

GENE KELLY DESTROYED BY SCHEMING WIFE

— NEW BOOK CHARGES

SHOCKING CLAIMS: ● He was cut off from family AFTER stroke ● Old friends barred from his sickbed ● His kids lost most of inheritance

SCREEN legend Gene Kelly's third wife isolated him from his loving family and friends and took away his joy of life, his wife Betsy Blair will claim in her blockbuster new book, *Gene Kelly: A Biography*, she says.

Gene Kelly, starring in the Rain star, was 83 in his Hollywood home in 1996.

Before that, his younger wife Patricia Ward, who is his junior - had been cutting him off from his own kids and other friends after he suffered a debilitating stroke two years earlier, she says in her upcoming biography, *The Memory of Gene Kelly* (Knopf), sources say.

"After his first stroke, his children were sad (at the hospital) and concerned," sources say. "They had less charges. 'They had depression Gene didn't know how to deal with these calls.'"

Sources also say Blair will claim that "at the time of his stroke, he was cut off from everyone familiar. Lois, his secretary for 50 years, was no longer welcome in the house. His housekeeper, his doctor, his business manager and his friends who left messages and no calls back. Even his daughter Bridget was told not to come to make an appointment."

Gene was a 16-year-old dancer when he met Kelly in 1939. Two years later and had married Kelly in October 1942. He was friendly with the actor's first wife, Jeanne Coyne, who had a son Timothy, now 41, and a daughter Bridget, 38 - but has been a bitter enemy for his third wife, sources say.

Gene tied the knot with Kelly in 1990, and, sources say, Patricia Ward, "was welcomed



Kelly with his first wife Betsy Blair, holding their daughter Kerry (top left); second wife Jeanne Coyne, holding son Timothy (below left); and with third wife Patricia Ward

happy, but were worried he was making a big mistake," says the source.

"He was bewitched by his young wife and did everything she told him," the source explains.

"But the real trouble started after he got sick. She and Gene changed his will. He was happy that she got most of his millions in cash, property and bonds. He thought the kids were old enough to fend for themselves and were being looked after."

Toward the end, charges another insider, Kelly was not getting many messages. "She claimed most people put him in danger of having another stroke," says the insider. "She was running his life with an iron hand and there was nothing anyone could do about it."

After Kelly died, his children displayed the same class he exhibited during his life. "The kids were too proud to raise a stink about Patricia getting the lion's share of Gene's money," says the insider. "They didn't want their dad's memory tainted by scandal. But they felt they'd been shoved aside and deliberately left out in the cold."

The sources say Blair claims that Kelly's three kids were not allowed to stay at his house for his funeral and never got to say goodbye. According to sources, Blair writes: "Gene was deprived of everything at the end. I cannot forgive his widow, not because she got almost all of the children's inheritance, but because I don't think he had the happy ending he deserved."

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by his children. Sadly, she betrayed him and them. She took a great deal away from him - first his pride and then his *joie de vivre*. And in the end, she had most of his fortune."

Kelly's longtime publicist Dale Olson tells GLOBE, "Gene was a great, great guy. After his stroke, he was never the same. But I know nothing about Pat cutting off contact between him and his kids."

'Gene was deprived of everything at the end'

One insider close to the family says that Kelly was mesmerized by the pretty, young writer. "Ward came to his house to write his biography," reveals the source. "At first, she lived in his guest house, but he eventually invited her to share his bedroom."

"The kids are delighted that Betsy has written this book. They never dreamed they'd be almost completely cut out of his will."

Kelly's kids wanted him to be