

# What A Betty

A local award named after her and a ranch in the area, Tony-Award winner Betty Buckley never gave back the title of Miss Fort Worth.

**You'd have to forgive her if she seemed the slightest bit nervous.** I'm talking with Betty Buckley, and two days later she'll be reunited with her kids for the first time in decades.

No, she's not an absentee-mother — unless you can be cancelled from your household.

The *Eight is Enough* reunion is about to happen on the *Today Show* and Buckley, to her credit, doesn't try to distance herself from her stepmother role on the classic 70s show. But it would only be fair to credit all the other things she's been. A Tony Award-winning actress, a Grammy and Emmy nominee, an inspiration to Fort Worth entertainer hopefuls.

Still, once she was just another child dreaming in Fort Worth of her chance to shine in the spotlight. It didn't hurt that she had been named Miss Fort Worth as a teen and subsequently got to sing at the Miss America Pageant. But her real dream, if she can confide, was to ride in the barrel races.

"I loved horses before anything else," she admits, longing to get back to her four-legged friends at her ranch near Fort Worth after months on the road.

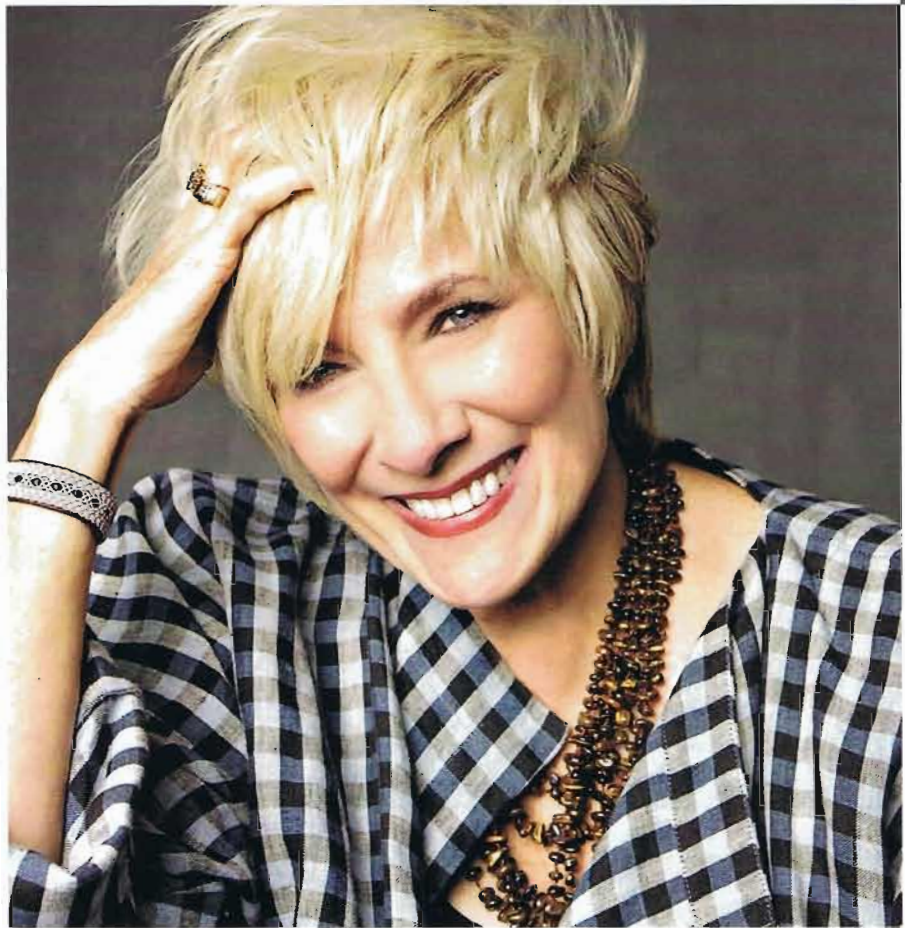
She begged her military father for one and he finally, albeit reluctantly, acquiesced when she was 10. Not to say he was a pushover, characterized by Buckley as strict and not particularly approving of her career choice. But he still gave her that horse and, anyway, her mother provided her positive reinforcement. A dance teacher herself, Buckley proudly says everyone in Fort Worth knows Mama Betty Bob.

And the annual Betty Lynn Buckley Awards at Casa Mañana Children's Playhouse says folks won't soon forget her daughter either. Though she admits her involvement in the playhouse isn't what it once was, she's thrilled to have the awards named after her.

"It's like a Tony Award for kids," she says. "To see the pride they take in it, it makes me feel good." Especially when she thinks back to her own Fort Worth learning experience from dance teachers Ed Holliman and Larry Howard, who both worked with Bob Fosse.

"They showed me so much and were also very patient with me," she recalls.

When Buckley's entertainment engagements finally end, the first stop, she says, will be her favorite Fort Worth restaurant, Joe T. Garcia's, chomping on the vegetarian Mexican dinner. You also might find her at



Eddie V's on 7th or taking in an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art.

And you may even spot her at the local National Cowgirl Hall of Fame, trying to lobby for her own induction, a not-so-secret dream of hers. "I'm giving them fringe rhinestones to try and win 'em over," she laughs.

But for those who are interested in her personal life, she does have someone close waiting at home, someone she gushingly admits to calling "honey bear." Does it make it less juicy that it's a horse? "2012 Futurity Champion, the cutting horse champion!" she declares. "I've already got that title in my mind."

For Buckley, her own title hunt may not necessarily be over either, an Oscar nomination practically the only entertainment nod that's eluded her, it may not forever.

Appearing in film classics such as Brian DePalma's *Carrie* and Bruce Beresford's *Tender Mercies*, she's recently been seen in M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening* and continues to garner top casting consideration.

Still, no matter where the set takes her, big cities are no longer her home — even New York, where she lived from the age of 21 until 9/11.

"I needed nature again in my life after that," she says. "I forgot about how much I loved having space with animals, how much I love Fort Worth."

You could also see the love she had for her TV family, sitting beside actor Dick Van Patten on the *Today* set just days later, the very definition of a work husband since they played a married couple for years. But she admitted to me to be most excited about seeing her once young cast.

"I can't believe I still call them kids!" she says. "They're in their 40s now." Then she laughs for a moment. "Well," she assesses, "I guess we all got older!" **fw**