



Sheila Kaufman  
1928 - 2009

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The New York Community Trust

THE NEW YORK  
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**S**heila Seymour Kelley Kaufman was born to make the world a better place, and she did. Over the course of her long and successful career in government and public relations, she committed her ample intellectual and financial resources to improving the lives of those less fortunate and less gifted than she. The two funds she endowed in The New York Community Trust, the Jane and Donald Seymour Kelley Trust and the Sheila Kelley Kaufman Fund, will ensure support for the causes and organizations most important to her—women and the homeless, among others—forever.

Sheila Seymour Kelley was born on February 3, 1928, in Bronxville, New York, to William J. and Jane Seymour Kelley. If there was a gene for interest in the public good, Sheila would have inherited it from both of her parents. Bill was an advertising executive, and hailed from a family of Irish immigrants who had settled in Lexington, Kentucky. One of eight children, he became the first in his family to attend college after a high-school teacher, noting his exceptional intelligence, helped secure a place for him at Stanford University. But at the urging of his professor, Herbert Hoover, who thought he belong at an Eastern liberal arts school, midway through his studies he transferred to Harvard. After graduating, Bill served as an intelligence officer in France during World War I and in 1919, at the request of Hoover, he traveled to Russia to support the American relief effort in the Ural Mountains. He returned home to a



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career in public relations with various firms, finally at Doremus & Co., a leading financial advertising and public-relations firm.

Jane Seymour, Sheila's mother, was descended from an old New York City family, and was a "career volunteer." She worked tirelessly all her life in pursuit of voting rights, educational opportunity, and prison reform, and deeply influenced her daughter. Jane served as president of the Westchester County and New York State League of Women Voters, and was asked to lead the national organization, a position she declined so that she could take care of her family. Jane's formidable legacy included three schools she founded—the Home School and the Adult School in Westchester, and the literacy school for inmates of the Westchester County prison.

Sheila was an athletic child, frequently palling around with her dog, Skip, and joining

her father for a round of golf at the Scarsdale Country Club. She attended Scarsdale public schools and went to Syracuse University, majoring in journalism and political science. A keen intellect with a curious wit, Sheila filled her time between classes as a part-time society writer for the *Syracuse Post-Standard* and as an on-air reporter for the Syracuse radio station, WFBL. She graduated *magna cum laude* in 1949 and moved back to New York City, where she landed her first job as a reporter for the Gannett newspaper in Westchester.

But the airwaves beckoned, and in 1952 Sheila was offered a position writing for and producing “The Tex & Jinx Show,” which pioneered American talk radio. Host Tex McCrary was a journalist by training, and in the mid-50s, along with his glamorous wife Jinx Falkenburg, was as close as one could find to a multimedia sensation. In his prime he hosted two radio programs and a weekday television show, and wrote a column for the *New York Herald Tribune*. On his shows he and Jinx interviewed top figures in politics and entertainment, and in his column McCrary helped shape public opinion on the issues of the day. McCrary is even credited with having helped to draft General Dwight D. Eisenhower—then just returning from Europe—to run for President of the United States.

Sheila’s political and journalistic talents made her an invaluable asset for Tex and Jinx. She was “the star writer,” in the words of her friend and former “Tex & Jinx” colleague Josephine Nelson DeGiorgis, working on both the radio show and the newspaper column. “Sheila was a hard-nosed reporter, meticulous and truthful,” remembers Josephine. “She

came across as tough, but in reality she was very sensitive to people's feelings, and that's why she was so good at getting the story." In photos from the period, Sheila is seen breezily chatting up the movie stars, politicians, and other celebrities who appeared on "The Tex & Jinx Show"—Eleanor Roosevelt, Grandma Moses, and Danny Kaye among them. After leaving Tex and Jinx, Sheila went on to produce "Citizens Union Searchlight," a Sunday morning public affairs program hosted by Melvin Bergermen and later by Ben Grauer.

In 1956 Sheila left radio to work at the World Veterans Fund for Alfred Vanderbilt, who promptly deployed his new hire to support New York State Attorney General Jacob K. Javits's first campaign for the United States Senate. Sheila stepped in as "the brain" behind Javits's radio and television appearances, and it proved to be a turning point in both her professional and personal lives. When Javits won the race for the Senate in 1956 and headed to Washington, Sheila followed him. It was here that she would launch her career in public relations—eventually serving as Javits's press secretary—and find her lifelong love, a sharp young legislative aide named Robert Kaufman.

On Capitol Hill in the 1950s office romance was the stuff of scandals. First, as Bob recalls, there was the extremely intense environment of a senator's office—the tight deadlines and the close quarters. Sheila and Bob even shared a secretary. Second, there was the issue of salaries. Everyone worked for relative peanuts, but two staff members together would earn more than the Senator himself, and—in Bob's words—"we'd never get another raise!"



(Left) Sheila with client Frank Sinatra. Photo by Barry Kramer.  
(Right) Sheila with client Kirk Douglas.

It was for these reasons that Sheila and Bob decided to keep their romance under wraps. They'd first met years before in New York City. Sheila had been living on Central Park West and 103rd Street with her friend Ruth Usher, and Ruth co-chaired the American Youth Hostel Ski Club with Bob. Bob would stop by Ruth and Sheila's apartment for the club's periodic meetings, and remembered Sheila mostly as "the roommate," coming in only to grab the television and move it to the bedroom. Sheila—still athletic as ever—joined the club for a few trips, but it wasn't until Bob joined Senator Javits's staff in the summer of 1958 that she took proper notice of him. The two began dating and decided to marry in November of 1959, taking a morning off to visit a justice of the peace in Manassas, Virginia. For the next two years, until returning to New York City with his bride, Bob maintained the appearance of living with his old roommates over in Arlington. He spent so much time at the office that not even his parents wondered why



he was never available for phone calls.

When Sheila and Bob finally announced their nuptials, everyone who knew them—from their own families to Senator Javits—expressed delight and relief. Sheila returned to New York City first, in the spring of 1961, accepting a post at Harshe-Rotman & Druck, a large public-relations firm. Bob followed a few months later, settling in to practice law at Proskauer Rose LLP, where he embarked on a long and distinguished career. The couple lived first in an apartment on Central Park West and 100th Street, and eventually settled on the east side of Manhattan.

Though she spent most of her time at Harshe-Rotman working on large corporate accounts, Sheila continued her involvement in public affairs through her own small political public-relations firm, Votes Inc. She produced campaign-defining television and print advertisements for some of New York's most memorable political figures, including



(Left) Sheila with Grandma Moses and (right) with her husband Bob. Photo by Sy Fox.

Chief Judge Charles Breitel and Court of Appeals Judge Sol Wachtler. Sheila passed the better part of a decade at Harshe-Rotman, and when word got out in the industry that she was ready to move on, she received a call from her father's old firm, Doremus & Co. Doremus was still at the top of the financial and corporate PR game, and they made Sheila an offer she couldn't refuse. Her father had retired as a vice president; she would start as one. Her salary would be her father's plus fifty percent. Sheila said yes, and spent the lion's share of the rest of her career there, though as a result of a series of mergers and acquisitions, Doremus public relations became part of Gavin Anderson & Co. A number of years later, she moved to the Dilenschneider Group.

At the time of her retirement as a Principal of the Dilenschneider Group in 2006, Sheila had worked for years to promote excellence in her profession. As a director and later president of Women Executives in Public Relations (WEPR) and a founding member of





its foundation, Sheila was a vocal advocate of WEPR's scholarship program as well as a dedicated mentor to young women. Judith Sussman, development director of Resources for Children with Special Needs, met Sheila when she joined WEPR's board of directors in 1998, and remembers Sheila as a "towering figure" in the profession. "We respected and admired her, and she was as supportive as a mentor could be," Judith says. "I always felt confident that if I needed her to do something, and she could do it, she would." Sheila stepped down from the board at the expiration of her term in 2004; WEPR was absorbed into another professional association, Advertising Women of New York, two years later.

During more than 40 years in New York City, Sheila and Bob enjoyed a lively and engaged urban lifestyle, attending theater performances and dining out, often for business, during the week. When the weekends came, however, they invariably packed the car and headed north. They'd

built a house in 1962 near Mount Snow, in Vermont's Deerfield Valley, and visited year-round. In the winter they skied, and in milder weather enjoyed the golf course at Mount Snow Country Club. They rarely played a round together—Bob calls Sheila a “killer competitor”—but when they did, it was often with Sheila's old roommate Ruth Usher and her husband Milton, who had become the Kaufmans' neighbors in Vermont. In the warmer months they were wholeheartedly devoted to their garden: Sheila grew flowers, and Bob focused on vegetables. A friend recalls that in a single year the Kaufmans, who did nothing halfway, counted no fewer than 87 entries in the Deerfield Valley Farmers' Fair. They were honored six times as Deerfield Valley Gardeners of the Year. The Kaufmans also enjoyed traveling farther afield, for many years taking a winter holiday to the Caribbean and an annual ski trip with the DeGiorgis family, often to Europe.

Bob Kaufman became a director of The New York Community Trust in 1986. Sheila soon became a committed supporter as well. She and Bob often inspired each other's involvement in charitable organizations; they generously supported a wide range of organizations and institutions engaged in education, legal, refugee, women's, and homeless issues. Through the Jane and Donald Seymour Kelley Fund in The New York Community Trust, they endowed a fellowship in Sheila's cousin's name at the University of Louisville, which earned each of them the honorary title of “Kentucky Colonel” from Governor Paul Patton in 1991. They helped fund a women's health center in Jordan, a development effort spearheaded by Brigadier General HRH Princess Aisha al-Hussein,



(Left) Sheila with Bob and xxx.

the daughter of King Hussein. Through the Sheila Kelley Kaufman Fund, they will support nonprofits that work to improve the lives of homeless New Yorkers.

Sheila Seymour Kelley Kaufman died on April 8, 2009, after battling Alzheimer's disease. She is remembered by those who knew and loved her as a smart, strong, multi-faceted woman, and a loyal and honest friend—a legacy that will be preserved by her generous gifts to The Trust.

**The New York Community Trust**

is a community foundation, helping New Yorkers achieve their charitable goals and making grants that respond to the needs of our City.

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