

# catching DIANE ATWOOD health

## **Conversations About Aging**

**Bill Green, 65**

**June 17, 2019**

**Diane:** If you live in Maine you should instantly recognize my guest on this episode of Conversations About Aging. He's been in the television business for more than 40 years. He began his career behind the scenes as a cameraman and in 1975 made his onair debut on WLBZ in Bangor as a sportscaster. In 1981 he moved to Portland to become the weekend sportscaster for WCSH. Today, he produces and hosts the wildly popular Bill Green's Maine. I visited Bill at his home recently. In between sips of tea — that's right, he's a heavy tea drinker — he talked about his upbringing, his family, his career, and his plans for the future.

**Diane:** when I first met you, you had red hair.

**Bill:** How about that.

**Diane:** I don't remember seeing it getting like suddenly turn white.

**Bill:** They say that when I got married I walked in with red hair and walked down, back down the aisle with graying temples and Pam's always been concerned that I haven't liked marriage because as soon as I got married at 32, I went white and a, I'm a marriage has been the best thing for me and um, uh, but we always, we sometimes joke about that but I went, I went white early.

**Diane:** Maybe she was a calming influence?

**Bill:** That's what it was, it calmed me down and all the color came out of my hair.

**Diane:** When were you born?

**Bill:** September 2nd, 1953. I'm 65 years old.

**Diane:** Where you from? Bangor?

**Bill:** Yep, Bangor native Maine native all the way. Um, my dad was a railroad brakeman, so kind of a blue collar

family. And you know, Dad went to work in like what you used to call a frock? Blue Jeans and a, not blue jeans, but a railroad outfit with the coveralls and the blue jacket, dungaree jacket and, and, you know, worked hard, union man, had five kids.

**Diane:** Where were you?

**Bill:** I was four. The only interesting thing about me, my mother was from England, born in England and immigrated as a 10 year old and she kind of lost all of her Englishness except I'm sitting here drinking tea tonight with you, Diane.

**Diane:** I was surprised when you offered me tea.

**Bill:** Yeah, that's my drink. I still drink a minuscule amount of alcohol, but um, my favorite drink is tea.

**Diane:** Did you sit down at four in the afternoon and have tea with your mother?

**Bill:** We weren't formal people like that, but we drank, I drank tea as a little boy, like other kids drank hot chocolate a lot of times. So just a little different. I'll show you the picture of her coming through Ellis Island. May I? Let's do

it. I can bring it to you, but they came over on a boat called the Cedric and my grandfather came over first sponsored by his brother. He came over, worked for a year and sent for the family. And here we are and in the background you can vaguely see the buildings of Ellis island. That's my grandmother holding uncle Tom. That's my mom, Aunt Eva Aunt Winnie. I can't see the picture very well. And there were three more born here.

**Diane:** That's a beautiful picture.

**Bill:** A wonderful thing to have isn't it? And they're with people they don't know, some were Polish. There's about 15 people in the picture and um, you know, just posed on the dock at Ellis island.

**Diane:** What was their last name?

**Bill:** Wharton w-h-a-r-t-o-n, like the school of business. But you know, no, but the interesting thing about that family is, uh, the younger you were, the more successful you were. The only one of those siblings living is my Uncle buck. And he became a doctor and you know, the older ones, you know, my mother get through high school and worked at, you know, if you've ever seen me late at night

and there's a clock factory where they use like radium on the dials. She worked in that factory making those clocks.

**Diane:** And she didn't get ...

**Bill:** No, lived to be 86. And um, and then she joined the WACS during World War II and that's how she met my father.

**Diane:** What was he?

**Bill:** An Army guy, you know, just, uh, you know, he was an engineer, but that means he drove a truck.

**Diane:** When you were growing up and your dad worked on the railroad and your mom basically was at home most of the time?

**Bill:** All the time. My Mother didn't ever drive.

**Diane:** I can't imagine how someone doesn't ever drive.

**Bill:** We walked down to the corner and got on the bus, go shopping. Or my mother did not drive.

**Diane:** Not even when she got older?

**Bill:** No, almost did. And you know, there was a dynamic between my mother and my father that I think played into that. But yeah, she should

**Diane:** They had their roles?

**Bill:** Yeah. Yeah. My Dad, my dad was a funny guy. He was a good guy. Um, you know, hard drinking, hard playing, hardworking.

**Diane:** Green. What's that?

**Bill:** Is that Irish? I guess. But you know, we've done the genealogy now and it's northern European, French, a lot of French in me that. I didn't know about until we did genealogy.

**Bill:** Because I was something of a mother's boy, I guess, I mean, I love sports and things. I think of myself as English an English American. There aren't many of us. You never meet anybody who says they're English American. But I think of my heritage is English, although physiologically it's, it's more French. I think, Irish.

**Diane:** Did you think when you were a kid you might want to follow in your dad's footsteps?

**Bill:** No, never. No. I was going to be a college guy. Uh, I didn't know how I was going to do it. Didn't have, I didn't have any mentoring. My mother was um, you know, um, no, also she was old. First of all, she had me when she was 39, she had my younger sister when she was 44, which in 1959 you have a child at 44 was pretty old. And um, but you know, she was kind of old school and you know, the other mothers were younger and kind of hipper and stuff. And my mother was kind of old fashioned and she made us read like banshee. She made us sing. She, you know, made us wash our faces. And comb our hair and marched us off to church, sing in the choir, you know, and you know, that's what she did.

**Diane:** And so the obvious question is why did you become a sportscaster to begin with?

**Bill:** I love sports. I played a lot as a kid. I played every day and you know, I, I was actually decent at baseball. I played football, too and I just played whatever was available at the park. And you know, I was pretty good baseball player. Captain of the high school team would have loved to go on and played in college, probably at

the division three level. But you know, I didn't have any way of going to college. My father actually said to me, this is interesting cause I, I don't want to play my dad as a bad guy, but he said, you're not getting any money for college. So I knew I was going to have to work my way through college.

**Diane:** So you can't do sports and work, too?

**Bill:** Well I, I could, I could see it now, but I had no idea how to do it. And I applied for college the last day you could. I filled out an application to the University of Maine, which was 10 miles up the road and got rejected. I mean like I sent it on Wednesday and got the letter on the next Tuesday or something.

I wasn't a very good student. I'm applying the last day. I'm sure they were almost full and here comes this guy with a very bad essay and uh, you know, scrawling on it, you know what I mean?

So I went to night school for two and a half years and to do that, I finished my freshman year of college. It took me two and a half years to do 30 academic hours. So.

**Diane:** You're a hard worker.

**Bill:** I was a hard worker. I worked 48 hours a week during that time, starting in March of 72, which was my first freshman year and I worked 40 hours a week all the time that I went through college,

**Diane:** Why was it so important to you to go to college?

**Bill:** I just, I don't know, that's what I saw myself doing. I didn't see myself and we'd go out, my, my brother, who didn't go to college was really good with cars and we'd go out and lean on the hood of a Studebaker Hawk and I couldn't identify any of it. You know, I'd lean in there and kinda, you know, and it's just, you know, well, why am I leaning in this car? You know.

**Diane:** Because you wanted to make your brother happy.

**Bill:** Sure, oh no, absolutely. But I, you know, I just had, I had no mechanical aptitude. I still don't.

**Diane:** But he probably can't throw a baseball.

**Bill:** That's right. See? So, no, I, um, I just could not, you know, I just couldn't do mechanical things and I was, and I was right about that. My, uh, high school guidance

counselor and I had one meeting with the guy, he called me in, what are you gonna do? Thought I'd go to college and he said, you should go to EMVTI. Eastern Maine Vocational Technical Institute. Maybe be a mechanic.

And I just laughed and said thank you very much and left and you know, and really I, you know, I didn't have a mentor and I would recommend that to, I don't know if any young people listen to conversations on aging, but I've recommended to my kids get mentors.

**Diane:** Well, one of the questions that I like to ask people is if there's anybody in their life when they were younger, that was a role model for them. Sounds like there really wasn't.

**Bill:** I had role models, but they were only people I looked up to, I think, you know, not many people, people certainly help you along the way and I certainly had plenty of that.

**Diane:** So how would you describe a mentor?

**Bill:** Maybe somebody who you talk with about your ambitions and your dreams and helps you plan, develop a plan to get there.

**Bill:** You know what, I did have mentors in the TV business. I mean, you know.

**Diane:** Well, I wanted to ask about that because you love sports and you must've recognized early on that had this oratory gift.

**Bill:** I could sling it. Yeah. And there's one place my father comes up big. I think my father was a better, one of the best storytellers I've ever heard. You know, he was, you know, kind of a beer drinking, tell a story guy, but he was a funny guy and a smart guy and a guy that had no opportunity in his life, you know, born poor into the depression, the CCC's WPA. But I admire him greatly because we all kind of have a trick. You know what I mean?

**Diane:** You learned the art of storytelling.

**Bill:** I did.

**Diane:** So you, at this point of your life, a few years have gone by now, you probably can't go anywhere without people wanting to talk about a story you've written.

**Bill:** Yep. It's amazing really. And that's one thing, um, as I've kind of, I think I'm a better person now than I than I've ever been because I was maybe a pretty rotten person at times. No, I don't really feel that way. But you know what I mean. But part of the reason that I've, that I've had some happiness or success in my life is every single day five people tell me how much they liked my show. I love you. I like your show. Strangers come up, shake your hand. Think of that kind of positive reinforcement that I'm getting and have been getting. And you got, but you know, I mean, it's amazing. And after a while you just think hey stop being anything but nice to people and you know, enjoy this trip.

**Diane:** After several years of reporting on sports, Bill realized that there were other stories he'd like to tell.

**Bill:** I had kind of an epiphany. I was with Pam and we were at one of her business conventions and I was just being the spouse and we're having dinner with people from Chicago, New York and Washington DC. And where are you from? You know? Oh, from Maine. And they were like Maine, you know, and they're kind of looking down their noses. But as the conversation went on, the quality of life in Maine was higher than in those cities. And it became evident to me that night that I'm going to start bragging

about Maine. You know, it was in 1990 I was 37 I was a weekend sportscaster, not going anywhere for me really. It's a nice life. But you know, and so I started doing features about Maine and eventually I got off of weekends, did My Hometown, started telling these stories. And then when the Thompson family sold us to Gannett, Gannett wanted to look local and I was expendable so they could put me on the show and if it went, they told me it would go three to five years and we don't know what will happen on the other end, you know, so it was a little bit of a risk, but I thought, you know, see what happens. And it went really well.

**Diane:** And it still is.

**Bill:** Still is. How about that? 20 years later.

**Diane:** You told me 65, Do you have what do they call it, a succession plan?

**Bill:** Yes, I do. And I can't quite tell you yet, but um, you know, I'm, I'm planning a way out and part of it is I want to wrap it up and I want to show, I want to do that on a number of levels. Um, some of it is just the mathematics of my age.

**Bill:** I'd like to spend more time with Pam. I'd like to travel more. I, I work too many hours. I'm not an efficient worker.

**Bill:** I'd like to wrap up my career in such a way that I can show people that you can, you know, have a career and walk away from it. Not walk away from it, but you know what I mean?

**Diane:** Well, could you produce, continue to produce stories but in your own? Well you do it in your own way ..

**Bill:** Yes, yes. They would give me a deal where I'd work a per diem and work on special projects. And so, uh, that would be fun. And like, let's say I retired now, which I'm not doing, but, uh, next year, uh, is a Maine turns 200, the Olympics, we do that Olympic zone show, you know, bike maine thing that we do. And um, Patrick Dempsey thing, I could do a few of those and still get my puss on TV, you know.

**Diane:** It sounds like you still want to have your...

**Bill:** Yeah, I do. Because I work so hard building this brand.

Being Bill Green and then no longer being Bill Green.  
What's that going to be like? I gotta remember, I'm still Bill Green when I'm not Bill green. And one thing that being on TV does is it gives you power, especially if you're doing what I'm doing because everybody wants to be on my show because it's all, you know, I'm going to get on Bill Green's Maine, he's going to talk about me, talk well of me for four minutes, you know,.

**Diane:** Does it feel good?

**Bill:** Right. Nobody's afraid of me. So, um, you know, and I'll lose that power. So I'm sure that, you know, things will change a little bit.

**Diane:**

But why is it important to you to have that.

**Bill:** A, it's nice. B, when you retire, you know, you start on that gradual downhill at the bottom of which stands an open grave, wrote somebody Grimes of Iowa to William Pitt Fessenden, you know what I mean? I mean, you know, somebody said one time it struck me, uh, after retirement there's only one big event, you know, and what, you know, so, you know, there's that fear of going into the next phase of my life.

**Diane:** And becoming invisible?

**Bill:** Uh, I don't know. Um, uh, maybe, maybe powerless.

**Diane:** I think I do understand what you mean.

**Bill:** You know what? I like the grind. I like gas station pizza. I like the lousy coffee and I know where to get good coffee on the road. I would never make fun of a Maine small town, but I get my coffee as close as I can to town because sometimes when you're 50 miles from a town that, you know, of 5,000, the coffee you can get pretty tough. You know what I mean?

**Diane:** Now that you are older, you can feel changes in how you think about your life and how you move through it physically, but do you find that people treat you differently?

**Bill:** Oh yeah.

**Diane:** How?

**Bill:** Well, I'm older. They call me Mr. Green. They call me sir. A lot of people show signs of respect, which I certainly never got as a young man.

sometimes, just sometimes I feel that old people are disrespected. Like there's a feeling that I'm going to be slow or there's a feeling that I'm going to be something that I may or may not be, you know,

**Diane:** Making assumptions about you?

**Bill:** About age. Um, you know, because I don't mind, I like being old, like, I have enough money, I can pay my bills. I know how a mortgage works. I know. How are, um, the stock market works.

I've got to talk a little bit about body's age. Uh, one thing that's happening with my show is like I ran five marathons. I couldn't run a five k today. You know, I could walk it, but I couldn't, I couldn't run it. So like I did an ice climbing story this winter. It was a, a kid whose father was a guide who I know very well, is starting a guide service. So I thought I'll go climb some ice with them. I got ropes and picks and you know, crampons. When I was 30 I would have run up the piece of ice that we are on, you know, and, and he'd go, good job Bill, You know, it wasn't, it was this 65 year

old guy who weighs 30 pounds more than he weighed 30 years ago, you know, going up a piece of ice and I can do it, but I'm thinking, who wants to watch this? You know, you know the story. It isn't even, you know, I built the fire while Jim wrestled the alligator. It's can the old guy make it? And I think, you know, it's so it's changed the beat a little bit.

**Diane:** And it becomes more of a story about you if everybody's watching and think you're going to fall over backwards.

**Bill:** First, look at the size of his butt and two, can he make it right.

**Diane:** You said you like getting older, you talked about there are things you appreciate about being older cause you're, you're smarter.

**Bill:** Yup. I'm, I'm more in control of my life, you know. Um, I was a wild man in my twenties, you know, and, and, you know, until the point of embarrassment, I'm, I'm kind of more in control of that kind of thing. Um, I feel my life started when I turned 30.

**Bill:** I joke that in every locker room that I was ever in, nobody ever said meet a good girl settle down and put a lot into it and you'll be rewarded tenfold.

**Diane:** And that's what happened.

**Bill:** But that's what you should do. You know? It's been good for me.

**Diane:** I'm glad and you had two beautiful children.

**Bill:** Yeah. Can't believe it.

**Diane:** And they're both married now.

**Bill:** Both married, no grandkids. Come on.

**Diane:** What's it like to just be the two of you?

**Bill:** It's really good. Um, because when all is settled down, all's said and done and everything's settled, you know, at the end of the day, I really enjoy conversations with Pam every single day.

**Diane:** What makes it a good day for you?

**Bill:** I don't know. I'm very blessed, my wife, my family. I have a lot to do. I have a lot of fun things to do. My job is good. I meet interesting people. Uh, Diane Atwood came to my house to interview me about aging. I mean, you know, how great is that, you know, it's very, I have a very interesting life.

**Diane:** Your legacy?

**Bill:** You know what? I don't know how I feel. Well, I'm just going to say it. I asked for an intern and we got a great young man who's a library sciences intern and we've at least archived all the Bill Green's Maine so that, there'll be digital, they're going to go to the Maine State Archives. There's some other stuff I'd like to get done in the next, you know, whatever. And it's going to be, and just so there'll be a record of what I did because I, I want people to know that I lived.

**Diane:** I'm just trying to picture you as an old codger.

**Bill:** I want to be a cute little guy who's well dressed, you know, you know those guys that are kind of dapper and very polite and kind of small. You know, I got to lose some weight, but you know, I want to be one of those guys that, you know, seems like a nice guy.

**Diane:** You gonna wear a bow tie?

**Bill:** No, not a bow tie guy. Got one now but I'm not a bow tie guy.

**Diane:** A little hat?

**Bill:** Nah, I'm not a hat guy, either.

**Diane:** You're just Bill Green.

**Bill:** Just Bill Green.

**Diane:** You've been listening to Conversations About Aging, a Catching Health podcast. I'm Diane Atwood. To listen to other conversations about aging and to read my blog posts on health and wellness visit [CatchingHealth.com](http://CatchingHealth.com).

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And a thank you to Tom Meuser for his support. He's Director of the Center for Excellence in Aging and Health at the University of New England.