



All the Best Podcast
Episode 61: “A Celebration of Literacy”
Featuring Clips from a recent Barbara Bush Foundation Event with Garden & Gun Magazine

May 23rd, 1988. Nothing irritates me about Barbara Peirce Bush. When you have been married 43 years, there isn't any irritation. We seldom even argue and when we do, it's over in a hurry. Yes, she's my best friend. I can talk to her about what bothers me. When the kids are down or the grandchildren have problems, we can talk about these things and share our views with one another. Family is the key to an awful lot. The secret to a successful marriage? Give and take. Respect for the other guy's opinion. Give each other some elbow room, in terms of not insisting on doing what you want to do. She has enhanced my life and career by caring, by loving, by supporting. She has her own array of interests; garden, literacy, grandkids, love of our house in Maine, needlepoint, reading herself, reading to children and now, grandchildren. Nothing annoys me about her. Nothing at all. There's no single thing I like most about her. It all comes together. Her laugh, her beauty, her caring, her love, her being with me through thick and thin. In the early days, we moved a lot. In the Navy, base to base then to New Haven for two and a half years, then out to West Texas. Then to Houston, then to Washington, but never a complaint. Never a selfish word. What has she meant to me? Everything. George H. W. 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."

2020 proved to be quite a year and so much has changed for all of us. However, what hasn't changed is the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy's commitment to building a more literate America and fulfilling the legacy of my grandmother, Barbara Bush. At the beginning of the holiday season, the Barbara Bush Foundation teamed up with Garden Gun Magazine to host a virtual evening of cocktails and conversation to celebrate the continuing importance of literacy as the Foundation looks ahead to the exciting work it has planned in 2021. And I got the chance to be the event's Master of Ceremonies, so on today's episode of "All The Best" we're going to share some of our favorite moments from the evening, hearing from the event's special guests who happen to be my cousins, Jenna Bush Hager and Jeb Bush, Jr. But to get things started, here's some opening remarks from Anita and Tim McBride, who served as the co-chairs for the Barbara Bush Foundation's 30 year anniversary celebration. I think their words perfectly capture the mission of the Foundation throughout the year 2020 and beyond.

Anita: We all know how passionate Barbara Bush was about literacy and she truly believed that literacy is the key to a life of equity and opportunity for all Americans. And this year has shown us just how right she was. Our nation's 130 million low-literate families have been hit the hardest by the global pandemic and the economic uncertainty.

Tim: Barbara Bush would be proud of how the foundation has stepped up to support those families during these challenging times. From supporting parents and children with toolkits for at-home learning, to providing books and literacy resources to families in underserved communities, the Barbara Bush Foundation has stepped up to the mission-critical moment. The work of the Barbara Bush Foundation is more important now than it's ever been.

Same: So as previously mentioned, my cousins, Jenna Bush Hager and Jeb Bush, Jr. were the special guests of the event and we couldn't get too much into evening without hearing a little bit about how Ganny and Gampy inspired Jenna's latest New York Times Best Seller, "Everything Beautiful in Its Time."

Jenna: You know, I wrote this book really for myself on the night that our grandmother passed away. I turned on the TV and there were a lot of memoriams about our Ganny and of course Sam wasn't on there talking about how much she made us laugh and how really nobody could make her laugh like Sam. So I turned on the TV and I listened, and some of the things they said made me mad and probably to nobody's fault of their own but when you feel sad about losing somebody you love so much and then you see somebody you don't think really knew her that well, talking about her on television, there's a rawness to it. And so, finally I turned it off and I wrote our Ganny a letter that she would never read. So, I wrote this book, really for myself and then published it because what I realized in writing it is that it wasn't even the memories that struck me so much in losing them. It was the way that I felt, I'm sure we've all felt, when we walked in the doors of Kennebunkport or Camp David or Washington. Wherever they were. It's how we felt and it's that we felt really loved and we wanted to be in their glow and that's a hard thing now that I have three little kids, like creating a home where people want to be is just the ultimate goal and they did it so, so well.

Sam: In addition to Jenna's latest book, we also loved hearing about the inspiration behind her fast growing Book Club, "Read with Jenna." It's almost like she's considering changing her name to Oprah.

Jenna: That's so sweet, Sam. I feel like I need you as my agent. No, I'm going to keep Jenna just because Oprah's already taken and she's pretty fantastic. And actually, I talked with her about the Book Club because I was definitely copying. Any of us would go to the airport and see an "Oprah Book Club Pick" and want to read it. And she said, "Yeah, don't worry. I don't feel competitive, I just want as many people to read and fall in love with books as possible. And that's how Ganny felt, that's how I feel and I think the reason why Jeb, Sam and I feel really lucky and fortunate because we fell in love with reading. We were the little kids who Ganny would sort of yell, "Do your summer reading," which would irritate us. And so, whatever she did worked and I fell in love with reading. I also have a mother that's a librarian so I think it's just in our DNA. This is the best part of my job, that I get to talk with authors, I get to read all the time. I'm like, "How is this part of my job? It's so much fun and actually, our uncle Marvin said like, "Have there been any authors that you've loved?" and I'm like, I've loved every single one. I email with them, I just am loving it. And I think the only regret, really, is that Ganny didn't get to see it.

Sam: And speaking of summer reading, if you go up to Walker's point and the wind is blowing just right, you can still hear the faint sounds of Ganny saying, "Do your summer reading." My cousins and I are now quite a few years past

those summer reading assignments but Jeb, Jr. and Jenna now have children of their own. Here's how Ganny's love of reading influenced Jeb, Jr. and his children.

Jeb, Jr.: So, one of our favorite memories in Kennebunkport was Ganny would get up at 5:00 in the morning and she would write thank you notes and notes to friends for hours and she would grab coffee and turn on the news and everyone that was there, that's like kind of the first thing we'd do is like, wake up early and run over there. Georgia, my daughter would do that as well and we'd go over there and sit there and my grandmother would read to her. And seeing Georgia now who is in fourth grade, because she got involved with reading early, she reads about five grade above her reading level. I mean, it's hard for us to find books that she's emotionally ready for and it had to do, I think, I'm convinced, that she either saw Ganny read when she was a baby, Ganny read to her and it works.

Sam: You know what's an interesting thing? When we were children, Ganny and Gampy would read to us but once they got older, it came full circle and we would be the ones that read to them. Here's Jeb, Jr. with a story about reading to Gampy.

Jeb, Jr.: I think it was the last time I was on Gampy's boat where he drove and he's kind of just cruising slowly and we were cruising Kennebunkport and it was Sandra, myself and Gampy and Evan, who was with us at the time brought a bunch of letters from all Gampy's friends around the world. And so I couldn't read it because I would just get too emotional but Sandra read them while Gampy was driving his boat and we were just cruising, which is pretty special.

Sam: Anyone who knows my family knows that when we get together, no one is safe and this event was no different. While on the subject of reading to Ganny and Gampy, we knew we had to hear from my mom, Dora Bush Cook. So, we pulled her from the safety of the Zoom gallery into the featured panel to talk about how all the grandchildren would read my sister, Ellie's book, "George and Barbara Bush: A Great American Love Story" to my Gampy.

Dora: Ellie wrote a book called "George and Barbara Bush: A Great American Love Story" about mom and dad's remarkable love for each other and at the end of dad's life, all of the grandchildren would come in and read the book over and over and he loved every single bit of it. And because he was losing his memory, he would remember that someone had read the exact same passage the day before but he loved it because of their great love for each other. That he loved hearing about their love story. Over and over again. Each grandchild came in and did that at the end of his life.

Sam: But there was one time that Jenna had a bit of apprehension about reading to Ganny.

Jenna: Yes, well, Barb and I wrote a book together called "Sisters First" and I really wasn't nervous about letting anybody read it, except Ganny to the point that we were in Maine and she said, "I want to read your new book. Do you have a copy?" And I did but I lied. I had to get home safely in the walls of my own apartment before she read it only because she once wrote me a letter. She wrote actually a letter to my dad and me and I would like to say that I received it at like the age of seven but I actually received it when I was 35, 36. She was very angry. It was a scalding letter and it said, "Dear Jenna and George" and the details are kind of stupid but I played in a tennis tournament, I'd just had a baby, I was not good. My tennis did not look good so instead of focusing on the tennis, I focused on the theater of the sport. I did the worm and my dad kept cheering, "That's my girl." I might have like booed against the other team. Anyway, what she thought is that I was being unsportsmanlike in front of Gampy and she was so loyal and protective of him and really, all of us, and she wrote a letter where she was really mad. And I get that she was mad, but anyway, she said, "P.S. tear it up and don't show it to anybody." And so I published it. But the reason why I published it is because she was a letter writer until the very end which was so her. So anyway, I was scared to show her that book. I did eventually read her parts of it. And she actually thought it was funny because she had a great sense of humor. One of my favorite things she said which should be a mantra is "Humor Helps." And it's so true. It's like laughter and not taking everything so seriously is just a really wonderful way to live. And so, yes, I read to her and it was pretty beautiful.

Sam: Later in the evening, the audience got a chance to ask questions and that prompted the sharing of a wide range of memories. These memories included the grandchildren watching the movie "Grease" on repeat in the Walker's Point dormitory, the playing of hide-n-seek in the dark after dinner, and a particular altercation between Jeb, Jr. and Jenna, involving a teddy bear. Plus, long-time Chief of Staff, Jean Becker even chimed in to stir up a little trouble by asking who the naughtiest grandchild was. In reliving all these memories, there was a common theme throughout all of them, which Jeb, Jr. perfectly captured.

Jeb, Jr.: One of Gampy and Ganny's great, I don't know, call it legacy or just things they did, is that all of our cousins, literally all of them, were all very close. I mean, I sent a picture of Sam's mustache at the beginning of this Zoom to the grandkids text message thread. So we're all close and it's incredible because it's probably 30 of us now that are all over the country and I think we all love each other most of the time.

Sam: And the final question that was asked by the audience was the often wondered origin of the names "Ganny and Gampy." So here's the answer, plus a little extra.

Jenna: Dad's mom was called Ganny and dad's dad was called Gampy. So, it just was a passed down.

Female: What are you using, Dora, for your grandmother name?

Dora: My grandmother name is Mom Bell. That's my boys Sam and Robert call me mom, though.

Female: My dad is "jefe," which is Spanish for "boss" and we say that basically nobody calls him boss anymore so he just wants the little kids to call him that, which is not even how it is. He's really bossed around by those little girls.

Sam: This truly was a wonderful event and I know my Ganny would've loved to have joined us for an evening of great cocktails, great conversation and to celebrate the never-ending importance of improving lives through literacy. Thanks to the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy and its rock star President and CEO, British Robinson, for hosting such an amazing evening. And thanks to Anita McBride and Tim McBride for their opening remarks. Also, a big thanks goes out to Brooks Reitz, the founder of Jack Rudy Cocktail Company, for serving as the evening's mixologist. And of course, one final thanks to the special guests, Jenna Bush Hager and Jeb Bush, Jr. and the impromptu special guest, my mom, Dora Bush Cook. Thanks for listening, we'll see you on the next episode.

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.