

Katharine Graham:



—Examiner photo by John Gorman

KATHARINE GRAHAM . . . "It is hard for many women to take themselves seriously in professional spheres."

Influence With Concern

By Caroline Drewes

REARED WITH a deep sense of public responsibility, as well as a gold spoon in her mouth, Katharine Meyer Graham in her middle years has been labeled "the most influential woman in the country."

During her youth, "There was a great deal of emphasis on not behaving rich and a lot of emphasis on having to DO something. It never occurred to me that I didn't have to work."

Emerging from the University of Chicago a liberal-minded New Dealer, she came to San Francisco to cover the waterfront for the Scripps-Howard News—a tall, slim, cultivated, rather shy, very conscientious young woman who worked hard at her job. That was three decades ago.

Today, as president of the Washington Post Company, she is publisher of the Post, the capital's most influential paper, and of Newsweek, the second largest American weekly magazine. She has a reputation for reserve, for being tough when she has to be, for entertaining VIPs. (Truman Capote once gave a party for 500 in her honor.) She has said, "My job is an indirect one. But the Post is influential because only if people have a lot of information, can they make decisions."

In the past thirty-odd years, Mrs. Graham reared four children (she has "two and a half" grandchildren), endured the tragic death of her brilliant husband, who preceded her in the Post empire, and emerged from the traditional role of stylish Georgetown matron to wear with singular grace and strength her present mantle in the world of media management.

★ ★ ★

When Philip Graham died in 1963, his widow took over the paper which had been purchased by Eugene Meyer, her banker father, thirty years before.

San Francisco's distinguished Walter Haas family is Kay Graham's kin. She has been no stranger to this city during the years. But this week she came officially, in a capacity she says she does not relish, to make two rare speaking appearances. She addressed the Junior League yesterday at the Mark Hopkins, today it was the Commonwealth Club.

So here is Katharine Graham thirty years later, elegant in a pale tan ultrasuede Halston coat and dress of rich brown, wearing no jewelry but a pair of gold earrings, as slender as she was in her youth, a woman of intellect, humor and charm, with a smile of singular radiance. Still a little shy when it comes to public speaking, but before she was

through she had awed her audience of bright, well-informed young women.

She talked about the changing role of women, about progress in "eliminating some of the injustices women as a class have been made to endure . . . One reason barriers are falling is that women have gotten new legal tools and have learned how to use them to pry open doors. Over two centuries ago, Dr. Samuel Johnson declared that 'The Almighty, having given woman so much power, the law in its wisdom wisely gives her none.' But times have changed."

She talked about "the stubborn fact that it is not just the bias of the male world, but also the particular self-image of women that contributes to our present dilemma." She offered, in the end, "a note of caution" concerning "that self-destructive and, I think, damaging trend among some to disparage . . . what has been traditionally thought of as a woman's role, to disregard the fact that the most important part of a woman's life can be to have children whom she loves and to be part of a family that is happy."

★ ★ ★

She warned of a "second danger . . . that professional women will trade in one form of paternalism and disrespect for another. For it is a danger always to be guarded against among protesting and aggrieved groups . . . that they may finally abdicate all responsibility in the very search for it. By that I mean that an overactive sense of having been wronged . . . can lead to a ward-of-the-state psychology . . . to a sense of entitlement to promotion or praise or high pay that has no connection with merit or effort or personal worth. I do not think the women's movement will have been a success if women are content to exchange the so-called role of 'sex object' for that of quota object."

Finally, she told the Junior Leaguers "the essence of the revolution, in its broadest and most durable sense, is not to set a crowd of women marching off down any particular road. It is to give each woman, as an individual, the confidence and the sense of autonomy, and the social flexibility, to choose a road for herself."

Then, tortoise shell spectacles in hand, Katharine Graham looked up, to answer questions from her audience.

She smiled at the last one: Did she feel her special abilities as a woman had given her an advantage over men? (She has a good sense of timing.) "No," was her reply, and then, "I'll amend that . . . If women lead lives totally to please men they end up boring men. You do get along better with men if you have your mind on something else besides cooking and children."