

Life With Ave What A Ride

Ave Cole

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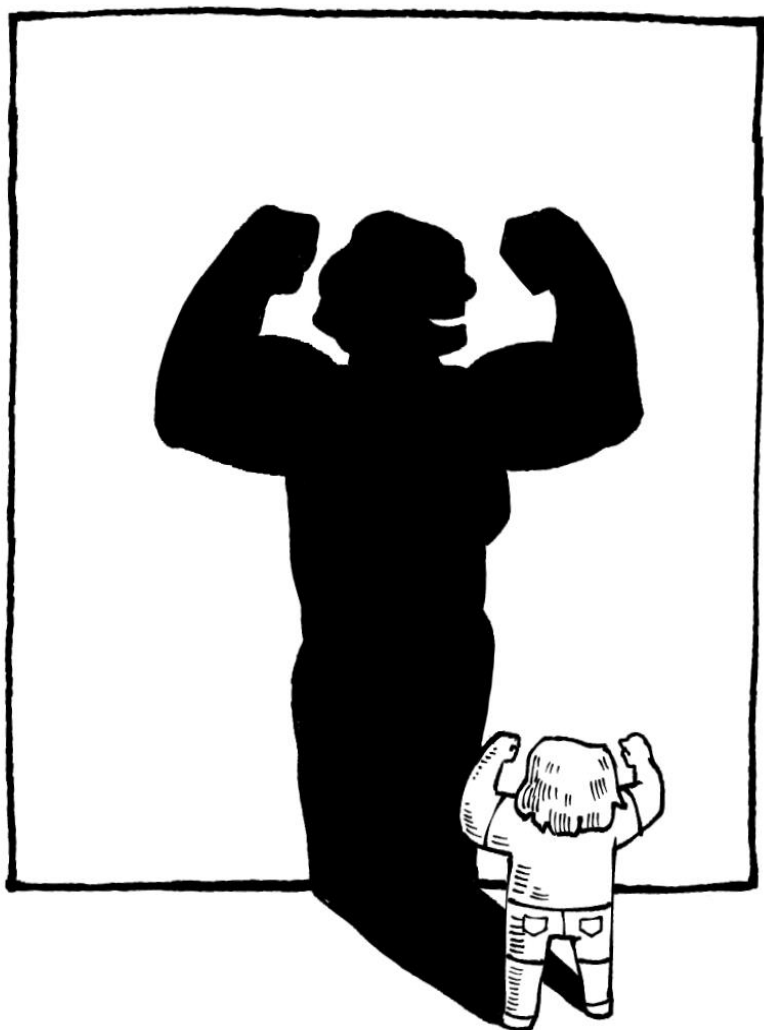
“Wings are like dreams. Before each flight, a bird takes a small jump, a leap of faith, believing that its wings will work. That jump can only be made with rock solid feet.”

J.R. Rim

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Life With Ave, What A Ride



Chapter One

I'm Going to Be a Lady Wrestler

I WAS A WILD little thing, a rough and tumble girl who couldn't sit still if my life depended on it. Mother was the director of sales at a hotel called 1776 in Washington, D.C., a grand place with polished floors and chandeliers that sparkled like stars. She dragged my older sister and me along to work more times than I can count, expecting us to behave like perfect little ladies' hands folded, mouths shut until someone addressed us. That was her world, steeped in the hospitality industry and a military family legacy of discipline. But me? I was a tornado in a teacup, barely three years old and

already tearing through those hotel lobbies like I owned the place.

I'd dart past the concierge, weave through clusters of suited businessmen, and make a beeline for the pool. "Hi, my name's Ave. Can we be friends?" I'd chirp to anyone who looked remotely approachable. Instantly, I'd have a playmate, some kid splashing in the water or an adult humoring me with a smile. Mother would glance over, see me giggling with a stranger, and relax. Happy little Ave was fine, as always. I didn't need her hovering; I'd learned early how to fend for myself.

I preferred wrestling with the boys over playing dolls with the girls. They were rough like me, ready to tumble in the dirt or race up a tree. Didn't matter if my knees got scraped or my clothes got filthy, I was having a blast.

From the ripe old age of three, whenever someone asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I’d puff out my chest and declare, “I’m going to be a lady wrestler.” It stuck with me through ten years old, that bold, brassy answer. I think it started with my sperm donor father Jack before he left us when I was barely two. We must’ve watched wrestling on our little black and white TV, the kind with rabbit ears that you had to smack to get a clear picture. I can imagine him pointing at the screen, laughing, “Look at those lady wrestlers, Ave! You could do that!” The seed was planted, and I watered it with every chance I got.

The reactions were gold. Adults would chuckle, their eyes lighting up with surprise or amusement. “A lady wrestler, huh?” they’d say, and I’d

bask in the attention. It wasn't just about the wrestling, it was about being noticed, being interesting. Later in my youth, I would wrestle with Peter, my stepfather at the time, who later adopted me and became my father." We would roll across the carpet until we were both breathless, or take on the neighborhood boys in flag football, dodging and tackling like I was born for it. I'd climb to the top of the monkey bars, hang upside down just to feel the blood rush to my head, then leap off and land with a thud, grinning like a fool. Even now, at nearly sixty, I'll shimmy up a tree if the mood strikes me.

But I wasn't always surrounded by playmates. My sister, three years older, didn't care for my antics. Our eldest sister had died at eight, when I was two and she was six, and I think

that loss wedged a wall between us. She resented me, maybe blamed me for still being here when her best friend was gone. My sperm donor father had split before that tragedy, and Mother threw herself into work to keep us afloat. So, I was alone a lot, even with people around. It didn't faze me, though. I'd spot a stranger across the room and think, there's a human. I'll make them my friends. And that is what I did every time.

That independence made me a badass, even as a toddler. I had to be tough, self-sufficient, and ready to defend myself if it came to that. There's a fuzzy memory of a babysitter who wasn't kind, nothing vivid, just a shadow of unease but it taught me to rely on myself. My sister once locked me out on the sliding glass porch while she and the sitter

stayed inside, laughing. I'd bang on the door, then give up and entertain myself, plotting my next adventure. Trouble didn't scare me; I'd run toward it, knowing I'd handle it before moving on.

One adventure went too far, though. I had a stuffed animal named Tiger Lily, a scruffy little thing I adored. At three, I decided she needed a bath. So, I hauled her to the washing machine, climbed up on a stool, and tossed her in along with a can of red paint I'd found under the sink. I punched the start button, proud of my genius, and wandered off. Soon, the machine overflowed, red paint spilling across the hardwood floor like a crime scene. The wood warped, the mess was catastrophic, and Mother's voice cut through the chaos: "I'm gonna whale the hell out of you!" She didn't hit me,

never did but we had to move because of that stunt. Grounded, no allowance, and a pile of chores like washing windows with newspaper followed. Did it stop me? Nope. I was too curious, too stubborn.

That curiosity shaped me. I'd arm wrestle adults at it, my tiny hands surprisingly strong, or twist a kid's arm behind their back just to show I could never hurt, just to say, "Notice me." It worked. People gravitated toward me, drawn by my energy. Even now, as a personal trainer, I see that kid in me. I don't step into a ring, but I push my clients to their limits on the beach, in their driveways, at the gym. They pay me to "beat the crap out of them," and I love it. It's come full circle from that little girl who craved attention and found it through strength.

My childhood wasn't perfect. There were moments of chaos like when my grandparents' friends thought it was cute to let me sip their wine or puff their cigarettes. I entertained them, and that approval hooked me early. Alcohol became a friend, a family tradition of joyful drunks, not angry ones. But it was wrestling, not drinking, that defined me. It was my way to connect, to stand out, to turn loneliness into something bold. And it still is.

Get ready for some crazy stories in chapter two

Ave's Lessons from Chapter One:

Boldness can turn a fleeting moment into a lasting identity. Physical strength builds inner resilience, even in the smallest bodies.

Being different isn't a flaw, it's a spotlight that draws others in.

Childhood dreams aren't just whims; they're clues to your future self.

Independence is a gift forged in the fires of solitude and curiosity.



Chapter two

Your Shoes Are Too Small

I HATED MY FEET for years, big clumsy things that didn't fit the dainty image I chased. From the time I could pick my own shoes, I'd cram them into sizes too small, desperate to hide what I saw as a flaw. My sister and Mother had petite feet, size five, while mine ballooned to an eight by six years old. I'd raid their closets, squeezing into their heels or flats, wincing with every step but convinced it was worth it. Small feet got attention, approval, boyfriends, or so I thought. Mine felt like clown shoes, a disfigurement I couldn't escape.

It started young, around five or six,

when I'd play dress up in Mother's room. Guess what? Mother's shoes fit me at an age when they should've been comically huge. I'd teeter around, feeling both proud and horrified. By ten, I was scouring consignment stores for cute shoes two sizes too small, ignoring blisters because vanity trumped comfort. I'd smush myself into tight clothes too, anything to mask the chubby girl I saw in the mirror. I wanted to be the skinny, size two chick who turned heads, not the rough tumble tomboy with big feet who only got noticed for wrestling.

The pain was constant: pinched toes, aching arches, a dull throb that followed me everywhere. But worse was the discomfort of feeling wrong in my own skin. Even when I wore stuff that fit, I'd tug at it, hating how it

looked. I lived in a cycle of self-consciousness, always trying to change myself into someone else. It wasn't just shoes; it was me, forcing myself into a mold that didn't fit.

That changed in the summer of 1983, when I was eighteen. My boyfriend, later my husband, who I'll call The Jock, took me to Miami Beach. I'd bought my first bikini, a pink white checkered number with ruffles on the top and bottom, like something out of a Daisy Duke fantasy. Putting it on felt like stepping off a cliff. I'd always hidden under T shirts at the beach, scarfing cheeseburgers beers without a care. But that day, I swore I wouldn't cover up. If I was exposed, I reasoned, I'd think twice before overindulging.

Then fate threw a curveball. The beach had been hit by a black tar spill, the kind that sticks to everything. I

plopped down, oblivious, stood up with a massive stain smeared across my backside. Mortified, I froze but didn't grab a shirt. I walked around all day, tar all, refusing to hide. It was a turning point. That bikini became my armor, a reminder that discomfort fades but confidence sticks. I've worn one ever since, even on big fat days, because it keeps me honest about my health.

The real lesson sank in years later, though. By 1993, my life was a mess. The Jock had totaled my truck in a DUI, Mother was dying of pancreatic cancer, I was drowning in grief, a toxic marriage. That March, during the no name storm, The Jock rolled my truck on the way home from Vero Beach, rupturing his spleen and getting bay flighted out. We had no insurance on the truck, he was too stubborn to let

me help him recover. He wouldn't even let me help him into the house, though he couldn't make it on his own. So, I had to drag him into our house while he fought me every step of the way.

By May, Mother's diagnosis hit, by July, I'd bought my first new car, only for The Jock to wreck it in another DUI in Miami. I flew to Liberty City with \$1500 cash, heart pounding in the worst neighborhood I'd ever seen, to bail him out and retrieve my beer soaked, pot burned car. He berated me the whole drive home, blaming me for his stupidity.

Then, in November, Mother passed. At her funeral, The Jock got trashed, slurring, stumbling, making a fool of us both. A month later, he hit me with a \$2000 fine he'd hidden, threatening jail if I didn't pay. It was the final

straw. I saw my shoes, my life, were too small, crushing me. I'd been uncomfortable for so long, physically and emotionally, that I couldn't ignore it anymore.

But those big feet I'd loathed? They became my salvation. As a personal trainer now, I spot clients' issues instantly: pronation, worn out soles, slumped posture. I'll pull them aside mid class: "Your shoes are too small. Kick one off; see that tread? Gone." If they're my size ten, I'll swap shoes right there, letting them feel the difference. "Like clouds, right?" I'll say, grinning. Hundreds have walked away changed. My feet, once a source of shame, balance me literally and figuratively. They always let me land on them, no matter what life throws at me.

It took until my forties to stop

squeezing into too small shoes, but the shift started at eighteen with that tar stained bikini. By 1993, I knew I couldn't live in discomfort forever. My feet weren't the problem; the life I'd forced myself into was. Now, at nearly sixty, my feet that I once despised were my steel belted tires, strong with a bit of bounce to them. They were my strength, carrying me through boot camps beyond. I'm sorry I cursed them all those years; they were always meant to save me.

You're not going to believe what I went through in Chapter 3

Aves Lessons from Chapter Two:

Forcing yourself into someone else's mold only breeds pain and regret. Flaws can transform into strengths when you stop fighting them.

Confidence isn't about looking perfect it's about owning who you are, mess and all.

Discomfort is a wake-up call; heed it before it breaks you.

Your foundation physically or emotional matters more than you think.



Chapter Three

1993

1 993. A year that started with hope, carried on in chaos, and ended in transformation. This was the year homes were moved, cars were wrecked, storms raged, and I began to see life, truly see it, for what it was. It was a time of change, testing my strength, patience, and spirit.

The House That Went for a Ride

I had just turned 28, and with that birthday came a house on the move, literally. The company I owned, Gator Water & Waste Water Management Inc., had purchased an old 1921 fishing cottage back in 1987, intending to turn it into an office. Then, a group of doctors swooped in

and bought the land right out from under the house. Here I was, left with an 800-square-foot wooden house and nowhere to put it.

Mother, always the problem solver, had a “brilliant” idea: hire a company to move the house to a new piece of land in New Port Richey. My husband, The Jock, and I would finally have a place to settle down.

Sounds simple, right? Well, have you ever tried to move an entire house?

It took fire departments, city permits, and an entire operation to lift the cottage, place it on a trailer, and slowly haul it two miles down Main Street on the **Fourth of July**. This meant fire trucks, police escorts, and utility workers literally lifting power lines out of the way as my house crawled through town.

Being practical (and slightly panicked), I asked the moving company what to do with our belongings. Should I pack up the china? Take down the pictures? The head mover just smirked and said,

"Lady, if your china breaks, you've got much bigger problems."

Turns out, they weren't taking any chances with an anxious homeowner watching. So, they flat-out lied. Told me the move would happen on July 5th, then snuck in at midnight on the 4th of July and did it while we slept. Like a drunk turtle on Lunesta, the slow journey began. By the time I woke up, the house was sitting pretty in its new spot, and we had missed the entire show.

The Creepy Restaurant Guy & the Birthday Gift

Fast-forward to February, my actual birthday. Money was tight. The house needed renovations. But Mother, being the queen of unexpected generosity, took me out to ILE de France, their favorite restaurant. The owner was an excellent entertainer, and a slightly terrifying French man who flirted just a little too hard. It made me want to carry a bottle of spray disinfectant in my purse every time I visited the popular restaurant.

Dinner was delicious, but the real gift came when Mother handed me \$500 in cash. At 28, that was a fortune. It meant renovations could move forward. A new bathroom. A kitchen pass-through. Small things that made a big difference. I hadn't expected it. Mother had a way of surprising me like that. She always knew exactly what I needed, even when I didn't

know myself.

The Jock Rolls a Truck & The “No-Name Storm”

Then March hit. The Jock took my truck to Vero Beach for baseball tickets. I stayed home, scraping 100-year-old tar glue off the floor just a normal day. Until the call came in. He had rolled the truck and was thrown from it. He was being airlifted to the hospital.

This wasn't even his first emergency hospital trip. A couple of years earlier, he had burst his urinary bladder playing drunk flag football before a Buccaneers game. The doctor actually credited beer in his system for saving his life. (Apparently, when you have a torn bladder, alcohol slows the internal bleeding. Who knew?)

So now, here he was again, rupturing his spleen in a car accident. Tired of playing nurse to an ungrateful patient, I chose not to visit him at the hospital this time.

Instead, I dragged his newly spleenless body home just in time for a massive, unexpected storm. The Gulf Coast had no warning. The sirens blared, and before they knew it, a freight train of wind and water came crashing through Florida. The “No Name Storm” of 1993 had hit us hard. Yes, that was the actual name of the storm.

Being the only functional adult in the house, I tried to help The Jock to safety. When he refused my help, I ended up having to physically drag him, shoving him into the old fireplace while he cussed at me the entire time.

Somewhere between the wreck, the storm, and his never-ending ingratitude, I had a moment of clarity: How much more of this can I take? At this point I began building an emotional brick wall that would soon shut The Jock out of my life completely.

Mother's Diagnosis & My Husband's Arrest - Again

I had always known Mother was tough. A force of nature. A woman who, no matter what life threw at her, would meet it head-on with a smirk and a plan. But in April of 1993, I was about to face my biggest fight yet.

I hadn't seen her in over a month. That alone was strange. We worked together, spent every day together, practically attached at the hip. But in early April, our schedules had pulled

us in different directions. When they finally reunited, I took one look at her and felt the air leave my lungs.

Mother had lost at least 15 to 20 pounds, and fast.

At first, Mother brushed it off.

"Oh, Tunia, isn't this great? The weight is just falling off me!"

She loved how she looked, convinced this was some kind of magical, effortless diet. But I wasn't buying it. Something felt wrong.

I wasn't the only one who had concerns. A year earlier, Mother had gotten sick, so sick that doctors removed her gallbladder when they couldn't find another explanation. But before they discharged her, one doctor pulled me aside.

“If anything seems off, even the smallest thing you call me.”

That conversation rang in my ears as I studied Mother now very closely. Something was definitely off.

What Mother hadn't told anyone was that she was seeing blood in her stool. She felt something changing inside her. But she ignored it. Because she had things to do, damn it.

I wasn't about to let Mother's stubbornness win this time. I immediately called the doctor and booked an appointment.

The next day, my father and I took Mother in. The doctor took one look at her, just one, and said words that hit like a sledgehammer:

“Nancy, you either have Hepatitis C or pancreatic cancer. If it's cancer, you

won't make it six months."

Just like that. No sugarcoating. No easing into it.

Mother didn't flinch. "Okay. What do we do about it?" No fear. No panic. Just a woman ready to roll up her sleeves and fight.

The Diagnosis: 30% Is All She Needed

The tests came back quickly. Pancreatic cancer. The size of a grapefruit.

The doctors gave her the breakdown:

- Surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation gave her a 30% chance of making it to surgery.
- Without treatment, she had six months, maybe less.

My father and I already knew the truth. The odds were brutal. But Mother? She grabbed onto that 30% like it was a winning lottery ticket.

"Well, 30% is better than zero. So, let's get moving."

She didn't cry. She didn't fall apart. She didn't wallow in self-pity. She planned. Her entire mindset shifted to strategy mode, because she wasn't going to just let cancer take her. If it wanted her, it was going to have to fight her first.

My father and I knew that we had to quietly prepare for the worst. We started making practical decisions behind the scenes. What would happen with the business? The bed and breakfast? But Mother refused to discuss it. Because as far as she was concerned, she wasn't going

anywhere.

Fighting With an Iron Fist

Cancer had no idea who it was dealing with.

Mother took on her treatments like a general at war. Chemotherapy? Bring it on. Radiation? No problem. She was determined to beat the odds, to be the exception. And she continued to refuse to slow down.

Even as she weakened, she continued watching football with her tequila and Diet Coke, continued running the bed and breakfast, and continued tagging along with me and my crew of friends like she was one of the girls. Her philosophy was simple: If cancer was going to take her, it was going to have to keep up.

I watched in awe. This woman,

Mother, was staring death in the face and smirking. But then, slowly, the fight started taking its toll. She lost weight faster. The pain got worse. Her body betrayed her, little by little. But her attitude never wavered. Even when the signs became impossible to ignore, she refused to let go. Because, in her mind, letting go was never an option.

And Meanwhile... The Jock Was a Disaster

While I was balancing Mother's fight, my job, and trying to hold myself together, my husband was off getting arrested. Surprise Surprise...

The Jock had gone to Miami under the pretense of "helping" my father, and took Mother on a trip to the beach to relax. I thought it would be good for him to be there, to help out. Big

mistake.

The first night? Fine. The second night? The Jock got wasted, smoked some weed, drove over a curb stop which severely damaged the car, and got arrested. A cop witnessed the entire thing.

At 2 AM, I got a call from a state trooper, who kindly let The Jock use the phone. The first thing I heard? The Jock screaming at me.

"LOOK WHAT YOU MADE ME DO!"

Oh, of course. It was my fault now.

I was now running on fumes. I had to fly to Miami, withdraw \$1,500 in cash, take a cab to Liberty City Jail, and bail his sorry ass out. The Miami cab driver, an actual stranger, was so concerned for my safety that he refused to leave me alone outside the

jail. That's how bad it was.

When The Jock was finally released, he had the nerve to spend the entire ride home yelling at me, and blaming me for everything that happened to him.

That brick wall I had been building inside me? It was almost complete. I didn't know it yet, but I was getting closer and closer to my breaking point.

The Battle Was Ending—But Mother Never Surrendered

By the time summer faded into fall, Mother's body was giving up before her mind was ready. She grew weaker. But she never stopped believing she could win. Even when the doctors gave her another gut-punch update, she just squared her

shoulders and kept going.

My father and I, meanwhile, could see what was coming. But we had no choice but to play along. Because, if Mother was still fighting, we were going to fight with her.

High School Reunion - Security, to the Delta Terminal...

Between hospital visits, house renovations, and The Jock's never-ending shenanigans, I hadn't had much time for fun. But my mother, dying, mind you, insisted I go to my 10-year high school reunion.

"You need a damn break," Mother told me. "Go, have fun, and don't bring your idiot husband."

And so, I listened. The reunion was held at a Tampa International Airport hotel, a strange choice, but

convenient for out-of-towners. By some miracle, I found myself reconnecting with a couple of former Goody Two-Shoes from high school, women who had been model students back in the day but now, as adults, were ready for some mischief. And Me? I had just the idea. I thought to myself, it's time to corrupt these 2 women and wipe away the Goody Two-Shoes label off their foreheads for good!

The party was supposed to end at midnight, but no one was ready to call it quits. There was just one problem: the airport hotel bar had closed, and was locked up for the evening.

Feeling very bold (and maybe fueled by just enough liquid courage), we started wandering around the airport terminal and found a wonderful bar with the entry gate halfway open (bar

closed - lights out). I eyed the gate and turned to my old Goody Two-Shoes classmates.

"Oh, please. This isn't closed. It's just... temporarily inaccessible."

Without hesitation, I lifted the gate, strolled behind the bar, and poured myself a beer then handed drinks to my two stunned but delighted friends. They went from rule-followers to co-conspirators in a matter of seconds.

It was glorious. Until airport security showed up.

The guards took one look at the scene: three adult women, dressed for a class reunion, standing behind the bar with freshly poured drinks and arrested us on the spot.

Well, sort of.

The security guards, somewhere between annoyed and amused, dragged us down to the airport's holding area for a stern lecture. Ultimately, we were released without charges, though I did wake up the next morning to find out I had been voted

"Most Likely to Be Arrested Again in the Future."

Mother was thrilled when she heard the story. Dying of cancer, yet still managing to laugh her ass off.

"I knew sending you to that damn reunion was a good idea," she told me. "Finally, some entertainment around here."

For all the hell I was going through, I had to admit I needed that moment.

The Final Goodbye

October 31st. My parents' wedding anniversary. It was supposed to be a day of celebration, but instead, it was the day I finally had to face what I had been avoiding. Mother was slipping away.

She had been bedridden for weeks now, her once unstoppable energy now reduced to quiet, hollow breaths. She barely spoke. She barely moved. And the thing I hated most? When we looked at each other, we both knew what was coming, and neither of us wanted to say it.

So, I avoided the room as much as I could, busying myself with tasks, slipping away to do things that felt important but weren't. I wasn't ready. But I knew, deep down, that it was time.

My father had asked me to buy Mother a robe, a simple, final gift to make her comfortable. So, I did. A soft, beautiful

robe, something warm, something gentle. I picked out a card, too. And when I walked into that room, I knew this was it.

We used to do everything together, watch TV, play cards, go to the gym, work side by side. And now? I couldn't get Mother to do anything. She wouldn't watch a show, wouldn't even play a game of cards.

I sat down next to the bed, finally forcing myself to meet Mother's eyes.

"Mother, I want you to know I'm going to be okay."

My voice cracked. But I kept going.

"I know I have my hands full right now. I know my situation isn't great. But you can go knowing that I'm going to be fine. I've always landed on my feet, and I will again. Because of you."

I didn't say it out loud, but I realized something in that moment, something that hit me like a thunderclap. Mother had sacrificed her own life so I wouldn't follow in her footsteps. She had let go so that I would finally wake up.

I was 28 years old, living the same life as Mother had lived, coming home, slamming beers, numbing the pain, letting a man who didn't deserve me break me down little by little. I called it partying, but now I saw the truth: it was survival. It was an escape.

Mother, who had always known me better than anyone, must have seen that. So, maybe, just maybe, She had stopped fighting so that I would start fighting for myself. And I did just that.

The next morning, **Mother slipped into a coma.**

I sat with Aunt Caroline, Aunt Buff,

Grand Mommy, and my Sister Shannon next to Mother all day, talking, laughing, reminiscing, telling stories from the past, because what else could we do?

We sat on the bed next to Mother's hospital bed, almost like children, whispering and giggling like they had as girls. They talked about family memories, childhood mischief, old love stories, and all the amazing things Mother had said and done over the years.

And then, something strange happened.

Mother, in the middle of the coma, started speaking.

Her words were scattered, dreamlike, but I could tell she was listening, caught between this world and whatever came next. And then, in the middle of their stories, she suddenly said,

"Who's that man standing in the room?"

The women all froze.

I glanced around. There was no man in the room.

"Mother... what man?"

Mother's voice, soft but certain: "Is that Abraham Lincoln?"

I blinked.

Well. That was unexpected.

We all burst into laughter, the kind of laughter that only comes when you've been awake for 24 hours, sitting in a room filled with grief, looking for anything, absolutely anything, to break the weight of it.

And so, I played along.

"Yes, Mother. It's Abe Lincoln. He's here just for you."

Mother sighed, content. "That's nice."

We all laughed again, our bond strengthening with every hour that passed. Because in the end, this was how we handled grief, together, through humor, through memories, through finding light even in the darkest moments.

The Morning She Left

November 2nd. My Aunt Caroline and I arrived at the house just after dawn, coffee and donuts in hand. It had only been a few hours since we had last seen Mother.

But it was already too late. Mother had just passed.

The room was too quiet. The stillness in

the air was different. And I felt it, deep in my bones, she was gone.

I stood there, letting it settle in, letting myself feel the weight of it. And I realized, in that split second, that this was the first step forward for me that Mother would have wanted. The first step forward that mother wanted for me. Toward a life where I wasn't just surviving, but actually living. And I realized in a split moment of intense grief, that I owed it to Mother not to waste a second of it.

At the funeral, the church was packed. Cars lined up in a hundred-car procession. And The Jock? He held it together for the service, then got wasted at dinner, like clockwork. The final set of bricks in the wall, now in place, that I needed to get rid of the main problem that was holding me back.

Breaking Free

I didn't wake up one morning and just decide to leave The Jock. It wasn't a sudden revelation, a neatly packaged epiphany tied with a bow.

No, 1993 had been chipping away at me, bit by bit, piece by piece, until there was barely anything left of the woman I used to be.

It started with small things. The bruises that faded too quickly, the exhaustion of constantly covering for him, lying for him, cleaning up his messes, both literal and figurative. The way he had the uncanny ability to turn everything into my fault.

Then there were the big things. The hospital visits, the car wrecks, the police calls at 2 AM. The fact that, in the middle of Mother's battle with

cancer, I was also battling a grown man who refused to act like one.

By the time Mother passed, I was running on fumes. But it was Thanksgiving that finally shattered whatever was left of my patience.

The Thanksgiving Lie

The Jock had always been a drinker. That wasn't new. But his deception? That was what sent me over the edge.

The plan was simple: Thanksgiving morning with my family, then later in the day, they'd head over to The Jock's family. A split holiday tradition.

Except, when they got home, The Jock picked up the phone, called his mother, and started talking. Loudly.

I overheard the conversation.

The Jock, in his fake conversation, stated to his sister, "Oh, you and mom got into a fight? So, No. We won't be coming over."

I frowned. Something felt off.

A few days later, I stopped by The Jock's mother's office for an unrelated conversation about his upcoming birthday.

The second I walked in, his mother lit into me.

"I can't believe you! Not even a phone call on Thanksgiving? You're keeping my son away from his family?"

I froze in disbelief. Oh. My. God.

The Jock had lied. The entire Thanksgiving phone call was a performance. The "family fight" he claimed happened? A total

fabrication. He had never called his mother. He had pretended to, just to make sure they didn't have to go.

And the worst part? It worked.

I was relieved when I thought there was family drama. She hadn't even wanted to go. But the level of manipulation required to stage that call... that was something else.

I picked up the phone, called The Jock, and said:

"Talk to your mother. Now."

The Moment Everything Snapped

I had spent years making excuses for The Jock. But suddenly, I saw it all at once. Every lie, every manipulation, every single moment I had let slide.

He was a grown man who never took responsibility for anything. And at this point, I was so. damn. tired.

I stood up to him for the first time.

"No. No, no, no. We're not doing this. I'm done."

It was like a dam had burst inside me. This wasn't just about Thanksgiving. It was about all of it. The wrecked cars. The hospital visits. The arrests. The **years of walking on eggshells**. The fact that I had spent more nights in a hotel with the dogs than I could count, because it was safer than staying home.

I had been chipping away at the breaking point for years. And this was it. I was done.

Christmas & The Last Straw

If Thanksgiving had been the wake-up call, Christmas was the final nail in the coffin.

We went up to The Jock's parents' cabin in North Carolina. It should have been peaceful, a chance to reset. Instead, it was three days of hell.

The Jock was angry, mean, and impossible to be around. I was grieving, drained, and completely over it.

And in the quiet moments of that miserable trip, I finally admitted something to myself: "I can't do this anymore."

When they got back, I started making calls. I found a counselor. I went to Al-Anon. I started laying the groundwork to leave.

The Jock didn't know it yet. But I was already halfway out the door.

The Year That Changed Everything

By the time 1993 came to a close, I knew one thing: I had survived a year of complete and utter chaos.

I had chipped tar off old wooden floors while my husband crashed our truck.

I had dragged a spleen-less man into a fireplace while a storm tried to flatten my house.

I had bailed him out of jail at 2 AM.

I had watched my mother fight cancer with an iron fist.

I had said goodbye to the one person who always had my back.

And somehow, through all of it, I had come out the other side.

The woman I was at the start of 1993 would have kept putting up with The Jock. She would have absorbed the abuse, shouldered the blame, and buried herself in excuses.

The woman I was at the end of 1993?

I was done making myself small.

I was done waiting for things to change.

I was done carrying the weight of someone who refused to carry himself.

I wasn't just leaving The Jock. I was saving myself.

And that? That was the real story of 1993.

Because that was the year that I finally woke up.

Lessons & Proverbs for 1993

“The fire that warms you can also consume you; it’s up to you to control the flame.” (Native American Proverb)

1993 was fire, it burned, it destroyed, but in the end, I took control and walked away stronger.

“A boat doesn’t sink because of the water around it. It sinks because of the water it lets in.” (Unknown)

I spent years letting The Jock’s chaos seep into my life. 1993 was the year I stopped sinking.

“The wind does not break a tree that bends.” (African Proverb)

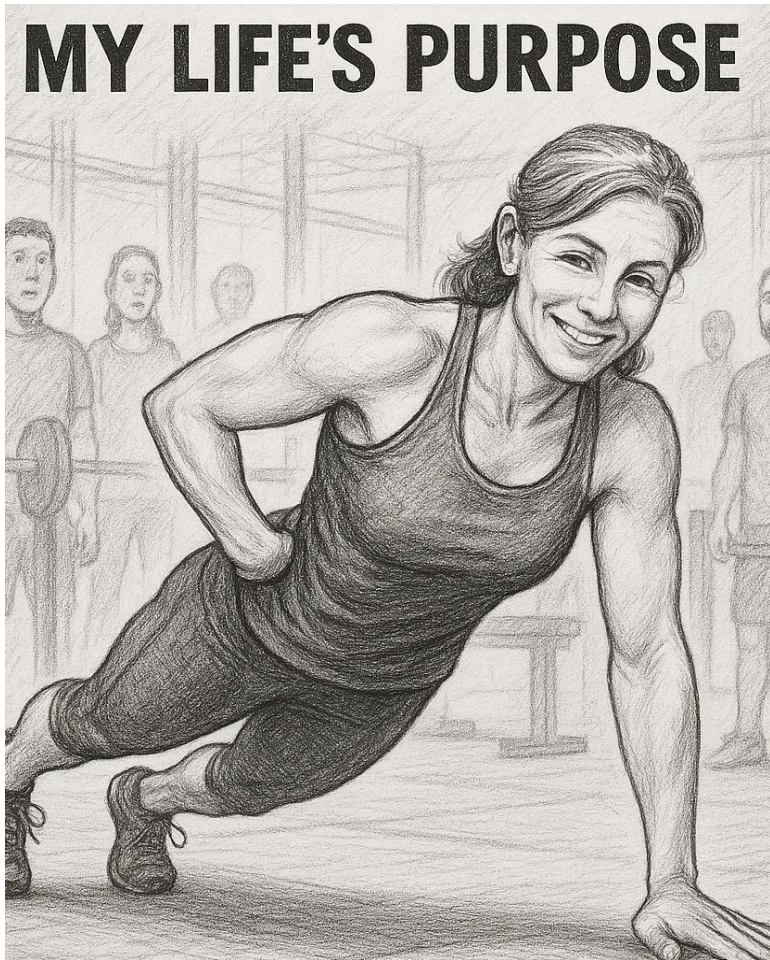
Through storms, losses, and battles, I bent but never broke.

“A lion doesn’t lose sleep over the opinion of sheep.” (Arabian Proverb)

By the end of 1993, I was done caring what The Jock thought, what anyone thought I chose myself.

“Sometimes, you have to jump off the cliff and grow wings on the way down.” (Ray Bradbury)

I didn’t have a perfect plan. I just knew I had to jump. And I did.



Chapter four

My Life's Purpose

My Life's Purpose

For most of my life, I had been running. Running from pain, from insecurity, from the skin I was in. I deflected with humor, distracted with drinking, threw myself into the chaos of others to avoid looking inward.

But then, 1993 happened.

Mother, the force that had always kept me grounded, was gone. The Jock was spiraling further into his own self-destruction, and I was done picking up the pieces. The past had taken everything it could from me.

And now? Now, it was my time.

The Gift of Giving & The Gift of Receiving

Mother had taught me many things, but one lesson had always stuck with me: "Giving is a gift. But receiving? That's a gift, too."

Mother had a way of walking into a room full of strangers and making it feel like home. She was a giver, of time, of energy, of pure, infectious joy. But she also knew how to receive, because when you refuse to accept what someone is offering, you steal their joy of giving.

I had learned how to give. That part came naturally. But learning how to receive? That took time.

For years, I had pushed away compliments, deflected kindness, buried my own worth under humor and bravado. But in the wake of my mother's passing, something shifted.

I had something to give back to the world. I just didn't know what it was yet. I was getting closer.

A Body Built for More

Growing up, I had always hated my feet. At six years old, I was a little girl with grown woman's feet, too big, too clumsy, too noticeable.

"Why are they so big?" I used to ask.
"Why can't I be normal?"

I hid them as much as I could, tucking them under chairs, stuffing them into shoes that never seemed to fit right. It was just another thing about myself that I wished I could have changed.

But as I stood at a crossroad in my life, newly independent, searching for direction, desperate for something that felt like mine, it all clicked.

My feet weren't a curse. They were a foundation. They were built for balance, strength, stability, and for movement. They had carried me through every storm, every fight, every moment I thought I wouldn't survive.

And now, they were about to carry me into the next chapter of my life.

Finding Home in the Gym

I had always been active, a tomboy, a football player, a rollerblader. I could drink with the best of them, throw a poker chip like a pro, and laugh my way through just about anything. But fitness? That had always been a way to escape.

Until it became the thing that saved me.

After losing Mother, the gym became my sanctuary. For the first time, I wasn't just going through the motions. I wasn't just filling time.

I was building something.

My body became my project. I learned about nutrition, strength, and endurance. I became stronger, not just physically, but mentally. And the people in the gym?

All of a sudden I was seen not as The Jock's wife. Not as her Mother's daughter. Not as the woman who had spent a year barely holding it together.

They saw ME.

And that's when I realized: "I belong here."

The Wild West of 90s Gyms

Back then, gyms weren't what they are now. They were grimy, testosterone-fueled dungeons filled with cheap equipment and wannabe trainers who didn't know their ass from a rusty squat

rack.

I witnessed a guy cleaning toilets one day, then wearing a muscle tank and calling himself a trainer the next.

"Wait what? You were just scrubbing urinals!"

It was ridiculous.

I watched them work and thought, I could do this better. Hell, I could do this in my sleep.

And so, I did.

I started helping women with proper form, better techniques, and real training. I wasn't trying to be a trainer, it just happened.

Women started seeking me out. Asking for advice. They wanted to learn from me.

And before I knew it, I wasn't just working out. I was teaching. I was a fitness trainer.

Defying the Politician & Becoming a Coach

When the gym offered a six-week personal training course, I was all in.

The Politician, however: "No. Absolutely not. You have a business to run. You don't have time for this."

Well. That just made me want it more.

For the first time in years, I did something for myself. I took the course. Learned everything I could. And when I finished? I was hired immediately, and within two weeks, I had a waitlist.

The Politician was furious.

I couldn't care less. Because for the

first time, I had found my calling.

I wasn't just training people. I was transforming them.

Finding myself in the Gym

For so long, I had been drifting, playing roles, dodging reality, deflecting pain with laughter and chaos. But after Mother passed, the urgency hit like a freight train.

Time wasn't limitless. Life wasn't guaranteed. And I had wasted enough of it hiding from myself.

I could have a strong body.

I could have a healthy mind.

I could get my act together and finally move forward.

But first, I had to figure out where I belonged.

A Different Kind of Family

The gym wasn't some instant epiphany, some magical transformation. It started as a distraction. A place to be, somewhere to go where I wasn't surrounded by memories, by loss, by the suffocating weight of everything I had just been through.

At first, it was just about moving.

One workout turned into two.

Two turned into a routine.

And then, something shifted.

The gym became my refuge.

At first, I didn't have friends there. And that was fine. I wasn't there to

socialize. But as time passed, I started making connections, real ones.

These weren't people who wanted to use me, control me, or bring drama into my life. These weren't the chaotic family and friends of my past. These weren't people who were there for the gossip, the drinking, the distractions.

These were people who saw me. Who respected & recognized what I was capable of. They weren't drawn to me because I was just there. They were drawn to me because I was damn good at it. They witnessed me walk the walk and become a pillar of strength, boldness and grace...

And that? That was something new.

I had completely transitioned from a woman in total chaos to a highly

focused fitness trainer who transformed other people's lives for the better.

The Roses & the Realization

One of my first clients was a short Greek woman, married to a man who owned gyms, yet couldn't get her to lose a pound.

He tried everything. Nothing worked. Until he hired me.

I taught her how to squat, how to train, and how to believe in herself. She dropped 25 pounds within a few months.

One day, her husband walked into the gym I was training at and handed me a dozen roses.

"Thank you for giving me my wife back."

That was the moment. The moment I knew. This wasn't just a job. It wasn't just a passion. This was my life's purpose.

The Birth of Ave's Bootcamp

Corporate gyms were a nightmare. They didn't care about people, they cared about numbers.

And of course, I broke all of their silly rules.

If a client missed a session because their kid was sick? I wouldn't charge them. If someone needed extra help? I would stay late. I put my students first. And that? That got me fired. More than once.

So, in early 2000, I said screw it and opened Ave's Bootcamp.

I started with nothing. No funding, no fancy investors, just a rented strip mall space and a dream.

Every single piece of equipment came from my clients. Every treadmill,

every dumbbell, every bench was donated. It was built with love, with sweat, with community.

And within weeks? It was thriving.

I had created more than a gym. I had built a movement.

A Legacy of Strength

My big feet? They were never a curse.

They were built to carry me through fire, through storms, through years of heartbreak and loss. They weren't just there to help me land on my feet, they were the foundation of my strength. A gift that ensured that I would rise, not just survive.

Those strong, steady feet built my new life from the ground up. They were made to ground me, to balance me, to make me unstoppable.

And now, those same feet led hundreds of people to their own transformations.

Because I didn't just teach fitness. I taught people how to stand taller, fight harder, and never give up on themselves.

Mother had left me the greatest gift of all. I was finally ready to receive that gift from Mother. I was ready to Run, Jump and Motivate my Bootcamp Tribe on any given ten square feet of ground.

Advice for Your Life's Purpose:

"She stood in the storm, and when the wind did not blow her way, she adjusted her sails." (Elizabeth Edwards)

My journey has been about adapting, pushing forward, and refusing to let

life's storms sink me.

“Do not be afraid of growing slowly, be afraid only of standing still.” (Chinese Proverb)

My transformation wasn't instant, but I never stopped moving forward.

“The flower that blooms in adversity is the rarest and most beautiful of all.”

Buckle Up Buttercup - The Next Chapter Will Take You On The Huge Roller Coaster Lift - Right Before The Big Fall!

Mother



Chapter five

Mother

WHEN WILL I ever truly understand her grace, elegance, and strength?

Mother. The word itself holds so much weight for me. She wasn't just Mother; she was a force, a presence, an unshakable tower of grace under pressure. I didn't fully realize it at the time, but everything she was, her strength, her humor, her relentless ability to turn life's sour moments into something palatable became the blueprint for the life I would eventually build. Even now, decades later, I hear her in my head, see her in my actions, and feel her in my resilience.

She was superhuman. That's not an exaggeration; it's just fact. The way she carried herself, how she made people feel, the way she took the worst situations and somehow turned them into a cocktail party with silk napkins, she was magical that way. And looking back, it's clear she was laying the foundation for the life I was meant to live.

The Strength to Walk Away

Mother's early adulthood wasn't just difficult, it was a test of endurance, of willpower, of sheer stubborn refusal to let life break her. She married my father thinking he was one thing, only to discover he was another. She endured loss that would have sent most people spiraling into despair. Her firstborn daughter died, leaving behind a grief so deep it should have swallowed her whole. But you would

never know it from the way she carried herself. No one ever saw her buckle under the weight. Mother took the worst hand life could deal and somehow still made people feel like they were at a five-star resort in her presence.

Just after her unexplained illness in 1992, Mother left my adopted father, an amazing dad, I was so proud of her for that. She reached a tipping point and walked away. That strength, that moment, was one of the many ways she showed me how to value myself. Of course, eventually she went back.

One cold November weekend, she moved back in with my father. He charmed her, wore her down, did that thing some men do when they spin sunshine and sweet nothings just long enough to reel you back in. I couldn't believe it. It was like watching

Wonder Woman lay down her shield. She went back, and I hated it, because I could see what she couldn't. She was better than that life. But at the same time, I understood. Love, no matter how complicated, is hard to walk away from.

Watching Mother struggle between independence and old habits would become one of my greatest lessons. When I found myself in a similar situation with my own marriage, it was her strength that whispered to me in the back of my mind. You don't have to stay. You can go.

Grace Under Fire

Mother had an almost ridiculous level of grace under pressure. Whether she was running a hotel, hosting a dinner, or managing an entire business, she did it all with an effortless kind of

elegance. Her home was an extension of that. If you were a guest in Mother's house, you felt like you had been personally invited to the White House. If your favorite drink was only available in New York, guess what? She'd find it and have it waiting for you, just to see your reaction.

She made people feel important. It wasn't just hospitality it was her gift, her way of making people believe they mattered. And she did all of this while balancing an impossible life, carrying grief, running businesses, raising kids, and navigating a world that constantly undervalued her worth.

Even in her career, Mother faced blatant inequality. When she ran the sales department at a very popular resort in central Florida, her personal handwriting became the official

signage of the resort. Her impact was literally etched into the place, yet when she found out that the men she hired were getting paid more than her, she walked. Not with bitterness, not with complaints, just with a quiet, resolute dignity that said, “I can do better.”

And she did. Over and over again.

The Lasting Impact

It wasn't just Mother's ability to walk away from things that weren't serving her. It was also her ability to walk toward things that did. When my dad inherited the water treatment business, she didn't hesitate—she jumped in, learned it inside and out, and built something from nothing. Was it glamorous? No. We were dealing with wastewater, literally poop. But she made it work, and she

made it successful.

And in the process, she showed me what it meant to dig in, learn something new, and make your own path even when that path is covered in sewage.

That same ability to pivot, to take what life throws at you and turn it into something worthwhile, would later define my own career. I just didn't know it at the time.

Mother's Influence on My Path

I didn't always know I'd end up in fitness. But looking back, I realize it was always there—because Mother was always there. The way she carried herself, the way she encouraged me, the way she always made me feel strong, like I could do anything. She always told me I was

her petunia blossom, that I was smart, that I was tough, that I was capable. Even when I was a stubborn teenager, making wild decisions, she let me figure things out but never let me forget my worth.

And maybe that's why I push people the way I do today. Why I take them out to the beach at sunrise for bootcamp and make them believe in themselves. Why I don't let people quit. I hear her voice in my head every time I coach someone who says, "I can't do this." Because Mother never let me say that. And now, I don't let them say it either.

The Final Lesson

Mother always saw the bright side. No matter how bad things got, she found something positive to hold onto. I used to roll my eyes at it. Mother, not everything has a silver lining. But you know what? She was right. There always is. Even in the hardest moments, even in loss, even in grief there's something to learn, something to take with you.

Her legacy isn't just in the lessons she taught me, or in the businesses she built, or in the way she could turn a disaster into an opportunity. It's in me. It's in the way I live my life, in the way I push forward, in the way I make people feel.

Mother was grace, elegance and strength. And if I can be even a

fraction of the woman she was, then I'll know I've done something right.

Life Lessons from Mother:

1. "Grace is not about being unshaken—it's about carrying yourself with dignity even when the world is crumbling around you."
2. "Strength isn't about never falling, it's about getting up every single time."
3. "The way you make people feel will outlive anything you do."
4. "Walking away from something that doesn't serve you is just as brave as walking toward something that does."
5. "Find the bright side, then give gratitude—there's always one, even if you have to dig for it."



Chapter six

The First Lady

FROM FIRST LADY TO Sing Sing!

If someone had told me in 1993 that I would one day be the First Lady of Port Richey, Florida, I would have spit out my beer. Or, more accurately, chugged the beer, crushed the can, and muttered something unrepeatable before returning to managing my poop business. But life, as it turns out, has a twisted sense of humor.

It all started with who I will refer to as “The Politician”. He was husband number two. Unlike husband number one, whose resume included drunkenly rolling vehicles and failed sobriety tests, The Politician had a

talent: diffusing arguments. He could separate two fighting Rottweilers with a single glance and charm even the angriest of homeowners into shaking hands over a dispute about mailbox height. This skill led him to the Homeowners Association, which, naturally, led to local politics. And then, before I knew it, the presiding mayor approached me and said, “Wouldn’t you like to be First Lady?”

My first response? “What are you talking about?” Because, at the time, The Politician wasn’t even thinking about running for mayor. But my friend had a vision. And, as I thought about it, I saw it too. It wasn’t long before I was pitching the idea to my husband, who, like any sane person, initially said no.

But then came the sunshine-blowing brigade. Their friends surrounded

him, sang his praises, and filled his ears with the kind of political pep talk that makes men believe they're one election away from Mount Rushmore. Before long, The Politician was in. And me? Well, I was about to undergo the transformation of a lifetime.

From Poop Management to Political Decorum

I had spent years managing a wastewater treatment business, where cursing was as common as breathing and getting dirty literally was part of the job. Now, I was suddenly in a world of pressed suits, polite applause, and dinner parties where the wine flowed freely, but the conversations required restraint.

The first thing to go? The language. Turns out, "Well, bless your heart" is a more politically acceptable

response than “Are you f*ing kidding me?”

Next came the wardrobe. The ripped jeans and work boots that had seen more sewage spills than I cared to remember had to be replaced with tailored blazers and sensible pumps. I mastered the art of small talk, learned to spot political traps before stepping in them, and, most importantly, became the kind of woman who could host an impromptu dinner for eight with only a few hours’ notice.

The campaign was my proving ground. I wasn’t just The Politician’s wife, I was his secret weapon. The most any mayoral candidate had ever raised in the city was \$3,000. I pulled in \$15,000. And when we won, we donated the extra money and The Politician’s entire mayoral salary, an

earth-shattering \$300 a month back to the city.

Governing with Style (and Sarcasm)

As First Lady, I found myself rubbing elbows with governors, senators, and high-ranking officials. I attended fancy events, hosted fundraisers, and even got to dunk my husband in a dunk tank for charity. But politics wasn't all photo ops and ribbon-cuttings. There were people, many people—who wanted to see them fail.

I learned quickly that political opponents didn't just attack policies; they attacked families. I became a prime target, with people goading me into saying something that could be used against The Politician. But I had been battle-tested in a toxic marriage, survived a storm with an invalid

husband, and cleaned up after more disasters literal and figurative than most people could stomach. I wasn't going to crack under the pressure of a few well-placed insults.

My ability to stay composed infuriated our opponents. They wanted a reaction. Instead, I would smile, nod, and say, "You're speaking to the wrong person." And they hated it.

With my support, The Politician served two terms, and they managed to turn the city's finances from a disaster into a surplus. The city was thriving. Everything was looking up.

Until the IRS came knocking.

From City Hall to the Courthouse

It turns out, while we were busy fixing the city's budget, we had neglected our own. Specifically, The Politician had failed to report income from an older business, and the IRS does not take kindly to such oversights. The charges came swiftly, and suddenly, the mayor and his First Lady were facing tax fraud charges.

The Politician, ever the optimist, ran for re-election anyway. He won unopposed.

But even a mayor can't campaign his way out of the federal justice system. He had to step down, and by 2012, it was time to face the music. The IRS originally wanted five years. We managed to get it reduced to one. Then, The Politician and I made a decision: instead of serving our

sentences separately, one after the other, we would go in together, splitting the year into six months each.

Checking In to Club Fed

On October 3rd, 2012, I drove The Politician to his new home: a low-security prison camp in Estill, South Carolina. The first thing I noticed? The guard checking us in was wearing a Dallas Cowboys shirt.

Of course, I just couldn't resist. "Wow, you got a lot of balls wearing that shirt around here."

The Politician, who was desperately trying to blend in, muttered, "This is a prison, Ave."

I grinned. "I make friends everywhere I go."

And I did just that, even in prison.

When my time came, I followed in The Politician's footsteps, landing at a low-security women's camp. There were no bars, no violent criminals, just a lot of women who had made bad financial decisions, married the wrong men, or, in my case, trusted that the IRS wouldn't notice a little missing paperwork.

Lessons from the First Lady (of Federal Custody)

Prison, I discovered, was not all that different from politics. You had to know when to keep your mouth shut, when to play nice, and when to hold your ground. I spent my time observing, adapting, and, of course, making friends.

By the time I got out, I had seen the full arc of my story—from an underdog in a crumbling first marriage to the poised and powerful First Lady of Port Richey, to an inmate who could still crack a joke at my own expense.

And as I walked out of that prison, head held high, I knew one thing for certain: No matter where life took me next, I would land on my feet. And this time, I wasn't looking back.

Next Is Chapter 7:

Ready For Some CRAZY Stories
About Loose Fitting Prison
Jumpsuits, and a field trip to the
county jail.

Ave's Unique Lessons From Chapter 6

**"You can take the girl out of the
poop business, but you can't take
the survival instincts out of the
girl."**

Learning how to handle crap literally
figuratively prepares you for politics
and prison alike.

**"Politics is just high school with
more expensive haircuts better
lies."**

The popular kids still make the rules,

if you're not careful, someone's always waiting to trip you in the hallway.

"Life will put you in some ridiculous situations. Make sure you're the one laughing first."

If you can't laugh at getting checked into prison by a Guard in a Dallas Cowboys shirt, you're doing time all wrong.

"Never underestimate a woman who has survived a toxic marriage, a natural disaster, and a mayoral campaign."

If she's made it through all that, prison is just a forced vacation.

"People will try to bait you into ruining yourself, don't give them the satisfaction."

Hold your head high, smile, let their frustration eat them alive.

"If a man can talk his way into office, he can also talk his way into a federal indictment."

If he's really talented, he can do both in the same decade.

"Sometimes life hands you a crown. Sometimes it hands you handcuffs. Wear both with grace."

Whether you're the First Lady, or the first inmate in line begging the lunch lady for decent food, dignity goes a long way.

"If you're going to jail, at least go in style."

Even in federal custody, I knew how to make an entrance.

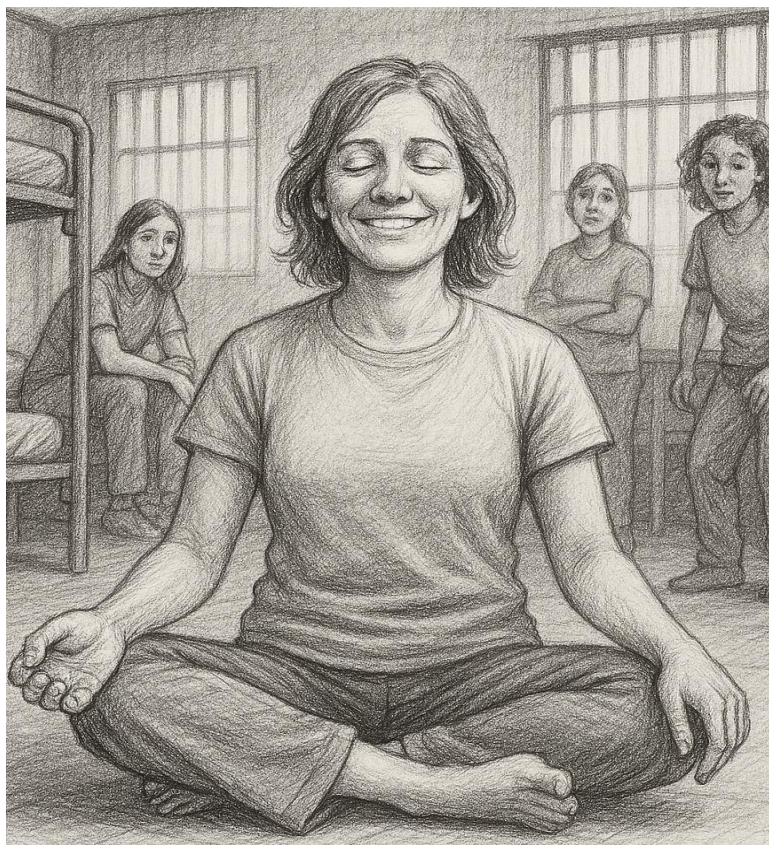
"From politics to prison, the key to

**survival is simple: read the room,
know your audience, never run out
of wine."**

Or, in prison, instant coffee Tampons.

**"Reinventing yourself is a skill.
Master it and you'll never be stuck
in a bad situation for long."**

I went from wastewater manager to
First Lady to inmate and came out on
top every time.



Chapter seven

The First 180 Daze... Of Bliss

Prison Zen: Finding Peace in the Clink

If someone had told me I'd one day describe six months in federal prison as "bliss," I'd have laughed them straight into next Tuesday. Yet here I am, penning a love letter to a concrete bunk and a world without palmetto bugs. Life's funny that way, sometimes the worst moments gift you the best stories. Buckle up, because this chapter's got more twists than a soap opera and more lessons than a self-help seminar run by a parole board.

The Courthouse Fiasco: A Rookie Mistake

It all began on sentencing day at the federal courthouse in downtown Tampa, 13th floor, naturally, because the universe loves a good omen. My husband, we'll call him The Politician, and I walked in, expecting the hammer to drop hard. Five years, our lawyer warned. Maybe three if the stars aligned and the forensic accountant worked some magic. I'd braced myself for half a decade of orange jumpsuits, but what unfolded was pure chaos of my own making.

Here's where I screwed up royally: I invited a hundred of our closest friends and colleagues to pack the courtroom gallery. In my head, it was a brilliant move, a sea of supportive faces to convince Judge Moody I wasn't a monster. Turns out, judges

don't see it that way. To him, it looked like I'd rallied a fan club to cheerlead my tax-dodging shenanigans. Pro tip for anyone facing a gavel: leave the entourage at home. Your buddies' tears won't sway the bench, they'll just piss it off.

The hearing's a blur. Judge Moody grilled me for an hour: **"how'd the business start", "where'd the money come from", "how'd we end up deviating funds"?**

I must've charmed him with my dazed honesty because he started crunching numbers like a mad mathematician. Five years became one year, tied to a measly \$55,000 of unreported income. The Politician and I could split it: six months each. We opted to serve it simultaneously, three weeks apart, because why not rip the Band-Aid off together?

Post-sentencing, no handcuffs, no shackles, just a numb shuffle to fingerprinting and processing. I was a cocktail of emotions: furious at The Politician, disdainful of the mess, and oddly detached. Anger was my fuel, and I was about to burn it bright.

The Lobby Rally: Tears to Taskmaster

Emerging from processing, we hit the courthouse lobby, and there they were: 75% of my ill-advised cheer squad, sobbing like it was the Titanic's farewell scene. I snapped out of my coma, clapped my hands, and barked, **"Hey, what are you crying for? I'm not leaking tears up here! We've got work to do!"** Suddenly, I was General Ave, issuing orders: **"Find me a house sitter! Feed my dogs! Pay my bills!"** It was August, and we had until October to report.

Those weeks became a whirlwind of logistics, moving, shaking, and dodging the dread of what lay ahead. It was the strongest I'd ever felt, a phoenix rising from the ashes of my own bad decisions.

Lesson #1: When life hands you a prison sentence, don't wallow, delegate. Tears won't scrub your floors or walk your pups, but a rallied crew just might.

Dropping The Politician Off: Cowboys and Crocodile Tears

Fast forward to October, and it's The Politician's turn to check into Estil, South Carolina. I drove him up, a 12-hour road trip fueled by tension and unspoken resentment. We rolled up to the prison, and out strolls a hulking guard in a Dallas Cowboys jersey. Being a lifelong Redskins fan, I

couldn't resist: **"Oh, nice shirt, how's it feels rooting for a team that's gonna choke again?"** The Politician elbowed me, hissing, **"Shut up, I have to live with this guy!"** But the guard laughed, a deep, rumbling chuckle, and I knew I'd just scored The Politician his first prison ally. I dropped him off, waved goodbye, and sobbed the whole way home. Twelve hours of ugly crying, mascara rivers and all.

Then came the kicker: my mother-in-law. I'd banned her from my life after years of her meddling, but she showed up uninvited the second I got home. My saintly house sitter, Susan, had a glass of wine and a salad waiting. Enter the mother-in-law, waltzing in through the garage, picking up my fork, stirring my food, and cooing, **"That looks good, too**

bad I wasn't invited." I lost it. Scraped the plate into the trash, flung the dishes in the sink, and roared, **"Get the f* out!"**** She called me dramatic: **"The Oscar goes to Ave!"** but I escorted her to her car, held the door open, and unloaded: **"Prison's gonna be a vacation compared to dealing with you."** She peeled out, and I exhaled. Free at last, until my own sentence began.

Finding a House Sitter: The Susan Saga

With The Politician about to leave, I scrambled to secure a house sitter. I posted on Facebook, expecting a flood of volunteers for my waterfront home with a pool. Instead, people asked, **"How much you paying?"** I was floored. **"You get to live here free, bills covered, just watch my dogs, I ain't paying you a dime!"** Enter

Susan, a former client's referral. She'd just moved from California to Naples with her blind dachshund, Pelli. We met, our dogs fell in love, and I knew I'd struck gold. Susan became my partner in crime: loyal, steadfast, smuggling me Carmex in prison (more on that later). She moved in, handled everything, and kept my world spinning while I was locked up.

Lesson #2: Trust your gut when picking your people. The right ally can turn a nightmare into a cakewalk.

Check-In Day: Coleman's Clean Surprise

My turn came, and friends Mark and Judy drove me to Coleman Federal Prison Camp. I expected a grim hellscape: cockroaches, grime, and surly guards. Instead, I walked into a

spotless admin building, three women cheerfully scrubbing floors like they were auditioning for a cleaning commercial. It was old, sure, but it shined. No smells, no bugs, I was in heaven. I turned to Mark and Judy, tears in their eyes, and said, **“Go home. I’m good.”** And I was.

Then came the strip search. A no-nonsense female officer led me to a broom closet, brooms shoved aside, and ordered, **“Drop ‘em.”** I grinned: **“It’s day two of my period, a real gusher. Enjoy the treasure hunt.”** She didn’t flinch, just handed me oversized brown scrubs and sheets. I got the slab in my dorm, the coveted couch-bed, and met my bunkies, sweet ladies who’d become my prison family.

Squirrel and the Service Code

My “**big sister,**” a kind inmate guide, showed me the ropes: a rickety gym, a shell-covered track, a library. She introduced me to a picnic table crew, including Squirrel, a grumpy chick in a ski cap. I smiled; she snarled, “**What the f* are you so happy about Miss Susie Sunshine?**”** I shot back, “**I’m Ave, you don’t know this now, but we will all be friends, and all of you will cry when I leave here in 6 months.**” Six months later, we were all close friends and every single one of them cried when I left.

My good friend Bobby, a corrections officer, had given me the lowdown pre-prison: “**Be of service. Don’t complain. Help without asking for anything.**” I took it to heart. Day one, I hauled 50-pound laundry bags up stairs for the laundry chick. She

glared, assuming I wanted something. I didn't. Soon, we were tight: proof that kindness disarms suspicion.

The Lift Station Hustle

Everyone works in prison: 19 to 48 cents an hour. My HVAC and wastewater treatment skills landed me the jackpot: lift station duty under Mr. Kenna, a sweet civilian boss. Lift stations grind raw sewage, nasty, but I'd stuck my hands in worse. He handed me Ford F-150 keys: **"Drive anywhere on property. Don't leave, or it's five years."** I'd check meters, fix pumps—ten minutes of work—then spend the day training clients or running. Kenna didn't care, as long as his stuff got done. I had a truck, a microwave, a washer—prison perks galore.

Lesson #3: Find your niche. A little expertise can turn a sentence into a side hustle.

The Biggest Loser Triumph

I launched a “Biggest Loser” contest that turned Coleman into a fitness bootcamp. Twenty women shed a collective 300 pounds, and I got creative: broomsticks with buckets for bench presses, sheets for resistance drags around the track, deck-of-cards squat pickups. The gym officer tried to run it but flopped, so I took over. We tracked progress with a bucket: each pound lost earned a rock inside the bucket. By the end, that 300-pound bucket was unliftable, a gritty monument to our grit. I bartered \$25 commissary credits for prizes: a chick made bracelets, others chipped in Secret Santa baskets, against all rules, but who cares? The

officer threatened to confiscate it all, but I dared her: **“Take the buckets, you can’t take the victory.”** She walked away, and we celebrated like champs.

New Year’s Eve Jailhouse Jamboree

New Year’s Eve started innocently enough: my bunkies and I plotting a creative dinner with no stove. Then **“Charo”** barged in, a four-foot-eight blonde tornado with wild hair, speaking in tongues like a Pentecostal preacher on a bender. She zeroed in on Lily, my mild-mannered bunky, getting in her face. I stepped in, arm between them, calm as a Zen monk: **“Nobody’s laughing at you, but you gotta go.”** She poked my chest with two fingers and, bam, collapsed like a marionette with cut strings. We laughed; it was absurd. But a tattletale neighbor ran to Officer

Hollywood, claiming assault. Next thing I know, Charo and I are off to Sumter County Jail: 16 days of chaos.

No timeout room available at Coleman, so they shipped us off to the county jail. I rode with Charo in an unmarked car, her babbling, me staring ahead, diffusing myself: **“This is out of my hands. I’ll be fine.”** At Sumter, Charo did a split during her pat-down, proclaiming, **“Look what I can do!”** The officer pegged her as the troublemaker, locking her in solitary while I joined the community pod: 25 women, endless entertainment. Charo licked walls across the glass divide; we watched like it was live theater. I allied with Angie, a former Coleman rival, over peanut butter and jelly sandwiches: best I’ve ever had, bar none. Sleeping in a plastic canoe at capacity, I kept my cool, even when

a drugged-out newbie couldn't figure out how the phone identification system worked: When asked by the system to **"State Your Name"** she kept repeating the exact words **"Your Name"** over and over. My BFF Angie and I were hysterical.

Chow Hall Takeover and Orange Hair Days

Back at Coleman, I flipped the chow hall script. The cook hated me for skipping her slop: overcooked, greasy nonsense. I gave her tips: **"Don't make it gross. Cook it right, and people might thank you."** She did, and suddenly it was my kitchen. My Biggest Loser crew ate with me, and when they grabbed Danishes, I'd wipe the food on my shoe: **"You asked for help, eat this now?"** They'd beg me to toss it. Power move. The prison salon dyed my hair orange once. I

laughed it off. Who cares? It's a prison, not a pageant.

Tampon Innovations and Bathroom Battles

In jail, I learned that tampons are the Swiss Army knives of incarceration, the strings for eyebrow plucking and the boxes for storage. Genius. Let's not forget coffee grounds for facials. Can you say Exfoliate? I set my bathroom hours at 3 a.m. for privacy, but one chick squatted in my face mid-session, begging for a spare. **"Get out before I lose it,"** I snapped. She scurried off. Lesson learned: boundaries matter, even in a steel-toilet pod.

Release and Reflection

Six months flew by. I dropped from 145 to 125 pounds. I am now sober, fit, and bruise-covered from jail's

metal bunks, but alive.

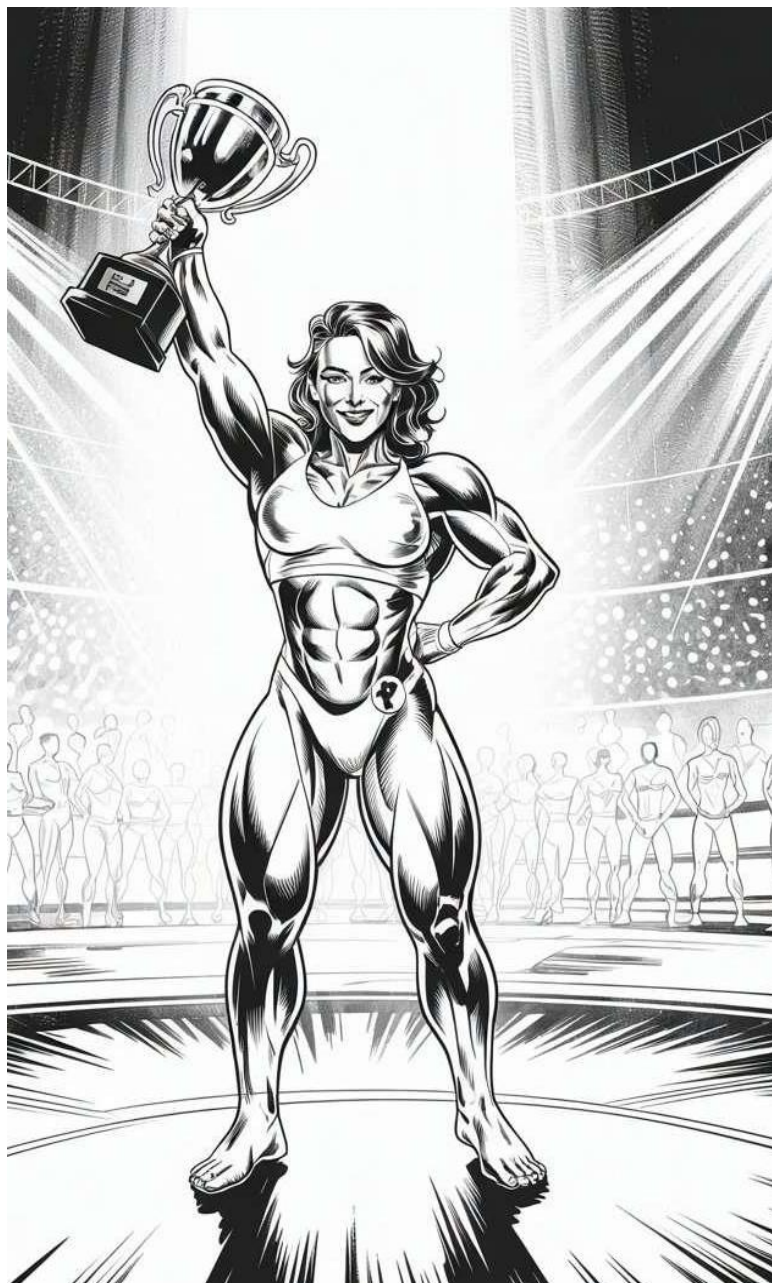
After being in county jail for 16 days, my bunkies welcomed me back with hot dogs and notes. I'd made a difference. Then, three months later, I was released, and hit the liquor store, at which point I realized: prison was the easy part.

The real chaos was before and after: mother-in-laws, audits, life.

Prison was clean, safe, and bug-free bliss.

Chapter 7 Final Lessons:

- "Sometimes the cage sets you free. Embrace the unexpected, it might just save your soul."
- "In the crucible of confinement, forge your own peace, chaos bends to those who wield calm like a blade."
- "The bars don't define you; the bridges you build behind them do, connect, don't collapse."
- "When the world shrinks to a cell, grow larger within it, small spaces birth vast strength."
- "Sewage and shackles teach what freedom forgets: resilience is the art of thriving where others merely survive."
- "A sentence isn't the end but a strange intermission, play the role, rewrite the script, and steal the show."



Chapter eight

The Birth of Stella

From Inmate to Iron Goddess

Six months in a low-security prison camp does something to a person. It forces clarity, sharpens resilience, and provides an undeniable amount of time to reflect. For me, it did all that, and then some. By the time I stepped out of that place, head high and heels clicking on the pavement, I wasn't just free. I was reborn.

My name was still Ave, but inside, a fire had been lit. A challenge had been set. And the world had no idea what was coming next.

Rebuilding from Scratch Isn't for the Faint of Heart

I walked out of prison without a job, without savings, and without the stability I once had as the First Lady of Port Richey. I had no safety net, just my own two feet and the sheer force of will.

First stop? The gym.

Fitness had always been in my blood, even if life had pulled me away from it. Now, I went back to what I knew best: coaching, training, and pushing people past their limits. I found work at Family Fitness, juggling clients and building myself back up one session at a time. If I had learned anything from prison, it was that discipline and endurance could carry you through even the darkest days.

But while the weights, the sweat, the grind of training welcomed me back, some people did not.

I was used to whispers. Judgmental glances from those who knew my past, who only saw the version of me that had been splashed across news headlines. But I didn't let it stop me. Every rep, every drop of sweat, every muscle I rebuilt was proof that I was more than what they believed. Still, the shadows of the past haunted me. Nights were the hardest. I lay in bed staring at the ceiling, wondering how I had let myself fall so far. The guilt of past mistakes gnawed at me, whispering doubts into the silence. But every morning, I got up. I fought. I forced myself forward, one step at a time.

Then there was the matter of him.

The Politician was gone. The divorce was inevitable. By December of 2014, I had already made peace with the fact that our marriage was over. I let myself drink, party, and escape reality for one last month. But I also made a promise to myself: January 1st, I would go all in. No more distractions. No more excuses. It was time to rebuild.

And I did just that.

I started working at Family Fitness in September 2014, and by the time the new year rolled in, I was balancing my job as a receptionist, trainer, and group class instructor. I was vibrant, energetic, and finally beginning to feel like myself again.

Then came The Muscle Head.

I had seen him a few times before, but

it wasn't until I watched him do a one-arm pull-up that he truly caught my attention. A strong, older man with a quiet confidence, he intrigued me. I admired strength, both physical and mental, and at first glance, he seemed to have both. One day, as I passed by him at the gym, he made an offhand comment.

"It's too bad you're not single." I stopped dead in my tracks. **"YES, I AM SINGLE!"** I quickly turned around, ran back to my briefcase, grabbed a business card, handed it to him, and said **"let's have coffee."** The Muscle Head laughed, and the energy between them shifted. That moment changed everything.

The Muscle Head took his time reaching out. When he finally invited me to lunch, I fell fast. Older, in shape, and retired, he seemed to have the

kind of stability I needed. He moved in within a month.

And that was when the first red flag appeared.

The Muscle Head, for all his strength, was jealous. Controlling. Angry. One day, he saw my ex-husband, The Politician, across the street visiting a friend and flew into a rage.

“Your f*ing ex-husband is across the street, and he’s antagonizing me. I swear to God, I’m going over there to kick his ass!” I completely froze. This wasn’t just a minor outburst. This was a warning sign. A big one. And I mistakenly ignored it.

Surviving The Muscle Head: A Prison of a Different Kind

The Muscle Head’s jealousy turned into control. His anger became a

weight around my neck, dragging me into submission. I had survived prison, but somehow, I found myself trapped again. Only this time, the walls weren't made of concrete and barbed wire. They were made of fear.

My drinking worsened. I was clearly spiraling.

One October morning, I woke up on the bathroom floor of a hotel. Puke on the tile. Phone in my hand. The Muscle Head called.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Laying on the floor... in my puke.”

The Muscle Head's response was sharp. Cold.

“You can come home now and fix this, or you can stay there and die.”

That was the moment.

The next day, October 26, 2016, I walked into my first AA meeting. I picked up my white chip. And from that moment on, I never drank again.

Enter Stella: The Underdog Champion

By January 2017, roughly 90 days into sobriety, I was restless.

One day, my friend Lydia challenged me with quite the surprise.

“You always said you wouldn’t do a fitness competition because you couldn’t drink. Well, you’re sober now. What’s your excuse?”

My first response was “F*-Off,”** and then I gave it some serious thought. I had zero excuses.

So, I hired a competition trainer. I learned to pose. I walked Clearwater Beach for hours in a tiny bikini to get comfortable in my own skin.

I trained harder than ever before.

By June 2017, I was ready.

And then came another roadblock.

Three weeks before the competition, I got a call.

My age group had been canceled.

Panic. Doubt. Fear.

“I can’t compete against 40-year-olds!” I told my coach.

My coach didn’t hesitate. **“Ave, you’ve come this far. Just show up.”**

So, I did.

Defying the Odds, Owning the Stage

I frigging owned that stage.

I stripped away all distractions, no extra jewelry, no gimmicks.

I stepped onto the stage, exuding confidence, presence, and poise.

And it worked.

I didn't just place.

I took second place.

My competition trophy had a name.

Stella.

The Birth of Stella: A Lesson in Reinvention

Some people crumble under pressure. Others?

They forge themselves into

something greater.

I had learned the hard way that life wasn't about waiting for a second chance. It was about taking it, reshaping it, and running with it.

The world had tried to count me out more than once.

Now?

I was stronger. I was smarter.

I was now Stella.

And this was just the beginning.

Ave's Life Lessons For Chapter 8

"I have walked through fire, and yet I do not burn. I am forged, not broken."

"Strength is not in the muscles, but in the will that refuses to kneel."

"Every fall is a lesson, every rise is a revolution."

"I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become."

"The weight of my past is nothing compared to the power of my rebirth."

"I did not come this far to only come this far."

"Survival was my training ground, thriving is my destiny."



Chapter nine

The First Day of the Best of My Life

**How I Escaped Prison, Found a
Turkey Burger Soulmate, and
Learned to Rub One Out for World
Peace.**

Picture this: me, Ave Cole, a woman who'd rather fist-bump a sweaty gym rat than cheat on a man, trapped in a relationship that felt like a minimum-security prison with no parole board. I'd always prided myself on my loyalty, never once oogled another guy while spoken for. I even made every boyfriend sign an unwritten contract: **"If your eyes wander, just tell me**

before your hands do.” Fair, right? But The Muscle Head, oh Mr. Muscle Head, he didn’t just wander, he built a brick wall of indifference so high I couldn’t even see the horizon of my own happiness. And then, on one glorious day in March 2023, the universe threw me a lifeline in the form of a turkey burger and a man who knew how to use it. Welcome to the First Day of the Best of My Life.

Let’s rewind the tape. Living with The Muscle Head was like sharing a bunk with a grumpy warden who’d misplaced his humanity. Everyone, my friends, my dad, probably the mailman, saw it before I did: I was in shackles again. He was cold, controlling, and had the emotional range of a stale saltine. My joy? Stripped. My life? A treadmill stuck on **“uphill misery.”** The outside world

kept nudging me: **“Ave, you’re in hell!”** but I’d just dig my heels in deeper, defending my Cellblock Love like it was a five-star resort. That is, until Stefan swaggered into my life with a cooler full of protein and a smile that said, **“Get in, loser, we’re escaping.”**

It was early March, and I was burned out. Seven-day workweeks had turned me into a hamster on a wheel, and The Muscle Head, bless his curmudgeonly heart, vetoed every vacation idea like he was allergic to fun. **“Overnight somewhere? Nope, my prostate says no,”** he’d grumble. So, in December ’22, I’d finally snapped: Sundays were mine now, no more slaving away. That’s when I noticed: The Muscle Head and I hadn’t done diddly squat together in years. Two years, to be exact. No dinners, no

trips, nada. I was waking up, and the alarm clock was blaring.

Cue the racetrack, my Wednesday ritual since I was eight, meeting Dad and his crew of lovable degenerates, Guys who lived paycheck-to-paycheck, beer stains on their shirts, fingernails that hadn't seen soap since the Clinton administration. Then, one day, there he was: Stefan. Clean-cut, articulate, with a six-pack (the abs kind and the cooler kind), he was an alien in this sea of disheveled chaos. I rolled up to the picnic table, and it was like the heavens parted, angels sang, or maybe that was just the buzz of the track's PA system. Dad, oblivious as ever, chirped, **"I was thinking of setting him up with Heather!"** I nearly choked on my own spit. **"Hold the phone, Pops,"** I said, laughing. **"Give me a sec to ditch The**

Muscle Head, and we'll talk."

Stefan and I clicked like two puzzle pieces from the same box. Fitness buffs, healthy eaters, turkey burger enthusiasts, when he pulled one out of his cooler, apologizing like it was contraband, I whipped mine out too. **"Cheers,"** I said, and we toasted with ground poultry. Sparks flew. If he'd said, **"Hop in my car, let's ride off into the sunset,"** I might've left skid marks. Instead, I went home to The Muscle Head, sat him down, and dropped the bomb: **"A guy caught my eye today, and I caught his back. Something's rotten in our Denmark."** Calm as a monk, I laid it out. The Muscle Head? He freaked. **"Nothing's wrong! Guys hit on you all the time!"** Uh, no, buddy, my radar's not that rusty. He brushed it off, and that's when I knew: the wall

was up once again, and I was done.

Enter my exit strategy, stage left. A client (now my landlord) had mentioned a rental house months back, and I'd laughed it off, "**Who do I know that needs a shack?**" Me, apparently. I started setting traps for The Muscle Head, little tests to see if he'd respond with joy or his usual venom. Spoiler: venom won every round. I'd come home buzzing about my day, and he'd snarl, "**Why do I care? Tell someone else.**" Case in point: the gym rat story. This massive dude I'd fist-bumped for years shrank before my eyes: 450 pounds down to 200, all because my relentless cheerleading lit a fire under him. He cornered me one March morning, grinning, jokingly stating "**This is your fault!**" I beamed; Planet Fitness did an internal press release and

made a big deal about it. I raced home to tell The Muscle Head, expecting a **“Wow, cool!”** Nope. **“Why would I care?”** Classic Muscle Head response, the human joy-vacuum.

By April, Stefan and I were dancing around our mutual crush. He'd become my racetrack confidant, but he drew the line: **“No dating while you're with him.”** Fair. He coached me through my breakout, offering tips, some printable, some... less so. Meanwhile, The Muscle Head is chipping away at me and turning into full-on demolition. I was physically sick: nauseous, shaky, done. My beach girls noticed. One pulled me aside: **“My condo's yours whenever. Just say the word.”**

Another tragic bombshell: Heiny, my 81-year-old Bavarian snowbird student, died. He'd been the life of our

group, a widower we'd resurrected with laughter. I got the text at 2 a.m., sobbing on the toilet. Then, The Muscle Head barged in: **"What the f* is your problem?"** "Heiny passed away,"** I choked out. The Muscle Head heartlessly stated, **"He was old. Big deal."** That was it... I was done with him! The final straw snapped.

The beach crew rallied like superheroes. Six or seven of them crafted a May-June calendar: condos, second homes, all gratis, with my favorite snacks stocked. I bounced from place to place, training them while they saved me. My bestie Bob scoped out the rental house: outside a dump, inside a gem. **"You can't live here!"** she gasped. **"Watch me,"** I winked. I had a vision, and a nest egg.

Back in '19, Dad gifted me \$5,000, a rarity. I turned it into a CD, then

managed to save a nice nest egg and emergency fund in four years, thanks to COVID booming my biz. I didn't know why I was hoarding cash, until now. It was my ticket out. I could change things on a dime with my savings. It was my escape route from a bad situation if I ever needed it.

May 2nd, 2023, dawned. I wrote The Muscle Head a note, couldn't face him, apologized for my cowardice, and bolted. Trained clients, taught a class, then hauled my suitcase to T's condo. Fifth floor, ocean view, a sunset I hadn't seen in years. I snapped pics, bawled, and declared it: the first day of the best of my life. (Well, second, day one was my first prison stint, but that's another tale.) The Muscle Head texted later, whining I hadn't been **"forthcoming."** Dude, I'd been waving red flags like a matador.

Stefan's final gift? A bonkers stress-relief tip. I had to face The Muscle Head Monday to grab stuff and see my cat. Panicking, I texted Stefan. **"Rub one out 15 minutes before,"** he said, dead serious. **"Picture me on your dash. You'll be zen."** I laughed, then tried it. Behind the gym, his photo propped up, I took his advice. Damned if it didn't work. I strolled into The Muscle Head's living room, cool as a cucumber, while he blubbered out useless mumbling words to me. Dr. Ruth's male heir had saved me again.

Post-Muscle Head, Stefan ghosted me. He'd headed to Michigan the day I left, promising a date on his return. Ten days of texts, then poof, gone. Schmuck or savior? I lean towards savior. Without him, I might still be in The Muscle Head's joyless jail, cat in

tow.

Now, nearly two years later, I'm free, still shaking off the watched feeling, but free. May 2nd, 2023: the day I traded shackles for sunsets, turkey burgers for triumph, and learned that sometimes, the best therapy comes with a smirk and a selfie.

Ave's Interesting Lessons for Chapter 9

1. "Toast with turkey, not tears, freedom tastes better with a side of protein."

Inspired by our turkey burgers, Stefan and I toast at the racetrack. This mantra celebrates small victories and the people who spark change, reminding us that liberation can start with something as simple as a shared poultry snack.

2. "Shackles don't break themselves, sometimes it takes a stranger with clean fingernails to hand you the key."

A nod to Stefan's arrival as the catalyst for my escape from The Muscle Head, this saying highlights how an outsider's perspective (and hygiene!) can unlock a prison you

didn't even see.

3. "When the wall goes up, build a ladder, or better yet, a beach condo escape hatch."

Reflecting my exit strategy with my beach girls, this quip encourages creative problem-solving and leaning on your crew when the going gets tough.

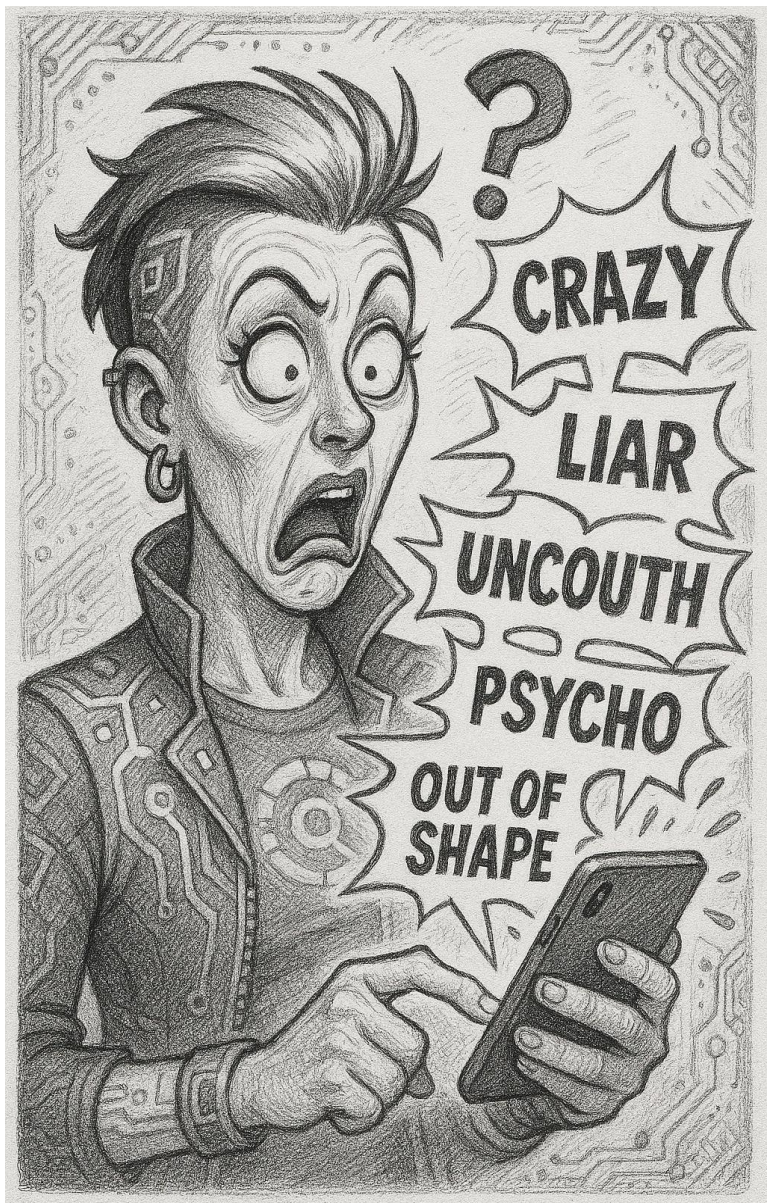
4. "Rub one out, stress one away, sage advice is just a dashboard photo and a deep breath from genius."

Directly from Stefan's wild stress-relief tip, this cheeky mantra turns an eyebrow-raising moment into a universal truth: sometimes the weirdest solutions are the most effective.

- 5. "A sunset unseen is a life half-lived, chase the horizon, even if it takes a suitcase and a sob."**

Tied to my emotional sunset on May 2nd, this saying urges seizing beauty and freedom, no matter the emotional baggage you drag along.

- 6. "Fist-bump the grind, but don't marry the grump, joy's a muscle worth flexing."**



Chapter ten

100 New Dresses

You'd think after several divorces, psychopaths and abusive relationships, I'd have learned something about men, right? Wrong. Well, I'm getting there... Hi, I'm Ave Cole, and welcome to the circus of my love life, a parade of clowns so bizarre I had to start numbering them like dresses in a never-ending shopping spree. I call it the "100 New Dresses" game, because every time I swiped right, I was trying on a new disaster. Two years after splitting from The Muscle Head, I'm still single, still hopeful, and still laughing at the lunacy of it all. Spoiler alert: it's a comedy of errors with a twist ending I didn't see coming.

It started innocently enough. Fresh out of break up number three: I dusted myself off, signed up for Match.com, and thought, *This'll be easy. I'm a catch!* Oh, sweet, naive Ave. I had no idea I was about to wade through a swamp of weirdos so deep I'd need a hazmat suit. After the first seven dates crashed and burned, think bad breath, worse lies, and one guy who brought his mother I decided to get strategic. I numbered them. And when that wasn't enough to keep my sanity, I gave them nicknames. Buckle up, because these are the top ten losers who paved the way to the love of my life and the hiccup that stopped it cold.

**Here is a Small Dating
Charcuterie Sampling for Your
Entertainment:**

Enjoy!

Dress 1: Spanky

Dress 1: Spanky

First up was Spanky, a personal trainer from the other coast of

Florida who seemed promising. No dick pics, no sleazy come-ons, just a gentleman who liked fitness and texted before calling. We planned a Sunday meetup at his brother's place in St. Pete. I'm thinking, *This could be it!* Then Saturday night rolls around, and my phone rings. **"Hey, Ave,"** he says, voice low and serious. **"I hope you like spanking, 'cause I'm gonna spank you hard. And if you don't, I'll spank you harder."** Slap, slap, he's clapping his hands in the background like a deranged cheerleader. Before I can process this, three photos ping through my cell: a cartoon cowboy spanking another

cowboy, a meme of a husband spanking his wife, and a straight-up porno still. I'm staring at my phone like, *Did he just overdose on crazy pills?* **"Lose my number,"** I say, and hang up. Spanky, you're out.

Dress 2: Taco Bell Boy

Next came Taco Bell Boy, an Army vet and trainer from Naples. We hit it off, prepping meals together over the phone like some wholesome cooking show. I'm thinking, *This guy's got potential.* We plan a halfway meetup, and on Monday, I text, **"Whatcha eating tonight, some of that chicken we prepped?"** **"Nah, ate it all,"** he says. **"LOL, hitting Taco Bell then?"** I joke. Silence. Then: **"Why would you say that? That's so insulting."** I'm like, *What? It's a fast-food chain, not a war crime!* **"I'm kidding!"** I backpedal. **"Okay,"** he

says, **“but I’m gonna read my book now. We’re done.”** Done? Over a Taco Bell jab? He ghosted me, and I didn’t even have to block him. Bullet dodged, tortilla shredded.

Dress 3: Shrimp Fingers

Shrimp Fingers takes the gross-out cake. A local guy from Facebook Dating, decent-looking, had his own place. He postponed our first date for a neck procedure, something about **“human concrete”** after a car accident. Sweet, right? He recovers fast and meets me at Crabby Bill’s for lunch. I order a grouper Reuben; he gets peel-and-eat shrimp. No wet wipes, no bowl, just dry napkins and his bare hands. He’s peeling, sucking, licking those fingers like a feral raccoon, and I’m gagging into my sandwich. *He just had surgery*, I tell myself. *Give him a pass*. He doesn’t

wash his hands, ever. Not after eating, not after an hour outside with a soda. Date two, he picks a bar (I'm sober, strike one), orders more shrimp, and starts pawing my leg with those crustacean-crusty claws. I fake a dad emergency, bolt, and text him at 3 a.m.: **"This isn't working."** He calls, insisting I was **"turned on"** by the shrimp stench. **"Lose my number, perv,"** I say, and block. I haven't touched peel-and-eat since.

Dress 4: Face Licker

By dress 25-ish, I'd wised up a bit. I Demanded ten days of chat, phone calls, and a recent photo with a newspaper, because catfishing is real, folks. Face Licker passed the test: father of three, good-looking, lived across Tampa Bay. We plan dinner halfway at Westchase. I roll up in my Jeep, little black dress, heels clicking,

feeling fabulous. I spot him, same face, but with a beer gut so big it's resting on the table. *Okay, maybe a client*, I think. Dinner's fine, he's charming, but I'm not feeling it. He walks me to my car, leans in, and, get this, *licks my face* from chin to cheek, then grabs my hand and plants it on his crotch. I'm in an empty parking lot, stunned, no one knows where I am. I freeze, climb into my Jeep, and peel out. He texts later: **"Another date?" "No, block."** Face Licker, you're a legend, for all the wrong reasons.

Dress 5: I'll Move In Tomorrow (Glenn)

Glenn, from Tennessee, was a long-distance charmer. Same high school, outdoorsy, owned acreage, my kind of guy. We plan to meet halfway at Live Oak for a hike. Then, mid-phone call, he says, **"How big's your backyard?"**

Big enough for a garage?" "Why?" I ask. **"Where else am I gonna put my stuff when I move down?"** Record scratch. *We haven't even met!* **"Hold up,"** I say. **"I need time to digest this."** He doesn't listen, blows up my phone. Next morning, at 6 a.m., he's got a new plan: **"We'll date remotely for six months, then I'll move."** **"You're smoking something fierce,"** I say. **"We're done."** Click, block. I'll Move In Tomorrow, you're too fast for this filly.

Dress 6: Major League Boy (TC)

Major League Boy, a retired trainer for the Dunedin Blue Jays, suckered me in with his baseball cred. Well-groomed pics, hours of gentlemanly phone chats, I'm hooked. We meet at Bonefish Grill. He rolls up looking like Larry the Cable Guy's unkempt uncle, yelling, **"Hey, girly, you look hot!"**

Strike one: he forgot I don't drink, suggesting **"drinks"** anyway. Strike two: he's rude to our gay waiter over happy hour prices. Strike three: he flaunts World Series rings like a peacock while I'm plotting my escape. End of the meal, he grabs my hands: **"We've got chemistry!"** **"Nope,"** I say. **"That'll change with a big kiss,"** he grins. Outside, he ambushes me by my Jeep, pulling me in. I sock him in the face. **"Nice punch, little filly!"** he laughs. I drove off. TC, Total Creep, buh-bye.

Dress 7: DUI Guy

The DUI Guy from Sarasota seemed normal: muscular, manicured, met me for coffee near my gym. We plan a workout date at his place. I drive down, we lift, grill steaks, cute, right? Then he goes quiet. **"I need to be honest,"** he says. **"I'm a convicted**

felon.” “Me too!” I laugh. **“Tax fraud, six months. You?” “Fourth DUI,”** he says. *Fourth?* **“So, no license?”** I ask. **“Nope. But I’ve got a plan, I’ve taken my twin brother’s identity. Keep him drunk at home.”** He shows me the license. I’m horrified. **“That’s awful. Don’t call me.”** Block. DUI Guy, you’re a felony too far. I keep asking myself, am I watching some kind of movie? Sometimes my life just does not seem real. LoL.

Dress 8: Foot Cast Fibber (Mark)

Mark was a summer fling who broke his foot, or so he said. We chatted while he traveled, bonding over my wacko stories. He suggests a beach weekend: two rooms, his treat. Then I Google him. Turns out, his **“broken foot”** was from choking an Uber driver who shot him in self-defense. I call him out: **“Why lie?” “Thought**

you'd laugh," he says. **"I'm a felon too, yippee, I told you upfront. "No, you didn't."** Insta Block. Foot Cast Fibber, honesty isn't your forte.

Dress 9: Doug the Ditcher

Doug, a car restorer from Fitness Singles, meets me at Frenchie's. Half an hour before, he's crying: **"My best friend's wife died. He pulled the plug last night."** I counsel him through lunch, he leaves, says he'll call. Never does. I spotted him back on the dating site, fresh as ever. Did he ditch me with a sob story? Doug the Ditcher, you're a mystery, and a ghost. In your search, I hope you find a shred of class.

Dress 10: The One (Number 100)

After 99 disasters, I hit 100 on a Fit Over 50 site. He flirts, I flirt back, and we FaceTime, my first ever. He's hot,

funny, 58, from Philly, mid-divorce. Chemistry's off the charts. He buys me a Valentine's ticket to fly up, but his ex flips out, so I stay put. We keep talking, fall in love. He flies down for my birthday, four days of bliss. He's moving here, job interviews lined up, then just recently: his ex gets a diagnosis. Cancer scare. He's torn, staying in Philly to support her. I'm heartbroken, pushing him to be there for her, but terrified it'll rekindle their past. He swears it won't. I don't know.

So here I am, dress 100, madly in love with a man who might be my 100th, my last dress, my Big One. Two years, dozens of lunatics, and a closet full of metaphorical outfits later, I'm praying I can stop shopping. But with his soon to be ex's health concerns looming, it's a cliffhanger. Will I finally hang up my dating apps, or am

I doomed to try on dress 101? Stay tuned, because I don't know the ending yet. The Wild Ride Continues... I definitely see a tall pitcher of lemonade that is closer than ever.

Ave's Lessons for Chapter 10

"Swipe right, but pack a hazmat suit love's a swamp, and the weirdos bite hard."

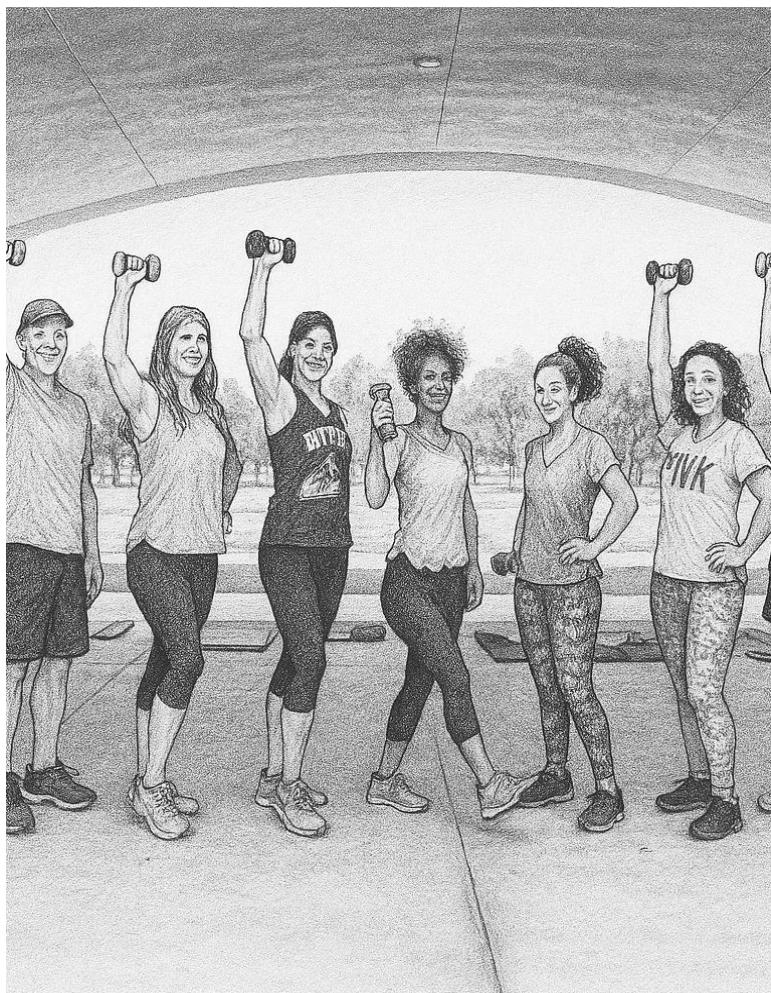
"Number your disasters, nickname your clowns sanity's the prize in the dating circus."

"If he licks your face or grabs your hand south, punch first, block later self-respect is non-negotiable."

"Beware the sob story that smells like shrimp, trust your gut when the vibe's fishy."

"Felons are fine, but 4 DUIs and a twin swap? Block fast crazy's a dealbreaker, not a quirk."

"Dress 100 might be your Big One, but 100's a closet hope's a gamble, so laugh at the stains."



Chapter eleven

Your Heart, Feet, And Future

Previously On...

Throughout this journey, you've seen what real resilience looks like. My life has been a wild ride of triumph, grit, loss, laughter, and fierce independence. I took every setback (broken marriages, personal battles, loss, chaos) and turned them into stepping stones. Through it all, I found my strength in the most unexpected place: my own two feet. Strong, grounded, unstoppable. Today, I stand tall, leading others to discover that same power within themselves.

And now? I'm taking everything I've

learned and pouring it into you.

Today's Big Idea

The right coach can change your life, not just your body.

I'm not just a Master HIIT bootcamp coach. I'm an experienced Life Coach who has spent the last 20+ years reshaping bodies, rebuilding lives, mindsets, and reigniting hope. My philosophy is simple but revolutionary: start at the feet, the body's tires and suspension system. When you fix the foundation, everything else follows. And now, I'm inviting you to build your strongest self yet.

Because when you walk stronger, you live stronger.

The Hook

It always starts with feet, and shoes.

When a brand-new client walks into my bootcamp, nervous and fidgeting, I don't just say, "Drop and give me twenty." I kneel down. I check your stance. I assess your feet. I look at your shoes (worn-out soles, tight fits, the wrong support) and I know instantly what's holding you back.

One woman came in sobbing quietly, thinking she was too broken to be helped. After fifteen minutes with me (barefoot, laughing, standing tall), that same woman looked in the mirror and said, "I feel like a completely different person."

I didn't just fix her posture.

I gave her back her belief.

And belief is where the real transformation begins.

The Proof

My methods aren't theories. They're time-tested results. They're living, breathing proof that no matter who you are or where you start, you can become unstoppable.

I've coached every type of human being you can imagine: overweight beginners who hadn't exercised in years, skinny teenagers lacking coordination, postpartum mothers rebuilding strength, 80-year-old warriors who refuse to slow down.

Through extensive assessments (stance, foot, shoe, push-up, squat, lunge, plank), I tailor programs like a master craftsman. I don't believe in "one size fits all." I believe in "start where you are, build from the ground up."

Hundreds of transformations later,

my bootcamp isn't just a workout. It's a launchpad for life.

One of my students, 63 years old and recovering from two surgeries, walked into bootcamp thinking he'd never run again. Six months later, he completed his first 5K, sprinting across the finish line with tears in his eyes.

Another woman, who struggled with low self-esteem her entire life, finally showed up wearing shorts to bootcamp after three months of training, her legs stronger, her mind unbreakable.

That's the magic I strive for.

That's what happens when someone believes in you more than you believe in yourself.

Here's How You Can Do It:

Step 1: Take the First Free Step

- Your first bootcamp session and full-body assessment are **FREE**.
- Zero pressure. Just a chance to see what's possible.

Step 2: Let Me Check Up On Your Foundation

- Shoe check. Stance check. Basic movement check.
- I'll know exactly where you are and how to get you moving safely and powerfully.

Step 3: Connect Daily

- I'm not the coach who forgets your name.
- I stay connected daily to each student, **heart and soul**, invested in your success.

You are never alone on this journey. My daily check-ins, encouragement, and tough love are the bridge between where you are and where you want to be.

Step 4: Become Part of the Future

- Later this year, I'm launching an **online bootcamp ecosystem**: training programs, live sessions, community support, mentorship.
- You'll be able to join my tribe wherever you are in the world.

Fitness is evolving. So am I. And you can be part of the very first wave.

Step 5: Step Forward with Confidence

- I don't just build bodies.
- I build **unshakeable humans**

ready to tackle life head-on.

Whether you're climbing mountains or climbing out of old habits, your new life starts with one brave step. And I'll be right there, cheering you on.

What This All Means

When you fix the feet, you fix the foundation. And when you find a coach who invests in you (body, mind, and spirit), you stop surviving and start thriving.

I'm not offering you another fitness trend.

I'm offering you a home. A tribe. A shot at becoming the strongest version of yourself you've ever imagined.

If you live in Tampa Bay, Florida, or if you're ready to join my new online

family soon, the time is now.

Because life's too short for the wrong shoes, and the wrong coaches.

Put yourself first. Start from the ground up. And never, ever stop moving forward.

Remember This

"Strong feet, strong soul,
unstoppable life."

Your journey doesn't end here.

It's just getting started.

Jumping Into the Future

The future is coming, and it's fierce.

Get ready to meet my new Online Bootcamp and Life Transformation Community launching later this year. It's not just about workouts. It's about building a global movement of

resilient, powerful, unstoppable humans.

Training videos, mentorship, live coaching calls, nutrition guides, daily encouragement, and an entire tribe of warriors moving through life together.

Are You Ready??? Let's HIIT It!!!

Because the ground beneath your feet isn't just holding you up. It's launching you forward.

About the Author

Ave Cole

Ave Cole is a veteran HIIT bootcamp coach, Master Life Coach, and fierce believer in human resilience. With over 20 years of experience transforming bodies and lives, she created the breakthrough Feet First System, a revolutionary approach to fitness that starts at the foundation (the feet) to build unshakeable strength from the ground up. Known for her bold energy, heartfelt coaching, and no-quit spirit, Ave leads a thriving fitness community in Tampa Bay, Florida, and soon, worldwide through her online bootcamp movement.

When she's not coaching, you can find her barefoot on the beach,

wowing 20 year olds at the gym, or building healthy warriors out of everyday people.

<https://www.avesbootcamp.com>

