



# *Katharine A. Park*

## *1903-1981*

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Founder of The  
Katharine A. Park Fund for the Elderly in

The New York Community Trust  
909 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

In the summer of 1927—two months after Lindbergh flew the Atlantic—a large Cunard liner was ploughing the seas on its way to New York. Leaning on the forward rail were a young couple who were just getting acquainted. The girl and the boy were both 24 years old.

She was Katharine Anderson, and she had a definite Southern accent. He was young Sam Park, fresh from a vacation in Europe celebrating his new master's degree in business from Harvard.

It was the beginning of a lifelong romance.

Katharine Anderson was born in the South at a time when the region was beginning to recover from the Civil War and Reconstruction days. Her father, James Dorroh Anderson, hailed from Greenwood, South Carolina. Her mother, Elizabeth Beall Stephenson, was related to the illustrious Byrd Family of Virginia. The traditions of the South and qualities associated with it—gentility, conviviality and charm—were traits that were important to Katharine Park, traits that were characteristic of her until the day she died.

James Anderson and Elizabeth Stephenson were married in St. Louis in 1892 and settled not long after in Baltimore. In the early years of their marriage, James traveled throughout the South as an investment advisor to a number of banks. With their first child, a daughter, Bessie Beall, the Andersons spent their winter holidays each year with relatives on a family estate in San Antonio, Texas, and it was there that Katharine was born, on January 4, 1903.

Twelve years later, James Anderson died. By then, Katharine, who was known to friends and family as "Kitty," was attending a private girls' school in Baltimore. She was an active, vivacious girl, fond of riding horses.

As a teenager, however, Kitty began developing allergies—a chronic condition that was to plague her for the rest of her life. To minimize the discomfort of her daughter's allergies, as well as to broaden the cultural horizons of both daughters, Mrs. Anderson began to take Kitty and Bessie Beall abroad each summer.

It was on one of these trips home that Kitty and Sam met in 1927. When the Cunard Liner docked in New York, Kitty returned to Baltimore and Sam went to work for the Morgan Trust Company. The romance blossomed, and in time Sam and Kitty became engaged. On January 4, 1930—Kitty's birthday—they were married in Baltimore. In New York, the young couple set up housekeeping on upper Park Avenue. A short time later Sam developed tuberculosis. He resigned from Morgan and took a less pressured position with a banking firm in Baltimore. But within a year it became apparent that he would have to put his career completely on hold and devote himself full-time to getting well.

He and Kitty packed their bags and left for a rest cure at Saranac Lake in the Adirondack Mountains of upper New York State. They remained there for about seven years. During that time, Kitty devoted herself to helping her husband recover. By the end of the 1930s, Sam was finally ready to return to work. They moved back to New York City where Sam went to work for John Hay "Jock" Whitney, a fellow Yale alumnus. According to Whitney's biographer, Sam Park was "Jock's chief fiscal agent." He served as a partner of J.H. Whitney & Company, on the executive committee of the *New York Herald Tribune* (which Whitney owned), was an honorary trustee of the United States Trust Company and a trustee of the John Hay Whitney Foundation. He also helped estab-



1903. Katharine Anderson is in the carriage. Her sister Bessie Beall is at the helm.

lish and served as president of the *Herald Tribune's* Fresh Air Fund, created to send underprivileged children from New York City to the country for free vacations.

Sam Park remained with Whitney organizations until his death in 1976. At the time, his title was Chairman of the Finance Committee of Whitney Communications.

Throughout these years, Kitty's life was busy and social. She loved to entertain at home (first an apartment at 122 East 76th; then one at 850 Park Avenue); to attend the Opera—and to dress for it. She enjoyed shopping and wearing fine clothing her husband loved to present to her.

Both Sam and Kitty enjoyed traveling in Europe, returning to favorite hotels from year to year. In France, Kitty spoke French with ease, for she had studied the language and brushed up on it in classes.

The Parks also owned a home in a private resort community, "The Onteora Club," in the town of Tannersville, New York, in the Catskill Mountains. There, Kitty played tennis, Sam golfed;

they dined with others. Kitty participated in theatrical productions and contributed to a community newsletter. One piece she wrote, a humorous feature she titled "Landed Gentry," about the unanticipated burdens of home-ownership, was awarded a prize by the Club.

Although Katharine Anderson Park was not a politically active woman, or a typical "doer" or joiner, there were some organizations that were important to her. As a young woman in Baltimore, shortly after her debut in the winter of 1920-21, she joined the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, an organization that rebuilds and operates historical homes. She joined the Maryland chapter and remained a member throughout her life. She was also a religious woman, in a quiet, unobtrusive way. Her church in New York, located in her neighborhood, was St. James Episcopal, and she attended Sunday services regularly when she was in the City.

While Kitty thrived on an active social life, she also cherished the time she spent alone with her husband. Together, in the City on weekends, they took long walks in Central Park. They had no children, and the attention they might have lavished upon them they bestowed upon one another.

In the early 1970s, Sam and Kitty became interested in The Fresh Air Fund's camping program in Fishkill, New York, 65 miles from Manhattan. They decided to do something for it, and so they established there a five-acre wildlife refuge.

When Sam Park died at the age of 73 in 1976, Katharine Park found herself in a new position: leading her active life alone. She still played tennis with competitive zest at Onteora. She made frequent visits to the wildlife refuge in Fishkill and worked closely with The Fresh Air Fund to expand it and to establish a library of nature and wildlife books, in memory of her husband. In the City, she invited friends to accompany her to the Opera. A young cousin became a favorite, treasured companion.

*In 1979 Kitty (at right) gave a party at her home for the New York alumnae of the Baltimore preparatory school she attended. Among her guests was former headmistress Blair D. Stambaugh.*



Yet tell-tale signs of loneliness in her life were evident: She did not relish traveling alone to Europe, so she eliminated her trips abroad. She confessed to a friend of sixty years, a woman from Baltimore, that, at times, she felt “all alone in the world.”

Katharine Park began noticing things around her that she'd not seen quite so keenly before. She saw elderly women and men in her neighborhood, the Lenox Hill area on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. And though that area is by and large an affluent one, she became increasingly aware of the difficulties besetting her less fortunate contemporaries. Alone and restricted by limited incomes, many were unable to leave their apartments, unable to do errands, unable to attend religious services, concerts and films, unable to visit friends and acquaintances. Kitty grew aware that isolation breeds mental and physical anguish among the elderly. And she became convinced that if, somehow, these people could get out—or if someone could come to visit them and help them get out—that the quality of their lives would be vastly improved.

In the last few years of her life, Katharine Park joined a small group from her church to volunteer at a senior citizen center in her neighborhood. Every third Saturday, Kitty helped serve hot lunches to 150 older men and women. As well, she was a member of the volunteer council at St. Luke's Home for the Aged, and when the Home merged with the Peabody Home to become the Morningside House Nursing Home, Kitty served on its Board of Directors.

In the fall of 1980, she was operated on for cancer. Following a course of chemotherapy, she went to Florida for the winter. But the cancer spread. Kitty returned to New York, where she died on March 14, 1981.

Katharine Anderson Park established in her Will legacies to a number of charitable institutions. But her largest legacy was a fund she established at The New York Community Trust.

*“I desire,” she wrote in her Will, “that the income be used to assist the elderly; not necessarily with health care or financial assistance, but to help them with the problems of loneliness and boredom, whether they are in institutions or living alone. I would hope this could be done by means of personal contacts such as younger members of a family might give to their parents or grandparents.”*



*The New York Community Trust is  
a publicly supported community foundation  
that provides centralized management for  
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