

CARMEN BERMUDEZ BUSINESS & ECONOMICS



Carmen Bermudez

From an early age Carmen Bermúdez has had a determined spirit because of the example her mother set for her, “I’ve always been ambitious because of my mother and watching her set the example that anything was possible was a great inspiration to me.” Carmen was born in Costa Rica; the third youngest of four children. Her mother was a single parent who always aimed for the best for her children. Carmen spent her early years living in the remote jungles of Costa Rica without electricity or running water. Unbelievable to some, but to Carmen it was normal. “I have very good memories of my childhood because even though we lacked food and money we never lacked love.” Eventually Carmen’s mother would come to the realization that she needed to make a better life for her children so she got a sponsorship from her sister living in the United States but could only afford airfare for two. “She took me out of school and brought me to the United States. I just worked very, very hard and I didn’t go to school because we were working every day whenever we could get jobs night and day...finally after a year and a half my mother got enough money to bring my siblings here.”

After her family relocated to the United States, Carmen decided to return to Costa Rica to fulfill a dream of becoming a bullfighter. “I just love it, I don’t know what it is but I just feel like it’s kind of like an injection and you feel all of a sudden that you’re alive and your heart pounds.” Five years of great success and notoriety as a bullfighter in both Mexico and Costa Rica was enough for Carmen so she decided to find a career that would allow her to see the rest of the world. She landed a job with TransWorld Airlines where she spent 18 years working her way up from a flight attendant to an in-flight service manager; a career she truly enjoyed. While on one of her flights Carmen met her husband Thomas J. Feeney who was in the financial industry. “He found me fascinating, I found him very intelligent.”

Carmen was interested in the financial industry and started working with her husband’s company, Marathon Asset Management, where she worked her way up to Chairman and Treasurer. Carmen saw an opportunity to start her own trust company and in 1994 formed Mission Management & Trust in Tucson. The company was the first one of its kind to be owned by a minority woman. Now as CEO, Carmen is one of the highest ranking Latina executives in the American financial industry. Carmen says oddly enough it was bullfighting that prepared her for the boardroom, “If I had not done this I don’t think I would have succeeded in

business because I would have been intimidated by walking in the boardroom with a lot of egotistical men and to me [it] didn’t bother me because after all, I’ve faced an animal bigger than you are, why should I be intimidated...”

Carmen is also a former national-class athlete participating in numerous triathlons. A week before her 50th birthday she competed in the Escape from Alcatraz Biathlon and came in first in the 40 and over age division. When asked about the achievement she jokes, “Well I wore the medal to bed, I was so happy.”

But for Carmen her biggest personal achievement came in 1991 when she got her U.S. citizenship. “I cried, oh gosh, I cried from emotion and I dressed in red white and blue.”

While serving on the board of the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in Washington D.C. she visited the White House several times and also met President George W. Bush. But, the one moment that stands out as the culmination of the American dream was in 2004 when she had the honor of giving the Pledge of Allegiance as an Arizona Delegate at the National Republican Convention. “It was the most magnificent moment of my life.”

Carmen Bermúdez has lived a fascinating life and has already accomplished more than most but she isn’t finished. “I want to continue making a difference if I can for as long as I have health.” And this woman who has succeeded in a male dominated industry has a mission to help women and minorities within the field by remembering where she came from, “when you reach the top, don’t forget to send the elevator back down.”