



All the Best Podcast
Episode 10: “The Life of a Commander in Chief”
Featuring former Chief of Staff, Andy Card

Andy: Excerpts from election night 2004. "I sat with the President in his residence on the second-floor office. I was thinking to myself, "What lies ahead? Will God continued to give him the strength and perseverance he needs? What comes next in the fight against terror, in working with the Congress, and bringing our divided country together? What can he do to lower the decibels of hatred and anger?" And then to myself, I was saying, "I wish I could help this son of ours. I wish I could do something to help ease the burdens, a burden incidentally that he never ever complains about."

The President said to me, "Dad, you realize that this is the first time since 1988 that a president has won with a clear majority of the vote?" My mind raced back to my win over Dukakis in 1988. Who would have thought back then that I would be bonding with my own son in this matter? I thought back to many of the things I loved about living in that special house for four years, and then I thought about how blessed we are to have a fine son there for four more years. Victory. How sweet it is."

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 & 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."

Lyrics

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 told 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 through it.

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 tonight for 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 & Barbara Bush Foundation, this is "All The Best. Hello, and welcome to "All The Best." It is my pleasure to introduce Andy Card, the former Deputy Chief of Staff to my grandfather, George H. W. Bush, and the former Chief of Staff to my uncle, George W. Bush. Andy, how are you today? Thanks for joining me on "All The Best."

Andy: It's so good to be with you, Sam. It's a great privilege to talk about your grandfather and the entire family. I love the Bush family.

Sam: There might not be anybody on the planet who has had a longer working relationship with my grandfather than you. How did you come to meet him?

Andy: Well, the beginning goes all the way back to 1968. I was actually a student at the University of South Carolina, and I was paying attention to politics. I loved politics. Your grandfather gave one of the responses to a state of the union address. He was one of the Republicans to respond to Lyndon Bain Johnson's speech, and it was just an amazing experience for me to listen to them. That was the first time I heard his name, and I can actually remember what he talked about. He talked about the government spending too much money. It was the taxpayer's money, and they should be careful how they spend it.

But then fast forward in 1972, I ran for the Massachusetts legislature, a very young man, and I didn't win that election. But 1974 I was going to run again. And in 1973, I happened to meet your grandfather when he was Chairman of the Republican National Committee, and I was very impressed with the speech that he gave in Boston. It was not really a partisan speech. That's what impressed me. It was about the importance of our institutions in our democracy.

This was the height of the fallout from Watergate, a terrible time to be Republican, the Nixon impeachment process, and it was just really ugly. But your grandfather did a great job of saying, "Hang in there. The institutions of

our democracy are important." He defended the institution of the White House. He defended the CIA and the other institutions in D.C. and in government, but he also defended the institution of the two-party system and the Republican Party. And I was very impressed with it.

I ran for the Massachusetts House in 1974, and I got elected. And it was a surprise to everybody. I was the only Republican in New England that defeated an incumbent Democrat in the 1974 election, and it was a big upset. The district that I came from was six-to-one Democrat, so it was a seat that had been held by the Democrats. And, I wasn't supposed to win, but I did, and that changed my life. So that's when I first came to know him.

Then I went candidate shopping after I attended the convention in 1976, and I was getting ready for the 1980 Republican convention. I went candidate shopping and George H.W. Bush, his name was out there, and I wrote letters to everybody who was running for president on the Republican side. I got a nice letter back from him. He came to my dinky little office in the Massachusetts statehouse. We sat down, had a wonderful conversation, and I fell in love with them and decided I was gonna support him. So I got to meet him in late December 1978 and signed on to be the chairman of his campaign in Massachusetts, and we hit the ground running in 1979.

Sam: Well, sometime after my grandfather launched his 1980 campaign for the presidency, George H. W. Bush remained, in his own words, an asterisks in the polls, meaning he was pulling in the low single digits well behind the better-known candidates like Ronald Reagan and John Conley. Andy, how to Gampy turn this rather situation around?

Andy: I actually remember a celebration when we made it to 3%. So, yes, he was an asterisk in the polls when he got up to 3%, but yes, there was an awful lot of work that went into increasing his name recognition. Even in Massachusetts, when I first started with him, I remember pleading with Jim Baker, who was kind of in charge of the campaign. I said, "Can we spend some money?" We were supposed to just be raising money. I said, "I'd like to spend some money because nobody associates the name Bush with politics and government. They think it's a Bush beer. They think it's Anheuser Busch." He told me I could spend a little bit of money, and we ran radio ads during the election season for mayors in Massachusetts.

So people were paying attention a little bit to politics because they're wondering who the mayor of Boston would be, or Springfield, or Worcester, or Chicopee. And so I wanted to run some ads just introducing the name Bush in the context of politics so that people would pay attention to him, and it made a big

difference. It actually increased the recognition that when you said the word Bush, people didn't think of beer. They thought of, "Yes, he must be a candidate for something. He must be a good leader, and I wanna learn more about him."

So, yes, he was an asterisk, but I watched him climb in the polls and actually end up surprising people. We're coming up to the period where Iowa has their caucuses. And I remember the caucuses in 1980 where your grandfather exceeded expectations and actually won a narrow victory. And the campaign kind of made a mistake of calling it the Big Mo, big momentum. He got about 31% of the vote, but he came in first in the Iowa caucuses. And that surprised a lot of people. We went on to do pretty well, and he gained recognition and respect and ended up getting the nomination to be vice president of the United States and kind of the rest is history.

Sam: So, we've gone through the 1980 campaign, and it brought us to the vice presidency. You're uniquely qualified to talk about my grandfather in this capacity. What was his relationship like with Reagan?

Andy: President Reagan recognized the role that George Bush could play in his administration when a lot of people around Ronald Reagan were suspect of him. They didn't think that he would fit with Ronald Reagan. And, they had campaigned against each other, so it was a surprise to a lot of people when Ronald Reagan asked George Bush to be his vice president. They ended up having a phenomenally great relationship. It started off probably a little tender, but I think Jim Baker being the Chief of Staff helped smooth the waters between the two of them. But George Bush ended up having one of the most significant roles of any vice president to the nation's history.

Walter Mondale had helped change the vice presidency during his tenure, and we watched as George H.W. Bush took what Mondale did and did a better job in part because he understood Congress, he understood bureaucracies, he understood the world, and he traveled the world at the request of President Reagan. He attended virtually every funeral for anybody who is a leader in the world anywhere in the world. So he knew the world, but he also took on significant responsibilities and a lot of vice presidents don't get asked to take on responsibilities.

Ronald Reagan asked Vice President Bush to take on responsibilities to give us better border protection at the borders and help fight the war on drugs. He traveled and did a lot of diplomacy. He was an expert in the national security area. Kind of functioned almost as a national security advisor to President Ronald Reagan, and it was clear that their relationship grew. They had lunch virtually every Thursday. I was on President Reagan's staff then.

I served as special assistant to the president for intergovernmental affairs as the liaison to the nation's governors for President Reagan and then the director of that office, and I got to watch how Vice President Bush was really the most supporting vice president that he could be of Ronald Reagan, at the same time offering sound advice and counsel and making a difference and getting people to get engaged to help the president succeed. And vice president Bush was really part of the team-building effort that allowed Ronald Reagan to be so successful.

Sam: I was gonna mention that lunch because I know they had a standing lunch weekly. I mean, that's not normal for presidents and vice presidents. Is it from your experience?

Andy: Your uncle George W. Bush and Vice President Cheney had pretty regular lunches every three or four weeks, and they were pretty candid. But it was Ronald Reagan and your grandfather that set the tone for how to do it the right way, and it really did make a difference because they spoke to each other candidly. They both had the courage to speak truth to each other. Ronald Reagan was a great mentor to your grandfather, and I was blessed to witness that relationship as it grew.

Sam: Andy, there are times in history when pop culture and history collide. And, in 1991, Jesus Jones wrote a song called "Right Here Right Now," and one of the famous lines was, "The world wakes up from history." And I feel like that really epitomizes my grandfather's presidency. What were the most important events of those four years, and how did my grandfather play into them?

Andy: Any historian would look at his record and say he was the most successful one-term president in our nation's history. But right at the top of the list, the Berlin Wall came down. Ronald Reagan called the world's attention to what was going on in a divided Europe, in a divided Germany, and he said, famously, "Tear down this wall." Well, the wall came down under your grandfather's leadership.

And there were a lot of people that thought if the wall came down, it meant that we would go from a cold war to a hot war, World War III. Your grandfather's steady hand respect for the role of diplomacy and talking made a huge difference, and we came out of the cold war without a hot war. People were freed in East Germany. Germany was united. The whole part of Europe that had been in the Soviet block got to experience freedom, and that was probably the greatest gift that your grandfather gave.

But he did many other things. He gave us the Americans Disability Act. It was probably the greatest civil rights act after the original civil rights act. He empowered people with disability to be part of our community. It couldn't have been done without your grandfather's leadership. He signed the Clean Air Act, the first Clean Air Act calling for us to clean up the environment. He negotiated a treaty on ozone so that we keep the ozone layer from being penetrated and broken. He expanded the wetlands in the United States and protected them. He created new sanctuaries to take care of our seas.

He was a remarkable leader on so many different fronts, but he also managed to build an economy that was growing and robust. And, he demonstrated the ability of us to recognize that we have roles as individuals in our society by highlighting the reality that there are points of light, and each one of us can be a point of light and make a difference in somebody else's life. And, that is a legacy that has gone on.

And then your grandmother, she taught us how to read, and she made sure that we all work to make sure that everyone could be taught how to read. The combination of George H. W. Bush and Barbara Pierce Bush working together really did change America and the world for the better.

Sam: Speaking of my grandmother, Barbara Bush, what was her impact as first lady?

Andy: I'm gonna start off when she was second lady, it was the height of the AIDS epidemic. It's before many Americans had much understanding of what the disease was. And there was this fear in America that it was very, very contagious, and you'd catch it by touching someone or if they coughed on you. And, people were not very kind to each other as a result. Your grandmother realized what was happening, and on her own, not being told to do this by anybody, found out that there were babies with AIDS in the local hospital in Washington D.C. And she wanted to go demonstrate that, yes, you can care for them, you can love them. They need care, and you can be around them.

So without really getting any permission from anyone, she organized a group to go over to the hospital, and she went with them. And she held these AIDS-infected babies in her arms, rock them in chairs, comforted them, stayed with them for quite a while, and it was a media spectacular way of telling a story that people had to hear but they weren't gonna get it in any other way. And, your grandmother made sure that they paid attention. And, it really did change the debate on AIDS and made us all understand the responsibility we have to care for each other.

Beyond that, I can tell you there were many times when she would give us a little correction if we needed correction. As a White House staffer, I remember one time there was a prominent White House staffer who had said something that was not very kind, and your grandmother called me up and said, "I don't think that's the way my husband would feel." I was deputy white house chief of staff, and I had the responsibility to say, "Thank you very much. I will take care of this." And so she was a conscience, sometime a vocal conscience to do the right thing. There were people who were in fear of Barbara Bush but didn't wanna leave her side.

Sometimes I would catch her giving me a glance, and I realized that I had done something wrong, or maybe I was just thinking about doing something wrong and she became a great conscience. So, she had a huge impact, but probably her example as being a living point of light. Yes, her husband called attention to it, but she is the one that kind of coined the phrase, and she lived it. She was a point of light, but she was also a guide to all of us so that we could find our way to be a point of light, make a difference in somebody's life. What she did was remarkable. She was a force. She was a real force, and she taught. Sometimes it was a tough lesson you had to learn, but boy, you were glad you learned it from her and not somebody else.

Sam: The most solemn responsibility any president has is as the commander-in-chief. Sending America's young men and women in uniform into harm's way during combat has to be one of the most grueling decisions a president can make as commander-in-chief. Would you share a few memories of those experiences?

Andy: Can I tell you a story that really impacted me? Manuel Noriega down in Panama had been doing some really bad things as the leader of that country, and your grandfather had the tough decision to make, "What do we do about it?" I remember a meeting in the Oval Office where the Secretary of State, Jim Baker came in and the Vice President of the National Security Advisor and the Chief of Staff. And everybody sat around, and there's this rehashing of all of the options that the President would have.

And I was in charge of an easel that had photographs and charts on it, and others were more senior and they were the principals in the meeting. And I remember Jim Baker standing up at the end of the meeting. He was the Secretary of State and saying, "Mr. President," he stood up, looked at the President, said, "I'm gonna leave you to your decision because this is not our decision. This is your decision. It's your decision to make, and I'm gonna leave you to your decision."

And he got up and walked out of the room. I remember everybody else also got up and started to walk out of the room. And I was there starting to pick up the photographs and the charts and take the easel down, and the President got up out of his chair and he went over and sat behind the President's desk. And he folded his hands, shut his eyes, and I believe he was praying. He put his head down, and then he looks up and he's looking at me. But I was just a piece of furniture. I was probably 10 feet away from him trying to get this easel into my arms, and he says out loud, "I'm making a decision that will cost young men their lives."

And he got up, and he didn't say a word to me. He went out to the south grounds of the White House and just started walking around. And I remember collecting the photographs and the charts and the easel and going out of the Oval Office and thinking to myself, "I just watched a president make a presidential decision." He made the decision acknowledging what the very likely consequences might be, that young men would lose their lives. And that stayed with me for a long time, but I wanna fast forward another month.

I was Deputy Chief of Staff, and I'm working on the President's trip to Cincinnati, Ohio. And he was going to a school to talk about education reform. And I would have to do the homework, and I would usually check to see what email came in from the zip codes around where he was going and what people had on their minds. And I remember looking at the computer printout of the letters that had come in, that there was a letter that came in from the zip code where the President was gonna be where a mother, had written to the President a very angry letter saying, "I wanna meet with you, Mr. President, and I would like to come meet with you because I wanna call you a murderer to your face. You murdered my son." And I said, "Wow."

I did my homework and found out her son had been killed in Panama. And I went down to the National Security Advisor's office, Brent Scowcroft. He was the action officer on the letter, and it had been answered. And I found out that it had been answered, how appropriate it was. And I find out the President had sent a handwritten letter when this soldier had died, and that the Defense Department had responded appropriately. I was standing in Brent's office when my little page went off. So, I went down to the Oval Office. I walked into the Oval Office, and the President started asking me, you know, "I want you to do this." And then he interrupts himself, and he says, "What's bothering you? Something's bothering you." I said, "Oh, don't worry about it, Mr. President?" He says, "No, I can tell something is bothering you, what's bothering you?"

And I said, "Well, you're going to Cincinnati in a couple of weeks, and I'm working on your trip to Cincinnati. And you got a letter from someone who

lives in the zip code where we're going who demanded to meet with you?" And he says, "Well, what's the letter about? I get those letters all the time." And I said, "No. She wanted to meet with you to call you a murderer to your face." And he said, "Wow, that's pretty serious. Who did I murder?" And I said, "Her son died in Panama." And he says, "Of course, I should meet with her."

Fast forward, we went to Cincinnati and I accompanied the President. We go into the school, he meets with faculty, and then he meets with some students. Then he goes in and he addresses a crowd that's gathered in a large auditorium. I go down to meet this family that is coming to see the President after he finishes his remarks, and it's the mother, a stepdad, a brother, and a sister of the young man that was killed. And I walk in, I'm with Marlin Fitzwater, who was the Press Secretary, and I greet them and the mother lets me have it with both barrels. She says, "I can't wait to see the President. I'm gonna tell him to his face." She was very, very angry. I just let her say her piece. Marlin Fitzwater says to me, "I'm leaving you alone on this one."

And then the Secret Service comes down, and they say, "The president's on his way." I step out and talk to the President, and I remind him what the names of everybody was and why they're there. I said, "She's very upset." And he said, "Of course she is." And he walks into the room. He goes over to the woman, and she stands up and looks him right in the eyes and calls him a murderer to his face and is really, really angry with him. He says, "Your son was a patriot, and I couldn't do my job if it weren't for people like your son. I want to know all about him. Tell me all about him."

And the mother went on to describe wonderful things about her son. And then he turned to the stepdad, and he said, "Was he a good boy? Was he a good kid?" "Oh yes. He was in Boy Scouts, and he was in this organization. He played little league baseball." And then he turned to the brother and said, "What was he like as a brother?" The conversation was wonderful. Everybody is teary, they're hugging, and they're grateful. And, the President was 100% in their attention. He gave it all to them. That's the burden that a president carries.

The mother, as the President is getting ready to leave, reached into her purse and she pulled out a note in an envelope, and she gave it to the President. He put it into his breast coat pocket on his suit coat. And we get out in the limousine, and he reaches in, pulls the note out. And he opens it up, and then there, written on white paper with blue lines in pencil, is a note that says, "When I grow up, I want to be a soldier, and I'm not afraid to die for my country." It was signed by the little boy who died for his country. He wrote it when he was in like the fifth or sixth grade.

So that's the burden that a president carries. President Bush never forgot that. And every day that he was President of the United States, he realized that there were people making sacrifices because he needed help keeping his oath of office, and the help came because those people kept their oath of office.

Sam: What a story. Andy, thank you for sharing that.

Andy: I was blessed to be with him on many different times and that was one of the greatest blessings.

Sam: Andy, I'd like to end on a lighter note. You're working on a really special project for the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library. I was hoping you could help explain to our listeners exactly what will be coming to College Station very soon.

Andy: George and Barbara Bush gave so much to this great nation and to the world and so much to the conscience of America. All of us remember the day that George H.W. Bush died. It was a very sad day, but it was also a day where we could celebrate a great life. And you remember as the funerals took place, there was a remarkable tribute to the President where he, in his casket, was taken out by the military with great reverence, carried and put in a train car.

It was blazoned with the American flag and hauled by a very special train engine, 4141, in honor of the 41st president. And that engine had the name George Bush on it. It was painted in the colors of Air Force One, and it carried the President to his final resting place in College Station. Union Pacific has donated the engine 4141 that carried President Bush to his final resting place, the George & Barbara Bush Foundation on the campus of Texas A&M university. And that engine will be on display outside the Presidential Library that honors President and Barbara Bush.

And so I'm proud to be associated with President and Barbara Bush. I'm also proud to be associated with Union Pacific Railroad and the great work they do for this country and the great trip that they have given to one of the most remarkable leaders in the history of our great land.

Sam: Well, Andy, thank you so much for coming on "All The Best" today and hope to see you very soon, maybe in College Station when that train goes down.

Andy: That would be wonderful. I'm proud to be part of this program, and I'd love to join you again.

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."

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.

