



A NEW TRADITION

Begins
RIGHT HERE!

My knock went unanswered, but I knew someone was there. I had an appointment, so I cautiously opened and peeked around the unlocked door. The dogs' expected barking still startled me as I quickly stepped inside and closed the door. For the first time these furry youngsters (the Elder Statesman was not among them) seemed to recognize me as more friend than foe. Still I stood alone. The room was semi-dark except for the cloudy light filtering through the breakfast room windows on the back wall. Before I called out, I listened. I could hear what sounded like voices, but they seemed to come from a room darker and deeper into the center of the house. Nonetheless, with the dogs to lead my way, I assumed the role of intruder and headed toward the sounds.

A few, hesitant steps...voices, varied voices... more cautious steps...louder voices...bolder steps...laughter, excitement... suddenly....I stood in a doorway peering into a small room awash with bright light. Mirrors on each side of the doorway were

illuminated by strips of rounded, glowing bulbs; counters and stools in front of the mirrors provided comfortable workspaces for the busyness in the room. On one counter a large metal case, with several layers which folded out for easy access. The bins on each layer were filled with an array of brushes and blushes, shadows and shapers—make-up to highlight any skin, eye or hair color—the birthplace of a beauty. On the other counter, hair brushes and combs, clips, hot rollers, hot irons and hair dryers and cans of the ever-present hair spray. The room was filled with a corps of workers and watchers.

On the make-up stool sat a

young blonde beauty while the hair stool was occupied by a slightly older brunette. Although both girls appeared already gifted with a physical appearance attractive to anyone's eye, the whole truth was yet to be revealed. Thirteen-year old Malori Carlow resembled an alien visitor with her blonde locks captured by a head full of hot rollers while her eighteen year old companion, Morgan Miller, explored the colors and shapes, which would accentuate her sparkling blue eyes. Obviously, these girls are winners and have just been crowned to prove it. On May 1 at the John Thomas Performing Arts Theater, Morgan

Miller was crowned Miss Teen Arkansas-World; Malori Carlow, Junior Miss Arkansas-World. They are now preparing for their winners' photography session—a rigorous preparation required by every pageant appearance. This routine will definitely be repeated in June in Houston during the Miss Teen United States-World Pageant and Junior Miss United States-World Pageant.



Morgan Miller, Miss Teen Arkansas-World 2010



Malori Carlow, Junior Miss Arkansas-World 2010



According to Debbie Brower, the Executive State Director, girls throughout the state of Arkansas and residents of Bowie County, Texas, (a stipulation of Director Brower) are eligible to compete in the Miss Teen-World pageants. The two age brackets for contestants are Junior Miss, ages 9-12 and Teen, 13-19. Contestants must be residents of their respective areas with reputations beyond reputable and no wandering pictures. Each girl completes a questionnaire and pays an entry fee. Three local judges and four from out-of-town choose the winners based on four categories worth 25 percent each: (1) *Private interview*. All the judges are present for the no-holds-barred interview. Judges may choose their questions from the contestant's fact sheet or develop some of their own; (2) *Evening wear* and (3) *Onstage questions*.

Contestants are unaware of what their onstage questions might be.

(Perhaps that's why there are books of potential questions and answers for pageant contestants to study.)

Teens compete in (4) *Swimsuit*, while Juniors compete in (4) *Sportswear*.

The pageant itself was begun by Houstonian Gaspar Cruz as a vehicle to recognize both the beauty and character of young women. It is the only pageant for teens that goes to a World Pageant. Beginning at the state level—as in Miss Teen Arkansas-World—winners next compete for Miss Teen United States-World; ultimately, Miss Teen-World. The first Miss Teen-World hailed from England while the reigning Miss Teen-World calls South Africa her home. Even though contestants for Miss Teen-World now come from approximately 35 countries, hopes are high that the third Miss Teen-World will be from the United States—to be exact, Little Rock, Arkansas—Morgan Miller's hometown. Winners receive scholarship monies and cash, modeling contracts and make contacts. As these girls prove, many of the rewards associated with pageants are not taxable, but change the lives of the participants, nonetheless.

Morgan Miller, the new Miss Teen Arkansas-World, is well aware of both the frenetic pace and pressure of representing herself well. With one eye accentuated by the make-up and blush on one cheek, she does not yet have the "look" of a pageant beauty—

but her incessant, glowing smile is still present and she can easily laugh at herself. "No! I can't do serious," she observes. This 5'5" brunette with the penetrating blue eyes would be striking whether in her softball or cheerleader uniforms. As a student at Episcopal Collegiate School in Little Rock, Morgan played second base, shortstop and pitched for the girls' softball team. "I really do like pitching a lot for the school teams. There is definitely no pressure," Morgan laughs. "I love going to the lake to water ski, too. I'm not very good but enjoy it a lot."

When Morgan hangs up her uniforms, she exercises her creative energies by baking cookies. "I have mastered the art of cupcakes," this Food Network fan proudly declares. "My most ambitious project was baking my friend's 16th birthday cake. It was a square cake on the bottom with a round top and buttercream icing on it so the blue fondant would stick. (They sell the fondant at the craft store.) The 16 candles were on top. She was pretty excited and so was I. The cake was good, too." Morgan virtually bubbles with pleasure as she describes the success she and her friend shared.

That same enthusiasm is evident as she talks about her peculiarly perfect family. Her mom and dad are divorced. Her mom has been a figure skating instructor in Dallas since Morgan was nine years old. Morgan, her dad and stepmom, "Iboo," live in Little Rock, also home for her two older brothers. "We all get along," Morgan declares. "It's



an awesome deal, and all of them support me." Currently, older brother Matt, 22, is a student at Florida State University while Spencer, 13 months older than Morgan, attends the University of Arkansas. Since her high school graduation is just behind her, Morgan plans to join Spencer in Fayetteville in the fall. Her only problem? Leaving her three Schnauzers behind, but she knows how to deal with challenges....

For one challenge, Morgan thoroughly enjoys eating—

her favorites include sushi and spicy foods—but she has the discipline to work out regularly. "I workout 1-2 hours almost every day," she explains. "That's my time. I like it because no one bothers me. I do lots of cardio work on the ellipticals, crunches for abs and free weights."

To look at Morgan as she dons a strapless denim summer dress with its short, ruffled skirt or her long, flowing turquoise gown, or even her "Whoo Pig Sooie" red, rhinestoned Razorback T-shirt with jeans, every hair perfectly placed and make-up accentuating her best features—no one would guess..... "I am really a shorts and T-shirt kind of person. I wear no make-up to school and often go with wet hair. I like to sit for hours and talk and talk and talk—about anything, and I love hanging out with friends. I like to dance, too. I really don't like attention on me.

"My graduation from high school was my day with my family, (my dad cried), but I wanted the attention spread around—

kinda' like world peace—I wanted it spread out." She turns her head thoughtfully and shrugs her shoulders.

"It is kind of a good thing to be in pageants, though, especially being able to handle the pressure of the questions." For Morgan, as for many pageant contestants it seems, responding to the judges' questions is a real challenge. "I have learned in the interview process not to spurt out

my answers and to let my personality shine through." Morgan is pleased that many of the pageant participants learn about eating and exercising and practicing healthy lifestyles as they prepare for swimsuit competitions. In the process of preparing, decision-making is an absolute necessity, so girls also have to learn what they like and what they don't like.



Unspoken by Morgan but obvious is that pageant competitions provide mixed messages. They do teach participants to represent themselves, but what happens when they do not win First Place...and they don't always? For example, Morgan competed in the Miss Teen Arkansas USA for 3 years and finished in the top 15 for the last two. She was a competitor in the Miss Arkansas High School Pageant, competing against winners from all the high schools in the state for 2 years. She was First Runner-Up in 2009. Miss Teen Arkansas-World has been her first First Place. From each of her pageants she has made discoveries about herself as well as pageant *dos and don'ts*. Morgan has chosen to learn from each of her finishes, getting

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better with each pageant performance.

Morgan Miller is a positive representative of Arkansas and of herself. She is learning to establish priorities in her life, priorities which affect both her exterior and interior beauty and provide her balance and confidence and excitement. She's a winner on or off the stage.

Pageant veterans agree. Jaclyn Gooding, a former Miss Texarkana and both Miss Texas and Miss Arkansas competitor, remembers that she enjoyed the competitions more for the people she met and the connections she was able to make. "It does a lot for you personally," Jaclyn explains, "You meet a lot of goal oriented people who compete to win. They set their goals and achieve them." New Boston native Melinda Carlow, Miss Red River and a Miss Texas competitor, admits "I liked the competition and the glamour. Competing with others is not as much fun as competing with myself." Both women admit that most pageant girls are later successful in their respective choices because they have learned how to prepare themselves to succeed.

Some pageant girls have more time to prepare. Malori Carlow has been competing since she was 10 months old. "She did a few competitions off and on," mom Melinda explains, "but when she was four years old, she said she didn't want to do it anymore. That was okay; then last year she decided she wanted to compete again."

"I had fun before, so I thought it would be fun again," Malori admits. Her blonde, straight locks encircle her oval face with the bright blue eyes and the effervescent smile. She never appears to be posing; her 5'1", maturing 13 year-old frame carries her 80 pounds confidently, and she appears to be "just having fun." The results speak for themselves. Since she has returned to the pageant stage, she has been named Junior Miss Texarkana-World, Junior Miss New Boston, Junior Miss Southwest Arkansas and Junior Miss Arkansas-World. Her biggest supporters include her father Blake, brother Mason, grandparents Harrell and Kay Hignight, and grandparents, Bowie County Judge James and Nancy Carlow. Her companion, mentor, guide, tutor, and best friend is her mom—Melinda, who admits that being a pageant mom is much harder than being a pageant contestant. "My mom never sits down during a pageant," Malori explains. "She panicked when she saw the stairs the girls were going to descend onstage during the Miss Teen Arkansas-World pageant."

"I did," Melinda admits. "Malori just raised her dress and began to walk." Malori's sense of humor and experience sometimes save the day. Nonetheless, Malori relies on her mom's support and presence. When both are told that no moms will be backstage at the Houston competition, a startled, grinning Malori whimpers, "But, I'm only 13. Who'll help me?" Perhaps the only moment her displeasure really shows is with her "perfectly straight" hair. As Tracy Lilly, volunteer hairstylist and beauty pageant veteran herself, puts down the hot roller and picks up the hair spray one more time to tackle a stubborn piece of Malori's hair, Tracey observes, "I can tell she is not loving this part of being a beauty queen." Malori's ever-present smile signals her agreement.

For this New Boston Middle School student whose favorite subject is reading, pageants provide a way to develop yet another dimension of herself. She has studied dance for 10 years, and she loves to dance. When there's music, Malori is moving. It's no surprise that her favorite form of dance is clogging because it's fast and upbeat. Yet,



Sierra Swamda, Miss Teen Arkansas-World 2009, holding Baby Miss Arkansas-World Adalyn Blue; Tiny Miss Arkansas-World Kennedy Collins; Little Miss Arkansas-World Gracie Britton; Petite Miss Arkansas-World Eliza Upchurch; Young Miss Arkansas-World Jenna Williamson; People's Choice Winner Leighla Pearcy

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athletics are not in her future in spite of her attempts at volleyball, basketball and track. "I try hard, but it doesn't happen," she shakes her head in disgust. So she seeks adventures in other directions.

Those new directions might one day take Malori to culinary school and her own restaurant, at least that's her current dream. "It's kinda' funny," she confesses, "I always buy cookbooks to read. Right now I don't really have a favorite food." Potential customers can be assured that Malori's restaurant will have only the freshest produce. She's learning to grow her own. She and her grandfather are starting on a smaller scale by planting watermelons together every summer. No doubt, their watermelon harvests will lead to many more home grown treats. Malori laughs, "It's just a hobby. We just have fun."

Obviously, Malori lives up to her description of herself as "outgoing, always happy and fun to be around." Melinda nods in agreement.

Blake's only directive has been that if pageants should begin to change her, Malori will be through with the pageants. With the healthy support and monitors Malori has in her family, her wish that everyone understands "I am still the same person I am" will be easy to fulfill. "She is so funny," her mother notes. "It was four to five months before any of Malori's friends at school even knew she had been crowned Junior Miss Texarkana-World."

As for what pageants have already taught Malori? "I have learned to think before I speak." Her listening skills are being honed as well. With coaching, Malori is learning to answer in three's. That means she attempts to answer the judges' questions with at least three points of description to make her answers more substantive. Since most of her competitions right now have no talent component, the interview portion assumes added importance. What a valuable skill to acquire so early!

Pageants and

dancing are succeeding in helping Malori to handle her physical appearances. She can pose playfully in her red Razorback T-shirt and blue denim, sparkling shorts, or she can move elegantly in her strapless hot pink full-length gown. Even at this point she appears to be confident, although tired... "Is that a real smile?" the photographer asks. Quitting, however, is not an option—regardless of excessive hair spray, tired lips, slightly wilting makeup and repeated wardrobe changes. Malori is already a "trouper" who will represent the State of Arkansas proudly as Junior Miss Arkansas-World.

For how long does Malori expect/ want to participate in pageants this time around? "I'm hoping as long as I can," she concludes.

Texarkana is fortunate to have the opportunity to support the Miss-Teen World Pageants—a new tradition in the making. Already merchants and individuals have shown their willingness to support the young contestants in achieving their significant goals. One step backstage will affirm that this is a demanding and challenging undertaking for both contestants and organizers. Our community is fortunate to have among us those who step up for change and young people. They deserve the support of us all!

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