



All the Best Podcast
Episode 16: “The Backbone of the Country”
Featuring Country Singer Reba McEntire

Reba: March 24th, 2011. Dear, dear Reba, it was so great to see you and to have you be at George's big night. We are still pinching ourselves over you coming so far. You added a feeling of love and humor. I will confess that I knew only one or two of the others and did not understand most of their music, and yet love them for coming. We loved the evening from start to finish. I'm hoping that the message gets across that anyone and everyone can help somebody, and that party affiliation is not as important as being an American. We go to Kennebunkport on May 2nd and would so love to have you and your car-racing son come visit. I wish I could've heard how he's doing. We love you. Bar.

George: Well, 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".

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.

Barbara: You are a human being first, and those human connections with children, with friends, are the most important investments 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".

Welcome to "All the Best". Multimedia entertainment mogul Reba McEntire has become a household name through a successful career that spans across music, television, film, theater and retail. Not only has she won 3 Grammys, 15 American Music Awards, 16 American Country Music Awards, and is a Country Music Hall of Famer, Reba was also a Kennedy Center honors recipient in 2018 and holds multiple philanthropic and leadership honors. She holds a record 35 number one singles and has sold over 56 million albums worldwide. It's our honor to have Reba McEntire with us today. Reba, how's it going?

Reba: I'm doing great. How are you doing?

Sam: I'm doing very well. Again, thank you so much for joining us. Reba, I'd like to start off by going back to December 6th, 2018 in Saint Martin's Church in Houston. You offered up an amazing version of the Lord's Prayer at my gampy's funeral. That was a very emotional day for us as a family and I can only imagine it was emotional for you too. Can you tell us about that day and its significance for you?

Reba: I was honored to be asked to sing at his funeral. He's a man that I respected dearly. To be in that church, to get to sing right after the Oak Ridge Boys was very emotional, very moving. I was very thankful that I held myself together. And Joe Bonsall and I were sitting together behind the big pipes of the organ where the audience couldn't see us, and after they got back, I said, "Where did y'all walk?" Because I couldn't see where I was gonna go.

And he was telling me and we were, you know, having our stuff together, and then I went out and I sang and I saw the casket there, and it was really moving. And I did everything I could, looked at every exit, but I wanted to go over and touch the casket so bad and then that flag. And I thought, "Better not do that because you'll really lose it."

So I got through with my song and I looked at President Bush sitting there on the front row and then I exited back and I got a hold of Joe and we just bawled. We were just like two little kids missing our buddy. And then we went back around and I was very relieved, very glad I did it. And then we got to visit with the Oaks and Jenna and Barb, and say hello to Laura. It was just a very special, special day. Very glad I got to be a part of it. That's American history right there, but more than anything, I got to see the family of two of my best friends.

Sam: We were so lucky to have you there. And you were getting emotional. Now you're getting me emotional, because unfortunately, we inherited a gene

from my grandfather, a crying gene. So if you...don't get started because I'll join you and then we'll be in trouble.

You essentially came to the funeral straight from Washington.

Reba: It was a blur of a week because I had done the Kennedy Center Honors and then I went to Las Vegas to do my residency with Brooks & Dunn. So I did my show that night and we got on the plane and flew to Houston to do the funeral, and then I got back on the plane to Vegas after the funeral, and then the next night we played again in Vegas.

Sam: No rest for the weary.

Reba: Well, you do what you have to do and want to do.

Sam: Talking about the Kennedy Center Honors, of all the accolades you've received throughout your decorated career, where did that one sit? Yeah.

Reba: It was huge to be honored in that way. I was just thrilled to pieces. I had been a participant of that function four times with Dolly, Loretta, Carol Burnett and Carole King. So to get to be honored...you know, I was there four times like, "Oh, man. One of these days I hope so." And then to finally be there was just huge. It's surreal. You can't imagine that this is a real thing going down right now.

Sam: Reba, you've been friends with our family for as long as I can remember. How did you first come to meet my grandparents?

Reba: Shelby was six months old. We were playing in Washington. Somebody had made the arrangements for us to get to go meet President Bush and we were thrilled. And Narvel and I took Shelby in and Shelby got a hold of President Bush's thumb. I said, "Oh, my gosh. Mister President, I am so sorry." He said, "Oh, don't worry about it. I'm used to this. I've got tons of grandkids."

And so we stayed and visited and he showed us his drawer where he's got all of his country music stashed and just so sweet. We took pictures and then when we were leaving Mrs. Bush was kinda following us out. She said, "Hey, would you like to see where we live?" And we got big-eyed and go, "Oh, my gosh, yes."

So we went upstairs and she showed us the Kennedy room and all around, and it was just so hospitable and warm and my gosh...these people are just like family. And they treated us just like family. And then years later every time

we'd go to Houston for the rodeo, President Bush and Mrs. Bush would come over, and sometimes we got invited to their house and then we got invited to Kennebunkport and spend the night when I was up there touring. And then we got to go to the Greek Islands on the cruise. It was just priceless to get to hang out with them.

Sam: Do you have a favorite story about my grandparents?

Reba: Well, it was funny. We were there. I was sitting right beside him at lunch one afternoon at their house in Houston. Going into the house Barb said, "George, won't you go up and show them our new swimming pool?" She said, "The only way you could see it is you gotta stand up on the bathroom toilet and see out the window."

Sam: Oh, God.

Reba: And I kinda looked at her kinda funny and I said, "Well, okay." So we walked upstairs and she was sitting there needlepointing working on a project and she said, "While you're up there, make up the bed." I said, okey-doke. Of course, I didn't do that, but we looked at the swimming pool out back and we sat down for lunch and he said, "So you're gonna go back over for sound check?" And I said, "Yeah." I said, "What y'all gotta do?" He said, "Well, we're planning my funeral." And I went, "What?" He said, "Oh, don't worry about it. We do it every year, you know. It's just be prepared." And I said, "Okay." And I said, "Anything else going on?" He said, "Well, got me some new hearing aids." I said, "Oh, you like them?" He said, "What did you say?" Just real loud. I thought it was hysterical. I almost fell out of my chair laughing.

Sam: Now, Reba, did my grandmother ever call you dearie?

Reba: Yeah, we were on the cruise in the Greek Isles. I love what she would do at dinner. She would take playing cards and cut them diagonally in two, and then when you walk in to wherever we're gonna eat there was a bowl of half of these cards. Like if you picked up half of a queen, well, the other queen was somewhere on the plate, and so you had to walk around the table and find your spot. Jean Becker was there and Jean had told me, "You will know that she's not happy with something you say if she calls you dearie." And I said, "Whoo, I never wanna be called dearie." And I was sitting by her one day and I said something, voiced my opinion and she said, "Well, dearie..." And I looked at Jean Becker and Jean's eyebrows went up and I thought, "Oh, my gosh. I'm in trouble." And I don't remember what the subject was or anything but I knew I had been deariied.

Sam: Well, if you only got away with one through your time, you're pretty good. Unfortunately, growing up with my grandmother for 30 plus years, my second name was dearie, so I got in a lot of trouble. Me and a couple of cousins, maybe Jenna and Barbara. Anyway, we won't throw them under the bus.

Reba: Too much fun.

Sam: Now, Reba, my grandfather in particular had a real love for country music, Reba, and it seems like it was reciprocated by so many people, certainly you, the Oak Ridge Boys. I think of Moe Bandy and Brad Paisley to name a couple. Why do you think that was? Why was that bond so strong?

Reba: I think country music is about relatability. People that draw to country music are the backbone of the country. And I think he was the backbone of the country. Everybody in my family, my friends, loved President Bush because he was the person who loved our values and our morals because that's what he had. It was just like we speak each other's language. Country music speaks Middle America's language, and that's where I grew up. So I gravitated toward him and his values and what he stood for.

Sam: Reba, you were always so kind in supporting our grandparents, especially in their charity work like performing at a big Points of Light event or my grandmother's 90th birthday which raised some amazing funds for the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. Service was so important to my grandparents and it's really the central theme of this podcast. So I have to ask, what are some causes that are close to your heart?

Reba: I have tons. I have the Reba Ranch House and the Reba Rehabilitation Center. We started that in '84 doing concerts, asking friends to come in and perform at the concerts, and we help people in Northeastern Texas, Southeastern Oklahoma get their medical problems taken care of. But I think my biggest thing that I am a huge advocate for is children. I can't believe the children who go to school hungry. I am a big supporter of the backpack system so kids will have food when they go home on the weekend and they don't come back to school hungry. And children who are in the foster care service, when they get out of that system at 18, what do they do? So, trying to help them out. And it's not just one big organization that I try to help, but lots of different ones. The homeless. That's a big thing here in Nashville, Tennessee. The homeless, the hungry, and the forgotten, and the mistreated. I don't like that.

Sam: Similar to my grandparents. Sounds like you have your hand in a lot of things. They couldn't get enough. We're better off that you're working hard to make this a better country and a better world. And man, that's great to hear.

Now, Reba, I heard you're gonna be my competition soon. You're starting a podcast. Can you tell me about it?

Reba: I can. I was kinda like...one day...I don't have anything to do. What can we do? And it's...well, let's do a podcast. I said, "Well, all right." That was last year.

Sam: It'll keep you busy...

Reba: And so...yeah. I'm looking forward to it. I've been watching Kelly Clarkson's TV show every morning and seeing how much fun she has, but I know how much work goes into it. This is just a drop in the bucket to what she has to go through.

Sam: Sure.

Reba: I am really looking forward to it. You know, when you do interviews, you talk about what my projects are, but when we're doing a podcast, I'm really wanting to dive into subject matter and get people's opinion on things. And that way, they could change my mind one way or the other, or it's just gonna broaden my insight of a subject. And I think it's gonna be very fun to hear somebody's opinion and to get the expert to come in and to say their opinion.

Sam: Sure.

Reba: Well, I might agree with them, might not. So we'll see.

Sam: And finally, Reba, I wanna know about your upcoming tour. I know everyone listening is gonna wanna come see you. So where can they do it?

Reba: Oh, yeah, absolutely. We're gonna be touring all over the eastern part of the United States, having a lot of fun. Got a brand new show we're putting together. That's what we've been working on this morning, was the set list, the costuming. All of that's in the running and ready to go and...well, not exactly ready to go, but it's getting closer anyway. And we start the middle of March and then go into April on our tour, and then we go to Vegas to continue the residency with Brooks & Dunn. Get back out on the tour with the Reba Show, and then we go to until Mother's Day.

Sam: How do you do it? What drives you to keep going and going and going? You've been doing it for so long. I mean, is it just the passion for music and people or...what's the secret?

Reba: All of the above. I don't do anything I don't wanna do, that I don't love to do, that I don't have a passion for. Because if I don't love to do it, my fans will know it and they'll see I'm bored, I'm not interested. It's wasting their time, their money, their energy. So I only do what I love to do and have a passion for it. And two, we've got some great songs that I've been really blessed to get to sing for these last 44 years, and it's a God-given talent that I appreciate, very thankful for. I'm very thankful for my fans, my band, my team, everybody who's helped me put this show together. I didn't do it by myself. You've got to have creative people, and I'm very blessed to have folks like that around me.

Sam: Well, that's humble of you to say that. It is a God-given talent, but I know you work your tail off to get where you are. So it's a lot of hard work too.

Reba: Well, thanks, thanks. But it makes it a lot more fun when you have fun people to work with.

Sam: Gotta surround yourself with great people like my grandparents did with you.

Reba: Oh, thanks.

Sam: Well, Reba, thank you so much for coming on and sharing your stories. It was really a pleasure for us to have you and hear from you. Good luck on your tour. Good luck with your podcast, okay. You have to get used to saying, "Like, subscribe, write a review." You'll get used to it but just like, subscribe, review and you'll be great.

Reba: Okay. Thanks. I appreciate it.

Sam: Thanks, Reba.

Reba: Sam, thanks for sharing your family with me. So sweet.

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: 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.

