

DIANE HUDSON



DAVID PAGE



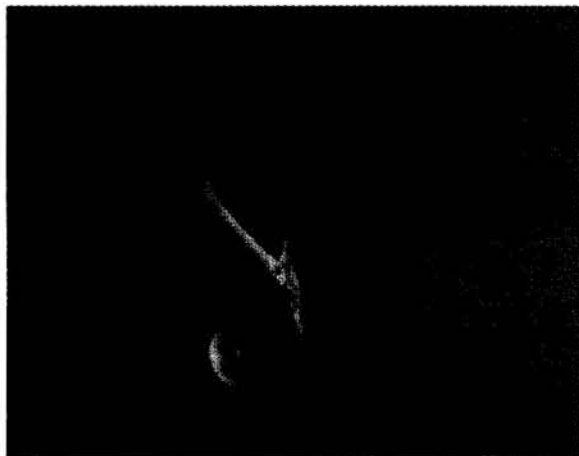
The Most Intriguing People in Maine

Former President George Bush

Interview by Colin Sargent

What intrigues Mainers about former President **George Bush's** lifelong connection with Kennebunkport is that some of his summers have been carefree getaways over the years, while others have been interludes between history-making world events. **ALL THE BEST**, his new and very personal collection of correspondence

From Staff & Wire Reports



COURTESY OF PRESIDENT BUSH

spanning 1939-1999, includes letters that are alternately full of relaxed fun and highly charged with a sense of purpose. We caught up with former President Bush right at presstime, during a fall visit to Walker's Point. Because of his unimpeachable character and dedication to family, because of the revelations in **ALL THE BEST**, and naturally because his son, Texas governor George W. Bush, is the Republican frontrunner for next year's presidential election – former President



Bush is more than ever in demand for interviews and the subject of national interest.

What was it like returning to a place like Kennebunkport after 58 combat missions in the Pacific? How did you learn to relax again and enjoy the essential whimsicality of tourist stops like the Whistling Oyster, the Red Dragon, the Blue Wave? Did they hold River Club dances to acquaint servicemen and

women with the world they'd left behind? It must have been strange – the first time back after World War II.

GB: My memory is dim about returning. I do recall spending some time in the summer of 1946 at K'port, a lot more during the summer of 1947; I had left the service at war's end and gone to Yale. I have no recall of a sense of reunion with friends – no dances. I simply picked up my sporadic visits to Maine – my summer life – as before the war, except I was married to Barbara in 1945, so she was at my side on all return visits to Maine.

What was the saddest summer you've spent in Kennebunk?

GB: I have had no real sadness in Kennebunkport, only joy. Of course when our three-year-old daughter, Robin, was sick there was a great tension and worry. She loved Maine and though desperately ill with leukemia she played her little heart out on the beach and here on Walker's Point.

Have you ever run into Kennebunkport friends in extraordinary places far away from Maine? In China?

What was it like to run into other Kennebunkport friends who had been in uniform themselves? Did you lose some of your Kennebunkport buddies to war?

GB: One of my closest summer friends was Gerry Bemiss. He too had been in the Navy, but, again, we just picked up on our lives visiting each other and going out in our outboards, sailing, swimming, all the joys of Kennebunkport, with no particular emphasis on our having served our country. All the guys my age went into the service, but we did not go into the "war story" side of things. I did not lose any Kennebunkport friends in the war – lots of friends from other places, though.

What Mainers have been most encouraging to you through letters over the years? Were there letters from Mainers that filled you with energy or restored your spirits during a critically important time?

GB: Gerry Bemiss, of Richmond and then of Kennebunkport, wrote a lot. He remains one of my closest friends.

GB: No recall of this.

What dear friend and guest who visited you in Kennebunkport absolutely HATED the place? [Once some young Navy seabees working to help build President Bush's helicopter pad on Route 9 made the mistake of parking on the verboten waterside peninsula behind the former hardware store while getting their hair cut at the old barber shop that is now home to a coffee shop. Now we're not saying anyone pulled the two young men out by their ears, dragged them to their vehicle, and told them to repark... Did lobster stew get spilled on Marlin Fitzwater? Weren't there any run ins between distinguished guests of Walker's Point and K'port's local fishermen (or the notoriously charming shopkeepers)...] What happened?

GB: None of our jillions of guests hated Kennebunkport – none. They wouldn't have been invited if we thought there was any chance they would not like this place.

What individual places around the Port are especially magic and romantic for you and Barbara?

GB: The rocks off Walker's Point have special magic for us. The little harbor at Trot's Island where our family used to picnic almost every Sunday still is wondrous and special. I love going in there now in my speedboat. Happy memories come flooding back. I know all the reefs and shoals near Kennebunkport, and I love seeing them at dead low, for they are all reminders that I should be careful at higher tides when the reefs are masked by the sea. The beach has tons of happy memories for us, and of course Cape Arundel Golf Course is very special indeed – so many great matches, so much challenge. Many victories, many defeats – they all blend in and add up to happiness. And then of course there is St. Anne's Church, where my parents were married 80 years ago, where several of our kids have been baptized and married, where we worship in this magnificent little stone chapel or in the outdoor chapel overlooking the ocean. So many happy memories when we go to this little church. But for me and for my entire family, it is this place, this majestic point of land that is our anchor to windward, that binds our family ever closer one to the other. Age matters not. Only family.

What about Maine will never change?

GB: The ocean never changes. The rocks, one an aircraft carrier, another a turtle's back, they never change. The tidal pool in which my mother at three years old swam never changes. The tide comes in. Cool clean salt water replaces the water warmed by the sun and the cycle begins again. We have pictures of four generations splashing in this same tidal pool.

Jim Dougherty

Imagine for a moment that Elvis Presley's twin brother – the one who died in infancy – had lived. Imagine further that through a stroke of good fortune we'd discovered him working the Maine coast as a lobsterman for this issue. Well, that's a little like how we felt when we learned that **Marilyn Monroe's first husband** was not only alive, but also everybody's favorite retired police detective (and Maine Police Academy instructor) in Sabattus, Maine.

Crusty, funny **Jim Dougherty**, 78, never brings it up unless you ask, but he really did know, love, and marry Norma Jeane Baker somewhere back in the long ago. Dazzled by the recent Christie's and Sotheby's hoopla surrounding the auctions of Marilyn's personal effects (from her saffron yellow Le Creuset cookware to her turquoise Chinese silk pajamas), we met with Jim at his year-round lake-side saltbox on Martin's Point, where since 1978 he's enjoyed autumn in Maine with his wife Rita. And like any Mainer, he laconically wonders what the big deal is about Marilyn.

"We met in 1941, when I was working at the Lockheed plant assembling P-38 Lightnings," he says. "I was a jock, loved sports – I'd played football at Van Nuys High School. My football number? Whatever the number was on the shirt that I picked up." Ironically, the handsome Dougherty (who took first in his class "at Occidental College in a Shakespearean festival acting contest, reciting Shylock's revenge speech") was already surrounded by future movie stars. "I worked right beside Robert Mitchum at Lockheed, and Jane Russell and I went to high school together. We're still friends."

Jim's mother and Norma Jeane's foster mother were good friends, too, and before long Jim found himself giving Norma Jeane rides home from school "between Lockheed shifts in the Ford I

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**Jim & Norma Jeane
Dougherty as newlyweds
on Catalina**