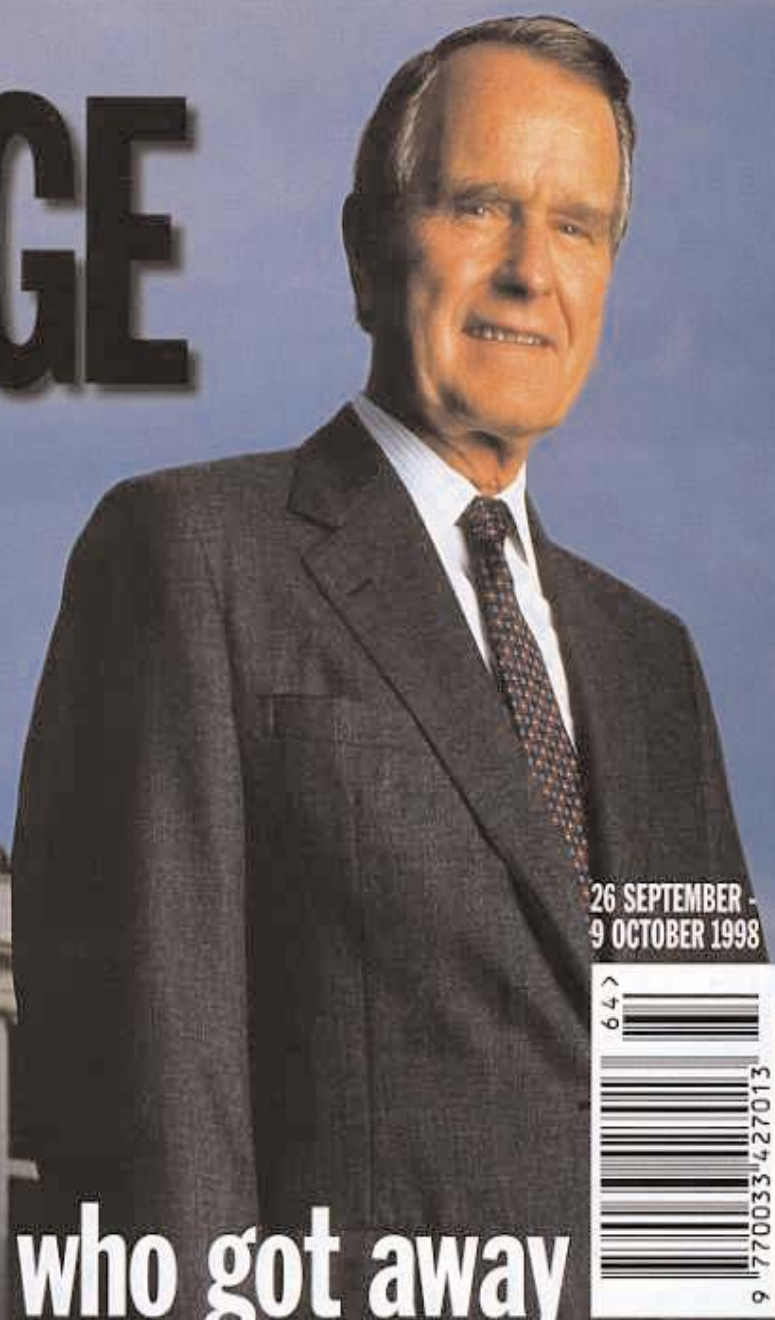


Punch

£1
ISSUE 64
FORTNIGHTLY

THE GEORGE BUSH AFFAIR



26 SEPTEMBER -
9 OCTOBER 1998



The President who got away
with adultery in the White House

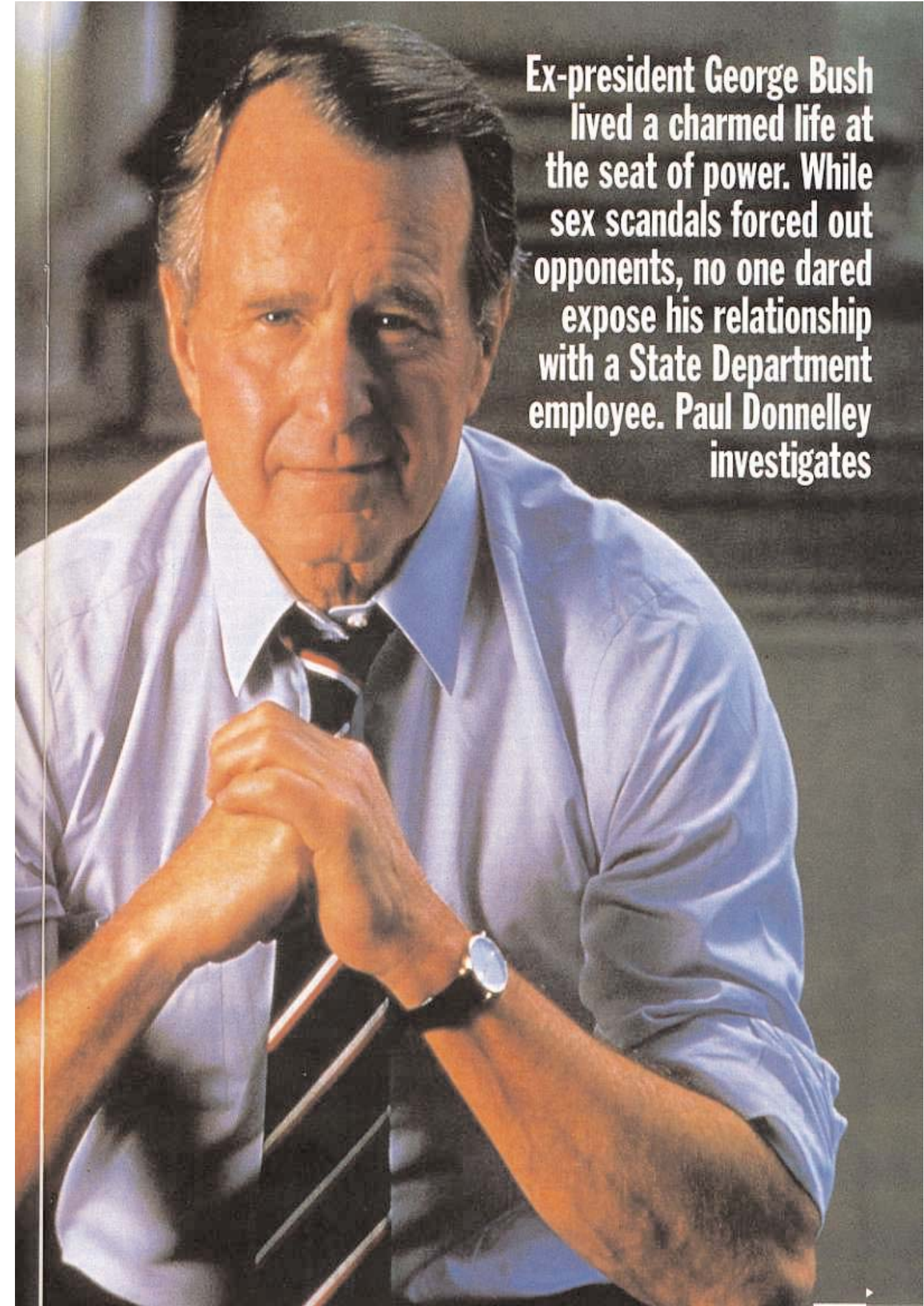
BURNING BUSH

THE AFFAIR KEPT SECRET BY ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

...AND THAT
INCLUDES
KENNETH STARR



STARR TURN: As solicitor-general, Kenneth Starr worked closely with President George Bush and would have known details of his private life



**Ex-president George Bush
lived a charmed life at
the seat of power. While
sex scandals forced out
opponents, no one dared
expose his relationship
with a State Department
employee. Paul Donnelley
investigates**



NO FLOOZIE: Jennifer Fitzgerald (above and right, with Bush at the CIA in 1976) was too much like Barbara to be of any salacious interest



THE GEORGE BUSH AFFAIR

Kenneth Starr is a man who allows nothing to deflect him from the search for truth. If ever he felt any queasiness about the degree of sexual explicitness he was putting into his report on President Clinton's extramaritals, he didn't allow it to get in the way of his sacred duty. No personal intimacy between Slick Willy and his White House intern Monica Lewinsky was too petty to be included. He even noted her gift of a pair of kneepads with a presidential seal on them.

Which makes it all the more surprising that he could have sat around the cabinet table with a previous president who was engaged in a long-running sexual relationship with a woman other than his wife and fail to blow the whistle or resign. For Starr, the man they call Judge Dread, was solicitor-general under Clinton's predecessor, George Bush, who successfully conducted a clandestine affair with a State Department employee for more than 20 years. Her name was Jennifer Fitzgerald.

Little is known of Fitzgerald's background beyond the fact that she was born in England in 1933 and bears some resemblance to Barbara Bush, herself no voluptuous starlet type. She is currently deputy chief of protocol at the State Department but, significantly, given the claims by the anti-Clinton brigade that the President attempted to "silence" Lewinsky by getting his friend Vernon Jordan to find her a job, Fitzgerald has been employed in six different positions — all on government payroll — in the past 20 years or so. And she has always worked closely with Bush.

After being considered to head NASA, Bush was appointed by President Richard Nixon as the US's permanent representative to the United Nations in 1970. At this time, Bush and Fitzgerald were rumoured to have shared an apartment in New York.

In November 1972, Nixon made Bush chairman of the Republican National Committee. It was in this capacity that, in 1974, Bush handed Nixon the note telling him he must resign. President Gerald Ford then appointed Bush US chief liaison officer in China in October of

that year. (Diplomatic relations with China had yet to be restored at that time and no ambassadors were exchanged between the two countries.) And while Bush was in Beijing, Fitzgerald was his head of protocol.

From January to November 1976, Bush was the head of the CIA. Again Fitzgerald moved with him. Barbara preferred to stay in New York throughout most of the appointments, an arrangement that more than suited them both.

Rumours began circulating about an affair in the early Eighties, shortly after Bush's election as vice president. The relationship was, by all accounts, an open secret in Washington DC, and one source has told *Punch* that the romance continued until 1992.

The late American ambassador, Louis Fields, told CNN reporter Joe Trento in 1996 that he knew of the affair "first hand" because he had arranged accommodation — a guest house — for Bush and Fitzgerald in 1984 when she accompanied him to the talks on nuclear disarmament in Geneva. "It became very clear to me," remembered Fields, "that the vice president and Ms Fitzgerald were romantically involved. It made me very uncomfortable."

On November 8, 1988, Bush stood for president against Michael Dukakis. The rumours of the Bush affair were one of the few moments of light relief in an otherwise dull campaign that was mostly greeted with indifference from the public after the one glamorous candidate had already been forced out following a marital indiscretion of his own.

On May 1, 1987, Democratic contender Gary Hart blew his chances of the nomination by going on a boat trip with a blonde model called Donna Rice. The boat in question was called *Monkey Business*.

With Hart out of the way, the chattering became louder and Bush's oldest son, George W. Bush — now seen as one of the favourites for the Republican nomination in the year 2000 (see *The Second Coming of George Bush*, *Punch*, August 29) — was prompted to ask his father if he had been cheating on his wife. A letter to *Newsweek*, published on June 22, 1987, addressed the matter of his father's adultery.

"The answer to the Big A question," wrote Bush Junior, "is N.O." It is one of the exceptionally rare public denials of misbehaviour by any member of the immediate Bush family.

At the time it appeared the Republicans couldn't seem to make up their minds who the real enemy was. Bush's campaign manager, Lee Atwater, accused David Keene, his opposite number in the camp of the rival Republican contender, Senator Robert Dole, of circulating the rumour of Bush's adultery.

Keene went on television to publicly label Atwater "a liar". Not long afterwards, supporters of Bush and Dole got together to discuss the sex issue. They came to the conclusion that both parties must show the public a dignified face of the Grand Old Party (the Republicans) or its image would suffer and Dukakis would stand a chance of reaching the White House.

But the Bush camp remained convinced that it was only a matter of time before the public would learn through the media of the vice president's affair with Fitzgerald. In June 1988 Michael Steed of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, wrote: "Several major newspapers are sifting... reported dalliances of Mr Boring."

Rumours began to circulate that the *Washington Post* was about to publish intimate details of Bush's sexual peccadilloes. The *Post* is, of course, the paper that broke the Watergate story that ultimately led Richard Nixon to resign in disgrace. On October 19, 1988, the rumour-mill hit Wall Street and the stock market dropped "sharply". *The Wall Street Journal* carried the story of the collapse and reported that the *Washington Post* was "preparing to publish a report that he [Bush] had had a mistress for several years".

Donna Brazile of the Dukakis campaign staff told reporters in New Haven, Connecticut, the next day: "I wasn't on the stock market yesterday but I understood that they got a little concerned that George was going to go to the White House with somebody other than Barbara. I think George Bush owed it to the American people to fess up. The American people have every right to know if Barbara Bush will share that bed with him in the White House. I'm talking about Barbara Bush and someone with the initials J.F. or whatever the names [sic] are." A few hours later, Brazile, a young black woman who had also accused the Bush camp of running a racist campaign, was fired from the Dukakis campaign team.



THE WIVES ARE OUT: Barbara Bush (above) was a beloved figure who no one wanted to hurt with stories of her husband's infidelities. Fate has not been so kind to Hillary Clinton (right)

On October 20 the Associated Press news agency put out a piece that summarised the rumours surrounding the affair. Bush's press aide, Sheila Tate, scathingly referred to the entire story as "warmed-over garbage". In the end, the *Washington Post* lost its nerve and didn't publish a single word about Bush's affair. With the *Post* out of the picture, the rest of the media fell in line with Bush's wishes and no one carried the story.

For almost five years the story was hushed up, until May 1992 when, during the run-up to the November election, Hillary Clinton raised the subject in an interview with *Vanity Fair* magazine. The future First Lady said: "I had tea with Anne Cox Chambers [owner of the Cox media empire and one of America's richest women] and she's sitting there saying: 'You know, I just don't understand why they think they can get away with this. Everybody knows about George Bush.' And then Chambers launches into this long description of, you know, Bush and his carrying on, all of which is apparently well-known in Washington. But I'm convinced part of it is that the Establishment — regardless of party — sticks together. They're gonna circle the wagons on Jennifer [Fitzgerald] and all these people."

At a press conference at his home in Kennebunkport, Maine, Bush — standing next to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin

A SEVEN-INCH-THICK DOSSIER ON THE RELATIONSHIP WAS COMPILED

— was asked by Mary Tillotson, a CNN reporter, if he was having an affair. Bush did not deny his infidelity. "I am not going to take any sleazy questions like that from CNN," he blustered. "I am very disappointed that you would ask such a question of me and I will not respond to it."

Bush's press secretary, Marlin Fitzwater, banned Tillotson from any further White House events. The day before, in the Oval Office, Bush had responded to a question on Dateline NBC in similar vein. He told reporter Stone Phillips: "I'm not going to take any sleazy questions. You see, you're perpetuating the sleaze by even asking the question, to say nothing of asking it in the Oval Office."

Matters came to a serious head when Bush was mugged outside his mistress's Washington apartment building (although *Punch* was told that it was not Fitzgerald's home, but that of another mistress who has never been identified). To avert scandal, the Secret Service went to the headquarters of the District of Columbia police and "persuaded" them to expunge all records of the attack. The attack was reported in Washington's *City Paper*.

Also in 1992, Democrat advisers to Bill Clinton, James Carville and George Stephanopoulos, went to see Bush's strategists with a plan. (Bizarrely enough, Carville's now-wife, Mary Matalin, then worked in a similar capacity for George Bush.)

Carville had compiled a seven-inch-thick dossier on the Bush-Fitzgerald affair and the deal was that the Democrats would lay off Jennifer Fitzgerald if the Republicans laid off Clinton's former mistress, Jennifer Flowers. The deal was trashed when *Star* magazine, a stablemate of the *National Enquirer*, paid Jennifer Flowers a sum said to be not too distant from \$250,000 (£150,000) to tell her story. It has to be said that while Clinton's infidelity being out in the open did not exactly harm the Republicans, they did not go particularly out of their way to exploit it either.

The question remains, however: how did Bush get away with it and why has Clinton been pursued so relentlessly?

Tony Hendra has a theory. He was an editor on the now-defunct American magazine *Spy* and is author of the satirical book, *Born to Run Things: An Utterly Unauthorised Biography of George Bush*.

"I think there's a strong element of class in

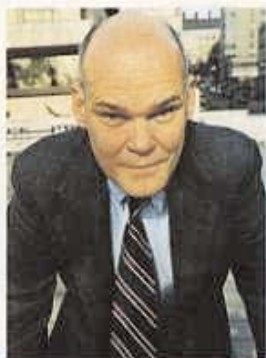
this obsession with Clinton's sex life," he says. "I think there's a real class structure in America, especially between the media and the others that no one will acknowledge. It is particularly prevalent below the Mason-Dixon line [the border between the northern and southern states]."

"The tone of *The New York Times* editorials on this is unbelievably patronising, unbelievably patriarchal. It's like they are talking to some dumb hick who just can't keep his pants up. The lead editorials take a tone that they wouldn't dare take with a president of a more traditional mould and traditional class. Bush was completely a rich kid from the moment he was born."

That is certainly true. While Clinton's father died before he was born and he was brought up by his mother and an aggressive bullying stepfather, Bush's childhood was a model of WASP decorum. His father, Prescott Sheldon Bush, served as senator for Connecticut for 31 years and George grew up as part of the Ivy League aristocracy of the patrician eastern seaboard. He went to Yale, where he was captain of the baseball team, and served in most of the great departments of state before taking on the presidency.

Social alliances were not the only thing protecting Bush. Hendra says: "A light way of coming at it would be to say that no one was interested [in his affair] because she [Fitzgerald] really looked an awful lot like Barbara Bush, so there wasn't an awful lot of salacious mileage to be gotten out of it. It wasn't a floozie or a torch singer or a kid."

"There is this other element in this Clinton thing, which is that she's [Lewinsky] just this innocent young child who somehow got seduced by the boss. Anyone who went to



HUSH HUSH: James Carville (left) brokered a vow of silence over Jennifer Flowers (below) and Fitzgerald



Beverly Hills High is not a child. The idea that Bush's mistress was a mature woman — as I say, she did have some rather unfortunate resemblances to his own wife — meant there was a certain amount of 'fascism' at work.

"There was a perception that it would have to be true love because she was ugly. There were other rumours that it wasn't Bush's first affair. There are other rumours that he had a fling when he was Republican Party chairman too, back in the post-Watergate era. The sort of conclusion that I came to even when I was writing my book was that he was a real insider." Bush, it seems, was careful to pick women who had no reason to blab.

Hendra continues: "He knew everybody and he'd known everybody ever since he was a kid and you just don't do that kind of thing in that class. And that's not the case with Clinton. In their view, Clinton was an outsider, a hick, and he ought to jolly well behave himself and thank his lucky stars he was allowed to be president."

"I do think that there was also a sense that she [Fitzgerald] was one of us, that she had a real career and that it would be destroyed if this came out and that made her case different from Donna Rice and all those floozie kind of incidents."

"The other thing was that, even before she went into the White House, Barbara Bush was really quite a beloved figure and that was certainly true when she was in the White House. She was far more of an asset than anyone realised for quite some time. I certainly did hear people say that it would be terribly cruel to Barbara to spring this. I think people probably thought: 'If this leak could be traced back to us, we're going to get blamed for what we did to Barbara.'"

Mrs Bush was certainly formidable. As Barbara Pierce, she married Bush on January 9, 1945, at the First Presbyterian Church in Rye, New York. Their second son, John Ellis, known to the family as Jeb, once revealed: "Dad was the chief executive officer, but mother was the chief operating officer. We all reported to her. She did a good job of keeping the family intact." Mrs Bush has often stated in interviews, "I married the first man I ever kissed."

Perhaps she knew in her heart of hearts that she wasn't the only recipient of her husband's embraces. But, in those days, there was no Kenneth Starr to take it further. □

