

A View of America's 'Most Powerful Woman'

Washington

KATHARINE GRAHAM just might be the most powerful woman in America.

There was a time when the 56-year-old publisher of The Washington Post thought the word "power" had an unpleasant connotation, but she doesn't think so any more.

"I don't flinch at it the way I used to," she said. "I think that the head of this company has a certain amount of power to influence the amount of information people get and the way they get it, and I suppose that is having power.

"I also have another theory: If power is there to be used, it is used whether you abdicate it or whether you use it. You have to remember that you can do as much damage by abdicating it as by using it in the wisest way you know. This is what I try to do."

Katharine Graham is in a position to know about power. Her newspaper, which put its reputation on the line in pursuit of the Watergate scandal and won a Pulitzer Prize as a result, was involved in a power struggle with the Nixon administration.

Mrs. Graham — and her paper — came out on top.

"What you've got to understand about Kay is that she's got moral vision," said Truman Capote, whose friendship with Mrs. Graham goes back 12 years. "Watergate got through to her. Without her, the Watergate (coverage) couldn't

have happened. I saw her during that period. It disturbed her a great deal, but she never wavered. She said to me, 'I'm going to jail, or they are.'

"I don't think anyone is good enough to marry her," said Capote. "When we had lunch together, she always asked me to make the reservation. She'd say, 'They don't know my name and we'll get a bad table.' She has no sense of her importance. She doesn't believe in important people. Now she's come out of her shell, and the one thing she is interested in is the way she looks. She didn't care before."

The "way she looks" is tall (about 5-foot-8), attractive and alert. Her voice is throaty and well modulated and she always appears ready to match her wits and intelligence against anyone. She's friendly with strangers who are introduced to her and she's the same with her employes, but she never quite seems to forget the money and power at her command.

Her tennis game reveals something of her character.

Political columnist Clayton Fritchey, a frequent partner, says that unlike most women, she plays a strong net game: "She doesn't wince like most women when a shot comes at her at the net, and she sure puts some of the shots away."

That kind of firmness is evident when Mrs. Graham talks about the repercussions of the Post's Watergate coverage.

"We have been accused of

being character assassins and of being biased," she said. "We have been maligned in the press and we have been maligned in speeches by a half-dozen spokesmen for the administration.

There were no direct threats, but there was indirect pressure, charged Mrs. Graham, who is also the controlling stockholder in the Washington Post Co., which also owns Newsweek magazine, three television stations and some radio stations.

She said businessmen and newspapermen would come out of the White House every day after talking to administration officials and they would report that "the White House people were terribly mad, terribly vindictive and terribly personal and they were going to get us."

There are also the "challenges" to the licenses of two of the Post-owned TV stations in Miami and Jacksonville.

"I can't attribute the license challenges directly to the administration, and I don't, but of course there are a lot of people involved who were connected with the Committee to Re-elect the President."

Mrs. Graham also disagrees with persons who complain — mostly in the mail — that the paper's coverage would have been different if a Democrat had been in the White House.

"They keep asking why we didn't cover Chappaquiddick as carefully, and the point is we did. And the point is that the Kennedys were probably as mad at us as the administration is — and they still are to some extent. They used to say that somebody at Newsweek had something against the Kennedys and that the Post was reporting too toughly.

Mrs. Graham's major role in the Watergate coverage was to work through her editors as a sort of devil's advocate.

"I went down to see Ben

(Ben Bradlee, executive editor of the Post) constantly through the summer and fall . . . especially the fall, of course, when the campaign heated up and the stories got tougher in their reporting.

"My role was to make sure we were being fair and we were being factual and we were being accurate. I had to ask every single question that I could think of because the reputation of the paper was clearly at stake."

Mrs. Graham describes her own method of operating as hiring good people and then letting them run things. She demands to be kept fully informed on issues on both the editorial and business sides of the newspaper, and she retains for herself the final decisions on major policy questions.

Bradlee says Mrs. Graham is "terrific. She's got brains, guts, and there ought to be a helluva lot more like her in publishing."

There have been reports from some employes that Kay Graham's goal is to replace The New York Times as the national newspaper in this country.

Mrs. Graham, however, denies that she wants to make the Post a national newspaper.

"I guess I would like people to think of us as the best, but I would qualify that by saying I really think that we have to do that in quite a different way than The New York Times. I hope we will get a national reputation, but our base is local and our primary purpose is to be a local newspaper."

Mrs. Graham and The Washington Post have mightily impressed at least two key men at The New York Times — publisher Arthur Ochs Sulzberger and vice president James Reston.

"The Post is a first-class newspaper," says Sulzberger. "I admire her and I'm high on her personally. She has a great head on her

shoulders."

"She is superb," says Reston. "When you realize the enormous tragedy that brought about her elevation to the top job at the Post (her husband's and former publisher of the Post, Philip

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Graham committed suicide in 1963), what she has done is one of the greatest and most heroic achievements in the history of the country.

Reston said the Post is an immensely better paper today than it was when he took it over. He called the Post's Watergate coverage "the finest job of investigative reporting that I've seen since I've been in the business."

Victor Gold, former press secretary to Vice President Spiro Agnew and former newspaper columnist, said that even though he disagrees with both general political views, the Times and the Post are great publications. He believes, however, that the Times still has more influence.

Joseph Alsop, conservative newspaper columnist and former Vietnam war hawk, said that now the Post is ahead of the Times as a newspaper.

Senator Jacob K. Javits (Rep.-N.Y.) believes the Post has performed a great public service in uncovering attempts to hide the Watergate scandal.

Conservative politicians who have never liked the Post, like it even less after its role in Watergate.

Senator Robert Dole (Rep.-Kan.) said, "The Post tends to be started against those who don't hold the liberal view, and it's a springboard for those who do. The Post and The New York Times are both good newspapers, but they represent the liberal view and anyone holding a contrary position has little chance of being quoted in either."

Senator John Tower (Dem.-Texas) offered the

most biting criticism: "The Washington Post does a credible job in covering news around the world. However, the Post fails miserably in efforts, if it makes any at all, to keep its editorial policy out of its news columns."

Mrs. Graham became annoyed when asked why she hasn't remarried: "I'm not really into the women's lib thing, but I am when you ask a question like that. You wouldn't ask a male publish-

er why he hasn't remarried."

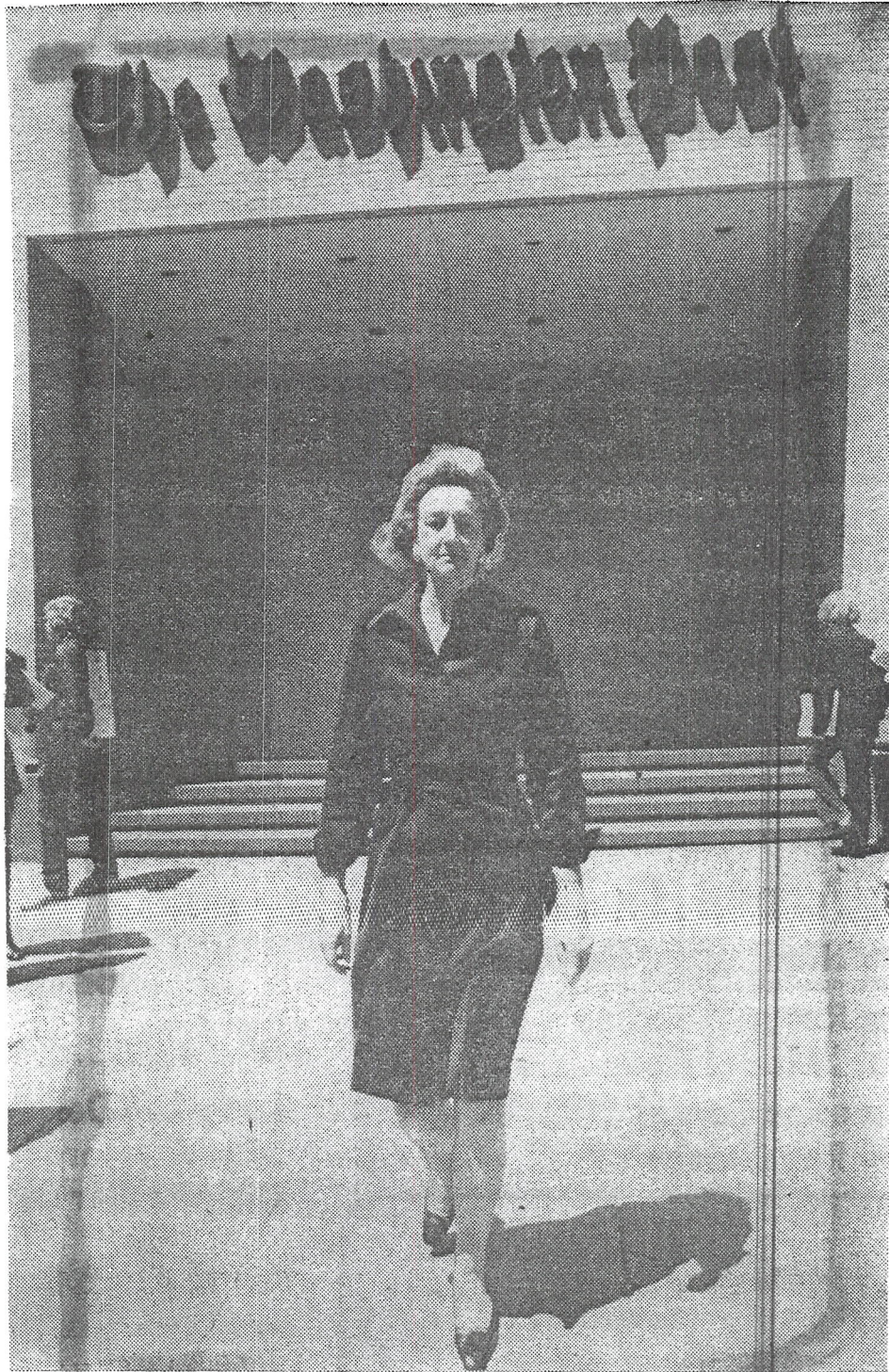
She added, however, that she "really doesn't know why."

One of the most surprising things about Kay Graham is that she is shy. Nicholas Von Hoffman, the Post's radical, slugging columnist, says, "She can be friendly and funny when she gets to know you.

"I remember once when I

came stomping into the office after having trouble getting an editor on the phone. 'Kay Graham,' I yelled to her across the newsroom, 'Why don't you spend some money for more telephones?'"

"In reply, her shoe came sailing across the newsroom before hitting the ashtray on the national editor's desk, then she yelled: 'Gimme back my shoe.'"



Katharine Graham: She doesn't flinch anymore