



All the Best Podcast

Episode 93. One of the Best Jobs in the World

93. Featuring Jim Appleby, Former Personal Aide to George H. W. Bush

Jim: July 14th, 2016. Dear Paige Camden, on June 28, 2016, you arrived in this big, exciting world and became part of a wonderful family. You have two outstanding parents who love you, more than tongue can tell. You also have a big brother who will always be at your side, as together you explore the wonders of this world. I used to be president of the United States. No kidding! Now I'm just a plain old guy who loves life. I'm blessed with a great family and many wonderful friends. Your mom and dad are very dear friends of mine and my family, and we love them, we love James, and we love you. Warmest wishes to you, Paige Camden. I hope your life ahead is happy, healthy and full of challenge and excitement, and I further hope that you live in a world at peace. Sincerely, George Bush

George H. W. Bush: I believe that character is a part of being president, and life really must have joy.

Sam: This is all the best. The official podcasts 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 H. W. Bush: I remember something my dad told me. He said, "Write to 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 Bush: You are a human being first, and those human connections with children, with friends are the most important investment you will ever make.

George H. W. Bush: 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”.

Jim Appleby is a member of Shell's corporate relations team, managing brand and reputation, media communications and stakeholder engagement for Shell's power and trading businesses in the United States. Before joining Shell, Jim was the personal aide to former President George H.W. Bush, with responsibilities ranging from media and communications to scheduling, event management, travel and correspondence. Jim also acted as the president's liaison to former government's host organizations, the media, U.S. federal and state agencies and U.S. embassies worldwide. Jim received his undergraduate in history from Gettysburg College and a master's in public service and administration from the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. Originally from Maine, Jim Now resides in Houston, Texas, with his wife, Lori and their two children, James and Paige. We couldn't be more excited to have Jim Appleby with us today, Jim. How's it going, man? Great to see you.

Jim: Hey, Sam, thanks for having me here. I'm really excited.

Sam: Jim, welcome to all the best. I'd like to start by asking about how you got to know George and Barbara Bush. I believe you started as a yard lad at Walker's Point.

Jim: Yeah. So let's see. I am from Kennebunk, Maine, and of course, that's where your family has their home in the summertime at Walker's Point and I had the good fortune to have a best friend whose mother owns a landscaping company and had been doing the landscaping at Walker's Point for years. I was working for her one

summer in between junior year and senior year of high school, and she happened to find out that your grandparents were looking for a new summer lad. The guys who were there had graduated college. They were heading off into real jobs out in the real world. And so she, unbeknownst to me, she put my name in and I had the opportunity to go out and interview. And of course, the interview process out there was not just with one person, of course, it was with many people, everybody from the office staff to the Secret Service to, of course, your grandparents. And of course, summer lads don't really work for your grandfather. They worked for your grandmother. So I had the pleasure of working for her first, although I did interview with your grandfather when I went out there. And of course, you know, after a whirlwind day of being out there and the knots in the stomach and everything else of getting to go to Walker's Point, which of course, if you're from Kennebunk or Kennebunkport, you know all about it, but it's not like you're out there behind the gate. And so just that was an amazing experience. But getting to meet your grandparents for the first time, everybody out there was so warm and welcoming before I even had the job. And then I was able to, you know, they said yes. And of course I said yes. And so I started working weekends that fall. And, you know, to answer your question about what the job entailed, it was probably one of the best jobs in the world because it was everything. You got to bring people in from the airport, everybody from Terry Lacey to Michael W. Smith to, you know, all of the various friends that you're that your grandparents always invited up every summer to working on the pool. And I got to learn how to make sure a pool didn't, you know, have green stuff growing in it because your grandmother loved to swim every morning. Helped out at parties. Your grandparents always had something going on out there, as you well know. And then, you know anything else that needed to happen projects, special projects working on the boats, you know, of course, I think you'll ask any Summer Lad, and I think working on the boats is probably the highlight the various iterations of Fidelity that were out there and then the Maine coaster and everything else, you know, these are the boats that you guys got to, you know, grow up on. We had the, you know, the great fortune to kind of be a part of that. So it was an amazing, amazing experience. I did that for several years.

Sam: Well, Jim, how did you end up making that jump from yard lad to personal aide.

Jim: So you know what, it was never part of my plan. I was always one of these guys that had, you know, I had my plan, I was going to go to college. I was going to do one thing is that, that was what I was going to go do. And so in between Graduate school and undergrad, your Grandfather's chief of staff, Jean Becker and his personal aide at the time, Tom Frechette, asked me to come in and do the intern job. And so in the summertime in Maine, there's a small staff that's up there. And I had the opportunity to come and do that, and I said, Yes, you know, it was absolutely a fantastic opportunity. You got to stay out there, got to, you know, keep coming back to Maine, which is always on my list of great places to be. And then I went to grad school and I happened to go to the George Bush School of Government Public Service at Texas A&M. Halfway through my first year there, Jean Becker comes down the hallway and she says, I want to talk to you. And she offered me the job as his personal aide, totally out of the blue for me, it was never something like I said that I had put my hat in for or that I had mentioned or anything like that you know, it was never part of the plan. But like many things around your grandfather, even if it's not part of your plan, you kind of grab hold of it, and it led to an amazing next six years as his personal aide.

Sam: They were both extremely active during their post-presidency and became even more popular than ever during this time. Jim, why do you think that was the case?

Jim: Well, bottom line, I think, is because they got out there. I think that there was certainly that time. It was before my time as his aide where, you know, he was coming out of the White House and he could have gone a different direction. He could have kind of hunkered down and lived a quiet life. And that was just not either one of their style. Right. And so after a little bit, he got back out there and not only did he get back out there, but he got back out there and started figuring out how he could serve other people. And I mean, as you know, better than most, your grandfather and your grandmother were all about service to others. Now, whether that was attending an MD Anderson cancer meeting or whether that was flying to, you know, a tsunami wrecked area of the world, regardless of what it was. I think that was one of the key reasons that both your grandfather and your grandmother were such beloved people as they as they move through post White House years. They had the opportunity and they took the opportunity to to get involved. And I think people really recognized that there it was genuine on their part. They weren't doing it for any other reason other than that they felt it was the right thing to do.

That really brings out the best in people. And I think that's what was a hallmark of George and Barbara Bush was that they worked to bring out the best in people, whether they were actively trying to do it or whether it was just something that was kind of part of their nature. But you always wanted to be your best around them. And I think that that that really lent itself to keeping them in the limelight exactly where they should have been.

Sam: Jim, you traveled on many occasions with my grandfather during his post-presidency. One of the biggest trips you were a part of was to the Olympic Games in China as a former president, but also as a former U.S. envoy to China. My grandfather has a lot of history with the Chinese people. How was my grandfather received during these Olympics and is there anything that sticks out to you from that trip?

Jim: It was always fun going with your grandfather to China because the word I would use as rock star, no matter where he went, no matter who he was meeting, everybody knew who he was. And you've got to remember, this is many, many years after he was an envoy to China, right? And it was even many years after he was president. You know, this was in the, you know, between 2006 and 2012 for myself. And so it always just amazed me that he had such a rapport with everybody he met. And so when it came to the Olympics, he had a great opportunity. He was the honorary U.S. team captain. And so we got over there early before a lot of the official party got over and spent about 10 days over there in Beijing. And I mean, of course, you know, for me, it was, you know, walking in the footsteps of a giant over there, getting to see things that you only read about in books and some things you don't even read about in books, because I think that was the other. The other amazing part is that your grandfather was provided access to everything. There's a place called the Forbidden City, where I'm sure others have talked about it. It's where essentially the Chinese nobility used to live, and it's really an off limits sort of place to most people. And yet that's where we went and had dinner a couple of times with friends of his. We got to go to any of the sporting events that he was interested in. And so we saw everything from fencing to swimming. We saw Michael Phelps win gold medals, we got to meet the U.S. Basketball team and see the madness around that game. Just trying to get through the press of people that were around was incredible and then kind of on the quieter side. He had friends that he wanted to meet with old acquaintances. And so getting to meet and be around those kinds of folks was absolutely amazing. One of the funniest things that

I remember, there's several, several funny kinds of stories from that trip, but we got to go and see the women's water polo team practice and it was a surprise. And so we pull up and there is a picture later on of the 41st president of the United States standing next to the pool, giving a pretend lecture to all of these incredibly athletic young women wearing one of those water polo helmets. And if you've ever seen one of those, there are cloth helmets with hard ear coverings, and I'm sure you can look it up somewhere. But it was really funny and your grandfather took every opportunity to joke around with folks to make other people at ease and at heart. He was absolutely a jokester. Another story there from the Olympics. Your uncle, the 43rd President, was coming in with the official delegation. And like I said, we've been there for several days ahead of time. And so he was bringing with him, Jenna and Barbara, and they were staying in the same hotel, just a couple of doors down from the president. Forty one and we had gone back into the hotel earlier in the day we'd been out. He wanted to take a little rest kind of refresh before everybody got there. And so I went into my room 15, 20 minutes later. I come back out and the Secret Service weren't in the hallway where they typically were outside of his room. And so I went looking, you know, sometimes he had a tendency to sneak away without telling me. And so I went down the hallway and there outside a different door, and I look at them and they kind of give me a shrug. You know, the agents give me a shrug and I look inside your grandfather, 41st President United States is inside Jenna and Barbara's room with the U.S. ambassador to China, and they are in the midst of short sheeting, the beds of Jenna and Barbara. And if nobody knows what short sheeting is, basically it's removing all of the linens off the bed and then tucking them in such that you can't actually get in the bed when you get there. And so just the sight of these two official personages, if you will, including the sitting ambassador in there playing a practical joke on the daughters of the sitting president of the United States, it just lends a whole different kind of perspective to who George Bush was.

Sam: Another important trip was in 2007 to the state funeral of Boris Yeltsin. We all know how important their relationship was in ending the Cold War and the beginning of the new era of friendship and partnership with Russia. Jim, how important was this friendship to my grandfather and what do you remember from that state funeral in Russia?

Jim: I suppose I'll leave it to the historians to say how important it was and what it really led to. But the funeral itself was, of course, incredibly well done. I think the turnout was amazing. I remember flying in. Of course, we went with President Clinton and we flew into Moscow and went to the U.S. ambassador's residence for a while before the funeral started. And then we went to the cathedral, where President Yeltsin's body was lying in state. And there was a whole service, of course. And one of the things I remember is that your grandfather was standing with the other dignitaries, and he teared up. And I think that spoke to who he was in terms of the relationship was not just an official one. I think he recognized the man that President Yeltsin was. I think he recognized the relationship that they had was more than just transactional. And he was sorry to see a friend pass away as we are at any of our friends' funerals. After the cathedral, there was a procession, and this is probably what I remember most about, about the whole event because it was completely surreal. It was very, in my mind, a very typical Russian procession where the dignitaries followed the body down a sunken road to the gravesite. And I remember that there was no other option but to go with the president. So typically in an event like that, an aide would step aside, right? And we would go hide somewhere essentially until we were needed and until there was a change in the program or something. But there wasn't an opportunity to do that here, and there was no motorcade; you walked. And so I recall walking along with your grandfather behind the current President of Russia, Vladimir Putin and all of these former East block leaders who, of course, your grandfather had known many of them when he was president and to some extent, vice president. But here I am walking down this sunken road in Moscow with the 41st president of United States behind the funeral procession of Boris Yeltsin, and like I said, it was completely surreal. The road was lined with Russian people paying their last respects. We got to the burial site and of course, there was a very moving ceremony there where again, your grandfather went up with President Clinton and paid his respects not only to President Yeltsin, but to his wife who was there. And then we made our way home. But it was just such an amazing experience to know that history was happening right there. And I think that happened so many times around your grandfather maybe it gets overlooked a bit in his post-presidency years. But he continued to make history, and that was just one of those one of those things that that was special about him.

Sam: Jim, you worked for my grandfather during many exciting legacy projects and maybe none more as exciting than the HBO documentary "41", directed by Geoffrey Roth. Surprisingly, my grandfather agreed to this project and as you know, he rarely did agree to talk about himself, especially in a documentary. So, Jim, why did he agree to do this project? And what do you remember from the time filming with HBO?

Jim: Yeah, that's actually what comes to mind is that no matter where we turn to Jeff and his team were there. I think at the beginning it might have maybe been a little frustrating. They had to run through some hurdles. Your grandparents didn't go anywhere without the Secret Service, and you talk about an amazing group of people right there and they take their job very seriously. And so to have these folks with cameras popping up here and there at the office, at Astros games, at golf events, you know, in Kennebunkport, popping in on the White House. I think that was probably the biggest change to life during that time was that Jeff and his team were around. But it was a really interesting experience to see your grandfather kind of accept that and get into a little bit too. Right? There were a couple of times he took Jeff and his team out on Fidelity, on the boat in Maine and to say he didn't like to go slow, I don't think I don't think that's an understatement. The waters off the coast of Maine can be a little bit rough at times, and I think your grandfather had a little bit of a sadistic streak in him at times. And so, as he has done with many people, he I think he enjoyed taking Jeff and his crew out there once or twice when the waves were a little bit high, a little bit rough and knocking them around a little bit just to remind them where they were and who they were with. But yeah, you know what? I think, you know, he definitely never liked the L Word "Legacy", right? He always wanted to leave it up to history, which I think is incredibly admirable for a man who lived history his entire life. There's not that many out there who essentially went through everything that he did and did as many things as he did. And so, of course, you know, something like that, really. I mean, it's amazing that it got made. I think the credit probably goes to Jean Becker for moving that along. I'm not sure she'd take that credit, but it was nice that he accepted it, and it was nice that he got his wife to accept it as well because it was an intrusion, right? It was definitely an intrusion, something like that into your family. And I mean, you know, right, you're a family surrounded by cameras for so many years and continue to be. And so bringing that into your household can be a little bit challenging, but it was a lot of fun. Jeff was always looking for different places to be and ways to bring out those things that made your grandfather, your

grandfather, and I think he did an amazing job. They did the premiere showing in Kennebunkport, and they brought in everybody, and it was so much fun. There was a big party and and I think it was it was good for your grandfather and your grandmother to be able to be, you know, again surrounded by all these people from their life who they held so dear. And it was great of HBO and Jeff to to make that happen.

Sam: Jim, you were in Kennebunkport when the USS George H. W. Bush visited their namesake for his 88th birthday. We talked about some of his legacy projects, but this is one of his favorite legacies. Can you talk about the lead up to getting that very large ship to Kennebunkport? And how do you remember that day? Could my grandfather have been more overjoyed?

Jim: When I joined him as his aide the ship was still being built, and in fact, it was in its early stages being built. And so throughout that whole period, it was amazing to see him at each one of the milestones. I mean, your mother did the christening and he was so proud of that. And when the ship was commissioned, it was an incredible scene. I mean, we were down there at the shipyard and there were thousands of people and it was special that his son, the president, was there to help commission it with him. And so, you know, once again, it was about family for four forty one, right? And everything about it was about family. And so as the ship rolls into or sails into or steams into Kennebunkport, whatever the proper Naval term is for it, you know, the fog clears off in the morning and there's this massive ship out there. And it's hard to describe if you haven't seen one of these, but they are immense and certainly nothing like that had been seen off the coast of Kennebunkport. And so, of course, everybody lined the roads and it was kind of a stop everything you were doing that day to go out and see this. Now everything in the background to make something like that happen. It's not kind of a small thing, right? And so the, you know, the office staff that was there again, very small, small number of us along with the Navy were able to organize a whole day out there. And as you know, we were able to take the family out. And so we had helicopters landing on the yard at Walker's Point. Still probably the highlight for me, and we load everybody up on a helicopter and take them out in waves and you land on the deck of this giant ship and you'd be welcomed by the crew and of course, the captain and the officers they were just so excited that they were able to do something like this because just to be clear, things like this don't tend to happen ever. But the namesake of the ship was alive, and he lived on the coast and just

happened to be where the ship could get close enough. And so, you know, the things I remember about that day are the re-enlistment ceremony on board the ship for these sailors who had two presidents, two former presidents at that point, standing there doing their re-enlistment, absolutely amazing. I can't even imagine being them. And even more so your whole family was out there and President Bush had gone to the ship a couple of times before, but he wasn't able to bring everybody with him. I think your mom went. Maybe a couple of others went, but this time he got everybody out there, and I think that was so special to him. And you talk about him being so excited. He was. He lived a life where he could be excited all the time. But I think that the ship and the connections both to his anchor, to Windward, if you will, in Maine and his family being out there. It just tied the knot. It tied the bow for him. And it was an incredible day, something I don't think anybody will forget.

Sam: Jim, you worked so closely with George and Barbara Bush for over 11 years. You must have received some advice. Would you share some with us today?

Jim: What I took away from my time with them, both as a yard lad, as an intern, as his aide, as just having the opportunity after that to be around them was the importance of family, the importance of having that place to go to, whether it's a physical place or a mental place, that kind of grounds you. I had the good fortune of spending every summer for 11 years with them in Maine. And as you know, it's a special place, whether you spend a day there, whether you spend six months there. And I think having that and having that grounding was really important, and I took that away as something to try to achieve in my own life. And then just the importance of always trying to do a good job. And as I think everybody who ever met him would say is make sure the other guy gets credit. I think it's so important, you know, whether it's in public service life or your private life that you recognize that you're not necessarily going it alone, right? There's always somebody out there, whether it's a team or an individual or somebody else who's there for you or there to help you along. And it's great to recognize those folks whenever you get the chance. And I saw him do that a lot, both publicly and privately. And so some really important things, always something to take away. We could spend an entire hour talking about what you learned from George and Barbara Bush, but just having the opportunity to be around them, you take away so much.

Sam: Well, Jim, I'm going to give you all the credit for this great podcast. Thank you for being a part of it. Send my best to your family and I'll do the same to mine. Thanks for being on the show.

Jim: Thanks, Sam. Really appreciate it.

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.

George H. W. Bush: Yeah, we're

Barbara Bush: 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 H. W. Bush: 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.