



**All the Best Podcast**  
**Episode 29: "In the Arena"**  
*Featuring Texas Land Commissioner and Grandson George P. Bush*

George: September 18th, 1982 Dear P, I've been thinking a lot about this summer. I had a very good time. It was fun playing with twins. It was fun going out in the Fidelity. But, P, I've been thinking about it a lot. The most fun was the big rock boat, climbing out on it, watching you and Noelle playing on it. Near the end of the summer when the moon was full and the tides were higher, and there was that special day at high tide when it almost seemed like the boat was real. The most fun was that rock boat. I loved it when I was on it, and I liked it, too, when I looked out my window and saw you guys playing on it. Don't ask me why this was the most fun. Maybe it's because just at that moment, I turned a corner of my life. I could see down the road with no fear and I suddenly had great happiness because I felt that in 50 years or so, you'd be out there on that rock boat, loving the ocean as I do, surrounded by family, aching a little bit when it gets cold. I can't wait till next summer. Love, Gampy

President Bush: In the first place, I believe that character is a part of being president.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best," the official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best."

We're Mountaineers, volunteers.  
We're the tide that rolls, we're Seminoles.  
Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

President Bush: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, "Write your mother, serve your country." And he said, "Tell the truth." And I've tried to do that in public life all though it.

And we're one big country nation, that's right.

Barbara: You are a human being first and those human connections with children, with friends, are the most important investment you will ever make.

President Bush: We stand the night before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, this is "All the Best."

Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

Sam: Much like my grandparents, my cousin, George P. Bush, has dedicated his life to public service. He has served as a public school teacher, an officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve, and now, as the 28th Land Commissioner in the Texas General Land Office. As the land commissioner, George has led the state housing-related recovery efforts following Hurricane Harvey in 2017, helping more than 60,000 victims rebuild their homes. In his private life, George is also committed to helping others, by co-chairing a \$30-million capital campaign for Big Brothers Big Sisters in North Texas, and by serving as the co-chairman of the Dallas/Fort Worth Celebration of Reading. We're so lucky to have my cousin, George P. Bush, with us here today on "All the Best." Welcome, George.

George: Good to be with you.

Sam: George, I'd like to start with this. Gampy once said of his father, Prescott, our great grandfather, that service was his creed. Prescott Bush had been the town moderator in Connecticut, a U.S. senator, and led a number of charities and non-profit groups. So starting with Prescott, and then certainly our Gampy, you could say that service in all of its forms, has become an unspoken core value in our family. Yet it's not something that anyone really has to talk about or even encourage. Why do you think that is? Who is embedded in our DNA, whether it was our great-grandfather, Prescott Bush, or his wife, also known as Dodie Bush? She instilled in all of us the timeless virtue of service to others, that we're truly blessed and fortunate to have the lives that we have in the short period of time on this great Earth, that we actually use some of that to be productive towards meaningful ends. And whether it was my grandfather or now, our generation, a lot of us are defining that in ways outside of politics, in ways in which we can serve others, particularly during this pandemic, finding small ways to be enriching to the lives of others, whether it's raising our kids

and finishing their academic year or investing in a local business as they try to make it during a difficult time. Well, George, I wanna go back to your college days. You played baseball at Rice University for the Owls fabled and very successful coach, Wayne Graham. In fact, I believe you walked-on as a freshman. What was that like? Did you have dreams of the major leagues at that time?

George: When I walked-on at Rice, that was my passion, my calling. And Wayne Graham, those of you who may not know, was a pitching coach and batting practice coach for over 20 years for the Houston Astros, and then Rice University recruited him. His first year was my first year and he brought a very disciplined approach to baseball, which I still incorporate in my daily life. We kept really early in getting after the days as soon as possible but he was a great leader and provided some leadership that eventually led Rice to, I think, three College World Series during his time.

Sam: So George, you also had some teammates who made the jump to the big leagues. I know Gampy and Ganny taught us not to be name-droppers, but I would love it if you could share some of those big leaguers with whom you played.

George: So in high school, as you may know in South Florida, baseball really is a religion for a lot of folks. And I happened to go to a competitive high school with Alex Rodriguez. And Alex Rodriguez, at the time, was already being marketed as a future, not only pro player but an All-Star. And on his team, they had, eventually, on the starting nine, they had five eventual major leaguers. They were the number one ranked high school team at that time, just incredible talent. We actually came within one run of tying them after a seven ending game, but A-Rod pulled our plans with a solo home run in the seventh inning. But eventually, at Rice, you start to see the differences between a future major leaguer and somebody like me, just proud to ride the pine on a Division 1 baseball team. You know, Jose Cruz and Lance Berkman, both demonstrated power from both sides of the plate, and they're just incredible athletes. And so, we had our future major league prospects on the mound as well with Will Perez, and then we had Matt Anderson, who was at one point our starter. He became reliever for the Detroit Tigers. I learned a lot about myself that I had a lot more ways to go in terms of maturity, to become better at who I've set up myself to be, whether it's in politics or in baseball, that time in my college years.

Sam: George, from a major leaguer to a major reader, you and Mandy helped to run Ganny's Celebration of Reading events in Dallas before you decided to run

for statewide office. Can you talk about Ganny's commitment to family literacy and what you and Mandy learned from that experience?

George: When Gampy and Ganny left public service and they came back to Houston, they were essentially asked by every single non-profit organization in the entire state if not the country, to come out and provide support. But Ganny was always focused on family literacy and this started way before her time in the White House, where she really felt, and perhaps, it's raising six rambunctious children, that family literacy is really the first step toward making sure we produce as many productive citizens as we can in our country. And statistics really back that up. When you really dive into the details of the program, particularly as related to adult literacy issues that we see in our country, you know, when it comes to projects such as this or philanthropic efforts, people tend to follow people that are A, affected by it and B are passionate about it. And she, definitely, was passionate about it. And so, when she asked me and Nina to help out the effort in Dallas, which was already up and running, we decided to contribute by bringing in folks from Fort Worth and people from all walks of life to the event. And it just ended up being, as it was in Houston and other parts of the country in the D.C. area, just a really powerful event that brought great, not only writers and thinkers together, but tangible stories of people that were able to rescue themselves from the illiteracy and being able to challenge themselves to a way in which they never thought they could.

Sam: George, in time, you decided to continue your service to others by running for statewide office. Why did you choose the General Land Office, and for all of us non-Texans, can you please explain what the General Land Office does?

George: Not a lot of Texans know what we do. But, I think because of our work the last few years, more people know exactly what we do. In the midst of one of our country's worst disasters, our agency has been the point person on behalf of the federal government in helping Texans respond, so Hurricane Harvey became our largest responsibility in today's day and age. We also manage the oil and gas minerals for the people of Texas. And it provides one of the largest sources of revenue to schools, whether it's K through 12 or post-secondary education in Texas. And with the oil and gas crisis, the 1-2 punch both on the supply and demand side of things, it couldn't be a more challenging time for the industry. And that's why I recently implemented a relief plan for the oil and gas industry to help them get back on their feet. And, you know, beach closures are a big issue right now in California. We just made the announcement today that, on behalf of the people of Texas, we're opening beaches, subject to social distancing. We felt that, as state parks were opening, that people maybe get

outdoors to help our economy recover. But, of course, to do it in a sensible and safe way, where people socially distance, wear masks, and conduct in, hopefully, some commerce to help some of our small businesses get up and going. We also maintain the state's heritage, whether it's the day-to-day operations of The Alamo or the multimillion archives documents that we maintain in the Stephen F. Austin. It benefits us as a people and it's a great role in which we take care of pretty much Texans of all backgrounds.

Sam: You briefly mentioned Hurricane Harvey and I want to dig a little deeper because, even as someone from D.C., I could see the amount of damage that, you know, wreaked havoc throughout Texas in 2017. And I think you were placed in a pretty challenging role of helping address housing needs of those Texans affected. I read somewhere that 135,000 homes were destroyed or badly damaged. How do you even begin to start wrapping your arms around a problem that massive?

George: As Uncle George would sometimes talk about when he was in office, surround yourself with as many smart, bright, hardworking people as you possibly can because I do not claim to know everything there is about housing or recovery. What was unique about the 17th hurricane season is that people forget there were 2 other major cataclysmic storms that hit Florida and Puerto Rico at the time. And FEMA officials told us that essentially, "Texas, you're gonna have to figure it out on your own. We have to attend to these other disasters." So the governor basically tapped us to lead that effort immediately. And we created a unique pilot program where we signed a block rent with FEMA and got going. But more importantly, this is about helping people's lives and what was amazing about the Texas spirit was the volunteer mentality. And people from all over the country still send me letters, emails, and texts about the resiliency of the Cajun Navy. We had one campaign worker get in his boat and save 62 fellow Texans, in Dickinson, Texas, where there were over 50 inches of rain in 3 days. That's the determination that I was inspired by and that's the stories that I've been sharing with our staff as we continue to prosecute the largest housing recovery in American history.

Sam: Well, George, before you became Land Commissioner of the General Land Office, which oversees The Alamo site in San Antonio, did you know that rock star and drummer, Phil Collins, was such a massive collector of Alamo artifacts? How is the Alamo renovation going right now?

George: I did know about Phil Collins, you know, the rumor that he believes in reincarnation, and considered himself to be a Texas revolutionary who died in the battle. I did not know about his collection and a lot of Texas collectors did not know. But they knew about an anonymous collector who would frequently

go to Mexico or come here to auctions here in Texas and would acquire massive amounts of Alamo-related artifacts. As it turned out, Phil Collins in 2014, right when I got elected, signed an agreement with my predecessor that gave his entire collection, an estimated market value of \$30 million, to the people of Texas on one condition, that we build a museum and visitor center within 5 years. So, we're working on that project as we speak. I can't disclose the location of the collection. Unfortunately, we cannot publicly exhibit it till we finish the museum. But I've had a chance to hang out with old Phil, he calls me Prescott in his British voice. Really cool guy. In fact, he's offered to do a tribute concert with Genesis and some of his old hits for the benefit of fundraising around the idea of making sure The Alamo's around, but the project moves forward.

We're focused on not only building the library and museum but to bring some history to the most visited sites in the state of Texas. I consider equivalent to what was accomplished at Independence Hall. So the Independence Hall, you may recall, with the Liberty Bell, it actually used to be in the location in Philadelphia, in the building itself. But scientists said that if it was not recovered and relocated, that it would deteriorate and essentially create a hazard for visitors. And that's what we're doing, which has created a lot of controversy here in Texas and in some historic circles throughout the country. But it's the right thing to do. Otherwise, it won't be around for our children and grandchildren. Independence Hall also dealt with urban blight. There was a lot of development around it that was confusing to the visitor. And in San Antonio, we deal with the same issues where 18-wheeler traffic comes within 50 yards of where the Church and the Long Barrack is located, and right over where William Barret Travis drew the proverbial line in the sand. So we face a lot of challenges similar to what Philadelphia in the state of Pennsylvania did. We replicated a lot of their procedures to move forward, and we're excited about the future of The Alamo to make sure that it's around for our children and our grandchildren.

Sam: George, let's switch gears. What's your takeaway from the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders and other protective measures that have been going in. You recently touched on the beaches opening up, which is a great step. What else is going on in Texas?

George: You know, I was speaking with our public health officials that are running the efforts statewide here in Texas. And they share with me that in places like Austin and even in rural areas, that two of three deaths are occurring in elderly facilities. So clearly, we have to do something differently as it relates to quarantining our elderly. We need to ramp up testing. We need to begin contact tracing so folks that come down with it need to basically be able to

identify, in a virtual way while they're quarantining, who they came into contact with. That way, we can smooth the curve and deal with public hospitalizations. The good news is in Texas, we're only averaging about 2 cases per 100,000 residents. So of the southern states, we're in about as good a position as it gets, which gives us the liberty of reopening our economy in a slow measured way. But we've got a long way to go in terms of science and ingenuity for the vaccine and therapies. But in the meantime, there are things in which we can do at our state level to make sure that we're taking care of our elderly and those that are susceptible to this.

Sam: Well, George, I'd like to end with this and first, I'd like to say thank you so much for spending time with us today. And I love hearing about all the great things that you're leading down there in the great state of Texas. So, we hear a lot of people these days to decrying the state of politics. Do you think it's discouraging good people from running for office and what's your advice for a young person who wants to throw their hat in the ring and run for office?

George: I'm not going to disagree. I think a lot of very good people wave off the idea of running for office. The good news is that you don't necessarily have to be in politics to make sure that our country remains resilient. There are ways in which our generation has stepped forward with so many different non-profit ideas that have benefited so many. I'm not here to tell you that politics is lost. I really think that there are ways in which you can continue to serve and help your community. And I do think that politics is one of the best ways in which you can do that, Republican or Democrat. So when I visit with young people, I encourage them to get involved in a campaign, see it from behind the scenes, get up close and personal, and learn about some of the good people that throw out their good ideas. Like a lot of other professions, there's sometimes the few that ruin it for the rest of us. But by and large, we have great public servants that offer themselves. And I would also offer that in local county and state politics, you can often end up doing more than you can at the federal level. And so, a lot of young people are calling me and ask which office to look at first. I say, "A lot is done outside of the nation's capital that can affect your community and the life of future generations." So, I think our country continues to be resilient and optimistic. We can find commonalities in areas in which we can come together to serve a better purpose than ourselves.

Sam: Well, George, I know that you are one of those great public servants, and I know Texas is in great hands with your leadership. And I just want to say thanks again for joining us on "All the Best."

George: Thank you, Sam. Thank you for having me.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond, reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All the Best" on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate "All the Best."

Yeah, we're one big country nation, that's right.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house, every house, all over America.

President Bush: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor, courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America, the greatest country on the face of the Earth.

