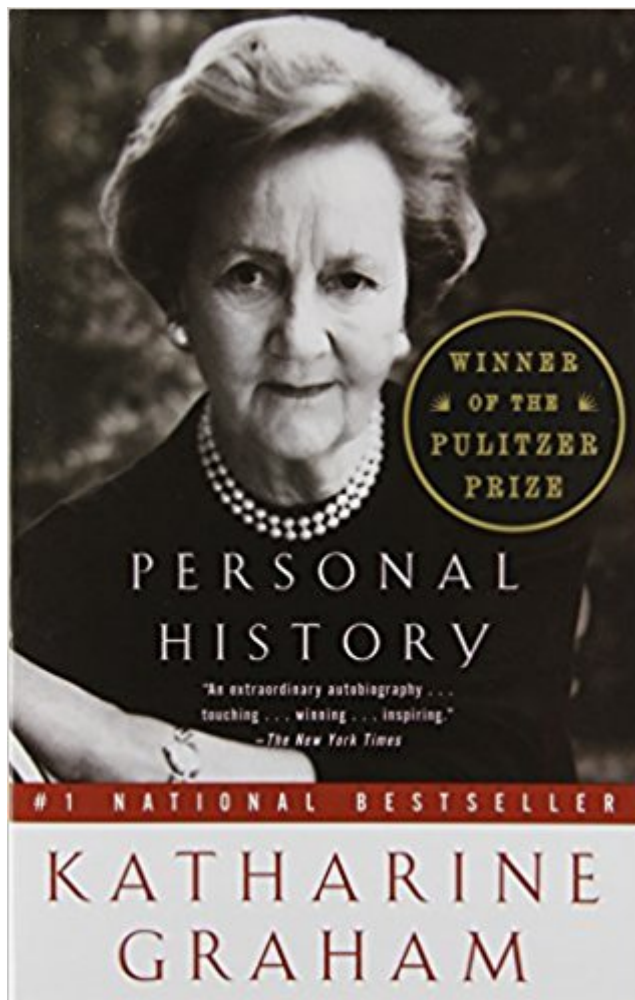


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Personal History



Synopsis

Winner of the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for Biography An extraordinarily frank, honest, and generous book by one of America's most famous and admired women, *Personal History* is, as its title suggests, a book composed of both personal memoir and history. It is the story of Graham's parents: the multimillionaire father who left private business and government service to buy and restore the down-and-out Washington Post, and the formidable, self-absorbed mother who was more interested in her political and charity work, and her passionate friendships with men like Thomas Mann and Adlai Stevenson, than in her children. It is the story of how The Washington Post struggled to succeed -- a fascinating and instructive business history as told from the inside (the paper has been run by Graham herself, her father, her husband, and now her son). It is the story of Phil Graham -- Kay's brilliant, charismatic husband (he clerked for two Supreme Court justices) -- whose plunge into manic-depression, betrayal, and eventual suicide is movingly and charitably recounted. Best of all, it is the story of Kay Graham herself. She was brought up in a family of great wealth, yet she learned and understood nothing about money. She is half-Jewish, yet -- incredibly -- remained unaware of it for many years. She describes herself as having been naive and awkward, yet intelligent and energetic. She married a man she worshipped, and he fascinated and educated her, and then, in his illness, turned from her and abused her. This destruction of her confidence and happiness is a drama in itself, followed by the even more intense drama of her new life as the head of a great newspaper and a great company, a famous (and even feared) woman in her own right. Hers is a life that came into its own with a vengeance -- a success story on every level. Graham's book is populated with a cast of fascinating characters, from fifty years of presidents (and their wives), to Steichen, Brancusi, Felix Frankfurter, Warren Buffett (her great advisor and protector), Robert McNamara, George Schultz (her regular tennis partner), and, of course, the great names from the Post: Woodward, Bernstein, and Graham's editorpartner, Ben Bradlee. She writes of them, and of the most dramatic moments of her stewardship of the Post (including the Pentagon Papers, Watergate, and the pressmen's strike), with acuity, humor, and good judgment. Her book is about learning by doing, about growing and growing up, about Washington, and about a woman liberated by both circumstance and her own great strengths.

Book Information

Paperback: 642 pages

Publisher: Vintage (February 24, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375701044

ISBN-13: 978-0375701047

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.4 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 262 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #25,632 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in [Books > Reference >](#)

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Customer Reviews

In lieu of an unrevealing Famous-People-I-Have-Known autobiography, the owner of the Washington Post has chosen to be remarkably candid about the insecurities prompted by remote parents and a difficult marriage to the charismatic, manic-depressive Phil Graham, who ran the newspaper her father acquired. Katharine's account of her years as subservient daughter and wife is so painful that by the time she finally asserts herself at the Post following Phil's suicide in 1963 (more than halfway through the book), readers will want to cheer. After that, Watergate is practically an anticlimax. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Not just the story of Graham's stewardship of the Washington Post, this "personal history" ranges from her favorite tennis partner (George Schultz) to her husband's fall into madness and suicide. A 200,000-copy first printing. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Interesting memoir of interesting woman

A treasure for people who make a hobby out of media stories, as I do, Personal History is as much about the Post as it is about Graham herself. But as I think Graham is saying in the book, everything personal in her life was somehow linked to the paper-- either through her own efforts at its helm or as the wife and daughter of the men who were leading it. I've read a lot of the criticism of this book-- and I know enough about media history to know that at least some of it is fair. At least in the sense that it's accurate. Graham doesn't come out wearing a hair shirt about the real media relationship to people in power. She also has a slightly nervous tone-- the sound of someone who

isn't very sure her accomplishments are going to be achieved. But in the end I found that even valid criticisms didn't really interfere with my reading of the book. In the end I was moved by it, and felt honored that Graham was so willing to put herself out there to be observed and judged. In some respects it's difficult to argue that Graham had a difficult life-- she was born to such enormous privilege that she had resources to deal with tragedy that most people can never command. (You hear her refer to her family's 'summer home', but what that means remains opaque until you see the picture!). Even still, Graham is human. To be constantly in the shadow of the people in your life, to see yourself as helpmeet and not a full person, to emerge from that shadow and assert that you have a place in your own right-- that's certainly something that speaks to everyone, regardless of who they are. What I find extraordinary is how revealing the book is about her insecurities. This is a very personal autobiography, and Graham lets you see her weaknesses in a way that I think most public figures would not allow. I don't agree with many of the positions Graham takes, and certainly she and I are light years apart in almost every aspect of background and experience, but I felt lucky that I was able to read this book. And I was also glad that she wrote it. A book to read, and to give away as a gift.

Filled with details about Watergate and the Pentagon Papers from a different point of view. My favorite part was the pressmen strike. Highly recommended.

I am still reading this book, going very slowly as the (very well written) book is crammed with names and events and I keep going to Wikipedia to read about the people Catharine mentions. I find background reading about people I would normally never look up extremely enjoyable.

This is a great story of an important American, the press, and politics. But it is so much more: Katharine Graham shares her thought processes, inner feelings about events, and admits to her very human fears and shortcomings. In reading it, one can gain great insight into what CEOs go through in their efforts, including their learning curves. Although a long book (over 600 pages), it is such a good read with terrific descriptions of events, emotional highs and lows, and includes many humorous moments. Truly fascinating from beginning to end. Personal History

Kay Graham's book maintains the same calm and gracious tone through the wildest (and sometimes dull) events of her life in Washington, D.C. and the world from World War II to the present.

Fascinating book by a wonderful lady who had to learn how to use power by herself and survive and maintain a sense of grace.

Katharine Graham was an amazing, humble person and her book reflects those traits. It could have been a much more exciting and interesting read except for her modesty, but then that was not her style. I enjoyed reading her story.

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