



**All the Best Podcast**  
**Episode 22: “Life of Purpose and Meaning”**  
*Featuring Governor Jeb Bush, Sr.*

Jeb: February 11th, 1997 Dear kids, Okay, so you might think I've lost it. I plan to make a parachute jump. So there. Yesterday, I went to the international Parachute Association's annual meeting here in Houston. Asked to describe my war experience, I told them how terrified I was, how I pulled the ripcord and released my chest straps too early and how I'd sunk fairly deep when I hit the water. As I recounted those errors, however, something happened. For some reason, I went back to a thought I had way in the back of my mind. It has been there, sleeping like Rip Van Winkle, alive but not alive. Now, it was quite clear. I want to make one more parachute jump. Devotedly, Dad

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."

song- We're Mountaineers, 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 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.

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 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." My uncle, Governor Jeb Bush, served as the 43rd governor of Florida from 1999 to 2007. He currently serves as the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. We're so happy to have Jeb with us today. Jeb, welcome to "All the Best."

Jeb: Sam, thank you for doing this. And I look forward to our conversation.

Sam: Jeb, growing up with Ganny and Gampy, I'm sure was both a totally normal existence, with neighborhood friends and lots of baseball, but also somewhat different in that Gampy's name would occasionally be on the ballot and in the news. What was that like growing up?

Jeb: The first part of my life, he was a business guy and a community leader, and it was a pretty idyllic experience. As you said, we would go to school. When we got out of school, we would play until the sun went down. And we couldn't come back in until we had finished playing, literally, playtime. And I advocate that for all kids these days. I think free time's important. But as I got older, I think he ran for the Senate when I was 11. That was kind of weird, to be honest with you, to go from like not knowing anything about politics to be sitting on an elephant with George W., and Neil, and Marvin, and Doro on the back of an elephant. That was kind of strange. Things that you don't normally do and politics, we got to do in 1964 and 1966 and then in '74 as well, so by then I was a teenager, kinda understood it a little better.

Sam: Let's fast forward to the 1980 campaign. By then, you had launched your own business career, you were married to my beautiful Aunt Columba, and you were a father. But it was all hands on deck and the whole family jumped in to help Gampy almost pull off a long-shot bid for presidency. What did you do during the campaign and what did you learn from it?

Jeb: So I was living in Venezuela. I had opened an office for Texas Commerce Bank. It was a great job but when my dad said he was running for president in 1979, I quit my job to work full-time as a volunteer in his campaign, not because of politics but it was kind of payback time for me, to pay back the blessings that my mom and dad had given me growing up.

So, I was his travel aide, along with David Bates for a while, and then, campaign. I went to 45 states, had some unbelievable experiences, humiliated myself in all sorts of different ways. I didn't really think about politics being

cool or important. I was excited about the prospect of my dad fulfilling his dreams but it was a formative experience in my life to work for George H.W. Bush and then for the Reagan-Bush campaign, just extraordinary experiences, and it was a wild ride for sure.

Sam: You then moved to Florida to continue pursuing business opportunities and also started out on your own political path. First, as the Dade County Republican Chairman and then later, as Florida's Secretary of Commerce. Why Florida?

Jeb: I wanted my children, who spoke Spanish first, to be in a place where they were welcomed. Houston would be that place today. 1980, not so much. And so, I felt like it was great for Columba and my kids to grow up in Miami. It's a wild and crazy city in a lot of ways. In the early '80s, it was a difficult place, lots of crime, and the cocaine cowboys, and all that stuff. It was a great decision. I'm so happy that we still live here.

Sam: After Gampy left the White House, it was learned that he was so distraught by the politically motivated attacks on Uncle Neil, who was unfairly caught up in the S&L crisis, that he wondered privately in his diary if continuing as President was worth the pain caused to the family. Does that surprise you?

Jeb: No, it doesn't surprise me. But he shouldn't have thought that way. We were all in it together. The fact that he would worry about a child or a grandchild is not a surprise at all. But look, public life is the chance to serve. In one degree or another, most of us have been taught to have a servant's heart. So along the way, you get scruffed up for sure. I've had my entry into that kind of scrutiny and you just accept it. You put on your big boy pants and move on. That's what Neil did and Dad shouldn't have worried a bit.

Sam: Jeb, Gampy never liked talking about the L-word. Legacy. What was his greatest legacy as President?

Jeb: His legacy would be what kind of man he was and how that played out in public life. This guy was all of the virtues that we sometimes consider passe today, the timeless virtues. As imperfect as we all are, he came as close to perfection in my mind as anybody I know. He was courageous. He was always honest. He treated people with dignity and respect, no matter what part of life they came from or whatever. He was humble, which is a leadership skill that is in short supply these days. Because of all those virtues that he brought to the public square, he was an extraordinary president in many ways. I mean, the things that he got to do, history kind of unfolded while he was president. I'm not

sure other leaders would have been as successful as he in building the kind of team he had, of building the coalitions to take out Saddam Hussein, for example, to manage the end of the Cold War. All of those things were experiences that he had, of course, but personal skills that could be brought to bear on a larger stage.

Sam: Well, of course, Ganny's legacy as First Lady has to be her incredible work promoting family literacy. Work in which you have been so involved and even helped to lead. Can you talk about the work of the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy and its impact around the country?

Jeb: It's phenomenal what they do. I was chairman when we came up with this crazy idea of creating an XPRIZE [SP] to be able to extend the reach beyond these phenomenal, not for profit, grassroots organizations that help adults learn English so that they could teach their children how to read. That work is really important. But imagine the aspiration of dealing with the millions and millions of people who are functionally illiterate as adults, who have a hard time getting a job because of it, who are marginalized in society. But even more important, can't be the first teacher of their child.

So the work that the Barbara Bush Family Literacy Foundation does is to address this problem. There's not a lot of other organizations nationally that focus on this but there are a lot of corporations and philanthropy that understand now how important it is. So thanks to my mom. And your mom is doing a phenomenal job as chairman now. Jeb Junior's on the board. I'm really proud of the family focus on this, and it continues to do great work.

Sam: Jeb, education is more than just a passing interest for you. In the 1990s, you helped establish Florida's first charter school. And it was one of your great hallmarks of accomplishments from your two terms as governor, your A+ plan. You're still very much involved with the Foundation for Excellence in Education as president and chairman. What drives that?

Jeb: Well, my interest is to see that every child has the power to live a life of purpose and meaning. They have to have the tools to do it. The world we're moving towards, Sam, as you know, is very different than the world of the decade ago. And the skills required to be successful are very different as well. And yet, our education system, pre-K to life if you will, hasn't really adapted to this reality.

And so, what we try to do with the foundation...we're a policy foundation. So, we try to change laws and change rules to allow for more innovation to rise up from the bottom to be able to create a grassroots movement for raising student

achievement. That requires more parental involvement, including parental school choice. It requires better accountability. It requires a command focus on early childhood education. It requires the aspiration, which I think should be a national objective implemented locally, of every high school kid should graduate from high school with a diploma, of course. But also, perhaps, college credit under their belts and a nationally recognized certificate that says, "I can go get a job." Transforming our system is the only way you could get to accomplishing that aspiration. So we work state by state to try and make that a reality, along with partners in every state. It's a passion of mine and I continue to stay involved.

Sam: Between Gampy and Uncle George, you were intimately involved in five or maybe even six presidential campaigns at a very high level. Overall, what did you learn from those experiences?

Jeb: My experience is it's better to win than lose. That's always important. It's easier to win when you run against a bad candidate than a good one. Those are the two lessons I give to young people that come to me saying, "Old man, I want to know what your advice is to run." That's kind of the first things that I say is, "Pick your time and pick the candidate to run against. You'll have a better chance of winning."

Look, the national mood changes and politics kind of ebbs and flows inside of that. Every campaign is different because of that. The joys of winning are phenomenal when you see your brother or your dad win. Losing is hard. You know, and so you feel bad for them. It doesn't relate to politics. The best experiences in my life personally, the experiences where I learned the most, at least, have been when I've lost. Whether it's in politics or business, when you lose, you have to pause and take account of why it is that you did that, and it typically makes you a better person. I think my dad has done that. He lost a couple of times, and he won quite a bit as well. He had that same experience. George did it, lost once and then he won twice as president. But he learned along the way what you have to do. If you have enough humility to know that you're not perfect and that you have to adapt and change based on the conditions, you'll be a great candidate and then a great president. Having a sideline seat watching their presidencies, I think they were shaped a lot by the circumstances that they had to deal with, but also by the campaigns that got them there.

Sam: In 2016, Jeb, you out-organized, out-fundraised, and pretty much out-everythinged the other candidates in the field. But something had appeared to change dramatically. What's your assessment of both the 2016 GOP primary and general election?

Jeb: First of all, I wasn't a good candidate for the times in which I was running. You got to be honest about that. As you were here talking about my mom and dad, if I had said the things that I was supposed to say in order to be a more effective candidate, to kind of sharpen the focus or push someone down to make yourself look better, to create controversy, all the things now that are kind of more commonplace, my mom would have slapped me across the face, which she did occasionally.

Sam: I don't doubt it, yeah.

Jeb: To unlearn the habits of trying to be a good person is not easy in a world where the political environment now mirrors a different culture. I could have been a better candidate and I think I got better going along but the environment in which we were operating in a very contested field of 18 people, I didn't fully understand the change of our culture that created a changing political environment. And kudos to President Trump for understanding that. I'm not sure at the end of the day that is what an effective leader needs to do as president but as a candidate, he was masterful for sure.

Sam: Jeb, I want to end with this question, "Are you optimistic about our country's future?"

Jeb: I am. I am. I think we're kind of stuck in this gridlock politically but if you stop the focus on D.C., which, believe it or not, I mean, if you watch cable news, I mean, the whole world revolves around D.C. Well, 3,000,000 people on average may be watching cable at any given time, maybe 4,000,000. We have 330,000,000 people living in our country. They're out being and doing. They're taking care of their families. They're small business people applying technology to make their lives better and their customers have a better product. They're striving for success. And our political system is broken temporarily but the American people are moving forward, so I'm very optimistic. You think about the things we take for granted today that didn't exist even 10 years ago and imagine what's coming our way for the next 10 years, cures of disease, technology applied in ways that defy our imagination. If you have the capacity to achieve or earn success, if you have a family that loves you with their heart and soul, that provides the kind of grit, and determination, and the skills to be successful. And if you have a high-quality education, this is the greatest time to be alive. And America will lead the world in that regard.

Sam: Well, Jeb, thank you so much for taking the time and joining me, and all the best. I hope to make it down to Miami for a Sunday fun day soon.

Jeb: All right, Sam. Thanks for everything you're doing for the George and Barbara Bush Foundation.

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."

song- 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.

