



All the Best Podcast

Episode 55: “The Right Honorable Brian Mulroney: CAVU” *Featuring Former Canadian Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney*

Prime Minister Mulroney: August 5, 2000. Dear, Brian, that letter from you after George W. was officially nominated to run for president at the GOP convention, means a great deal to Barbara and me. There is no way I can tell you the emotion we felt when we saw George P. then George W. up there, in front of the convention. One good thing, when George finished his acceptance speech, it was like a new day had dawned on our family. I felt that finally my political days were over. The record sealed and finished, with the historians left to decide. The baton had indeed been passed. And when Bar and I left the hall, proudest parents in the world, we felt that a wonderful chapter was closed, finished. For us, the mission is now to stay off stage and pray for our boy.

When the road ahead for him is rocky, and it will be, we will be here for him, our arms held out to him, just as they were some 50 years ago, when he'd fall on the rocks right out of this window, and come in with a cut on his legs. We are his loving parents, he is our loving son. That, dear Brian, is what this is all about right now. Love to all in your great family. And yes, if you can pop over here for a night or two, please do. Your friend, George Herbert Walker 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."

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.

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."

In September of 1984, Brian Mulroney led the Progressive Conservative Party to the largest victory in Canadian history, becoming Canada's 18th Prime Minister, where he served for nine years in the role, four of which occurred during my grandfather, George H.W. Bush's presidency. During his time in office, Prime Minister Mulroney introduced bold new initiatives such as the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Canada-U.S. Acid Rain Treaty, and the Canada-U.S. Arctic Cooperation Agreement. Prime Minister Mulroney also served as Co-Chairman of the United Nations World Summit for Children. And his government played leading roles in the campaign against apartheid in South Africa, the reunification of Germany, and the first Gulf War. Prime Minister Mulroney is also the first non-American in history to eulogize a president, first with Ronald Reagan in 2004, and again with my grandfather in 2018. In 2018, he was also awarded the George Bush Award for Excellence in Public Service.

Prime Minister Mulroney, we are honored to have you join us today on "All the Best." How are you doing?

Prime Minister Mulroney: I'm doing fine. It's a little chilly up here in Montreal, but I'm doing fine.

Sam: Mr. Prime Minister, I'd like to start with this. The main theme on "All the Best" is service, because the overriding force in my gampy's life, outside of his family, was service to others, helping others, making a difference. Can you talk about your own path to public service and what motivated you?

Prime Minister Mulroney: My father was an electrician in northern Quebec, a little town in northern Quebec, Baie-Comeau. One of the things that he always said to us was that the only way out of a paper mill town is through a university door. That led me to a small university in Nova Scotia. And after my career as prime minister and business and so on, I decided to emphasize public service in a tangible way. And so I took on the responsibility, in my own mind anyway, of

raising money and giving money for scholarships for children who otherwise couldn't have gotten to university. And I've been doing that now for 25 years. And we've raised enough money, and I've donated enough to provide, I suppose, for hundreds of scholarships. It's kind of when I get letters of thanks from these young students, for putting them on a way that they can serve their country in the future, that's the warmest feeling I get. I just love it. And that was my path to public service.

Sam: I'd like to flashback to December 5th, 2018, when you were among the four speakers chosen by my gampy, to eulogize him. To those who were not born or aware when gampy was president, what was the most important thing you wanted the world to know about your friend, George Bush?

Prime Minister Mulroney: Two things, that he was a great man and that he was a great president. And I gave illustrations of both in my eulogy to your grandfather. I knew him as a great president, and history will remember him as that. But I wanted to emphasize those two features of a remarkable human being, namely, President George Herbert Walker Bush. And so I emphasized the human qualities, the kindness, and the generosity, and the consideration, the thoughtfulness for others, both as president and as a friend. So I wanted to do that and I wanted to illustrate as well, some of the extraordinary things that he accomplished as President of the United States that tend some time to be forgotten. But these should never be forgotten, because they were so important to the world. And so I tried to do that.

And if I can judge by the communications I received after my eulogy, I received a ton of them, saying thank you for speaking about President Bush and telling us in detail, from someone who was there, who sat with him, and listened to him, and worked with him, what a great man he was.

Sam: Well, that's exactly right, because as you know, Mr. Prime Minister, gampy abhorred the word legacy, because in his view, it connoted a sense of entitlement or arrogance. But all presidents, of course, have legacies. Let's talk about foreign policy first. We just recently marked the 30th anniversary of German unification. Next year marks the 30th anniversary of the victory in the first Gulf War. And coming up in 2021, we will mark 30 years since the Soviet Union gave way to a democratic Russia, effectively ending the Cold War. Mr. Prime Minister, where do these achievements rank? And are we leaving anything out?

Prime Minister Mulroney: Well, we're leaving a lot out. For example, he signed NAFTA, he signed the Canada-United States Acid Rain Treaty. He was a great environmentalist, as you know. These were earth shattering achievements. You mentioned the reunification of Germany, but reunification of Germany within NATO. The Soviet Union opposed that completely, of course, but we finally got Gorbachev to the point where he would accept it. And when Chancellor Kohl delivered his report on German reunification to the Bundestag, he made it very clear that none of this would have happened without the brilliant leadership of George Herbert Walker Bush. Period. There was no better Judge of what happened during that period than Helmut Kohl. And that was precisely his point. Of course, Gorbachev played a major role as well, and others had some roles in it. But those were the two big players. And this was a huge accomplishment.

The Gulf War, of course, he got in and out, won it with casualties kept to an absolute minimum. That was a huge victory. And the manner in which he assembled the coalition, through the United Nations Security Council, involving for the first time in history, Arab nations, in an attempt to drive out another Arab nation, having invaded another Arab nation. And he did all of that, this was his point of view. And I think you mentioned another one?

Sam: Well, I talked about the Soviet Union giving way to a democratic Russia.

Prime Minister Mulroney: Well, that was the result of the Reagan/Bush years. President Reagan and President Bush articulated the same policy. And it resulted in the implosion of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, as we just said, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. And all of this, the West won the Cold War without firing a shot. History doesn't get any bigger and better than that.

Sam: That's amazing.

Prime Minister Mulroney: This was leadership of the highest order. And something else, which touches upon what you mentioned, he was such a modest man. When the Berlin Wall came down, it would have been entirely legitimate for him to go to Berlin and make a speech or do something. But he said, "No, this is for the German people. I'm not going to go there and dance on the wall, simply to get my face on television." Now, how many other leaders do you think would have resisted that opportunity? I can tell you the answer, none. And so this gives you an idea of a truly great man with a sense of modesty and concern for others. That's what big leaders are.

Sam: On the domestic side, gampy also secured passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. But I want to focus on another landmark piece of legislation of particular interest to you and our neighbors in Canada that you've already briefly touched on, the Clean Air Act Amendments. Can you tell us about your work with my grandfather on this critically important issue?

Prime Minister Mulroney: Well, I started with President Reagan, and I had to really mount an attack to make some progress on it while President Reagan was there. He had a good heart and his intentions were pure, but there were people around him that didn't think it was worth the problems that it might cause in the middle west of the United States kind of thing. But all the time that I was there with Reagan, your grandfather was in the room, and I knew him to be sympathetic to what I was trying to do. He listened carefully and so on. We kept in touch all the time. Just before his first speech to the joint session of Congress after he was inaugurated, he had called me and he said, "Brian, I'd like to come up to Canada in a couple of days after this speech, and I want to talk to you about acid rain." So he came up. I found out from his inner circle, namely, Jim Baker, that the weekend prior, he had gone to Camp David, and he had restudied all of the documentation, and how the acid rain, which was 50/50, coming from the United States, was killing off all the rivers, lakes, and streams in eastern Canada and the eastern United States. But in our case, we were being devastated. He came and he said, we are going to do a treaty together, you and me, because I'm an environmentalist and I don't want this happening in my country. And to the extent that the poison is coming from the smokestacks in the middle of west, we're going to deal with it.

I had presented to him what I call a clean hands policy, where Canada would do the exact same thing. We would pay our own fair share of this. And the result of this is very interesting, because in those days, I remember when President Reagan made his first trip to Ottawa in 1981, there were 50,000 people outside the Canadian Parliament, protesting acid rain. If you come to Canada anytime now, you'll never hear the word acid rain because it doesn't exist anymore. Because your grandfather made it possible, in his cooperation with Canada, to rid the continent of the scourge of acid rain. So our rivers, and lakes, and streams, and so on in both countries, are now without that vile poison in our environment. So he did a terrific job there as well.

Sam: When it came to dealing with the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, Mr. Prime Minister, you were so close to my grandfather that he frequently coordinated with you, following key meetings and perhaps even employed your

services as a back channel. Much is rightly made of the special relationship between the U.S. and the United Kingdom, but your incredibly close relationship with gampy takes it to the next level. How did that work?

Prime Minister Mulroney: Well, we became very good friends, as you know.

Sam: Yes.

Prime Minister Mulroney: And I would see him regularly, not just on state visits. Sometimes he'd invite me down for lunch, or dinner, or we'd speak on the phone regularly. Sometimes he called me about problems he had in the United States. And what did I think he should do? We were very close friends, and so we spoke about everything regularly. Now, in 1989, I was in a state visit to Moscow, I spent five days with Gorbachev. And we talked about the reunification of Germany, the possible end of the Cold War, the changes in the Soviet Union, and your grandfather's role, because he'd just been elected president. And so I came back from Moscow to a NATO meeting. And then at your grandfather's invitation, I flew right to Washington for dinner. And I went over everything of my five days with Gorbachev, to give him a better first hand view of what his key was going to be, what he was like, Gorbachev, and so on.

And when the visit had been arranged on a huge boat, I think in Malta, I came back down and met with the president again, and we went over the strategy that he should employ in dealing with Gorbachev for the first time in a formal way. He would say to me, "You're going to meet so and so, would you ask him what he thinks of such and such, because I want to do so and so? And tell him that I'm going to do it, and I hope he's ready to support me." That kind of thing, I did often for him. And it was credible, because everybody in the world circles knew that he and I had a specially close friendship. And when I passed on a request or a message like that, that I was speaking for him.

Sam: Of course, this podcast is presented by the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. And you and your lovely wife, Mila, were so close to both of my grandparents. Mr. Prime Minister, let me ask you first to assess my ganny's effectiveness as a political spouse.

Prime Minister Mulroney: Oh my God, she was...the sky is the limit. She was fantastic. Apart from everything else, she was a much better judge of character. And she had a sharper political antenna than your grandfather did. And she wasn't afraid to take people on who had negative thoughts or actions about any member of the family, believe me. I've heard her, and I've listened to her, and

I've seen her do that. Whereas your grandfather would kind of sit back and listen and not say anything. Oh, she was the gold standard for political wives of great leaders, no doubt about that.

Sam: Well, everyone who knew my amazing grandmother has at least one memorable story involving her and I know our listeners would be most curious to hear one of yours, sir.

Prime Minister Mulroney: Well, I can remember being in Houston with them, at their home in Houston, when a prospective candidate, a United States senator, was called by Barbara, was there with George and me. I won't name him because he's a nice guy. He was thinking of running against George W. and he had made a nasty comment about him in some newspaper somewhere. Well, I tell you, you should have heard her upbraiding this senator. You know, and saying, "And I thought for you as you were our friend. What are you doing talking like that about my son?" And your grandfather was sitting in his chair, hoping this thing would be over, because that wasn't his style, as you know.

Sam: Sure.

Prime Minister Mulroney: But she was direct, abrupt, and honest, and that's why people loved her.

Sam: During one of your annual summer visits to our family home in Maine, some 20 years ago, you had a very personal conversation with my gampy above his life at that point. After which I think he showed you a very important plaque with a very important motto he had discreetly installed on the corner of the big house on Walker's Point. Mr. Prime Minister, can you take the story from there?

Prime Minister Mulroney: We were having a private conversation, which I recorded in notes and referred to in my eulogy, when I spoke at the National Cathedral about him. He said, "Brian, come with me." He led me around the corner to the back of the house, fronting the ocean. And he pointed to a small plaque that had been installed there. It was almost imperceptible. And he said, "Brian, that's C-A-V-U, that stands for Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited." He said, "That's what a young pilot like me, 18 or 19 years old in the Pacific, wanted to hear more than anything else before we took off. Because it meant clear sailing, everything was good, everything was going to be good." And he said, "That's the way I feel about my life today. Bar and I are perfectly happy. We're delighted with the children. We're delighted with their success. And

we're happy for them all. But most of all, we're happy for ourselves in the sense that this brings us joy. I realize I'm in the bottom of my years and I couldn't be happier. So it's clear sailing for me all the way, and Barbara." And that was the story of CAVU.

Sam: Yeah, it's such a fitting motto for him and his life. And we still go and visit the plaque. And it's a special motto for us as a family. And I'm glad that it's something that you think about sometimes as well. Mr. Prime Minister, I'd like to end with this. In your wonderful eulogy two years ago, you touched on my gampy's ever present sense of humor. I think that's one of the reasons you and he got along so famously. A particular memory I can't help thinking about is a briefing you and my grandfather gave to the news media at Walker's Point in 1989. The news of the day, the fish weren't biting. And the fishing slump became an intense focus of national news coverage. You always seemed to see the humor in life, especially when together, didn't you?

Prime Minister Mulroney: Oh, yes. You know, apart from Walker's Point, we went fishing elsewhere, Newfoundland and Labrador, in New Brunswick for salmon, on Anticosti Island, in the middle of the St. Lawrence River, for salmon again, the Northwest Territories. We did a lot of fishing together. In those days, what I noticed about your grandfather was patience and humor. He always saw the funniest part of life, and so did I. We bonded in many ways around family traits and family experiences, but mostly family. We were both rooted in family. And a great sense of humor that he had that made everything easier for all of us. Look, I have the fondest recollections of your grandfather, your grandmother, and indeed your whole family. Because, you know, this was built up over, I'm going to say, like, 40 years of real friendship. You know, you run into all kinds of people in politics. For the moment, you're friendly. But this is the first and only time with me, from the day that we met to his death when I eulogized him, we were great and personal friends all the way through. On a regular basis, we spoke, and I tell you, I loved him. He was a wonderful man.

Sam: And I know that went both ways. He kept you in such high regard. And, well, we're just thrilled that you could join us today, Prime Minister. And thank you for sharing your stories. And please send all the best to your family. And you know I'll do the same for mine.

Prime Minister Mulroney: Well, thank you, Sam. It's great to hear your voice again. Hell, I remember you with your grandfather when you were two or three. And here you are, a radio star.

Sam: Unbelievable, unbelievable. Well, we're only as good as our guests so we're so happy to have you. And thanks so much, Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Mulroney: If you call me anytime that I can do anything, I'll be here for 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.

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.

