

Miss America Uses Unusual Cuts, Interesting Patterns to Express Personal Style

BY XAZMIN GARZA
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Posted: Jan. 12, 2012 | 2:05 a.m.

Every morning for the past year Teresa Scanlan has looked at herself in the mirror and thought, "Do I look like Miss America today?"

"It's something most people don't have to think about," says Scanlan, who at 17 was the youngest Miss America crowned since 1937. "But if someone meets me for the first time that day, I want to fulfill every expectation they had."

For the reigning Miss America, who will pass on her crown Saturday at Planet Hollywood Resort, that means looking her best. Today that translates to lip gloss and mascara. In high school it meant a fresh roll of duct tape. Yes, the stuff you use for heavy-duty sticking jobs.

The former Miss Nebraska gained a reputation at her high school as the girl who wore duct-tape dresses. People thought it was weird, but she didn't care. At a time when kids desperately wanted to fit in, Scanlan wanted to stand out.

Rebellion? Maybe. She credits it more to being smack dab in the middle of seven kids. All her clothes were hand-me-downs. The only way to not look like the outdated version of her older sisters was to make their old duds her own. If she didn't do it with duct tape, she did it with scissors.

Scanlan would remove sleeves, cut a new neckline, even create a new fashion concept, all with just a few snips. The 18-year-old fondly recalls a pair of "shants" she made. "One leg was shorts and the other leg was regular pants," she says. "They were good for that in-between weather."

When most teenagers use the word "eclectic" to describe their personal style, they might have a penchant for hats, maybe they've scoured a thrift store or two in their time. When Scanlan uses it, she's not messing around.

As Miss America, she's had to tone it down a bit. She uses big, chunky jewelry, interesting prints and atypical cuts to make a statement now. One thing she refuses to do is show her body to get attention. Scanlan notes that she can wear the most modest of dresses, but her confident carriage will still turn heads. She thinks young women could benefit from understanding that.

"(Revealing clothes) only cheapen who you are," she says. "There are enough women out there who are willing to show way too much."

Since Scanlan prefers extraordinary clothes, she doesn't like to shop at predictable places. Department stores at the mall would have her looking too predictable. Instead, she likes discovering independently owned boutiques and looks to political leaders, not celebrities, for style inspiration.

Women like first lady Michelle Obama demonstrate the kind of sophisticated elegance she hopes to show if her dream of becoming a Supreme Court justice comes to fruition one day. She may even set her sights on a political office. She jokes that she's shaken enough hands and kissed enough babies in the past year to qualify.

With her taste being so diverse, she doesn't have a signature look. She does, however, wear the same bracelet every day. It bears the message "Accept yourself, accept others," a creed that supports the platform for which Scanlan raised awareness the past year: eating disorders.

Scanlan calls them a societal problem that can only improve with a new outlook on health. Rather than focus on the number on the scale, she says, women need to instead consider the health aspect.

"I work out not because I hate my body and want to change it," she says, "but because I love it and want to keep it healthy."

She would like this to be the primary consideration in the battle on obesity, too. Otherwise, the message becomes strictly appearance-driven and something with good intentions can turn upside down.

Her beauty efforts don't begin and end with her body, though. Scanlan's reign as Miss America taught her the importance of skin care, too. Before working with the official Miss America skin care sponsor, Artistry, her beauty regime made makeup the top priority. Now she realizes the surface underneath the makeup is just as crucial. She's also opened her eyes to anti-aging maintenance, even though she's many years away from seeing her first wrinkle.

Scanlan's age made headlines when she earned the Miss America title last year. The then 17-year-old was competing against girls with far more pageant and life experience, yet she managed to pull off the win. Someone told her father recently that he should have put money on his daughter winning the crown, the odds were so stacked against her.

Not only did her age make her a long shot, but her home state did, too. Before Scanlan, Nebraska never had one of its own win Miss America. Even Scanlan didn't expect to go all the way.

"It took the pressure off," she says. "My goal was just to make the top 15. Once I made that I was thinking, 'OK, I'm good.' "

Teresa Tidbits

**Recommended Reading: "The 5,000 Year Leap: A Miracle That Changed the World,"
by W. Cleon Skousen**

Celebrity crush: I don't have one, never have. I really have to know someone to have a crush on them.

Team Edward or Team Jacob: Jacob

Favorite dessert: Anything my mom makes.

Dream car: big, Chevy truck

Last downloaded song: "My Father's Heart," Rachael Lampa

Personal hero: my mom

Wanted to be as a kid: lawyer, judge, Supreme Court justice

Contact fashion reporter Xazmin Garza at xgarza@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0477.