

## On the Homefront...“A Crowning Year!”

As many of you know our girls, over the years, have been involved in pageantry. What you may not know is why we have valued this avenue of involvement when it appears to reinforce the “external” girl instead of what we as Christians value –the “hidden beauty of the heart.” We could quickly point to the scholarship money in the excess of \$20,000, along with the fun family reunions that have occurred as members have come from TX, OK, SC, & TN to support. Yet, the real value has been what both girls have walked away with in their personal walks with the Lord. Following is their gratitude for how God has used something that appears superficial to shape them into the young women they are today, and why they call 2010 a “crowning year!”

*Audrey*



Surprisingly, I hadn't even thought of doing a pageant since my sophomore year in college. I had come close to winning a title but quit competing just short of it. So when a director friend asked me to do his pageant – (they were afraid they wouldn't have enough contestants) I said “yes” to help. Participating in the pageant brought to the surface some areas I knew the Lord wanted me to grow in. Pageantry is not for cowards. It's an environment that brings all of your fears to the forefront. Being back on stage caused me to revisit old fears of being self-conscious about my speech impediment & being tempted to try to be what I thought the judges wanted me to be, instead of simply being myself. I had always wanted to ignore my speech shortcoming, as I honestly didn't believe it could get better – as a result I had never acknowledged it in the interview, though it was obvious.

However, this year in particular, I felt the Lord calling me to embrace my strengths *and* my weaknesses through having the courage to re-enter speech therapy whether I saw the results or not. I can't begin to express how my life began to change as I admitted my weaknesses to the judges –preliminary pageant after preliminary- as well as sticking with speech therapy - learning everything from correct tongue placement to swallowing differently. I began to find confidence amidst feeling very vulnerable. Through embracing my weaknesses, I was able to embrace myself as a whole –loving me as the Lord loves me, broken, imperfect parts and all. This newfound truth was displayed in my final interview in which I was excited to simply be Audrey instead of trying to be a better version of myself.

This year I have a greater freedom to encourage others because I can now love myself just as I am. Now, I'm more approachable, genuine, & relatable, for I can show firsthand that a person can be loved even with their imperfections on display. Needless to say when I won the interview award at Miss Mississippi this year I was blown away! Me... with a lisp & with all of my fears & confidence showing had the five judges in tears as they related to what I shared. Yes, this year at Miss MS was a crowning year – I learned that brokenness is the road to wholeness & that being able to share it is a blessing to others! Praise the Lord!

I'm currently working in Birmingham, AL at Stacks Furniture Outlet. If you or your friends are in the market for furniture, come see me! Audrey.hardin@gmail.com

*Abigail*



I have often said that pageants are like life in a capsule. In a one-day experience, you are tested in every area of your life! You work to be intellectually sharp, physically fit, accomplished in a specific talent, well spoken, and confident even with a spotlight in your face! This is the main reason I love pageantry – it continually challenges me to grow in all areas of my life and evaluate my identity.

It's so easy to think we have to play a certain role to reach the results we want. Pageantry has a “celeb-like” status. Appearances, or the external self, are valuable in pageants. I may compare myself with the other competitors, or the “ideal” image I believe the judges are seeking, but Psalms reminds me that we are uniquely crafted into our own self as God has seen fit to design us. I am realizing that God works so much deeper than the external self. He has placed a longing within me to serve from my heart rather than from a “role.” Ultimately, I want to be a leader, and that takes more trust than achievement.

The most revealing aspect of pageantry for me is not what is happening on stage, but what is happening in my heart. I may do my best in every area, but I don't receive the results. I'm completely humbled. My head tells me to work harder or strategize a way to obtain the results. But my heart keeps telling me to trust the Lord with all my efforts and who I am. I'm learning that understanding becomes a state of the heart rather than an achievement of the mind when I look to my Savior. He challenges me to see my worth and my identity in Him, with or without the results.

I'm so grateful for the Lord and how He has used pageantry in my life. I get so lost from God's plan for my life when I start looking at others or the results to give me an identity. Pageantry is my conviction, or “litmus test,” to show me when my eyes are wandering.

Let us praise Him! For He is a God who understands our innermost longings and answers them in the small details of our lives!