

Remembering Anne Bass and the Roaring 80's Divorce of the Century

By Bill Dougherty

Since all things-Covid began in early 2020, many have not paid attention to anything else. However, if you happened to be rich and famous you could not help but notice the death of former Texas and New York socialite Anne Bass. She died of ovarian cancer in April of last year at the age of 78. The former Mrs. Bass had stayed largely out of the limelight for the last several decades. Instead, she quietly retired to a sprawling farm in South Kent, Connecticut. But there is far more to this story than the passing of a once iconic socialite.

Oil and Water

Sid Bass made his vast oil fortune after being given his father's company Bass Brothers which had been founded in the 1930s. The company controlled more than 100 oil fields. By the time the Yale and Stanford educated Sid took over from his father in 1968, Perry Bass's heir apparent was close to making his father's company a billion-dollar operation. He had married Anne Hendricks, a well-bred, Vassar educated clothing buyer and fashion editor several years prior. The couple quickly had two daughters and built their home in the family dynasty of Ft. Worth after making brief stops in Palo Alto and Dallas. It was in Ft. Worth in 1970 that they would move into the sprawling space-age Paul Rudolph designed mansion. The home would become perhaps one of the most dazzling post-war modern homes of the 20th century. It was often photographed by architects and home magazines alike. They truly showcased themselves to the world as the dream couple of the 1970s and 80s. But by 1986 there seemed to be water in the oil.

Sid Bass

Sid Bass was a second-generation Texan. He was kind to everyone, affable and very easy going. By the late 1970s, he was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with his wife's high-profile reputation in Ft. Worth as well as New York; where Anne had made an even bigger presence. Sid was a man who did not even like wearing tuxedos much less attending charity balls. He was simple and down to earth, but he liked forceful women. He often told friends that he was disappointed that his family wealth had gone to his wife's head. He preferred to remain in Ft. Worth, while Anne spent most of her time in New York.

Mrs. Bass

Anne Bass did not exactly have the best reputation in the social world. Though she was clearly at the top of the social heap, having opulent homes in Ft. Worth and Manhattan and more money than God, she had her share of detractors. Since she was clearly the richest socialite in both cities where she resided, she seldom took no for an answer. She was obsessed with the ballet in both Ft. Worth and New York. She spent time collecting fine works of art from the likes of Degas, Rothko, Picasso, and Calder. Her playground bully tactics earned her a very bad reputation. Anne could dismiss anyone with her steely pale blue eyes. She smoked almost 3 packs of cigarettes a day and was noted for the two plastic combs she wore on a constant basis in her blonde blunt-cut mane. Anne was quiet, unapproachable, and referred to by others in the social swim as "The Ice Queen." Many have said she was not well-liked.

The Persian Geisha

Enter Mercedes Kellogg. She was not particularly attractive but her put-together polished appearance, quick wit and style made her the go-to guest at the most rarefied dinner parties



The clam before the storm. Anne Bass 1986



Out and about. Sid Bass and Mercedes Kellogg on one of the first public appearances 1989

in New York. She was married to Francis Kellogg. They had met in the early 1970s in Switzerland, while she was an assistant to the UN in Lausanne, and married in Geneva. They seemed very happy and Mr. Kellogg adored his witty and vivacious wife, but she

wanted more and sensed that there was a better life for her once they settled in New York in the roaring 1980s.

I Want to be Rich

Mercedes saw the trappings of her new Fifth Avenue life early on. While she had a nice and comfortable life with the ambassador, she often told friends "I want to be rich." After several brief encounters at Manhattan charity balls, Mercedes finally hooked her Bass. While the two flirted at the second party in the Hamptons, Mercedes lobbed a dinner roll at Sid's head. He quickly scrolled her telephone number and thus began a clandestine affair. They thought they were safe at countless rendezvous in New York and Paris until they were spotted at the Plaza Athenee. Then all hell broke loose! Up until that time, many in the rarefied circle said wives were safe. You never considered an affair with another man's wife; you had a mistress. The affair shook the social world to its core and changed the way they had once moved.

The Divorce of the Century

Anne Bass went for the jugular. She was awarded more than 200 million dollars. It stands as the highest settlement ever awarded in the state of Texas. She retained her futuristic home in Ft. Worth and her Park Avenue apartment. But she was quickly overshadowed by the new Mr. and Mrs. Bass. Most had sided with Sid since he had the money. However, there were some in the Anne camp too. John Fairchild, the publisher of *Women's Wear Daily*, refused to address Mercedes Kellogg as Mercedes Bass even after the couple had been married for some time. *Spy Magazine* told readers that the only reason Sid Bass had married his second wife was because she obviously could perform weird Far East sex tricks. The Duchess of Windsor had also claimed to be able to do the same thing. The magazine adding that both women were beyond homely.

Afterwards

Mercedes Bass would go on to be one of the most respected socialites in New York. People adored her. Like her second husband she was approachable and kind to everyone



Anne Bass 2018



Mercedes Bass 2020



The magnificent Ft. Worth home of Anne and Sid Bass built in 1970

she encountered, even the help. She hosted at least two lunches a week in the couples' New York Penthouse and gave a small fortune to homeless charities and the ballet. She continues to be a force of nature on the charity scene.

Anne Bass would eventually leave New York and settle in Connecticut with her artist boyfriend Julian Lethbridge. It was there that the couple was subjected to a horrific and unfathomable weekend. The two were held hostage by their Romanian butler and injected with saline which he claimed was poison, in order to extort millions from Mrs. Bass. He was eventually sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Much to the surprise of everyone in New York, Mercedes and Sid Bass quietly divorced in 2011. Sid simply told friends he no longer wanted to keep up with his second wife and that he was done going to charity events. He gave her their homes in New York, Aspen and Ft. Worth, an enormous settlement and then he disappeared.

Anne Bass passed away surrounded by her daughters and friends in April of 2020. Sid Bass was said to have paid for the lavish funeral and reception at the Ridglea Country Club in Ft. Worth. By this time, many had forgotten about Anne Bass. In her final years she had softened, and she never stopped supporting the charities she helped prop up, including The Ballet Center of Ft. Worth which survives today because of her generosity. She made her mark.