

Guardsmen cheers, reads, pours and rides

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The yelling gets loud, so she flips a lot on Sundays. Girls from East Aurora, N.Y., say she's bionic. But pumping iron is the only way she can relax and put everything out of her mind.

The Buffalo Jills boost crowd adrenaline and are the 12th man instigators for the Buffalo Bills football team. **Marisa Palermo** is a cheerleader, dancer and tumbler with the Jills and is also a senior airman with the security forces squadron of the 107th Air Refueling Wing here. She's also a full-time student, a self-professed "gym junkie," works as a bartender, tools around on a Harley — a Sportster 1200, of course — and spends a lot of time being a "cool sister" (her favorite pastime).

The Sportster is Palermo's first bike. There aren't many bikes with more power and size, "but if I'm going to do something, I'm going to do it the right way," she said.

Head-on is Palermo's lifestyle. She's driven beyond common sense — her

mother calls her "crazy." In Palermo's world, activities that many people see as work are leisure for her.

"I don't really get 'time off,' so when I'm doing my homework, it's a nice break," she said. "I love going to the gym, too. It's pure enjoyment, my passion, my relaxation time."

Friday nights are recreation times. Palermo tends bar, which she's done since she was 18, because it gives her a chance to have some fun. It seems her only enemy is the constant movement of time, so when FOX Television selected her for a feature for their NFL pregame show, it meant more commitments had to be plugged into an already plugged-up schedule.

Most of Palermo's days start around 5:30 a.m. and end about 10 p.m. Homework is always on the "list" because much of her time and energy is spent working toward a master's degree in forensic chemistry. She's a certified phlebotomist, and hopes to attend the 12-week FBI forensics course at Quantico, Va., after she graduates.

This inner strength and quest to search out as much of life as possible seems to have played a part in her decision to join the Air National Guard.

"I really wanted to do something that matters," she said.

Service to her country has moved to the forefront of Palermo's accomplishments. "This is one of the best things I've ever done," she said. "The Jills is something I really love to do, but being in the Guard is something that I'm really proud of."

There's only one thing Palermo might be more proud of: being a big sister.

"My brother is a great 13-year-old man. I'd be very lonely without him," she said. "It's the one thing that I let myself get a big head about. Getting to be the 'cool

sister' is more exciting to me than anything else."

Palermo has no intention of slowing down — there's too much to do, and she's having too much fun doing it. The final destination is still unclear, but that doesn't seem to matter either. "Right now I just want to graduate. I don't have too much insight into the future, but I hope to be successful at whatever I do," she said.

— Tech. Sgt. Paul Dean
107th Air Refueling Wing Public Affairs

photos by Tech. Sgt. Paul Dean



"She's like a magnet," said Jen Chodora, a line captain for the Buffalo Jills, of Marisa Palermo. Palermo is the only tumbler on the squad and is a crowd favorite. She has spent 18 of her 25 years as a dancer.



Marisa Palermo's father felt uneasy about her joining the Air National Guard, especially when she volunteered to support Operation Enduring Freedom — spending several months away from home. "He's really proud of me now, though," Palermo said.