



**All the Best Podcast**  
**Episode 25: “On the Right Path”**  
*Featuring former personal aide to Barbara Bush, Michele Stanton*

Michele: December 2003. Dear M., Here's a little yearend cash Don has deducted, cautious man that he is. Anyway, it comes with joy in my heart because you brighten my life and save hers, BPB. Have a wonderful Christmas and a great 2004. George Bush.

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."

We're mountaineers, volunteers  
We're the tide that rolls, we're Seminoles  
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 through it.

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 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."

We're one big country nation, that's right

Sam: Michele W. Stanton was the personal aide to my grandmother, Barbara Bush from 2003 until 2006. She then served as a presidential appointee for my uncle, President George W. Bush, in Commissioner's Office of the Food and Drug Administration from 2006 till the end of his administration. She currently serves as the executive assistant to the Dr. von Eschenbach, who has also joined us on "All the Best." Michele is a proud member of the advisory board of the George Bush Presidential Library Center, and volunteers for various local organizations, including the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. It is our pleasure to have Michele Stanton with us today.

Michele, welcome to "All the Best. "

Michele: Thank you so much for having me.

Sam: I like to start with this, Michele. It seems like everyone has a story about how they came to work for Gampy and Ganny. What's yours?

Michele: Mine has everything to do with my dear friend Quincy Hicks Crawford, who I know was on your podcast not too terribly long ago. It was in the late '90s and she was your Ganny's aide, and everyone on the Point was going on a trip, except for Quincy. So, Mrs. Bush felt badly for her so she told her that she could ask one friend to come and stay with her for the weekend and that friend and Quincy could go on the Point and swim on the pool. So, Quincy called and asked me, and I was thrilled. I was so excited. I'd never met your grandparents before and I'd never been to Maine. Only catch was that I had to help Quincy in the office for two days before they left for the trip. So, we worked in the office and met your Ganny and Gampy, who were just so amazing. I mean, welcoming and inclusive and made me feel so comfortable right off the bat.

Fast forward to the day before they're leaving for the trip, and we were done. Quincy and I had gone home for the day, and President Bush called Quincy on her cellphone and asked her to come back to the Point and to bring me. So of course, we're both terrified thinking we had done something wrong. So, we go back to the office and he invites us to come into the big house. We go into the family room and he says, "Guess what, two people had backed out of the trip and I want you and Quincy to come as stowaways." We couldn't believe it. And

so he said, "You're gonna have to share a room. Otherwise, the whole trip is paid for." It was like, "Okay, we can definitely share a room."

So, I called my boss, who I remember at the time saying to me, "If you are lying, when you get home, you are fired," because I had to ask for another eight days off. It was a trip of a lifetime. I couldn't believe it. I thought nothing like this will ever happen to me again. Fast forward three years, and Jean called me and said, "Mrs. Bush wants to know if you'll come and work for us and be her aide."

Sam: My grandmother was known for being direct. I won't ask you if you found her that way as well, because I think I know your answer, Michele. But in what way could she be direct?

Michele: Most of the time, I appreciated it, because you always knew exactly where she stood and what she wanted and how she wanted you to do it. But there was one little thing that actually drove me a little nutty. Your grandmother is a huge scrapbooker, so she had a digital camera that she took everywhere we went, and she took tons of pictures, except when she was on stage, then it was my job to take her picture.

Well, our very first event, I took her pictures, we come home, she develops them, she calls me to her office and says to me, "You are horrible. You can't take a picture to save your life." So, she teaches me how to work on her cameras. "Push halfway, and push all the way. Push halfway, push all the way." Every event, for three years, she taught me how to use the camera. But she told everyone what horrible pictures I took, that I didn't know how to use a camera. And when Kristen came in to take my place as the aide, I'll never forget what she said, "I know one thing for sure that you'll do a lot better than Michele, take pictures." I was like, "Oh my gosh, give me a break."

Sam: Well, you came to work for Ganny a few years after she left the White House and helped her manage her schedule and her travels, how was she spending her time at that point in her busy retirement?

Michele: When I was there, it was early 2000s, so they were both turning 80. Your Ganny had just finished her book "Reflections" so my very first responsibility was to help her organize her book tour, which included book signings and huge events. She was on "David Letterman," "The Tonight Show," we were travelling three months solid. And then about the time that the book tour ended, it was time for your uncle to run for president again. You may recall that your Ganny was a big part of that campaign, so we were campaigning. I mean, we were travelling everywhere. And in between there, there were

speeches and charity events. It was exhausting, quite frankly. They were so busy, and I always felt badly because I was in my 30s and she was 80 so it was like I cannot be tired because she's not tired.

But I do remember one day, there were days that she would get tired. One day in particular, we were in Houston, she was doing a charity event for a smaller charity, but a charity that meant a lot to her, and it was a big event. It was long. She had to do reception and a lunch and a speech. Anyway, I go pick her up for the event, and she just wasn't feeling very well. Her back was hurting, and she was tired. So, I told her, "Why don't we call them and see if we can't modify the events so it'll be a little shorter?" And she looked at me and said, "No. No, I'm not doing that." And I said, "Why? Why not? I know they'll understand." She goes, "Because all I have to do is show up. As long as I show up, this group will raise thousands of dollars. Why would I be so selfish as to not show up?" That's a good lesson in life, to just show up when you need to.

Sam: Michele, we're currently in the midst of celebrating my grandmother's new book, "Pearls of Wisdom," which was edited by our mutual friend Jean Becker, who I know we both love very much. It's now a New York Times Bestseller. Of course, you were asked to contribute a pearl. I'd love to hear your pearl of wisdom.

Michele: Your Ganny, and President Bush too for that matter, were very particular about the pronouns that they used. Very little I, me, and my and mine, and much more of we and our and us. One of the very first letters I wrote for Mrs. Bush, she put it back in the mail carrier to have it returned to me, and she made me a note that said, "I want you to circle and count the number of times you used an I, a me, or a my, and write that at the top of the letter. And then I want you to rewrite the letter and have zero or maybe one me, my, or I."

But I told her, one of the last times I saw her, before she passed away, that it had so stuck with me, and it's just much more inclusive, and that was my pearl that I contributed.

Sam: Well, as my grandmother's aide, you got to see the madness of Maine, and Walker's Point up close. I think my cousins and I were able to attribute to some of that madness. What was the difference between my grandparents' life in Texas versus Maine?

Michele: It was very different. When we were in Houston, there was a lot of travelling and speeches and charity events, even at that time. It was busy and bustling and very business-like, if you will. Versus in Maine, my job shifted and I was more of like a social secretary. So, I helped Mrs. Bush coordinate

guests, and that included family. Who's coming, who's going, where will they stay, what do they eat, what are their allergies? And there were also a lot of charity events at Walker's Point too but they were longer. They were usually a weekend event, so that took time to coordinate, prepare. And everything was just casual. She and I really never went anywhere while she was in Maine. It was her time to just sort of be with family, be with friends, still do charity work, but be at a more relaxed pace. So, it was still busy, but it was totally different.

Sam: Well, Michele, I would be remiss if I did not ask if you had any stories or anecdotes involving my grandfather. Do you have any stories you could share about Gampy?

Michele: There are so many, but one of my favorites was actually in Maine. So, there was one summer and it seemed like overnight, all these new houses were up at Ocean Avenue. So, we're in the office one day, President Bush calls a staff meeting, and asks us all if we noticed all of the new houses on Ocean Avenue. I thought, "That's so funny. I had noticed that." He said, "Well, you know what that means, we have a lot of new neighbors." And then he said those famous words. "I have an idea." And his idea was to invite everyone on Ocean Avenue, new neighbor or old neighbor, to Walker's Point for essentially a block party, a welcome-to-the-neighborhood party. And he said, "We're gonna have barbecue and cocktails, and I think I'll ask the Oaks to sing."

Sam: The Oak Ridge Boys.

Michele: The Oak Ridge boys. He calls the Oak Ridge Boys, they come. So, he says to me, "Michele, here's your job. You need to go and now invite to everyone to the Point, and Mrs. Bush and I are gonna host everybody." Some neighbors' contact information we had, but all the new people, we didn't. So, I literally had to go and knock on people's door and they would open the door and I would say, "Hi, I'm Michele from the house of George Bush, please don't shut the door." Because they wouldn't believe that it was true, right, they were inviting you over to the Point for a party.

So, it was a huge hit, hundreds of people came and the Oak Ridge Boys performed. Your Gampy was so fun and funny and made everyone feel so happy. I love that story. It's so him.

Sam: Just a revolving door of friends and people and new friends alike. Well, Michele, the main theme of our podcast is service. After you left working for my grandmother, you continued your public service in D.C. Tell us what you did and what you learned from it.

Michele: I went and worked for the Food and Drug Administration, which is a good fit for me, because I had done healthcare sales, both insurance and pharmaceuticals, prior to working for Mrs. Bush. So, I went to work for the FDA, and the commissioner at the time was Andrew von Eschenbach. He gave me a job in the Chief of Staff's office, and I worked in crisis communication. Whenever there was a crisis, I would help organize all the different entities of the FDA to come together so that the message to the public was coordinated. I was there for two years, and I absolutely loved it. In fact, I still work for Dr. von Eschenbach today doing all his scheduling and invoicing and it's wonderful. It was a wonderful opportunity to be in D.C. at that time when your uncle was president. I thought it was great.

Sam: Well, Michele, I'll end with this. With Ganny now onto her greater reward as my friend Jim McGrath would say, what would you miss most about having her around?

Michele: I just miss her friendship. She always had such sage advice. Anytime I would ask her a question, it was just amazing to me how her ability to connect with people and know what to say and because of her life experiences, she always would lead me on the path that was the right one, and I miss that. And sometimes it was little things and other times, it was big things. I miss not being able to ask her those questions anymore. Or sometimes I didn't ask. Sometimes, she would just let me know.

Sam: She'd offer it.

Michele: She would offer it.

Sam: We all miss that. And Michele, thank you so much for sharing with us today. It was such a pleasure to have you on "All the Best."

Michele: Thank you, Sam, for having me. It's good to see you.

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."

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.

