

MY CONTESTANT LETTER:

Dear Prospective Contestant:

I will be one of the judges at the Mrs. Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin 2018 pageant and want to share with you my personal experience in being crowned Mrs. Minnesota-America. You may wonder what it was like and what lifelong benefits I gained.

Quite frankly, I didn't expect to win. There were nearly 30 contestants, and it was only my second pageant *ever*. But I challenged myself to be the best authentic *me*. As a result, I was crowned Mrs. Minnesota and succeeded in my personal goal to put my best stiletto forward without losing myself in it. I made new discoveries about myself, and those discoveries are still with me two decades later. Don't get me wrong. I had to train hard. But I gained friends and confidence that I don't think I would have gotten through any other means.

I discovered new friends that are still very dear to me, including the woman crowned Mrs. America that year, as well as another state title holder who is a New York Times bestselling author. Over the last few years, I was primary caregiver for both of my parents who had Alzheimer's. I always wanted to be an author, and my caregiving experience was a story I needed to tell.

Early on, after decades apart, I contacted my author friend. She graciously mentored me by emails, despite her own writing deadlines, and introduced me to people in the business. At a recent writer's conference, I got to see her again. After hugs and tears, we talked about our pageant experiences in the Mrs. America pageant. We talked about how being a title holder and the training to get there launched in us the confidence necessary to tackle writing, bearing our souls to agents and publishers, book promotions, interviews, and rejection. We agreed that

without the confidence we gained through being pageant title holders, we may never have achieved the successes. The best part? The sisterhood of pageant contestants was invaluable. Once connected, we stayed connected. And we support and nurture each other no matter how many years go by.

I hope you consider to be a part of this amazing pageant experience. But put on your seat belt. You may have experiences beyond your wildest dreams.

Hope to see you there!