

'THE KATHARINE GRAHAM STORY'

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The Woman Who Wields The Power at the Post

READERS WHO PLUNGE into "Power, Privilege and the Post" looking for new tales of Woodward, Bernstein and The Washington Post's groundbreaking coverage of Watergate will come away hungry. Sorely four pages of the new book by Carol Felsenthal dwell on the scandal that brought down a president and all the president's men.

But this, after all, is subtitled "The Katharine Graham Story" and as an unauthorized biography of the paper's principal owner and chairman it satisfies the appetite with stories of how media, power and powerful people have intersected and made history.

Felsenthal, whose book will be published next month by G. P. Putnam's Sons, presents Graham as a painfully

Paul D. Colford

insecure woman. Thrust into the role of running the Post upon the suicide of her philandering and abusive husband, she slowly learned how to exert authority and started to make her imprint on the paper beginning with her gutsy, though no less anxious decision in 1971 to publish the Pentagon Papers against the threat of government censorship.

And by the time Graham celebrated her 70th birthday in 1987, she was a figure of capital importance. Post columnist Art Buchwald offered the toast in front of President Ronald Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz and a bunch of world leaders by saying, "There's one word that brings us all together here tonight, and that word is 'fear.'"



Katharine Graham, from insecure wife to media mogul

UPI Photo

Also among the book's anecdotes and revelations:

- In 1974, Graham turned down a can't-miss opportunity for The Washington Post Co. to buy Simon & Schuster for only \$17 million because she came to loath the publishing house's crusty patriarch, Leon Shimkin, during their initial get-together. The house that got away now takes in about \$500 million a year.

- Graham has long been uncomfortable with her Jewish background — her father was Jewish — and once protested to Stephen Birmingham, who viewed Spiro Agnew's attacks on the press as anti-Semitic, that she did not think of herself as a Jewish publisher. When managing editor Howard Simons, who had shepherded the Watergate coverage, left the paper in 1984, he said that he would never get the paper's top job because he was Jewish.

- Graham, portrayed as a reluctant feminist, has deferred mainly to powerful men and acted on their counsel. She started using vulgarities after hearing them so often from Ben Bradlee, her salty-tongued executive editor. She had deep crushes on two other advisers.

One is former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who had ordered the preparation of the Pentagon Papers; the eye-opening history of U. S. decision-making on Vietnam, but who told the Post that The New York Times had the documents only several days before the latter started publishing them. The Post then scrambled to catch up.

The other favorite is affluent investor Warren Buffett, whom she added to her board of directors. The book elaborates on a previously published reference to Buffett's spending a night in her home, citing a friend's claim that they also shared the same bed. Another friend, journalist Richard Clurman, says he be-

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Katharine Graham

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lieves Graham and the married Buffett, who is 13 years younger, had an affair that endured "for years and years."

• After The Washington Post endorsed Jimmy Carter over Gerald Ford for president in 1976, the new chief executive offered Graham an ambassadorship. When she declined, Carter "stopped giving much thought to Kay Graham." Years later, she reconsidered the editorial endorsement and passed word to Ford that the paper had made a mistake.

Felzenthal had interviewed Graham while writing a biography of Alice Roosevelt Longworth. While the publisher later refused to do interviews for the book about her own life, it's clear from the highly sourced results that she did not discourage others from talking. Meanwhile, Graham's autobiography, acquired by the Alfred A. Knopf division of Random House four years ago, is not yet scheduled for publication.