

marie claire
society



bathing suits, ballgowns & bickering

Behind the scenes at the Miss Universe pageant

free speech



Breast special

I was delighted to see the article "Small Chests vs. Big Breasts" (July 1997).

I have always been less than satisfied with my 34B chest and have con-

sidered getting implants, although my boyfriend and other male friends have tried to dissuade me. I was surprised to see that Claudia, Naomi and Linda are all 34Bs and Carla Bruni is a 34A. This shows you don't have to have "big breasts" to be beautiful.

—Amanda Woelzlein, Phoenix, Arizona

Land mines

Thanks for "Women Who Defuse Land Mines" (June 1997). I have seen Cambodian and Afghan Red Cross hospitals filled with men, women, and children mutilated by land mines. As one American said to me at a Phnom Penh rehabilitation center, after visiting all the legless

and armless and sightless people, "It makes you ashamed to be human." The U.S. companies making a buck off the production or supply of land mine components are merchants of death.

—Helena Soister, Denver, Colorado

I am most impressed with "Women Who Defuse Land Mines." I am a Cambodian-American woman and have yet to see any other popular women's fashion magazine publish an article on Cambodia, let alone on the women themselves. They have been through hell, and I applaud your efforts to make this known to all women.

—Laksmi M. Sam, Reston, Virginia

Girl soldiers

As I read "Children at War" (July 1997), I found myself left with a haunting image which lingered for many days. It seems in this world the most persecuted, debased, and ignored class of people is children. I cannot cease to be amazed that such atrocities exist against the most defenseless. I am a sixth-grade schoolteacher in Manhattan. The thought of these young children going

into battle to murder, dismember, and capture "rivals" is so ludicrous I want to laugh, but then I remember that this is in no way a joke. What has our world become when such inhumane practices are an everyday form of life for so many?

—Arlene Jograj, New York City

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featured this month



SPALDING GRAY

Only Spalding Gray could share his sexual secrets in "Men's Sex Strategies" (page 138)

with so much excitement and so little embarrassment. This writer and actor has turned confession into an art form with monologues that probe his inner quirks. He appears on stage and in the films *Swimming to Cambodia*, *Monster in a Box*, *True Stories*, *Beaches*, *The Paper*, and *Beyond Rangoon*.



KATE BOHNER

The ghostwriter for Donald Trump's *The Art of the Comeback*, Kate Bohner was

given carte blanche when she covered Trump's Miss Universe pageant. (See "Bathing Suits, Ballgowns & Bickering," page 118). "That meant that no matter how many times I got in someplace where I wasn't supposed to be, I wouldn't get kicked out of the pageant altogether," she said.



EDWARD KEMPER

For "Basics with a Twist" (page 284), Edward Peterson and Kemper Hyers

found ideas wherever they could: memories, experiments, happy accidents—even their own office layout! The pair started as interior designers in 1989. Now they work as stylists for ads, TV, and print. Their work appears in everything from Pottery Barn catalogues to *Baking with Julia Child*.

They may seem all sweetness and light, but what becomes of **beauty queens** when the cameras aren't rolling? Kate Bohner gets the real dirt on the most beautiful women in the world.



Imagine my surprise when I suddenly find myself squatting between sequined gowns and flesh-colored undergarments, somewhere deep in the bowels of the Miami Convention Center. After all, I'm a journalist, not a terrorist.

And yet here I am, setting my sights on Miss Puerto Rico—known around town to be a serious contender for Miss Universe. “You’re not supposed to be in here,” she hisses. “Even my family... they can’t come in. Not even Marla Maples Trump. It’s strictly for us contestants.”

“I know, I know,” I whisper. “It’s just that I wanted to see it from the inside.” I wave my hand around the room. She nods, scanning our setting. “Be careful,” she says. “I don’t want to get in trouble.”

“Can I ask you a few questions?” I crouch down onto a pair of high red patent-leather pumps. Ouch.

“No problem,” she coos. “I want American press.”

We share a devious smile.

“Deal.”

There I hunch in her flimsy, makeshift cubicle. Notepad outstretched, pen poised, I look toward the ceiling. The wardrobe rack is organized in categories and labeled with little lavender tags: Opening Sequence, Bathing Suit Comp., Evening Gown Comp., etc.

“So how did you get into this, anyway, Ana Rosa?” I sneak a peek behind me. Young girls with false eyelashes and French twists swirl in golden gowns. Middle-aged matrons bustle about with pins in their mouths. Ingenues gossip, all atwitter. Excitement in the air.

“I work for the phone company,” Miss Puerto Rico confides.

“How does that fit in with pageant life?”

She looks up, suddenly startled, like a doe in headlights. Uh-oh. Security alert! I’m

being dragged out of yet another “Unauthorized Zone.”

But I sneak back in from the other side. Miss Curaçao is struggling and bickering with a tireless Mama.

Apparently the contestant’s white velvet strapless number is too tiny to accommodate her gargantuan boobs.

I glance left. Miss Taiwan and Miss New Zealand are

Miss Curaçao's strapless number is just too tiny to accommodate her gargantuan breasts.



The dress rehearsal is held hours before the pageant. Miss Panama waits patiently in the backstage holding pen, while a fellow contestant grabs a quick catnap

mimicking the two Latinas’ frantic attempts to make the dress fit—squashing, shoving, and tucking flesh. They giggle furiously—until they see Miss Venezuela watching. They immediately stop. No one screws around with her; after all, she wins every other year. The Venezuelan vixen tosses the mimics a nasty look, then struts over to the other side of the room in silence.

I catch Miss New Zealand’s eye. She gives me a wink. I creep forward and inquire: “Do you think the contest is skewed for the Latin girls?” She shakes her head.

“My dear,” she twangs. “It’s favored toward the white girls. They don’t like dark skin.” New Zealand, who is Maori, says she is sick of it. “Why should we even come?”

Taiwan’s genteel voice chimes in: “It’s no use. We’ve lost before we’ve started.”

I catch sight of a petulant, blond, Shetland-sweater-and-pearl-strand-wearing Miss Universe executive eyeing me. I flee back to my hotel.

I distinctly remember that while jetting to Miami earlier that day—on The Donald’s \$30 million midnight-black 727 jet, which has a burgundy “T” inscribed on the tail—I was told I’d be given “carte-blanche.” I was his ghostwriter, after all. They could trust me. I don’t know, perhaps they don’t speak French, because to them “carte-blanche” apparently means that no matter how many times I get in someplace where I’m not supposed to be, I won’t get kicked out of the pageant altogether. Terrific! I’d rather crawl in and out of long legs and wardrobe closets than be escorted around by a public relations robot. Seriously.

What a scene that day on the plane. Four limos race onto the tarmac at La Guardia. Supermodel Eva Herzigova has just rolled off the Concorde after catwalking the shows in Paris and Milan. She carries a tiny Louis Vuitton bag and a *petite maison* for her little lapdog, Gent. I step out carrying a tiny laptop. Eva’s husband, Tico, drummer for Bon Jovi, climbs aboard and gently taps out a tune on the table in front of him. After we’ve all settled in, Donald bellows, “Wheels up!”

“Donald, dude,” Tico remarks, “you’ve got to get a haircut.” The Donald looks flabbergasted. “Man,” Tico continues, “it’s too long.”

“The guy’s got balls,” replies The Donald. “Tico, keep in mind—I’ve got an eject button.” The Donald smiles his ▷

beguiling smirk while plowing his way through at least a dozen tea sandwiches, leaving a mountain of bread behind.

"Donald, why you no eat the outside?" coos the lovely Eva.

"I only eat protein. No carbs. Twenty strips of bacon for breakfast." Our private flight attendant, Stacey, suddenly appears and efficiently whisks away the offending pile of bread crusts. "Thanks, honey," says The Donald. "Isn't she great?"

The pageant is dull, as expected. The fake-boobs-per-capita ratio is shocking. And I'm not even talking about the contestants. I find myself in a tumultuous sea of middle-aged Latin women dressed to kill. Beauty pageants are a national obsession in Latin America. On the day of the event, the entire country of Venezuela shuts down. If a Miss Venezuela wins as Miss Universe, she never, ever has to pay income taxes for the rest of her life.

George Hamilton and Marla—the co-hosts of the show—are yukking it up. It's difficult to hear because the Venezuelan contingency is yelping at a deafening pitch.

"Marla, it looks like you've lost weight," says George.

"Yes, George," says Marla. "About two hundred pounds."

The crowd roars! All cameras pan to The Donald. He's sporting a combination wry smile/sheepish grin.

On the plane ride home, I ask him if the exchange made him mad. "Hey, it's great for me," spins The Donald. "I'm glad they noticed I've shed ten pounds." Everyone chuckles.

"These girls are not models; it's some sort of pageant stuff." The gorgeous Eva Herzigova is speaking over Monique Pillard, president of the Elite Modeling Agency. Monique and Donald are carrying on about how Monique wants to sign Miss Italy. "She's not right for Miss Universe," says Donald. "But she's exquisite."

I strain to hear Eva over Monique. I crane my neck. "Miss U.S.A.'s dress, it just looks so common," she purrs.

At the "After Ball," I hook up with Miss Estonia. She's from a town of 1,700 people. She explains that she's never been on a plane before.

"Was the pageant all you'd hoped for?" I ask.

"I love it. I want to move to America. Everything is so new here."

We laugh, exchange kisses, and promise to keep in touch.

We speak two weeks later. "How are you?" I bellow into the crackling phone line.



Miss Puerto Rico

felt shame. She was flown out of Miami at 8:00 A.M. the day after the pageant.



Top: Two fans admire a particularly statuesque Miss Turkey. Above: Contestants watch what's happening on stage via television monitors.

Even with the bad connection, I can tell she's not well.

"All I do is walk through the graveyards, day and night. I walk and walk. There is nothing for me here. No one cares that I was Miss Estonia. No one cares that I was one of the final ten women."

"But it was such a feat, honey," I continue. "The final ten is big."

"Maybe. You know what I do now? I book flights. I go from being Miss Estonia flying to America, wearing ball gowns and bathing suits to booking airline flights. I work for FinAir now."

I decide to pursue my bond with Miss Puerto Rico.

"Ana Rosa? Hello, it's Kate. Remember me? What are you up to?"

"Working for the telephone company."

"Oh. Is that all right?"

"Oh yes, I love it."

"Really? Isn't that a bit of a change from the pageant life?"

She begins to speak, in half-English/half-Spanish. Here's what I can gather:

She felt shame.

There she was, representing her country, and she failed.

They flew her out of Miami at 8:00 A.M.

the day after the pageant.

Her boyfriend was giving her the silent treatment.

Her parents were being nice,

but Ana Rosa could tell they were being fake.

Everyone acted like they were disappointed in her—

except for her colleagues at the phone company.

They appreciated her.

"Things will get better," I offer.

"Kate, maybe for you. But the pageant was the high. Things

will never get better than that."

The night of the pageant, my evening ends at 3:00 A.M. with

"Let's go, girls." It's Donald.

Finally, and thankfully, he wants to leave.

We climb into the back of a limo.

I scramble out of bed the next morning with a splitting headache and make my way to the Fontainebleau,

where the contestants are staying. I run into Miss Canada.

"Carmen, Carmen . . ." I scream. "How are you?"

"I'm all right—you see, I didn't expect to win."

Vacationers are meandering around the lobby.▷

We shake hands. "I guess it's back to teaching ballet..." she says cheerfully.

We chuckle. Apparently she's going to Disney World for a vacation.

"Kate. You want a story? Something interesting for your piece? If you're not Latin American, you've got no chance in Hell. They shut you out. They're complete snobs. I mean, I was Miss Red Deer in Canada!"

I look perplexed.

"It's really kind of prestigious for beauty pageants. It's not like I come from nowhere."

I gently nod yes.

"If you're not Latin," she continues, "forget it."

"I just had such a wonderful time," says Miss Mexico. "Everything was so great. I had so much fun." I'm beginning to get suspicious. I've now interviewed nine of the eleven Miss Fill-In-The-Nation contestants who speak English, and they all say the same thing. They sound like members of some weird cult: "I had a great time at the Miss Universe Pageant because I had fun with the girls;" "Miss U.S.A. won because she is beautiful inside and out;"

"It was so much fun and a great thing to do for my country;" "Everyone deserved to win;" And in response to my throw-away question, "Were you upset that you lost?": "I was just so happy to be at the Miss Universe contest at all."

"I can't believe Miss U.S.A. won."

"What a joke."

"She's smart and everything, but please."

I'm listening to two CBS execs talking to each other at the After Ball Party.

"I've got to give it to her, though—she killed on that last question."

It's like this. There are three finalists. They are all asked the same question. To make it fair, the two girls not on the spot are in soundproof plexiglass cylinders. The question: If you could do anything crazy/wild/for a day, what would you do?

"Miss Venezuela blew it," says a random leech in the crowd. Frankly, I don't think she understood the

The contestants all have the same responses—they sound like they're in some weird cult.

question. Some of these girls deal with an interpreter. Just for the record: If you spend three years having orthodontia, plastic surgery, walking lessons, and peridontia while toning, tanning, drinking diet powders, and training with free weights—why not learn to speak English? Anyway, she did blow it.

She said something about traveling around the world, but most of it was inaudible.

After Miss Venezuela came Miss U.S.A. I was watching her and, as it turns out, so was Donald. She looked like she was reading Hamilton's lips. Miss Venezuela doesn't even bother to learn English, and Miss U.S.A. reads lips! Her answer: "I would eat everything in the world, and I would eat it twice!" The crowd goes wild.

Drum roll. The three contestants saunter downstage. Miss Tobago-Trinidad looks mortified; she's smart enough to know she botched the question. Miss Venezuela looks smug; she's confident. Miss U.S.A. is positively glowing; she knows she's won. And so does the crowd.

"Second runner-up," bellows Hamilton, "Miss Tobago-Trinidad!" The crowd claps absentmindedly. The lovely Caribbean wears a pained expression, something to pass for a smile. Miss U.S.A. and Miss Venezuela clutch each other's arms in a show of false camaraderie.

"First runner-up..." Hamilton imposes a lengthy pause. "Miss... Venezuela!" Half the crowd goes silent with shock. Half the crowd—the U.S. contingent—claps and hoots at ear-splitting decibels. Miss U.S.A. beams—the recipient of a million stares, the only one left—Miss Universe!

I glance over at Miss Venezuela. The expression on her face is extraordinary, it's hard to describe—a combination of fear, disappointment, surprise, and disgust. It's the look of a spring bride, standing before a congregation of 500 guests, in a grand church in Alabama, when she's told she's been stood up at the altar. A fate, I'm sure, that Miss Venezuela would have preferred. □

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