young kin, and a piercing and quite frightening coldness and ruthlessness.”



Ms. Geyer in 1971, when she was a foreign correspondent for The Chicago Daily News. When she joined the paper, in 1960, women were most likely to be assigned to the society or education beat.

Her later work took her to the Soviet Union, Poland and the Middle East, among other places. From 1977 to 1980 she conducted a series of interviews with the Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat. She interviewed Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 1973, before he became a nemesis to the United States.

“He was trying so hard to be, or to appear, open and frank,” Ms. Geyer wrote. “But all of my questions evoked only hooded responses — as hooded as those handsome but chilled eyes.”

Her other interview subjects included the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran, Juan Peron of Argentina and Muammar el-Qaddafi of Libya.

“During these years the correspondent’s role was changing,” she wrote. “Diplomats could not get to these revolutionaries, for the revolutionaries blamed them for their problems. We had become the new diplomats — the new intermediaries in the world.”

Ms. Geyer had her detractors, among them the pro-Israel Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America. Her views on immigration as a potentially divisive force also incurred criticism.

“The problem for the United States in your lifetime will, strangely enough, be related to the problems we see in the Yugoslavias, the Tajikistans and indeed the Russias of our world,” she told graduates at Northwestern in 1993 in a commencement address. “It is the problem of national and cultural disintegration. For in our own way we are allowing organizers, activists and ambition-ridden political putative leaders to divide this country much the same ways that Yugoslavia has been deliberately divided since 1987.”

No immediate family members survive.

Though Ms. Geyer was known for her intricate knowledge of world affairs and for her sometimes strong opinions, she showed another side in her book on cats, which was inspired by a stray she had adopted in Chicago. The kitten, she wrote, used to chase beams of sunshine coming through the window.

“He reminded me at times of a philosopher searching in every dark corner for the light of truth,” she wrote.

“I knew the intention,” she continued. “I had tried to do the same many times. He never quite did catch it, but then, how many of us do?”

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