

OUR CULTURES

— *Stories That Shape Us* —



She Was Never Given a Name...

So She Became One

Interview and story by Ronald Hale

Before the titles and global recognition, Betty Speaks built her identity through war, loss, faith, and a deep commitment to restoring humanity.

Long before “Ambassador” followed her name, she came to understand something few people ever face: a name means nothing if people refuse to accept it.

“I still look at myself as Betty,” she says. “That little girl that was born out of wedlock... teased about her name... didn’t have an identity.”

The way she speaks about it is controlled, but not distant. She doesn’t describe identity as something that formed naturally over time. For her, it had to be built deliberately, through experiences that left no room for doubt.

Most people grow into identity without giving it much thought. She didn’t have that path. Instead, she made a decision that would influence everything that followed: she would not allow others to define who she was or what she would become.

“Be kind to your neighbor. Then your community. Then your country.”

That decision followed her into environments where she would be tested again and again.

“I was in the military during an era when females weren’t necessarily accepted,” she explains. “And once we were, we stepped into spaces where I had to ask myself... why am I here?”

She didn’t avoid the question.

“I didn’t vote for equal rights, equal pay... any of that,” she continues. “So why am I on a battlefield?”

She stayed anyway. Soon, she was leading forty-five soldiers, men and women, many older, all watching closely. In a setting where authority was often questioned before it was earned, she led without demanding recognition.

“You know their greatest fear?” she asks. “Having a female leader.”

There are many ways to respond to that kind of resistance. She chose neither confrontation nor retreat. Instead, she focused on connection.

“Community,” she expresses. “You build relationships. You learn people. You understand what they face.”

Then she makes it personal.

“It’s like holding someone else’s child,” she explains. “That child can reject you, or come to you. But if they come to you, it’s because they trust you.”

Trust is not given. It forms over time. Through being there and showing up when it would be easier to step back. And once it is earned, it brings responsibility.

Some of the moments that tested her didn’t happen in battle, but they left a lasting impact on how she understands people and pain.



February 2014. A friend. A comrade from service.

“She committed suicide,” Betty says, then corrects herself. “It was a double homicide. She killed her children first.”

There is no attempt to soften the truth. She speaks it plainly, because for her, truth matters more than comfort.

But what followed mattered just as much as what happened.

“I started reaching out,” she recalls. “To my female comrades. Because we’ve been on hostile grounds. We’ve seen things. But we don’t talk about them.”

That silence, she realized, was not protection. It pushed people apart. Pain grew in spaces where connection was lost.

“Sometimes people don’t want to die,” she says. “They just don’t know how to respond to the pain.” That understanding changed how she engaged

with others. The issue wasn’t just loss... it was disconnection. And the solution had to be connection.

She calls that work *civility*.

“People think civility is weakness,” she asserts. “It’s not. It’s discipline. It’s action.”



Civility, for her, is not about avoiding conflict. It is about choosing how to respond to it.

It is how you remain open when shutting down would be easier. How you speak when silence feels safer. How you remain present when everything in life says turn away.

“It starts small,” she declares. “Be kind to your neighbor. Then your community. Then your country.”

Simple in concept, but demanding in practice. What she describes is not instinct... *it is intention.*

*“A civility leadership architect...
A global legacy builder.”*

Her life has been tested in ways few could imagine. She survived cancer. She lived through terror attacks, including Khobar Towers. She endured rejection, divorce, and misunderstanding. Each moment could have narrowed her focus. Instead, it deepened her calling.

“I’m a product of my pain,” she says. “And a producer of my purpose.”

The pain came first. But purpose gave it direction.

She remembers asking God, ‘*Why me?*’

Then came the answer: *This is not about you. You’re going to live. You’re one of my toughest soldiers.*

The assignment didn’t change. Her understanding of it did.

Today, she brings that perspective to everything she builds. *She teaches. She speaks. She writes.* She creates opportunities for others to recover, rebuild, and discover possibilities they might not have seen.

Even now, the focus doesn't stay on her.

"I want to see people excel," she explains. "Hope is helping others excel."

For her, hope is not an idea. It shows up in action.

"If someone tells you you're fired," she declares, "that doesn't mean it's over. It means you need to do something else."

This is not encouragement. It is instruction.

There are aspects of her life most people never notice. She is legally blind in her left eye, yet most wouldn't realize it when they meet her.

"I don't give them the opportunity to take advantage," she admits.

Everything she does reflects one principle: if you do not define yourself, someone else will.

She defines herself... clearly, intentionally, and without apology

When asked how she wants to be remembered, she pauses.

"A civility leadership architect," she declares. "A global legacy builder."

Then she sharpens it further.

"A woman who led with faith, walked in integrity, and transformed lives."

It sounds final... but it isn't. Her story continues.

"I'm still growing," she says. And that is not uncertainty, it is proof.

Identity isn't given at birth. It is built... through experience, choice, and the courage to keep becoming.



*She was never given a name she could grow into.
So she became one.*