

By Rebekah Montgomery

Thelma Wells, leading inspirational speaker and author, uses her success in overcoming challenges in her past to encourage others to fight the battles of life.

WHEN ONE THINKS of a strong-willed warrior, images of a warm, Southern grandmother with a megawatt smile and wearing a bumblebee brooch aren't the first that come to mind. Until one has met Thelma Wells, that is.

"The bumblebee is able to do what God designed it to do in spite of its scientific limitations," says Thelma. "The body of a bumblebee is too big, its wingspan too narrow for it to be able to fly. It defies the laws of aeronautical science but adheres to the law of God."

Thelma Wells does indeed fly. Known to many as "Mama T," she is an author, professor, and sought-after speaker. She

was one of the original "Porch Pals" of the well-known Christian women's organization, Women of Faith, and speaks regularly at conferences around the country.

Thelma's books, including *God Is Not Through With Me Yet: Holding on to the One Who Holds You Close*; *The Buzz: 7 Scriptures to Energize Your Life*; *Listen Up, Honey: Good News for Your Soul*; *What These Girls Knew: How Girls Back Then Talk to Us Today*, reflect her warm, conversational tone and desire to influence other women toward faith and godliness.



Great-grandmother fell in love with Baby Girl. She was cherished and tenderly nursed back to health. From her great-grandparents, the little girl gained.

Her new book, *Don't Give In—God Wants You to Win* (released March 2009, Harvest House Publishers), reflects Thelma's strong faith and resolute attitude that took her from a frightened, abused child to a woman who now soars above the troubles in her past.

The book, based on Ephesians 6:10–18, tells how to fight the good fight of faith, God's way. Thelma outlines God's strategies for winning everyday battles people face—health difficulties, depression, anger, unforgiveness, abuse, addictions, broken marriages, and wayward children, among others.

"Every single battle fought on a daily basis is already won by God," says Thelma, and she wants the reader to realize it.

Fighting daily battles to overcome the enemy is a subject Thelma knows firsthand. She also knows the enemy's attacks sometimes come from the very people we are supposed to be able to trust the most.

CRIPPLING SECRETS

Mother Dot, Thelma's grandmother, was a church-going deaconess in public and a vicious, mean-spirited woman in private. She focused her inner bitterness and rage on her own daughter, Dorothy Nell, and later, Dorothy Nell's daughter, Thelma.

"She may have been in the pew every Sunday, but her life had no salt and no light," states Thelma.

soaring to

VICTORY

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Some of the hatred may have stemmed from skin color issues—Mother Dot was “high yellow” (lighter skinned) while Dorothy Nell and Thelma were darker skinned. Thelma remains unsure whether her grandmother was embarrassed, superstitious, or blamed herself, but the blind hatred was ever-present.

Early on, Mother Dot singled out Thelma’s mother for special abuse, not only because she was dark-skinned, but

also because Dorothy Nell was born paralyzed on the right side, probably from a stroke at birth. Mother Dot would beat her as she tried to straighten out her twisted right side. Then, when as an unwed teenager Dorothy Nell gave birth to “Baby Girl,” Mother Dot threw them both out.

When Baby Girl was two years old, she and Dorothy Nell both became very ill. Mother Dot refused to help either

her daughter or granddaughter. But, says Thelma, her refusal to take them in was a “Holy Ghost setup.” Thelma’s great-grandparents opened their home to mother and baby.

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SINGING IN THE DARK

“Jesus loves me, this I know...”

On those occasions when she went back to visit Mother Dot, Thelma was locked in a front bedroom closet for the duration. Being locked in the dark might have paralyzed another child with terror, but because of her great-grandparents’ godly mentorship, Thelma sang praises to Jesus instead. Before Thelma’s grandfather returned from work, Mother Dot retrieved Thelma from the closet, cleaned her up, and pretended everything was fine.

Unbeknownst to Mother Dot, Thelma learned a powerful lesson in the closet that shaped her future: She was not alone. This reality had the power to transform a frightened child into a volitional warrior for truth and became Thelma’s motto for life.

To explain it, Thelma uses a coded acronym: “Jesus is with you in dark places. This I know. And in Christ, regardless of your circumstances, you can BEE the best. By God’s help we can: Be aware of who we are; Eliminate the negatives; strive for Eternal value; have overwhelming Success. B+E+E=Success!”

Because of her trust in Jesus, abandonment, rejection, prejudice, and abuse did not prove to be crippling. Donning the armor of the Lord and carrying the Word of God in her heart, Thelma went out to meet the world.

CONTINUING THE FIGHT

Upon graduation from high school, Thelma decided to attend North Texas State University (now the University of North Texas) in Denton, Texas, rather than one of the “Negro colleges.” Again, she ran headlong into some of the same hatred and prejudice she had experienced at the hands of Mother Dot. This time, however, she chose to confront the prejudice and didn’t allow it to put her in a closet and isolate her.

As Thelma recalls it, her shorthand professor was an outstanding teacher. However, the professor steadfastly refused to allow Thelma to answer any questions in class. Thelma waited at the professor’s office for the better part of the day to ask her why she wouldn’t acknowledge her in class. The professor was blunt: “I’ve never taught a Negress, and I’m not going to start now.”

Thelma’s response was equally as blunt: “You’re the best teacher I’ve ever had, and you can’t stop me from learning from you.” She promptly signed up for the professor’s next-semester classes.

“I’m a risk taker, and I’ll go out on a limb for what I believe is right,” says Thelma. “I’ve taken a few knocks in life, but I use them to empower others. I’m a faith-driven, Word-driven soldier for good.”

Thelma eventually earned her bachelor’s degree from NTSU and went on to receive a master’s of ministry degree from Master’s International School of Divinity, Evansville, Indiana. In 2002, she became the first black female professor there.



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Women of Faith, says, “I used to wonder how Thelma always has the right Scripture verse to share at the right moment. Then I realized she’s never without her Bible. She’s always taking in biblical truths, so she always has them to give.”

Thelma currently gives teaching webcasts and is the host of both the Faith and Encouragement channel on WebTV4Women.com and Bee the Best with Thelma and Friends, broadcast on the GospelonDemand.com. She is launching “Ready to Win” conferences, teaching from Ephesians 6, on a family cruise beginning in June 2009.

Her latest venture is “You Go Girl!” which can be found on her personal Website. You Go Girl! is a network of 150–200 women, with more joining regularly, who are there both to be mentored by Thelma and to encourage each other. Some of the self-named groups within the network include, “Ready-to-Win Women,” “Worthy Workers,” and “Outrageous Overcomers.” Thelma answers their questions and gives them Scripture-based wisdom.

“My opinion doesn’t count, but the Word of God does,” she says.

A key component of the You Go Girl! network is prayer, and Thelma spends much of her time praying for each woman who crosses her path. Her goal is to spiritually hold each woman’s hand during whatever situation she is going through. Her love and heart for the women in her circle of influence are evident to all.

Thelma sums up her ministry thusly, “My goal is to travel globally, extracting diamonds out of people’s dust!”

The epitome of the Titus 2 woman, this willing warrior encourages, inspires, informs, and empowers people to BEE their best in Jesus Christ.

Thelma can be found online at www.thelmawells.com.

PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL

Mentoring women, particularly those in ministry, is what Thelma believes is her commission from God. She began with 100 women, taking them through a nine-month series based on Titus 2: 3-5, “Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live . . . Then they can train the younger women. . . .”

In 1996, Thelma’s speaking and storytelling ability propelled her to the platform of the Women of Faith tour. Her message to women to, “sing in the closets of their lives” affects anyone dealing with hardship and encourages them to fight the battles of life with God’s Word.

In an article, “The Power of Mentoring,” Sheila Walsh, her co-speaker at