

Graham driven by money, bad image

By Stephen Crocker

"I can't, you know I can't," is what Katharine Graham, shy, 46 and just widowed, said when asked to take over the management of the Washington Post.

Graham's brilliant, manic-depressive husband, Phil, the president and presiding genius of the Post, had shot himself the day before. Now his enormous mantle descended around the unwilling shoulders of a pale, dowdy, overweight housewife whom her husband had derided as "a Jewish cow."

Few people have been more ill prepared for high responsibility. Numbled by her husband's verbal onslaughts and often bullied by her own children, Kay Graham fitted the profile of a victimized homemaker to a T.

"I was always the butt of family jokes. You know, good old Mom, plodding along. And I accepted it. That's the way I viewed myself."

Began her real life

But one all-important factor separated this abused and suffering woman from the legions of battered wives around the country: money. When Phil Graham died, his wife received 55 percent of the voting control in the Washington Post Co.

This sharply etched biography, based on the author's conversations with dozens of people who have known Graham well, is the

POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND THE POST

The Katharine Graham Story

By Carol Felsenthal

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story of how a subservient and commonplace woman began her real life at the very top, and used her power to make her newspaper famous — though with a fear and trembling that never left her.

In the process, she fired virtually every top editor and executive the Post had. One of her first victims, an old family friend and managing editor of the Post, was Al Friendly, the kind man on whose shoulder she had leaned after Phil's death, the one who kept telling her that, yes, she could run a newspaper.

One man survived the purges: Ben Bradlee, whom Kay brought over from Newsweek as the Post's managing editor. This casual, swearing blueblood banished dullness from the paper and urged his reporters to pursue what he called "holy s--- stories." He made a point of treating her like one of the boys — "Why don't you go f--- off, Kay?" — and she seems to have loved him for it.

Felsenthal hints that Graham felt most secure around very powerful men from whom she could learn. First there was Eugene, her

millionaire father, who bought the Post in 1933 and, intending that she some day assume his position as publisher, gave her a \$25-a-week job in the correspondence department. Then there was Phil, whom her father hired in 1946 as associate publisher and whose alacrity more or less forced Kay into a retirement that lasted for 20 years.

A pathetic self-image

Her mentors during the period she ran the Post were Robert McNamara, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., John Kenneth Galbraith, McGeorge Bundy, and Joseph Alsop. They taught her much about economics and politics and history and finance, but came far too late in life to teach her kindness.

Felsenthal paints a picture of a changeable, unpredictable woman whose early rejection by her egocentric mother left her with a pathetic self-image and a deep reservoir of resentment.

There seem to have been two Kay Gramhams who alternated roles with the changing circumstances of her life. There was the altruistic publisher of the Pentagon Papers and the quiet, loyal supporter of her sick husband. And there was the icy newsroom executioner, "the boss from hell."

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ONE OF THE BOYS: Katharine Graham with Ben Bradlee in 1971.