

SAS Who Dares Wins Jungle Hell contestant Faye Banks: 'I was just fighting for survival'

By **gemmacockrell**



Faye Banks studied as an engineer | Credit: Channel 4 / Pete Dadds

SAS: Who Dares Wins Jungle Hell contestant Faye Banks talks to Gemma Cockrell about her experience on the show, how running marathons helps her to manage her emotions, and the resilience she has built up from her childhood experiences.

Faye Banks, 43, left her job as a director of operations at an international electronics firm in Nottingham behind for two weeks when she ventured to Vietnam to take part in *SAS: Who Dares Wins Jungle Hell*.

The show puts contestants through training that replicates the UK Special Forces selection course, something that Banks always dreamed of completing when she was growing up in Leeds.

"All I wanted to do as a teenager was the military. But there weren't many options open to me. Women couldn't get into the infantry when I left school.

"I've always been a great fan of the show, and I wanted to apply because no matter what barriers people face, it gives them the confidence to never give up," she says.

She is currently working towards her pilot's license at Sherburn Aero Club, so you may assume that heights would be the least of her worries. But the show revealed some unexpected fears that she had to face.

"The show made me realise that I did actually have a fear of heights. Being in a plane is very different to walking on two scaffolding poles 70 feet high!"

For many, the process is just as difficult mentally as it is physically. Banks found herself to be one of the weaker contestants, which proved to be her greatest challenge.

"I was one of the lighter contestants, so I really did have to push through. The physical challenges were definitely harder for me than the mental ones."

She credits the directing staff for instilling confidence in her, motivated by her determination to prove herself after hardships she faced during childhood.

She was born to a Romanian mother who struggled to learn English due to learning difficulties. Her father passed away when she was only two years old.

"My mother was quite vulnerable. When I was nine years old, there was a serious incident where I witnessed her being physically abused. I rang the police, and we were taken into emergency foster care."

This wasn't a smooth transition, and in the following two years she was moved between 50 different emergency placements, denying her of any stability.

"When I started high school, I was just fighting for survival, as opposed to focusing on education. It was a dark time for me. It really was just about fighting for survival."

Leaving school was a turning point for Banks, which saw her working in a meat factory while re-sitting her GCSEs. She got nine A grades, the highest you could achieve at the time.

With a helping hand from the engineering manager in the factory, she was successful when applying for an advanced apprenticeship in electrical engineering.

Following this, she joined a distance learning programme at the Open University, achieving a BSc in engineering, an MBA, and two MSc qualifications in technology management and engineering.

During that time, she won the UK Young Woman Engineer of The Year, received a nomination in the Financial Times' top 50 female engineers, and won a Higher National Gold Award.

Most recently, she became a visiting professor at both the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Open University.

"That's something that I'm really proud of. It's a way for me to give back to the energy sector, and also future engineering students," she says.

She continues to further her education by studying for a PhD on digitalisation. "I love learning. It's something I'm passionate about, and I'll continue to do it throughout the rest of my life."

Alongside this, Banks has represented England in marathons on 20 occasions. Running was a passion that she discovered during her youth when she joined her local club.

"It helped me manage my emotions. It's part of my DNA now. It's really helped me when I've been going through bad times, to keep me on a good track."

In 2023, she will be training for two marathons, while continuing with her studies. She also plans to use her role as a STEM ambassador to share her journey on *SAS: Who Dares Wins* with fellow engineers.

"It taught me to adapt when we fail because that's character building. We don't like it when we struggle, but perseverance, dedication, and commitment will help you build resilience, which is fundamental in life," she says.

"Life is about doing the things that you enjoy. Time is precious, and I'm making up for lost time as a child. I just want to get my story out there."

***SAS: Who Dares Wins* airs on Mondays at 9pm on Channel 4**