



## Power, Privilege and the Post: The Katharine Graham Story

By Carol Felsenthal

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Katherine Graham's story has all the elements of the phoenix rising from the ashes, and in Carol Felsenthal's unauthorized biography, Power, Privilege, and the Post, Graham's personal tragedies and triumphs are revealed. The homely and insecure daughter of the Jewish millionaire and owner of The Washington Post, Eugene Myer, Kay married the handsome, brilliant and power hungry Phillip Graham in 1940. By 1948 Kay's father had turned control of The Washington Post over to Phil, who spent the next decade amassing a media empire that included radio and TV stations. But, as Felsenthal shows, he mostly focused on building the reputation of the Post and positioning himself as a Washington power-player. Plagued by manic depression, Phil's behavior became more erratic and outlandish, and his downward spiral ended in 1963 when he took his own life. Surprising the newspaper industry, Kay Graham took control of the paper, beginning one of the most unprecedented careers in media history. Felsenthal weaves her exhaustive research into a perceptive portrayal of the Graham family and an expert dissection of the internal politics at the Post, and a portrait of one of a unique, tragic, and ultimately triumphant figure of twentieth-century America.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

According to Felsenthal ( *Alice Roosevelt Longworth* ), Katharine Graham, the imperious media mogul whose empire includes the Washington Post, Newsweek, TV stations and cable systems, was a fragile, withdrawn person, ill-prepared to run a troubled newspaper, when she became publisher of the Post after the suicide of her manic-depressive husband Phil. In this absorbing, gossipy biography, Felsenthal sympathetically portrays Graham (b. 1917) as a survivor of emotional abuse and as a brave fighter for a free press who took tremendous risks by printing the Pentagon Papers and by disregarding pressure from Nixon in covering the Watergate affair. As a girl, she had to prove her mettle constantly to her father, Eugene Meyer, a Jewish Wall Street millionaire, and to her bombastic Lutheran mother, Agnes Ernst Meyer, a "do-gooder liberal" who preached tolerance while harboring "an ugly streak of anti-Semitism" and belittling her children. Felsenthal presents Graham as an "emotionally battered" wife who endured her husband's anti-Semitic slurs and even laughed at the crude jokes he made at her expense. Photos. First serial to *Vanity Fair*; BOMC featured alternate.

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#### From Library Journal

In this new biography, Katharine Graham emerges as a woman of contradictions: a powerful publisher plagued by insecurity and self-doubt. Beginning with Graham's difficult relationship with her mother and moving through her marriage to the brilliant but manic-depressive Phil Graham, Felsenthal ( *Alice Roosevelt Longworth* , LJ 2/15/88, and *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority: The Biography of Phyllis Schlafly* , LJ 1/81) documents the emotional abuses that helped shape a vulnerable and tough Kay Graham. Ever contradictory, she supported Nixon for president yet made decisions that permitted Washington Post reporters to pursue a story that would result in his resignation. She believed women were inferior yet led a media empire to both financial and journalistic success. This is the second biography of Graham; the first, Deborah Davis's newly reissued *Katharine the Great* (Sheridan Pr., 1991), stirred controversy and was pulled soon after its publication in 1979. Felsenthal devotes a chapter to the fate of the first. She bases her biography on interviews and offers the reader a compelling portrait of a complex woman. It belongs in both public and academic libraries.

- *Judy Solberg, Univ. of Maryland Libs., College Park*

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#### About the Author

CAROL FELSENTHAL is the author of several acclaimed biographies, including the best-selling *Power, Privilege, and the Post: The Katharine Graham Story*; *Princess Alice: The Life and Times of Alice Roosevelt Longworth*; and *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority: The Biography of Phyllis Schlafly*.

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### **Christine Erhart:**

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