



JAMES A. BAKER, III

Gifted statesman, public servant,
and serious upland huntsman

STORY BY MILES DEMOTT
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At a time in the American democratic experiment when it can be hard to find a statesman, I found one in the unlikeliest of places, walking purposefully through the sage and mesquite of South Texas in search of bobwhite quail. As each covey is found, Jim Baker is first off the wagon, orchestrating an approach to the point and, when it's his turn, shouldering a trusted 28-gauge to honor the dogs and harvest a bird for the dinner table. He leans into each shot and rarely misses. Perhaps it's the Marine Corps marksmanship training from over six decades ago, but it might also stem from a lifetime of hunting. He got his first duck at the tender age of seven and never looked back. The magic, though, is in the orchestration, and Baker imbues the hunt with fellowship and camaraderie, celebrating the importance of each gun's contribution regardless of differences in skill or perspective. More than just being a great host, he is building relationships and fostering a sense of community that will flower over cocktails and supper stories.

"You make a lot of good friends, hunting and fishing," Baker says during a later fireside chat, and I can't help but believe him. He's been an honest broker of political power and influence across decades and across party lines. His is a lost art in our current political climate, which he describes as "toxic, where compromise is a dirty word, and where divisiveness

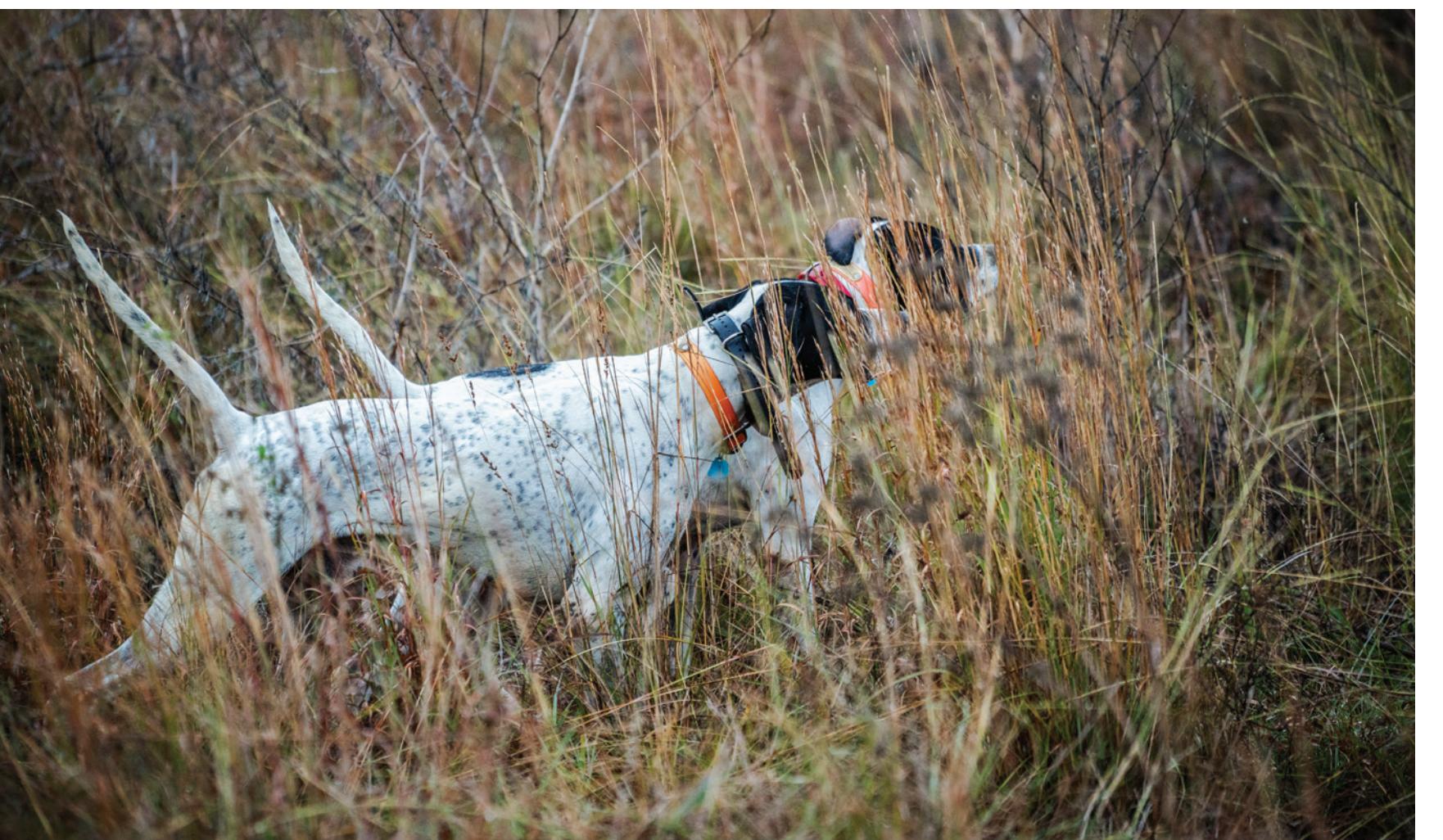
sells and comity does not." It would be easy for him to wax nostalgic and go on about his personal business, and yet Baker remains an active participant in the national conversation into his late 80s, his sharpness no doubt a benefit of a lifetime of active days outdoors and thoughtful conversations around crackling fires.

A Houston native, Jim Baker has spent a good bit of time afield since being, as he puts it, "involuntarily retired from public service" at the close of the George H.W. Bush administration in 1993. That service ran the gamut of the national political spectrum, from Under Secretary of Commerce under President Gerald Ford, to delegate wrangling for Ford, to White House Chief of Staff and Secretary of the Treasury under President Ronald Reagan, to Secretary of State and White House Chief of Staff again under President Bush. Not a bad trip to Washington for a man whose grandfather always told him to "work hard, study, and keep out of politics." That mantra eventually became the title of his autobiography, in which he

MORE THAN JUST PROPERTY

Over the years, James A. Baker, III has shared his coveted sporting haven in South Texas with everyone from close friends to dignitaries across political lines.





writes, "History shapes us. It defines our opportunities. And it challenges us." Baker is quick to affirm the universality of that perspective—that it applies to everyone—during our fireside chat, and that presents an interesting framework through which to consider the lasting relevance of a man whose magic was most often wielded behind the scenes.

THE SHAPE OF A MAN

As is true for most of us, the story of James Addison Baker, III did not start with a slap on the bottom and a wailing intake of oxygen. He obviously descends from a long line of James A. Bakers, and all of those men were lawyers, in the same town, in the same firm. Baker Botts is an old Houston firm with a global reach, and its siren call played in the ears of Jim Baker throughout his life. Like his father before him, Baker was educated at The Hill School and Princeton University, but law

evolved into love between Jim and Susan, whom he described as "a beautiful woman with great common sense, a wonderful spirit, and unwavering faith." After marrying in 1973, they began creating a balanced personal life together in Houston. They combined seven kids and would welcome an eighth four years later. That elusive midlife groove was once again within reach, when a different partner—a tennis partner—led the family to Washington and changed their lives forever.

THE VERY DEFINITION OF OPPORTUNITY

Perhaps Jim Baker's grandfather should've offered a different mantra, something along the lines of "Never underestimate the value of a good doubles partner." Despite his admittedly weak serve, Jim Baker proved to be an extraordinary partner, on and off the court. It was, after all, his doubles partner, George H.W. Bush, who ushered him into politics in early 1970—initially

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school would have to wait until the conflict in Korea—and Baker's service in the Marine Corps—were resolved in 1953. Then, Baker and his new bride Mary Stuart passed through Austin, Texas for three years of law school, before moving back to Houston to face the first of his history's hiccups. A nepotism clause at Baker Botts allowed only one James A. Baker at a time, so the youngest Baker hired on with Andrews, Kurth, Campbell & Bradley, another prestigious Houston firm, both up the road and out of the shadows of the older Bakers. His law practice thrived, his family flowered to include four sons, and Jim Baker found success and happiness.

I suppose if history is to shape a man, its entire course—past, present, and future—should be considered. After 16 years of marriage, Mary Stuart suddenly died of cancer, and Jim Baker had little time to grieve. The past may have been the best years of his life, but his 1970 present included raising four boys and grappling with an increasing restlessness with his law practice. Just when he should have been settling into the comfortable grooves of midlife, Baker's world was turned upside down. Forces were conspiring to shape his professional future, if only he could bring his personal life back into balance.

Susan Winston had been a close friend of Mary Stuart's, but her divorce brought a now single parent of three back to the dating scene at about the same time as Baker. Their interests aligned, their kids knew each other, and friendship naturally

as a distraction from his grief and restlessness—to help with his bid for the US Senate. That was problematic for a couple of reasons. First, Baker didn't know anything about politics, having lived his adult life in accordance with his grandfather's assertion that it should be avoided. History would reveal him, though, to be a fairly quick study. Secondly, Baker was a Democrat, along with most other conservatives across the South. Bush was running as a Republican in a state still suspicious of that party's motivations almost a century after Reconstruction. Nevertheless, Baker switched parties and entered the fray.

Bush's unsuccessful 1970 Senate run was followed by other losses for Baker, including Ford's 1976 presidential bid, his own 1978 try for the attorney general's office in Texas, and even Bush's primary battle with Reagan in 1980. It was an educative decade for Baker, to say the least, but he cultivated a taste for the competition and gamesmanship of politics, even if he only had the scars to show for it. Then, as it so often does for those in the path of progress, opportunity knocked again, and the Reagan/Bush years offered Baker a

IN THE SHADE OF LEGACY

Jim Baker and Tom Brokaw rarely miss a bird, or an opportunity to discuss politics and big ideas along largely parallel career paths that have witnessed so much of recent American history.



chance to step outside his personal history and shape a future that informs our national journey today.

THE CHALLENGE OF HISTORY: LEGACY

If it shapes us and defines our opportunities, then history's leading role is in challenging us to both live into our individual potential and to leave the human experience better for our time within it. Jim Baker has a complicated relationship with legacy, but he likes the challenge. The history that shaped him, the string of James A. Bakers that came before him, left a trail of fairly significant breadcrumbs to follow. In his words, the Bakers have always been "reasonably well-to-do, with each generation building on the success of the previous." They've been lawyers and investors, tycoons, and benefactors, and the road ahead might well be seen as all but paved with gold. But prominence and extraordinary achievement cast a shadow across generations. In 1900, Baker's grandfather, "Captain" James A. Baker, solved the famous New York mystery behind the murder of William Marsh Rice, and secured that fortune for the creation and preservation of Rice University, as intended by the original will of the deceased. If you live in Houston, and your name is Baker, how do you top that? Along comes the grandson, whose achievements in government are legion, cementing the epic stature of the James A. Baker line for all, unless you're the next in line. Admittedly, the baggage is not all bad, but it's not all good, either. Again, a complicated relationship with legacy.

Among the many parts of Baker's legacy is the institute that bears his name on the Rice University campus. A top-rated think tank that includes global energy policy research, the James A. Baker, III Institute for Public Policy has flourished beyond anyone's imagination. It is, in one sense, a just reward for Baker's many years in the political trenches because, in his words, "Politics is the way someone achieves the right to set policy." As a bridge between the world of ideas and the world of action, the Institute also embodies a central characteristic of Baker's political philosophy. No fan of labels, Baker calls himself a principled pragmatist, and his gift was and remains finding common ground, without sacrificing your principles or going over the cliff with your flag held high.

To understand this concept more completely, and in upland terms, consider Baker's perspective on conservation. He's an avid hunter, of birds and big game, and he'd rather be waist deep in a Wyoming trout stream than almost anywhere in the world. "If you love the outdoors," he says, as rain falls steadily outside and another log is tossed on the fire, "and you love to hunt and fish, then you have to be actively engaged to keep it."

SEÑOR DOBLE

(Above left) This plaque, given by Baker's ranch manager Lolo to Bush #41, was a gift after successfully completing a double while hunting at the property in South Texas.

All sides of the conservation debate are passionate, and the true path forward is neither unrestricted hunting nor the abolition of hunting altogether. Whatever the future holds, Baker hopes that it will honor the primal history man has with hunting, that it will be predicated on the principles of fair chase, and will foster the cultivation of fellowship and friendship in ways that nothing else does or can.

Not that his principled pragmatism doesn't have an edge, though. Tom Brokaw—a member of our hunting party who has been friends with Baker for nearly 50 years—recalled the description of the incoming Secretary of State Baker that he gave to a curious Bibi Netanyahu at the beginning of the George H.W. Bush administration. "Jim Baker," he said, "is a great turkey hunter." Netanyahu needed clarification, so Brokaw continued. "He gets up at 4:00 am, covers himself from head to toe in camouflage, including face paint, and goes into the woods. He sits against a tree for hours, without a twitch, despite the snakes and the mosquitoes and the bugs, and he calls patiently, coaxing the big gobbler to within 25 yards of his tree. And just when he gets the bird right where he wants it, he blows its head off."

Patience has, indeed, been a hallmark of Baker's practice of politics and diplomacy, outpaced only by his decisiveness and clarity of purpose. In the years that have followed his "involuntary retirement from public service," his interest and sense of duty have never waned. He has chaired commissions with leaders from across political divides, directed a legal battle to secure an Electoral College victory by the slimmest of margins, and given his all to perpetuate a growing group of scholars who dive deep into global energy and political issues, without partisan limitations or expectations, to light the path forward. A recurring theme in Baker's perspective is, "We should be a global force for good and not abdicate our leadership role," and he does his part to foster that spirit wherever it might take root. For him, leadership is not the purview of a particular social class or political ideology. Leadership is simply knowing what to do and doing it, the best of the world of ideas executed thoughtfully by the world of action.

These days, with our political echo chambers and confirmation bias, it can be difficult to imagine a time when our democracy thrived on both conversation and compromise. Baker saw the possibilities and, more significantly, the need to move things forward, and he will be long remembered as one of the last great statesmen of our national experiment with democracy. As will the many others who have spent time with him through the years, I will recall my time afield with Jim Baker for the sharpness of his wit and his argument, the gleam in his eye when the dogs hit the ground, and the heartiness of his laughter when the fire is lit and the stories are told. Embodied in him is the humility, the grace, and the enthusiasm of a man shaped by history, a man who seized uncommon opportunities, and a man who challenged himself and others to leave it better than he found it. 