



**All the Best Podcast**

***Episode 99. Down in the Front!***

***99. Featuring Ben Mulroney, Canadian producer, and former television host***

Ben Mulroney: [00:00:01] The country had been in a recession despite our many attempts to jumpstart the economy. It was beginning to dominate the headlines and influence 1992 politics to the right. Honorable Brian Mulroney, Prime Minister of Canada. Ottawa, November twenty-six nineteen ninety-one. Dear Brian, you sensed, might be concerned about all the piling on and you called me. Thanks so much for that. We are in a tough period. There are no easy fixes to this economy. And yes, things are slow and a lack of confidence abounds. But there's a lot of fundamental strength out there, too. Every [00:00:30] day, I'm grateful for true friends. That's you! George

George H. W. Bush: [00:00:34] The first place. I believe that character is a part of being president, and life really must have joy.

Sam LeBlond: [00:00:41] 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. [00:01:00]

Music: [00:01:08] We're one big country nation, that's right.

George H. W. Bush: [00:01:11] 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. You are a human being first, and those human connections with children, with friends, are the most [00:01:30] important investment you will ever make. 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 LeBlond: [00:01:40] On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. This is all the best. We're one big country nation. That's right. A former co-host of CTV's Daily Morning Program, Your Morning, and contributor to CTV's EE Talk, Ben Mulroney, is regarded [00:02:00] as one of Canada's premiere television hosts. Despite being the son of former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney having a law degree from Laval University and a history degree from Duke University. Mulroney found his calling in show business, not politics. Mulroney has also appeared as a contributor on the weekend edition of the ABC news program Good Morning America and has joined host Kelly Ripa as a guest co-host on the popular daytime talk show Live with Kelly two [00:02:30] times. Highly regarded as a preeminent charitable emcee. Mulroney also hosts a variety of philanthropic events for various causes on a regular basis and works closely with a number of charitable organizations such as Cystic Fibrosis Canada and Sick Kids.

Sam LeBlond: [00:02:47] Mulroney was also the national spokesperson for Water Can in 2012, a charity focused on bringing drinking water to those most in need. In this capacity, he helped raise funds [00:03:00] and awareness by climbing the highest peak in Africa, Mount Kilimanjaro. It's my pleasure to welcome Ben Mulroney today to All the Best. Ben, thanks for joining us.

Ben Mulroney: [00:03:11] Real pleasure to be here. Thanks so much.

Sam LeBlond: [00:03:13] Well, Ben, as many listening might know your father. The Prime Minister and my Grandfather were great friends and both led neighboring nations during the same time. You just read one of the many letters the two exchanged over the years. They had an incredibly strong bond formed around many [00:03:30] common qualities and ideas they both shared. I'd like to start by asking about that very relationship from your perspective. What do you remember about their historic friendship?

Ben Mulroney: [00:03:41] I think it was really top of mind for me, and I focused a lot on it, probably because it happened at a time when I was probably mature enough to appreciate it. I think my dad had a strong relationship with Ronald Reagan. I was probably too young to appreciate that, and I think he had a good relationship with Bill Clinton, but it was a short one, given that they only overlapped [00:04:00] for a few months. Your grandfather in my father shared a bond based on so many shared qualities, and I think the first one and you would know this, I don't think it would be surprising to you, family, the appreciation of family, and I got to see that firsthand. I got to see how important President Bush's family was to him and how important his friends were to him. And a letter like this demonstrates how much it meant for him to tell his friends what they meant to him. I learned that from my father and it was reinforced in me [00:04:30] through your grandfather.

Sam LeBlond: [00:04:31] Ben. Growing up, the family member of a world leader can be a lot of fun. Believe me, we had a lot of fun, But it also can be difficult in many ways, sacrificing your privacy and especially the unrelenting criticism that comes with being a public figure. That was something for me. I took it personally. I couldn't help it. Then your father was prime minister for 10 years, so you must have seen and heard it all. How difficult was it for [00:05:00] you to hear the criticism and how did you handle it at the time?

Ben Mulroney: [00:05:03] Well, I took my lead from my parents and they were able to deal with it, so I dealt with it as well. I never liked it. And like I said, the older I got, the more shocked I was by the criticism. I saw how genuine my father's love of his Country was, how much he wanted to help,

Ben Mulroney: [00:05:17] How much I think he earned his place in government and therefore the right to make those decisions and those choices on behalf of the country. So I never understood the venom and I would say the unfair choices made by journalists to [00:05:30] cast them in one light or another. But the one thing that happened that was very funny was that the opposition, the journalists are all calling for his head for one reason or another because that's what you did. And I believe it was your grandfather who floated the idea that my father should be the head of the United Nations. And I remember sitting around the dining room table saying, Let's do it, Dad, let's get out of here. They don't appreciate you. Let's go to New York. We'll get a great apartment.

Ben Mulroney: [00:05:55] We can park wherever we want. No one's going to give us parking tickets. Let's just go. [00:06:00] And two things happen. One, all those

people who were criticizing him or a number of them who are criticizing him for his job said, You've got to stay and finish what you started. But my father was said, no, I had a job to do. I committed to it. I ran in an election, I formed a government and I intend to stay until the next election is called again showed me. You finish what you start. Even though I really would have liked to park all over New York City with no parking tickets. Diplomatic immunity.

Sam LeBlond: [00:06:25] Ben, you tagged along with your father on [00:06:30] a visit to Walker's Point in Kennebunkport, Maine. My grandfather called it his anchor to Windward. It's where the family goes to unplug and spend time together. As you may have noticed upon your visit, even while President of the United States, my grandfather was able to relax and entertain guests in a way that wasn't. Possible anywhere else. First, Ben, what do you remember from that trip, and do the Mulroney's have a similar anchor to Windward? Where do you go to get away from it all?

Ben Mulroney: [00:07:00] So [00:07:00] I tell you, your grandfather to me was, I never forgot he was president. And so it always amazed me when I would have these moments with him and I knew I was standing with the president of the United States, a man who occupied the most powerful office in the world. And yet this is the man who taught me to play horseshoes right off of his kitchen. And it wasn't because there was a photographer around. It wasn't because this was going to score political points. We had [00:07:30] honest-to-goodness conversation. This is a man who taught me horseshoes. This is the guy who took us out on a speedboat and asked us about our day and how things were going with us. My memories are like that. Every time I think back, I remember some of the most wonderful memories that we had in the nine years that my father was in office. And I remember a beautiful home full of memories and pictures and joy and laughter. And I remember this was the first time, the first time I ever had lobster was in Kennebunkport, [00:08:00] and I remember I had never cracked my own lobster, and I did not know that on the inside was more than just meat. And there's a whole bunch of stuff came up and I was really. And it landed in my lap, and your grandmother was kind enough to let me know that these things happen. I have incredible memories of that place. I can appreciate why it holds such an anchoring place in your lives because as I think back at it, it fills me with joy and calm to remember those wonderful [00:08:30] moments where these two men, the weight of the world on them. And let's not forget, the first Gulf War was omnipresent in those times.

Ben Mulrone: [00:08:38] And they were able to spend time as friends and with family in a place that was unlike any other.

Sam LeBlond: [00:08:46] Do you guys have a place where you can escape from it all is there? Is there a meeting point for your family where you can kind of unplug and get away from it all?

Ben Mulrone: [00:08:54] Florida and my parents have a much, much smaller footprint, but the same effect.

Ben Mulrone: [00:08:59] I hadn't seen my [00:09:00] parents for that long in a very long time. Covid has been rough on all of us, and my father is 82 now. So to be able to spend that much quality time with my parents. And and and their grandkids, which includes another Brian Mulrone, but really, really meant that meant the world.

Sam LeBlond: [00:09:16] Now, Ben, I heard a rumor that you almost got yourself in trouble with the Secret Service when attending a play in which my grandmother and other former first ladies were in attendance. As long as the statute of limitations has [00:09:30] passed, would you mind sharing that story with us?

Ben Mulrone: [00:09:33] Oh, I'd love to. And actually, this is the first time I've ever shared it publicly. I've told it to friends before, but never shared it publicly. We were in London for the G7 summit, so I'm guessing it was ninety-one, maybe ninety. And I really want to go see a play. I heard Miss Saigon was a tremendous play and I really want to go see apparently the helicopter on stage I had to see this and I got a ticket. And it was me and my RCMP member Security [00:10:00] detail that was with me and we were in the second row of the balcony and in the first row, the balcony all of a sudden appears a throng of security and a number of first ladies. And the reason I knew they were first ladies was because I recognized your grandmother from the back, obviously with her distinctive hair.

Ben Mulrone: [00:10:16] And I took it. I took a gamble. I took a chance and I screamed "Down in front!" And she turned around. She turned around and recognized me, thankfully instantly, and gave me a hug. And [00:10:30] we enjoyed the show. And it was only later that I realized that could have ended terribly, terribly. but it didn't.

Sam LeBlond: [00:10:37] Ben like your father. You also chose a life in the spotlight. Or should I say the Spotlight chose you? Can you talk about getting your

start in TV and the decision to pursue that career path? As I'm pretty sure that wasn't always the original plan, was it?

Ben Mulroney: [00:10:53] They shook up law school in Quebec City. I was at my father's alma mater, Laval University, and it was near the I think I was [00:11:00] taking summer courses and the Progressive Conservative Party, which was my father's former political party were having their convention in Quebec City, just a stone's throw from my apartment, and my father said, Listen, I can't make it there. The party is not doing very well in the polls, and I think it would be a shot in the arm for them and get some press for them if you were to show up. My father rarely asks me to do anything, so I said, of course. And as it turns out, he was right. I ended up on the cover of the Global Mail Canada's national newspaper. I conducted interviews with [00:11:30] all the main outlets.

Ben Mulroney: [00:11:31] They asked me what my thoughts were. I guess they had seen me in a few years, so this was kind of a novelty for them and somebody. A television executive, Suzanne Boyce, was watching this in Toronto, and she saw this guy on TV and she said, Oh, here's a guy who's well versed in a number of topics he's not afraid of the camera probably didn't hurt that my last name was Mulroney, and she offered me a job to start on a very small cable channel, which then became a bigger channel and that became Canadian Idol and that became my entertainment show. E! Talk, which then became my [00:12:00] National Morning Show Your Morning, and that culminated in a 20-year career, which ended just a few months ago.

Sam LeBlond: [00:12:06] Ben, your platform and hosting skills have given you the opportunity to give back in many unique and impactful ways by lending your voice and celebrity to support many causes. You've worked closely with many charities serving as the National Ambassador to Cystic Fibrosis Canada. A spokesperson for the CNIB Foundation. Your involvement with SickKids and many more [00:12:30] wonderful charitable groups with such a busy schedule over the years. Why was it so important for you to always make it a priority to volunteer your time to these causes?

Ben Mulroney: [00:12:41] Well, you know, Sam, you and I these days would be described as privileged, but I think we both grew up in a time where we were references. We knew we were fortunate. I knew I was fortunate. There was no other way to say it. My parents would tell me all the time. They tell us at dinner they'd say, Listen, in this house, you are special. And to us, [00:13:00] you can do no wrong and we will help you in any way we possibly can. But when you leave

this house, you are not special to the people out there. You need to earn that. You need to earn that feeling outside in the real world, you need to prove to people that you deserve all the things that we give you for free in this house. And that instilled in me a recognition that I didn't deserve the things I had, but I had them and we had an obligation to give back. That the world was not a fair place that the world was not safe for all, that everybody [00:13:30] didn't see how that feeling of being special in their own homes. And yeah, and I knew I was lucky I won the genetic lottery. So, if I won the genetic lottery, I didn't earn it. I should. I should probably help out. You know, I should probably do what I can, and it feels good to do that. It feels like it's my responsibility.

Sam LeBlond: [00:13:48] Ben, serving others has also taken you to new heights, literally, when in 2012 you supported Water Can and led an expedition to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa. Now [00:14:00] that's what I call an extreme act of service. What inspired you to support Water can and climb Africa's highest peak?

Ben Mulroney: [00:14:08] A couple of things, right, but right before I climbed, I found out that I was having my third child. My wife called me from the other side of the world, said we're pregnant.

Ben Mulroney: [00:14:16] So that gave the extra incentive to get down alive. But because if working towards the goal of ensuring that the world has the most basic fundamental right of drinking water, clean drinking water, if that's not a worthy goal and a laudable [00:14:30] goal to try to achieve that, I don't know what is, and I still believe that. And if I can get on a soapbox for a second, the fact that in Canada today, a G7 nation, one of the richest places on Earth with more drinking water than we know what to do with, we have at any given point nearly a hundred boil water advisories in First Nations communities across this country. That's a national travesty that we are still dealing with, and the first prime minister who was able to solve that problem will be recognized as a great prime minister. I can tell you [00:15:00] that, but know that drinking water, I mean, it doesn't get more basic or fundamental than that.

Sam LeBlond: [00:15:05] Ben, you and your wife, Jess, have three young, beautiful children. How do you both prioritize your time with them? And what are the things you are both doing to instill in them the same service mentality? You both have.

Ben Mulroney: [00:15:19] My parents weren't around all the time. I mean, if I went to look at the official schedule, I bet I could find weeks on weeks where they

weren't. They weren't physically present in our home. [00:15:30] But that doesn't mean I didn't feel their presence when I think back on my childhood. I remember having parents who were there, and what that tells me is that it's not about the time that you're physically around your kids. If you're physically around your kids and you're on your phone, you're not. But if you are, if you have a job that requires you to travel, you're checking in, you're calling them, you're communicating. If FaceTime is a tool that you can use, your kids will remember that you were there. And I believe that because I experienced that [00:16:00] myself. And so spending time with your kids is not about quantity.

Ben Mulroney: [00:16:04] It really is about quality. And I feel the way that Jess and I do it is we do not give ourselves grief if we can't be there because we know that when we are there, we are one hundred percent there. Because if we have to leave or God forbid, we want to have a night out or go spend some time with some friends, we're not going to give ourselves any flak for that because we know that while we were there and present with our kids, we gave them one hundred percent of our time. And [00:16:30] as far as instilling in them what was instilled in us, I'm doing exactly what my parents did to us. I'm reminding them that while they're in the confines of this home, they are as special as any gift from God in the history of the world. But when they leave this house, they've got to prove themselves. They've got to tell the world, this is why I'm special. This is why I matter.

Ben Mulroney: [00:16:49] And I'm going to prove that by helping other people,

Sam LeBlond: [00:16:52] Then it's been a great conversation. Thank you for being a part of the show. I want to end with this question, which I think you've heard probably a couple of times [00:17:00]. When growing up in a political family, Ben, one question you often hear is when are you getting into the family business? If you asked my grandmother while she was still alive, she would say there have been enough Bushes in the spotlight. Let's clear the floor for someone else. Well, I'm sure you have had your fair share of inquiries on the topic throughout your career. But now that you have taken a slight step back from television, has politics ever crossed your mind as the next step? And what does your father think about the next generation of politicians [00:17:30] in the family?

Ben Mulroney: [00:17:31] Well, so firstly, my sister is taking care of that because she is currently the Minister of Transport in the Ontario provincial government. Fortunately, is taking a lot of the heat off of me. But no, I still get it today. It's a no-win situation. I don't know if you're a Star Trek fan, but it's my Kobayashi Maru. It's a no-win situation. There's nothing I can do.

Ben Mulroney: [00:17:51] If I were going to politics. People would say that's trading on my family name by going into another line of work. People would say, I'm trading on the family name. [00:18:00] There's nothing I can do except follow what makes me happy. I'm a person who's deeply invested politically. I have a lot of thoughts and opinions on those things, much like a lot of people out there. I don't know that I have a lot of solutions to offer, and so I respect anybody who presents themselves, regardless of their political stripes, that they feel that they see a [roblem in the world, that they can bring a solution to bear on that problem. And they think that they are the best suited to do it in the public arena.

Ben Mulroney: [00:18:26] I have the utmost respect for them. I have a problem with [00:18:30] people who go into it for a permanent paycheck. That's just me. But I like to sit in the cheap seats and complain. You know, I like to sit there with my friends and talk about the things that irritate me in politics. I don't know that I have the metal or the stuff to make it in politics, nor do I think that I have anything to necessarily offer. If I ever did, it'd be a different conversation, but I don't see that happening. And so the answer is, no, I don't want to go into politics. I don't think about going into politics. I don't dream about going into politics, and I'm very proud that my [00:19:00] dad was in politics and my sister is in politics.

Ben Mulroney: [00:19:03] One last thing? It's been such a pleasure reminiscing about the time with your grandparents. They are two are the most gracious, wonderful people I ever had the pleasure of knowing. I doubt that I will ever meet a couple as genuinely in love with each other and as wonderfully affectionate towards each other and others for the rest of my life. And it was a pleasure to know them for the time that I did.

Sam LeBlond: [00:19:23] Ben, thanks again for being a part of the show. Thanks for offering your time. Please say hello to Jess and your kids and [00:19:30] see you next time.

Ben Mulroney: [00:19:31] All right, thanks so much. I really appreciate it. All the best.

Sam LeBlond: [00:19:34] 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.

music: [00:19:48] Yeah, we're one big country nation. That's right,

Barbara Bush: [00:19:52] Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house, every [00:20:00] house, all over America.

George H. W. Bush: [00:20:03] Preparedness, strength, decency, 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.