



All the Best Podcast
Episode 3: “Greatest Legacies”
Featuring Son of George H. W. Bush, Marvin Bush

Marvin: Dear kids. Last year, there was only a tiny sense of time left of sand running through the glass. This year, I must confess, I'm more aware of that. No fear, no apprehension, just a feeling like, "Let's go." There's so much to do and there might not be a lot of time left. I don't expect to be on the A team anymore, but I wanna play golf with you. And I wanna fish or throw shoes. And I wanna rejoice in your victories, be they political, or business, or family happiness victories. And I wanna be there for you if you get a bad bounce in life, and no doubt you will for the seas do indeed get rough. I don't want you to pull your punches. If I call Lauren, "Barbara," go ahead and give me your best shot, I can take it. But try not to say, "Come on Alf, get with it." If I shed tears, easier, try not to laugh at me because I'll lose more saline and it might make my mouth dry later on. Hey, don't point the finger at whomever is shedding the tear because all the Bushes cry easily when we are happy, or counting our blessings, or sad when one of us gets bruised or really hurt inside. Who knows? Maybe they'll come out with a new drug that makes legs bend easier, joints hurt less, drives go farther, memories come roaring back, and all fears about falling off the fishing rocks go away. Remember the old song, "I'll be there ready when you are?" Well, I'll be there ready when you are, but there's so much excitement ahead, so many grandkids to watch grow. If you need me, I'm here 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 & 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."

George: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, "Write your mother, serve your country." And he said, "Tell the truth." And I try to do that in public life, all through it.

Barbara: You're 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 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." Welcome to "All the best." I'm here with my uncle and Godfather, Marvin Bush. Marvin, thank you so much for being here today.

Marvin: Thank you for having me.

Sam: Well, Marvin, as you know, the focus of our podcast is service, and not just public service through elective office, like a couple of our family members have done, but service in all the forms it can take. What did you learn from Gampy and Ganny about service?

Marvin: I learned everything from them. They never preached to us about public service or service, overall, but they lived it. And each and every day, whether it was working in their community, Ganny, you know, mom helping out with a school district, you know, dad being involved, obviously, in elective office, their credo was, "Do something for someone else. And it's gonna make you a richer person."

Sam: It's such a great example that they've set for you, and your brothers, and sisters, and obviously the grandchildren. It's almost by osmosis. We're kind of getting that service trade.

Marvin: You don't think there's a competitive gene in our family where people want to sort of say, "Okay. I'm doing this to make somebody else's life better," but...

Sam: There is a piece of that, but I think that's healthy.

Marvin: Absolutely.

Sam: Especially when it's about helping others. Gampy often said of his own father that service was his crede, and credits his dad, your grandfather, with being among his biggest role models. I know you were very young, but do you

have any memories of your grandfather, Prescott? And what is your perspective on how he so influenced his son who ended up becoming the president of the United States?

Marvin: Well, he was a bigger than life guy in so many ways. First of all, he was about six foot five. And so, he was a towering figure in my dad's life. But he was a guy, himself, who was involved in his community in virtually every aspect. He was a Town Councilman in Connecticut, volunteered with the hospital in his hometown. And he inculcated into my dad this sense that, you know, again, your life is not purposeful if you're not helping other people out. My dad happened to blend in some characteristics from his mom. And I think that's where my dad sort of got more empathy towards other people. His dad was a stern guy, a great man, in so many ways, but his mom was probably the kindest person I ever met. And so, that aspect of your grandfather was something that was carried on.

Sam: Me personally, as I'm only 35, I did get to spend time with great Ganny a lot. And I know she had a big influence on him. I remember a quote, "It's how you treat the other guy." You know, other lines, like, "No one likes a braggadocio. "

Marvin: Absolutely. And, you know, the biggest crime you could commit in her eyes was to be unkind to somebody, to cut them down. That was just not permitted.

Sam: And Gampy, certainly took that on to an amazing level with all the things that he did. Talking more about Gampy here, I think it was Uncle George who said Gampy was the inventor of quality time, meaning, I think that as busy as he was when you and your siblings were younger, he still found ways to spend time with each of you and be present as a father. How did he do that?

Marvin: I'm sure it was hard for him. I mean, it was a chaotic household we lived in with, you know, my three older brothers, and your mom, and myself in the house. And there were times where some of us were up and there were times where some of us were down. And we could always rely on dad to give great advice and to be supportive, to bolster you when you weren't on your A-game. He wasn't one of those dads who was able to make every game. And we understood that I mean, because he was out serving his country and doing so many other things. But I never had a minute in my life where I didn't feel like he had my back and was supportive.

Sam: It's an amazing trait because that translated to the grandchildren. I mean, even me, one of, what, 17 grandchildren, I felt like I was special. And I think he

had that way of giving that quality time, whether it be a short or big, but he made time for everybody. And we've asked a lot of our guests how he did that and it's hard to put your finger on it.

Marvin: I think it's just one word. He's just a thoughtful guy. And if you're thinking about the other person, you know what their interests are, and you connect on that level. You know what the important days are in your life, You connect on that level. So, he connected.

Sam: And I think nothing really exemplifies that more than his letter writing.

Marvin: Oh my gosh.

Sam: I mean, how many letters do you think he wrote over his lifetime? It must have been hundreds thousands.

Marvin: Hundreds of thousands. And to this day, I don't think a week or a month goes by where I don't bump into somebody who, first of all, they pay respects for his passing. But they say, "We have six of his letters framed in our den" or "He reached out when my daughter was in the hospital," or, "I lost my job and the first guy I heard from him was George Bush."

Sam: I was with my mom at her house a couple of weeks ago, looking through her letters that she had saved and she saved a lot of them. She had five or six books filled with them. Obviously, as the daughter, he wrote her a lot of letters, but just as an example of the sheer number of letters that he churned out over his lifetime.

Marvin: One of my biggest regrets in life is I didn't save all of them. I saved some of them. But being a typical guy, you know, I'd toss one every once in a while.

Sam: Sure. You know, you're in college, it's like, "Oh, dad wrote me again, you know." Well, Marv, before you became a very successful in private business, family law has it that you had a small stint as a wedding photographer, specifically for Uncle Jeb and Aunt Columba, your brother and his beautiful bride. Can you share a little bit of that story? It's a great story.

Marvin: Well, here's what happened. So, I fancied myself in high school to be sort of Ansel Adams Junior, the great photographer. And I saved my money up and bought a Minolta camera and, you know, film was expensive. So, we would roll our own film, you know, to save money. And Jeb kindly offered to have me be the photographer and there were only 20 guests or something like that. It was

our immediate family, my grandmother, and a couple of others in Columbas family, of course. And so, I decided to get kind of artsy-fartsy with it. And, you know, as they were coming down the aisle, they looked over, and there I was on the ground snapping pictures from below, and trying to get all sorts of different angles. And anyway, so flash forward, about a week later, I was back in the darkroom rolling out the...

Sam: The film.

Marvin: Yeah, yeah. And next thing I know the first impression I saw, I saw a bride. But I also saw a guitar. And I'm thinking, "What the heck?" Then I realized that that one moment that you have and we've all had them in life, where your faces just flush and I thought, "Oh no." I had gone to a Frank Zappa concert the week before, had re-rolled the film. So, it was a double impression. So, he had pictures of Columba and Frank Zappa and his band in the background.

Sam: That's a hell of a wedding band.

Marvin: Well, it would have been a fine band but here's what happened. There is a happy ending to the story. I submitted it into the art school show and won second prize overall for creativity.

Sam: Bride of Zappa? What did you call it?

Marvin: Correct.

Sam: Is that what you called it?

Marvin: I did.

Sam: Yeah, that's a classic.

Marvin: The other thing is, Jeb is a pretty quiet guy and he's shy. He's not the most communicative guy in our family, but goodness, he never asked about the pictures.

Sam: Does he have any of the pictures with Zappa? Or do any of those still in existence?

Marvin: No. That's another one of my regrets. I wish I still had those. But the one picture that he has of his wedding date was taken by my mom. And it was, like, an Instamatic.

Sam: I've seen that picture. It's a great picture. That's a great story. That story will live on and all the best forever, don't worry. After Gampy passed in 2018, someone ventured an opinion that without Ganny, without Barbara Bush, there probably would not have been a President Bush. I know that is kind of a hypothetical statement. But the truth is, Ganny was totally devoted to Gampy and supported everything he did 110%. They were the closest and best of partners. Weren't they?

Marvin: Hundred percent. I mean, listen, she devoted her life to him. Think back to when she was an 18-year-old girl and he was 19. And he decided, after graduating from Yale University, a couple of years later, that instead of sticking to what many might have expected his career to be in finance or econ or something like that in New York, he said, "Look, I wanna either be a farmer in the Midwest or I wanna do something with my hands in Texas." And next thing you know, they hop in that car. And with her support, she said, "Look, I'm with you." And they drove all the way to Midland Odessa area in West Texas, which couldn't be anything further from where these two grew up. And that was, to me, that's sort of emblematic of that support that you're talking about. And then when he decided to run for office in Houston, Texas, he was the only republican out of the 24 congressmen from Texas. And, you know, that's a gutsy move. And she supported him through that and through every other challenging post that he had ever held. And in another of the obviously, moving to China, I don't know if you know that story of how that came about.

Sam: No. Let's hear it.

Marvin: So, when President Nixon resigned President Ford, basically was picking between Nelson Rockefeller and your grandfather to see who would be the vice president, the appointed Vice President. And Gampy finished second in a two-horse race. And Jerry Ford said, "Look, you can be an ambassador anywhere in the world." And so, he brought our family together. We were up in Maine. And he sort of, you know, "Okay. Kids, write down the countries you'd think would be interesting." And, of course, you know, England, France, Spain, whatever it was, but those were their choices. Well, he obviously wasn't taking a vote. Because they...

Sam: A poll maybe.

Marvin: Their poll. And he came back and he said, "Look, here are the two places that I considered. I considered going to Russia," this is in the middle of the Cold War, "or going to Beijing." And this is before we had normalized relationships with China. So, it was more of a liaison post. But he felt, "Look,

this is a civilization, a society in China, that has so much raw potential. I wanna be there early to help our relationships with China."

Sam: That's amazing. I mean, especially, looking back now, I mean, he said China or Russia, I mean, how important are those two countries right now...

Marvin: Unbelievable.

Sam:...at this day and age within the foresight that he had?

Marvin: He was pressing in that regard. And by the way, that was one of the best experiences for the two of them because they were away from sort of the pressure cooker of Washington. You know, they took Chinese lessons together. They spent a lot of quality time. I'm convinced that that was part of why their marriage was so strong.

Sam: The foresight for Gampy to say, China, I mean, if you look at it now, I mean, it's like, they're everything with all the stuff that's going on today. So, amazing story. So, between Gampy and Uncle George obviously both being president, Gampy for one term, and George, for two, our family has been blessed to have so many, like, special opportunities and different things that we've been able to do because of them being in office, going to the White House, which I know we've both done. And, you know, our wonderful Christmases at Camp David, which is so special to be able to do that. Is there any one memory... I know this is a tough one. But is there any one memory that stands out through all of those to you over the years?

Marvin: I think one memory that stands out is having the opportunity to go to the Olympic Games in Beijing with my dad and my brother, and seeing the respect that the Chinese people had from my dad was an amazing experience because he was at that point in his 80s. And it was fantastic.

Sam: Let's talk about Maine a little bit. For your whole life, you spent time in Maine. And I know he's called it the anchor windward, where we all kind of come together and we've had so many special memories there. Do you have any memories to share? I know we had a big pickleball tournament this summer.

Marvin: We did. That was outstanding.

Sam: You were the commissioner.

Marvin: No, tons of memories in Maine. And I think the overriding sort of sentiment that I have is similar to Gampy's, and that is that it is a place where

we can all come together. And I know this summer, in particular, being the first summer where mom and dad were not there, I think they would have been so pleased because so many of their grandchildren came together. All of us in our generation came together. I thought about them all summer long. We were there because they loved it and they would love to see us there.

Sam: Let's talk about George W. this summer. He spent the whole summer in Maine.

Marvin: I know. I couldn't believe it. I just don't know how much painting, golfing, bossing us around he could do but he pulled it off.

Sam: Yeah, he did. Well, everyone thought, you know, as he's taking over Gampy and Ganny's old house, everyone thought he would take on the role of Gampy but maybe a little bit more taking on the role of Ganny.

Marvin: He had a little bit of that in him. No, he was great. He's great. He brings an energy level to any place he goes that is incredible. And he and Laura are incredibly gracious hosts. So, I know we had friends up and your family had friends up, and they make them feel like they're part of our family, just like Gan and Gampy did.

Sam: It was crucial for him to be there and bring life to the big house because I was nervous and I know other people were nervous as well about, "What's the summer gonna be like," and he really did breathe some life into the point and the big house is kind of the center point.

Marvin: It is.

Sam: And having life there and guests, and kind of the excitement that Gampy and Ganny insistently had was really, really great.

Marvin: With Gampy, as you know, you never know who you would see at Walker's Point, the Singing

Priest, the Oak Ridge Boys, Phil Mickelson.

Sam: Teri Hatcher.

Marvin: Teri Hatcher. Every time you turn around, there were some other person.

Sam: That was amazing. I think George is picking up the slack there. We've had some great guests this summer and I'm sure there's plenty more to come.

Marvin: But he's not like Gampy, where he would crash the wedding's at the no-name and invite the singer to come over and sing at Walker's Point the next night. It's a little bit of a different dynamic but it's still fun.

Sam: Not quite. Yeah, Gampy was amazing. He'd go into town and meet somebody, and the next thing you know, they'd be back at the house and they'd be showing off in town...

Marvin: And Ganny would be going, "Who the heck is that?"

Sam: "I met him down at the dock," or whatever. What a special place Walker's Point is and I know that you and your family really enjoy because your family's kind of spread out.

Marvin: Maine is that place. You know, our kids come home to Virginia with some frequency but, you know it's an easy sell, getting them to come up to Maine.

Sam: I was about to say, it's an easy sell, say, "Hey, let's meet in Walkers Point." "We'll be there, dad."

Marvin: Yeah, no, it's been fun.

Sam: I wanna transition to, as Gampy be called, The L Word, legacy. For years and years, he had avoided talking about legacy and always thought that he would leave it up to the historians. I would love to hear your thoughts on Gampy and Ganny's greatest legacies.

Marvin: I think, one is the fact that they built a family where everyone loves and respects each other. And it's because that's what they would want. And they brought us together in Maine and in Texas, and raised us to be good to each other. And I think if you're a grandfather, and you've got 17 grandchildren, 5 kids and 5 in-laws, who would lay their body on a railroad track for you, that's a pretty good legacy.

Sam: That's pretty amazing. We would have done anything for him. And, you know, that's not even including their legacy projects that go on with both of them through their foundations and all that good stuff.

Marvin: People always ask, "You know, what job are you most proud of? When he was elected president or this or that?" No, I mean, he was just a great dad, and he never lost sight of what's important.

Sam: And I think he said once, you know, when people kept pushing for the legacy thing and, you know, he was always hesitant, and wanted people to kind of figure it out after the fact, and leave that up to the professionals. But I think when he's pushed and pushed, one of the legacies and is our family obviously, and then also the Bush School, and the students there. I think he was more interested in the legacy of the people and instilling in them service, like many of the Bush School students do. And then obviously, all the great things that our family has done. I've interviewed a lot of the cousins, and your sister, and some of your brothers, and it's amazing to hear just the potpourri of things that each of them are doing to help others. And whether it's Lauren serving 100 million meals in Africa or, you know, my mom and Jeb with the Barbara Bush Foundation.

Marvin: Literacy. Absolutely.

Sam: It doesn't stop. Is there anything in your life that you're doing that you...?

Marvin: I'm a non-spotlight guy, as you know. And my crede is do something good for somebody every day. Reach out to somebody who's down and out. I learned this from my dad, of course, and my mom. Yesterday, older lady was walking her dog in my building, you know, I reach out, I help her. I've dog sat that dog. I mean, little things. You know, I'm involved with some charitable stuff, of course, like all of us, but I wake up every day grateful for my life and thinking, "What can I do to make somebody's life better?" And sometimes it surprises me what it is, but I will not go to bed without doing something, even if it's getting a ticket for my godson to the World Series or to Dave Matthews.

Sam: Awesome. Awesome. I wanna end with this, Marv. We've talked a lot about Gampy and we've touched on Ganny, but I'd love to hear a funny story about growing up with Barbara Bush as your mother.

Marvin: She was phenomenal in every way. The thing I loved about her was the fact that she had a self-deprecating sense of humor. She was self-aware. I remember growing up and she kept trying to dye her hair different colors. And one time she came home and it was kind of an orange-ish, brownish, Texas burnt orangish color. And I think she looked in the mirror and she was young, she was prematurely gray and naturally, and I think she said, "You know what? This isn't the authentic Barbara Bush." And after that, she let it go gray. She joked, she said, "Look, some people think George is my son, you know,

because of the hair color." But she didn't care. She was incredibly authentic and true to herself. And that's the thing I admire, I think the most about her.

Sam: Yeah, I mean, there wasn't really no one more authentic in my mind. I mean, she was who she was, all the way to the end, sharp as a tack and funny as ever.

Marvin: In her final days, I was one of the people, like your sister and Neil and others who were reading to her, we were reading her actual book that she wrote.

Sam: Memoir?

Marvin: Yeah. And it was basically derived from her diaries where she was a prolific diary writer. In fact, I used to go tear out pages when she would write really honest but revealing stuff about me. So, I'm reading from the book and she was in the bed upstairs, and she was so frail. I mean, she was literally saying goodbye to people. And all of a sudden, I'm thinking and I was alone with her, and I'm thinking, and I go over, and she's not reacting in any way, and I went, "Oh, man. Oh, boy." I leaned down and I put my head, you know, like in the movies, check the pulse. She goes, "Not so fast, Marvin."

Sam: Classic. Classic. Classic. Well, we'll end on that. Marvin, thank you so much for joining us on "All the Best." It's been a great conversation. Thanks for being here.

Marvin: And thank you. I'm proud of all you're doing, Sam.

Sam: Oh, thank you, Marvin.

Marvin: Awesome.

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

Barbara: 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.

