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G.I. Jill & Miss Congeniality

It's very difficult to describe Jill Stevens with a brief statement,

but it would be safe to say the 2006 version of Miss Southern Utah University is setting a good example on how to get the most out of life.

Jill is constantly running from one task to another and seems to love the not-a-minute-to-spare lifestyle. She loves the literal form of running, too. She started her fitness craze as a sophomore at Davis High School when she would show up at 4:30 a.m. for cycling classes. A little while later, she joined a running club at 5 a.m. and carried that right on through the extreme challenges of boot camp when she joined the National Guard right out of high school. Now, the 23-year-old nursing student is juggling her continuing commitment to the Guard, her schooling and her passion for fitness.

"I can't think of a better morning than to go workout, get dripping wet with sweat, shower, have

breakfast and tear into another day," says Stevens. "What's not to love about it," she adds. "When you're doing fitness, you are always going to better yourself." Jill has now completed seven marathons, her last in well under three hours. She has been the female member of the



Jill reacts to being named Miss SUU 2006-07.

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JILL STEVENS, *on her pageant experience*

ROTC's Ranger Challenge team for two years in a row and in her spare time teaches cycling classes at a local fitness facility.

Jill also has some musical talents, which she has come by naturally. Her three brothers and one sister have all pursued music majors and that stems from their mother being a music teacher and a member of the world-famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir. "I can't carry a tune like anyone else in the family but I do enjoy singing in the car and other places people can't hear me." She loves big band jazz music and is especially fond of two musically-gifted men—Harry Connick, Jr., and Michael Buble'.

She not only gets involved in a variety of activities, she ends up being a leader in nearly everything she does. She spent a few years serving as a Presidential Ambassador early in her SUU career, helping with recruiting and hosting activities. She also went to work in the Service-Learning Center, where she became a service leader.

While stationed at Bagram Air

Base in Afghanistan, Jill worked as a medic on wounded soldiers and local families, especially children. During her year-long tour in Afghanistan with the 211th Aviation Group, Jill enjoyed the chance to make a connection with many of the young children she encountered, and helped. "I love the challenges," she states. "How could I not do this? It's just another chance to serve my country."

The same kind of attitude came out when she was recruited to participate in the 2006 Miss SUU Pageant. With no pageant experience, and no real desire to compete, she decided that her goal would be to win the Miss Congeniality title. She did much more than that with her own unique style. "I've discovered this woman inside of me," says Stevens. "I didn't even know where to go to buy high heels. I do think that whoever invented high heels is probably laughing in their grave."

Jill admitted that it was harder than she thought to compete in a pageant. "They should send soldiers to pageant workshops," she exclaims. "This will help me be a better-rounded person. It kinda unleashed this girl inside of me."

She has now been in the Guard for more than five of her eight-year commitment and is already admitting that she will miss it when the time expires, but she also knows that she has plenty to keep her busy. She has one more year to finish her nursing degree, which is quite a surprise even to Jill. "I came here for just a year to get some generals [general education classes] out of the way and then I was moving on. But, after I checked out some other schools and saw how crowded they were and that I was just going to be a number there, I decided to stay and take advantage of the opportunities here."

Jill gets a big smile on her face when she states, "Man, at SUU you can be somebody."

If you are one of the 'somebodies' who goes out to eat with Jill you may be surprised by what you see. "It's pretty fun to watch me eat," admits Stevens. "They teach you how to eat fast in boot camp." She learned how to crush her bread, and make a soggy sandwich to get it down fast. She also likes to shop fast, and she gets that done at WalMart.

She does like to make a little room for a social life but admits even that is being squeezed by her rigorous schedule. "I'm dating someone special and that's important to me," says Stevens. "However, this

SUU President Steven Bennion. She also continues to collect costumes so she can wear them to entertain and bring smiles to the faces of the young people she plans to help as a nurse in the future. "I love to work in hospitals and especially in pediatrics. I would like to join a humanitarian team, go live in a hut in the jungle and help people who can't get help. I just want to share and have a balance in all things."

Finally, Jill put some perspective into where she turns for help when it all seems a bit overwhelming. When talking about serving overseas



Jill with her Guard unit.

pageant thing means that I need to stay single for the year of my reign and that will be a challenge for both of us, but we are going to be there to help each other out."

Jill gives a great deal of credit for where she is in her life to her mother. "I have her to thank for where I am. She taught me that if things fall out of place, you don't quit, you just try a different route. You try every option...you remain persistent and ambitious."

Jill continues to serve others and accept challenges each day. Her latest calling is to serve on the search committee to find a replacement for recently-retired

in the Guard she says, "Faith and fear cannot exist at the same time, one must depart." Then she smiles while leaning back into a comfortable posture and boldly states, "The Lord is in control and there is no better person to be in control." **SUU**

In mid-July, Jill was named 2nd runner-up in the Miss Utah pageant (the largest state pageant in the Miss America System) out of 54 contestants. Jill also won the preliminary evening wear competition, and was an audience favorite throughout the week.