

another. I couldn't say that about myself."

The two met in 1950 through Warren's sister Bertie, who attended Northwestern University with Susie. They married two years later, after Buffett had done a stint at Columbia Business School in New York City and gone to work as an investor on Wall Street and then for himself in Omaha. "She put me together," he says simply, and by all accounts, it's true. Susie was a born nurturer who took care of everything from dressing Warren to caring for their home and three children to arranging their social life and engaging with his family. Warren's mother Leila was a difficult woman prone to hysteria and vicious verbal attacks on her children. Susie headed her off and managed her needs so that Warren could be left to do what he was good at—making money.

But she was also responsible for deeper transformations, like Warren's conversion from Republican to Democrat. A civil rights supporter, Susie was involved in helping integrate Omaha in the 1960s, going so far as to front for blacks who wanted to buy houses in white neighborhoods. She took Warren to hear people like Martin Luther King Jr. speak. One speech in particular, given at Iowa's Grinnell College, became a turning point for Buffett. The topic was "Remaining Awake During a Revolution," and one line in particular chimed deeply with the young investor: "It may be true that the law can't change the heart," said King, "but it can restrain the heartless." It was something that Buffett began to think deeply about. Led by Susie, he became more involved in liberal politics, helping overturn anti-Semitic membership rules at the Omaha Club and doing Democratic fundraising at a national level.

It was the first time there had been space in Warren's life for anything outside of moneymaking, and it was Susie's doing. She was "a great giver," he says, "and I was a great taker." But the dichotomy eventually resulted in separation. After their children were grown, Susie, who hungered for a life of arts and culture that she could never have in Omaha and who wanted to pursue a career as a singer, decided to move out of their home and into an apartment in San Francisco. Warren reluctantly agreed. "We were like two parallel lines," she said in an interview with Charlie Rose two months before her death. "He was very intellectual, always reading and thinking big thoughts. I learned to have my own life."

But Susie worried about Warren, who was socially and practically inept. "I'm

## BUFFETT'S WORLD. WHERE THE 1% MEETS THE 99%

Buffett's net worth is \$45 billion



### BUY AND HOLD

Buffett once called his home, purchased for \$31,500 in 1958, Buffett's folly. Now he says it's his third best investment (after two wedding rings)

### LIFE IN THE '50S

What Warren watches. It's *Complicated* could be the title of a movie about his personal life



### CRUISE CONTROL

Buffett drives a 2006 Cadillac DTS, which he bought in support of beleaguered former GM CEO Rick Wagoner. He says it's "a good investment and a great-looking car"



### SECOND CHANCES

Buffett with Astrid Menks, his second wife, a former *maitre d'* and chef at Omaha's French Café

lucky if I can get him to comb his hair," she said. "He needs help." So she introduced him to Astrid Menks, a hostess at a local French restaurant and a friend of Susie's who became his mistress and eventually, after Susie's death, his wife. "I called Astrid. I said, Astrid, will you take Warren, make him some soup, go over there and look after him?" She did. And she stayed. It all happened consensually; the three even sent out Christmas cards together. It worked for all of them. "He appreciates it, and I appreciate it," said Susie. "She's a wonderful person."

Seven years on from Susie's death, Buffett is still coming to terms with it all. When I ask if he regretted being apart from her in her final years, he insists, "We didn't live that separately. We were as connected in the last years of her life, perhaps more connected, than we'd ever been. We had exactly the same view of the world. We just didn't want to go about it in the same way." He tells me about her interview with Rose, the only major one she ever granted, which was done with his encouragement, because he wanted the world to better understand the woman who was most important to him.

Then his cheerful face crumples, and he bursts into tears. "Her death is—it's just terrible. It's the only thing that's really up there," he says, his voice shaking. "I still can't talk about it." It takes several moments, as we sit together at the table overlooking the golf course at the Happy Hollow Club, for Buffett to recover. I put my hand on his arm. Eventually, we move on to an easier subject—his investments.

## BUY AMERICA

AS ANYONE WHO READS THE FINANCIAL press knows, Buffett is a "value investor," which means that he seeks to buy companies and stocks that are selling for less than they are fundamentally worth. It's a skill he learned from his Columbia Business School professor Benjamin Graham, whose book *The Intelligent Investor* Buffett memorized early in his career. Value investing is a task that involves forensic examination of a company's balance sheet. It was one to which Buffett, a numbers geek who'd read every book in the Omaha public library by the age of 11 and who enjoys poring over *Moody's Manuals* in his spare time while eating potato chips, was well suited. Even now, he can call to mind prodigious amounts of data, from the value of the Dow in 1932 to the number of housing starts needed to equal 2006 rates.

Buffett believes that once the housing market recovers, the U.S. economy will be back on track. "Once we get back to a million housing starts per year"—the current tally is 685,000—"I think pundits will be surprised just how fast unemployment will come down in this country," he says. "There are 4 million people hitting age 22 every year in this country. Sure, you can double up on households for a while, but at some point, hormones kick in, and living with your in-laws loses its allure." Buffett notes that nearly every one of his major nonhousing businesses has had several strong quarters, and Berkshire companies are making a record number of investments, the vast majority of which are