



All the Best Podcast
Episode 17: “A Great American Love Story”
Featuring Granddaughter of George H. W. Bush, Ellie LeBlond Sosa

Ellie: December 3rd, 2007. Dear special, wonderful Ellie. Your mom told me you tried to call me, and she told me what it was about. My message back to you is that I love you, I am proud of you, and I will always be in your corner. We all hit bumps in the road of life, but you will get past this bump and go on to great things. Here are some worry beads. If you ever worry, rub these beads and the worry should fade away. Also, you can pawn them if you go broke in Tanzania. Whereas your mom once asked, "Are they real?" Well, they are. So, if you need a Starbucks double latte mocha special, pedal them. One last point, if you ever need a shoulder to cry on, an arm to lift you up in the years ahead, or just plain someone to say, "I love you, Ellie," I'm the man. Good luck in your fascinating life ahead. Out of difficulties come new, exciting challenges. You will do well, of that, I'm sure. Devotedly, Gampy.

George: 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.

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

George: 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.

Brad: 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.

George: We stand tonight before a new world of hope, with 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.

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

Sam: My sister, Ellie LeBlond Sosa, is the co-author of George and Barbara Bush, *A Great American Love Story*, a book about our grandparents' incredible legacy of love. She works for BB&R Wellness Consulting as the Executive Director of the Achieving Optimal Health Conference, an annual wellness conference held at Georgetown University every October. Ellie lives in McLean, Virginia with her husband, Nick, and it's my pleasure to welcome her today. Ellie, welcome to All the Best.

Ellie: Thanks for having me.

Sam: Ellie, I'd like to start with this. Growing up with George and Barbara Bush as your grandparents was pretty special as I can attest to, and I know you can as well. What are some of your early memories of them?

Ellie: It was very special growing up with Ganny and Gampy as our grandparents. But I think, as you know, and what I felt as a child growing up, I never really thought of Ganny and Gampy as anything more than our grandparents. I didn't really understand that Gampy had this important job, and I think that's because Ganny and Gampy always put family first and always included us in everything. Whether that was at the White House, or Camp David, or up in Maine, we were always there. Some of my earliest memories, it's weird to say, but they were at the White House. You and I, Sam, moved down to Washington with mom after mom and dad separated. And, you know, mom wanted to be near her parents, and she was sort of finding her footing here in Washington and getting back into the dating scene and eventually finding her new husband.

Because of that, you and I were dropped off of at the White House a lot. And Gampy and Ganny would, "baby sit us." So, some of my earliest memories with them, you know, I was age three, four, five around that time, was just running around the White House with you. Probably, you know, causing headaches for everybody there, but, you know, playing hide and seek and doing all kinds of

things like that. And, you know, like I said, Gampy, it didn't really matter what his job was. You know, I remember, I was one day in the Oval Office with him, and he was meeting with some foreign dignitary, important person. And they were in there, and press was in there, and a lot of Gampy staff were in there, and you know, I was playing quietly on the ground. And all of the sudden, I realized I had to use the bathroom. So, I went up to Gampy, and I tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Gampy, I know I need to use the bathroom." And, you know, like I was asking his permission, and he's like, "Okay, go ahead, start over there." And so, I run off, and about 30 seconds later, I come back, tapped him on the shoulder, "Excuse me, Gampy, but did you leave that poo-poo in the toilet?"

Sam: Oh, gosh.

Ellie: And Ganny told me years later that people would bring that up to him all the time. And it's just kind of a perfect example of, you know, family was always around even if it was, you know, gonna embarrass him like that. Those memories in the White House, you and I also had the honor of being the Christmas elves at the White House. And I don't exactly remember what our responsibilities were, in general, but I do remember one responsibility was cleaning up all the decorations in the White House at the end of the Christmas season. As you know, I have always been somebody that follows the rules. I was a good little girl. You, on the other hand, have always been a little mischievous.

Sam: What? Me?

Ellie: Yes. So, I remember specifically, one day, I spent probably hours sweeping up all of the fake snow on the ground that we had been instructed to sweep it all up and then put it all into the trash cans that I spent all those time doing. And I was so proud of myself, and moments later, you come over, take the trash cans, multiple trash cans, pour them all over me. And I remember I was crying. I was so mad, and you just run away laughing. So, yeah, I mean, the White House, I would say, those were my some of my early memory is also Maine, being in Maine, which I know we'll talk about.

Sam: It seems that you've been campaigning for him since the beginning. I was reminded recently about one of the youngest staffers that Gampy had on his campaign, and it was you. I saw a credential from his original campaign with your face on it, your cute little two-year-old face.

Ellie: And I remember, you and I, we campaigned, too, for getting Gampy. I think we were on the Spirit of America train. You and I went across the country

with Ganny and Gampy, and our job was really nothing else but to be cute, and smile, and wave at everyone. And, you know, like I said, I think they wanted family around just because of the stress of their job.

Sam: You wrote a wonderful book, George & Barbara Bush, A Great American Love Story. There have been lots of books written about our grandparents. Why did you focus on the legacy of their love story?

Ellie: Well, thank you for saying it was a great book.

Sam: I agree.

Ellie: It was really an honor to write this book about their love story. Like you said, there've been a lot of books written about them. Most of them, great books, couple not great. But most of them, wonderful books, but none of them focused on their love story. Like you said, I, along with all of us, but I had been a witness to it for, you know, 32 years of my life. I had seen them together. You know, the things that stuck with me most were their later days, and I would see them, you know, in their late 80s and early 90s, they would be holding hands, and they would poke fun at one another and, you know, flirting, basically. And, you know, they would laugh with one another. And our family, and those of us close to Ganny and Gampy, got to see this side of them. But I think people outside of our world maybe didn't really know that side of them. They knew their political life. They probably knew some about their family life, their charitable work, but there wasn't much out there about their relationship with one another. And I just knew it was really special, and so, like I said, it was just an honor to be able to share that with the world.

Sam: You and your co-author immersed yourself in the Presidential Library in College Station when researching this book. Do you have any stories or artifacts that you unearthed while researching that you could share with our listeners?

Ellie: Kelly, who was my co-author, she and I were doing this together, and it was our first book for both of us, so we had no idea what we were really doing. And we booked our trip to go down to the George H.W. Bush Library, and we were there for a day and a half. And we thought, "Okay, this is gonna be just easy. We'll just kinda breeze through." And we got there the first morning, and Mary Finch, who oversees the archives there, brought us into the room. And it's a huge room, much bigger than I thought it would be, and it's very cold. They keep everything very well-preserved, and there were just rows, and rows, and rows of scrap books, and different documents, and videos and just way more

than I ever thought. And it's because Ganny kept everything over the years. I mean, it's crazy.

The first scrapbook we opened was from their Yale days. So, this is after Gampy had come back from the war, they got married. They had Uncle George, and Gampy went back to Yale, and Ganny was there with him and Uncle George. And so, we start looking through this scrapbook. There's pictures of them, you know, with friends. You know, there's newspaper clippings of Gampy, you know, at Yale. And we keep flipping through, and we get to one page where there's an envelope that you can see has something protruding out of it, like there's something in there. So, we asked Mary, who's with us, if we could see what it was. And she reaches in with gloves on, again, keeping everything very well-preserved, and she pulls it out, and it's a wish bone. You know, at first, we were kind of wondering, "What the heck is this?" And we looked down where it came from, and Ganny, of course, had written there next to the envelope that it was a wish bone from their first Thanksgiving turkey together.

Sam: Oh my gosh.

Ellie: Seventy years ago.

Sam: Holy smokes.

Ellie: And first of all, the fact that it was still intact was unbelievable. But also, the fact that Ganny thought to save this. You know, this is before they had gotten into any sort of political life, but she just knew that their relationship was special, and that years later, she'd wanna have this wish bone from their Thanksgiving turkey. So, at this moment, we had two emotions. First, we were excited, because we're like, "Oh my gosh, if this is here, what else is here?" We had so much to work with. But then, we're also terrified, because we had way too much to look through in such a short time. But that was really having the library was one of the greatest gifts to us, and we got so much out of it from letters that people haven't seen before to diary entries of Ganny's, to all kinds of things that are included in the book.

Sam: Ellie, you wrote a wonderful book, George & Barbara Bush, A Great American Love Story. I see you have it with you there. Would you be willing to share an excerpt?

Ellie: Sure, I'd love to. This is a letter that Ganny wrote to Gampy in response to Gampy inviting her to his Andover prom. And this was a letter she wrote to him. She said, "Dear Poppy." And Poppy was his nickname. "I think it was

perfectly swell of you to invite me to the dance, and I would love to come, or go, or whatever you say. I wrote mom yesterday or the day before. And rather logically, I haven't heard from her. But I'm sure she's going to let me come, or go, etc. I really am excited, but scared to death, too. If you hear a big noise up there, don't worry, it's just my knees knocking." They're just very cute and just an example of kind of showing their young love, and she was so nervous to go to the prom with him. She did end up going to the prom with him, and the end of the night, Gampy kissed her on the cheek. And that was their first kiss, and she said that she floated her entire way home that night.

Sam: So, Ellie, what was the secret sauce to their long-lasting relationship?

Ellie: So, you think that after writing an entire book about their relationship and their love story, that I'd have any easy answer for that, but it's not an easy answer. I remember when we interviewed Ganny, we got to interview her, I think, three or four times throughout the process of the book. It actually ended up being during the last year of her life, which obviously wasn't planned, but it was really special to have this time with her and talk with her about Gampy, the person that she loved more than anyone in the world. During our first interview, I asked her that question. I said, "What's the secret? We all want to be like you and Gampy and be so in love 73 years later." And her answer, you know kind of classic. She's like, "Well, it's just easy being married to George Bush." And I think Gampy would say the same thing. But doing research for the book and reading all of these stories, there were a few things that did kinda come up throughout.

The first is humor, and I think that was so important in their relationship. We got to see a lot, you know, as their grandchildren. Actually, I have put a quote at the back of the book that Ganny had said at one point, which is, "One of the reasons I made the most important decision of my life to marry George Bush because he made me laugh. It's true. Sometimes we'd laugh through our tears, but that shared laughter has been one of our strongest bonds." Another thing that came up a lot, and there's a lot of examples throughout their life, is being strong when the other person is weak or down.

The one example that comes to mind is when their daughter Robin was sick with leukemia. During the time that she was sick, Ganny was with her in New York at the hospital. And she was getting treatments, and Ganny would read to her, and laugh with her, and try to keep her spirits up. And she was sort of the strength that Robin needed during the time. Gampy would go back and forth between Texas and New York, and the second he walked into the room, he'd burst into tears every single time. So Ganny made a rule, you know, no crying

in the hospital room. That was very hard for him, but you know, she stayed strong for Robin.

After Robin passed away, they went back to Texas. There was an emptiness in the house, and Ganny sort of fell into, you know, they were both grieving. She fell into a really dark place grieving Robin. And Gampy now had to find the strength to, you know, lift her up, and hold her while she was crying, and you know, help her continue to raise the boys. And that's just one example, about being strong when the other is weak. Two other quick ones, speaking up when the other is quiet, which we know Ganny had no problem with, especially later in life when Gampy wasn't talking as much, and then being patient when the other is hurting. I don't know if it's a secret sauce, but those were the things that I saw.

Sam: I love asking family members about advice they've gotten from Gampy and Ganny over the years. Did they ever give you any advice that comes to mind?

Ellie: They didn't. They weren't really the type to give advice like that, and I think you will agree with that. It was more like we lived by their example. The biggest thing that I took away just by watching them was being kind. You'll never know what the other person is going through. So I was thinking, like, of an example, you know, driving in traffic and somebody cuts you off. And your reaction is you want to, you know, honk your horn, yell, something like that. But everyone's going through something, so, you know, taking a moment and just thinking about the other person and having compassion for them even though they just did something rude to you. I feel like that's how Ganny and Gampy lived their lives. And they treated everybody, no matter who they were, it could be a leader of a foreign country, it could be a waiter at a restaurant, a neighbor, anyone, they treated with respect and with kindness always. So, that's the main advice but not really advice that I took from them.

Sam: Ellie, you are currently the Executive Director at BB&R Consulting for the Achieving Optimal Health Conference. As far back as I can remember, you have always been obsessed with health, and exercise, and wellness. How does this new role, or newish role, feed into that obsession?

Ellie: Well, obsession is a strong word, but I do agree with you, it has become a bit of an obsession. It all started maybe six or seven years ago when our Uncle Danny was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. I watched as Trisha, his wife, who's a holistic health counselor, sort of helped him through this journey of living with pancreatic cancer through nutrition and what he was eating. He ended up living much longer with pancreatic cancer than the doctors thought he

would. So, that's sort of when something clicked to my head. I started to understand the power of food and using food as medicine, and that kinda spiraled into everything else. I started to exercise and loved how exercise made me feel. And then, more recently, I've gotten into mindfulness, and specifically, meditation.

I attended a conference in Florida just a few weeks ago with BB&R. And there were some doctors there from the Cleveland Clinic and from MD Anderson, and they were talking about how stress more so than nutrition, or exercise, or anything else is the leading cause for disease and decreased longevity. So, that sort of, again, clicked to brain and, like, I need to get any sort of stress under control, especially with some changes coming up in my life, so I started meditating. And so, this is all to say that these are things that have worked for me, that make me feel good, and to be able to sort of put that into the work that I do and marry the two things that I love, which are event planning and health and wellness. And to be able to share that with others through the conference is, kind of sounds dramatic, but it's a dream come true for me. People leave the conference, you know, changed, and having learned ways to take better care of themselves, better care of their families, the people they love. It's very special for me to be able to do that work. And just for the record, the conference this year is on October 3rd at Georgetown University.

Sam: That's right. And I also heard you had a pretty good boss.

Ellie: I do. I call her mom.

Sam: She's the best.

Ellie: The best.

Sam: So, Ellie, Walker's Point in Kennebunkport, Maine has always been a place for us as a family to gather and get away from the hustle and bustle of our everyday lives. What does Walker's Point mean to you?

Ellie: Walker's Point and Maine are so special to me. Maine is where I was born. Maine is where I got married. Maine is where our family comes together every summer. And I remember a letter that Gampy had written to his five kids, and in it, he says, "That there's something about this place that gets into your very soul. Don't you agree?" And I couldn't agree more. There is just something really special about this place, and I'm just so grateful that we have it, and that we have it as a place for our family to gather every summer.

Sam: Yeah. I'm already counting down the days till we open up the bungalow and can head back up, so I'm so excited.

Ellie: That is something that every time I leave, I'm thinking about, like, there's always a countdown. Even if it's the end of summer, it's like, "Okay, we have six months and four days until I can go back.

Sam: You've recently moved back to the DC area, but you lived in Boston for a while with Nick, you husband. That's a pretty short drive up to Kennebunkport, so you spend almost every weekend of your summers in Walker's Point.

Ellie: Yeah. It was an hour and 40 minutes, you know, we'd have summer Fridays. We go up Thursday nights and have full three-day weekend, and it was actually when I was writing the book. So, kind of worked out that I was spending all this time with Ganny and Gampy.

Sam: So, I'd like to end with this, Ellie, it's exciting news because, one, I can finally call myself Uncle Sam, as you and your husband Nick are expecting your first child. It's so exciting. I also can give you my full permission to name the child Sam. Whether a boy or a girl, it works for both.

Ellie: Just for the record, I do love the name Sam. That has always been at the top of my list. I think it's such a cute name, and the only problem is I married somebody with the last name Sosa. So, is it weird to have a child named Sammy Sosa?

Sam: So, maybe that's not the best, but if it's a girl.

Ellie: It'd still be Sam Sosa.

Sam: Oh, oh. Yeah. I guess so.

Ellie: I don't know. But just so you know, it was up there. If I hadn't married someone with the last name Sosa, my child would be named Sam. No, but it is very exciting, and it's something I've always wanted was to have family, and to be a mom. And people have told me, and mom has told me that the love that you have for your child is unlike any other love that you feel. So, I'm looking forward to that. I'm a little anxious and nervous about the, you know, not getting sleep for the next couple of years. But I guess everyone does that. There's six billion people in this world, so everyone figures it out, so I'll get past that. We just feel really lucky.

To be honest, it wasn't really an easy journey to get here for us, so the fact that I'm here and that I am pregnant, I'm in my second trimester, it's a huge blessing. So, very much looking forward to end of August. The due date is August 28, which is two days after your birthday, so who knows? We could have a...

Sam: Double August 26 Sam.

Ellie: No.

Sam: Maybe. Oh, maybe we'll be back to Sam again. Well, Ellie, thank you so much for being on All the Best, and sharing your amazing stories and sharing your book with us, and all the great knowledge you had on their amazing love story. I hope to see you very soon. I love you. Thanks for being on All the Best.

Ellie: Love you too. Thanks for having me.

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

Brad: 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.

George: 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.

