



PROJECT KILIMANJARO: THE CLIMBERS

Deb Sanders, Supervisory Special Agent, FBI

Deb Sanders is 56 years old and a native of Salem, New Hampshire. A graduate of Bowdoin College, Deb applied to join the FBI after college, was advised to get other work experience, and reapplied in 1982. She was sworn in early in 1983, as one of the few female special agents at the time. (The first female special agents were admitted in 1972; today, 19% of that group is female).

During her career, Deb has been stationed in Boston, Tampa, New York City, Honolulu and Houston. Her cases have included bank robberies, fugitives, foreign counterintelligence, terrorism surveillance and technical operations. She is a firearms instructor and emergency vehicle operations instructor. Deb was called back to New York after September 11th to work with the NYC technical squad in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks. The recipient of many awards throughout her career, Deb recently received a Combat Theater Award for service in Iraq from March-July 2008.

Even though her job as an FBI agent has demanded that she be in good health, Deb reports that upon seeing photos of herself with friends a few years ago, she didn't recognize her shape! It was time to get serious, and she renewed her commitment to working out and eating healthfully.

The FBI's law enforcement side, where Deb has worked for the past 28 years, has a mandatory retirement age of 57; so, in January 2011, Deb will retire. She describes the upcoming experience as "bittersweet." She's had an exciting, unusual career, but she wonders, at 56, what she will do next. The choices are both "wide-open" and "daunting," depending on how she thinks about it. "I know there will be tears and sadness," she says, "but it's time to leave the FBI."

Deb credits her competitive nature and goal-oriented personality to the success she's had both professionally and personally. And she cites friend Becky Pope as motivation for climbing Kilimanjaro. "Becky's been through chemo TWICE, recently, and if she can train to do this, then so can I. She is a rock, and I want to be there with her at the top to celebrate her triumph over ovarian cancer."

Deb looks forward to the adventure and celebrating with a group of inspiring women at the top of the mountain. "Who knows?" she says. "Climbing Kilimanjaro could be the reinvention of FBI Agent Deb Sanders into her new career as . . . a personal trainer and fitness coach!"

