



Barbara Bush

A Memoir



Barbara Bush

A L I S A D R E W B O O K

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## Preface

I have loved writing this book and know that it is a story of a life of privilege—privilege of every kind. If I didn't know it before, I certainly do now. No man, woman, or child ever had a better life.

Lisa Drew, my editor with Scribner's, passed a message to me after reading five chapters that said she would only allow me to use one "wonderful" a page and one "precious" a chapter. Later Jean Becker added "close friend" to that list. "Nobody has that many good and close friends," she said.

Not bad to have had a life that was filled with *wonderful* people and happenings, *precious* family, and many *close friends*. That's the life that first my family, and then for much longer, that wonderful, precious, close friend, George Bush, have given me and I'm grateful for it.

I wrote every word in this book myself from copious diaries, tapes, letters, and a very selective memory of the early days. It is the truth as I see it.

It might amuse the reader to know that I wrote in my diaries about more good meals that I have eaten (and am wearing today) and that many pages were filled with resolutions not to eat so much and remorse over my lack of self-discipline. I have spared you that.

I also note that we seem to weep a lot in this book. We are an emotional group and rather like a good tear or two. Please also notice that we cry when we are glad *and* when we are sad. Love brings a tear. Friends bring a tear. A smile, sweetness, even a kind word brings a tear. In a life of privilege there are lots of tears.

I have left out so many friends and happenings, but I hope they will forgive me. Time and space have run out. I hope you know who you are and how much we love you.

I want to thank lots of people for putting up with me, especially Jean Becker, who not only researched this book but also reassured me, did the first editing, checked me on truth and spelling, and laughed in all the right places. I certainly want to thank Lisa Drew, my editor, for her third attempt to make a writer of me. (She was there also for *Millie's Book* and *C. Fred's Story*.) I suspect that Lisa wanted more from me, but she applied no pressure to write about things I did not feel were appropriate or things that might make a book sell, but also might hurt.

I also want to thank everyone at the George Bush Presidential Library Center, especially Mary Finch, for helping us track down the facts.

And to the hero of this book, what can I say? George Bush knows how I feel. He is the hero. Incidentally, at my request, he read the book before it went to print. I wanted him to save me from myself, as I would not knowingly hurt someone. He made no deletions and the only additions he made were so typically George. He added many complimentary adjectives, often added praise for a fellow worker or shared the credit with others. I, of course, gave it to him alone. He is my hero.

Barbara Bush  
March 1, 1994

# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>1 Prologue</i>	i
<i>2 Growing Up</i>	5
<i>3 Love and War</i>	16
<i>4 Striking Out on Our Own</i>	30
<i>5 Robin</i>	39
<i>6 Oh, the Glamorous World of Politics</i>	50
<i>7 A Different World</i>	64
<i>8 The United Nations</i>	79
<i>9 Surviving Watergate</i>	97
<i>10 China</i>	107
<i>11 Keeping Secrets</i>	132

12	<i>Hitting the Campaign Trail</i>	143
13	<i>Around the World and Back</i>	159
14	<i>The Poet Laureate (Retired)</i>	194
15	<i>The 1988 Campaign</i>	220
16	<i>"Please Guide and Guard Us"</i>	248
17	<i>The First 100 Days</i>	264
18	<i>Whirlwind First Year</i>	290
19	<i>Flying Chain Saws</i>	325
20	<i>The Storm Before the Storm</i>	354
21	<i>Desert Storm</i>	385
22	<i>Of Cabbages and Queens</i>	409
23	<i>"Back &amp; Forth and Ups &amp; Downs"</i>	446
24	<i>The Campaign</i>	475
25	<i>"One Last Time"</i>	500
26	<i>A New Beginning</i>	516
	<i>Appendix A</i>	533
	<i>Appendix B</i>	535
	<i>Appendix C</i>	538
	<i>Appendix D</i>	543
	<i>Index</i>	545

## *Prologue*

January 20, 1993. We were going home. For four extraordinary years, home had been the White House, but when we woke up that morning, it felt like a foreign place. Our bed, along with our tables and chairs, already were in Texas. George had been telling people that I almost had gone, too. He was right. Once we lost the election, I had tried to ignore the hurt and turned my mind toward Houston and a new life.

George, on the other hand, was presidential until the very last moment. He worried about the staff and where they would go. And he had to cope with the larger problems of Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia.

We started that day as we did every morning, waking up about 5:30 A.M., ringing the bell for the butlers, and drinking coffee in bed while we read the papers. Our phone started ringing almost immediately with our children checking in to make sure we were okay.

Later in the morning, George called me from the Oval Office and asked if I wanted to walk around the South Grounds with the dogs just one more time. It was a glorious, sunny day. The dogs ran and chased squirrels and dashed around looking for who knows what. The pleasure George got from his dog Ranger taking flying leaps over imaginary logs cannot be described. We talked about the ducks that had been nurtured in the South Grounds fountain the past spring and summer and wondered if they would all come back to roost that spring. If they did, how would the White House groundskeepers cope with all those little families? We walked past the tennis court and the horseshoe pit,



where you could always hear the clink of shoes at lunchtime. We wondered if Bill Clinton would keep up the White House horseshoe tournaments. It was a great way to get to know the ninety-three people who kept the People's House in such beautiful shape. We walked hand-in-hand by the swimming pool and the cabana, the Oval Office and the Rose Garden, sharing happy memories. Even writing about that day, the house, and the very thoughtful staff brings a warm feeling to me. We always have lived in happy houses, but nothing matched this special place. The problems George faced there were unbelievable, but the staff surrounded us with goodwill, warmth, and caring. They gave the President of the United States exactly what he needed: a happy, tranquil home.

We had put off the good-byes to the residence staff and grounds-keepers as long as we could, but at 10:00 A.M., it was time. We had been dreading it. Chief Usher Gary Walters, head of the household, led off with a funny, warm essay about all the new phrases they had learned from George. It read in part: "We thought that 'Pops' were either soft drinks or a breakfast cereal, but we found it to be a term of endearment. We also thought that 'Eeoooooh' was something you said when you hit your thumb with a hammer—not 'Where's Ranger?' We learned that the real name of the presidential retreat in the Catoctin Mountains was Camp Marvin, not Camp David, and that a six-pack does not necessarily refer to beer, but is the means to becoming the horseshoe king."

Ron Jones, a houseman and a great horseshoe competitor, presented George with a trophy made in the carpenter shop. The staff also gave him the flag that was flying over the White House on January 20, 1989, and one that had been flying there that morning. Nancy Clarke, the genius in the flower shop, gave me a beautiful doll in a large Lucite case—a reminder of all the beautiful dolls and other decorations her staff had made for Christmas each year. We had so much fun together decorating the house for formal state dinners and holidays. (I should say she and her shop worked; I admired.) We were too choked up with emotion to say what we felt, but I think they knew the affection we had for them all.

Vice President Quayle and Marilyn and George's chief of staff, Jim Baker, and Susan arrived, along with my outstanding chief of staff, Susan Porter Rose. We talked for a few moments, and then right on time—at least I thought it was right on time—the Clintons, Gores,

and the other guests arrived. I say that because I read in the paper that they were late. I don't think that was true. The ladies looked great and both wore hats. It reminded me of how critical everyone had been about Marilyn Quayle's hat four years before, and I wondered if Hillary and Tipper would get away with theirs. The time probably dragged for the newcomers, but it raced for me. When we were told we must leave for the ceremony, I rushed around, through the Red Room then back into the Blue Room, to hug the butlers, out of sight of everyone else. How dear they had been to us and our family.

From then on, it was all downhill. The hard part for me was over. I rode to the Capitol with Hillary, and the conversation was relaxed and easy as we talked about the long day ahead. It could have been an awkward time, but I think we were both determined it would not be. People waved at the new First Family, as they should have, and everyone looked very happy.

Then came the moment when the mantle was lifted from the back of my superb husband and placed on Bill Clinton's. It will come as no surprise that I felt a lesser man by far had won the election, but that was behind us now. The speeches were fine. Bill Clinton's was short and sounded very familiar—like John F. Kennedy's, but not quite as eloquent.

We said good-bye to Senator Bob Dole and Elizabeth, Senator Alan Simpson and Ann, the Clintons, and the Gores. The loyal Quayles flew with us to Andrews Air Force Base, where we hugged good-bye. After a great send-off from staff and supporters, we flew to Houston on *Air Force One* surrounded by friends. From my staff we had Susan Porter Rose and Laurie Firestone, both remarkable women who had been with us for twelve years. My great and dear friend Andy Stewart was there along with Richard Moore, the former ambassador to Ireland, and so many others. Every person on that plane was someone we hold very dear.

The press complained bitterly to me that they were not being allowed to send a press pool. That amused me, and I told them that any one of them who had voted for George should speak up then or forever hold his peace. The silence was deafening.

During the flight we watched a film put together by Dorrance Smith, a Houston childhood friend of our children, and more recently George's communications director and tennis opponent. It was very funny, very tongue-in-cheek. He had interviewed many of George's

staff, and two of our children, Marvin and Doro. It poked fun at us, and it lightened the day.

We arrived in Houston to a great airport rally and immediately saw so many old friends. We said good-bye to the people who had flown down with us, as most of them were going back to Washington with the plane.

Our new life began.

We did not expect the welcome we received. Everywhere we looked were yellow ribbons. Stores and motels had WELCOME HOME on their marquees. There were billboards with WELCOME HOME, GEORGE AND BARBARA. There were even homemade signs on the backs of pickup trucks. People stood and waved flags along the entire route.

When we pulled up to our rented house, the neighbors were all out to give us a big welcome. It was so sweet, and made everything look brighter and better.

There were even more surprises ahead. We walked into a house that was unpacked and filled with plants and flowers. Paula Rendon, our beloved housekeeper; dear Don Rhodes, who had been with us for years; and our friend and neighbor Jack Fitch had worked like dogs sorting out what should be stored and what should be opened. Jack's wife, Bobbie, organized the neighborhood to put flowers in the house and in the garden. What a wonderful way to come home.

*January 21, 1993*—What a difference twenty-four hours make. We awakened at our usual time of 5:30 a.m.—but we had no bell to ring and no butlers. We got up, walked and fed the dogs, picked up the papers, and carried coffee upstairs to read in bed.

So here we are—almost full circle—taking care of ourselves again and loving it. How did we get here, and where are we going . . .

## *Growing Up*

Where to start? I was born in New York City in 1925, the daughter of Marvin and Pauline Pierce. Our family had just moved out of the city to Rye, but my mother returned to the same doctor and hospital where my sister, Martha, five, and my brother Jim, three and a half, had been born.

Rye was a wonderful place to grow up. It was tiny in those days, and we knew most of the eight thousand people who lived there. It had a bakery, a meat man, a greengrocer (no supermarket), a movie theater, and a library which we visited often. We went to the movies almost every Saturday afternoon, usually children's adventure stories.

It was then, and still is, a bedroom community to New York City. Daddy worked for the McCall Corporation (he became president of the company in 1946), and every day he walked fifteen to twenty minutes to the train station for the commute into the city. He loved the ride. In the morning he would read his paper, and in the evening he'd ride in the Club Car, where the men had a drink and played bridge. We didn't know him at the time, but George's father commuted on the same train, getting off two stops farther down in Greenwich, Connecticut. Some of my happiest times were walking with Daddy to the station in the morning, and then I would take the bus to school.

Everyone in Rye knew everyone's business. I remember one humiliating incident when I was ten years old. I had walked downtown, bought a can of Marshmallow Fluff, and happily ate it all the way

home. By the time I got there, my mother already had received three phone calls from people saying they had the cutest thing to tell her: Barbara was walking down the street covered with Marshmallow Fluff, eating right from the can with her fingers. Mother did not think it was quite so cute. To add insult to injury, I was violently ill. I haven't eaten it since.

Indian Village—the name of our section of town—was a true neighborhood. We knew everybody and all their families and dogs. The houses were modest by Rye standards, but I know our house seemed enormous to my parents after a New York City apartment. Years later when I visited the house with my brother Scotty, I was surprised how much smaller it was than I remembered.

The bedrooms and bathrooms especially were squeezed into a small space. Once, when George and I were visiting after we were married, Mother asked him not to go to the bathroom at night because he woke her up when he flushed the toilet. George, already inventive at twenty-one years of age, went out the window! That would have killed Mother, but her request was outrageous.

My memories of that lovely little house are only good ones. Our living room was full of bookshelves, and although I do not ever remember Daddy with a hammer in his hand, he was a graduate of MIT and claimed he made those shelves. He always said he had trouble making them even, so he tucked in a match someplace and all was well. There was a set of "My Book House," the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and several other collections. We were a family of readers, and many evenings were spent with everyone enjoying a favorite book or magazine. I also believe we had a radio in that bookcase which we listened to a lot in those days. I especially remember "The Shadow."

The best food in the world came out of our kitchen. I don't remember that Mother cooked, but she knew good food and trained the helpers very well. Thursday and Sunday afternoons were their days off. I don't remember what happened on Thursdays, but on Sunday evenings we picked up dinner. We ate a big meal at lunch, usually a baked chicken with the world's best stuffing and mashed potatoes. On Sunday night, we would have graham crackers and cream. What a glorious dish that was. Even talking about it puts on weight. Everything we had was rich and, I now know, bad for us. Daddy and I were the only ones with a weight problem; Scott and Martha were really

skinny. I remember my mother saying, all in one breath, "Eat up, Martha. Not you, Barbara!"

We ate meals as a family in those days—a wonderful tradition few families now enjoy. My mother sat at one end, my dad at the other, and Martha, Jimmy, Scotty, and I fell in on either side. Daddy always took the gravy spoon and made a little bowl in the mashed potatoes and then let the gravy fill it. Mother would scold him for very bad manners and for eating so much potatoes and gravy. On Friday we always had fish just in case one of us brought a Catholic friend home. (In those days, Catholics were not allowed to eat meat on Friday.) Scotty got lamb chops because he did not like fish, and since he was sick as a child, he got away with it.

Being kept home from school was fun. Sometimes we got to lie in Mother's bed and listen to the radio. There were all sorts of great, sort-of-forbidden programs like "Stella Dallas" and "Helen Trent." If you were getting over a tummy problem (probably from gorging on something like Marshmallow Fluff), which your mother mistook for the flu, you got milk toast. It was delicious. You toast some white bread, butter it while hot, sprinkle it with white sugar, and pour hot milk over it. Then you eat it immediately. It was just as good for you as graham crackers and cream, I'm sure.

☞ My dad was a smiling man, about six feet tall. He had a great sense of humor and everyone liked and respected him. He was the fairest man I knew until I met George Bush.

Daddy worked hard his whole life, starting in high school. His father, Scott Pierce, was born in Sharpsville, Pennsylvania, where the very wealthy Pierces had the big houses and had started the churches. They lost all their money in the 1890s, and my grandfather never recovered. He sold insurance in Dayton, Ohio, but the family lived humbly. Daddy and his sister, my Aunt Charlotte, supported Grandfather and Grandmother Pierce financially for years. They did it willingly and with love. My mother did not feel quite so loving about it. She would tell the story about how during World War I, when Daddy was serving in Europe, my grandfather took up golf and wrote Daddy all about his golf game. That irritated Mother no end, but I never heard my dad criticize his father.

Daddy was really bright and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, while at the same time waiting tables and tending furnaces. He also earned nine letters playing on all the athletic teams. Toward the end of his life, he was made Miami's first "M" man, a very special occasion attended by all his children. Miami is where Daddy met and fell in love with Mother, who was studying to be a teacher. It's also where he became friends with Colonel Red Blaik, who went on to become Army's great football coach. Red was Daddy's friend for life, and years later, I was thrilled to be at the White House when President Reagan honored Red with the Medal of Freedom.

When I was about four or five years old, my father would take me with him on business trips to Dayton, the site of a McCall plant. We would catch the overnight train from the Harmon, New York, railroad station. In those days, the sleeper had a female attendant who would undress me and put me to bed. In the morning, Grandfather or Grandmother would meet me and take me home by bus. I don't ever remember them owning a car. In the summer the house was so hot my funny little grandfather would sleep in the basement to keep cool. The rest of us died of the heat. My grandmother, Mabel Marvin Pierce, was a country girl and both she and my Aunt Charlotte put up with no nonsense. They called a spade a spade. Aunt Charlotte, who never married, taught school around the country. In later years, she would sometimes stay with our children when George and I went on a trip, although they didn't like her very much because she was too strict. One night, our boys apparently were misbehaving badly at the table, and in desperation my bright schoolteacher aunt told them if they didn't stop she would leave the table. So of course, they just got worse, and she left. They still laugh about that. I know she was a wonderful teacher, because many people over the years have told me she taught them fifth grade, and they loved her.

When she died she left each of Daddy's children \$6,000. That was a great gift to me. We had five children at the time, and we could only afford necessities for the family. But George said, "This is for you alone. Do not spend it on groceries or something for the children." I wonder if he regretted saying that. That \$6,000 really spread itself thin, because whenever I wanted something for myself I'd just think, Aunt Charlotte would want me to have this . . . and this . . . and this . . .

☞ My mother was a striking beauty who left the world a more beautiful place than she found it. She grew lovely flowers, did the finest needlepoint I have ever seen, and knew how to keep an exquisite home.

I understand her better now than I did then. I certainly did not appreciate all the pressures she must have felt until I also became a mother. She taught me a great deal, although neither of us realized it at the time. Probably her most important lesson was an inadvertent one. You have two choices in life: You can like what you do, or you can dislike it. I have chosen to like it.

My mother, on the other had, often talked about “when her ship came in” she was going to do such and such or buy such and such. She was a lucky woman who had a husband who worshiped the ground she walked on, four loving children, and a world of friends. Her ship had come in—she just didn’t know it. That is so sad.

She was a wonderful gardener and was, in fact, famous for her green thumb. Our house had an unfinished basement that would often flood in heavy rain (it also had rats), but one year Mother grew endives—that wonderful white vegetable that grows in damp, dark places—down there. Another year Mother sent off for tons of earthworms and nurtured them in our basement, using them to aerate her garden soil. She also had a compost heap—although not in the basement. My sister Martha tells the story of when she took Mother up to Greenwich to meet her future mother-in-law and aunt, two very stylish older ladies, and a woman rushed up to Mother and exclaimed, “Oh, the compost and worm lady!” Martha was humiliated. I suspect Corinne and Madeleine Rafferty thought she was charming. Mother was very active in the Garden Club of America and was the conservation chairman for a while.

She grew up one of four children in Marysville, Ohio. Her father, James Robinson, was a lawyer who served on Ohio’s Supreme Court in the mid-1920s. Her mother, Lulu, was a tall, thin woman who changed after my grandfather died. Up until that time, she was a very sweet, sedate lady who baked bread and looked after her husband. After his death, she learned to drive and with several friends drove a small trailer around the United States, Canada, and Mexico. My mother and her sisters complained about their driving and safety. I only knew her after her husband died, and I loved my Grandmother Robinson more than my other grandparents.



Mother was close to her sisters but her only brother, Jim, was an alcoholic who caused nothing but heartbreak. At one time he was married to Aunt Peggy, and they had a son, Jimmy. After my uncle ran away with his secretary, Aunt Peggy left with Jimmy, and we have absolutely no idea where she went or what happened to them. My uncle surfaced off and on, always in trouble and often drunk.

☞ Mother did most of the scolding in the family. My brother Jimmy got the most spankings. Yes, my mother spanked us and pretty hard with either the back of a hairbrush or a wooden clothes hanger. I bet that Jim would agree with me that we were never spanked without deserving it. I know I deserved my spankings. And we were never really hurt—mostly hurt feelings and probably a little mad that we had gotten caught. I spanked my own children, but not as hard as my mother did. On the other hand, they were not as naughty. I can't remember anything I ever did that was really bad, but I suspect I baited my mother and was rude and sulky.

My older brother and sister fought a lot. Martha was thin but tall, and Jimmy was feisty. She would kick him, and he would pick up the child's chair by our fireplace and fend her off like a lion tamer. I must have been a real pill, for I either told on them or called my friends to come and watch.

Our neighborhood had few children Martha's age, and she grew up somewhat of a loner. She was a great student and a raving beauty in her teenage years. The boys all adored her. She used to compete in the Manursing Island swimming and diving meets, and we were very proud of her. People wore rubber bathing suits in those days, and those suits had to be handled with care; I seem to remember her bathing suit ripping during a Fourth of July or Labor Day meet. She has been a great sister and shares my love of reading. She once told me that she got one of those college reunion questionnaires, and one of the questions was "How many books do you read a year?" Well, she figured she read probably close to 260, but felt that would be bragging, so she knocked off 110 books. The reunion newsletter reported that the average number of books read was eight a year. There was a footnote that said, "One liar claims to have read 150!"

I both was terrified of Jimmy and looked up to him—he was,