



## The Pageant

By Quintashia Mixon

**Never** in my life did I picture myself in a beauty pageant. My junior year of high school, the representatives for the Miss Teen Burbank Pageant came to speak at our school. I attended the meeting with one of my friends who was actually the one entering the pageant. I never

planned on signing up for anything, but by the end of their presentation I was convinced that this was something I could do.

Now if you know anything about the city of Burbank, then you know that it is not popular for its diversity. Burbank is a town where the fact that you are black is still considered a “threat” to its residents. Their definition of an out of control situation is being pulled over, and the cops stumbling upon the fact that you are black. The school system is set up as a closed district in efforts to keep the at risk minority kids out. Black influence is cut out completely, so you won’t see any recognition of black history or black culture within the “small town.” Their ignorance around civil rights and the movements that arose from it sit silent in its streets.

Upon entering the pageant at the last minute my friend had something come up and she backed out. Now there was about fifty white girls, and me, the only black girl. At first or even throughout the rehearsals this thought did not cross my mind, nor did I once feel like the minority of the group... until the day of the pageant.

I was back stage getting hair and makeup done, and as a sixteen-year-old girl the fun and excitement had gotten the best of me. Taking steps around the room had become virtually impossible. Each of us had luggage spillage in an endless supply. There were three large white tables centered in the room full of clutter. The first table was loaded food and snacks. The second table was covered with makeup, hair utensils, and pretty much anything that had the brave opportunity of attempting to alter our appearances. The last table was used as an enormous chair. There were no chairs, so the table or the clothing soaked floor were our only options for sitting. Burning curling irons, enflamed hair, and a delicate linger of perspiration with fruit flavored body splash filled the air. The clamor of anxious, nervous girls could be heard through brick.

In one corner loomed a scene of seriousness, while in another music roared, as some made the last preparations to ensure they didn’t miss a move. We all smiled and sparkled brighter than golden suns seemingly ready for what was ahead. Within that whirlwind of excitement, a quietness still loomed, a type of stillness that could only be examined in that moment. The laughs, smiles, and sheer happiness that saturated our faces would always be treasured in our hearts and imprinted in our thoughts forever.

As we were making our last preparations the pageant coordinator invited the judges backstage. So, at this point it was supposed to be like a one on one meet and greet. All the judges were really nice except one who stuck out like a sore thumb, at least to me. She was younger with a

more diverse background than the other judges. When she entered the room we made eye contact almost immediately. There was an ease to her. Her steps were light, but strong. She wore a white button down top with khaki pants that fit snug to her slender body. Her face was tender, and her smile was bright with teeth that were the definition of flawless. She carried an inviting feel to her movement, and the warmth in her smile was comforting. She walked up to me and asked:

“Do you think you are going to win?” Her smile was still warm, but her eyes searched deep into mine.

I replied: “I don’t know, but I hope so. Isn’t that the point?”

“Well I wouldn’t get my hopes up,” she said. “Do you actually think that these people are going to let a black girl win this competition? You would have a better chance at this with your kind.” Her body language stayed positive and her words came with such ease. She didn’t seem to find anything wrong with what she said.

I was not sure why I wasn’t moved in a more profound way by her comments, but for whatever reason I was grateful. Discrimination was something I read about in my history books, something I heard other people talk about, but not a subject that I ever had a personal story about. I instantly became aware of a real reality, a reality of someone trying to hold me back from my true capability. It was a life changing moment, but I wasn’t afraid. I wasn’t angry. I was calm and accepted her comments into my heart and mind, without passing judgment. Still, I needed to prove her wrong. I was there to make my family proud, and also myself proud. I accomplished something that I didn’t even believe I could do. I wasn’t about to let her take that from me. It was my time to shine, and she couldn’t have it! I went on to win second place.

I deserved to be on that podium, unmoved and untouched.

Quintashia Mixon was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA. She is currently a student at Santa Monica College, majoring in communications and is planning on transferring to Cal State Dominguez Hills. She also has a cat named Achilles, whom she adores more than anything. She is a member of the SWC.