

Maria Grace Gomes, RN, BSN, MPH
Federal Women's Program: Celebrating Women of Character, Courage, and Commitment

Born in Madeira Islands, Portugal in 1962, Grace Gomes has lived the life of someone seeking the American Dream—and finding it!

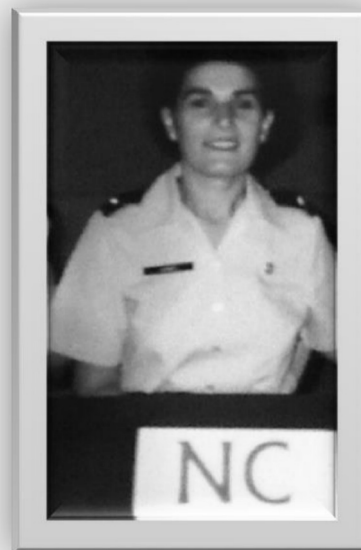
The fifth of eight children, Grace arrived in the United States at age 16, eager to try out her high school English. Her father and one of her brothers were already there, and Grace couldn't wait to join them with the rest of her family. What a shock it was when she landed at Kennedy Airport and found that she could not understand a word. But that didn't reduce the thrill of riding across the George Washington Bridge in the dark of night, marveling at its exquisite jeweled suspender arching overhead. "In America," she thought in her native Portuguese, "Everything is big and beautiful."

The next morning, she discovered that "big and beautiful" did not happen right away. She awoke on the third floor of an ugly, bedraggled walk-up in a rundown neighborhood of Newark, New Jersey. There was a cramped kitchen with a hot-water heater right in the middle. The tiny bathroom contained a cracked mirror and a bare-bones shower, toilet, and sink. Next to the kitchen were her parents' narrow bedroom, a room shared by two of her brothers, and the closet-sized space that Grace shared with three sisters. To get to her room, she had to walk through all of the adjacent rooms.

She felt nostalgic for the image of America that she'd carried in her imagination, so different from her new reality. But there was no time to waste. She had to get her education! Her first year in high school, she and two siblings were placed in ESL classes for Spanish speakers, so she had to learn Spanish before English. No matter what, she worked as hard as she could, never missed a single day of school, and graduated in the top third of her class.

There was never any doubt about Grace's professional calling. Ever since her childhood in Portugal, she longed to become a nurse. After earning her associate's degree in Nursing, she worked for ten years in the Clinical Nurse Cardiothoracic Intensive Care Unit of Newark Beth Israel Medical Center.

During that time, she received many Air Force recruitment letters and saved all of them. She wanted to join and knew she needed a bachelor's degree, so she went back to school and earned it. During her last semester, Air Force



recruiters came to campus and things happened fast. She signed up, was taken on a tour of Andrews Air Force Base, and embarked on her journey to a glorious career.

Grace says, "Being part of the USAF was one of the greatest experiences of my life. We were treated as a family—a military family. We could disagree like any other family, but when it came time to stick together, we did, just like a family. Our cohesiveness was hard to describe, unless you've had that experience. The Air Force treats every member extremely well, but is also very strict when necessary, just like a good parent. I have no regrets. I am blessed that I had this experience. If I had to do it all over again, without any doubt, I would. I would do it all over again."

Education

Maria Grace Gomes, RN, BSN, MPH
CDR, U. S. Public Health Services
Health Services Administrator
FCI/FDC Tallahassee

ADN, Essex County Community
College, Newark, NJ, May 1985

BSN, New Jersey City University,
Jersey City, NJ, August 1999

MPH, American Military University,
West Virginia, May 2005

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Military Service

Branch	United States Air Force
Years of Service	Military Service: U.S. Air Force: 6 years and 6 months PHS Commissioned Corps: 7 years and 10 months
Rank	1999: Commissioned into USAF as First LT (02) 2000: Promoted to Captain (03) 2006: Transferred to U. S. Public Health Services (USPHS) 2007: Promoted to Lieutenant Commander (04) 2012: Promoted to Commander (05), current rank



Duty Station / Jobs

- 1999-2003 Clinical Nurse, Emergency Medicine
Wilford Hall Medical Center
Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas
- 2003-2006 Clinical Nurse, Critical Care
Air Force, Eglin AFB, northwestern Florida
- 2006-2009 Clinical Supervisory Nurse
Indian Health Services (IHS), Peach Springs, Arizona
- 2009-2012 Assistant Health Services Administrator
Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP)
Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) Texarkana,
Texarkana, Texas
- 2012 to the present Health Services Administrator
Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP)
FCI Tallahassee, Tallahassee, Florida

Uniformed Service Decorations and Awards

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| 1999 | AF | Air Force Training Ribbon |
| 2001 | AF | Air Force Outstanding Unit Award |
| 2002 | AF | Global War on Terrorism Service Medal |
| 2002 | AF | National Defense Service Medal |
| 2003 | AF | USAF Commendation Medal |
| 2006 | PHS | Isolation Hardship Award |
| 2006 | PHS | Commissioned Corps Training Ribbon |
| 2008 | PHS | Achievement Medal |
| 2008 | PHS | Hazardous Duty Award |
| 2009 | PHS | Hazardous Duty Award |
| 2010 | PHS | Special Assignment Award |
| 2010 | PHS | Regular Corps Ribbon |
| 2012 | PHS | Achievement Medal |

