

Boot Camp Bess Story

By: Tina Baiter

Everything you have ever heard about her is true. She will yell at you. She will make you cry. She was a model and a marine. Some people fondly call her “Mommy” and proudly wear t-shirts proclaiming, “My Mommy Hurts Me”. Others call her “Boot Camp Bess”. No matter what you call Bess Gamble-Williams, there is no mistaking her passion for physical fitness and her deep connection to her Choctaw Indian heritage.

Bess was born and raised in the Rose Hill area of Texarkana, where she fondly recollects eating fresh fruit from her neighbor’s yards as she grew up.

“I remember the Watermelon Man coming down the street,” Bess said with a smile. “I just loved to hear him. We always had something to eat. We loved fresh fruit. I could tell you where every blackberry vine in Rose Hill was.”

Throughout high school, Bess was a talented athlete with limitless dreams. After graduating from Liberty Eylau High School with honors in 1977, Bess attended the Mayo/Hill Modeling School in Houston, Texas.

“Once I saw this picture of my grandmother,” Bess said, as she recollected why she went into modeling. “I didn’t even recognize her. She just looked like this movie star.”

That photo, coupled with Bess’s internal passion for dressing up, made modeling sound like an easy career choice. Beth was an instant hit at the modeling school, and soon she was appearing on shows like *Good Morning Houston* and teaching classes at the school. But one day, while working at a fashion show, Bess decided she needed to follow her other calling.

“I’ve always had this adventurous spirit,” Bess said. “My mom kept instilling in me education is key. Don’t ever limit yourself. She always wanted to go into the military. She would tell me, ‘Just think of all the places you could see.’”

That adventurous spirit caused Bess to literally leave the stage of a fashion show with her makeup on and her hair beautifully done and drive across Houston to a post office where she knew she could sign up for the Air Force. The Air Force, after all, appeared to provide the flight time necessary to fly to these places Bess had heard about growing up.

The recruiting officer for the Air Force, however, was out to lunch when Bess arrived, and a “sharp looking Marine” named Simon Dorsey, was available. Because of the way she was dressed, Dorsey thought Bess was there to take someone out for lunch. When he learned she was really a tomboy at heart looking to join the military, he knew exactly how to convince her to join the Marines. He showed her their uniforms.

“He played me on that,” Bess said, as she recollected how impressed she was with the Marines’ button down uniform and dress blues.

Bess went on to spend 20 years in the Marines, retiring in May of 2003 as a Staff Non-Commissioned Officer.

“It was always predestined by God,” Bess said as she described her time in the Military. “The streets I lived on were always named after trees of Indian tribes, and the number eight was always in there.”

The number eight was significant to Bess, because June 18, 1988 was her wedding anniversary. And she always knew it was a positive sign when the number eight kept appearing in her life. In Japan, she lived at 18 Chatan. Her last address in Cherry Point, North Carolina, was 88 Chataba.

During her last year as a Marine in Cherry Point, Bess injured her back doing a routine training exercise. That injury would ultimately inspire her post-retirement career as a physical fitness trainer.

“One of my doctors and my spirit said to me, ‘You can make your back strong,’” Bess said. “When I exercised every day the pain started relieving.”

While doing her daily workout routines at the gym, Bess noticed three ladies constantly watching her. One day they approached her and asked if they could pay her to be their trainer. She accepted, and that was when she realized after retirement, perhaps training people would be a good new career move.

When Bess returned to Texarkana as a retired Marine, she knew one thing for sure: She didn’t want to put on any weight. So she made a deal with a local gym to have a free membership in exchange for teaching classes. Her first class only had three or four people in it, but by the second class, that number had doubled.

“They said I was crazy, but they came back,” Bess said. “It was a challenge.”

That challenge is what people were looking for, and by the time her third class started, she had a packed house. Bess continued to teach at the gym for the rest of the year, but by 2004, Bess was ready to start her own business. She started with 10 people in a small building on Texas Boulevard, and by the following year, she had to move to accommodate her growing classes.

Bess now does three classes a day with a limit of 20 people per class, and she has a long waiting list of people wanting to get in.

“That tells me we have a problem in Texarkana,” Bess said. “Texarkana has more people with high blood pressure and strokes. They just don’t know what to do. I have to teach them the basics. There is no magic pill. Everything is natural. I turn fat into muscles.”

Starting with the basics may sound easy, until you realize they are literally the basics for Marine boot camp. Each day class members are expected to do 500 crunches in 15 minutes, among many other “basic” requirements.

But the basics also mean eating healthy and learning to live off of natural food sources.

“I teach my clients the value of the earth and what God gives you,” Bess said. “Make your own juice. Apple juice is not brown. *Apple juice is white*, and it tastes delicious.”

The Extreme Marine Boot Camp has been rewarding for Bess over the last six years, not only because it has allowed her to give so many people a new lease on life by restoring their health, but also because it has kept her in shape.

“I am very proud I can still get into my uniform,” Bess said.

To learn more about Bess, visit her website at www.bootcampbess.com, or call 1-800-WAAA. Just remember, she will make you cry!