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Betty Beale: Washington

The tables are turned on Kay

WASHINGTON — A book on the most powerful woman in America, Katharine Graham, is at last in the works. Feisty freelance reporter Deborah Davis, who took on the Mafia in a series on the private carting industry in New York, got 200 interviews here in two weeks with people who know the publisher of the Washington Post, Newsweek and co-publisher of the Paris Herald Tribune. But the boss of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein refused to see Deborah. "I have called a halt to all personal publicity," said Kay Graham.

It was difficult at first to get a publisher, said literary agent Lucy Goldberg, "because previous writers had so much trouble getting people to talk to them. But Deborah is a bird-dog reporter and she doesn't give up. She says she has already discovered a secret romance of Mrs. Graham — a multimillionaire who fits into a father image — but I have to wait until the book is written to find out who it is."

Former President Nixon's personal physician at the White House, Gen. Walter Tkach, had not read Woodward and Bernstein's "The Final Days," so did not know until a few days ago what the authors said Pat Nixon "confided to one of her White House physicians." According to the book Mrs. Nixon said she wanted a divorce in 1962 and had rejected her husband's advances ever since. Incensed readers have been saying any doctor who would divulge his patient's confidence should be barred from medical practice.

Dr. Tkach, outraged by the insinuations, would agree. "A doctor never talks about his patient to anyone, particularly about a President and his family and particularly to someone he knows is going to write about it. I never talked about anything like that to Mrs. Nixon. I would never, never bring up a subject of that type with her and she would not either," said Tkach.

A fellow named Scott Armstrong, he said, asked to see him but he told him to put his questions in writing. Armstrong, who was helping Woodward and Bernstein, refused to do that. "He kept calling to go the verbal route but I wouldn't see it," said Tkach, who added, "As far as I know, Mrs. Nixon did not see or talk to the other two doctors (on the White House staff). I was always there."

Former Nixon aide Bob Finch said the material in the book about his visit to San Clemente was never checked out with him. They wrote what he thought but "how did they know what I thought?" asked Bob. The authors never even called him to find out. All these things raise questions about how much of the book is based on hearsay or third-hand information.