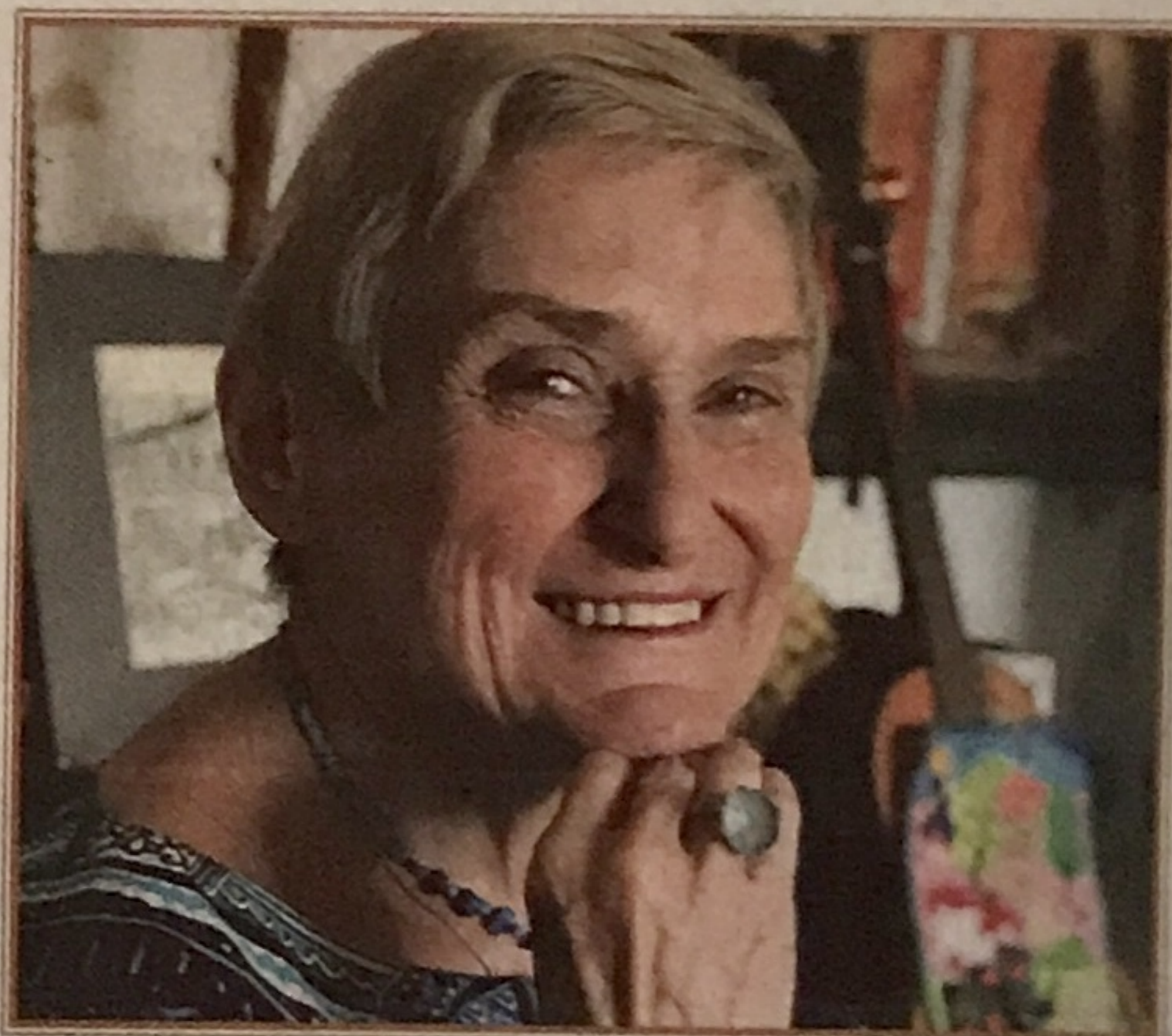


Tania Grossinger, with psychedelic guru Timothy Leary, while promoting his Playboy interview in the 1960s. Submitted photos. Below, Grossinger today, who wrote "Memoir of An Independent Woman."

Hangin' with the glitterati

11/1/13



TANIA GROSSINGER CHRONICLES HER EXTRAORDINARY LIFE IN BRANFORD TALK

By Lisa Reisman
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CALL TANIA GROSSINGER the female incarnation of Forrest Gump. Not for any lack of intelligence; she began college at 15. Because her life reads like a trip back through the defining personalities and events of the 20th century.

As a child growing up at the famed Grossinger's resort in the Catskills, the comedian Jerry Lewis took her to the dentist. She honed her Ping Pong skills with Brooklyn Dodger Jackie Robinson, the animated 76-year-old told an audience of 50 at Branford's Anchor Reef Clubhouse last week at an event sponsored by the Shoreline's Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven. And heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano took cha cha lessons so she'd have someone to dance with at cocktail hour.

Being on a first-name basis with such legends as Frank Sinatra, Elizabeth Taylor, and Mickey Mantle only went so far, and for a simple reason. She remained at a distance from the one figure whose attention and affection she most craved, she writes

in the recently published "Memoir of an Independent Woman": her mother, the resort's glamorous social hostess whose Viennese background, charm and fluency in 13



Jackie Robinson with Tania's mother Karla, the glamorous social director and hostess at Grossingers Resort.

languages endeared her to celebrities and management alike.

Yes, she and her mother made their home at the lavish resort reminiscent of "Dirty Dancing" whose grounds sprawled over 850 rolling acres, with Olympic-sized swimming pools, an ice skating rink, outdoor and indoor tennis courts, and championship golf courses, along with its own airport.

Still, as second cousins of the family-owned business, they lived, quite literally, as second-class citizens, relegated to an attic room of a cottage without a kitchen or a private bathroom. "If the hotel was overbooked," she writes, a porter removed the dresser and installed a third bed for a guest.

Nor did the physical proximity of their living quarters do much to bridge the cold detachment her mother practiced toward her. "My mother would say she loved me," said the long-time Greenwich Village denizen. "I just never felt she liked me."

No matter that the two rarely saw each other while Tania was growing up, with the hours requisite to hostessing dinner and entertainment

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Glitterati: Rubbing shoulders with the icons of an age

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extending well into the night. "I didn't have a meal with my mother until my early 20s," Grossinger said in her precise New York-inflected diction.

Whatever her seeming privations, Grossinger managed to parlay the

savoir faire she had gained hobnobbing with the glitterati of the day — and her last name — into a series of high-profile jobs that constitute at once an encyclopedic record as well as an up-close-and-personal take on the bold-faced names and events of her time.

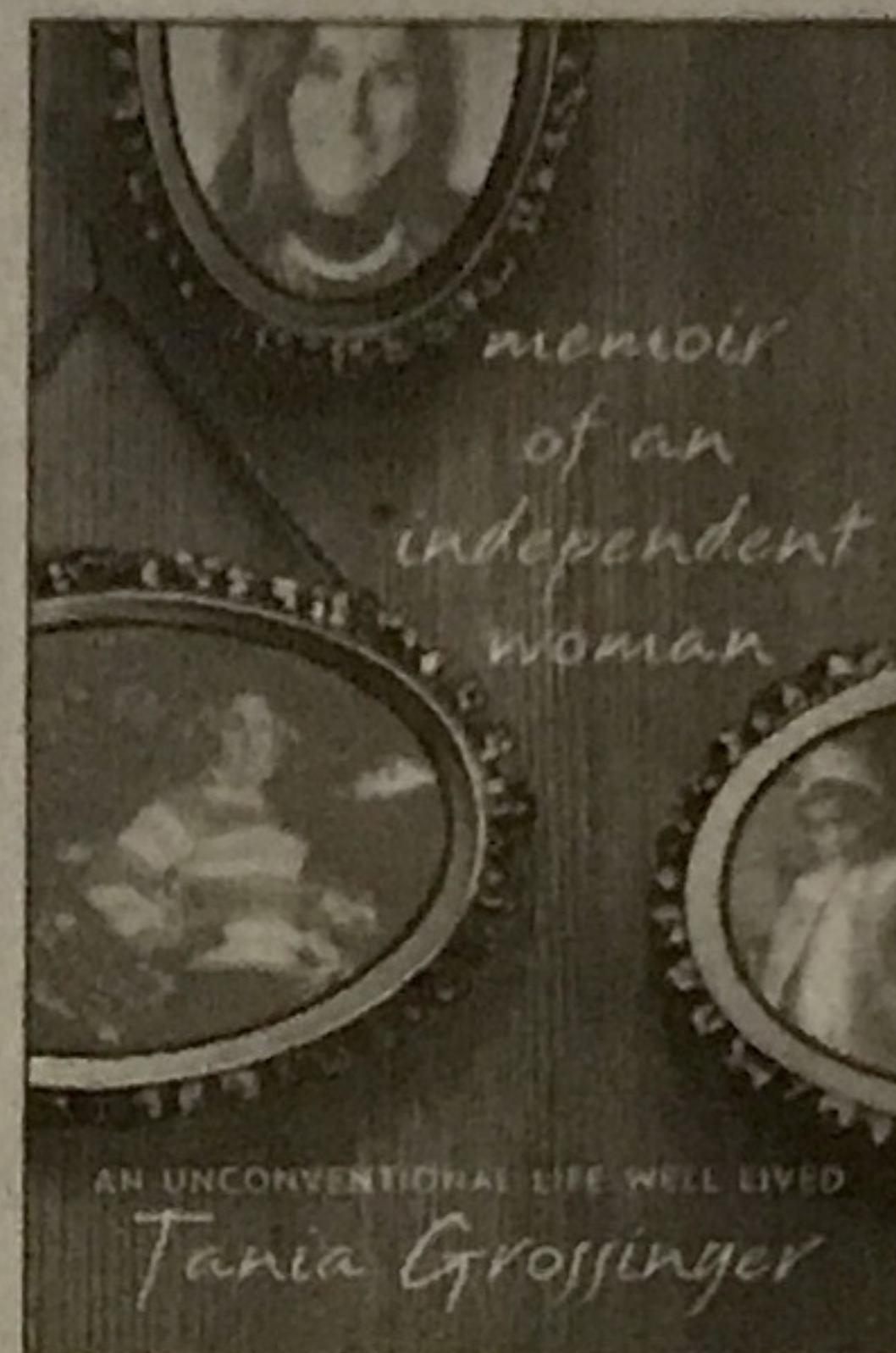
The first of such jobs,

on the heels of her graduation from college, where she studied under pioneering psychologist Abraham Maslow and acted as student guide for then Sen. John F. Kennedy: a position with the public relations agency working with a client that sponsored the TV quiz show "The \$64,000 Question," the downfall of which was dramatized by Ralph Fiennes in the Oscar-nominated "Quiz Show."

That, as she writes, "I was the last to know the show was rigged and the first to be let go," did not faze her. Soon she was forming her own PR firm while rooming with an off-Broadway composer in the heart of Greenwich Village; Mel Brooks and Joan Rivers regularly dropped in.

"I grew up in a place where people were rarely what they seemed," she told the rapt crowd, in explaining why she pursued public relations — specifically, broadcast promotion. "I understood how it worked."

Indeed. One year she was polishing the image



Tania Grossinger's book.

of the famously abrasive feminist icon Betty Friedan to such a sheen that Merv Griffin invited her on his show to discuss "The Feminine Mystique." The next she was counteracting negative publicity surrounding Playboy Magazine by convincing Hugh Hefner to place highly regarded writers in the magazine on popular talk shows.

But it was in her other role at Playboy, as coordinator of media events for Playboy Bunnies at the Playboy Club, that she exhibited her Forrest-Gump-like qualities to

full effect. There she entertained, among others, the "intimidating" conservative philosopher Ayn Rand who, she discovered, had a wicked sense of humor. Not to mention Johnny Carson. By 2 a.m., she writes, "semi-sloshed," he vowed to get the number of any Bunny he wanted. (It was against the rules, she informed him, and ushered him home.)

There, too, she arranged a dinner with the writer and psychedelic-drug advocate Timothy Leary before a late-night interview. Toward the end of the dinner, he excused himself to the



Grossinger with Hugh Hefner.