

# WOMAN NEWS

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A Weekly News Report for and about Women on the Move

## Behind the news

### Chicagoan tells unauthorized tale of Washington Post's Graham

By Marion Kabaker

**I** have no desire to write an authorized biography," says Carol Felsenthal, a Chicago-based author. Her new, unauthorized biography of Katharine Graham, Washington Post powerhouse publisher, "Power, Privilege and The Post" (Putnam, \$29.95), has been a featured alternate selection of Book-of-the-Month Club since February. Grossbart/Barnett Productions of Hollywood is developing a movie about the book for Ted Turner's TNT cable station.

"When you write an authorized biography you give up control of the manuscript," Felsenthal says. "You get the family's cooperation and access to letters and private documents. In exchange, you let your subject or some member of the family go at it with a blue pencil. And there goes all of the interesting stuff."

Felsenthal, 44, also has written biographies of Alice Roosevelt Longworth and Phyllis Schlafly.

The biographer is the mother of three children, 12, 9 and 2 years old. Her lawyer husband spirited the older two children out of the house when, pregnant with her third child, she needed to assemble and organize her voluminous tapes of interviews.

It took three years to complete the book.

She reports interviewing about 200 people for the book. The lineup of power hitters included top politicians, writers and editors.

"What I do best is interview with a great deal of energy and tenacity," she says.

Felsenthal says she is aware that in writing about a public figure



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you have to filter out the people with grudges or axes to grind.

"In my book about Alice Roosevelt Longworth, I was quite surprised that so many of the Roosevelts would talk to me. I came to realize very quickly it was because she had insulted so many of them. They were happy to have their retribution.

"In the case of Katharine Graham, she did fire so many of her top editors and executives, but they weren't standing in line to talk to me. Even those whom she had treated most cruelly, with no grace or sensitivity, had good things to say about her.

"They led me to my conclusion that whatever faults she had as a businesswoman and as a human being, she created a great newspaper in the financial and editorial sense."

Graham has been called the most powerful woman in the world, Felsenthal says, despite a

childhood devoid of warmth and affection, followed by a disastrous marriage to the brilliant, unbalanced Phil Graham, who committed suicide.

In the split second that it took her husband to blow his brains out, Graham was transformed from an emotionally abused wife to a financial titan, Felsenthal says.

"Once she tasted power and learned how to use it, she fired her long-time managing editor and close friend, Al Friendly, replacing him with Ben Bradlee.

"Friendly's widow, Jean, was one of my best interviews, but I had to feel there was some bitterness there, and you have to be careful about that.

"I planned to go to Europe to interview Pierre Salinger, but he came to Chicago to get an award, and he was wonderful. He's at a point in his career where he can be totally candid. It's people who are my age who are tough."

Some of the people Felsenthal needed for her book were in their 80s, so she approached them first, she says.

"I would start my day reading the obituary pages of the New York Times and Washington Post," she says.

"I was in college during Kent State, the Cambodian invasion and the Pentagon Papers," Felsenthal recalls. "I was very much into politics, and Kay Graham was my heroine. I think she is a woman of great courage, and her publication of the Pentagon Papers was a turning point for her, followed by her courageous pursuit of the Watergate investigation."

Felsenthal will talk about her newest book at a dinner at 6:30 p.m. June 15 at Mareva's Restaurant, 1250 N. Milwaukee Ave. The cost is \$37.50, which includes dinner and a copy of the book. The event is sponsored by the Chicago Literary Society. For more information and reservations, call 312-973-3523. She also will read and sign books from 4 to 5 p.m. June 19 at Grace Place, 637 S. Dearborn St., during the Printer's Row Book Fair. Call 312-987-1930. ■