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THE QUINTESSENTIAL QUEEN

THIS THOROUGHLY MODERN PAGEANT WINNER TALKS ABOUT LIFE, BEAUTY AND HOW SHE PULLS IT ALL TOGETHER

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE between attractive and beautiful? Pretty—or a knockout who commands everyone's attention? It's hard to put your finger on it. Is it blond hair, porcelain skin, big eyes? Beauty, as the famous cliché goes, may be in the eye of the beholder, but there is always something more to it than that. Take the case of Alisha Townsend, the first Ms. Canada. Townsend's story is an interesting one—and her definition of beauty is one indication why she was the first to wear this particular crown.

"What constitutes beauty? That's easy," says Townsend, an exotic 29-year-old brunette. "It's really about the mind. It's an attitude, a confidence. If you 'think good', you feel good. And that's what makes the difference."

The savvy model-turned-entrepreneur may be one of the few beauty queens in history who was recruited for her crown. Most beauty pageant contestants work their way up, going through a series of local and regional pageants, gradually gaining experience until they compete at the national level. But Townsend had never competed in a pageant and, in a sense, she still hasn't. "The people who run Canada Pageants became aware of me through my modelling. They were starting a new pageant—Ms. Canada—and they asked me to apply."

For those of you in the know, there are several beauty pageants in our country, including Miss Canada, Miss Teen Canada and Mrs. Canada. Ms. Canada was created to showcase the accomplishments of single women. Beauty was one aspect of the competition, but there was a heavy emphasis on education, career and commitment to the community.

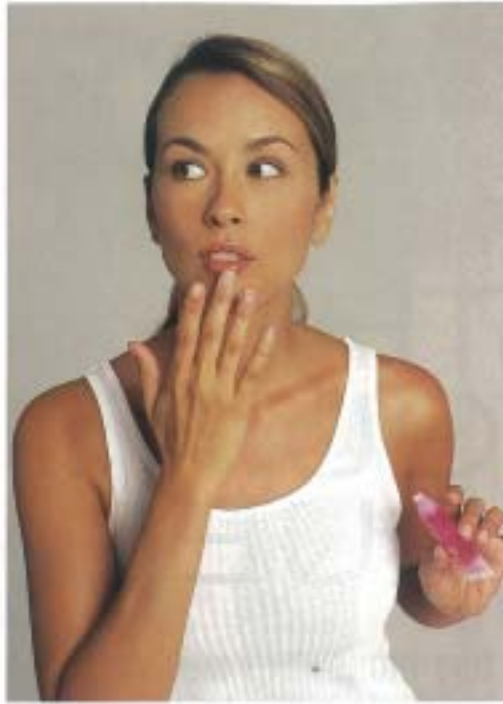
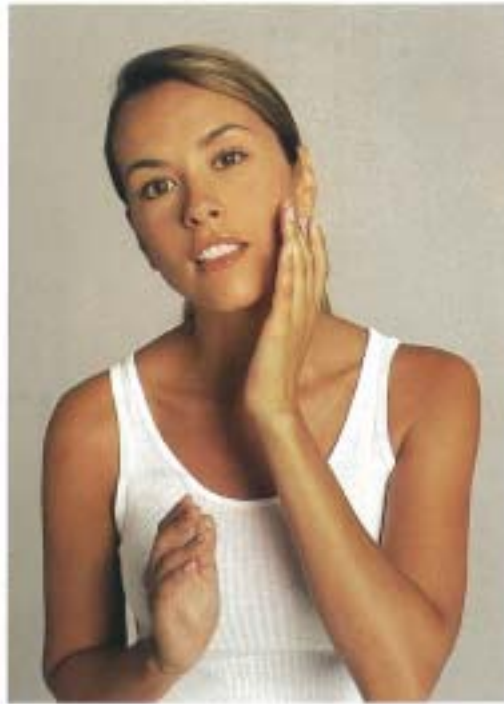
It is not surprising that Townsend was approached. Her list

of accomplishments is extensive. She has two degrees—one in Environmental Studies, one in Education—and several years of experience in marketing and advertising. Even though she was director of marketing for a health care company, she continued to model on the side and was also making plans to start her own production and photography company. The fact that she is drop dead gorgeous didn't hurt at all.

"I think I was a prototype for the new pageant," explains Townsend. "I went through the application process, including the interviews, and they finally told me it was down to me and one other applicant. They offered me the crown on the condition that I accepted a shortened reign (about four months). There was no ceremony, no prizes, but I became the model for what future contestants would conform to." Strange as it sounds, the concept suited Townsend completely. "By this point I had quit my job and started my new company. I would need time and energy to work on that, so I wasn't prepared to commit myself long-term to other projects."

Typically, the high-energy Townsend incorporated her new status effortlessly into her existing life. After spending even a short amount of time with her, it is obvious she is a woman who believes in balance. She seems to have an uncanny sense of what's right for her. One of the decisions she made when she decided to apply for Ms. Canada was to have her teeth whitened. While the concept of cosmetic enhancement suggests a radical alteration in appearance, sometimes a simple procedure can make a dramatic difference.

"It was actually Dr. Bhandari, my dentist, who suggested I do it," explains Townsend. "When he realized I was competing >



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in the pageant, he thought it would really improve my smile and he was right. I couldn't believe how much brighter my teeth looked. I used an at-home system—just four nights—and the change was significant.”

The Hamilton, Ont. native didn't start out as a beauty queen. In fact, she was anything but. “I was a tomboy as a teen, almost a nerd,” laughs Townsend. “I was not in tune with the styles and definitely not part of the popular crowd.” But in the summer of Grade 9, she suddenly “shaped up”, growing taller and filling out in all the right places. “When I came back to school that fall, guys who had wanted nothing to do with me before were suddenly interested.”

While most young women would have loved the attention, Townsend found it unsettling. “I didn't like it. It taught me a good lesson about beauty. Looks come and looks go, so you can't rely on them to feel confident. It has to come from within.” Her experience in modelling has only reinforced her beliefs. “Some people like your looks and some people don't. You just can't take it personally.”

However, despite her insistence that confidence and beauty come from within, Townsend is no slacker when it comes to taking care of herself. The same energy she puts into her work and play goes into maintaining her physical self. “It took me a while to get there,” she laughs. “As a teen, I was very active and could get away with eating a bag of

chips a day. I always ate a lot, even in university. Like a lot of students, I gained the freshman fifteen.”

A vegetarian for several years now, Townsend's diet is very healthy. “I never actually diet,” she says. “My mother always told me the best diet is moderation and I have stuck to that. I think that diets that impose something on you are very difficult to follow. I stick to fruit, veggies and carbs, and it works really well for me.” Rice and soya are two of her favourite foods, but she is trying to incorporate some meat back into her diet as she feels she needs the extra protein.

In terms of exercise, the active teen has matured into an active adult. “At this point, I think I'm conditioned to do it,” she explains. “Honestly, if I don't do it, I just feel worse.” A year-round membership at the gym is the basis of her exercise program, but in the summer she rarely goes. “I walk for miles, especially on the beaches out in Burlington. Anything to do with water I love, like waterskiing or jet skiing.”

But once the cold weather comes, Townsend is back in the gym. “I'll do 40 minutes on the elliptical trainer then some weight lifting. I also really like the results I get from circuit training.” She's not a slave to the gym, but tries to go at least three times a week. For anyone starting out, Townsend recommends hiring a personal trainer for a few sessions, just to get started in the right direction. “And stretch. It's incredibly good for you. It may be just in my head, but I really think it makes me look leaner and longer.”

As for beauty basics, Townsend has a regimen that befits a beauty queen—simple, but very effective. “I moisturize everything, every day. I've been doing that since I was a little girl. I saw my mother do it, so I did it too.” And before she had ever heard the word exfoliate, she was using a loofah. “I think it was

A VEGETARIAN FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW, TOWNSEND'S DIET IS VERY HEALTHY. "I NEVER ACTUALLY DIET," SHE SAYS. "MY MOTHER ALWAYS TOLD ME THE BEST DIET IS MODERATION..."

because I like the feeling of being clean, but I still do it daily."

Townsend uses the full range of products to care for her acne-prone, sensitive skin. "I experiment with different brands, but I always use a cleanser, toner, day cream, night cream, eye cream. My day cream has to have an SPF of 15 and I always choose a rich night cream," she explains. She wears little makeup, unless she's modelling and removes it as soon as possible. "And I always follow the Golden Rule: never wear makeup to bed."

One of Townsend's signature features is her long thick hair and she has often worked as a hair model. To counteract the stress of continual colouring and styling, she has a hot oil treatment every two weeks. "And I always use Joico's K-Pak shampoo and conditioner. They work perfectly on my hair."

Like many high-energy people, Townsend seems to effortlessly incorporate positive aspects into her life. For example: "I hate water, but I drink about two litres a day. It makes my skin look better, so I have a bottle by the bed, a bottle in the car, a bottle on my desk."

She strives to get to bed by 11 p.m.—"That's hard when you're starting your own business"—and has trained herself to fall asleep by 10 p.m. if she has a big day coming.

Her clothing style is very casual, though she has an affinity for "pointy-toe black shoes and a little black skirt" when she has to dress up. Makeup is also minimal—moisturizer, Blistex and a dash of pink lip gloss.

Not surprisingly, her mind still going a mile a minute, Townsend has one more piece of advice. "Buy a bra that fits. So many women try to fit into a bra that is too small and that's not flattering. Go and get a proper fitting done—you'll really notice the difference."

Townsend's definition of beauty as being all about attitude is more complex than she thinks. There's no doubt she has great genes—inherited from her Japanese mother and English father—but it's something more that makes her the knockout in the crowd.

It's a combination of energy and positive thinking that affects every area of her life. It's about an inner beauty that doesn't just shine through, it bursts through.

A real beauty queen. ■

ROYAL TREATMENT

Dr. Vineet Bhandari is an expert on enhancing people's teeth. Bhandari, who counts Donovan Bailey, several models and other Canadian celebrities amongst his clientele at the Bronte Dental Clinic in Burlington, Ont., was the dentist who treated Alisha Townsend when she was in the running for Ms. Canada.

"Alisha didn't need to have much work done. She naturally has great teeth." Continues Bhandari, who is a big fan of Townsend, whom he describes as a very attractive and humble person, "She has a very nice smile and shows lots of teeth. I told her if she wanted to look really stunning, all she needed was some whitening and contouring."

Townsend used the Zoom Weekender kit for brightening—it just requires three to four nights—and will be going back soon to see Bhandari where she will have her teeth contoured. Using diamond discs, the dentist will delicately shape the tips of Alisha's teeth so that they are more esthetically pleasing.

Bhandari believes in being on the cutting edge of dentistry, not for bragging rights, but for what new developments can provide for his patients. For example, he stopped using mercury fillings eight years ago. "I think that white fillings look better, they adhere well to the teeth and they don't pollute." He also uses a laser in his practice for specific applications because it minimizes pain, swelling and bleeding.

The newest service he offers in his clinic is BritesSmile, an in-office whitening system that is booming in the States. "It incorporates a high-intensity light without heat. The 15 per cent hydrogen peroxide solution is very safe; other systems use up to 50 per cent hydrogen peroxide which can damage the gums. On the average, teeth get up to six to eight shades lighter."

"People deserve to feel good about themselves," continues Bhandari. "I never tell them what to do, but rather I give them the various options they have and let them choose. That was why Alisha was such a good patient—in effect, she interviewed me rather than the other way round."

He must have made a good impression on Alisha because she recommended him to the people at the Ms. Canada—not in his capacity as a dentist, but in his newest endeavour—as a judge for this year's beauty pageant.

Dr. Vineet Bhandari, Bronte Dental Clinic, 905-825-1102.