

A black and white portrait of Katharine Graham, an elderly woman with short, wavy hair, wearing a dark top and a pearl necklace. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

PERSONAL
HISTORY

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Katharine Graham

PERSONAL
HISTORY



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*I would like to dedicate this book to
the most important people in it:
my parents, Eugene and Agnes Meyer,
my husband, Philip L. Graham,
my children, Elizabeth (Lally) Weymouth,
and Donald, William, and Stephen Graham*

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Other Books by This Author](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-one](#)

[Chapter Twenty-two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-eight](#)

— Acknowledgments —

FROM THE START, I very much wanted to write this book myself, although I realized I wasn't a real professional. I well remember the columnist Walter Lippmann once telling me how hard it was, even for him who wrote all the time, to get back into writing after a hiatus of only a few weeks. That thought kept recurring when I considered whether or not to write on my own rather than with a coauthor. But because I wanted this to be a personal story, I knew I had to tell it myself. If I've succeeded at all, it is due to two people: my researcher, Evelyn Small, and my editor, Robert Gottlieb.

Ev came from The Washington Post Company, where she was in corporate communications, producing an internal newsletter and doing research for speeches, including mine. She worked for several years at organizing my papers in such a way that we could together take a look back. As time passed, her role grew in importance. She knew as much about my life as I did. She took the words I wrote and shaped them, reminding me of important details, tactfully eliminating others, adding things from the research that I'd overlooked. This book could not have happened without Ev. For four years, she was ably assisted by Todd Mendeloff.

Only a small percentage of the stories Ev unearthed and brought to light again could find their way into the book itself, which was also true for the more than 250 interviews we conducted with people ranging from childhood classmates and lifelong friends to many of those who were involved with the Pentagon Papers, Watergate, or The Washington Post Company. But they all added to my perspective.

Bob Gottlieb, whom I first talked with about a book in 1978, became my editor when he returned to Knopf from *The New Yorker*. He has masterfully edited my copy with meticulous care and a ruthless eye for repetition, tediousness, and sequence. Quite often I found "we don't need this" written in the margins. Even when he axed a story I might have particularly liked—always in the interest of space, according to Bob—there were few squeals of protest from me. I may have grieved for the fallen pages, but he, Ev, and I always had the same goal in mind. And on those occasions when I thought something essential lay on the floor, Bob generously acceded to my pleading.

My friend Meg Greenfield, editorial page editor of the *Post*, and *Newsweek* columnist, whose editing skills and advice have been sought out by me and on whom I have relied for much of my professional life, also read and commented on the manuscript. Meg's mind and mine work in similar ways, as do our judgments about people and situations, about what is funny and what is intolerable. Our friendship has endured and grown almost from the moment of her arrival at the *Post*.

Five other important people also read and commented on the manuscript and were exceedingly helpful: my daughter, Lally, my sons, Don, Bill, and Steve, and my friend Warren Buffett.

This project has renewed my appreciation for the value of archival material. I have spent innumerable hours poring over old letters and memos from and between my parents, my husband, and myself, as well as communications involving *Post* and *Newsweek* executives and editors. I am thankful that we all wrote letters in those days. For saving much of this material and organizing it originally, I must acknowledge the late, and incomparable, Charlie Paradise, secretary and assistant to my father, to Phil, and then to me for some years. Charlie used to answer the phone by singing out "Paradise." My thanks go also to all of those from whose letters I quote.

I am indebted to Chalmers Roberts, whose living history of the *Post*—*The Washington Post: The First 100 Years* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977)—has been a constant source of information, and to Merlo Pusey, for his biography of my father, *Eugene Meyer* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1974). Both books informed our research and my thinking.

In my office, I am grateful to Liz Hylton for her devoted and patient work over thirty-three years, including help on the book. She has not only run my office, keeping all my papers and my business and social calendars, but she has managed my houses as well. In many ways she has been my alter ego. For the last two years I have also been greatly helped by my assistant, Barry Tonoff.

I have worked closely for fifteen years with Guyon (Chip) Knight, vice-president for corporate communications at The Washington Post Company, whose extraordinary talents have crafted all my public utterances.

In addition, I want to thank the people in the *Post*'s News Research Center, on whom we relied time and again, for their ever-ready and always accurate information.

I also want to thank the many people at Knopf who have helped me with this book: Sonny Mehta, Jane Friedman, Bill Loverd, and Paul Bogaards for their interest and support; Carol Carson, Virginia Tan, Cassandra Pappas, and Tracy Cabanis for their talented design and production; and Kathy Hourigan, Leyla Aker, Karen Mugler, Amy Scheibe, and Ken Schneider for their editorial assistance.

Of course I am responsible for the final contents of the book. I have tried to be frank and honest while honoring privacy, particularly that of my children, who are, naturally, more important to me than I can describe here and have achieved so much in their own lives. They, too, were deeply and permanently affected by all that happened.

My two surviving sisters, Elizabeth Lorentz and Ruth Epstein, have also been involved, helpful, and interested, sharing with me their own memories and judgments. My late brother, Bill (Eugene Meyer III), was always supportive during his lifetime, and I am eternally grateful for that, although he died before I began the book.

With all of my trepidations about writing, and with all of the complications inherent in looking back over a long and full life, writing this book has been a rigorous and absorbing exercise, one that I've enjoyed immensely. Throughout the book I hope I've given credit where credit is due and haven't neglected those to whom I owe so much. Necessarily many names have been left out, but they are in my head and in my heart.

— Chapter One —

MY PARENTS' paths first crossed in a museum on 23rd Street in New York. It was Lincoln's Birthday, 1908. Eugene Meyer, who was thirty-two years old, had been in business for himself for only a few years, but had already made several million dollars. Agnes Ernst, just twenty-one and a recent graduate of Barnard, was strikingly beautiful. She was earning her own living and helping to support her family as well by her freelance work for a newspaper, the old *New York Sun*. She was also interested in the art world, which was what brought her to the exhibit of Japanese prints. Both her interests and her work were unusual for a woman in those days.

On his way down to Wall Street, my father, who was driving a Stanley Steamer, one of the earliest automobiles, noticed an acquaintance whom he didn't especially like. But Edgar Kohler looked frail and dejected and my father felt sorry for him, so he offered him a ride, mentioning that he was going to stop off at a Japanese-print exhibit. Kohler decided to accompany him.

Going into the gallery, they met two friends coming out, who assessed the exhibition this way: "There's a girl walking around who's better-looking than anything on the walls." Once inside, Kohler and my father immediately spotted her—a tall young woman with fair hair and blue eyes, clearly strong, dynamic, and self-assured. My mother always remembered what she was wearing that day, because she felt that her "costume," as she called it, had played a part in her destiny. She must have been quite a sight in her gray tweed suit and small squirrel cap adorned with an eagle feather. My father, on seeing her, said to Kohler, "That's the girl I'm going to marry."

"Are you serious?" Kohler asked, to which my father responded, "I was never more serious in my whole life." Kohler, supposing that they'd never run into her again, suggested that my father speak to her. "No. That would offend her and spoil everything," my father replied. The two men then agreed that whoever subsequently might meet her first would introduce her to the other.

Just a week later, Kohler called my father and said, "Guess what happened?" "You met the girl," was the ready answer. "Damn you, I did," Kohler responded. He had been to a party at the home of one of Agnes's