

**Lessons on the Big Idea and Public Relations:  
Reflections on the 50-Year Career of Charlotte Klein**

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*“To honor in perpetuity those women,  
citizens of the United States of America whose contributions to  
the arts, athletics, business, education, government,  
the humanities, philanthropy and science,  
have been the greatest value for the development of their country.”*

-----National Women’s Hall Fame mission statement, Seneca Falls, New York

**Introduction**

Although public relations practice arguably can be traced back to the days of Aristotle and the practice of persuasive rhetoric, the profession itself is generally recognized to have come of age in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was then, in 1923 to be exact, that Edward Bernays coined the term “public relations counsel” in his book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* and taught the first college course devoted to the field at New York University.<sup>1</sup> As a relatively young profession not yet a century old, scholars have documented in textbooks and literature a number of public relations practitioners of the mid-twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, the majority of these histories have been about the men who dominated the era’s executive suites.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hanson, R.E. (2008). *Mass communication: Living in a media world* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Wilcox, D.L., Cameron, G.T., Ault, P.H., & Agee, W.K. (2005). *Public relations strategies and tactics* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Allyn and Bacon

and Heath, R.L. (2005). *Encyclopedia of public relations*. (Vol. 1). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>3</sup> Of the 37 practitioners highlighted in The Plank Center’s *Legacies from Legends in Public Relations* series, which provides insights and tips for students from living practitioners, only seven are women. The two publications were printed by the University of Alabama Printing Services in 2007 and 2008 and can be accessed from The Plank Center Web site, [www.plankcenter.ua.edu](http://www.plankcenter.ua.edu). The center was started by the first woman head of PRSA, Betsy Plank.

However, in a newly published paper, Suzannah Patterson “encourages scholars to join the development of the history of women using public relations. . . .”<sup>4</sup> This charge can be challenging, given the scarcity of early women PR executives in the profession’s first decades and the nature of the business itself, where practitioners project the limelight on their clients, but remain in the background.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, we help answer Patterson’s call by bringing to light one woman’s history through personal interviews<sup>6</sup> and secondary documents and by discussing the societal contributions she made through public relations and her strategic, big ideas.

### **Journalist and Publicist**

The early 1940s were an interesting time for young women coming of age in America. With multitudes of men away at war, opportunities that likely would not have been available to them only a few years’ prior, now were possible. Charlotte Conrad Klein, a sociology and psychology major at University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1944, is a case in point. She was among a group of three women editors of UCLA’s college newspaper, *The Daily Bruin*, in 1943–1944—only the second time women had served in that position at any of the school’s newspapers, dating back to their origin in 1919.<sup>7</sup> But it seems for Klein that such leadership was not unusual, for she had long been primed for a man’s world.

Born June 20 in Detroit to Jewish parents Joseph and Bessie (Brown) Klein<sup>8</sup> in the same year as Bernays’ book and public relations course were introduced, Charlotte was the last baby of her Canadian-born homemaker mother,<sup>9</sup> who gave birth to her when she was 31. Klein’s two

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<sup>4</sup> Patterson, Suzannah A. (2009.) “A History of the Development of Public Relations.” *Journal of Public Relations, Journal of Public Relations*. Other works about women’s public relations efforts include Miller, Karen S. (1997). “Woman, Man, Lady, Horse: Jane Stewart, Public Relations Executive,” *Public Relations Review* 23(3): 249–169; Lamme, Margot Opdycke. (2007). “Outside the Prickly Nest: Revisiting Doris Fleischman.” *American Journalism* 24(3): 85–107.

<sup>5</sup> Karla Gower reviewed articles in the *Public Relations Journal* from its inception in 1945 through 1972, when Betsy Plank became the first woman chair of the Public Relations Society of America, she found that of 2,260 by-lined articles, just 100 were written by women. See Gower, Karla. (2001). “Rediscovering Women in Public Relations: Women in the *Public Relations Journal*, 1945–1972,” *Journalism History* 27(1): 14–21.

<sup>6</sup> Personal interviews with Charlotte Klein were conducted at her apartment on East 36<sup>th</sup> Street, New York City, in June 2007 and 2008. Telephone interviews were conducted October 24, 2008 and February 14, 2009. E-mail and fax correspondence ranges from mid-2005 to February 2009.

<sup>7</sup> According to “Editors of UCLA Student Newspapers, 1919–1955,” Klein shared the editorship that year with two other women: Adele Truitt and Gloria Farquar. Josephine Rosenfield had been the first woman editor the year before and served with two men: Tom Smith and Robert Weil. Retrieved: January 2009, from [www.ulwaf.com/Daily-Bruin-History/index03.html#Anchor-EDITORS-23240](http://www.ulwaf.com/Daily-Bruin-History/index03.html#Anchor-EDITORS-23240).

<sup>8</sup> *Marquis Who’s Who*. (2008). New Providence: NJ.

<sup>9</sup> Charlotte’s mother had seven sisters, and two of Charlotte’s aunts lived with them for a time in Detroit.

sisters, Adelaide and Beatrice, were 13 and 10 years older than she, respectively. Her mother told Charlotte she had felt guilty and apologized to her father after Charlotte's birth because the baby had not been the longed-for son. But Klein's father had not been disappointed, Klein said. An auctioneer who owned his own business, he often traveled around the city and took his youngest daughter with him.

"That's the kind of man he was," Klein said. "I really loved him." Still, "I became a tomboy," she continued. "I tried my best, you know, to be the kind of person that they were looking for. And so I was always setting myself up to compete with boys."

When she was 11, her family moved to Los Angeles, where her sister Beatrice, a talented tap dancer, had moved to try to get into the movies. Instead, she met and married the eldest son of the Schwab's Pharmacy<sup>10</sup> family, Jack, when she was 21, the same legendary place where Charlotte later worked while in college. According to Klein, Beatrice was her father's favorite, and she would call crying that she was homesick. So, Klein said, the father moved the family to be close to her. Klein received a scholarship to and was graduated in 1941 from a private school,<sup>11</sup> where she wrote for the newsletter. She enrolled in UCLA the same year.

At this time, Klein said, UCLA did not offer a journalism major, and she'd never even heard the term public relations.<sup>12</sup> Instead, she started as an English major and focused her energies on the college newspaper. As editor of the *Daily Bruin*, she wrote an editorial every day and also served as a campus correspondent for *The Los Angeles Herald Examiner*. It was this experience, she said, that helped her get work as a United Press International (UPI) correspondent upon graduating in 1945. Of course, countless other early PR practitioners, both men and women, also began their professional careers as writers, including Ivy Lee,<sup>13</sup> Doris Fleischman,<sup>14</sup> and Lorena Hickok.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> According to a Hollywood tourism Web site: "In the movie 'Sunset Blvd,' William Holden's character calls Schwab's Drug Store 'headquarters; a combination office, coffee klatch, and waiting room' for Hollywood writers. And so it was. F. Scott Fitzgerald (author of "*The Great Gatsby*") had a heart attack here in 1940, while buying a pack of cigarettes. Songwriter Harold Arlin wrote 'Over the Rainbow' (from 'The Wizard of Oz') by the light of the Schwab's neon sign. Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd used to play pinball in the back room. And the rumor still persists that Lana Turner was discovered at Schwab's, but it isn't true. Alas, Schwab's was closed in 1986," <http://www.seeing-stars.com/Streets/SunsetStrip.shtml>, accessed Feb. 20, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Klein reports that the school, called the Cumnock School, no longer exists.

<sup>12</sup> However, Bernays' wife, Doris Fleischman, a skilled public relations practitioner in her own right, edited and published *An Outline of Careers for Women: A Practical Guide to Achievement* in 1928, in which she included public relations. (See Lamme, 2007.)

<sup>13</sup> Hanson, Ralph. (2008).

<sup>14</sup> Patterson. (2009.); Henry, S. (1997). "Anonymous in Her Own Name." *Journalism History* 23(2): 51-71.

<sup>15</sup> Martinelli, D. K., & Bowen, S. A. (Fall 2009). The public relations work of trailblazer and first lady confidante Lorena Hickok, 1937-1945. *Journalism History*. (In press).

“At UCLA, just before we would graduate, they would tell us how to behave when we were looking for a job,” Klein remembered.

And the instructions to women were that you must wear your gloves—little white gloves—and you must wear your hat. And I wanted a journalistic job, you know. And they wouldn’t hire me at any of the newspapers. And so I went to United Press with my little white gloves and my little hat, and of course they never wore clothes like that. . . . They were really hard working and so forth. And he [Mr. Switzer, the head of UPI in Los Angeles] looked at me . . . and he said, ‘You know, I would like to hire you, but just by looking at you, I really don’t feel that you would be that comfortable here. We just wear any old clothes. . . .’ And I had to beg him to hire me. I tore off my gloves and said, ‘I’m ready to work!’

Starting at \$27 a week and still living at home, Klein would have to leave very early in the morning to get to work by 6 a.m., traveling through downtown Los Angeles, where she would often encounter winos in the streets. Being a woman alone on the dark city streets made her feel vulnerable, she said, and she carried a knife. But she never shared this with her mother, for fear her mother would worry or want her to quit. This early work at UPI involved giving the farm report and the price of eggs for the Egg Council, but she soon began writing news for the print and radio wire service.

Although she regularly reported news about the war, she recalled she could not use the word “blood” in her radio copy, for radio announcers were not allowed to say it on the air. In addition, she said, “In those days, when crime was written about, they would always say, ‘Joe Jones, black, ‘a black’ or ‘a Negro did such and such,’ but they never did it for any other type [person]. So I used to omit that. I would just say, ‘Joe Jones.’ I felt, you know, because I was a sociologist, I felt that that was a very unfair thing to do, which probably a lot of people wouldn’t agree with. I was conscious of profiling, I guess, very early.”

The gravity of reporting on President Roosevelt’s death also is etched in her mind. However, she also remembers receiving news releases. “I’d throw them right in the wastebasket,” she said. “I would hardly even look at them. . . . We covered the news; so that was my first opinion.” Little did she know then that it would be PR—not journalism per se—that would dominate her life, and that through it, she would help build institutions and propel social causes.

Klein left UPI after a year, in 1946, to write for a CBS radio show called “Ona Munson in Hollywood.” Although Munson had played Belle Watling, the madam who was a friend of Rhett Butler in “Gone with the Wind,” she had never become a star; instead, she interviewed stars. Klein would secure the guests and write the background material for Munson. This job gave Klein more insight into the ubiquitous world of Hollywood publicity, and when the show ended in 1947, she left to join Selznick Studios in Culver City, California.<sup>16</sup> It was here, Klein said, that she learned to pursue big ideas.

“It was great because you had almost an unending budget to develop all kinds of ideas for movies,” she said. “That was a fascinating time, and I was a junior publicist. So I got to brainstorm all these wonderful kinds of things for movies. . . . We had complete open

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<sup>16</sup> Selznick Studios was run by David O. Selznick, who had produced “Gone with the Wind.”

possibilities for any kind of PR and stunts, publicity of all kinds because they had such big budgets. So you could dream. And, you know, they could make your dreams come true.”

During this time, before television, special events were used to get word and name recognition for one’s clients, she continued. When she was assigned to publicize the new Selznick film “Duel in the Sun”<sup>17</sup> in 1946, she thought of the intense rivalry of the UCLA–University of Southern California (USC) football game—itsself a “duel in the sun.” She approached the schools’ athletic departments, which organized student placard cheers, and suggested they hold up placards to say “Duel In the Sun” during the game. A *Life* magazine photographer snapped the photo, which ran nationwide in the popular publication.

While at Selznick, Klein also had an idea for another early kind of product placement. When she was assigned to promote the 1948 movie “Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House,” starring Cary Grant and Myrna Loy,<sup>18</sup> Philip Morris had an advertising campaign that showed people telephoning for Philip Morris, Klein said. “And so I thought of the idea of, in those days, in the hotels, there were staffers who would shout the name of a person who had a telephone call. So I suggested that we call different hotels at dinner time and other times and ask for Blandings. So all throughout the city they were paging Blandings and, of course, the movie was opening and it was Mr. Blandings. ...

“After that was successful, [the head of PR at Selznick] asked that I do a column to be bylined by Shirley Temple. At this time, she was in her twenties and Selznick had the rights to her appearances,” Klein said. So Klein ghost wrote a column for the famed actress. It appeared in the *Los Angeles Examiner* and was called “What Every Young Bride Should Know.” Being a pregnant young wife herself, Temple seemed a win for both the studio and William Randolph Hearst, who owned the *Examiner*, Klein said.

“So I would go over to Shirley’s house and interview her,” Klein recalled. She would travel a lot; she would tell me about her adventures and experiences, and I would write it up as a column.” However, the column was not long-lived. Once Temple had her baby in 1948,<sup>19</sup> she was not considered to be a “young bride” anymore.

After Selznick Studios went out of business in 1949 (with Selznick and his then-wife star Jennifer Jones relocating to London, where they continued to make movies), Klein continued her work as a publicist at Maury Foladare and Associates, a firm that promoted actors, actresses, producers and writers—including radio star Danny Thomas—in part by giving information to gossip columnists. She also got to work at the Academy Awards, identifying for reporters the stars who were coming down the red carpet. Klein said that it was common practice to make up information about and quotes for their entertainment clients, who would read and approve them

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<sup>17</sup> The film’s stars included Gregory Peck, Joseph Cotton, Jennifer Jones (who was nominated for an Academy Award), and Lillian Gish (who was nominated for an Academy Award for best supporting actress). According to a film Web site, “The publicity campaign for *Duel In The Sun* was immense and it paid off. Audiences flocked to see it and waited in long lines to buy tickets. The film made 17,000,000 on it’s first release and subsequent releases would bring in even more,” accessed March 1, 2009, <http://home.hiwaay.net/~oliver/duel.html>.

<sup>18</sup> The movie was nominated for a Writers Guild Award for best written American comedy. Accessed from the Internet Movie Database site March 1, 2009, [ww.imdb.com/title/tt0040613](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0040613).

<sup>19</sup> Shirley’s daughter, Linda Susan Agar, was the child of her first husband. They divorced in 1949. Accessed from NNDB, March 1, 2009, <http://www.nndb.com/people/089/000023020/>.

prior to release. But with her journalistic training, Klein said she felt uncomfortable with this practice.

Luckily, she didn't have to feel uncomfortable for long. By 1951, the new technology of television was gaining popularity, and it was based in New York. Thomas was leaving for New York, as were many other previously West Coast-based entertainers who looked to break into the new business.

Although still in her 20s and having never lived away from home, Klein convinced her boss at Foladare and Associates to allow her to open a branch office in New York City. But it was not really television that interested Klein. Instead, she was a self-proclaimed Francophile, who had long harbored a dream to move to France and write, and New York was a lot closer to France than California. After she'd sold her car and settled in the City, Klein said her boss had second thoughts about the costs of such expansion and told her to return. She refused, instead obtaining a job with Edward Gottlieb & Associates in 1951, a firm with no connection to Hollywood.<sup>20</sup>

### **“The Clean Side of PR”**

Although her prior PR work had been pure publicity, Gottlieb, who'd begun his agency three years prior,<sup>21</sup> liked her sociology degree and her newspaper and radio experience, Klein said. He too had worked for a news service, INS, from 1934 to 1940, before joining Carl Byoir and Associates as an account executive. Klein was pleased to be out of the entertainment business and in the “clean side of PR,” she said. More importantly, Gottlieb taught her to think strategically for clients over a longer period—six months to a year—to facilitate longer term client business, and her view of public relations changed. No longer was it about a quick stunt or mere publicity. It became about servicing her clients well, helping them to achieve their objectives, and also making a difference. She would remain with Gottlieb for 11 years, until 1962, and rise to the level of vice president.

Although she'd left the world of films some 3,000 miles away, Klein's studio work nonetheless continued to serve her in terms of big ideas. For example, one of her first accounts at Gottlieb and Associates was the Ideal Toy Corporation.<sup>22</sup> In the early 1950s, Klein said, “a fiery, red-headed white woman” in Florida named Sara Lee Creech was disturbed that black children had to play with white dolls. Only “mamie” or “pickanniny” dolls were available then, or white dolls that had been painted brown.<sup>23</sup> In response to Creech's activism, a respected sculptor named Sheila Burlingame, who had created a number of black statues, was enlisted to develop an anthropologically correct prototype for the toy company.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Gottlieb also helped launch the career of Amelia Lobsenz, who was a freelance writer and book author that joined Edward Gottlieb & Associates in the early 1950s, before starting her agency, Lobsenz PR in 1956. She was the first woman president of the international Public Relations Association in 1986. She died in 1992. *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*, p. 493.

<sup>21</sup> *Who's Who in America*. (1988). 45<sup>th</sup> Ed.

<sup>22</sup> Ideal Toy Company was founded as Ideal Novelty and Toy Company in New York in 1907 by Morris and Rose Michtom, who invented the Teddy bear in 1903.

<sup>23</sup> *Life Magazine*. (December 17, 1951). Vol. 31: 61–62.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*.

A natural PR practitioner, Klein did her research. She took the prototype on the New York subway through Harlem with her, carrying the doll in her arms to gauge people's reactions. A black woman approached her, curious to get a closer look at the doll, Klein said. When the woman saw it, she said the doll looked dead because of its grayish color. Klein rushed back to Ideal's management to suggest they enlist experts to decide on a more natural-looking color. Still thinking big, she approached Eleanor Roosevelt, who was a well-known civil rights advocate, and the former First Lady agreed to participate. Roosevelt convened a "color jury," by inviting a number of famous African Americans of the day, including the first black player in major league baseball, Jackie Robinson, and his wife, Rachel Isum,<sup>25</sup> to her home for a reception.

Despite these efforts, Klein said she had to continue to urge Ideal's president to proceed with the doll's production because he believed blacks would not have the money to purchase it. Klein persisted. With the support of the president's brother-in-law, Klein helped convince the company head by saying she could obtain a lot of good publicity for Ideal based on Roosevelt's involvement. As she knew from her Hollywood work, celebrity activity and prominent persons make newsworthy copy.

Articles about the doll's development appeared in *Life Magazine*,<sup>26</sup> *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Ebony*, as well as in newspapers around the country. Roosevelt wrote about the doll in her column, "My Day": "At 5 o'clock a number of people were kind enough to come in to tea with me to see a Negro doll, made by the Ideal Toy Corp. ... Certainly, any child would love one of these baby dolls. They have the loveliest expressions and are beautifully made."<sup>27</sup> *Time Magazine* carried a photo of Roosevelt with the doll and said, in part: "In Manhattan, after a period of long and careful study, a panel of judges including Dr. Ralph Bunche<sup>28</sup> selected a model for what will become the first 'anthropologically correct Negro Doll.'"<sup>29</sup>

And the doll, named Saralee after its creator, was popular: "Stores reported it was selling unusually well and noted that the doll is so cute that it is enjoying a brisk trade not only among Negro children but among white children as well," says a *Life Magazine* article of the day.<sup>30</sup> A November 1951 *Newsweek* issue featured a photograph of Roosevelt holding up the doll, and

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<sup>25</sup> Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play major league baseball and was a civil rights advocate. Accessed from the Biography Web site March 1, 2009, <http://www.biography.com/search/article.do?id=9460813&page=3>.

<sup>26</sup> *Life*, December 17, 1951. Photocopy provided by Charlotte Klein; page number unknown.

<sup>27</sup> Klein reports that Saralee is scheduled to be placed in Eleanor Roosevelt's cottage Val-Kill, where she was "born," along with some of Eleanor's other favorite things.

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Bunche is well known for his service to the U.S. government and to the United Nations. In addition, he was the first African American to win a Nobel Peace Prize. Accessed March 1, 2009, from [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1950/bunche-bio.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1950/bunche-bio.html).

<sup>29</sup> November 5, 1951, *Time Magazine*. Taken from a photocopy provided by Klein; page number unknown.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

said, in part: “‘They are a lesson in equality for little children,’ said Mrs. Roosevelt, who has ordered 500 for Christmas.”<sup>31</sup>

However, despite this campaign’s success and personal rewards, Klein’s persistent desire to make a difference by working on meaningful accounts caused her to consider leaving Gottlieb and Associates in 1955 to take a job at the United Nations.

### **Realized Dreams**

“I didn’t want to keep pushing products,” Klein explained. “I wanted something more socially significant.” Gottlieb, knowing her Jewish background and that she had been president of the Junior Hadassah, enticed her to stay by asking: “Is the government of Israel socially significant enough for you?” Indeed, it was.

“The image of Israel [in the U.S.] at that time [1955] was a little country with its hand out, and they really needed funds to continue their country,” Klein said. “And so we set out to change that image.” Klein approached *Life Magazine*’s editorial board to convince them to hold a meeting with Israel’s prime minister. It was a bold move, given the hostilities between the new state and Egypt, where *Life*’s correspondent was based.

“They had to get to know him, and it was very hard to do,” Klein said. “I had to say to the Prime Minister, ‘When they say this is off the record, they do mean it; it will be off the record.’ And that was true in those days,” she added. “So he agreed to answer any question they asked as long as it was off the record.” As a result, the magazine sent its first correspondent to Israel and wrote a favorable editorial. The agency also sent people across the country on media tours to speak on behalf of Israel.<sup>32</sup>

Shortly before Klein departed, on April 13, 1955, Gottlieb sent her a memo:

On the eve of your departure for Israel I want to take the occasion again to tell you that I think you are doing an outstanding job and that you continue to amaze me with your capacity for thought, planning and work all in one coupled with a strong sense of loyalty and responsibility.

Keep in mind that your trip to Israel should be not be entirely devoted to business. Nothing is so important on occasions of this kind as the need for one to take some time away from work to relax and to clear ones [sic] brain in part of the responsibilities in favor of fun and the needs of a social life.<sup>33</sup>

Later in her career, in the early 1980s, Klein would work for the Jerusalem Foundation, which seeks to unite Jews and Arabs. For that organization, “We set up our own agency people

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<sup>31</sup> *Newsweek Magazine*, November 1951. From a photocopy provided by Klein; page number unknown.

<sup>32</sup> Klein reported she also worked on the Jerusalem Foundation account around this time; it’s a nonprofit group that provides activities for both Jewish and Arab children.

<sup>33</sup> April 13, 1955 memo to Klein from Ed Gottlieb, on Edward Gottlieb and Associates letterhead. Photocopy provided by Klein.

in Israel to feed us photographs and material [for news stories],” she explained.<sup>34</sup> Also in later years, Klein said, “he [Gottlieb] apologized to me. He said, ‘I feel that I’ve interfered with your personal life.’ And that’s what he meant: that I had never married. I mean, I had plenty of dates. I did have to travel a lot in my PR career. Oh, when I went to Israel, I got more marriage proposals than I could count. And the reason I didn’t marry was because none of them were from love.” She continued: “And, you know, there were men studying to be doctors, lawyers, or so forth, and they wanted to get to the U.S. And they said it was my *duty* to marry them. But that finished that. . . .”

Still, Klein’s longstanding desire to go to France was realized through her work. Gottlieb had started looking for new clients in other countries, Klein explained, while French companies were looking to enter new markets. As a result, the firm had four French accounts by the late 1950s: cognac, champagne, leather gloves, and couture fashions. Gottlieb kept the cognac account for himself, but gave the others to Klein, and she finally traveled to France.

It was also during this time—in 1959—that Gottlieb’s life changed forever, and life at the firm was altered as well. On Feb. 4, just before midnight, Gottlieb was on an American Airlines Chicago to New York business flight, when his Electra turbo-jet plane crashed in New York’s East River.<sup>35</sup> Sixty-five people perished; only 8 survived.<sup>36</sup> Although Gottlieb was among the survivors, he was hospitalized for months at Bellvue Hospital in New York with severe leg injuries, Klein said. However, he didn’t stop for a minute, she said, and they held their staff meetings in his hospital room. Although he learned to walk again, Klein said he relied on a wheelchair and a cane for the rest of his life.<sup>37</sup>

Klein credits Gottlieb for her own successful approach to clients, one that she would employ with confidence when opening her own firm some years later. “It was a calm approach, a humble approach, but with outstanding results,” she said. “He was always my destiny,” she continued. “He kept turning up [in my life].” If not for Gottlieb’s efforts, she said she would have left the public relations profession. “He had very high standards,” and I was able to “practice my journalism in doing PR.”

Gottlieb’s charm—“the French loved him,” Klein said—no doubt combined with her understanding of the power of celebrity and big ideas, paid off for the firm and its clients. For example, she used a former U.S. Olympic swimming champion, who was then married to a Frenchman and living in France, as the model and spokesperson for their client’s novel washable leather gloves. She brought in television cameras to film the former Olympian swimming in a hotel pool in the morning with her gloves on, then had them return later in the day when the gloves were dry.

She partnered her French clients with another Gottlieb client, Cheseborough Ponds, which wanted to elevate the stature of its cosmetics line. Klein suggested they do that by

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<sup>34</sup> One angle they used, Klein said, was equating the new country, with its cattle ranches, to the Wild West of the U.S. a century before.

<sup>35</sup> *The New York Times*, Feb. 4, 1959, pp. 1, 18.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Feb. 5, 1959, pp. 1, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Despite the trauma of the accident, Klein said he remained foremost a PR man: Following the crash, a garbage barge reached him and pulled him aboard, and the crew asked if they could get him something to drink. “Yes,” he replied, said Klein. “I’ll have cognac.”

sponsoring the first U.S.–televised French couture fashion show. The sponsor and the mystique of French elegance interested CBS, and the firm secured actor Yves Montaine to serve as the show’s host.

Klein adeptly identified both her clients’ target audience—upper income Americans—and how to reach them: charitable organizations. She also organized what we’d today call Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities by partnering with community groups, such as the Junior League and the Damon Runyon Cancer Fund, in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago to host charitable fashion shows that paired the one-of-a-kind fashions with French champagne to raise money for their respective causes. Klein traveled from France with a designer and models on the new U.S.S. France, and the New York charitable event was held aboard the ship to benefit the French American Friendship Fund. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy served as honorary chair of the fund and was honored at the event. Klein also employed a beautiful French baroness as a spokesperson for the products and events, and Klein said her beauty and perfect English made their television media tour a great success as well.

Klein’s career was rich indeed. She owned her own agency, not once, but twice: Charlotte Klein and Associates, the first iteration of which was purchased by Porter Novelli in 1984. She served as an early woman President of the New York Chapter of PRSA, and headed an early women’s professional networking group in New York, called Women Executives (WE) in PR. She’s championed diversity in the workplace, established the PRSA Task Force on sexual harassment, and has been active politically.

She was a member of the International Women’s Forum,<sup>38</sup> serving in leadership roles from 1993 through 2001. As part of this work, she co-chaired a task force on violence against women globally. Part of this effort included creating a “hospital brigade to make heads of private NYC hospitals aware of the urgent need to make indentifying and treating battered women a priority,” says an entry in the book *Feminists Who Changed America*.<sup>39</sup>

While a senior vice president at Harshe-Rotman & Druck, Inc.<sup>40</sup>, for whom she worked from the mid-1960s until 1978, she represented the United Negro College Fund and the First Women’s Bank, among other minority clients.<sup>41</sup> She was a lecturer at Boston University and Pace College, and taught a course called “Making It In a Man’s World” in 1971 at the New School for Social Research in New York. According to an article written about it at the time, the

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<sup>38</sup> According to its Web site, the International Women’s Forum is advancing women’s leadership across careers, cultures and continents by connecting the world’s most preeminent women of significant and diverse achievement. Through this global organization, IWF members come together across national and international boundaries to share knowledge and ideas, to enrich each other’s lives, to provide a network of support and to exert influence. Through the Leadership Foundation, IWF helps prepare future generations of women leaders. [www.iwforum.org/](http://www.iwforum.org/), accessed February 22, 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Love, B. J. (Ed.). (2006). *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

<sup>40</sup> Klein joined the agency in 1965, and Druck was one of PRSA’s founders in 1948. Betsy Plank directly succeeded him as PRSA President in 1973.

<sup>41</sup> Fleischman also worked for minority clients, including the NAACP.

course dealt with “women’s ambitions in their careers and ways in which to deal with the obstacles they must face in human relations.”<sup>42</sup>

“We’re in a low bargaining position,” Klein says in the article. “Corporations will say a man has a family and needs more money. Or they will say they are afraid you’ll have a child and leave.” The piece ends with the following paragraph:

“There’s nothing militant about Charlotte Klein regardless of her success in business. She’s attractive, feminine and realistic—and the ideal person to be giving a course on how without bitterness and with honest self-appraisal a woman can make it in a man’s world.” Klein later taught public relations as an adjunct at New York University; her final course there was public relations ethics in 2001.

### **An Enduring Legacy**

It’s clear that Klein made a difference to her clients, her profession, and society. With all of her accomplishments, however, one of Klein’s most enduring has been the work she started while a senior vice president for a woman-owned PR agency, Flanley and Woodward, in 1965. Although her time at the agency was relatively short-lived, only about three years before she was fired,<sup>43</sup> it was her work here that would create a national institution.

It’s likely a woman-owned agency particularly appealed to client Purex in 1965, for the company branded itself with the slogan: “Products with a woman’s touch.”<sup>44</sup> However, unbeknownst to the agency, the company had invested heavily in the 1965 New York World’s Fair, creating a Hospitality Center for women’s clubs and the like to meet while visiting the event. But women weren’t going to the Fair for meetings, and the company was not getting the traffic—or return on investment—it sought. Around this time Klein remembers seeing New York University’s Hall of Fame and noticing there were no women in it. This prompted her to suggest creating a women’s Hall of Fame for Purex to sponsor and display at the Fair.

Once again, Klein thought large. She enlisted the daughter of former President Harry Truman, Margaret Truman Daniel, to head the nominating committee and let 200 women editors and broadcasters nationwide (media representatives who would want to cover the eventual inductee story) vote for the first 20 inductees—10 living and 10 deceased women of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who had made a contribution to society. The first inductees included Margaret Bourke-White, Edna Ferber, Dr. Frances Kelsey, Margaret Chase Smith, Jane Addams, Ethel Barrymore, Evangeline Cory Booth, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Dr. Florence Sabin, Eleanor Roosevelt (who secured the most votes), Helen Keller, Marian Anderson, Margaret Mead, Rachel Carson, Margaret Sanger, Pearl Buck, Grandma Moses, Amelia Earhart, Babe Didrickson Zaharias and

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<sup>42</sup> Hennessy, Helen. “Making It in a Man’s World: New School Teaches How to Do It,” Newspaper Enterprise Association/New York-Cleveland, Dec. 6, 1971.

<sup>43</sup> Klein believes her resignation was hastened by her desire to add a man to the team—which the principals refused to consider—and by Klein’s vocal concerns regarding client dissatisfaction, which perhaps was perceived as undermining her superiors.

<sup>44</sup> Klein personal interview, June 12, 2008.

Helen Hayes.<sup>45</sup> Six of the ten living inductees attended the reception of more than 200 invited guests and print and broadcast media.<sup>46</sup>

“Thirty-seven of the nation’s major newspapers ran the story on their front pages, most with photos of all 20 inductees,” Klein later wrote in a news release.<sup>47</sup> “Many ran editorials, some ran color. All three TV networks ran interviews; AP and UPI covered the story more than once. . . . Traffic [in the Purex hall] increased by 400 percent.”<sup>48</sup>

“The Women’s Hall of Fame actually, in a way, was a catalyst of the women’s revolution,” Klein said. “And of course I am proud of that. And I became a very big feminist myself, even marching down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue with Betty Friedan<sup>49</sup> and Gloria Steinem<sup>50</sup> and Bella Abzug<sup>51</sup>. I was very active in all that, and I helped found the New York branch of NOW [National Organization for Women] organization.”

Four years later, while working for Harshe-Rotman and Druck, Inc.,<sup>52</sup> where she stayed until 1978 and rose to senior vice president, Klein was approached by Seneca Falls, NY,<sup>53</sup> asking if Purex would continue their sponsorship of the Hall there. Purex declined, so Klein, who had originated the hall, gave Seneca Falls permission to take it over. Since then, they’ve added key suffragists and inducted outstanding women each year. Today, there are 226 women in the Hall.

The National Women’s Hall of Fame honored Klein in 2005 with its first Keeper of the Flame Award for being the creator of the initial hall. The award ceremony was part of a fundraiser for the institution and featured Gloria Steinem, a 1993 inductee into the hall, as its keynote speaker.

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<sup>45</sup> Photocopies of original ballots provided by Klein. Complete list of inductees taken from a “Women and Society” section front page of the *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 30, 1965.

<sup>46</sup> From a news release issued Feb. 14, 2005, by Klein for publication in PRSA’s publication *PR Tactics* in response to her National Women’s Hall of Fame–issued Keeper of the Flame Award, Feb. 3, 2005.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963).

<sup>50</sup> Steinham was founder of *Ms. Magazine* and, according to a January 13, 2005, news release by the National Women’s Hall of Fame, is “considered by many to be one of the most influential leaders of the late twentieth century women’s movement.” Accessed February 3, 2005 at [www.greatwomen.org/news.php?action=view&id=42](http://www.greatwomen.org/news.php?action=view&id=42).

<sup>51</sup> Bella Savitsky Abzug (July 24, 1920 – March 31, 1998) was an American lawyer, Congresswoman, social activist and a leader of the Women's Movement. In 1971 Abzug joined other leading feminists such as Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan to found the National Women's Political Caucus

<sup>52</sup> Harshe-Rotman and Druck, Inc. was founded by Kalman Druck and Morris B. Rotman in 1961 and based in Chicago. It became the sixth largest PR firm in the U.S. and was acquired by Ruder Finn.

<sup>53</sup> Seneca Falls contains a historical preserve to recognize it as the site of the first Women’s Rights Convention in 1848.

Klein said, “My career has been toward servicing a client but can show how PR can benefit society. . . . You know, public relations can be so broad and it can accomplish such terrific things.”

Klein worked during her vacation time to set up the Women’s Political News Service through the National Women’s Political Caucus at the Democratic National Convention in New York in 1976. “We had most of the copy in the paper because there was very little to talk about other than what we were sending out, and we were giving the press information and got them some of the delegates to be interviewed,” she said.

Jimmy Carter went on to be elected President. “This gave Bella Abzug and others ammunition to demand 50/50 female/male delegates to future conventions,” Klein is quoted as saying.<sup>54</sup>

Klein would interact with Carter again when she represented the American Arbitration Association. She came up with the idea of presenting then-President Carter with a special award from the organization for his mediation in the Middle East peace talks.<sup>55</sup> He accepted the award in the White House Oval Office, and, as a result, Klein has a photograph of herself with him there. More importantly, her client’s name was associated with his in the resulting cutlines and news stories.

She worked for PBS promoting a new Annenberg project, and—despite being an active Democrat—she obtained First Lady Nancy Reagan’s<sup>56</sup> commitment to tape a televised introduction to the program and was invited to a White House reception besides. She had worked in public broadcasting previously, as the director of press and government affairs for WNET, the nation’s largest public broadcasting station from 1978 to 1980. Klein said she had a staff of 33 and was eager to do something for the community through her work. But her boss, a woman vice president of communications, had a different management style, one that Klein said demeaned the staff.

### **On Her Own**

“This was a pretty low time in my career,” she said. However, this low point served as the impetus for Klein to leave and start her own agency in 1979, where she got a lot of public television stations as clients. And although her experience with Gottlieb had given her a lot of confidence, she was still asking people for advice, turning to the Women Executives in Public Relations, to which she had belonged for some time.

One of the founders of the group, Denny Griswold, herself an accomplished and well respected woman practitioner,<sup>57</sup> cautioned Klein to get a male partner. “Well, what do you mean?” Klein said she responded to the advice. “You won’t be successful unless you have a

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<sup>54</sup> Love, B. J. (Ed.). (2006).

<sup>55</sup> Although Carter was instrumental in the peace talks, which were held at Camp David in Maryland, he did not receive the Nobel Peace Prize many expected. This led Klein to think of the mediation award, she said.

<sup>56</sup> The First Lady was well known for her “Just Say No” anti-drug campaign.

<sup>57</sup> Griswold was the co-founder and nearly 50-year editor of *PR News*, which she started with her husband in 1944. It was the first weekly publication about PR in the world.

man helping you to be the head of it,” she recalled Griswold saying. Klein said she responded by saying, “Well, I’ll think about that.” But she didn’t think it necessary, and she started Charlotte C. Klein and Associates without a male partner in 1979.

Yet Griswold’s advice came back to Klein soon afterward, when she went after a large Japanese account. She was advised by another colleague to bring a man with her to the presentation, and this time, she heeded the recommendation.

“And we made the presentation,” she recalled, “and the PR head came to talk to us afterward, and he said, ‘You’ve done a great job, really great job. Only one thing, would you change the name of your company? A man’s name would have to be the head of it or they won’t hire you.’” “And so I said, ‘Goodbye!’” Klein said.

Such continued discrimination was disheartening, she recalled. When she served as president of the NY Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, she remembered making a speech and held up one of the chapter members as an example of a man who hired mostly women.

“So I gave him plaudits and he was sitting there. And I questioned him: ‘Steve, why was it that you were so interested in hiring women? Did you think that they did a better job?’ And he said, ‘No, they come in cheaper!’ But that was a long time ago. We have so many women who own their own agencies now. But, boy, they were sparse [then]. You just couldn’t make it.”

But Klein and a few others did make it. “I had all of the photographs from the Women’s Hall of Fame set up in my office, all the original pictures. Every day I could look up there for all these role models,” she said. Eventually, her former boss Gottlieb, who’d sold Gottlieb and Associates to Hill & Knowlton and went into the mergers and acquisitions business, helped Klein merge her agency in 1984 with Porter Novelli, who was looking for a New York presence. Even at the high level of senior vice president, Klein wasn’t happy. Her rule of serving clients with excellence was being compromised by the firm, she believed. Because Porter Novelli was owned by an advertising agency, “getting accounts was the most important thing ... and service began to go down because everybody was selling—had to sell,” she said. “It [service] was a very strong point with me.”

So she quit after five years with the firm and, because of her contract, was able to take a large client with her. That’s when the second incarnation of Charlotte Klein and Associates began, in 1989, which she maintained for five years before deciding to retire.

### **A Rich Career**

During her career, Klein, as Fleischman,<sup>58</sup> worked for diversity issues, and for women’s rights,<sup>59</sup> and she mixed with other prominent men and women public relations practitioners. Some of these colleagues included the man who was most influential in her career—Gottlieb—as well as Druck, a former PRSA president and someone whom Klein called “wonderful” and “a very impressive man.”

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<sup>58</sup> One of Fleischman’s most rewarding accounts was that of the NAACP in 1920 (Patterson, 2009.); Klein hired an African American man to help with her National Negro College Fund account and worked with black PRSA members to help develop minority PRSA programming in the 1970s and 1980s, respectively.

<sup>59</sup> Klein also did work to combat domestic violence for a group called The Women’s Forum.

“He had a way that was very different from Gottlieb,” Klein said. “In fact, it was just the opposite—big talk, big show, big promises that we couldn’t always live up to.” Klein prided herself on customer service and preferred Gottlieb’s approach, she said.

She was not alone: Another successful New York practitioner of Klein’s era, Barbara Hunter, said she lived by one rule during her 42 years of agency work: “Do not overpromise results to your client and make certain you deliver the promises you do make.”<sup>60</sup> Gottlieb, Klein, and Hunter knew the importance of credibility.

Klein networked with other influential women who also served as WE PR presidents: Griswold, Dorothy Gregg, and Caroline Hood—all of whom are included in the *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*.<sup>61</sup> But most importantly, public relations helped her fulfill her earliest dreams of contributing to society, of going to France, and even of having her name in *The New Yorker*.

Although the publication’s editors had sent her numerous rejection letters over the years, her name did eventually appear in the magazine, but not in the byline she’d imagined. Instead, it was part of a feature story about one of her client’s campaigns that chronicled her pushing comic strip characters Dick Tracey and Tess Trueheart’s baby, Bonny Braids, down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue as part of a publicity event for Macy’s,<sup>62</sup> the same street where she marched for women’s rights with feminist leaders Friedan, Abzug, and Steinem more than a decade later.

“Miss Klein informed us that Ideal Toy [Corporation] went into action the moment Chester Gould, the cartoonist who draws Dick Tracy, indicated in print that Tracy and Miss Trueheart were finally going to get hitched,” *The New Yorker’s* July 7, 1951 issue reads. “. . . Benjamin Franklin Michtom, chairman of the board of Ideal Toy, perceived at once that a Tracy marriage could mean a Tracy baby, which could mean a Tracy doll, which could mean a gold mine for Ideal. . . . Now Ideal is keeping a sharp lookout for the first local baby to be named Bonny; this baby will be given a free Bonny Braids doll. . . .”<sup>63</sup>

Reflecting more seriously on her 50-year career, Klein said, “Everything you ever do in your life at some point will have a meaning in your public relations career. . . . What I really tried to do in my career was things that would last, not just stunts or campaigns. . . .” Indeed, her desire to do good through both her paid and volunteer PR work, her desire for more inclusive workplace environments and her campaign “big ideas”—those that David Ogilvy called ones that get noticed, remembered, and inspire action<sup>64</sup>—included “bundling” clients together for greater

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<sup>60</sup> *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*, p. 399.

<sup>61</sup> Heath, R.L. (2005). *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*. Another contemporary of Klein’s was Phyllis Berlowe, who was born months before Klein, also to a businessman father and homemaker mother, and who also spent time with Harshe-Rotman and Druck and Gottlieb and Associates (although in that order) and who lived in New York and eventually started her own firm, The Berlowe Group, in 1986. She too was a member of WE in PR; she won the PRSA Silver Anvil award the year before Klein did: and she also received the John Hill Award. *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*, pp. 77–78.

<sup>62</sup> *The New Yorker*, July 7, 1951, p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Hanson (2008).

collective benefit; early product placement and CSR activities; and the involvement and support of a Prime Minister, one U.S. President, three First Ladies, and a President's daughter.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike Fleischman, who worked largely in the shadows of her husband, Klein was among the first generation of women to become accredited by PRSA and recognized by their peers, both men and women, as leaders in the profession. Following in the footsteps of PRSSA "godmother" Betsy Plank,<sup>66</sup> who was the first woman to head PRSA in 1972 and was also the head of her own PR agency, which she still operates, Klein headed the Woman Executives in PR in 1965 and the NY Chapter of PRSA in 1985. Klein received the New York Women in Communications Matrix Award in 1975,<sup>67</sup> won the PRSA Silver Anvil Award in 1978 for her work with the Aerosol Packaging Council in educating consumers about fluorocarbons,<sup>68</sup> and was given the New York Chapter's John Hill Award ten years later.

Also similar to her contemporary Plank, who was born less than one year after Klein and also has more than 50 years' experience in the field, neither had children. However, Plank was married for many years; Klein remained single. Although she had offers, she said, "I was married to my work. . . . You know, the men that I would meet wanted me to be there [for them]. And I always wanted to have children. I adopted, just by mail, really, an Israeli child. And, you know, I was involved with that child for about 10 years."

Klein, as Plank, continues to stay active. She serves her Murray Hill Homeowner's Association in NYC, editing their 20-page, four-color quarterly newsletter that includes local advertising, in the same apartment where the second Charlotte Klein and Associates operated. She looks back with great pride on her public relations work and accomplishments. "I learned that you could do almost anything in PR if you had the budget and the idea," Klein said. "But I was really interested in establishing things that lasted."

Patterson writes: "History left too long unrecorded will eventually be lost."<sup>69</sup> This paper adds to our knowledge of 20<sup>th</sup> century public relations practice through the experience of one woman's lengthy and noteworthy career. In addition, it is history recorded from multiple personal interviews and the benefit of reflection and hindsight, rather than solely from primary and secondary documents and third-party recollections, which dominates our literature about women practitioners.

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<sup>65</sup> Klein also received a letter of reference from Hillary Clinton.

<sup>66</sup> Heath (2005). *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*, p. 622

<sup>67</sup> According to the New York Women in Communications Chapter Web site, "The Matrix Awards recognize exceptional women who have made distinguished contributions to the fields of advertising, books, broadcasting, film, magazines, new media, newspapers and public relations." Klein's award is listed on <http://www.nywici.org/archive/matrix/fame.html#1975>.

<sup>68</sup> According to PRSA's Web site, "Silver Anvil Awards recognize complete programs incorporating sound research, planning, execution and evaluation. They must meet the highest standards of performance in the profession," accessed March 1, 2009, <http://www.prsa.org/awards/silveranvil/index.html>. The council was part of the Chemical Specialties Manufacturers Association; Klein worked for Harshe-Rotman & Druck, Inc. Winning entry accessed at <http://prcsearch.prsa.org/dbtw-wpd/exec/dbtwpub.dll>, March 1, 2009.

<sup>69</sup> Patterson (2009).