



All the Best Podcast

Episode 100. The First 100

Sam LeBlond: [00:00:00] May 29th, 1997. I can't speak for others out there, but I can tell you what helped me a lot in life, helped me through good times and bad, helped me as my guide in private life and in public life to values. When I was president, I often thought back to the advice given to me by my mother. My dad led by example. We'd watch his leadership in business and community, and we'd learn. But Mother gave advice. Early on, she'd give us profound advice. It sounds simple now, but when I became president, I knew just how sound it was. Be honest. Tell the truth. Be kind. Compassionate was too big a word for me back then, but that's what she meant. Care about the other guy. Help him. Don't look down on anyone. You have an obligation to help others compete hard and play to win. Be a good winner and also be a good loser. Give the other guy credit. And yes, don't be braggadocio. I was honored and blessed to be president of the United States of America. But I am dead certain that what truly matters in life is not the political office you hold or held. Not the famous people you know or the things that history might say you accomplished. What really matters are life's true values your faith, your family, and your friends. I am a very lucky man. George H.W. Bush.

George H. W. Bush: [00:01:40] Birthplace. I believe. That character is a part of being president.

Barbara Bush: [00:01:44] And life really must have joy.

Sam LeBlond: [00:01:47] 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.

[00:02:14] We're one big country nation.

George H. W. Bush: [00:02:16] That's right. 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 Bush: [00:02:29] 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: [00:02:37] We stand tonight for a new world of hope and possibilities for our children, a world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam LeBlond: [00:02:46] On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, this is all the best.

[00:02:52] One big country nation. That's right.

Sam LeBlond: [00:02:56] Welcome to a very special edition of All the Best. It's our 100th episode. Today, we're going to look back at some of our favorite moments from the podcast archive. But before we do, I wanted to say a few words. The George and Barbara Bush Foundation launched this podcast almost two and a half years ago with the mission to share the stories of my grandparents, family, friends, and colleagues with a focus on service. Now, 100 episodes later, I couldn't be happier to say that it's been so much more than that. The podcast has over half a million downloads across 45 different countries, and this would in no way have been possible without the support of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation and especially listeners like you. So from the bottom of my heart, I want to say thank you for the life of the podcast. We've enjoyed fantastically candid conversations with a multitude of world leaders, ambassadors, cabinet secretaries, and members of Congress. Plus, there have been wonderful stories of achievement and service from a wide range of athletes, authors, advocates, and musicians. And who could forget the incredible personal remembrances of George and Barbara Bush shared by their staffers, their aides, and, of course, their family? However, if there is just

one commonality in each of our 100 episodes, it's this. If your paths crossed with George and Barbara Bush, you knew almost immediately that you would confidently be able to call them friends.

Sam LeBlond: [00:04:35] And it didn't matter if you were with them in the Oval Office at a baseball game or walking the campus of Texas A&M in College Station. My grandparents were always their warm, genuine selves, and gave whoever they met all their best. So as we look ahead to what's next for the podcast, we want to hear from all of you, the listeners. If you have been directly impacted by the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, any of its affiliated programs and organizations, or by George and Barbara Bush themselves, we want to hear from you and share your story on the podcast. If you have a story to share, send it to the podcast at [Bush 41. Org.](mailto:bush41.org) And maybe one day you'll hear it on the show. Once again, that's a podcast at [Bush. The number 41. Dot org.](http://Bush.41.Dot.org) At this point, you're probably thinking the same thought that so many of my family members have thought about me at family gatherings. All right, Sam, stop talking and get on with it. All right. Let's get into some of our favorite best moments. To start things off, let's look back to September 22nd when I spoke with former secretary of state and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. And one of my favorite parts of the conversation was when she talked about the first time she met each of my grandparents.

Condoleezza Rice: [00:06:02] I was so excited to meet the bushes. I, of course, knew President Bush's long history in foreign policy, all of the roles that he'd played, the fact that he was, by everybody's account, just a wonderful, gentle human being. And so I was very excited to meet him. The first time I met President Bush, I actually was the note taker for a meeting early on in the administration when he invited Jack Matlock, who was then the ambassador to the Soviet Union, to come back for consultations. And I was the note-taker, and it was my first time in the Oval Office. And so I was sitting there and I was kind of looking around and thinking, Oh, wow, Roosevelt was in this office. Kennedy was in this office. Oh, my goodness. Look at that portrait of Lincoln. And I remember thinking, oh, my goodness, with a third through the meeting, and I haven't taken a single note. And at that point I thought, okay, you'd better focus on your job and less on the surroundings. But he took me aside and said, You know, I'm going to need a lot of advice and I'm just really glad you're here. And then in February, so just a few weeks after we were there in Washington, he asked me to arrange a meeting with a group of Soviet specialists. Bring them up to Kennebunkport now. It's February in Kennebunkport. And I remember kind of dodging the ice and snow as we drove up there. Actually, the only heated room in the house was the bedroom of President

and Mrs. Bush. And so we actually had the meeting in their bedroom with these Soviet specialists sitting around talking about what was going on in the Soviet Union. And that was really my first exposure to this wonderful couple, to Mrs. Bush, who was just such a wonderful person and so welcoming. We made popcorn in the kitchen. I mean, this would be familiar to you is the way that they treated guests. They just made you feel right at home, even if you were there to talk about the Soviet Union.

Sam LeBlond: [00:07:53] My grandparents really did make everyone feel at home. And speaking of feeling at home, next, let's go back to June 16th when I spoke with Captain Robert Aguilar, the commanding officer of the USS George H.W. Bush aircraft carrier. I loved hearing about how one of the unique things about the CVN 77 was that most of the sailors have actual memories of my grandfather, the aircraft carriers namesake, and that makes the ship feel even more like home for the crew.

Captain Robert Aguilar: [00:08:24] We are named after a president who I would say most of the sailors on board the ship actually can remember from when they were young. Right. All of our other ships are named after individuals who served this country and are now deceased. So many of our sailors can remember President Bush. I think that's sort of unique, right? We can carry our remembrances of the namesake of our ship with us. He's known for his service to the nation. One of the things I love most about President Bush is that one, he was a naval aviator, just like me, too. He served his country at a time when his country needed him the most, and he was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice. And I actually have in my office still images of his rescue after being shot down while attacking that radio station at Chichi Jima. I look at those pictures every day and I think I've got the frame of him in the life raft. And then there's the frame of him just before he disappears from the view of the camera and he looks up into the camera. There's no telling what was going through his mind. It was probably, get that camera out of my face. But there's no way he knew what lay before him at that moment, how he had been plucked from certain death and would go on to lead our nation through some very interesting times. And I just love that about the namesake of this ship. The other picture of him I have in my office is a lithograph of him wearing his naval aviation jacket with his gold wings on one side and the seal of the president of the United States on the other. To me, that caps a lifetime of service.

Sam LeBlond: [00:10:22] Well, while we're on the subject of boats, let's talk about a much smaller boat, the boat that my grandfather. Father would go fishing with former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. He joined us on November 25th,

back in 2020, and looked back fondly on the memories of fishing and humorous moments he and George Bush shared over the course of their four-decade-long friendship.

CPM Brian Mulroney: [00:10:45] We, apart from Walker's point, went fishing elsewhere. Newfoundland and Labrador in New Brunswick for salmon on Anacostia Island in the middle of the St Lawrence River for salmon again the Northwest Territories. We did a lot of fishing together. In those days, what I noticed about your grandfather was patience and humor. He always saw the funny part of life, and so did I. We bonded in many ways around family traits and family experiences, but mostly family. We are both rooted in family and the great sense of humor that he had that made everything easier for all of us. I have the fondest recollections of your grandfather and your grandmother and your whole family because, you know, this was built up over, I'm going to say, like 40 years of real friendship. You know, you run into all kinds of people in politics at the moment. You're friendly. But this is the first and only time with me from the day that we met to his death when I eulogized him. We were great and personal friends all the way through on a regular basis. We spoke and I tell you, I loved him. He was a wonderful man.

Sam LeBlond: [00:11:55] It's well known that family is a theme of importance to us. This podcast alone is a testament to that, and the friendships made over the years have often sparked generational friendships. So if one Mulroney wasn't enough for you. We also were fortunate enough to have Brian Mulroney's son, Canadian television host Ben Mulroney, join us about a month ago on February 16th. He also enjoyed his share of humorous moments with the Bush family and recounted a lobster dinner in Kennebunkport, Maine, that didn't go quite as planned.

Ben Mulroney: [00:12:30] 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 I ever had lobster in Kennebunkport. 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 that came up. 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 moments where these two men had the weight of the world on them. And let's not

forget, the first Gulf War was omnipresent in those times, and they were able to spend time as friends and with family in a place that was unlike any other.

Sam LeBlond: [00:13:31] I want to stay in Kennebunkport for a minute and go back to February 21st, 2021, to when I spoke with Annie Kennedy, the longtime gardener at Walker's Point. Now, Annie is someone who isn't afraid to speak. Her mind reminds me of somebody. But I loved the story she told where she feared that maybe her words went a little too far with my grandmother.

Annie Kennedy: [00:13:56] As far as working with her. My bond with her became one where I wasn't afraid of her, even when I made a few slips of the tongue. I wasn't worried, except for one time we were together, and some of the times we would be together a lot in May when no one was around before the family arrived in September and October. And this one foggy, foggy day. She was with the dogs and she was still riding a tricycle. I was trying to help her put these bags on and she said, No, I can do it myself. I can do it myself. And I said You are one tough old goat. And she said, "Tough old goat?" And I just didn't know what to do. I thought, oh, my good God, I can't do that. So I clenched my teeth and I could hear her pedal away saying, "Tough old goat." And she just went off into the fog. So I got in touch with Katherine Branch, who was her assistant, and I emailed her and told her what happened. And I said I'm not going to sleep. Am I going to get fired? And she said, Calm down. I'm sure she loved it.

Sam LeBlond: [00:15:03] That's not the only time a story of unvarnished honesty has been shared on this podcast. It actually happened again on November 10th when former US ambassador to Iceland, Sig Rogic stopped by. But this time the story featured my grandfather.

Honorable Sigmund Rogich: [00:15:18] We were in the limousine driving over to Congress. I was with the president going over the speech, the final draft, and he said Sigley. He always called me Sigley. He said, Is everything okay? And I said, Mr. President, everything is great except for the tie you're wearing. And he said, What do you mean? We're on our way now. We're in the limousine. And I said It's just the worst tie. I said I can't believe I let you get in with that tie on PS4. What am I going to do? And I said, Well, here, take my tie. So I took my tie off and he put it on and he looked sensational. It really looked good. And if you look at the pictures of him giving that speech, it's a youthful-looking tie, as opposed to one of those boring things he used to wear. And I forgot about it. And then he sent me a picture of him with the tie and he said for the sig. He said in that great chamber, as we declared victory against Saddam Hussein, a lone voice could be heard saying in

the back, Would you look at that tie? So that's the tie story. I liked it so much. I framed it with the picture and his comments, and it's in my lobby, in my office, and everybody comments on that tie and that story and that picture.

Sam LeBlond: [00:16:30] Once you hear that story about the tie, you can never forget it. And my grandmother never forgot a story that author Brad Meltzer told her about his mother. Brad came on the podcast on April 14th and shared about the time he introduced his mother to the president and first lady.

Brad Meltzer: [00:16:47] What I loved about President and Mrs. Bush, well, my mom died from breast cancer. I never get to tell the story. But one of the last great memories I had was bringing her to meet the president and first lady, my mom, before she was sick. Years ago, when Borders, the big bookstore Borders, was still around, the head of sales of Borders said to me, Guess where your books sell more than anywhere else? Straight sales, not even per capita. And I said I don't know. New York City, 8 million people in one place. They said, nope. So Washington, D.C., I write thrillers set in D.C.? Nope. The number one place where my book was sold was the Boca Raton, Florida, borders, one mile from the furniture store where my mother used to work. And that means my mother single-handedly beat 8 million New Yorkers. And Mrs. Bush, God bless her, never forgot that story. I told her one time at the beginning of my career back in like 2003 or 2004. And every time I would see her, she'd say, How's your mother? And she knew my mom was sick. I brought her to meet them finally because my mom never traveled with me to all the different ones. But when they did the one in Naples, I brought my mom. And I will never forget Mrs. Bush how kind she was, how much time she took. I'd met her. I can't tell you a dozen times before that. Just get us through the receiving line. I never want to bother them. I was like, I'm not taking pictures anymore. I'm done. I just wanted them to have a shorter night because they were getting older and they were tired. She spent so much time talking to my mother and even when my mom died, she was like, I still think of your mother and that story about her selling books for you. And I think that the reason I was always bonded to Mrs. Bush especially as she knew the power of a strong mother. She understood that inherently. And how could I not go back to see someone who reminded me of some of those great memories?

Sam LeBlond: [00:18:32] Before we play our final selection on this here 100th episode of All the Best. I want to once more give a sincere thank you to all who listen to the podcast. I also want to thank the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, whose support and vision continue to make this show possible. And again, to those of you listening, if you have been impacted by the George and

Barbara Bush Foundation or any of its affiliated organizations, we want to hear all about it. Email your story to the podcast at Bush 41. Org. You know, my grandfather hated talking about his legacy, or the L-word, as he called it. But in looking back at the past 100 episodes, I can say with absolute certainty that the legacy of George and Barbara Bush continues to be alive and well. Now for our final selection. Here's one of my grandfather's closest friends who was our guest on January 13, 2021. Former Secretary of State James Baker, the third.

James A. Baker III: [00:19:36] Nobody had a better friend than I've had in your grandfather, and nobody's had a better friend for as long, you know. We were best friends for almost 60 years. That's a long, long time. On the day that he died, they left here in Houston, not far from where Susan and I lived. And I had gone by the scene, and he was very chipper that morning. I think I got there at 830 or something like that. I walked into the room. He was in bed. His breathing had not become labored. Somebody said, Mr. President, Secretary Baker's here. And he looked up at me as he had done so many times when we were doing all those campaigns together. He said, Hey, Baker, where are we going today? And I said, Well, Hefty. I called him half. He wished his Spanish for chief. I said, happy we're going to have. He said, Good. That's where I want to go. And I left. He ate a very hearty breakfast. He had five at least five soft-boiled eggs. And I thought, well, wow, he may be coming back a little bit. But later on in the day, they called me and said that I might want to come by, that he wasn't doing all that great, and I did. And we got there and I think he passed away at 1010 that night. But it was a very peaceful passing and we got your Uncle George W on the line. And the last words your grandfather said, the last words he spoke were to George W when he said, I love you. And George, of course, said, I love you, too. But I think what people ought to remember about George H.W. Bush is what an accomplished president he was and what a lovely human being he was and what a compassionate man he was and what a wonderful friend he was and how he was. Without a doubt, no doubt about it. The most successful one-term president this country has ever had.

Sam LeBlond: [00:21:39] We've loved having you with us for the first 100 episodes. Thank you again for listening. 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.

[00:21:59] We're one big country Nation. That's right.

Barbara Bush: [00:22:03] 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: [00:22:13] 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.