There She Goes, A Miss America Who Cares About AIDS

January 13, 2011 By Shawn Decker

On Saturday night, Caressa Cameron will be passing her crown on to the next Miss America. Caressa is unique in the world of pageants due to her understanding of HIV, and that it is a problem that needs to be addressed in- you guessed it- the United States. The last time we had a Miss America that cared so deeply about this issue was in 1998 when Kate Shindle wore the crown.

I had a chance to speak with Caressa on the phone shortly after she won the title last year, here's a link to the Poz interview.

In recent years, the Miss America Organization has partnered with The Children's Miracle Network. It's a great and worthy cause, but that partnership along with some corporate responsibilities has made the year enjoyed by today's crown-bearer much different than that of year's past. For instance, when Kate Shindle won, the title holder had a year to promote their own individual cause. Kate caused a stir when she advocated for clean needle exchange programs to prevent HIV transmission.

I know Caressa would have liked to have done more with her "platform" during her year as Miss America. That's what they call them in pageants, by the way, "platforms", but in Caressa's case it's more than a word or a trendy cause. HIV is something that touched her life on a personal level when she lost a close relative at a very young age. It's what inspired her to learn more and start educating. She probably did more educating about HIV in the years before winning Miss America, when she was Miss Arlington, than she did as Miss America, which is a shame, because she could have extended the great work she did in the state of Virginia to the rest of the country. Imagine Miss America drawing attention to, say, the fact that over 5,000 Americans with HIV are on drug waiting lists?

Instead, the Miss America web site has her national platform issue listed as being an Ambassador for Children's Miracle network, and her real platform issue typed wrong: "Real Talk: Aids in America". Caressa would never spell "AIDS" using lower-case letters. She knows it's an acronym, and she knows it's a serious, multi-faceted issue that needs to be discussed.

I'm hoping that now, with the hard-earned title of Miss America forever attached to her name, that Caressa will be able to address the topic and reach people she may not have been able to before. I know that she wanted to, and I just can't help but wonder- if she would have had more freedom to talk about HIV- how many lives would have been changed.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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