



**All the Best Podcast**

***75. When the Cameras Were Off***

***Featuring Senator Alan Simpson and His Wife Ann Simpson***

Sen. Simpson: October 21st, 1991. Dear Al, after you left today, I got to worrying. I don't like to see my friend burdened down by anything at all. You seemed a little low. The joke was vintage Simpson all right but I am concerned that the press bashing may have been weighing on you. You were right on all this. You helped a decent man turn the tide. You walked where angels feared to tread by zapping some groups and some press. Even though some are sore at you, they won't stay sore. They love ya. They respect you and they know you to be fair. Having said all this, I'll confess, there are days when I just hate this job. Not many, but some. The attacks that demeans one's character sometimes get to me too. Yesterday at Camp David, I was a little down. I picked up two bright red leaves and I did something I haven't done in the last 60 years. I put the leaves pressed into a heavy book in my little quiet office. I felt better. Strange, but I really did. Don't let the bastards wear you down. Your friends love you. This president depends on you and believes in you and is grateful to you. Nothing you can do can change that. Immigrations, deficits, judiciary hearings, all those together pale in importance when up against friendship. George.

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 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."

Alan K. Simpson is a Cody, Wyoming native and studied law at the University of Wyoming, where he earned his juris doctorate degree in 1958. In between his undergraduate and graduate studies, Simpson married Ann, his now wife of 67 years and also served as a second lieutenant in the United States Army. After being admitted to the Wyoming Bar in 1958, Al then practiced law before beginning his political career in 1964, where he served in the Wyoming House of Representatives for 13 years. In 1978, Al was elected to the United States Senate, where he served three consecutive terms. Following his first term in the Senate, Simpson was Assistant Republican Leader and served in that capacity until 1994. Since leaving the Senate, Al has taught at Harvard University, the University of Wyoming and has traveled the country giving speeches on a variety of subjects. He also continues to serve on numerous non-profit boards. Al and Ann reside in Cody, Wyoming and close by they have their three children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Al and Ann, it's not every day we have such an amazing couple such as yourselves with us on "All the Best." Welcome to the show.

Ann: Well, Sam, we are so delighted to be on your program because we saw you grow up and we just think you're a great guy.

Sen. Simpson: Well, enough of that and hear I am. This is Al Simpson, ready to receive your inquiries and your jokular interrogation.

Sam: Well, it's great to hear your voices. You're in Wyoming now. I have to ask because you are some of the longest friends of my grandparents, how did your friendship start? Do you guys remember when you met George and Barbara Bush for the first time?

Ann: It seems to me that we always knew them. When we went to Washington, you know, they were first ones to greet us. And the fact that they had bought Al's parents house, which they didn't live in very long, but it was purchased on a handshake and Al's father said, "Such an honorable man." They both felt the other was a very honorable person and we just liked them immediately.

Sen. Simpson: Well, and this young congressman was elected from Texas. Dad was in the U.S. Senate and he was gonna retire. He had Parkinson's and arthritis and here came George, and they said, "We'd like to think about buying your house." And the old man said, "Well, what do you wanna pay for it?" And they shook hands and never called a lawyer or a realtor and they sold their house to George and Barbara. And I went back to see Dad close up his office. Well, George was out helping his father, Prescott Bush, close his office in Connecticut. And so, Dad was coming in when George was going out and that was in 1962. So that's about when this started.

Sam: Well, your relationship grew and obviously lasted a very long time after that. But I wanna talk about a specific time in your relationship, 1978. This is when Ronald Reagan ran for president and I guess the story goes that he cornered you, Senator, for support and you gave it to him, not knowing that your friend, George Bush was also gonna run. Can you talk about the conversation with my grandfather that ensued? It sounds like you both quickly amended the friendship and it really prospered from there.

Sen. Simpson: Well, Reagan came to me and he felt that he was going to win that election. So he asked for my support and I gave it. Then later, George surfaced and I knew that he was going to call, and then I called him. I said, "George, I just wanna tell you, I just can't help you. I committed to Ronald Reagan." And he said, "You know, it's not often that you get a call from somebody saying they can't help ya." But he said, "I appreciate this and I understand it." Of course, that's the way George was. So we talked and he went on with his campaign and I just said, "You know, let me know the next time and boy, I'll be right there with shield and the armor." But he never missed a beat on that one. He just said, "Well, I don't know that I've ever had to call somebody and tell I can't help."

Sam: Well, Senator you have so much experience taking part in many legislative efforts during your time in Congress, yet we seem to be debating similar issues

still today, like immigration, the budget. These seem to be recurring. Does history repeat itself?

Sen. Simpson: Without question. It never changes because they don't pay attention to history. The prize is to go back to your lobbying group or your organization and say, "I killed that bill" or "I made this bill." So those things will never change. Everything hangs by a thread. The play is Shakespearean and Greek. It's played out time after time. Everything hangs by a thread and nothing ever dies and on and on it goes. But now with the horrible hatred going on, where you hate Schumer, you hate McConnell, you hate Trump, it's all hatred and that's what I said after your grandfather's eulogy. "Hatred corrodes the container it's carried in."

Sam: Those are strong words and never more needed than now in today's climate. I have a question for Ann. Ann, you've always been an avid reader like my grandmother and a champion of the arts. Can you talk about your love of reading and go into depth about the Ann Simpson Artmobile, the University of Wyoming's largest art outreach effort?

Ann: Well, I'd be happy to share. After Al's first campaign, I became so acutely aware of the isolation of so many people in the oil industry, people living in trailers and little children and a husband that's gone taking the car. And I was asked after Al was elected to be on the board of the university pledging a new art museum board. And I had always been interested in art, collected some minor things. And when I was asked to be on, they wanted me to raise funds for collection. Well, I said, "You know, the University of Wyoming is in the corner of the state near Colorado. It is hardly in the center. I think we need some kind of outreach." And I suggested a mobile unit that would take some of our collection, because every museum has a lot in their collection that is not on, and take it to schools and set up exhibits. Well, people thought that was a great idea. So they made me chairman of fundraising. So that's what you get for suggesting something.

But because it was my idea, I was enthusiastic, went back to Washington, contacted all the lobbyists who did business in Wyoming, who represented Wyoming company and hit them up for contributions. And within six months, we had an Artmobile which has grown and is in great demand all over the state. We have a director, they drive the Artmobile, set it up in schools, a low budget item and extremely popular.

Sam: Well, that's fantastic. And then, what about your reading? I know that you've always had a love of reading, just like my grandmother. Do you have

anything to say about your reading prowess? It's almost famous like my grandmother's?

Ann: Yes. I think that if anything were taken from me, my eyesight and my ability to read would be the most difficult thing. That I loved to read since I was a child. I would be given a task to dust the bookshelves and I'd end up reading the books. And I belong to a book club and have always belonged to a book club. Started a book club in Washington with congressional wives. And when I waken in the morning, I have a cup of coffee and read the paper or whatever is...currently right now, I'm reading one of Doris Kearns Goodwin's book about presidents, which is fabulous, and that is my joy. I'm not a big TV watcher but I'm still a reader.

Sam: Well, you have both spent a lot of time with both of my grandparents outside of the political world, and I'd love to tap into your expertise of them when the cameras are off. What were George and Barbara Bush like behind the scenes?

Ann: Well, your grandmother said it like it was. She didn't mince words. She was very open and honest and because your grandfather was a very strong person, she never knew how many people were coming for lunch. So she had her own definite personality and you always knew where you stood with her. She always had a jigsaw puzzle set up in Kennebunkport, as you remember, and it was a great place to sit and casually visit without having uncomfortably try to carry on conversations. It was a wonderful thing to sit with her and work that jigsaw puzzle and visit about family, children. She was always interested in our children, what they were doing, and then would tell about all of you. So we've known about you since you were a baby, Sam.

Sam: Senator, what do you remember about George and Barbara Bush behind the scenes?

Sen. Simpson: They were robust, loving people. He was so decent a man that there was no way that anyone could deny that he was among the most decent people they had ever met. When he was getting slapped in the face, pounded around, he didn't get into a burrow and hurl insults and this and this, no. He'd just say, "Well, that too will pass." So we went trips with him when he was Vice President, just the four of us went to Glacier Park.

Ann: And about 20 secret service people.

Sen. Simpson: Yeah, that's right. I said, "What are these eyeballs around here? Is this coyots or wolves?" "No, it's the Secret Service." Well, one time we had a

private group of guys fishing in the Keys and the Secret Service was in the tent and the jokes got richer and I went over the guy. I said, "You know, I think it'd be best if you just sat outside the tent. This is not your bag." He said, "But what happens if something happens to him?" I said, "We'll all be there. We'll give him resuscitation. Just get out." Well, George would then loosen up, tell some old stories that he learned in the Navy and at Yale, and we went through a whole tapestry of those and I've torn 'em all up.

Sam: Well, after hearing your stories thus far, it's pretty evident that humor plays a very important part in George and Barbara Bush's relationship but also in their friendships. Could you talk about humor and the role it played in your friendship with them?

Ann: They loved having Al tell jokes. I remember our last visit and we were told, "Be careful. Don't make him laugh. It makes him cough." But Al did. He told him a couple jokes. And he coughed.

Sen. Simpson: I said, "George, have you heard any good ones lately or are you just being protected by your genial staff?" He said, "I haven't heard any." And Jean was there. Jean Becker and Anne, and I told him this blaster and his head went back. He said, "I can't stand that." I said, "I know, but don't choke to death. I don't wanna see you go out like that." But the rich part of it was humor, not hard humor, not nasty humor where your people are laughing uncomfortably.

But you weren't making fun of people. You never did that.

Sen. Simpson: No. It was belly laugh humor. And that's what it was. And then, there was a lot of singing, music and of course, the night we went to the Warner Theatre just before this to see Michael Crawford, who is not on his decline, I'll tell you that, but he was the top of his game and he went through all the Andrew Lloyd Webber stuff. Well, coming back in the car, we were singing, "Don't Cry For Me Argentina" and "Phantom" and we were doing stuff. And we got out the White House. Few days later, the press is just tearing his rear end off about something and he leaned his head back, he said, "Don't cry for me, Argentina." And they said, "He's losing his marbles."

And the worst one was when they had this huge ceramic vase at the Kennedy Center and we were with him in the box, and there was a recess and George came up and he said, "I believe that that's an Etruscan vase." I said, "No, no, that clay is from Mesopotamia." Well, people gathered around and I said, "No, it's the way it's fired, it looks like third century." And he said, "No, I don't agree with that at all." And Barbara and Ann came out of the box, said, "Get back in there." They said, "Neither one of them know anything about that thing."

Ann: We just said, "They don't know what they're talking about."

Sam: Can't help it. Well, I have to say, guys, I'm in awe of your relationship, 67 years married. You're quickly approaching my grandparent's 74-year mark together. I have to ask with such a long and amazing relationship, what are your secrets to marriage?

Ann: Well, you know the advice I give people when they ask me what to do, well, if you're having problems, get help. Don't try to solve those things yourself because you can dig in deeper and deeper. And we were fortunate that we happened to be Episcopalians and our priest was trained and pulled us out of some bad spots because every marriage has their bad spots. If they don't admit it, they're lying.

Sen. Simpson: And the other part is you both try to control each other and you both fail. If you're gonna change your partner or shape 'em out, get a new partner.

Ann: I've always said Al lets me do what I want so that he can do what he wants.

Sen. Simpson: And then, this is a word that's a shocker. It's about intimacy. I'm not talking about the fine things of marriage. I'm talking about intimacy. Hold the hand, give 'em a hug and that's what we have. That's what all married people should have, but they don't because you think the red light's gonna go on and you're off to the sack and that's not what I'm talking about. We had a beautiful, intimate relationship, which was based upon deep love, fun and humor and respect. And we've had that too.

Sam: Well, thank you both for sharing your amazing and very funny stories with us today. I'd like to end with this. It has almost been three years since the world has been without George and Barbara Bush. What do you both miss most about having them around? Ann, would you like to start?

Ann: Well, I just miss the fact that I trusted them and they were dear friends and I love them and felt very honored to be their friends.

Sam: Senator?

Sen. Simpson: Well, I have a hanging thread of their memory. Jimmy Baker and I talk quite often, Susie and Jim and Ann and I, just the four of us, and we'll say, "We miss our friend." And there isn't a day go by that I don't see his face and his

smile and absorb the cheer of his presence. There is no way to describe it. I'm sitting in my den with things that everything I might look at has something to do with George and Barbara. And I can see them in my mind's eye always together, holding hands, talking, the beautiful relationship based on absolute honesty and trust and love.

Sam: Well, I know that they were lucky ones too, to have such amazing and loyal friends such as you. So thank you both for telling your stories about my grandparents. It's such a great and unique perspective to hear from both of you, and two people who knew them maybe better than anybody else. Senator and Ann, thank you for being on "All the Best."

Ann: We love them and we love you and we wish you the very best, Sam. We're proud of you.

Sen. Simpson: Love you, pal. Take care.

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.