A black and white portrait of Katharine Graham, an elderly woman with short, light-colored hair, wearing a dark, high-necked top and a large, ornate necklace. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is dark and textured.

Katharine
Graham
*Personal
History*

January 26, 1997 | Mundy on Autopilot | Medicine on the Internet



From Earliest Childhood

The children of Eugene and Agnes Meyer all had the feeling that much was expected of them. And as the woman who grew up to run The Washington Post Co. moved beyond the privileged isolation of her Washington school days, those intense expectations—which were to prove both a burden and a blessing—began to shape her life BY KATHARINE GRAHAM

My parents'

paths first crossed in a museum on 23rd Street in New York. It was Lincoln's Birthday, 1908. Eugene Meyer, who was 32 years old, had been in business for himself for only a few years, but had already made several million dollars. Agnes Ernst, just 21 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 ac-



A young Katharine Meyer, sometime around 1925.

quaintance 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 Barnard classmates, where they were giving an amateur performance of "The Merry Widow" in which my mother was playing Count Danilo. When she appeared after the performance out of costume, Kohler realized that she was the girl from the art show.

I envied my sister Bis's self-assurance, her independence, her daring, her willingness to cut up and row with the family. I would have liked to be a dashing lawbreaker, but I didn't have the proper instincts.

He introduced himself, told her about the pact with my father, and arranged a lunch for the three of them.

My father's friend had fulfilled his pledge by introducing Eugene and Agnes to each other. On Lincoln's Birthday in 1910, two years to the day after Eugene had first seen Agnes in the gallery, they were married. When I look back over my long life, if there is one thing that leaps out at me it is the role of luck and chance in our lives. From this particular string of accidental happenings all the rest followed.

After two weeks at my father's farm in Mount Kisco, N.Y., which he had bought some years earlier, the newlyweds set out in a private railroad car, the Constitution, for their honeymoon trip around the world, he with a valet and she with a maid. By the time they reached San Francisco, where they were to visit with the California members of the Meyer family for a week before going on, my mother's maid hadn't worked out. The unsatisfactory maid was replaced by a lady named Margaret Ellen Powell, a practical nurse and a Christian Scientist and the salt of the earth. It was the luckiest thing that ever happened for all of us Meyer children, since Powlly, as we all came to call her, stayed to bring us up.

When my parents returned from their honeymoon and settled back into New York, my mother was pregnant. My father went back to Wall Street, and she had to begin making the necessary adjustments to being a married woman. Overnight she found herself living a wealthy life and running households. She once told me of thinking, as she rode in a chauffeur-driven car, "Can this really be me?" As she herself acknowledged, she had a difficult time, especially in the first years, long before I was born, the fourth child of

five. She had rarely thought about what marriage entailed in the way of relationships to spouse and children. I'm not sure she was ever really able to.

She seemed to regard her marriage as a contract she would always keep, and in her way she did. Her duty, as she saw it, lay in having and rearing children, running the houses, and being there when needed to fulfill her obligations as a hostess. After that, like so many of today's women but way ahead of her time, she was determined to maintain her own identity and intellectual life. In her own world, she went her own way. Later, in a memoir, she explained how she felt at the time:

I . . . rebelled inwardly and outwardly against the suddenly imposed responsibilities of marriage. During the first few years . . . I behaved as if the whole world were in a conspiracy to flatten out my personality and cast me into a universal mold called "woman." So many of my married college friends had renounced their intellectual interests and lost themselves in a routine of diapers, dinners, and smug contentment with life, that I was determined this should not happen to me. I wanted a big family but I also wanted to continue my life as an individual.

I believe she was often desperately unhappy in her marriage, especially at first. She went to a psychiatrist, on whom she leaned heavily. She tried to escape any problems with her marriage and motherhood by studying Chinese art and language and developing an interest in collecting modern art. She had already met a man who was to be one of the great influences in her life, the industrialist and pioneer collector Charles Lang Freer. They met at an exhibit of Chinese art, and he, having heard of her interest, invited

her to Detroit to see his collection. She responded, "Next week I am going to have a baby, but I'll come as soon after that as I can."

My mother was shocked and discouraged by the pains of childbirth. She asked her obstetrician during Florence's birth why anyone had a second baby. As she herself wrote, "I became a conscientious but scarcely a loving mother."

By 1914, she had had my second sister, Elizabeth—or Bis, as she was always known—and was chafing so over what she felt as the "crushing" of her personality that my father encouraged her to go abroad. They initially thought of going together, but the gathering war clouds concerned him and he decided to stay home to look after his, by now, very large business. In addition, given her frustrations in acclimating to marriage and a family, they both saw the need for some distance between them, so they agreed that she would take the trip to Europe alone and they would correspond often. Indeed, all her life my mother found it easier to communicate from a distance, and she conversed with us children at least as much through letters as she did in person. I took this form of communication for granted.

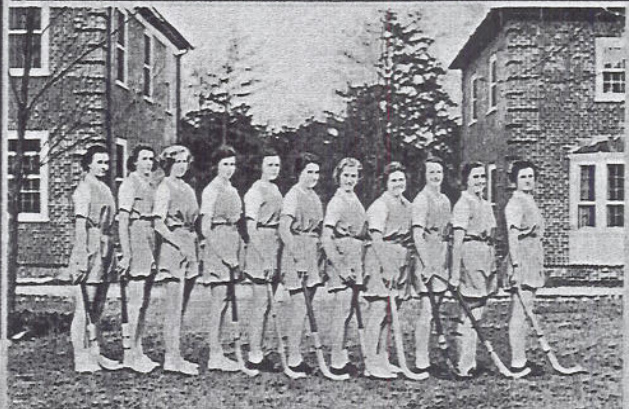
She returned more than two months later with a new commitment to this difficult relationship, determined to make it work. In a letter she had mentioned resting up before enduring more of "the baby business." I suppose her assumption was that she would have one every two years—and, indeed, she had my brother, Bill, a year later. And two years after that, on June 16, 1917, I was born.

In 1917, we Meyer children were occupying the entire top floor and half of the floor below at 820 Fifth Ave., which is where I was born. We—"the babes," as Mother often re-



The Early Years

Clockwise from left: Agnes Ernst Meyer, Katharine's mother; Katharine with her father, Eugene; with the family governess, Anna Otth, and flying kites; in Indian garb with brother Bill and Margaret Ellen Powell, known as Powelly; with the Madeira field hockey team (at far left) in the fall of her sophomore year; the Meyer family in an Edward Steichen photograph, clockwise from top right—Eugene, Elizabeth, Ruth, Katharine, Bill, Agnes and Florence.





ferred to us in her diary—lived with Powelly in this Fifth Avenue apartment. A governess, Anna Otth, had been added after Bill was born. My parents, however, were soon spending most of their time in Washington.

Making money, satisfactory as it was, was never my father's primary objective. Throughout his life, he looked for ways to make his money work for the public good. In New York, he had become engaged in many welfare organizations. He was also president of Mount Sinai Hospital, and his interest in mental health was already evident in his support for building clinics. He had set up a fund at his alma mater, Yale, to train young men for public service. At the same time, he was beginning to hanker for some opportunity to serve the government himself.

Being Republican, he had gotten involved in Charles Evans Hughes's campaign against President Wilson in 1916, which, of course, was narrowly unsuccessful. Shortly after the election, my father, even more eager to work for the government since he was certain America would be pulled into the war in Europe, had offered his services to his friends Justice Louis Brandeis and Bernard Baruch, and even to Wilson himself. With no specific assignment, he went to Washington as a dollar-a-year man, and, after a few false starts, he eventually got various appointments

her to see Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Elihu Root and Charles Evans Hughes. She met and, as she said, tried to impress H.G. Wells. She is very self-analytical in her diary, and mentions feeling not always mentally at her best, "but when I like people I have a silly wish to glitter that no one really could satisfy."

There are sporadic mentions in the diary of visits to Washington by the children, or of parental visits to New York. These references focused on how much we were learning, and our development under the care of Powelly and Mrs. Satis N. Coleman, a teacher who later became well known for her program for the early musical training of children. My sisters played the violin, and I did things like tap on glasses filled with varying amounts of water. In December of 1918, my mother noted, "The children delighted me with their progress and their happiness under Mrs. Coleman's influence."

I can't remember the years in New York, since I was a baby, and those very early years of separation and substitute parenting had the least effect on me of any of the children. Only psychiatrists can guess about their effect on my older siblings. Much later, my brother, when he was in the process of being analyzed to become a psychoanalyst himself, got very angry thinking about the separation and testily asked my mother how she could have left her children in



With her mother circa 1933, above, and in a photograph taken at the Crescent Place residence.

and high-level government assignments under seven presidents.

My father left New York for Washington early in 1917. My mother stayed in Mount Kisco that summer, following my birth in June. In October she joined him in a large rented house on K Street. For several vague reasons—Washington was crowded, there was a pneumonia epidemic at one point, they viewed their stay as temporary—they left us children in New York for the next four years, three of which they spent mostly in Washington with occasional visits back and forth. It's odd that they claimed not to have known how long they would be staying, since as soon as he got to Washington my father resigned as a governor of the New York Stock Exchange, gave up directorships in several companies, and sold all stocks that might involve him in a conflict of interest. In fact, in August 1917 he decided to dissolve his investment banking firm completely, since he knew even then that he would get deeply involved with the U.S. Treasury.

When she went to Washington, my mother's life changed drastically—and for the better. She was part of a team for the first time, going into a strange city in which she and my father were both new. And in Washington, unlike the many women who to this day find the city distasteful because they are regarded as appendages of their husbands, my mother found a wide canvas on which to paint.

As she had done in Europe, my mother rapidly got to know extraordinary people: Baruch, Brandeis, Felix Frankfurter, who took

New York for those early years. She said, "Well, you were all in school." But the older children were 2, 4 and 6, and I was a few months old, when our parents established themselves in Washington.

From as early as I can remember, I adored my older siblings, but particularly Bis and Bill. I was desperately eager to be part of their adventurous life and terribly envious of Bis's nonconformist image. I envied her self-assurance, her independence, her daring, her willingness to cut up and row with the family. I would have liked to be a dashing lawbreaker, but I didn't have the proper instincts or the courage, and I was always scorned for passively going along. Where Bis was a rebel, I followed the rules. I was Goody Two-shoes, begging to be taken along with Bis and Bill wherever they went. Naturally, they considered me a pain.

As the fourth of five children, I was oddly shielded from the rigors of living with parents who demanded perfection and from some of the eccentricities of our curious upbringing. More so than the older children, I was supervised by our parents from afar. This was in certain ways lucky, because, growing up somewhat alone, I didn't experience the rules and heavy hand to which the older children were subjected.

My difficulties were much more tied to a lack of guiding personal relationships, for I had more or less to bring myself up emotionally and figure out how to deal with whatever situations con-

fronted me. The only person who was physically affectionate with me was Powelly, whom I emotionally outgrew when I was about 7. From then on I was on my own.

When the family reunited in Washington in the fall of 1921, we moved into a large, dark, red-brick house on Connecticut Avenue, described by my mother in her diary as a "big, old-fashioned barn." She added: "The children are happy in their semi-country life, and we are all glad to be living together again." My earliest memories are of this house, where I was quite content. The house was a sprawling Victorian mansion with a stained-glass bay window in the dining room. It was rented from the Woodward family of the Woodward & Lothrop department store family.

During the year I was in the fifth grade, we moved out of the Woodward house, which had been sold, and into a red-brick house on Massachusetts Avenue, a couple of blocks from Dupont Circle. My commute to school was a little longer. I used to walk up the avenue every morning, about eight blocks uphill, carrying my roller skates. Coming back was easy—I simply whizzed home downhill, carrying my book bag in one hand and reserving the other to grab the lamppost at each corner in order not to go flying into the street.

After a two-year interim on Massachusetts Avenue, we moved to a large house owned by Henry White, an ex-ambassador to France, at 1624 Crescent Pl., just off 16th Street. I was then in the seventh grade, and this was the real house in which I grew up, my home in Washington, and where my mother lived for the rest of her life.

The house on Crescent Place, which my father rented for several years before eventually buying it in 1934, was designed in 1912 by

that all she could think of was Grape-Nuts. The Grape-Nuts were brought and set before her by the butler, who stationed himself behind her chair. Mary remembers her horror as the sound of each bite echoed from every corner.

I began my education in a Montessori school, where we were encouraged to pursue our own interests at our own pace—in other words, to do the things we liked most to do whenever we wanted to. I started by learning to tie shoelaces and progressed to reading a lot, which I enjoyed, and avoiding math, which I didn't. As a result of a rhythmic-dance class, using fancy tie-dyed scarves, I became adept at standing on my head and turning cartwheels.

At the age of 8, I entered the fourth grade at Potomac School, only two blocks from our house. Potomac was a private conventional grammar school, and so I went from a free-form, permissive society to a completely structured school where the desks were in rows, the school day was programmed, there was homework, and—worst of all—they were starting fractions, which looked like a foreign language to me.

Entering Potomac as a new girl was difficult. I think of my life in my early years there as being solitary. I felt awkward, out of place and different, especially in the ribbed socks that no one else wore. It was the last class in which there were both girls and boys; from fifth through eighth grades, beyond which Potomac didn't go, there were only girls, as was the case at Madeira, where I went to high school, and for my first two years of college, at Vassar.

Potomac School proved to be my first big adjustment—one that helped me with a basic lesson of growing up: learning to get along

The steelworkers advanced and the guards or the police suddenly fired on them, killing seven and wounding others. Pandemonium spread, and we all piled into any available vehicles and fled.

the well-known architect John Russell Pope and initially had 40 rooms. It was a very grand and rather formal house. The only somewhat cozy room on the main floor was the library, in which we spent most of our time. My younger sister, Ruth, and I shared a large room, but as the older girls left for college, the house was done over and I was allowed to choose my own room and decorate it. I said I would like it to be modern. A special modern designer created a plaster fireplace, painted white, with no mantel, and the room had quite beautiful made-to-order modern furniture. It was a strange contrast to, and an odd oasis in, a period house full of Chippendale furniture as well as paintings and sculpture—Cezannes, a Manet, a Renoir, two Brancusis, a Rodin and, in the upstairs hall, the Woolworth watercolor series by Marin. In the front hall there was a beautiful Chinese screen, a bronze Buddha and a gilt mirror, which later went to the White House to join its twin, already there.

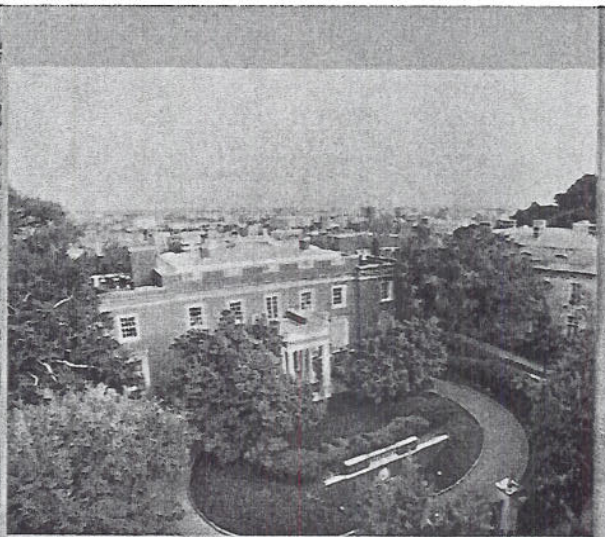
Although I didn't realize it at the time, the atmosphere of the Crescent Place house intimidated some of my friends. One of them remembers lunching in the vast dining room, just the two of us and my governess, attended by the butler and a maid. When my mother was there, she was served first and ate at once and so quickly that she would finish before the last person had been served. We called that unfortunate seat "Starvation Corner" and tried not to sit there. We learned to keep a hand on our plates; otherwise they would be removed before our forks returned from our mouths. To this day, I eat much too fast. It's odd how long childhood habits stay with us.

When I was in high school, one friend, Mary Gentry, came home with me for the weekend and remembers coming down to breakfast alone. She was seated in the huge dining room when the butler approached and asked what she would like. She was so terrified

in whatever world one is deposited. I had to observe what was done, to imitate. I had to cope with my loneliness, my differences, and become some other person. I was more or less alone until my second year there, or fifth grade, when I figured out how to start making friends by inviting people over to the house. Rose Hyde became my best friend, despite the way I extended my initial invitation to her: "Rose, I've called everyone else and nobody can come over. Can you?" She could, and it was the beginning of a long friendship.

By the seventh and eighth grades, I had made some other friends: Julia Grant and Madelin Lang—both daughters of Army officers, and Julia the granddaughter of President Grant. When we studied the Civil War in sixth grade, the students brought in pictures of their relatives who had fought in the war. Rose brought one of her great-grandfather, who was a clergyman in the Confederate Army. Julia came with the famous photograph of Gen. Grant leaning against a tree. "Guess why he's leaning up against that tree," Rose cracked. "Because he's too drunk to stand up." Julia socked her, knocking her down in the playground. Rose's mother had to write a note of apology to Mrs. Grant, and peace was restored.

By the fifth grade, I was fairly coordinated and had become proficient at team sports. Potomac was divided into two groups, the Reds and the Blues, which competed fiercely in games, races, volleyball and other sports. I was on the Red team and was inclined to be bossy, a trait of which I was quite unaware until Miss Preisha—the gym teacher, on whom I had a crush—pulled me aside one day and told me she thought I might be elected captain of the Reds if I didn't tell people what to do so much. Suddenly I could hear myself egging people on or giving orders. I took her advice and, miracle of miracles, it worked! I became *continued on page 30*



Coming of Age

Clockwise from above: The bankruptcy auction of The Washington Post, at which Eugene Meyer bought the paper for \$825,000; a view of the family's Crescent Place house; a newspaper clipping—with misspelled caption—from her University of Chicago days; in the low-back dress with leopard-skin straps that so amused the waterfront union negotiators; in the offices of the San Francisco News; with her father and aunt Rosalie Stern in San Francisco in 1938 or early 1939.



Striking a New Trail



KATHERINE MEYER AND DAVID HOPKINS. Children of notables putting out political bulletin at University of Chicago.

OPERA S. F. Society Gathers for Gala Opening of Season



Survey Shows Students React Away From Parents' Views

Sons and daughters of distinguished men enrolled at the University of Chicago most certainly will NOT follow in the footsteps of their fathers. In their hobbies and choice of subjects in college a few approach the professions of their fathers—a survey at the University of Chicago showed—but most of them are as far distant from the work of their fathers as young Huntington Harris. FINANCE NOT INHERITED. The son of Harden B. Harris of the Harris Trust & Savings Bank far from taking an interest in finance, collects photographs, records and is interested in the study of Japanese art and literature. His sister, Valerie, is interested in dramatics. Kay Meyer, daughter of Eugene Meyer, former head of the Federal Reserve Bank and owner of the Washington Post, has little interest in finance or journalism, but devotes her spare moments to the study of Spanish.

Meanwhile David Hopkins, whose father, Harry Hopkins, federal relief administrator, eschews politics while devoting his life to social problems, dabbles in politics. YOUNG ICKES NO POLITICIAN. Ray Ickes, son of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, is not interested in politics, in which his father has long been active. Young Ickes who is not a friend of young Hopkins through the disputes in their fathers have not come between them is a trap shooter of distinction. Marguerite Goodkind, granddaughter of the military philanthropist, John Vanderlip, son of Frank Vanderlip, the financier, studies foreign relations. Robert Emmert, whose grandfather founded the Chase National Bank in New York tinkers with motorcycles, and Don McIlroy, son of J. P. McIlroy, the writer, makes Judo, the Japanese art of self-defense.

PERSONAL HISTORY

continued from page 18

captain. This small triumph gave me great secret satisfaction. I had had my first social success, a sign that something was working.

When I got to the eighth grade, I was sent to Miss Minnie Hawkes's dancing school. My shyness made the class an ordeal to begin with, but adding to my torture was my height. I had grown tall—one of the tallest in the class—and had feet that were pretty big, too. During this time, my mother had a sudden fit of economy—or it may have been a genuine inability to shop—so I went off to dancing school in two hand-me-down dresses of Bis's. I still remember that one was pale-peach velvet and the other was red silk. Since the back of the latter was thought to be too low, it was filled in with other material in a not inconspicuous patching job. To complete the ensemble, my governess bought me gold kid shoes. The other girls had flat pumps and puff sleeves. My shoes were high heels—that's all the store had in my size—adding at least

mother's enormous ego lent the whole thing a healthy reality check.

When I began high school at Madeira, it was located in Washington, near Dupont Circle. My father greatly admired Madeira's founder, Lucy Madeira Wing, and was involved in helping her finance the school and move it to a beautiful new site in Virginia in my second year, when I became a five-day boarder, returning home on weekends.

The Meyer girls were all automatically sent to Madeira. Miss Madeira had some advanced ideas and attempted to broaden our horizons. She believed, for instance, that God was a woman. Under the guise of Bible class, she attempted to enlighten us about poverty. She used her bully pulpit to try to mold us into some species of "Shavian Fabian," as Rose Hyde called it. The school itself evidenced a very egalitarian spirit. Our uniforms helped obscure our differing financial backgrounds, and we generally didn't know or care about anyone's social standing. But, not surprisingly, we were rather narrowly cast. The Depression raged all around us at Madeira, but rarely hit home hard. A

boys in the stag line at parties and dances. I noticed that if you laughed uproariously at the silliest joke and acted lively, as though you were having a wonderful time, the boys thought you were attractive and appealing. I applied this knowledge shamelessly. I faked it, but achieved a passing measure of popularity. So I gradually made my way through parties in Washington, at which I managed not to get "stuck" with one boy, which was the nightmare. I knew one or two of my brother's friends from his Washington school days, and there were boys who occasionally took me to the parties and sometimes to movies. While at Vassar, I was invited to a few weekends at male colleges. But not until I got to the University of Chicago did I finally find real male friends and occasionally beaux, many of whom I frightened away through diffidence and not knowing how to cope.

At Madeira, as an upperclassman, I also had my first certified success of a worldly kind. To my stunned amazement, I was elected president of the senior class. I had no idea of anything approximating general liking and/or approval of me by others. It

On the job I was learning to write, or rewrite, from phoned-in news. It was still taking me too long to write, but my stories were appearing with fewer alterations by the editors on the callous city desk.

two inches to my height. This odd apparition, of course, towered over the boys, with the expectable disastrous results.

At about this period, we girls were all sending away for samples of soap and shampoo and trading them in the playground. Like my friends, I also collected photographs of favorite movie stars, Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, whose movies I saw on weekends. I memorized—in German—"Falling in Love Again," a song from "The Blue Angel." And we voraciously read movie magazines.

Also like most young people, I had fantasies, but I recognized them even then as being just that. One was that it would be great to be a model. I once expressed this notion to my high school friend Nancy White, who returned me to reality by asking, "What of? Houses?" The other fantasy I suppose I shared with many children was that of being "famous"—maybe not a movie star (although I had wispy visions of entering a room like Dietrich)—but in some way being successful and having people know who I was. The strange thing is that after Watergate to some small extent the fantasy came true. I always found this hard to believe—both pleasurable and a little embarrassing—but the shadow of my

"Poverty Party" was held, with the proceeds donated to the Social Welfare Fund.

Miss Madeira ran a tight ship in a strict age. Her motto, which she often included in her talks to the school assemblies, was full of puritan drive: "Function in disaster. Finish in style." Boarders were allowed to go into town to shop at one department store, though a chaperon had to stand guard in the shoe department because a man held your foot.

Despite my penchant for law-abiding ways, I participated in one illegal activity. I joined a secret society, *Vestes ad Mortuum*, which we translated as *Virgins Unto Death*—an odd goal, I must say. In the middle of the night, we virgins arose, donned heavy rain capes that Miss Madeira had procured from a French monastery, hiked a mile into the woods, and buried a pair of galoshes—the significance of which is unfortunately lost on me now.

Dances were held at school about twice a year. Of course, no boys were allowed, so all the girls put on their evening dresses and corsages and danced with one another. The taller girls, who led, as I did, often found it difficult adjusting to male dancing partners in later life.

When I was about 17, I made a determined effort to learn how to appeal to the

gave me inordinate pleasure, but it gave my father even more.

Despite my successes in high school, I left Madeira with scant training for the life I was later to lead. I still felt fairly different and shy and believed I had only a few friends. Apparently my classmates saw me differently from the way I saw myself. My senior yearbook entry describes a girl known for her laugh and her manly stride. My class prophecy read: "Kay's a Big Shot in the newspaper racket." But I envisaged no such future for myself or, in fact, any specific future at all. Rather than creating my own way, what I was trying to do all the time was figure out how to adjust to whatever life I found. I would have preferred to be trailblazing, and of course adventurous and daring like Bis, but the poem chosen to accompany my class picture at Madeira reveals a different kind of person: "Those about her from her shall read the perfect ways of honour." In other words, Goody Two-shoes.

Children watch and listen to their parents, sometimes critically but sometimes unquestioningly. Each of my parents influenced us in large ways and small. Certain of their habits rubbed off and

left their mark. One very peculiar habit I picked up unconsciously from my mother was a tendency to be suspicious and tight and ungenerous about small things. Though she was very lavish in some ways, she would complain about small bills she received, certain that people were cheating her. She would buy a fur and say, "You have to be careful, because you can choose one and they'll substitute another." She said, "If you have your pearl necklace restrung, you have to sit and watch to be sure you get your own pearls back." She was mean about raises for people in the house. She literally hated to give things away, even praise or encouragement. I, too, developed an inability to spend money, along with a dark suspicion that people were taking advantage of me and an inability to enjoy giving.

Many of these habits were overcome when I married Phil Graham, who was exceedingly generous and imaginatively giving. Some habits I have never overcome are odd ones I inherited from my father. Despite the vast scale on which we lived, my father had peculiar fixations on certain small expenses. He preached tiny economies with zeal—using things up completely, never wasting, never phoning if you could wire or, better still, write. The compulsion I am still left with is turning out every light before I go to bed at night. To this day, alone in a house, I am totally unable to leave a light on—I will go up and down halls and staircases if I know a light is on. I tell myself to stop, that it doesn't matter, yet then I go and turn it off.

Some lessons were impressed on me by reverse example. When I was young I perceived grown-ups behaving quite oddly at times. I remember being shocked or dismayed by things I observed and making silent vows not to behave as they did when I grew up. For instance, my mother, when confronted with a line waiting at the movies, would go to the box office and say, "I am Mrs. Eugene Meyer of The Washington Post," and demand to be taken in and seated. At that time, she did indeed get in. I cringed with embarrassment and hoped the ground would swallow me up. It had such a lasting effect on me that I have never been able to deal with headwaiters in restaurants who put you "in Siberia" rather than the better part of the restaurant. I just go meekly to Siberia.

As the years went on, my mother seemed to have a more and more difficult time emotionally. She was constantly beset with colds, pneumonia or various other illnesses, and she reacted to each one with the greatest amount of care, self-pity and drama, demanding and receiving constant visits, with all of us dancing attendance. In retrospect, I wonder if depression contributed to this intense concentration on her health.

She also started to drink more heavily,



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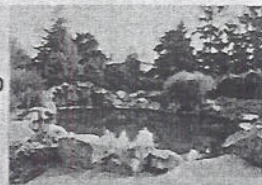
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sometimes starting as early as 10 in the morning, at least during one period in her life. This was a problem that greatly worried my father and was an escalating burden to him and to all of us. Even her drinking was done in a somewhat eccentric way. There was an old-fashioned locked whiskey-and-wine closet in the basement to which only my father had the key, so he would have to make repeated trips to the cellar and therefore knew exactly how much she was drinking. Of course, admonishments on this score never had an effect. The surprising thing is that she never bought whiskey herself or asked him for her own key.

My mother's effect on us was often contradictory. We received every encouragement for what we accomplished, yet her ego was such that she trampled on our incipient interests or enthusiasms. If I said I loved *The Three Musketeers*, she responded by saying I couldn't really appreciate it unless I had read it in French, as she had. Mother herself read constantly until the week she died—philosophy, history, biography and all the English, American, French, German and Russian classics. She had only scorn for people who read light novels, let alone trash or time-wasters.

Mother set impossibly high standards for us, creating tremendous pressures and undermining our ability to accomplish whatever modest aims we may have set for ourselves. Fundamentally, I think we all felt we somehow hadn't lived up to what she expected or wanted of us, and the insecurities and lack of self-confidence she bred were long-lasting. But despite whatever personal doubts about us she may have had, the picture of her family she presented to the world was unblemished. She created and then perpetuated the myth of her children's perfection. From her point of view, Meyer girls were brighter, more attractive, funnier, smarter, more successful, this or that—in short, better than anyone else. Most important, she felt we should be different, more intellectual, eccentric even.

I can't say I think Mother genuinely loved us. Toward the end of her life, I was a success in her eyes, and perhaps that is what she loved. Yet, with all her complexity, I felt closer throughout my early childhood to my mother than to the very distant and rather difficult figure of my father. I liked him, but always from a distance. Actually, he delighted in children and was rather jolly with us, but a little awkward. At most, he would take one of us as a small child onto his lap and dangle a watch at our ear.

But though he lacked the gift of intimacy, in many ways his supportive love still came

through to me. He somehow conveyed his belief in me without ever articulating it, and that was the single most sustaining thing in my life. That was what saved me. I realized this only in retrospect, however, since our relationship took time to grow.

In June 1933, my father bought *The Washington Post*. None of us could have known then what a transforming event this would be in all our lives. The paper had fallen on hard times, brought on in large part by the aimless ways of its owner, Edward Beale McLean, a dapper playboy whom Alice Longworth later described as a "pathetic man with no chin and no character."

From the time he inherited *The Post* in 1916 until he lost it a decade and a half later,



As a student at the University of Chicago circa 1938.

Ned had paid scant attention to either his news or its business side. He brought his mistress to editorial meetings, or so it was alleged by his wife, Evalyn, in divorce proceedings. In fact, concerning his news sense, Evalyn memorably said, "He would not have recognized a piece of news—not even if the man who bit the dog likewise bit Ned McLean." Evalyn, for her part, operated on a grand scale. The wealthy daughter of a mining tycoon, she lived in huge houses, gave lavish parties, and owned—and wore—the famous Hope Diamond, which was reputed to bring bad luck to its owners, and seems to have done so for her. She had every intention of saving *The Post* for her sons and so had turned down several offers to buy it—or persuaded her husband to do so—including at least one from my father.

In fact, my father had several times before expressed interest in *The Post* and other papers. As early as 1925, recognizing that William Randolph Hearst's two papers in Washington were both losers, he thought Hearst might be willing to sell one, and tried to acquire the morning *Washington Herald*.

Four years later, in 1929, he tried to buy *The Post* for \$5 million, certain that this price was so high that American Security & Trust Co., which controlled the paper then, couldn't possibly afford to turn him down. But it did. Other offers for *The Post*, includ-

ing two in 1931, each for \$3 million, were also rejected. This was because Evalyn McLean held on—despite divorce proceedings and court fights. So the profitable paper Ned had inherited from his father continued its downhill slide. Poorly managed, with at least a half-million dollars in debts, it was forced into receivership in March 1932, unable even to pay its newsprint bills, and was to be sold at public auction.

The bankruptcy of *The Post* came at a propitious time for my father. With Franklin Roosevelt's election that fall, he knew he was leaving the government. Since he didn't want to escalate the bidding at the auction by revealing his identity, he had a lawyer, George E. Hamilton Jr., do the bidding for him. He instructed Hamilton to raise anybody's bid by \$50,000 or even \$100,000 immediately, as though he were going to go on forever, then to jump in increments of \$25,000 once the bidding reached \$800,000. He also gave Hamilton an outside parameter of \$1.5 million to \$1.7 million, and sent him off to the auction on his behalf. He himself remained out of sight at Crescent Place, which was essentially closed up for the summer, hiding with his friend and lifelong assistant, Floyd Harrison.

The auction was held on the steps of *The Post's* gray gingerbread building at E Street on Pennsylvania Avenue on June 1, 1933, just a few weeks after my father had ostensibly retired. Gathered there on the steps of the building that day, among others, were Evalyn McLean, dressed in black and wearing the Hope Diamond; her two sons; her friend Alice Longworth; David Bruce, then Andrew Mellon's son-in-law; the *Washington Star's* Victor Kauffmann and Fleming Newbold; and representatives for the McLeans, Hearst and other bidders. All that was being sold at auction was what was left of the fifth of five newspapers in town: a circulation reduced to 50,000, the quaint, run-down old building and an Associated Press franchise—in short, a decrepit paper with debts of \$600,000.

Mrs. McLean's attorney and Hearst's lawyers were the only bidders who stayed with Hamilton's bids initially, but Mrs. McLean dropped out of the bidding at \$600,000. Hearst's people kept pace with Hamilton's bids until the price reached \$800,000. Hamilton, as instructed, went to \$825,000. Hearst must have instructed his bidders to stop at \$800,000, because they then dropped out. My father had bought *The Washington Post*—for which he had five years earlier offered \$5 million—for \$825,000.

What is most amazing to me about the purchase of *The Post*—especially given its importance to my future life and that of my family—is that I knew nothing about it. No one in my family had mentioned it to me ei-

ther before or even immediately after, nor were they aware they hadn't told me about it.

Sensitive subjects were rarely mentioned at our house, but three were particularly taboo—money, my father's being Jewish, and sex. None of the three was ever articulated by any of us in the family; in fact, nothing difficult or personal was discussed among us. There was such an aversion to talking about money or our wealth that, ironically, there was, in some odd ways, a fairly Spartan quality to our lives. We were not showered with conspicuous possessions, elaborate toys or clothes.

The only discussions I do remember relating to wealth had to do with being told that you couldn't just be a rich kid, that you had to do something, to be engaged in useful, productive work; you couldn't and shouldn't do nothing. Working was always a part of my life. I remember one Christmas vacation, when I was probably about 15, spent at the Federal Reserve Board learning to draw graphs.

Remarkably, the fact that we were half Jewish was never mentioned any more than money was discussed. I was totally—incredibly—unaware of antisemitism, let alone of my father's being Jewish. I don't think this was deliberate; I am sure my parents were not denying or hiding my father's Jewishness from us, nor were they ashamed of it. But there was enough sensitivity so that it was never explained or taken pride in. Indeed, we had a pew in St. John's Episcopal Church—the president's church, on Lafayette Square—but mainly because the rector was a friend of the family. When I was about 10, all of us Meyer children were baptized at home to satisfy my devout Lutheran maternal grandmother, who thought that without such a precaution we were all headed for Hell. But for the most part, religion was not part of our lives.

One of the few memories I have of any reference to my being Jewish is of an incident that took place when I was 10 or 11. At school we were casting for reading aloud "The Merchant of Venice," and one classmate suggested I should be Shylock because I was Jewish. In the same way I had once innocently asked my mother whether we were millionaires—after someone at school accused my father of being one—I asked if I was Jewish and what that meant. She must have avoided the subject, because I don't remember the answer.

About the third thing that was never discussed in our family, sex, I knew nothing for a surprisingly long time. I had no idea what sex was or how babies were conceived. In fact, it was as if our rigorous schedules and exercise and athletic program were constructed to keep us from thinking too much about it. I once asked my

mother what really happened during sex, telling her I'd read about the sperm and the ova but wondered how it all worked. She responded, "Haven't you seen dogs in the street?" Although unfortunately I hadn't, I naturally said, "Of course," and that was the end of the conversation.

Because these matters were never discussed, I was almost totally unaware of money, religion and sex. It's peculiar: I realized, of course, that the houses were big and that we had a lot of servants, but I didn't know we were rich any more than I knew we were Jewish. In some ways it was quite bizarre; in others, quite healthy. Equally odd was how little we were taught about the practical aspects of life. I didn't know how to manage the simplest tasks. I didn't know how to dress, sew, cook, shop or, rather more important, relate to people of any kind, let alone young men.

I was always well fed and cared for, of course. In fact, my mother was constantly reminding us of how lucky we were, how much we owed our parents, how farseeing and wonderful my father was to have taken care of us all. And we were indeed lucky. We had vast privileges. We had parents with solid values. Our interests were aroused in art and politics and books. But to all of this I brought my own feelings of inability and inferiority—not only to my mother, but to my older sisters and brother. I was, I thought, realistic about my own assets and abilities as I grew older. I was not very pretty. I grew tall early, and therefore seemed ungainly to myself. I didn't think I could excel, and was sure I'd never attract a man whom I would like and who would not be viewed with condescension by my parents and siblings.

In all the turmoil of the family and our strange isolation both from our parents and from the outside world, we children were left to bring ourselves up emotionally and intellectually. We were leading lives fraught with ambivalence. It was hard to have an identity. An early example of this came one day when the telephone rang in the playroom and there was no grown-up present. Bis very fearfully picked up the phone and said hello. A male voice impatiently asked, "Who is this? Who is this?" to which Bis replied, "This is the little girl that Mademoiselle takes care of." That was the only way she could think of to describe herself to a strange grown-up.

So the question of who we really were and what our aspirations were, intellectual or social, was always disquieting. The more subtle inheritance of my strange childhood was the feeling, which we all shared to some extent, of believing we were never quite going about things correctly. Had I said the right thing? Had I worn the right clothes? Was I attractive? These questions were unsettling and self-

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absorbing, even overwhelming at times, and remained so throughout much of my adult life, until, at last, I grew impatient with dwelling on the past.

In the summer of 1936, on a train trip to Mount Kisco with my father, I broached the idea of my studying at the London School of Economics (as my brother, Bill, had) the following year. It was met with an immediate "no." He believed that Bill had been too young intellectually, too immature, to put European social problems in context, and he thought I was, too. But he said that he understood why I wanted to leave Vassar—the "in" place for Madeira girls, which I had chosen by a process of non-thought two years before—and that it was all right with him if I went anywhere else in this country. I was so taken aback that I could hardly think of an alternative to London. But I thought I had to respond instantly rather than do the natural thing, which was to think it over, so I made an instantaneous decision. I hit on the University of Chicago not out of a sudden impulse toward serious study but simply because there flashed into my mind a picture I had seen while flipping through the pages of Redbook magazine of Robert Maynard Hutchins, the university's young, handsome, dynamic president. The caption under his picture said that he was revolutionizing the learning process and shaking things up with new and interesting ideas about college education, and that the university was in an intellectual ferment—or something of the sort. I added things up quickly: It was in the Midwest (I had never lived off the Eastern seaboard); it was coeducational; and it was in a city. "Okay," I said, "I'll go to Chicago."

And, in fact, with no more thought than that, off I went, arriving in Chicago less than a month after our conversation on the train. I hadn't foreseen the magnitude of the decision I'd made and didn't realize what I was in for until I was already in the thick of it. My father had come with me to Chicago to enter me in the university and find me a place to live, but once he left I was completely on my own in a strange environment and a sea of thousands of students, with only one or two casual acquaintances. Maybe it was lucky that I hadn't had the time or the sense to envision being so alone; I might well have pulled back. Probably I reassured myself with the thought that I was planning to stay only one year and could always return to Vassar.

I lived on the edge of the campus at International House, which was filled with foreign students, graduate students and some transfer students like me. We all ate in the cafeteria, sitting at round tables that afforded opportunities for making friends and

acquaintances of every kind. Before too long I met and became roommates with Tayloe Hannaford, a like-minded girl from Winnetka, Ill., who had transferred from Sarah Lawrence, and gradually we assembled a nucleus of friends. We both were entranced with a graduate student, Sidney Hyman, who was much around the house. Early on, Sidney and I fell into conversation about our shared enthusiasm for Thomas Mann, and we talked for hours, cementing a friendship that moved with me through the years. "Fun" for our group was talk, exchange of ideas, laughter, close-harmony singing and hours at the college beer parlor, Hanley's, which had a long bar, in front of which was a row of small square tables with red-and-white-checked tablecloths where you could sit with your friends and nurse a beer or two all night.

After a few months, I was approached by members of two different clubs, Mortar Board and Quadrangle, similar to sororities, suggesting that I join. I went to a meeting of one where lots of young women were sitting around, many of them playing bridge. It wasn't the kind of atmosphere I was used to, even at Vassar. Shortly afterward, a friend of mine who was a member of Mortar Board asked if I was really interested in joining and said that if I was she would go to bat for me: She was willing to take on a fight about my being Jewish, but not if there was nothing to be served by fighting. Having had no idea that my being considered Jewish was an issue, I was startled, and assured her that I wasn't really interested. Later, a friend told me that Quadrangle had actually disbanded over the question of admitting me to membership. This was one of the very few instances in which antisemitism touched me directly in those early years, and I was more surprised than distressed by it.

Chicago then was a center of intellectual turmoil. The university was a distinctly urban school, with mostly nonaffluent students, some excellent faculty, and high intellectual standards. Because Hutchins had become enthralled by the theory that education consisted in reading the great books of the Western world and absorbing their ideas, the academic program was very different from that at most colleges. Hutchins had been influenced by Mortimer Adler, who was the leading exponent of these ideas, and by St. John's College, where they had previously been tried out. Hutchins had also abolished football and other athletics. The whole thing was slightly flaky but stimulating—a universe of its own.

I had decided on American history as my major, so I enrolled in survey courses in economics and in history and, despite some trepidation, the course in the great books taught jointly by Hutchins and Adler. It

started with Plato and Aristotle, worked up through St. Thomas Aquinas and other philosophers, and ended with Freud and Marx and Engels. This class—which was supposed to teach you “how to read a book,” as Adler later titled one of his own books—met once a week for two solid, sometimes torturing hours. About 30 of us sat around an oblong table, and Hutchins or Adler or both would use the Socratic method in discussing what we had read and testing us. For the whole two hours, the two men hammered away, bullying us unmercifully—“Well, Miss Meyer, tell us in your own words what Aristotle thinks about this.” “What do you think about what he says?” “Do you really think that good behavior follows from good values?” “What are good habits?” “What are good values?” “If that’s what you think, what if such-and-such happened?”

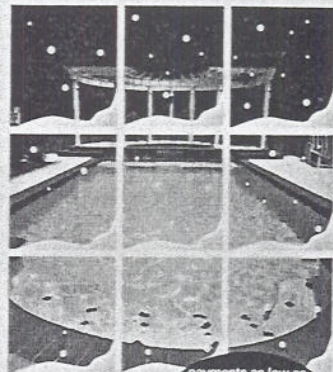
The methods they used often taught you most about bullying *back*, about standing up to Hutchins and Adler, about challenging them and fundamentally pleasing them by doing it with gusto and verve, so that they were amused. If you learned to cope with their methods, you could stay afloat. When I didn’t do well, the most awful depression set in, because so much depended on that performance. When I did do well, my elation carried over to everything else I was doing at the university.

Through an old beau of my sister Flo’s, I met a classicist emigre professor, Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, whose book *Goliath* I had read and respected. I found him to be a bit of a madman, but very entertaining and very bright. Soon afterward, I was excited and flattered to be invited to dinner by Borgese. We ate in downtown Chicago—a great treat, since we students lived almost exclusively in the area around the university. On the way back from dinner he quizzed me about how many of my classmates I thought were still virgins, a question entirely beyond my ability to answer or even guess at. There were other leading questions, followed by an invitation to inspect his apartment. I was still so young and unsuspecting that poor Borgese obviously took my acceptance as an agreement to amorous advances, but, being so naive about sexual relations, I was surprised when the distinguished professor made a pass at me. When I resisted, he pursued me, and I found myself racing around his desk, the professor in pursuit. Finally, I insisted on leaving, and he drove me home. Surprisingly, he called and asked me out again. I was in such a panic about offending the great man that I went to the university’s infirmary and insisted I had appendicitis. When the doctors assured me I was in fine health, I had to tell the professor I was unable to go out with him—a monstrously difficult thing for me to do.

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My political outlook developed further as a committed liberal—primarily passionately antifascist and sympathetic toward the labor movement. Yet, though I was engaging in liberal thinking and activities, I remained basically conservative. I had never encountered real communists until I reached Chicago. The American Student Union there was very different from the one I'd left behind at Vassar, which had been run by girls who were relatively new to politics and whose passions—the political ones, at least—weren't all that deep. I was greeted effusively by the Chicago branch of the union, which was mostly composed of communists and socialists of a rather boring mind-set. An exception was a young British graduate student, Norman O. Brown, a Commonwealth Fellow, who took me to a few meetings and to dinner. He kept suggesting that I join the Young Communists, since they and the parent party were the most effective antifascist forces in the world. At that time, with the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, and Franco fighting against the forces of Spanish democracy, this argument could be made with some force. The ghastly crimes of Stalin had not yet been revealed, and when the famous trials started, they were, at least initially, viewed ambivalently by even the liberals among us.

I remained unpersuaded, and wondered

whether Brown might be a communist himself, assigned to convert me. In response to his proselytizing, I eventually wrote him a letter—which I later found in one of my textbooks and probably never sent—in which I said that, although my parents were doing certain things with which I disagreed, I loved them, was grateful for the circumstances into which I was born, appreciated what I had, and had no desire to revolt against any of it. I didn't want to help overthrow a system that I knew I belonged to, although I certainly understood that there were problems that should be addressed.

I'm not sure why when many of my friends had joined the party I had the resolve to reject it. Perhaps there was a balancing weakness at work, one that had long been a part of me—that inherent desire to conform, to please, to abide by laws; to be a good girl, if you will. Anyway, very luckily for The Washington Post during the McCarthy era, when we were constantly being attacked as "reds" by various constituencies, I never had been a member.

In the spring of my first year at Chicago, I took a course on labor relations from Paul Douglas, later a U.S. senator, and grew interested in labor problems. This was a time of broad-scale industrial organization that was being resisted by the steel, coal and automobile companies in extremely forceful,

even violent ways. My sympathies lay with the right to organize, and they haven't changed in that respect, although I have grown to regard some union leadership and tactics with a degree of skepticism. But at this time the great mass of workers in the industrial area had no way of dealing jointly with employers.

I became friends with Ralph Beck, a young man who was stringing for the Chicago Daily News and covering the Chicago steel strike. The Republic Steel plant in South Chicago, not too far from the university, was being struck, and Ralph called to tell me that there was going to be a confrontation of some sort between the strikers and the company and invited me to go with him to observe it. I agreed with enthusiasm. The picketers were facing armed Chicago police. I was not in danger, being at some distance, but I was scared. Ralph had left me behind for safety and had gone nearer. The steelworkers advanced and the guards or the police suddenly fired on them, killing seven and wounding others. Pandemonium and fear of arrest spread, even to where I was standing, and we all piled into any available vehicles and fled this horrifying scene.

After recovering from this traumatic event, we returned once or twice to the struck plant, and it occurred to us to won-

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der what was going on inside. Ralph suggested we try to find out. I asked for permission, mentioning The Washington Post as well as the Daily News, and learned a never-to-be-forgotten lesson about the power of a Washington newspaper, even though The Post was a minor one at that time. We were invited in and toured the plant with its officials, somewhat to my embarrassment and surprise—a college junior and her stringer friend.

By the end of my first year at Chicago, I had decided I wouldn't return to Vassar but would stay on. I had found an intellectually stimulating academic environment, had developed wonderful friendships, had grown up significantly and enjoyed myself very much indeed. But I went on experiencing the usual angst about "who I was" and how to survive the great strength and influence of the family. I had occasional romantic flirtations—sometimes on my part, sometimes on a young man's, but rarely both at once. One of these attachments was a strange emotional relationship with a political scientist, Hal Winkler, who was much shorter than I but very intense and passionate. I was always attracted physically to brilliance, and he was brilliant—or so it seemed to me—but I was still shy and virginal and didn't know how to cope with sexual advances. I apparently went on looking

a great deal more directed and together than I felt.

One of the most significant things to occur in the fall of my senior year was a visit from my sister Bis, who was then working in California. I was always excited at the prospect of seeing Bis, who had been in Europe, New York and Hollywood while I was in Washington, Vassar and Chicago. Her friends remained glamorous and even famous. In New York, she had been friendly with and even courted by the playwright Sam Behrman, and she saw a good deal of George Gershwin, Oscar Levant and Harpo Marx, visited the famous Herbert Swope and his wife, and knew Alexander Woolcott, Dorothy Parker and others of the Algonquin set. She had a serious romance with a movie producer whom she wanted to marry—an idea nixed by my mother, who thought it unsuitable. Mother once told me proudly how she had stopped Bis from going to Hollywood and marrying this young man. She said she went up to our family's New York apartment, where Bis was living, and argued with her for a week. Bis remained adamant until my mother said, "Bis, if you do this, it will kill your father." And that, said my mother with satisfaction, stopped her.

The visit Bis and I had in Chicago was extraordinary. We spoke at length about the

complexity of being a member of this overwhelming Meyer family, of what it meant positively and negatively, and of what we both wanted to do with our lives. On the train, even as it was pulling out of the station, Bis began a long letter to me, so full of her essence and so full of insight into the family that I've kept it always. She wrote on November 20, 1937:

I wish I had had time to talk about your own problems which in the light of my experiences seem very difficult and complicated. One of the hardest problems for all of us is the one which I believe is at the root of Flo's doings, and which I see little or no hope of her even realizing, let alone solving. That is the difficulty arising from the fact that from earliest childhood, we have all, through what is said and what is unsaid in the family circle, had the feeling that we were born to do big things! It was just a question of choosing the line best suited to us—hardly even the line we were best suited to! There was no question but that whatever it was we had to be best at it. Mother even used to say that, remember? "I don't care what any of you kids do—even if one of you should want to be an actress—just so you're the hell of a good actress!"

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We have lived so long at the top in every respect that it is hard to make ourselves really at home, with roots, at the bottom of the mountain. And that is the only way we will ever grow, if any of us do, to be able to climb under our own power.

It took me almost a month to reply, but when I did, it was a summation of what I was thinking about work, the family, The Post, and in particular my father. Bis kept my letter and returned it to me decades later:

On the subject of Meyerdom, I have plenty to say, even though I don't pretend to understand it completely, either its causes or its effects. It can be compared, obviously enough, with an octopus whose tentacles stretch far and wide, and what is worst of all, deep. In other words if you try to run from it you are apt to find it within. More concretely, this is the way it is working itself out for me at this point.

To begin somewhere in a circular situation, I think I want to go into the newspaper business. This is because I have certain political views which may or may not change combined with the fact that I like to write . . .

Putting aside an unanswerable question at this time, my ability to be a good reporter, which is a gift given by God to a very few, I mean GOOD reporter, the fact remains that what I am most interested in doing is labor reporting, possibly working up to political reporting later.

As you can see, that is no help to Dad. He wants and needs someone who is willing to go through the whole mill, from reporting, to circulation management and problems, to editorial writing, and eventually to be his assistant. This presents the payoff in problems. One, I detest beyond description advertising and circulation and that is what a newspaper executive spends most of his time worrying about. Two, there is a question of point of view which would or might complicate things if I were to work under Dad. And three I doubt my ability to carry a load like the Washington Post, and four I know Dad needs a different kind of person, much more of an automaton under him, and five I damn well think it would be a first class dog's life . . .

Discarding, finally, for a moment, the idea of ever having anything to do with the W. Post, there are more theoretical results to be questioned and tested. As I said long long ago at the beginning of this letter, Meyer tentacles clutch deep. From Dad's point of view, I think it would mean something; I may be flattering myself, but I think it would mean several things, such as companionship, a living connection with the next generation, and the knowledge that all that he was slaving to build was not going to stop with him.

From my point of view, it would be giving up a position that it is fair to say thousands would fight for, that is an influential position, in an influential paper in the capital of the world's most important country. Right now

anyway. Besides that it would mean losing valuable help, company, and advice, which has already influenced me a great deal and which I respect highly . . .

If I find for some reason that I am not fitted to do newspaper work, and this may happen as among other things, I function a little on the slow side, which is not good, I shall get out and consider it no disgrace. I don't think this is part of the success idea, because by fitted, I mean simply a competent, not scintillating job. Though that is made difficult by our heritage, I should think it could be worked out practically, though I can't tell from my present ivory tower window.

And someday I think I shall marry A MAN. That is because by nature I do not like to live alone. I like to live with somebody and if you live with someone it is nice to be married. So maybe I shall devote myself, as Flo always used to prophesy with hoots of mirth, to having sixteen small ones and bringing them up to be unsuccessful and rather animal in their desires, with as little as possible of that specialized human quality called the Rational . . .

This letter seems to me to summarize who I was and what I was thinking after almost four years of college better than I can do it nearly 60 years later. I am puzzled that I had such reservations about working for my father, in view of the continuing conversations he and I were having about my education and career in journalism and the progress of The Post. I suppose the answer has to be that I was ambivalent, and maybe so was he, since he and I later both enthusiastically endorsed my husband's going on The Post and my going off to lead the life of wife, mother and good works.

While I was home after graduating, my father suggested that I accompany him to California, land of his youth. I scarcely knew the California branch of my family, but I quickly fell in love with them, and with San Francisco as well—its beauty and its people, the civic feeling, the friendliness, the informality. Very soon I came to think that it would be wonderful to work in such a congenial atmosphere and beautiful environment, so I resolved to try to stay. I told my father that if he would help me find a job there, I would swallow my pride and give up a job I had earlier got for myself in Chicago.

There were four newspapers in San Francisco at that time. In the morning, the Chronicle was the predominant and most respected voice. The competition was Hearst's Examiner, the best and strongest Hearst paper of a then still-vibrant empire. The two afternoon papers exemplified typical old-fashioned razzle-dazzle street-sales journalism, bursting with huge headlines, late-breaking stories, and much more sex and crime than the morning papers. My father called his

friend George "Deke" Parker of Scripps Howard, and it was on their paper, the San Francisco News, that he found me a two-month job. Our competitor in the afternoon was another Hearst paper, the Call-Bulletin.

I am surprised that my father didn't turn to his friends on the Chronicle, the better-known and more traditional paper, but the News turned out to be a great blessing for me, because it was a typically informal, understaffed, rowdy, scrappy, amusing afternoon tabloid—ideal for a beginner breaking in, since it afforded me opportunities I couldn't have had in a more structured, orderly atmosphere. But things didn't start out all that happily. I went to the city room knowing no one, and—worse—not knowing the elements of the job. I hadn't done much typing and certainly not much reporting. I didn't know the city or how to get around in it. Everything seemed so suddenly overwhelming. I sat down at my desk and was gripped by fear of failure, lost and defeated before I'd begun.

My father had stayed over a few days, and I went to his room one night and in tears told him that I was afraid I'd bitten off more than I could chew, that I felt unable to do the job and would be of little use to the paper, certainly not worth the \$21 a week I was being paid, and that I wanted to go home with him. Dad said simply that everyone had to learn, that maybe I should take some more time before deciding to give up the job, and that if I wasn't worth the whole \$21 a week now I'd be worth much more than that later, since I would gradually learn the things I was so discouraged about now. What persuaded me I'm not sure, but I agreed to stay, knowing I could always give up later.

Just one short month after my tearful desire to run away, my new life had become lots of fun. By mid-August, I was beginning to feel that there were more ups than downs. A touch of ambition was taking hold, and I could see further ahead than the next paragraph. I realized that not just the News but San Francisco itself was a good place for me to be starting work, since no one knew I was connected with newspaper big shots, and if some people did, they didn't care.

On the job I was learning to write, or rewrite, from phoned-in news. It was still taking me too long to write, but my stories were appearing with fewer alterations by the editors on the callous city desk. I was also doing elementary jobs, like tracking down people for pictures. I even covered a bartenders union convention. My first serious assignment was cooked up by some editor. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was meeting in town, and he suggested I lure some of the delegates to a bar with the simple proposition that they view the scene of the crimes they were railing



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against, and do a story on the visit. I duly got the deed done and written up.

After I had been on the job only a short time, my neighbor in the city room, Bob Elliott, the News's experienced, professional labor reporter, leaned over and said that he had heard labor reporting interested me and asked if I would like to be his "legman," as it was then called, on two big issues he was covering—the growing confrontation on the waterfront involving a possible lockout of the Warehousemen's Union and a threatened strike by retail-store clerks against the city's department stores. I responded with a vigorous and enthusiastic assent, and thus began a long story that absorbed me for many weeks in the San Francisco waterfront and with many of the major figures involved in it.

At the time I began working on the lockout, the longshoremen and warehousemen—those who loaded and unloaded the ships and those who stored the goods from the port in the warehouses and removed them later—were organized into one big union, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU). The distributors from all the industries, tired of being knocked over one by one and whipsawed against each other by this increasingly powerful union, got together and decided to exert their united front by locking out the ILWU so they could negotiate a master contract for the whole waterfront.

When a strike occurred at the Woolworth warehouse, the Distributors Association brought in a boxcar loaded by nonunion people and ordered it unloaded. The "hot car," as it came to be dubbed—meaning a railroad freight car loaded by strikebreakers—was sent up and down the waterfront, stopping at each warehouse, where the employees were asked to unload it. When the union members refused, they would either go out on strike or be "locked out" of work as a result.

One of my jobs as a reporter on this story was to follow the hot car on its journey along the waterfront, observe each warehouse on which it called and the ensuing work stoppage, and report back to Elliott. So my beat became the waterfront, and my ports of call were the ILWU, the Distributors Association and the Pacific Coast Labor Bureau, another strong force in the picture. The bureau was a group of radical economists and professional negotiators for the unions, headed by Henry Melnikow. One of its ablest and toughest but most charming members was Sam Kagel, a highly successful negotiator for the ILWU who had no love for newspaper people. Luckily for me, however, of all the papers covering the waterfront he disliked the News least, thinking it was the fairest of all the overtly anti-union press.

The ILWU was headed by Harry Bridges,

the radical Australian immigrant who had led the violent longshoremen's strike in 1934. The warehousemen were headed by another very strong leader, Eugene Patton, one of a huge and authentic waterfront family, all of whom had grown up there and earned their living on the ships or around the harbor. Patton, or Pat, as he was known everywhere, was a wonderfully romantic figure. Smart, funny and intuitive, though uneducated in any formal sense, he was a brave leader, and a charismatic one.

Each of these players said that I could make myself at home in his office and that if there were developments he would inform me. They all got together at the end of the day to trade information and unwind, usually at a bar at the foot of Sacramento Street, and I began going along. With Kagel, Patton and, occasionally, Harry Bridges, I spent many hours up and down the waterfront in one of the 20 or more small, dark bars within a three-block area. We used to get boilermakers—a glass of beer and a shot of whiskey—at 25 cents each. If you bought two, you got the third one free—pretty heady stuff for a 21-year-old.

We all became great friends. In fact—in a most unprofessional manner, I realize now—Pat and I became more than friends; he was an early romance of mine. We really liked each other—he was not only highly intelligent but very good-looking. Some weeks after we met, I realized that he was married. I also realized that he had a serious drinking problem. His courage and extraordinary leadership abilities revealed themselves during World War II, when, in the Battle of the Bulge, he was promoted from a private to an officer after all of his officers had been killed and he took charge. Unfortunately, after the war he went on with his hard living and drinking, and eventually committed suicide by leaping off the Golden Gate Bridge.

I had carefully guarded my identity and was merely viewed by the labor leaders as the reporter from the News until my allotted time at the paper was to expire. Patton had made some reference to future plans, and I said I wasn't sure I'd be there. "Why," he said, "are they going to fire you?" Not exactly, I responded, and then told them I had been hired only for two months at the request of my father, who was an Eastern publisher. They wanted to know who he was, of course, and what the paper was. When I told them, they were momentarily surprised and puzzled but accepted it, and we went on as usual.

It was lucky that they knew of my connection to The Post, because later Melnikow, a somewhat humorless and paranoid figure, said to them, "Be careful, we have a spy in our midst." Somehow he had found out that I was the daughter of a capitalist and therefore suspected I was a capitalist spy. Since I had already confessed, my pals



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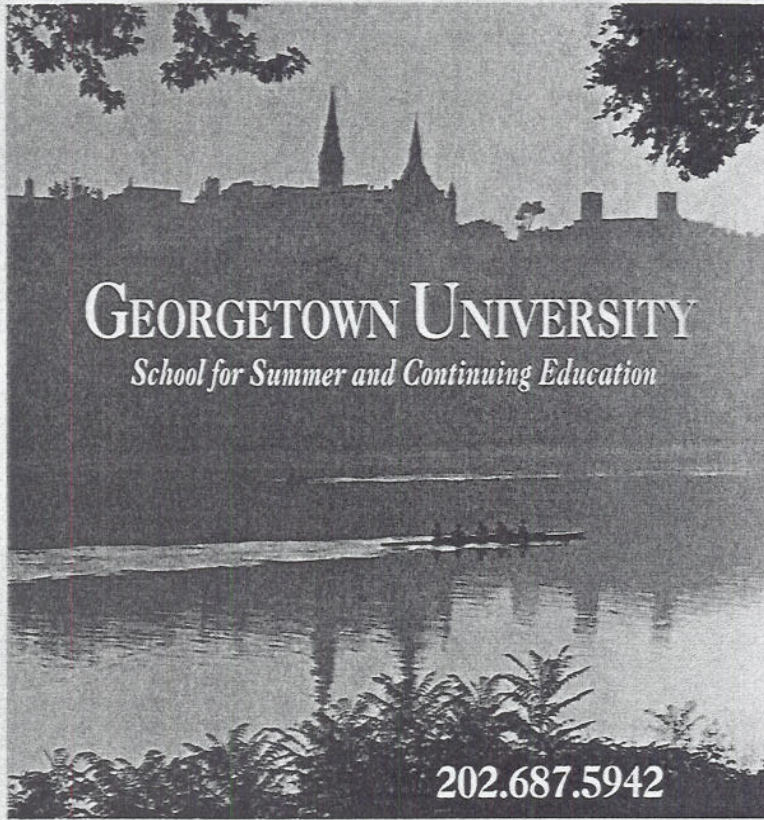
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were able to laugh and say, "Yes, it's all right, we know who she is."

There was no secret on the paper about my new friends, although the extent of our nightly forays was probably not known. I tried to be aboveboard. I told the paper and my family and felt I maintained objectivity in my reporting. Such behavior wouldn't be tolerated now; I shouldn't have been getting too close personally to one side of a dispute, no matter how useful my new friendships proved to the paper.

Things on the waterfront eventually came to an impasse and went into mediation, at which point the coverage scene changed to long waits outside the mediation-room door, with half a dozen of us sitting around for hours whenever we thought there might be a break. One day the principals were getting seated while the reporters were still inside the room. The night before had been the opening of the opera, one of the biggest social events of the year in San Francisco, for which everyone dressed absurdly elaborately. I had been invited by my aunt and had sent east for my best dress from the previous year—it was long black velvet with leopard-skin shoulder straps forming a V in front and a lower one in the back. A photograph showing a large expanse of my back had appeared amid the massive coverage of this event. Suddenly, to my consternation, Sam Kagel looked up and said to Bridges across the table, "Well, Harry, black velvet and leopard skin, what do you think of that?" Amid peals of laughter from the table, I vanished.

After the lockout was over, I was assigned almost full time to an even more important dispute from the point of view of the newspapers, the retail-store clerks' strike, which, like all San Francisco labor disputes, was long and violent and damaging to the economic prosperity of the community. By the time my two months on the paper were up, I was in the throes of all the excitement and wanted very much to stay on, but this was complicated by economic belt-tightening on all the papers due to advertising losses caused by the retail-store strike. I wrote a troubled letter to my father asking for his advice on what to do next. He responded quickly by calling my boss, thanking him for the past weeks, and making it easy for him to close the incident. Happily, my boss said he wanted me to stay, that I was doing fine work, that they would be delighted to keep me permanently, and that my father had a right to feel proud of me. Dad said that from that point on I was there on my own, and I decided to stay until I thought the point of diminishing returns had been reached.

In a funny way, I kept in touch with the world outside San Francisco through my parents. My father asked me to send him all my stories, even the most in-

consequential ones, and urged me to keep writing him letters as another way of learning to write. It was also my father who kept me up on both domestic and international politics—he was especially worried about the growing antisemitism in Germany. One of his ways of helping to deal with the horror was to support a great friend of his, the psychiatrist Marion Kenworthy, with a legislative scheme to permit the adoption of 20,000 refugee children.

Three themes dominated my letters: the anguish of the impending war in Europe, my work, and my play. No matter how immersed I was in the last two, it was hard to forget that so much hinged on events in Europe, even though Europe seemed much more remote from California than it had from the East Coast. I listened one morning to a speech by Hitler and wrote afterward that "the broadcast sounded a little bit as though you had gotten the zoo by mistake—that rasping voice punctuated by roars that sounded like a pack of insane animals." The more serious the situation abroad became, the more I thought it important to work terribly hard to learn the game well. Not that I thought I or any individual could make a difference, but I thought I'd go mad if I wasn't doing as much as I could in my own little rut.

As the labor story wound down, I looked forward to writing again. The routine activities involved in being a legman and getting kicked around were lots of fun after the highly theoretical existence I'd been leading in Chicago, but I was ready to start becoming a reporter. Initially I covered sob-sister stuff—a little girl whose Christmas tree had burned and to whom the News sent presents, a suicide off the Golden Gate Bridge, an interview with a woman who, in a fit of despondency because her husband didn't love her anymore, tried to choke her baby.

The news from Europe was crowded out of the San Francisco papers by a first-class sex murder with a beautiful blonde corpse. One brush with crime reporting came when I was sent out with a photographer to cover a distinctly unglamorous incident: A garbage truck emptying its contents at the city dump had turned up a corpse, a man who had been dead at least a week. My prayers were answered when the undertaker arrived just before we did, made off with the corpse, and saved me from the grisly spectacle. Not my story but that of another reporter was the discovery of a lady brutally murdered, her breasts cut off; across her torso, with her lipstick, had been written, "Honey, I love you." My mother sympathized with my assignments, deploring the way ugly things rest in the mind. In her inimitable fashion, she suggested I apply Schopenhauer's rule of objectivity: Unhinge the will until you feel neither hate nor fear.

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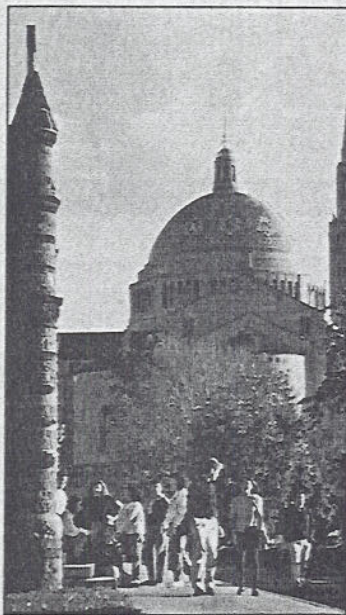
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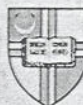
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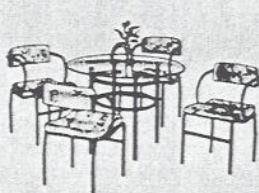
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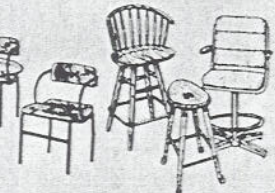
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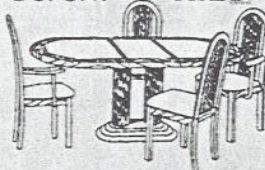
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My progress at work was uneven, a series of ups and downs. Every once in a while I thought I was catching on to the art of writing a news story, yet, even when I felt I might be getting the hang of it in terms of speed and efficiency, the top still seemed so terribly far away. Efficiency was my special bugaboo. Every time I did something stupid, I could hear my French governess's voice resounding through the years, saying, "Etourdie, veux-tu mettre les accents?"—"Scatterbrain, will you put on the accents?" Here I was, years later, still forgetting to put the accents on.

I feared getting scooped, but so far it hadn't happened. I went on worrying that I might be "hanging on," that I mightn't have been kept on if it hadn't been for my name, but then, thinking back to my first day, I remembered the hour it had taken me to write a three-line item and felt encouraged by having in just one day written two half-column stories, covered a wool growers' convention and a fire, and written the weekly church column that always got foisted on some poor sucker. The News, chronically short of staff, was particularly so while I was there, and I was always tired by evening, when I rode home on the cable car.

My final story for the paper was the opening of the Golden Gate International Exposition on San Francisco's Treasure Island, celebrating the new Golden Gate Bridge and the Oakland Bay Bridge. I covered the exposition all day and went out at night with an architect friend, Bill Wurster, who had designed the Arts Building for it.

In the spring of 1939, my father came out to visit and reminded me that I had said I was going to come back to work on The Post. In fact, his visit came at a propitious moment. The News was going through yet another of its economy drives and it seemed clear that someone would be let go, in which case I, the junior person, was the likely candidate. Besides, I was worried about taking someone's job who needed it. So I agreed with my father that I would return to Washington, not exactly reluctantly but not without mixed feelings and a certain sense of loss. I loved those months I spent in San Francisco as I have loved few times in my life.

On April 24, 1939, my photo appeared in Time magazine on the personalities page, with the brief story, "To Washington, D.C., went comely, 21-year-old Katherine [sic] Meyer, daughter of publisher Eugene Meyer, to handle for \$25 a week the 'Letters to the Editor' department of her father's Post. Said Father Meyer: 'If it doesn't work, we'll get rid of her.'"

This article was excerpted from the forthcoming book *Personal History* by Katharine Graham, to be published by Alfred A. Knopf. Excerpting will continue in tomorrow's Style section.