The Family
Kitty Kelley

Chapter 1

Flora Sheldon Bush was fuming. Her thirteen-year-old son, Prescott, was supposed to have spent that August of 1908 at a New Jersey sports resort with a classmate and his family. Flora's husband, Samuel Prescott Bush, had sent the boy there to play tennis, while Flora, their two daughters, Mary and Margaret, their younger son, Jim, Samuel's mother, Harriet, and the family nanny were spending the month at the East Bay Lodge in Osterville, Massachusetts. But Prescott had abruptly been sent home by his friend's mother, Mrs. Dods. Flora's regal mother-in-law, Harriet Fay Bush, urged her to demand an explanation and an apology from Mrs. Dods, but Flora, whose social instincts were unerring in these matters, restrained herself. "I am not ready for that," she wrote to her husband. "I think I may hear from Mrs. D. and if so, you must forward the letter . . . for nothing has ever happened that raised my indignation more than her summary dismissal of Prescott."
A few days later Flora again mentioned her vexation: "Your mother is quite sure I ought to write Mrs. Dods. It scarcely seems right. I resent it all more than anything I have experienced."
The unexpected change in Prescott's plans upset his father, who worried that the incident might have been Prescott's fault. If so, that might affect his acceptance into St. George's School in the fall. But after hearing her son's side of the story, Flora tried to assure her husband that the youngster was not entirely to blame:

I am sorry you are disappointed in Prescott and yet I am not surprised. He is of course a boy of very tender years. And I sometimes have a feeling of great dread at sending him away to school and yet I do feel that the strict discipline may be just the thing. He was glad to get back to us again but he misses his sport at Osterville-There are no tennis courts here but poor grass ones-he said if he had his clubs he would play golf.

The matter of Prescott's departure was finally cleared up when Samuel telegrammed Flora that the much-maligned Mrs. Dods had indeed written to explain herself. Samuel forwarded the letter from Ohio, and Flora was almost comforted to learn that Mrs. Dods had taken ill in New Jersey. "It was the only excuse I could possibly have accepted," she wrote. "Her letter was as satisfactory as anything could be + while I do not justify the haste I at least can appreciate her anxiety to get rid of the young company-as summer cottages are not the quiet hospitals one needs in case of illness."
A few days later, Prescott received his golf clubs. And Samuel must have been somewhat reassured to receive a letter from his seventy-nine-year-old mother extolling the teenager, if not without reservation:

I was much impressed with Prescott's appearance and manner as he jumped out of the carriage + came to speak to me-he is a handsome boy + a well developed figure for [illegible] growth. I trust the time will soon come when he will-if I can use the word-slough off the pernicious habit of fooling. If I had not seen its results in Aunt

Virginia's family perhaps it would not seem to be so fraught with danger, but with you and Flora to guard him and the uniform discipline of a school he will doubtless find its disadvantages himself. It makes friends with the boys but antagonizes the teachers as I also know by personal experience but little can be done except . . . protect him until he is wise enough to check it.

Grandmother Bush was more perceptive than perhaps even she could have realized. Her grandson's "pernicious habit of fooling" was something that would remain with him for years. At times, the result would be humorous; at other times, there would be serious repercussions.

Prescott could simply not be suppressed. He possessed all the precocious gifts of a firstborn son who was indulged and adored by his parents. He had inherited humor, dramatic flair, and sociability from his mother, while he exhibited his father's height, good looks, and graceful athleticism. The surprising effect of her "splendid boy" was not lost on Flora. "I have had one new experience," she wrote to her husband, "and that is the devotion of girls 18 or 19 years old to Prescott. He is having a charming time dancing with them + going swimming + indeed walking or running. Prescott + one or two boys a little older are all the boys there are + you may imagine their popularity. I shall be glad to have him away from the girls. He is very kind to me + indeed to us all-but-of course, being in such demand for any length of time might turn his head."

Even his grandmother's efforts could not rein him in, and she was someone to be reckoned with. Already widowed for nineteen years when she wrote the note analyzing Prescott, Harriet Fay Bush was born in Savannah, Georgia, of illustrious ancestors who fertilized the family tree with connections to British royalty. On occasion Mrs. Bush could be as starchy as Queen Victoria, but Flora loved her mother-in-law and fussed about the elderly woman's frailty. "I wonder how she keeps up at all," Flora wrote. "She has had so many wretched days + people tire and annoy her so very much that I have felt a number of times that it was almost too much for her."

Flora need not have worried. Behind that swansdown fan fluttered a steel magnolia who would outlast most of her relatives, including her daughter-in-law. As sturdy as the kudzu of Georgia, Harriet Fay Bush would live to be ninety-four years old.

During the summer of 1908, the Bushes were completing a two-and-a-half-story colonial-style seventeen-room home on Roxbury Road overlooking the bluff of Marble Cliff in Columbus, Ohio. They had purchased the 2.7-acre site for $12,500 the year before, and their letters were filled with details of the seven-bayed windows, five dormered bedrooms, upstairs ballroom, cedar-lined storage room, and awninged porch atop the first-floor sunroom.

"I still remember that house, and I'm ninety-five now," recalled Indiana Earl in 2001. "Of course, it was fitting for Samuel Bush to live there because he was extremely wealthy and viewed with enormous respect in the community. The Bushes' big white house sat at the top of a hill looking down on a marble quarry across the street from Sylvio Casparis's castle . . . Mr. Bush was well-to-do wealthy but not as really rich as old Mr. Casparis, who owned the Marble Cliff Quarries."

As the daughter of a prominent dry-goods merchant, Flora understood how to run a fine home and was delighted when her husband, the president of the Buckeye Steel Castings Company as well as one of the founders of the Scioto Country Club of

Columbus, bought land in Grandview Heights near where her brothers and sisters were building their large homes. Flora oversaw the architectural plans for the new house and attended to the details of paying various merchants. "This bill of Sargents is a terror," she wrote. "Certainly changing those panes is pretty expensive." Her letters brimmed with eagerness to see the construction completed in time for her family to move in the fall. "We shall all be together and be so very happy," she put in one of her notes.

In an era before such modern conveniences as washing machines and dryers, Flora expressed concern for a satisfactory cellar that would be "clean and nice and serve as an excellent drying room for laundry." She acceded to her husband's love of flowers and his desire for larger gardens to accommodate more plantings, but insisted on her own way in other areas. "About the fireplace-it must be done," she wrote. "There is no doubt about it. I am willing to compromise on the red. My only choice has been a suitable brown and if that cannot be found I shall certainly never give you cause to regret the red."

As pleased as Flora was to be at Cape Cod with her children and away from the noisy builders and summer heat of the Midwest, she missed her forty-four-year-old husband, who was known to intimates by his middle name. She began each letter with loving salutations such as "My Dear Prescott" or "My Dearest Boy." Irrepressibly affectionate at the age of thirty-six, she signed off with endearments such as "Adieu, my darling Boy," "I love you my darling and am thinking of you constantly," "I love you sweetheart dearly. Don't get on too well without me," "Please miss me a little, my dearest."

Nor was she coy about her desire for the man she called "Bushy." In one letter she wrote:

I should like to have you down here fore [sic] a week after every one has gone-+ we should lead an Adam + Eve existence-bathe and roam about-We could have a very happy time near to nature's heart . . . I so seldom see a person I desire for a friend. Of course it is because you + I are so much to each other. We do not need the others-I surely need little dear when I am sure of you-but it is the most vital thing in the world that you stay by me.

She also wrote about her own pleasure at "bathing," especially on the rare days she dared to ditch her petticoats, whalebone collars, and fishnet hose. One day, she said, was absolutely perfect because "we went in without skirts or stockings and the sensation was delightful." And Flora burbled on about the children's swimming lessons: "Such progress as they are making is truly delightful. Diving or rather jumping into the water and swimming right off-it is fine-I would give anything to have that love for the water or rather the faith-for I do love it-but to be without fear-there is nothing like it."

Flora seemed quite ready to leave behind the nineteenth-century discomforts of carriages and embrace the new invention of the automobile. As she wrote to her husband, "There is only one comfortable way to get about and that is in a motor car-such a vastly cleaner mode of travel in this part." That was the year Henry Ford introduced his Model T, which sold for $850.

Flushed with the good fortune of her life, Flora took nothing for granted, especially after she had a frightening accident one morning:

A baseball flying with terrific force, having been batted 50 or 75 feet away, struck me

just over the left eye. I dropped + was dazed but soon came to my senses-Prescott white as a sheet + others helping me up-I was able to walk over + then had applications + things done-but I have had a horrid day-as I am lame everywhere + my poor head feels as though it was not mine. Excepting that it hurts. It is turning a hideous green + blue. I suppose I ought to be brave + not write you but my dear Boy I have to let you know. It takes my breath when I realize how easily I might have been killed or my eye put out or anything.
Days later, she wrote: "My head is getting back to its normal state again, but my eye is a hideous black + blue, but I do not suffer. I can't help feeling thankful when I think of the narrow escape."
On her last day at Osterville, she wrote that she was looking forward to returning to Ohio to see their new home: "I am still giving thanks-just think I might never have seen the bay window had the ball struck half an inch lower. I am very thankful to have gotten off so well."
By the Cape Cod summer of 1908, Flora and Samuel had been married fourteen years and had four surviving children. They had endured the death of their second child, Robert Sheldon Bush, in 1900. He was three and a half years old when he contracted scarlet fever, which he fought for six weeks until his little kidneys gave out. He was cremated and his ashes reposed in the Forest Home Cemetery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where the Bushes had lived for two years. They never specifically mention that sadness in the correspondence that survives. In one letter Samuel alludes to "hard things to bear" and shows he is grounded in the biblical principle that human beings grow in grace only by overcoming adversity. "We should be wonderfully happy," he wrote. "We are and we will be . . . but surely we should not care to have our lives easy. There would be no accomplishment, no development. We must meet the difficult things and by mutual help surmount them."
Long before women got the vote and feminists looked like troublemakers in lace bonnets, Samuel Bush had accepted his wife as his equal. His letters to her sound as emancipated as those John Adams wrote to Abigail in the eighteenth century:

You speak of the father as the governing power and very lovingly, too, but my idea is that while the father may be the governing power in some things, the mother is quite as much so in other things and that the power is a dual one and so intended by its creator and it has always been my desire to so have it and so I wish to have you on equal terms and then by mutual consideration have our marriage and love complete and fruitful of the best.

These letters, saved by Samuel and bequeathed to his heirs, reveal a vibrant partnership between parents who loved their children abundantly and cared for their welfare, although, truth to tell, they write more of their two sons, Prescott and James, than of their two daughters, Mary and Margaret. In her letters, Flora jumps off the page in vivid color as she whirls among her various roles of caring daughter-in-law, nurturing mother, solicitous wife, and robust lover.

With her summer coming to a close, Flora made arrangements for the family to return to Ohio by train, the most comfortable means of travel in those days. "I have applied for sleeping car accomodations so that we will surely get berths . . . and have one Drawing Room."
She told her husband that their oldest child was more than ready to leave Douglas

Elementary School in Columbus and start the all-boys preparatory school of St. George's in Newport, Rhode Island:

Prescott is quite a beaux [sic] and I shall be very well satisfied to have him safely under Mr. Diman's care-the strict discipline is just the thing I agree in believing in discipline. You must be sure to arrange to go on with Prescott about the 20th as it is most necessary that you see his surroundings, meet the masters + feel satisfied about the whole.

Flora's reference is to the Reverend John Byron Diman, who founded St. George's School in 1896 and recruited Samuel Bush to serve on the school's board of trustees. She need not have worried about her husband's reaction to the school. Any parent able to spend $850 a year on tuition would have been delighted with the spectacular 350-acre campus on majestic cliffs overlooking three beaches of the Atlantic Ocean. At that time, the St. George's faculty numbered fifteen masters, and enrollment was limited to 125 boys.
"I enjoyed all the advantages of that very much indeed," Prescott recalled many years later in an oral history, describing the new world he was encountering, "with athletic fields and a beautiful gymnasium and all these things that we didn't have in the public schools . . . For that reason I think I appreciated it more than some of the boys who came there from private schools."
"St. George's was most definitely a rich boy's school," said John G. Doll, the school archivist. "We were very select, snobbish, and quite elitist then. Most of the boys were enrolled the day they were born, when their fathers sent telegrams to the headmaster to reserve their space. That all changed after the Depression.
"We had a jacket-and-tie dress code during the time Prescott Bush [1908-13] and his brother, Jim [1914-18], attended, plus a heavy emphasis on religion, with chapel once a day and twice on Sunday. The boys had to walk three miles each way to attend St. Columba's Church on Sundays. We were a big feeder into Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Still are. We're still much smaller and more exclusive than any of the other prep schools like Exeter and Andover, but now, of course, we're coed."
Records at St. George's show Prescott Bush to have been a mammoth presence. "He was really a big man on campus," said John Doll, rattling off a stupendous record of athletics and extracurriculars, including first-squad (varsity) football, baseball, and basketball. In addition, Prescott was president of Civics Club, vice president of Red and White Council, president of Dramatic Association, leader of the Glee Club, and president of Golf Club. "He was a marvelous actor and played the lead of Sherlock Holmes in the school play," said Doll. But the biggest honor came his senior year, when he was elected head prefect. In those days, that position, the equivalent of student-body president, carried the perquisite of a private suite of rooms that consisted of a large den with a working fireplace and a small private bedroom. So Prescott must've had a very happy senior year indeed.
When Flora and Samuel received advance word that their son had been elected head prefect, they were told to say nothing until the announcement was made at school. Flora could barely contain herself. She wrote to her husband:

I asked Prescott if there had been any elections and he said yes-baseball and he is Captain-he said Buchanan had two votes-but he had the rest. We did not speak of the other honor-the one Mr. Griswold told us of-until just as he left he said, "Mother, I

won't get that." I did not peep-nor even look wise but let it go-as I presume it is better to wait-but naturally I should like to have relieved his mind.
Prescott entered St. George's after the sweet summer of 1908, and his graduation five years later brought him to the threshold of his life's most formative experience-Yale, class of 1917.
"For me," he said years later, "it all began with Yale." He credited the university with shaping his entire life. Certainly his career would have been different, for he met his future boss Walter Simmons, who hired Prescott for his first job, at a Yale reunion. His personal life would have been far different as well. Because of that job in St. Louis for the Simmons Hardware Company, he met the wealthy Yale family the Walkers and his future wife, Dorothy Walker. After a series of sales jobs, Prescott used his Yale connections to launch his career as an investment banker.
If it's true that, as one Yale man said, "there will always be two Yales-the Old Blues and the rest of us," Prescott Bush was an Old Blue. He made no apology to "the rest of us" for his lifelong genuflections to Yale. The school had given him everything he valued most, and he felt no need to look beyond his college ties. As far as he was concerned, he'd met the best, so he ignored the rest.
After graduation, Prescott regularly attended Yale class reunions and Whiffenpoof anniversaries. He visited New Haven and the tomb of Skull and Bones at least once-and sometimes as often as five times-a year. Whenever he could, he sang at the tables down at Mory's, the clubby Yale restaurant where the Whiffenpoofs assembled to raise their glasses and sing their songs. He was an associate fellow of Calhoun College from 1944 to 1972; a Chubb Fellow in 1958; and an associate of Saybrook College. He served as a Yale trustee. He was the first chairman of Yale's Development Board. Prescott sat on the Yale Corporation for twelve years, served as secretary of his alumni class, and was a member of the executive council. Figuratively and literally, he never left Yale.
In writing to his class on the eve of his fiftieth reunion, he reflected on the importance of the school in his life: "I am more than ever conscious of what Yale has meant to me since 1913. Wherever I found myself in war or peace, in business or politics, in sports or social life, always the fact of Yale seemed to be there. I make this acknowledgement with a grateful heart."

Prescott walked onto the New Haven campus as a Yale "legacy" of his paternal grandfather, the Reverend James Smith Bush, class of 1844, and his maternal uncle Robert E. Sheldon Jr., class of 1904. Within four years he would create his own legacy, which would open Yale's exclusive doors to several more generations of Bushes, including his four sons, his three grandsons, his two nephews, and, in 2001, his great-granddaughter:
The Yale Family Tree: Bush/Walker/Pierce

1844	Reverend James Smith Bush (Prescott Bush's grandfather)
1899	Joseph W. Wear (Dorothy Walker Bush's uncle)
1899S	James T. Walker (Dorothy Walker Bush's uncle)
1901	James H. Wear (Dorothy Walker Bush's uncle)
1902	Arthur Y. Wear (Dorothy Walker Bush's uncle)
1904S	Robert E. Sheldon (Prescott Bush's uncle)
1913x	Francis Edwin House Jr. (married Prescott Bush's sister Mary Eleanor)

1917	Stuart H. Clement (married Prescott Bush's sister Margaret Livingston)
1917	Prescott S. Bush
1922	James Smith Bush (Prescott Bush's brother)
1925	William P. Wear (Dorothy Walker Bush's cousin)
1927	David D. Walker III (Dorothy Walker Bush's cousin)
1927	George H. Walker Jr. (Dorothy Walker Bush's brother)
1930x	James Wear Walker (Dorothy Walker Bush's brother, left after sophomore year)
1931	John M. Walker (Dorothy Walker Bush's brother)
1936	Louis Walker (Dorothy Walker Bush's brother)
1940	Reuben A. Holden IV (married George H. Walker Jr.'s daughter, Elizabeth)
1942	Walter Rafferty (married Barbara Bush's sister, Martha Pierce)
1943	Stuart H. Clement Jr. (Margaret Bush Clement's son)
1943	Francis E. House III (Mary Bush House's son)
1944	Alexander B. Ellis Jr. (married George H.W. Bush's sister, Nancy)
1944x	Prescott S. Bush Jr. (George H.W. Bush's brother, left after junior year)
1948	George H.W. Bush
1953	Jonathan James Bush (George H.W. Bush's brother)
1953	George H. Walker III (George H. Walker Jr.'s son)
1955	Ray Walker (George H. Walker Jr.'s son)
1960	William Henry Trotter Bush (George H.W. Bush's brother)
1961	Davis R. Robinson (married Louis Walker's daughter, Suzanne)
1962	John M. Walker Jr. (Dorothy Walker Bush's nephew)
1968	George W. Bush
1970	Prescott Bush III (Prescott Bush Jr.'s son)
1974	Corinne Rafferty (Martha Rafferty's daughter)
1977	John P. Ellis (Nancy Bush Ellis's son)
1986	William P. Bush (William H.T. Bush's son)
2004	Barbara Bush (George W. Bush's daughter)

S = Sheffield Scientific School before it was absorbed into Yale College
x = Did not graduate

When the head prefect of St. George's arrived for his freshman year of college, he looked like a matinee idol. At six feet four, he was the second-tallest man in his class, and one of the handsomest. His hair was as dark as sealskin and parted down the middle to show what Grandmother Harriet Bush called his "noble forehead." He was a good student and majored in history, but he truly excelled in sports, particularly as a first baseman on Yale's baseball team. So important were sports in the lives of Yale men then that "Not Winning a 'Y' " was listed as one of the "Biggest Regrets of College" by the class of 1917. Prescott had won his baseball letter by his junior year. He went out for the golf team and even became a football cheerleader, all of which combined to make him one of the most admired men on campus.

"There was a sort of mystique in the old days of people who were good in sports," said Stuart Symington Jr. (Yale 1950), son of the late senator from Missouri. "My father was a superior athlete. So was Pres Bush. They were the lords of creation . . . In that era, excellence in sports was highly prized. You'd see banner headlines in The New York Times that Yale beat Harvard or Princeton. It mattered greatly then. In that country-club world-small, social, and cohesive-a sport played well was a gauge of competence, a badge of manhood."
In his history of the school, Brooks Mather Kelley described Yale's class of 1917 as "more interested in their games, newspapers, sports and societies than . . . the curriculum." That could have been written to
describe Samuel Bush's son. Socializing was a big part of college life
for Prescott, who volunteered for Interfraternity Council, Junior Prom Committee, and Class Day Committee. "To Have Made Friends" was listed by the class of 1917 as the "Most Valuable Thing Obtained from College."
Prescott began scaling Yale his first week on campus. Singing was a cherished college tradition, so he immediately joined the Yale Glee Club, the Yale Quartet, and the Yale Men's Choir. In his senior year he was selected second bass for the Whiffenpoofs. "Life is but one song," he told the Yale Daily News. By then, he had become known as the hottest close-harmony man Yale had seen in twenty-five years.
"Prescott loved music," said Richard D. Barrett (Yale 1953). "He was made of music. That was the core of his character-his love of singing. He was happiest when he was singing . . . and he had a wonderful booming voice, a marvelous bass that he loved using. After he left Yale, he formed a group, all Yalies, of course, called the Silver Dollar Quartet that sang for years. When they died, Prescott found us and formed another group called the Kensington Four. He craved singing and was never without song."
In a 1957 letter Prescott sent to Yale about the Silver Dollar Quartet, he said the group had been performing for thirty-five years:

We began in 1922. For many years we made pilgrimages to Mory's to sing with the Whiffenpoofs. In the thirties we formed the Yale Glee Club Associates and planned and conducted its meetings in New York until I resigned as president, thinking a change of leadership would be helpful.
We introduced many a song at Yale. They still sing many of our songs even if they have changed arrangements and tempi in some to conform with their more modern tastes.

Prescott reveled in group activities. He pledged Psi Upsilon fraternity and joined the College Christian Association as well as the Young Men's Christian Association of Dwight Hall. He fit easily with the 347 students of his freshman class, most of whom were white Anglo-Saxon Protestant preppies. A profile of that class emerges from their answers to a questionnaire.
The fathers of 149 students had graduated from a university, and 58 of those had graduated from Yale. More than half of the fathers had not graduated from any college. Prescott's father had graduated from Stevens Institute of Technology with a degree in engineering, so that placed Prescott in the educated minority of his class. The class of 1917 listed football as their favorite sport, Douglas Fairbanks as their favorite actor, and Maude Adams as their favorite actress. Alfred, Lord Tennyson was their favorite poet, and "Crossing the Bar" their favorite poem. Their favorite

writer was Charles Dickens, their favorite novel Lorna Doone, and they said English was the most valuable subject. The person they admired most in history was Abraham Lincoln, which may account for the 227 students who listed themselves as Republicans.

The twenty-two Catholics, fifteen Methodists, ten Jews, nine
Baptists, and one Buddhist in the class defined its religious diversity. Racially, there was no diversity; the entire class was Caucasian. A majority of the students said they used tobacco and alcohol, and 113 had
traveled abroad by the time they arrived at Yale, but Prescott was not one of them.

When the class wrote its history shortly before graduation, they voted on those who had "Done Most for Yale" in their four years there: Harry William LeGore won with 129 votes; Prescott S. Bush placed second
with 36 votes. "Most Popular" was Spencer Armstrong Pumpelly, with 174 votes; Prescott S. Bush placed fifth with 21 votes. "Most to Be
Admired" was Spencer Armstrong Pumpelly, 108 votes; fourth was Prescott Bush, 30 votes. Prescott was not mentioned in the categories
of "Best Natured," "Best All-Around Athlete," "Most Scholarly," "Most Brilliant," or "Most Likely to Succeed," but he did win "Most Versatile," with 70 votes.

"There's a difference, a big difference," said Stuart Symington Jr., "between going to Yale and scaling Yale. The hierarchy of Prescott Bush's Yale began with excelling in sports. With that achievement you could qualify for the next step-a fraternity, then an honor society-all a staging area for the senior societies, the final step up the ladder. The senior societies held the greatest prestige, and of them nothing mattered more than Skull and Bones. Scaling that world of Yale was more important than getting the college education or degree of Yale."

In May 1916, Prescott reached the summit; he was one of fifteen men tapped for Skull and Bones. These names-Alfred Raymond Bellinger, Prescott Sheldon Bush, Henry Sage Fenimore Cooper, Oliver Baty Cunningham, Samuel Sloan Duryee, Edward Roland Noel Harriman, Henry Porter Isham, William Ellery Sedgwick James, Harry William LeGore, Henry Neil Mallon, Albert William Olsen, John Williams Overton, Frank Parsons Shepard Jr., Kenneth Farrand Simpson, and Knight Woolley-would anchor Prescott's life, the lives of his two sisters, who would marry Yalies, and his brother, also Skull and Bones, as well as the lives of his children and his children's children. These Bonesmen became one another's best friends, confidants, colleagues, business associates, golfing partners, investors, and clients.

Skull and Bones has been called "the most powerful secret society
the United States has ever known" because its members have presided
at the highest realms of American business and political life. Former Bonesmen hail from some of America's most prominent families: Bundy, Coffin, Harriman, Lord, Phelps, Rockefeller, Taft, Whitney, and, of course, Bush.

A Yale student named William H. Russell started the secret organization in 1832 in an effort to create a new world order that would place the best and the brightest at the helm of society. A wealthy elitist, Russell believed that the most important decisions should only be made by those who are bred to make them, so he created an environment that would shape the characters of the men who would shape the world. He called his group the Brotherhood of Death or, more informally, the order of Skull and Bones, patterned after a secret society founded in Germany, also in 1832. Since then, Skull and Bones has maintained its "tomb"-the basement of its headquarters-on the Yale campus in a windowless house on High Street just off the

Old Campus and has selected fifteen men, and later, women, too, in every junior class to be admitted to its elite ranks. These men, who automatically include the captains of the football and baseball teams, the editor of the Yale Daily News, the president of the student council, and the head of the Political Union, are all sworn to lifetime secrecy about their rituals and commit themselves to helping each other scale life's summits.

Within Skull and Bones, all Bonesmen are called "Knights," and members refer to the rest of the world as "Barbarians." When writing to one another, each Knight is addressed as "Pat" or "Patriarch" to signal his dominant role at life's table. In the tomb deep within the ivy-covered house, the Knights swear allegiance to each other until death renders them nothing more than skull and bones. This allegiance gives all Knights a leg up in the Barbarian world, for members are always willing to help each other with financial assistance, social entrŽe, and political access. The Knights also pledge a lifetime tithe to the Russell Trust Association, the corporate shell of Skull and Bones and the richest corporation in the state of Connecticut. The RTA also owns Deer Island, a forty-acre retreat on the St. Lawrence River, two miles north of Alexandria Bay, New York. On the property is a lavish clubhouse that serves as a retreat for members only.

All Knights are encouraged to "crook"-to steal something rare and valuable for the tomb, which will build up the coffers of Skull and Bones. The best crook is displayed with a plaque in the clubhouse with the crook's name, an honor all Knights seek. The competition in this area is fierce.

During Prescott's years at Yale, the United States was trying to negotiate an end to the Great War in Europe while maintaining its neutrality. Students followed the progress of the European war on large-scale maps in the university library, and Yale urged its men to train for military service in the patriotic spirit of Nathan Hale (Yale 1773), whose monument on campus, always wreathed, carries his immortal words: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

American antiwar sentiment remained strong until May 7, 1915, when the Germans sank the Lusitania and 128 Americans lost their lives. Twelve months later Congress passed the National Defense Act and instituted the draft. President Woodrow Wilson campaigned for reelection with the slogan "He kept us out of war." Opposing Wilson's isolationist policies, Prescott and several other Knights formed the Republican Club at Yale to support Charles Evans Hughes of New York, the esteemed Supreme Court justice who felt that American intervention in the war was inevitable, desirable, and in fact admirable. President Wilson was able to ride antiwar sentiment to victory, but after German U-boats sank five American merchant vessels, Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany to keep the world "safe for democracy."

That declaration of April 6, 1917, changed the lives of Prescott Bush and many other Yale men who immediately joined the National Guard.

"At Yale I developed the thought that I really would like in the long run to get into politics, and with that in mind, I decided that I would go to law school after my graduation," Prescott said in his oral history at Columbia University. "But unhappily the war broke out . . . and I immediately went into the Army and spent a little over two years in the service, getting out in May, 1919. I was a captain of field artillery. I might say that prior to that, in 1916, during the Mexican border crisis, I entered the Connecticut National Guard as a private . . . and that training was exceedingly useful to me and to many, many other Yale men who formed the so-called Yale Battalion

with four batteries of field artillery, which meant about 400 men-100 in a battery-roughly speaking."
The "Mexican border crisis" arose after the British decoded a secret telegram from the Germans. The telegram urged Mexico to declare war on the United States and promised that once America was defeated, Germany would insist on peace terms that would force the United States to return Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona south of the border. The German attempt to foment fighting within the United States was nullified with the declaration of war.
For two months in the spring of 1918, Prescott and four other Knights were dispatched to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, as members of the Army's last horse-drawn artillery unit. The unit pulled the cannons and caissons that served as ammunition carriers, and was commanded by Brigadier General Adrian S. Fleming, who placed Prescott on his personal staff because the young man continually led everyone in singing the field-artillery song: "Over hill, over dale, we have hit the dusty trail as our caissons go rolling along."
To Prescott and the other Knights of Skull and Bones, Fort Sill looked like a cornucopia for crooking, especially the Old Post Corral with its frontier relics and the Apache Cemetery that contained the grave of Geronimo, the Indian warrior who had led sensational campaigns against the white man. The chieftain had taken forty-nine scalps before the Army troops at Fort Sill finally captured him. He had escaped so many times before that he was lionized as a hero by both sides.
At the time of his death in 1909, Geronimo was the most famous Indian warrior in the world. As a result, the Apaches were afraid that white men might dig up his body and exhibit it in a traveling show or vandalize his grave, looking for gold and silver, not realizing that there would be nothing of value within because the Apaches were poor and did not bury valuables with their dead. Actually, Apaches were afraid of the dead and believed the spirits might contaminate them. They looked upon grave tampering with horror. So when the grave of a Comanche leader was desecrated, the Apaches, to prevent further tampering, spread the story that they had removed Geronimo's bones. National magazines and newspapers published stories in 1914 stating that Geronimo's remains were no longer at Fort Sill.
When the Knights of Skull and Bones arrived at the Army fort in 1918, they found all the graves unmarked and the cemetery overgrown with weeds and thorny vines. Available records failed to designate the burial site, and nine years after Geronimo's death men on the post could not recall the spot, and Apaches professed ignorance. Despite all that, the Knights claimed that they had unearthed the secret grave and had snatched Geronimo's skull in a midnight raid, along with his stirrups and a horse bit, all of which they carried back to the tomb in New Haven to be proudly displayed as the most prized of all "crooks."
These false claims proved to be another example of Prescott Bush's predilection for "pernicious . . . fooling." The actual location of the Indian chieftain's grave remained secret for many years until U.S. Master Sergeant Morris Swett, Fort Sill librarian from 1915 to 1954, shared his knowledge. He had become close to the Apaches during his many years at Fort Sill, and Nah-thle-tla, Geronimo's first cousin, had trusted Swett enough to show him the unmarked grave. Swett's story, "The Secret of Geronimo's Grave," confirmed by Apache leaders and tribal elders in Lawton, Oklahoma, was written by Paul McClung in 1964 in The Lawton Constitution, where it received little circulation. By then the 1918 myth of Prescott Bush and his Knights had taken hold as legend among decades of Bonesmen. The nonexistent exploit was so beguiling

that F. O. Matthiessen, literary critic from Yale's class of 1923, wrote it up for a Skull and Bones history titled "Continuation of the History of Our Order for the Century Celebration, 17 June 1933":

From the war days also sprang the mad expedition from the School of Fire at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, that brought to the T [tomb] its most spectacular "crook," the skull of Geronimo the terrible, the Indian Chief who had taken forty-nine white scalps. An expedition in late May 1918 by members . . . planned with great caution since in the words of one of them: "Six army captains robbing a grave wouldn't look good in the papers." The stirring climax was recorded by Hellbender in the Black Book of D. 117 . . . "The ring of pick on stone and thud of earth on earth alone disturbs the peace of the prairie. An axe pried open the iron door of the tomb, and Pat. [Patriarch] Bush entered and started to dig. We dug in turn, each on relief taking a turn on the road as guards . . . Finally Pat. [Patriarch] Ellery James turned up a bridle, soon a saddle horn and rotten leathers followed, then wood and then, at the exact bottom of the small round hole, Pat. [Patriarch] James dug deep and pried out the trophy itself . . . we quickly closed the grave, shut the door and sped home to Pat [Patriarch] Mallon's room, where we cleaned the bones. Pat [Patriarch] Mallon sat on the floor liberally applying carbolic acid. The Skull was fairly clean, having only some flesh inside and a little hair."

Many years after Prescott joined Geronimo in the happy hunting ground, this story rose up like a ghost in chains to smack the fortunes of Prescott's political son, George. When Geronimo died, the headline in one Oklahoma paper read: "Longed to Die in Arizona Where He Waged Bloody Wars-Resisted Civilization." So in 1986, Ned Anderson, a former chairman of the San Carlos Apache Tribe in Arizona, decided to try to find the chieftain's remains and take them to Arizona. During his search, Anderson received a letter from someone who purported to be a member of Skull and Bones. "What you're seeking is not over at Fort Sill. It is in New Haven, Connecticut, on the Yale University campus. If you are interested in pursuing the matter further, I will make photographs available to you."

Anderson wrote back immediately, and the anonymous Bonesman sent him a photograph of the glass display case in the tomb containing bones, stirrups, a horse bit, and what the informant said was the skull of Geronimo "crooked" by Prescott Bush and his fellow Patriarchs. The Bonesman also included a copy of F. O. Matthiessen's document that told the story of the fictitious raid on Geronimo's grave as if it were real.

The Apache chairman retained a lawyer to retrieve the skull so that it could be reinterred with the tribe in Arizona. The Skull and Bones attorney showed up for the meeting with what appeared to be the original display case, complete with the skull, stirrups, and horse bit. Anderson mentioned that the skull didn't look exactly like the photograph he had received. The Skull and Bones attorney said he'd had it analyzed. "We found out it's not Geronimo's skull," said Endicott Peabody Davison (Yale 1945), "but the skull of a ten-year-old boy."

All negotiations fell apart when the Skull and Bones attorney demanded that, in exchange for the display case, the Apaches sign a document stipulating that the society did not have Geronimo's skull. They also had to promise never to discuss the matter. Anderson refused to sign the document. He returned to Arizona and asked his senator, John McCain, to intercede by calling George H.W. Bush, then Vice

President of the United States. McCain told the Apache chairman that Bush would not take his call, but the senator had no recollection of his call many years later. The display case was returned to the tomb in New Haven, where Bonesmen to this day still erroneously refer to it as Geronimo's skull.

With America's declaration of war in 1917, Prescott headed for France, while Samuel, his civic-minded father, went to Washington, D.C., to serve as chief of the Ordnance, Small Arms, and Ammunition Section of the War Industries Board under Bernard Baruch. Described as a "Jeffersonian Democrat," Samuel Bush was a progressive who built housing for his company's employees and helped labor leaders persuade Ohio legislators to pass legislation for workers' compensation. During the war, Flora, who stayed in Ohio, had to rely on letters to communicate with her family. As she wrote to her husband:
Dearest,
Yesterday brought another dear letter from Prescott + even today he must be at the front-His letters are a constant source of happiness to me-as they must be to you and I hasten always to forward them at once-I knew the news of John Overton's death [Skull and Bones, 1917] would be a trial to him. [Overton was the first of Prescott's class to die in the war.] That news came yesterday through the Associated Press and also in Prescott's letter, which shows how delayed war news necessarily is.

Flora then refers to the front-page story in the Ohio State Journal that greeted her and all of Columbus on the morning of August 8, 1918. There was no byline on the story, or any indication of how the paper came by its exclusive. As a proud mother, Flora hoped that "the great epic" was true, but the realistic part of her was dubious. As she wrote to her husband: "The next mail Prescott receives will have our letter after the great news contained in Tom's letter was rec'd-He will receive a good many letters + these will fill his heart with gladness if only the great epic was written seriously-I hesitate to write the word if but to you surely I can write as I feel-and open my heart."
The Ohio State Journal story to which Flora skeptically referred had a headline that rang with glory:

3 HIGH MILITARY HONORS CONFERRED ON CAPT. BUSH:
For Notable Gallantry, When Leading Allied Commanders Were Endangered,
Local Man Is Awarded French, English and U.S. Crosses.

According to the anonymous reporter, a German shell had momentarily endangered the lives of three Allied leaders, General Ferdinand Foch, Sir Douglas Haig, and General John Pershing, as they were inspecting American positions. Prescott, who was guiding them about the sector on the western front, sprang forward to save their lives. In the sycophantic story, Prescott looked to be the equal of Charlemagne in valor and courage:

Suddenly Captain Bush noticed a shell coming directly for them. He shouted a warning, suddenly drew his bolo knife, stuck it up as he would a ball bat, and parried the blow, causing the shell to glance off to the right.
The three generals marveled at the exploit. Apparently they couldn't believe their eyes . . . Within 24 hours young Bush was notified of the signal recognition that was

to be accorded him-the three allied commanders had recommended him for practically the highest honors within their gift.
On the following day there was a parade in Paris of soldiers to be decorated. As he was the only one to receive three honors, Captain Bush was placed at the head of the procession.

The next day the cartoonist of the Ohio State Journal responded with unconcealed skepticism by drawing a young boy sitting under a tree with his dog. The caption underneath the boy read:

And just as the three greatest generals in the world were passing the boy captain, he noticed with terror a German 77 flying straight for Gen. Foch, Gen. Haig and Gen. Pershing. Quick as a flash our young hero drew his bolo knife, using it as he would a ball bat knocked the deadly shell far off to the right where it exploded without injury to anyone. For his notable gallantry in saving the lives of the three great generals he was awarded the cross of the legion of honor by the French government, the Victoria Cross by the English government and the Distinguished Service Cross by the American Government.

The caption above the dog's head: "Gee! I wonder if anything like that could ever truly happen to a boy!"
A week later the Ohio State Journal's news story appeared on the front page of the New Haven Journal-Courier under a different but equally fantastic headline:

TRIPLE HONOR TO P. S. BUSH, YALE '17:
Yale Man, in Remarkable Exploit,
Averts Danger to Foch, Haig and Pershing.
Changed Course of Shell. Struck It with Bolo Knife-
England, France and America Confer Honors for Act.

It was an extraordinary tale of heroism. But within a month Flora's worst suspicions proved true. On September 5, 1918, she wrote a contrite letter to the editor of the Ohio State Journal, which was reprinted on the front page:

A cable received from my son, Prescott S. Bush, brings word that he has not been decorated, as published in the papers a month ago. He feels dreadfully troubled that a letter written in a spirit of fun, should have been misinterpreted. He says he is no hero and asks me to make explanation. I will appreciate your kindness in publishing this letter.

Flora Sheldon Bush
Columbus, Sept. 5

The fabrication was punctured in Ohio but not in Connecticut. The New Haven paper never retracted its report. To this day the glory story remains attached to the page of Prescott's entry in the Yale class of 1917 yearbook in the reading room of the Manuscripts and Archives division in Yale's Sterling Memorial Library.
History does not record what Grandmother Harriet Bush had to say when she learned of all these turns in her grandson's "pernicious habit of fooling."