



## **All the Best Podcast**

### ***Episode 95. The Plane Waits For No One***

#### ***95. Featuring Tom Frechette, Former Personal Aide to George H. W. Bush***

Sam: August 5th, 2004. I address this to our chief asking that she enlist the summer lads or someone to solve this problem. All of you, each in your own way, have done a good job on paper towels, Kleenex, soap, and toilet paper. Indeed, we have had very few glitches, but now there is a new danger.

The toilet seat upstairs here appears to be misaligned. There is grave danger that if it tilts further, someone can fall off and get hurt. What if Laura re-broke her arm just before the cruise? What if Tommy or I had the embarrassment of having to call for help whilst writhing on the floor? How could we explain if M got seriously hurt in this unseemly, undignified, unladylike manner?

Jean, this may seem a tiny matter on this big barbecue day, just as wedding plans come to fruition, just as final decisions on the cruise might be made, security problems wrestled with, but please attend to this matter. Delegate, lead us. Do not ask Ariel, the man cooked all night long. Do not ask Teresa or Alicia or even Paula, they have other duties. Perhaps this crisis can safely wait until after we all leave.

But suppose we have all gone cruising and special, dear Amanda, while soloing on in there, falls off unattended? Please Jean, please do this. P.S. Do not call a plumber. After Robin's nest pond work, increasing demands for champagne, more ordering out of pizzas, more, "Can I borrow the car or the truck?," more just, "Have we met in Boston?" by people movers, I'm feeling broke. So we

must fix this ourselves. The more I think about it, Tommy, just bring me a monkey wrench. Sincerely, George Bush, 41st President of the United States of America.

President H.W. Bush: At 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."

[music]

President H.W. Bush: 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 investment you will ever make.

President 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."

Tommy Frechette began working for President George H.W. Bush in high school, as a summer lad, in Kennebunkport, Maine. He then became an intern and then served as President Bush's aide from 2000 to 2007. He currently is a managing director at Avenue Capital and a member of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation Advisory Council. He lives in New York with his wife, Jennifer, and their two lovely daughters.

I couldn't be more excited to welcome Tommy Frechette to "All the Best." Tommy, welcome to the show. How are you, man?

Tom: Sam, thank you. You've done an amazing job with the show, so thank you. Honored to be here. I really appreciate it, and happy to join.

Sam: Tommy, we are always interested in how our guests came to know George and Barbara Bush. Can you tell us how you first came to work with them starting as a summer lad, I believe, in

Kennebunkport, Maine?

Tom: Yeah, summer lad, a huge title. You know, I grew up in Maine and they always had some people helping out at the Point. You know, the town is small. You know, my parents were not close to your grandparents at all but they got invited to, you know, one of the thousands of cocktail parties they had here. But they always needed help in the summer. And you know, my brother had been helping them out when they were in the presidential years.

And so I was a high school student and they needed some extra help. And so I remember that first day, my brother taking me in, and your grandfather was up at the big house holding you know, some fish in his hand. And that was sort of the first time I ever met him. He said "How are you doing there, lad? You know, come on over here." And you know, from then on, we started. But that was my first approach.

And I did that for a few summers and was lucky enough to be invited into the office as an intern and did that while I was in college. And then my senior year, I got the call back to...I'd studied finance thinking I was going to New York City, do some big business job. And I was lucky enough to be invited back to permanently replace the aide at the time and fully jump on board. And what a great decision it was and how lucky I was to do that.

Sam: How was the interview process? Did you have to get through Jean Becker? Did you go to George Bush? How did the interview process for those work?

Tom: It was very tough. You know, I used to joke that I had to go to monster.com and presidential aide, and that's how I really got it. But no, I was very lucky. I sort of skirted through, probably, you know, to their detriment. They were kind enough to throw it out there, having spent a few summers. Or, gosh, at that point, it was four or five summers. You know, I remember, gosh, we used to go on those great trips and you know, fun stuff. But I'd spent a few summers with the family and them. And they were kind enough to have me join permanently. So it was great.

Sam: Well, as a personal aide to my grandfather from 2000 to 2007, you were by his side during a very active time in his career, traveling all over the world and domestically. Before we get into some of those amazing trips you were part of, I would like to know why he traveled so much. By all accounts, he could have taken it easy, enjoyed a relaxed retirement. What drove him to stay so active during his post-presidency?

Tom: He was not someone who sat still very well. You know, I think it was an innate quality within, right he had this lust for life, and endless curiosity, and interest in people, and never stopped learning. You know, he just had a drive to be involved and to help. And you know, there are stories that go all the way back to his childhood, or military service, or business career, in politics, where, you know, he just had this endless energy.

And I think 43 summed it best when delivering his eulogy for his dad, where he said, "George Bush was born with just two settings, full throttle and then sleep." So it was nonstop. My time with him, we traveled to over 60 countries and all across the U.S., right? So constantly going, we were on the road 230 plus days a year. I mean he was just active.

So retirement wasn't something that was gonna be for him. I think, you know, he was busy doing fundraisers with charities. He had helping NGOs, giving speeches, meeting military members, working on what the next fun trip would be, or helping guide or mentor someone, or more particular, parachute jumps, fishing, golf, or riding on his boat Fidelity. But he was just always going at full speed.

I remember my first year, I was 22, it was late in the afternoon one day and he'd come over and just said, "Gosh, Tommy, I'm really exhausted." We had returned the night before from a week-long trip overseas, and then he got up early at 6 a.m. to play golf, you know, then he had breakfast and he hosted someone, then he had a political fundraiser. Anyway, he was just jam-packed with stuff that anyone you know, even I, was tired at. And he still had to host a cocktail party and dinner. You know, he's like, "I must be getting old." And the reality was, he just loved to live life.

And you know, the easy answer was he...sitting still was something he was just unable to do. And he had the opinion that there was so much to do, so little time, you know. And he was excited for the future. And I think you know, he thought participating all the way to the end would be somewhat of a way for him to keep being involved. And you know, he was just this eternal optimist. So all that built together, I'd say, he just had energy and he had to do something so he was just always finding fun things to do.

Sam: Well, one of the more significant trips you were a part of took place on April 6th, 2005, at the funeral of Pope John Paul II at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. What a spectacle that must have been with over 200 world leaders converging to honor the Pope. Tommy, I know my grandfather had formed a bond with Pope John Paul over the years. How do you remember their relationship, and what do you remember from that spectacular funeral?

Tom: Their relationship had obviously gone back decades. So I believe the VP years was what I would imagine. But you know, your grandfather had always been a man of faith, he just didn't wear it on his sleeve. And I think it was much more personal to him.

One of his you know, favorite religious quotes was "Preach the gospel always, if necessary, use words," right. So he was quiet about it but it was very important. So there was a natural bond generationally around Christianity itself. And certainly, the commitment to see an end to the Cold War and communism across Europe and the Soviet Union, all for freedom, brought them naturally together.

But I believe that strong bond or perhaps that great esteem for Pope John Paul II was shared with 43, served as president as well. Because following 9/11, and through the buildup of operations in Afghanistan, the President, 43, asked 41 to deliver part of that historic message that they would be going to war, directly to His Holiness, the Pope. And Pope John Paul was a transformational figure for the church and had really changed the relationship diplomatically with a long list of U.S. presidents.

So it made great sense years later, 2005, when 43 asked his dad and President Clinton to join him as part of the official U.S. delegation to the Vatican to pay their respects. And you know, there was a funny story.

They were flying in late at night, I think they landed at 1 a.m. And if you've ever been on a president motorcade, which you have, Sam, but anyone else, it just go on forever, particularly if have you know, a president and two former presidents. And so they all got into the beast, right. And the secure package made its way to Vatican City. And they got to say their last respects.

And as they were coming out of the church, the President was going to stay at the U.S. ambassador's residence, and President Clinton and President Bush were going to a nearby hotel. And so jokingly, 43 says to his dad, "Dad, you're all set on a car, right?" I mean, of course, he is, he's got Secret Service protection and a motorcade, no problem. So he says, "Yeah, of course."

The secure package leaves and here they are, you know, in Vatican City and there's probably 100 yards or so to the gate where, technically, 41 and President Clinton's motorcades are. And so the President's motorcade leaves and they're standing there going, "Where are our cars?"

The poor two agents, one for 41 and one for President Clinton, are like, just sort of screaming into their speakers going, "What's happening?" So the two of them just say, "Let's just walk out of the gate, no problem." And I'll remind you, this is at a time of great rhetoric you know, from and to the U.S.

And the first delegation they get to, as they're walking out, is Iran, right. And all of sudden, all these guys would see security, probably guns, come running around the corner, and they're all you know, trying to take photos with them. And here they are taking photos. Anyway, it all ended well.

But that trip was quite impressive because, like you said, at the time, it was the largest gathering of heads of state outside of the UN, so it was a big deal. And you know, a lot of optics with you know, I think the next day the U.S. delegation was sitting you know, a row and a few seats up front of Iran and a few other countries that we had relations with that were sort of off to the side at the moment. So yeah, it was quite an event.

Sam: Well, don't get mad at me for this one, Tommy. Jean Becker gave me permission to ask this one. So I know, you know, one of the most important traits of a great aide is being on time or early.

Tom: You have to.

Sam: You gotta be early, right, so as not to hold up the motorcade.

Tom: [Inaudible 00:11:46.759]

Sam: Yeah. You don't wanna hold the motorcade or the security that is associated, you know, that you just talked about, with transporting the president all over the world. Tommy, I'm sure you were almost always on time. And I know there was a story about a trip to Germany, possibly your first foreign trip.

Tom: Yeah, it was early.

Sam: Yeah. Where you showed up a bit late and missed the motorcade. Hold on, we gotta hear the backstory on this one. But also, can you share how my grandfather reacted when you finally caught up with him?

Tom: The recovery. So first of all, I'm confused. I think your intel is off. I don't remember ever making a mistake by the time I was aide. So no, unfortunately, I wish that were actually the case. But yes, on this particular trip, I had made a gaffe along the way.

It was early on and I thought...you know, I think it might have been my first or second trip. But I thought you know, you go to these events and they seat you near the president at a different table or something. So I thought I had to go sit down.

And I was in this long German hall and you know, I was probably 20 tables away. And so you know, he gets in his seat, and I sort of hump on down to my table, and we get there. And I look up and I sort of see some commotion. I

thought you know, "What is happening here?" And so I make my way down. He's 30 minutes ahead of schedule, which you know, something I would learn meant George Bush was on time, right?

But my mistake, number one, was going to my seat to sit down. But he had taken off and I could see the tail end of this long motorcade going to the airport. Here's the problem. We're leaving Germany going to Austria and there's a cap on the timeframe that we can land in Austria. So that was probably weighing on his mind, schedule-wise, like we have to be there early.

So I'd also heard stories that when 41 was president, he left some senior staff, and they might have been General Brent Scowcroft had missed, had not gone to Air Force One. And they said, "No, you gotta wait, sir." And he came to you know, the Air Force dudes and said, "No, I'm president. We're leaving, they'll get there, right?" But the point was to send a signal to the rest of the senior staff that the plane waits for no one, you know, everyone has to be responsible and be on time.

So I had heard the stories and I knew those stories, so I knew it was coming for me. So luckily, we're outside this event and I somehow convinced, between the host and a couple of police cars there, to jump in and you know, get this very nice police officer, who doesn't speak English, I don't speak any German, to find the right location, the correct you know, FBO for the airplane.

And we get there and they're just sort of loading up the final baggage. I am, of course, sweating, thinking, "It's over, you know, how did I screw this up?" get on the plane and I apologized. But you know, as I shuffled back to the back of the plane. But instead of being mad, right, your grandfather you know, needled me about the situation. But then he spent more time impressed you know, on how the heck I was able to commandeer a police car without speaking a lick of German.

So, you know, of course, I thought he would be upset, but true to form you know, he found the humor in that situation like he did in most situations. So it's quite impressive.

Sam: Well, Tommy, you mentioned George W. It was a historic time, while you were aide to my grandfather, because that was when George W. was also president of the United States. What was that dynamic like between the two during that time? Did they talk often? What did you observe watching my grandfather watch his son in the highest office in the land?

Tom: What a historic moment in general, right having a father and son as president an administration apart. It just I mean happened long ago with the

Adams. You know, just amazing to think that that could happen in today's day and age. But you know, they did speak often, but it was I think, first and foremost, a relationship of that of a father and a son, and you know, albeit a father that understood exactly the pressures and the weight of the office he held.

But so much of it was just really a concern as a father, right. Having said that, what a better mentor or statesman to have a conversation with when you're president. I mean, it's a pretty exclusive club. You know, I think today, there's only...you know, 45 have served in that capacity over a nearly 250-year window, which is incredible. But you know, they were lucky to have that sort of back and forth. But it was not sort of, you know, "What's going on?" or, "What should I do here, dad?" or, "What's happening?"

Although, I think there was a window of time where some foreign countries or diplomats thought that 41 was helping move policy and direction behind the scenes. But it just wasn't the case. It was something that wasn't even possible, right, when you're out of that daily information flow or intel. But I think it was...you know, he might have...41 might have offered advice on you know, situational things or tactics. I believe 41 would offer advice when asked on, you know, maybe some you know, high-level sort of situational ideas.

But it really wasn't at all where he was involved in that. It was always you know, a father concerned for a son. And that was the relationship that he had. And you know, that carried on for the governor of Florida as well, and to all his kids and grandkids as well. You know, it's just always that concern, "How can I...? You know, I understand the situation, I understand the office that he's in, but really, how is he doing, and what can I do to help as a father?"

Sam: Well, I think by now, everyone knows that my grandfather loved his speedboat, the Fidelity, and he may be loved scaring people half to death by driving at breakneck speeds through the rough Atlantic Ocean even more. His most recent boat, the Fidelity 5, is a Fountain 38 with 300 horsepower, Mercury Verado outboard engines, topping out at a blistering 75 miles an hour.

Tommy, you were one of the few that had the credentials and trust from my grandfather to drive the boat without him. Why did he love being on the ocean and going so fast? And how did the Secret Service keep up with him over the years?

Tom: Fidelity was awesome, right, what an incredible machine. They were all great, all impressive, all fast. You know, I think, for him, it was a way... Since the early '70s, right, he had picked up security details, and then obviously, vice president, he had Secret Service, and for the rest of life, he had Secret Service.

So for him, it was a way to sort...an outlet where you know, he was in control and could really let loose.

And you know, remember he was a naval aviator long ago, right. So he was sort of getting, "Well, you can't drive a car. You can't..." He was sort of having it that way, this was sort of something to do. But you know, it gave him great joy to have that at his disposal.

But coincidentally, I think it was also a very great diplomatic tool, where he was able to build relationships with foreign leaders and dignitaries and spend time in a meaningful and intimate way. So you know, he loved the time spent on it, but you'll never forget, right, how he would always approach coming back home with you know, scared people, where he'd come full throttle in and then take those big turn.

But it reminds me of a funny story once where he came down to the house. He loved Fidelity so much that there was...gas prices were rising somewhat and he said...he came down by the office, you know, some staff and some friends of his that were there. And he said, "Good news, bad news, Tommy." And I said, "What's the bad news, sir?" And he said, "The bad news is Mrs. B said, 'I think you're spending too much on fuel for that boat, filling it up with 200 gallons of fuel. You should cut back some.'"

So I said, "Well, what's the good news, sir?" He said, "Well, the good news is that she has no idea that the boat holds 400 gallons." You know, he loved the boat. So for me, you know, I was really lucky that I came along, I had spent a bunch of time with him on the boat and you know, he knew I had boated before that and so he sort of watched me over time and then you know, I was given permission or allowed to do it.

And this was after a few nameless people, early on, had earned the nickname Captain Crunch for some of their boating mishaps. So I was very lucky to be entrusted you know, to take that boat. And what a thrill for me and what a great thing for him. But you're right, the Secret Service did always struggle to keep up. I mean that thing, like you said, 3 engines and 900 horsepower. Good luck. But he loved going out there and it was a lot of fun.

And I have to say, people might have been scared, but certainly it wasn't because of his abilities. He was a phenomenal boater. You know the North Atlantic seas can be a little dicey at times with hidden rocks. I mean the tide goes up and down 12 feet every, you know, 12 hours or so. He was fun to watch and it was great to be on that with him.

Sam: Tommy, since working for my grandfather, you have gotten married, you've started a family, and pursued your new career in New York City, yet you still find time to be a part of the advisory board for the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. What inspires you to stay involved in the legacy building of George and Barbara Bush?

Tom: Great question. What a great honor to be asked to serve on the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, the Advisory Council, you know, a nod to you, a fellow member. But you know, the Bushes continue to inspire me. I wish that everyone could have had the opportunity to spend even a little time with either one of them.

I'm reminded of some of the amazing things. Think of how incredible it was to watch 41 shaving his head after he learned that 2-year-old little Patrick, a son of a Secret Service agent on his personal detail, was diagnosed with leukemia, and you know, the entire detail was going to shave their heads in solidarity. And here's your grandfather saying, "You know, sign me up, we're going."

But he led by example. He reminded people that public service, in any form, is a noble calling that it's important to give back, right. He had a line he used to often use which was, "There can be no true definition of a successful life that does not include service to others." I know you've heard that a lot. But he really believed it and lived by it. And that it's important to do your best at whatever you're doing.

But you know, it's also make sure you don't take yourself too seriously, right? It's important lesson to have, a sense of humor. You and I've been talking about that. But you know, he listened, he, you know, tried to find compromise in his leadership abilities. And he just cared about the other guy. So these were you know, some of the key lessons.

And I'm not summing up here probably the life lessons of both President and Mrs. Bush, but I do love the Presidential Library and the Bush School Center at the Texas A&M, and now in Washington D.C. as well. It excites me that they're there. The kids and adults can continue to learn from the Bushes for generations to come. And that the Bush School can help educate and prepare future leaders in national security, international policy, diplomacy, you know, where they can groom them to become statesmen.

So it's a great piece to make sure that those tentacles of, you know, 41's legacy can continue to reach out and excite other people. But I know it excites you and it excites me, but you know, their leadership model needs to continue to be

learned. And I think now, more than ever, we need to have more of that leadership style. So that's what really excites me going forward.

Sam: Well, Tommy, is there a project that the foundation is working on currently that gets you excited?

Tom: There's a lot of activity going on. You know, we're collectively working on some very exciting pieces that I think a lot of people will really wanna go visit and be part of. I don't wanna get in trouble, I don't know how much I'm supposed to say or not say.

But yeah, they're working on a lot of great things and they're continually evolving the library, the museum, but really, the school too. And I think going forward, the school is sort of the...you know, will be a big part of that remembrance of who 41 is when just generations of students will continue to learning his leadership style and that of his entire administration.

Sam: Tommy, this has been fun. But before I send you back to the office, I wanna end with this question. Working so closely with George and Barbara Bush means a lot more than having two great bosses. It means having two great mentors. It means having two great friends. What do you miss most about having George and Barbara Bush in your life?

Tom: You know, I'll share a quick story. I was a few weeks on the job and we had just returned from a trip. And it was a Saturday, we were there and I think there's a lot of people in the office, a lot of Secret Service. And so he calls me down, "Tommy, come down here." And so, "Yes, sir." I come right down a little nervous, I had no pad, what's he gonna talk about, letters or preparing something else or outreach?

And so I get to his office and I sit down in the chair across from him and he starts you know, having the conversation. And all of a sudden, I hear a noise. So I thought, "That's very strange." What I didn't realize is the President had received, just that week, an electronic version of a whoopee cushion and he had taped it to the bottom of my chair.

And so another, you know, a sound went off again and I thought, "Oh, my gosh, this is so embarrassing." You know, he's keeping a straight face. And finally, it must have been a grand finale on this thing because it went off. And I'm pretty sure Jean and others and Secret Service were in on it because they all came running and laughing and that's when I realized this is going to be one heck of a ride.

But you know, to your point, I've been blessed to have you know, an amazing mom and dad to help guide me, but I was beyond lucky to be later included in

President and Mrs. Bush's orbit. You know, to see and learn firsthand from them was incredible. I said it earlier, but he always cared about the other guy, right? He lived by a set of principles and a code of conduct, of course, duty, honor, country. But he was also gracious, he was generous, he was honest, he listened. You know, he lived by these principles every day.

And you learned by watching, not simply by words, but actually seeing it live. And it was this set of principles that I think made him so successful at whatever he was doing throughout his life. And you know, he loved life and he loved people. So you know, I miss both of them, just being there, right rooting you on was something else.

But I'll leave with this, it was impossible to spend time with George Bush and not leave wanting to be a better person or a better version of yourself. He just had that effect on you. And it's why he was you know, such a leader and a hero to so many of us. He was the kindest, most caring gentleman that I've ever known. And if all of us in the world could be a little bit more like George H.W. Bush, what a better place it would be.

Sam: Wow. Well, you know that's right, Tommy. Well, Tommy, thank you for being a part of the show. Please send my best to your wife and the family.

Tom: Likewise.

Sam: Hopefully, see you in Maine, if you ever make it up there anymore. You're on the grindstone in New York City.

Tom: Exactly. We'll be around for sure. Thanks, Sam, so much really loved being part of this, and the show is awesome, so keep going.

Sam: Great to be with you. Thanks, Tommy.

Tom: Yeah, 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.

President 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.