

# 'Our Ashley' talks pageants

BY ASHLEY BURSEY

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Ashley Bursey ANDREW KELLY/FOR THE EX/

I remember standing onstage, my hair slicked into some sort of chignon, my mascara racooning down my face with sweat. My dress — worn to an ex-boyfriend's prom a year earlier — felt too tight and my nails were bitten to nubs. I was terrified.

That was three years ago.

Looking back, I was such a kid then. I was crowned Miss Teen Newfoundland and Labrador, but I didn't know what to do with the title. I couldn't talk to press — I was shoved on VOCM's *Nightline*, where I stammered my way through a post-crowning interview — and I had no idea how to do my hair with a crown perched on top.

I'm blonder now, and my nails — although completely fake — are a respectable length. I've learned how to walk in high heels and match my toenails to my handbag. I've taught myself how to get up in front of a crowd of 20 or 2,000 and say something memorable.

And, three years after that first teetering step, I'm doing it all over again.

I applied three months ago to be the Newfoundland and Labrador rep at the Miss World Canada pageant. I was chosen to go, and I needed to raise the funds. It was \$750 for the entry fee alone, and then there were flights, hair, makeup, clothing, shoes, accommodations, AND a charity fund-raiser I somehow had to organize, all within a very short time span.

So I'm sitting at my kitchen table at home, phone book open in front of me, contacting every business I can possibly think of for sponsorship, when I start getting the retaliation.

"A...what? A pageant? Like, a beauty pageant?"

No. No no *no*.

This is something I've gotten used to over the years. "Oh, you're a beauty queen!" Or, "What a shiny crown." It's all an image.

To most people.

I see it differently. In my year as Miss Teen, I attended more than 50 events. I did everything from getting soaked in dunk tanks to flipping pancakes to speaking to schoolchildren. I didn't just stand there, smiling vacantly, dreaming of tiaras and pretty dresses.

Miss World Canada is much the same. A large part of the judging is the fund-raising component, in which monies are raised to benefit a charity that will be going national this year and teaches children about bullying.

Further, pageantry has given me communication skills. Pursuing a career in journalism, I speak with hundreds of people a year about 1,000 different topics. I need to be capable of chatting with a fellow Townie or discussing the seal fishery with a politician. I need to be comfortable on both sides of the microphone or tape recorder, and being a titleholder has given me that.

I'll admit it. I've bought far more shoes in the last month than I've ever owned in my life. I now know how to contour my cheekbones, and my nails have really never looked better.

But I've learned something. In our world, image is important, but killer heels can only open the door. Only personality, compassion, and heart will take you past the threshold. ☺

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*Ashley Bursey is a journalism student at St. Thomas University who is writing for the ex/press this summer. She is also competing in Miss World Canada this weekend.*