

# BILL CALDWELL RETURNS TO MAINE FOREVER

## At noon today, the late writer's ashes will be deposited in Brunswick's Buttermilk Cove.

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### ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

"This will be a great party. [BILL CALDWELL] would love it," says [Tom Jones], a well-known Maine photographer. "You know Bill, he'd bring a little cooler and take home a few beers and some hors d'oeuvres. Aw, Bill - I'm sure he'll be here."

The last time I saw Caldwell was about seven years ago, over lunch in the Old Port with his wife Susan. Midway through lunch, Angus King wandered over, hunkered down and asked Caldwell for a frank assessment of his chances if he decided to run for governor. Caldwell, retired by then and spending most of the year in Arizona, unhesitatingly urged him on. In November 1994, Maine voters proved him right.

"Years ago, I was a young photographer out on Steer Clear with the famous Bill Caldwell," Jones remembers. "It was time to relax. I tied the dinghy to the stern of the boat, but I guess I didn't tie it very well. Bill got the canvas all snapped up - secured the boat, as seamen would say. Then Bill said, 'OK, get the dinghy,' and I looked out about a quarter of a mile and there was the dinghy bobbing up and down in New Harbor.

### FULL TEXT

Nancy Grape (e-mail: [spargrape@msn.com](mailto:spargrape@msn.com)) comments on state and national issues for the Maine Sunday Telegram.

However many people show up for today's public memorial gathering for longtime Maine journalist Bill Caldwell, host Tom Jones is expecting one more.

"This will be a great party. Bill would love it," says Jones, a well-known Maine photographer. "You know Bill, he'd bring a little cooler and take home a few beers and some hors d'oeuvres. Aw, Bill - I'm sure he'll be here."

If spirits follow their hearts, no doubt he will, for Bill Caldwell's heart for decades has belonged to the coast of Maine. Caldwell, a writer and columnist for this newspaper, died Jan. 5 at age 81 in Green Valley, Ariz.. Today, he returns to Maine and to his beloved Maine waters - never to leave again.

AS PART of the noontime memorial, family and friends will take Caldwell's ashes aboard Steer Clear, the 30-foot converted lobster boat he made nearly as well known as himself, and sprinkle his ashes in Brunswick's Buttermilk Cove.

"One night, we almost died," Jones remembers. "We were off Swan's Island and, of course, Bill was a very frail guy and I at the time was about 6 feet and 225 pounds. We were in this little dinghy and a storm came up. We were rowing against the wind and the waves, and the water was coming into the boat.

"We were probably maybe 30 yards away from Steer Clear and we weren't making any progress," Jones says, the experience fresh as salt spray in his mind. "Bill was rowing and I was sitting in the back and we switched seats, if you can imagine that in this little 8-foot dinghy. Anyway, so we switched and I rowed and we got there. But it was scary."

It was also the stuff of life to Bill Caldwell. So was playing cards with actor Zero Mostel on Monhegan Island, hanging out with Jamie Wyeth and tracking stories about lost and forlorn souls as well as the rich and famous.

Seldom did Caldwell's instincts serve him badly. One of those rare times, Jones remembers, occurred on Isle au Haut.

"We came into Isle au Haut and Bill, with that English accent of his, sent me ashore to get some transportation. I got a truck with no body to it and a fender missing here and there. I came back and Bill is getting off the boat in a powder-blue jumpsuit. I thought at the time, 'I'm not sure these fishermen out here are ready for a powder-blue jumpsuit, and I know I'm not.' So I urged him to go change into a sweater and jeans.

"He's puffing on his pipe and protesting, but I kept saying, 'I don't think powder-blue jumpsuits will make it up here.' And he went and changed."

CHANGING his clothes, however, did not mean changing his style. Like the painter Henri Matisse, Caldwell could genuinely say, "I have always tried to hide my efforts and wished my works to have the light joyousness of springtime which never lets anyone suspect the labors it has cost me."

That joyousness formed the essence of Caldwell's long career with this newspaper. Here he was, a small, wiry, aging, white-haired, white-bearded man with a weathered face, his insides fired with the energy and boundless enthusiasm of a young cub reporter prowling for his first big break. Curiosity drove Caldwell like a nuclear reactor.

Storekeepers in isolated Maine coves saw that curiosity ignite in his blue eyes when Caldwell, pipe in hand, sat down to talk with them about their lives. Governors saw it too, not always eagerly, but knowing they would be fairly, perhaps even generously, treated. And they responded.

The last time I saw Caldwell was about seven years ago, over lunch in the Old Port with his wife Susan. Midway through lunch, Angus King wandered over, hunkered down and asked Caldwell for a frank assessment of his chances if he decided to run for governor. Caldwell, retired by then and spending most of the year in Arizona, unhesitatingly urged him on. In November 1994, Maine voters proved him right.

YET Caldwell would never say, "I told you so." He didn't work that way.

"Years ago, I was a young photographer out on Steer Clear with the famous Bill Caldwell," Jones remembers. "It was time to relax. I tied the dinghy to the stern of the boat, but I guess I didn't tie it very well. Bill got the canvas all snapped up - secured the boat, as seamen would say. Then Bill said, 'OK, get the dinghy,' and I looked out about a quarter of a mile and there was the dinghy bobbing up and down in New Harbor.

"I thought that would be my last trip with Caldwell," Jones says. "But without blinking an eye, he got the boat ready to go after the dinghy and never said a word. Not one word."

With and without words, Bill Caldwell brought the "joyousness of springtime" into countless Maine lives.

The public memorial gathering to celebrate his life is set for noon today at Tom Jones' home in Buttermilk Cove, off Route 24 in Brunswick.

## DETAILS

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