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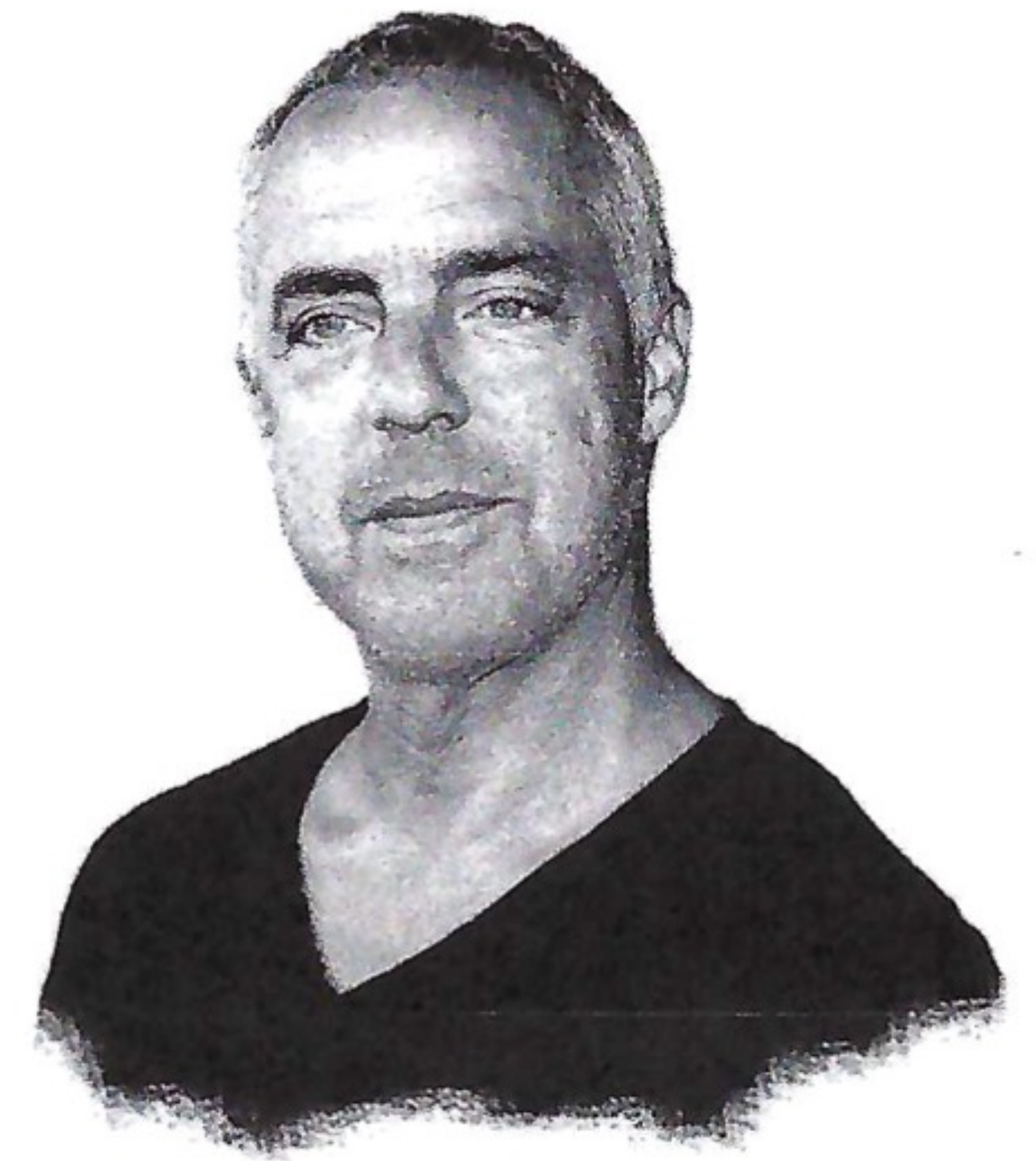
hen we talked to actor Titus Welliver for the October 2021 issue of *Down East*, the 59-year-old actor only had a little to say about his film and TV work, which includes roles in shows like *Lost* and *Deadwood* and, most recently, as the titular detective on Amazon Prime Video's *Bosch*. Instead, Welliver seemed delighted to tell tales from the childhood summers he spent in and around Lincolnville, where his father, the artist Neil Welliver, visited in the '60s and lived from 1970 until his death in 2005.

Though Welliver lives and works in Los Angeles (and has a place in Connecticut), he continues to visit family and friends in Maine. For our back page "My Favorite Place" item, he talked about some of the midcoast spots that are most meaningful to him. But he had plenty more to say about his and his family's relationship to the Pine Tree State. Below, some excerpts from a wide-ranging conversation, edited and condensed for brevity and clarity.

On Transitioning From the City to Rural Maine Summers

I really had the best of both worlds, living in New Haven, Philadelphia, and New York, but the bulk of my summers were spent in Maine, and then eventually my dad moved up there permanently. I did a little time in the public school system in Hope and Lincolnville. I did fourth grade at Hope Elementary. I know it's different now, but I can remember the textbooks being so old — in 1972, there was one textbook I found that said, "Man hopes to someday go to the moon," and thinking, "Oh Jesus." These kids are listening to the Osmond Brothers, and I was like no, the Osmond Brothers are weak. The Jackson Five is where it's at.

It was really, for me, a transition from being an inner-city kid, which I loved and embraced — but the '60s were tough in cities, they weren't necessarily safe. I had a bike stolen when I was eight years old, and a kid put a razor to my throat. So Maine was something we looked forward to, and it was an environment in which my father flourished, because he was an animal part of nature. He knew every single plant and animal. Being



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a guy who grew up in rural Pennsylvania, he was more at home in Maine than he was in the city, although he was an academic and an artist. So that was a thing we looked forward to.

My earliest Maine memories start at about two years old at McLaughlins Lobster Pound down at Lincolnville Beach. With Rick McLaughlin, who owns the takeout place. He was my classmate and one of my best friends. The local kids that I hung out with in the summertime, I spent my summers with them canoeing and fishing and hunting. And we hunted year round, not in hunting season. My friends and their families relied on that. If everybody got a deer, then it was a good year. The juxtaposition of that and being a city kid where you went to the supermarket and got your hamburger was an incredible experience.

It's a gazillion years later, and growing up and all doing very different things in life, but those bonds that I have with those guys in Lincolnville are really, really tight. When I go back to Maine, I make a beeline for the places and people that I know from my childhood and teen years. Those connections have never lapsed, and I think that speaks volumes about the place.

On Work and Play

We were kind of feral in a way. I don't remember wearing all that much clothing. Cutoff shorts. I never wore shoes unless we had to go into a restaurant. Shoes were always in the car. The bottoms of my feet were like moccasins. So we were kind of filthy, covered with mosquito bites and blackfly bites, blood rivulets on your legs. Dark tan, baked by the sun. The whole day consisted of rolling out of bed and eating and swimming in Pitcher Pond or Megunticook Lake or rolling down to Bayside.

So the summers consisted of being kind of feral and running around in the woods, riding on horses and mini-bikes, raking blueberries. That was backbreaking work. I used to rake fields out in Hope, and that was how you made your walking-around money. Or you'd want to get on a crew raking clams or something like that.

I had a place down the road from my dad that I lived in during the summer since I was 14 years old — my father declared that I was old enough to manage on my own. Which meant I rode a motorcycle and drove a car illegally, in and out of Camden and Lincolnville. Fortunately, I never got caught. And I'd work for him as a lumberjack during the summertime. I would go and cut areas for my dad, and he would allow me to take whatever there was as firewood. I'd cut that and lay it on a flatbed in bundles, then I'd drive into places like Augusta and sell it to hardware stores and convenience marts that wanted to sell camp wood. That was a great enterprise, and it meant I didn't have to rake berries anymore, I could make some serious money. And then I worked on lobsterboats.

I mean, a lot of my friends in the city were shooting out to Long Island and the Hamptons in the summer then, and I was like, no man, my summer is in Maine. That's where I roam.

On Musical Memories

There was a guy named Phil McBryan, and he and my father had a bluegrass band, and they used to play on the radio in Rockland on the weekends. My dad was quite a good banjo player.

And then there was a thing on Saturday nights, you had to drive up to Bangor, and there was the local Bangor television station that was not far from where the big auditorium was, and it was called Frankenstein's Country Jamboree. It was 11 o'clock at night, and it was all local people, and it was open mic, and it was broadcast on television. You had really good musicians and you had people who might have just come in from Togus or Augusta. My older brother and I used to go from the time I was about 12 years old and play Grateful Dead tunes. Then, it was purchased by this guy named Dick Stacey who owned a fuel mart and used to have these hilarious commercials on TV — you know, low budget — and he sponsored it, so it went from being Frankenstein's Country Jamboree to being Dick Stacey's Country Jamboree.

I'm telling you man, to be of that generation and to have had that, it was an enormous gift for me.

On the Midcoast as an Artist Enclave

All of the musculature of the art world was in Maine in the summer: Alex Katz, Louis Dodd, Fairfield Porter, my father, Yvonne Jacquette. Red Grooms would come and rent a place. Charlie Duback, Rudy Burckhardt, the sculptor Blackie Langlais. Going to Blackie Langlais's house as a kid was like going to Disneyland. When we got invited to go to dinner at Blackie's house, it was phenomenal, it was an adventure beyond belief. There were always parties on the weekends. Either Rudy had a party or my parents or Alex and Ada Katz.

That whole group of people — Red Grooms, Alex Katz, Yvonne Jacquette, Lois Dodd, they're still living — I didn't really grasp their sort of fame. I know that sounds terrible, but I mean, who my dad was and who these people all were, I didn't get it until I was a bit older. They were all kind of like extended family, aunties and uncles who made art, just like my dad did. And the art openings that happened up at Maine Coast Artists were always fun, because they were a little less fussy and fancy than the ones in New York.

On His Own Art

My own work as a painter emerged many years after having a career as an actor. It was something that seemed natural. If you grow up in a house with a plumber or a fine carpenter, chances are good that's what you'll end up doing, so for me, it seemed like a natural progression. But after a year or so of art school, I just thought it wasn't really. I had always acted in high school, and I was very much drawn to and completely magnetized by that.

Then I went through a period in my career as an actor — I don't want to say it was a midlife crisis, but maybe a stop-and-be-analytical moment. I think those epiphanies are important. I would never want to be the guy who gets to the end and goes, ah shit, there was that one thing I wanted to do. So I went back to painting. I show my work, and it's in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, they have my prints there. I'm sorry

that my dad and my mother didn't live to see that. I know they'd be very proud. I had ostensibly stepped away from it, and my both of my parents were always saying, you could paint again. So I do, and I'm happy.

On His Father, Generosity, and Community

When my father moved there, it was still very participatory local government. Very welcoming of summer people, but when they started getting involved with year-round people, there was a wariness. And my dad was kind of a bull who played around his own china shop. He looked around at what was going on with infrastructure in the town of Lincolnton, with the education system, and he came in and said, "I'm going to be on the planning board." So my dad would get in there and go toe-to-toe with some of these guys who were more kind of status quo and weren't necessarily interested in making programs people could benefit from.

Coming from the city, I had seen poverty. We had ghettos in Philadelphia and New Haven, certainly in New York City. But I had never been exposed to rural poverty, and it was a whole different animal. It was eye-opening to me. And because my father came from very humble means, he looked after people, he did things to help out the little guy. My old man went in there and kind of went, "You need programs here for kids who come to school and don't have any food. You need hot lunch programs." He got in there and made a lot of noise.

He would drive around and there'd be a falling-down barn where the structure was still good. He'd go to the farmer and say, "I'd buy that building off of you." They'd go, "Jesus, what do you want that for?" He'd say, "Well, the timbers are all good, the structure's good." They'd ask, "What would you give me for it?" and my dad would say, "What do you think it's worth?" And then he'd always pay way more than it was worth. And I would say to my dad, "Dad, you just overpaid," and he'd go, "He needs the money more than I do."

That's who he was as a person. Was he a hard man? Terribly hard. Would I even say he was even emotionally abusive? A very hard man to be the child of? A hundred percent. Was he a man who was filled with a tremendous capacity to love his children? Absolutely. Did he care about his fellow man? More than most men I've known. He extended himself and always made sure that people didn't go without.

He had a massive garden. Grew his own food and was very proud of it, but he grew more than enough. So people would come up there, he'd call them up on the phone and say, hey, my tomatoes are in, my cauliflower's in. And they would just come and get food. And they would do the same thing: sometimes an ancient old lady would drive up in a pickup truck and kind of wobble out of the truck, and then she'd come with a massive pile of wildflowers from her garden, wrapped in newspaper, and give them to my dad. It was a whole thing. I hate the term "old school," but it was old school. People looked after each other.

On The Relationship Between Locals and Summer People

It was not an us-them thing. Here's a testament to that. In 1975, my father's house burnt to the ground with everything he'd ever owned, including Picasso and de Kooning drawings, things of his, things that were irreplaceable. The house just went. It was a short circuit in the freezer, the house was a million years old, and it went up and was gone. The fire was so hot, I found an old tin of marbles in the ashes in the foundation of the house, and the marbles were melted.

My uncle Taylor Mudge owned the farmhouse at the end of the road, so we went there the next morning. And people started coming, cars were lined up down the end of the road, with casseroles, with bags of groceries, with bags of clothing for my siblings and myself. There were people there who brought things who didn't have a pot to piss in, but they came, and I'll tell you man, you can't see my face, but I have tears in my eyes telling you this. I have never been so profoundly moved, and in that moment I went, oh, they don't see me anymore as someone from away. They see us as an integral part of this community. And I was blown away by it, as was my father.

[Read more about Titus Welliver's Maine summers](#)