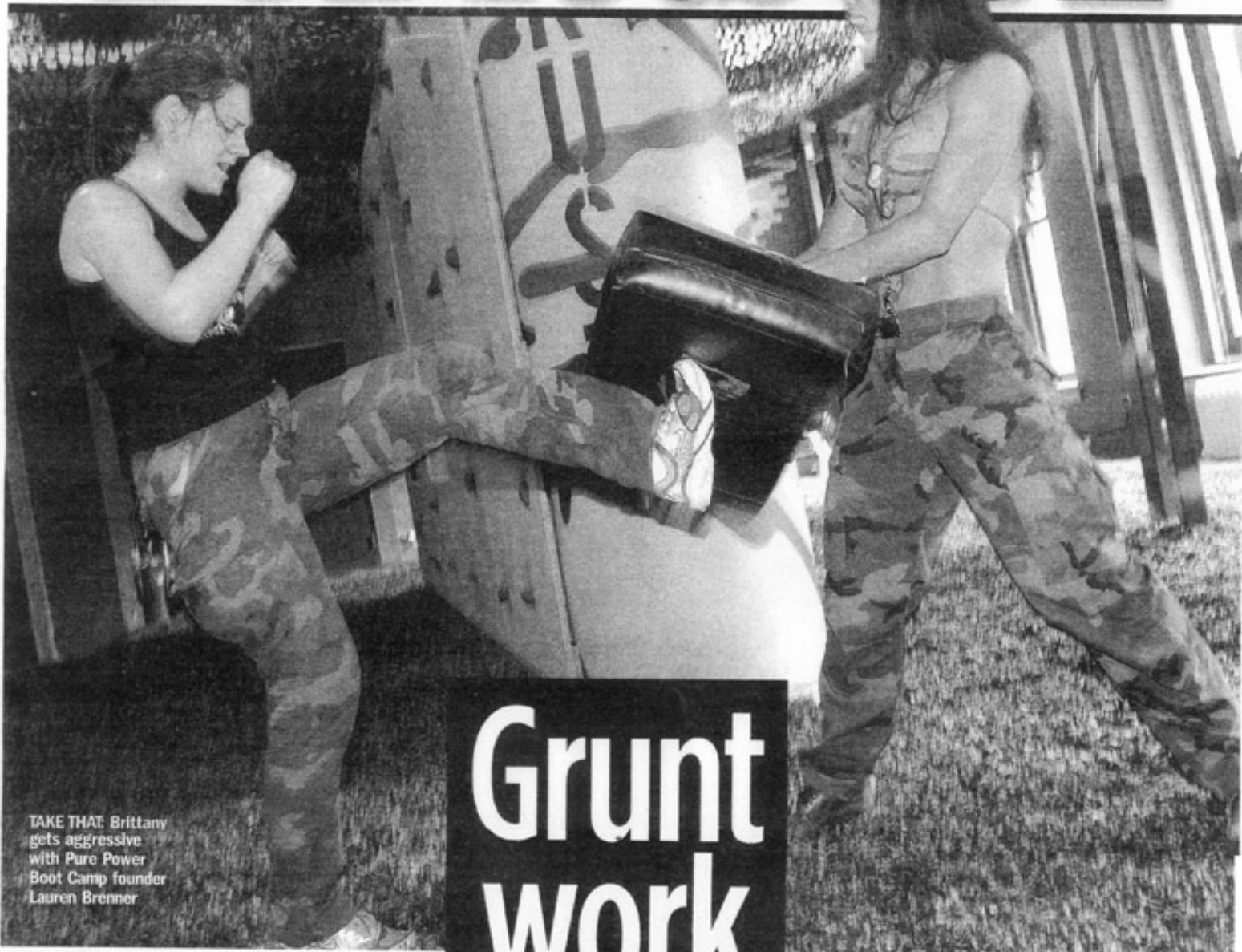


BODY & SOUL



TAKE THAT Brittany gets aggressive with Pure Power Boot Camp founder Lauren Brenner

REBECCA MCALPIN

Grunt work

Two News reporters find out if they've got what it takes at a six-week fitness boot camp

BY BRITTANY SCHAEFFER

As I climbed the rope, the stench, a byproduct of sweat and the residue of last night's margaritas, overwhelmed me. Choking back bile, I frantically tried to hang on as I began to slide down.

"OH HELL NO, SCHAEFFER!" yelled Drill Sergeant Ruben Belliard. "WHAT IN THE HELL ARE WE DOING?"

A hangover is bad enough, but rope burn is downright painful, and it wasn't yet 8 a.m.

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BY BREANNE L. HELDMAN

I have never been a quitter.

Never, that is, until my first day at Pure Power Boot Camp.

I'll admit that in the days before I began this six-week fitness adventure, my nerves were fried. For the past few years, the extent of my physical activity hadn't much exceeded walking to the nearest movie theater, shop or meal (desert included). I was well aware that I was in for a rude awakening — at 7 a.m., no less.

I underestimated the agony.

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New products for the active mother include Baby in the workout

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“I wanted to prove that I was no quitter.”

BREANNE L. HELDMAN

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After the first 10 minutes, we had completed countless synchronized jumping jacks, climbed a dozen flights of stairs and run what seemed to be a gazillion laps around the unairconditioned gym. (I only run when chased!)

A little more than halfway through class, and long since I'd exhausted the oxygen in my lungs, I was running yet another lap when SNAP!

My ankle twisted and down I went onto the rubber recycled shoe mulch.

Was it a blessing or a curse? I couldn't decide.

I hobbled through the rest of the class and iced my foot when I got to the office.

Between the throbbing ankle and groaning muscles in my body, sleeping that night was difficult. I cried and called my mom, hoping she would tell me that I didn't have to do it

and it was okay. She didn't.

But I did: As the night wore on, I convinced myself that for the first time in my life, I was going to quit and it would be all right.

Deep down, it wasn't all right, and, when the alarm went off, I put on my fatigues and headed to boot camp prepared to give Lauren Brenner, the commanding officer and owner of the program, the "news."

HITTING A WALL, THEN THE WALL

My argument was weak and I knew it. I took the day to rest my ankle and returned the next day with gusto — determined to prove to myself (and Lauren) that I was no quitter.

The next few days were difficult and, as I failed repeatedly to complete various tasks — or at least to complete them and remain upright — I still knew I was up to the challenge.

BREANNE L. HELDMAN

My greatest foe, in addition to the sports-induced asthma, was the "Perseverance" wall, the third and tallest of three vertical walls to be climbed without any assistance or equipment.

For the first wall, I could use my arms to hoist myself over. The second, however, required a certain technique that needed to be mastered. I am 4-foot-11 and

my fingers could just barely grip the top of it, and it took at least a week to figure out how to put weight onto my feet and eventually throw my ankle over the top to use the strength in my legs to pull me over.

Such technique would certainly help on the Perseverance wall, which stood just high enough that I had to take a running start to jump and grip the top.

With only two weeks left in the program, my fear gave way to determination, and I climbed the wall as if I had done it a hundred times. The sense of accomplishment was overwhelming, and I couldn't wipe the smile from my face as I charged up yet another dozen flights of stairs.

That momentum continued throughout my final sessions, and the difference in my fitness was monumental. I was dashing up the stairs with a weight vest, and my jeans had loosened, especially in the butt, where I needed it most.

When the last day came, I was equally relieved it was over and proud of myself for overcoming that foreign desire to give up. I celebrated as any sore bag of muscles should — with a trip to Cornelia Day Resort for a refreshing massage.

Every day since, as I forgo the elevator, I have little doubt: Pure Power Boot Camp was worth the experience.

But I don't miss it. ♦

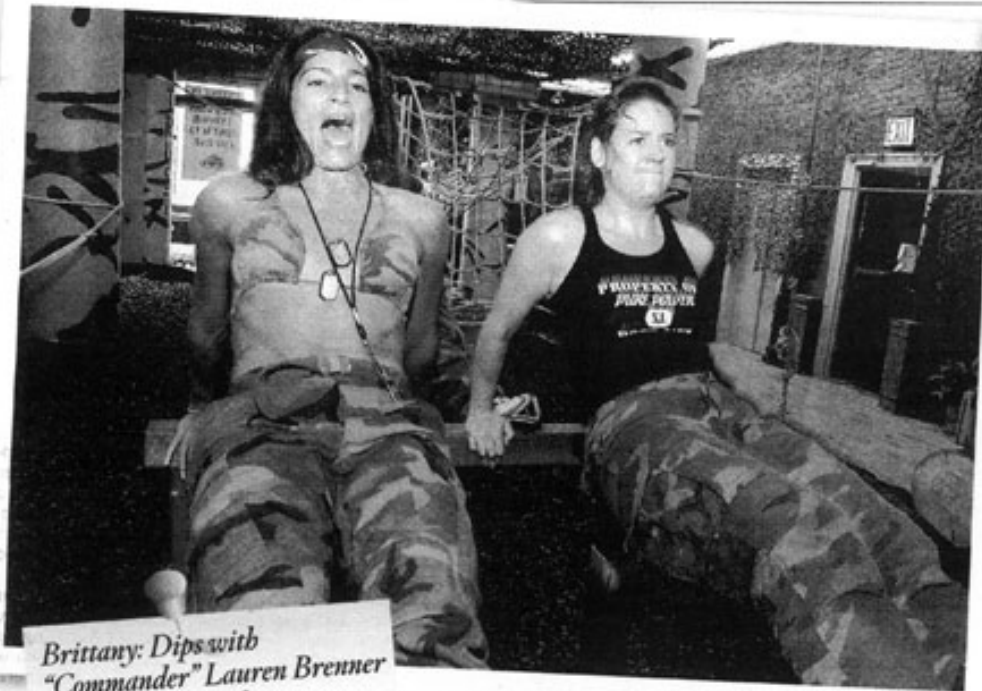


Breanne: Eventually, with some goading from Ken Wong, I was able to climb the 'Intensity' wall as if I'd done it a hundred times.



Brittany: The obstacle course, particularly the burdles, was real torture.

REBECCA MCALPIN



Brittany: Dips with "Commander" Lauren Brenner are definitely not fun.



In group situps, you get to share your neighbor's sweat.

REBECCA MCALPIN

"I needed to get whipped into shape."



BRITTANY SCHAEFFER

CONTINUED FROM COVER

For six weeks, four times a week, one hour a day, I worked out at Pure Power Boot Camp, pursuing a hot body. Modeled after the Army's Fort Knox training center, Pure Power is a military-style fitness program held in a renovated Chelsea loft.

"Recruits" sprint up stairs (up to 10 flights), leap over hurdles, climb walls and lift weights. Camo mesh hangs from the ceiling, and a snarling Army mannequin toting a machine gun greets visitors. And never mind sexy workout wear — everyone wears the same scratchy fatigues, drab olive T-shirts and dog tags. Recruits pay nearly \$900 for six weeks of this, hoping to score a perfect bod.

It doesn't hurt that Pure Power's owner, Lauren Brenner, a former Division One tennis star and Wall Street trader, has abs you could bounce a quarter off. One look at her, and I was sold.

Frankly, I needed to get whipped into shape. Since starting at *The News*, too many slices, peanut M&Ms and hours at my desk had expanded my waistline (and hips and thighs) by a whopping 10 pounds. My co-worker, Breanne Heldman, also joined. Since I'd only recently started skipping workouts — I was running 5 miles per day — I assumed I'd breeze through Brenner's class.

Ha.

SLOW DOWN, AND SUFFER

Ken Wong and Ruben, two marines, were the drill sergeants who led the grueling 7:30 a.m. class. They're the real deal, too: Both recently got back from Iraq.

"TOP OF THE MORNING," Ken shouted ominously at the beginning of every session. There were about 10 recruits per class, and Ken would start by lining us up for a round of jumping jacks, patrolling like a watchdog. Calisthenics came next.

Squat thrusts, "froggies" (springing straight up from a squatting position) and

the especially dreaded "mountain climbers" — an agonizing move I hadn't done since elementary school, and will never, ever do again — are part of the routine. Ken and Ruben pushed us through seemingly endless combinations of these exercises for several 2-minute rounds. A couple of minutes isn't long, but when your muscles are burning, sweat is dripping in your eyes and a mammoth marine is screaming at you, it's an eternity.

And don't even think about stopping. If anyone slows down, the sergeants add an extra 10 reps, minimum. Unfortunately, even on good mornings, my legs would give out, partially because the tourniquet-like fatigues restricted my porky thighs. Each time I let down my platoon — a mix of lean weekend warriors and chubby office-types — I got glares in repayment. Top of the morning, indeed.

But I shone when it came to running stairs, which was typically the next part of the workout. With visions of Prefontaine in my head, I'd sprint ahead of everyone, up the windowless fire stairwell, chuckling at the labored breathing of those in my dust. Brenner told me the second day of class that I was a "real athlete," and I arrogantly took the compliment seriously. A few weeks into the program, after finishing 10 flights, I smugly dared Ruben to slow me down. He handed me a 25-pound weight vest and told me to head back up. I learned to keep my mouth shut.

While the calisthenics and running were tough, the real torture was the obstacle course. At first glance, it looks like a playground, but I couldn't complete it my first time. My second day, my 25-year-old body was screaming in agony. My muscles ached, the rough pants had rubbed my skin raw and my shins were so bloodied from banging the wooden hurdles as I tried to vault them that I couldn't wear a skirt. I started to question whether Pure Power was going to make my body bikini-worthy, or ruin it.

The monkey bars were my personal hell. At first, I could only hang from them. I had tried slacking by skipping the bars entirely. But Ruben inevitably caught me, and I dreaded his scream of, "OH HELL NO, SCHAEFFER!" the way a kid fears a spanking. My punishment for cheating was endless rounds of pull-ups. Four weeks later, a body-conscious friend noted that my arms looked thinner. Comments like hers reminded me that there are worse things than blistered hands and burning pecs — like cellulite — and that I was shaping up.

NET EFFECTS

The cargo net was also a literal pain in my behind. While it's nearly impossible to gracefully shimmy up a giant net, it's even harder to get off with finesse. Once you make it to the top, you grip the bar the net is attached to, and, while hanging on, flip off. During my first few dismounts, my head got tangled in the net, so every time I flipped off, I feared hanging myself. I wasn't eager to die for a cut physique.

So, after all that, did I get a hot body? Sort of. By the time I completed the program, I'd lost only a few pounds, but was noticeably leaner, especially in my hips and thighs. Yet for all the pain I'd endured — waking up at 6 a.m., muscle strains and hungover workouts — I'd hoped to have Gisele's body. Unrealistic, sure. But perhaps I would have come closer if I'd cut out the cocktails and takeout. Brian Paquette, one of Brenner's star recruits, lost 30 pounds since last fall, and others have shed weight too.

My last day of class, Brenner challenged me to tackle the obstacle course, timed. I went for it, thinking I'd whiz through (did I learn anything?). While I still labored over

the large climbing wall, and whacked my shins on the hurdles, it was easier. I was a lot stronger. It took me 11 minutes, a damn good time, according to Brenner.

Call me masochistic, but now I actually miss Pure Power — minus the bristly marines, fatigues and muscle pain. But the post-workout afterglow — and my toned abs — made it worth it. And rope burn or not, I can drink to that. ♦



Brittany: I went for the burn, but unfortunately, it was a rope burn.

REBECCA MCALPIN