My right breast is slightly larger than my left. Not freak show bigger, I mean Barnum and Bailey won’t be knocking on my door and dragging me off to some glass case, hidden by velvet curtains, waiting to be introduced as the newest freak. And to the average person this physical imperfection is not viewed as a serious problem. However to the trained eye of a seasoned pageant judge it’s worth at least a one point deduction. To the public, when they see a beauty contestant on television she is perfectly put together, no flaws and a wonder of nature. They see skin of porcelain, hair thick and lustrous, and bodies that look like they were chiseled from fine Italian marble. What they must understand is that “Beauty Queens” are not naturally born. When a baby girl comes into this world bloated, red faced and covered in slime, you don’t automatically say, “She will be Miss America 2020!” There is a systematic way of achieving pageant victory that involves precise and dedicated pain.

I was never really aware of the pageant world until I turned fifteen and a girlfriend of mine convinced me to compete in a pageant that was offering college scholarship money. Knowing I needed money for college and aware it was right around the corner, I reluctantly and skeptically agreed and began building my pageant career.

Construction

*Always remember that true beauty comes from within—from within bottles, jars, compacts, and tubes.* —Peters Almanac

Before I became a beauty queen I surged through life as a pageant contestant. I prepared for each pageant in a self inflicting, masochistic routine that was done without hesitation or questioning of methods. I call this the construction phase. It usually starts months in advance with the shaping of the body. Going to the gym, living my life by digital numbers on the stainless steel scale lying on the bathroom floor, starving myself, and popping Ephedrine like M&M’s. After months of killing myself to achieve bodily perfection
the routine began simply and usually about two to three hours before “game
time.”

When entering a dressing room at a pageant the scene is always the
same. Rows of individual vanities and mirrors framed with round bulbs re-
sembling classic Hollywood lighting. Each girl sits in their director style chair
carefully and systematically applying make-up that most diva drag queens
would find appalling. By the time I’m done, the texture of the make-up on my
face is that of thick mud putted into smooth silk. My hair is perfectly quaffed,
not a hair out of place, frozen with cans of extra hold Aqua Net.

After hair and make up, I next apply Preparation H and Vaseline. The
hemorrhoid cream is applied to the bags under my eyes to reduce puffiness;
the Vaseline is applied to the teeth to help me smile bigger while on stage.
The application of Preparation H could be eliminated if I chose to sleep the
night before the pageant instead of staying up until 2:00 a.m. partying with the
judges in the hotel bar (wink, wink).

I continue with the routine by doing the ceremonial taping of the
breasts. Cleavage is highly important in the pageant industry and if you don’t
have it to flaunt, one must create it to flaunt. I personally have never had this
problem, however many contestants believe silver duct tape works great for
this purpose. The trick is to do it with two strips, ripping them long enough
to go from the left side of the left breast to the right side of the right breast.
Unfortunately, this is a two person job, and a mom, sister, aunt, best friend
or gay assistant should be in the dressing room to help tape while you squish
your two “girls” together.

To prepare for the swimsuit category I not only duct tape, but also
super glue. Swimsuits have a nasty habit of riding up the butt cheeks as I strut
down the cat walk. Since the look of having one or both cheeks poking out
from under the fabric of a swimsuit, and jiggling like Grandma’s Sunday Jell-O
is by no means attractive, I glue the bottom of the suit to the bottom of my
ass.

Dressing for formal wear can only be compared to stuffing five pounds
of sausage into a casing that only holds three pounds. To be able to accom-
plish this feat I strap on a number of apparatuses that completely reform my
body. I start with the “Wonder Bra” a size too small, creating mountains from
mole hills and couple it with control top panty hose and a girdle that hugs my
hips and flattens my tummy. Did I also mention this same girdle cuts off any and all oxygen trying to make it to the brain, sometimes rendering me unable to speak eloquently and intelligently? Other contestants have this same problem and that is why sometimes you will often hear “world peace” being used as a stock answer.

The final touch of this routine is footwear. A cute, little pump or small heel will not do. Since nobody likes a short contestant and definitely not a miniature queen, I must rise up to a new height of beauty. Most contestants will wear at least a three inch heel, but the majority, including myself, jack themselves up with a four inch. I’ve even seen a five foot Asian girl wear a five inch heel. When she went out on stage I thought she would wobble and fall with the grace of a falling tree, but she walked in those shoes like she was born with them on her feet.

Deconstruction

I’d be a butterfly; living a rover, dying when fair things are fading away. —Thomas Haynes Bayly

I’m sure your asking yourself, “How do I remove all this crap?” Well, sadly there are few ways, all unbelievably painful. Remember when your mother gave you advice when you were a child on how to get a band aid off? “Rip it off quick to avoid the pain!” Well I can’t use that same advice with duct taped breasts; otherwise I’ll end up with my nipples still attached to the tape. I can’t take it off slowly, either; this will cause me to see stars and grind the enamel on my teeth into a fine powder. There is a median combining the pain of both theories. The tape must be pulled fast, but in small two inch sections, avoiding the nipple area, where it must be peeled back slowly, until all the tape is safely off and I am left with breasts the same color as two large and luscious Red Delicious apples.

Removing the superglue is just as daunting of a task as removing the duct tape. I could pull the swimsuit away from my butt cheeks slowly but it will rip just as the duct tape would. Instead I use nail polish remover with acetone and a Q-Tip. Slowly I pull the suit away from the skin and brush the Q-Tip along the superglue until it would dissolve enough to pull the suit all the way off. As you could imagine, acetone and the human skin are not a good
combination. After all the superglue has been dissolved the skin is left dry and raw, feeling and looking like sulfuric acid has been poured on it.

The Ugly Side

*Beauty is only skin deep, and the world is full of thin skinned people.* —Richard Armour

What could be uglier than duct tape breasts, super glued butt cheeks and stuffed sausage gowns? The contestants themselves and what they will do for a crown, sparkling with diamonds as fake as their personalities and breasts. Girls were scandalous and their behavior induced by the promise of fame and money made things worse. To understand the ugly side of pageants the public should know that southern pageant girls and west coast or northern pageant girls are polar opposites. Southern girls do everything bigger. Bigger hair, louder make-up, more extravagant wardrobes, larger entourages and the worst cut-throating you will ever see. Sometimes I felt like it was bred into them since birth by their mothers. Fresh out of the womb they slap a cowboy hat on them, a miniature pair of rhinestone acrylic shoes and tell them, “You do whatever it takes to win young lady.” I’m sure everyone’s heard about the Texas cheerleading mom who hired a hit man to kill the rival of her daughter so she could make the squad. Pageant moms make that mom look like June Cleaver.

Rooming with another girl at a pageant in Texas, the heart of the pageant world, I received a front row seat to just how unethical a girl can get when given the opportunity. My roommate, Miss Oregon, and I decided to use our lunch break between rehearsals to grab a salad in the hotel café. Usually leaving your wardrobe backstage is a bad idea; however, we were assured that it would be watched by a pageant official, and be perfectly safe. When we returned backstage we were asked to dress in our eveningwear to resume rehearsals for the opening number. Miss Oregon was given a good, old fashioned southern reality check and was horrified to find her $3,000 “Claire” gown in black velvet shreds; a razor blade had obviously been taken to it. These gowns are usually seen on the red carpet at major Hollywood events. The designer and their couture is so difficult to obtain that you have to first find a major buyer willing to get you into the boutique in which you have to then fly to in Los Angeles. A feat in many years of pageants that I was unable
to achieve, but somehow Miss Oregon’s mother had connections.

Another heinous act was committed when I was competing in a pageant in Florida, another southern pageant state (are you seeing the pattern?). The girl who became the victim was not my roommate this time; if she was, maybe her talent tape would still be in one piece to this day. Her roommate decided that the talent portion of the pageant was going to come down to them, so in a last ditch effort for the better score, she took the heel of her five inch stilettos and smashed the talent tape to pieces. The tape containing the Karaoke version of “Dreamgirls” was completely destroyed. This deviant act was never witnessed because the contestant did it while her roommate was out of the room.

She continued to deny the accusations and instead blamed it on another contestant who she said bribed a maid to get into the hotel room. We knew this was a lie but were unable to prove it. She not only got away with it but won the talent portion of the pageant, due to the other girl not being smart enough to pack a back up tape and having to withdraw from the pageant. So why were these two girls targeted? They were a threat. If you have a strong talent, great body, incredible face or knockout wardrobe, you walk around looking over your shoulder with a bull’s-eye tattooed to your ass.

My Nemesis

*Observe your enemies, for they first find out your faults.* —Antisthenes

Every person in life has a rival, a nemesis, someone they are in constant competition with. It could be a sister, brother, best friend, sometimes even a parent. Mine was “Laura,” a fellow contestant on the pageant circuit. We always managed to be in the same pageant, not on purpose, and both of us always ended up in the top three. Thus it was a power struggle and an ongoing tally to see who could win the most crowns by the end of the pageant season. We were complete opposites in every sense of the word. I was blond with green eyes; she had hair and eyes as black as a raven. My skin was tanned browned after months of lying in an indoor rotisserie, a.k.a. a tanning bed; she had skin as pale and cold as a dusting of a November snow. I was plastic surgery free where as she had so much work done, she was as fake as a blow-up doll in the carpool lane. Boob job, saddlebag removal, shnoz adjustment, you
name it, she paid for it. My talent was dancing. Jazz, tap, ballet, I did it all and it was something I had been doing since the age of three. Her talent was singing, something newly acquired just so she would have a talent to perform in pageants. How was her singing you may ask? It was a cross between Rosanne singing the “Star Spangled Banner” and the last Chipmunks Christmas album. Due to this I did tend to win the talent segment of the pageants almost every time. Unfortunately that was only a small percentage of the score so there were other areas she could pass me in scoring. In formal wear she always wore a gown emblazoned with rhinestones, Austrian crystals and beading that would look like a walking chandelier. It was always some horrendous color and at least a size to small. She was always bragging that she spent thousands for her wardrobe but we all knew everything was a knock off.

One pageant in particular, Laura was doing very well in all categories, except of course talent, during which she decided to sing “Amazing Grace”, which in the end amazed me that the audience was still there. As they lined us up back stage, preparing us for our final moment in the spotlight, our final moment of judgment, I felt Laura standing behind me, uncomfortably close. She leaned in just inches from my ear and I heard her whisper, with her hot breath caressing my neck, “You will never beat me bitch.” The venom pouring from her perfectly painted lips seeped into my skin like acid. It took every piece of restraint I had not to turn around, yank off her state banner and shove it down her throat. To this day I can still smell Aqua Net hairspray and cheap Jean Nate perfume, her signature stench. I didn’t win the pageant but did receive first runner up. You would think this is somewhat of a victory but my pageant coach thinks otherwise. He usually had something sarcastic to say like, “That just means you’re the first person to lose,” or “Of all the losers you came in first.”

Victory?

Remember that not getting what you want is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck. —Dalai Lama

After all this I finally became a “Beauty Queen”. You would think that the pressure was off, the masochism would stop and the glory begin, however that was not the case. There is the reputation of the crown to uphold now.
Perfection for a pageant contestant and perfection for a queen are very different. As of now I am no longer responsible for my exterior, that’s my entourage’s job. Pageant appointed make up artists, hair dressers, speech coaches and personal trainers take over and create my style, my façade and my reputation according to what they want. They will turn me into a ribbon cutting, parade waving robot who has been directed to “smile and try not to talk too much.”

The person that I created to win the crown will now be revamped in accordance to what type of person the pageant feels I should be. For one year I am erased and any trace of originality that separated me from the other contestants will no longer exist. I am now the “Masochistic Beauty Queen,” and the crown I put my body through hell for is made of thorns and this is my crucifixion.

The Epiphany

*The absence of flaw in beauty is itself a flaw.* —Havelock Ellis

Beauty pageants encourage women and young girls to be dignified, have style and class. A contestant dresses in a business suit and is expected to speak in a mature and intelligent manner for the private interview and then an hour later she is expected to strip down to practically nothing and put herself on display to be judged. She is also expected to have many different sides and personalities to choose from, depending on what the judges are craving, usually none of them being who she really is.

Miss USA 2006 was caught being drunk in a bar in New York at the beginning of her reign. The American public demanded her dethroning, worried about the effect she would have on younger girls in America. Donald Trump decided to let her keep her title, however she had to go to rehab and admit she’s alcoholic. While this is sad and whether or not she had a problem with alcohol, I still respected her for being real. She showed that no one woman is perfect; we all have flaws, crown or no crown. I also think Trump made the right decision by giving her another chance, showing young girls that falling from the ideal of perfection and making a mistake is not the end of someone’s life.

Beaded gowns resembling walking chandeliers, four inch heels that
make the shortest girl look tall while curving her spine in the wrong direction, faces with makeup so thick you’d swear it was put on with a putty knife and of course all the little pageant secrets that beautify while causing pain and scarring, all done in the name of beauty, fame and a sparkling piece of jewelry with fake gems and a fake life that goes along with it. For one year you are someone else’s dancing monkey. You begin to question yourself and the reasoning behind this sadistic journey you put yourself through. Then you remember the scholarship money. The prize you fought for that made you lower yourself, question your morals and physically scar yourself, is a college education. Buy why? Why must women make up their face to resemble beautiful clowns, develop eating disorders, wear shoes that will require back surgery later in life, and do it all in the name of education? In contemporary society, men are not asked to strip down to their boxers, oil up, and be judged before they are awarded a college scholarship to Harvard or Yale. So why do we do this to young women in our culture? To make it worse, pageants put age limitations on the women who want to enter, with the maximum age being anywhere from 24-27. With this age rule, either the pageant systems are saying nobody wants to see anyone over 27 in a swimsuit or anyone over this age is not worth educating, therefore not worth the scholarship.

I no longer support, encourage, or voice an opinion in favor of beauty pageants. Ironically the same education that I craved and demeaned myself for is the same education that taught me what the oppression of women is and how pageants only encourage this oppression. Professors and classes on feminism have opened my eyes to see that the cycle of oppression continues because we as women allow it to.

I will admit I will sometimes watch a pageant on television just to see if society has made any advancement in the objectification of women. Every time, however, I am sadly disappointed, seeing girls still strutting around in bikinis and gowns that leave little to the imagination. Things could be looking up though; the public is getting either smarter or just plain bored. The Miss America Pageant ratings have been slipping so much in the past couple years that all the national channels have dumped the pageant and it’s had to move to the CMT network on cable. Even Donald Trump’s pageants have been victims to low ratings and rumor has it, he has questioned whether or not it was a good investment.
I ended up spending my late twenties coaching future pageant contestants on how to win the crown. I told them to diet 24 hours a day, practice walking in their four inch heels until their feet bled, and to do whatever they had to, to win that crown! It’s been ten years since I won my last major pageant and my vision is jaded, and my conscious guilty. I wonder how those girls that I influenced over a decade ago are doing and I hope they have awakened from their rhinestone encrusted dreams into a reality where they realize that beauty should come from the heart and not be masochistic.