

INTRODUCTION

The Inner Bitch

FROM THE VERY START, my life was unconventional. I mean, how else would you describe a childhood spent in the strip clubs that my parents ran in Adelaide, Australia, finding friendship and a sense of normality in the offbeat company of flamboyant drag queens?

The kids at school ridiculed me for being different, and I *was* different—I didn't think like them, I didn't act like them, and being the fat kid, I also didn't look like them. What's more, I actually viewed being different as a positive attribute more than a problem. If I was a round peg and the hole was square, well, then others would need to change the hole to accommodate me, because I sure as hell wasn't going to accommodate them.

Although my life in the clubs was full of fantasy and glamour, it was also punctuated by Dad's alcohol-fueled

mood swings, and was completely turned upside down when he suddenly disappeared and left my family with no money. Watching my mother pick up the pieces and keep us going taught me that in order to survive, you must take responsibility for your own actions and never trust anyone more than you trust yourself. That's why at a really young age I focused on my own passion and pursued a career as a hairdresser. Following the lead of the transvestite performers in my parents' clubs, I wanted to create looks that expressed how people felt inside rather than how others perceived them or wanted them to be. Authenticity is—and always has been—the key to who I am and who I want to include in my life.

Making my way up the industry ladder required plenty of determination and hard work, and by the time I launched my own salon, I knew how to make tough choices that weren't always popular with everyone else. Driven to be the best hairstylist and businesswoman that I could be, I always made it a point to say what I needed to say in order to accomplish what I needed to accomplish. Anyone who has worked with me knows that I don't suffer fools easily and that I won't hesitate to speak my mind. The irony of people's reaction to my candor is that I just say what most people want to say but don't have the balls to say. I tell the *truth*.

If, along the way, I've been called a bitch for being honest, I haven't taken this personally. I developed a thick skin very early

in life. Being raised in strip clubs made me comfortable with who I am and open to the choices that other people make for themselves. So when television viewers who saw me on Bravo's *Shear Genius* or on *Tabatha's Salon Takeover* called me a bitch for my forthright manner, I had to find a way to incorporate this perception into a further understanding of myself. I have always strived to be myself in front of the cameras and to be honest about what I thought of other people. As a result, bloggers made assertions such as "Tabatha's an amazing stylist but a total bitch," or "She's a great hairdresser even though she's really ugly."

I suppose it's easy to call someone ugly and hit below the belt when you can hide behind a computer screen all day, or when anonymously outdoing other bloggers' venomous remarks is your vocation. I bet none of those bloggers would have had the balls to actually spout their nonsense to my face, especially since their chatter was based on nothing. If they could recognize my talent, why did it *matter* how I looked? No matter what I say, I say it to your face. If that makes me a bitch, so be it.

But, what was I supposed to do? Sit at home and wallow in self-pity while eating chocolate bars? Not bloody likely. Having never let anyone else define me before, I wasn't about to start now, and I certainly wasn't going to obsess over the insults of a few self-appointed critics. Instead of giving their bullshit comments any validity, I dusted myself off and decided to take back the word "bitch." Why should a bunch of damned bloggers get

to define me as a bitch? I decided to define myself. So I reclaimed the word “BITCH” as someone who is Brave, Intelligent, Tenacious, Creative, and Honest. And because I am all of these things, I now proudly own the title . . .

Bravery—Mine is derived from being a risk taker, personally and professionally, and from always being willing to face my demons head-on.

Intelligence—I’m no idiot. Despite having left school early to pursue my career, I’m well read, well traveled, street savvy, and I’m a successful businesswoman with a strong gut instinct. What’s more, unlike many women who don’t want to appear intimidating, I never downplay my intelligence. I believe women can be both smart and beautiful.

Tenacity—If I’m really passionate about something, I never give up. I’m like a pit bull with a bone. I have always battled for what I want and what I believe in, and if I have to dig deeper for the energy to keep going, then that’s what I do to achieve my goals.

Creativity—If I didn’t have this quality, I certainly wouldn’t be writing this book! I thoroughly enjoy expressing my creativity in all aspects of life, whether I’m experimenting with a new haircut, sporting a new couture outfit, or adapting to a new challenge. Creativity keeps *me* engaged and makes my life that much more interesting while I am coping with whatever comes my way.

Honesty—I think I’ve already covered that, haven’t I? It is the key trait that makes people perceive a woman as a bitch—it intimidates people and rubs them the wrong way. Although this reaction is often due to sexism, women are more than capable of being intimidated, too. For me, honesty is saying what I think to the people around me, but it’s also about being honest with *myself*. If I can’t do that, then I can’t be honest with *anyone*.

The more I thought about my own positive spin on the term “bitch,” the more I realized that, on some level, everyone would like to be a little braver, or exercise a little more intelligence, or be a little more creative, or tenacious or honest. The truth is, all of us, women *and* men, have an inner bitch. We just have to choose how much of it to let out and when.

As soon as I embraced my own inner bitch, I felt more comfortable with myself. Owning it actually made me feel empowered, and that’s what this book is about: self-empowerment and how it’s all right to be who you are, stand up for what you believe in, and do what makes you happy without being defined by other people.

Cabatha Coffey, 2011