

Beyond Beauty

A blushing face.

A ripped dress.

A 15-year-old girl covered in jewelry, makeup and a glittering dress.

A roaring crowd filled with applause.

A success in a world she never knew.

Sophomore **Stephanie Mahaffey** competed in her first pageant, National American Miss, July 20, 2012.

Despite the fact she had less experience than most of the contestants and a few wardrobe malfunctions, Mahaffey said she did exceptionally well.

Mahaffey said she wasn't originally interested in pageants and assumed they just weren't for her.

"I thought they were stupid, and I made fun of the pageant moms for them," she said. "I thought it was all about being pretty."

Mahaffey won Dancer of the Year when she was 8 years old, and then again when she was 10.

Ever since, Mahaffey said she has been noticed by both the modeling and pageant world.

"I've gotten letters in the mail before for other pageants, and my mom usually just threw them out," she said. "But when I found this in the mail, I knew I wanted to do it."

Mahaffey said National American Miss is different than most pageants because the competition focuses on more than beauty.

"It is a pageant that's more about personality and not the looks," she said. "They don't have a swimsuit competition. Instead, they had an interview where you actually sit down with the judges and just talk."

Mahaffey said at first she wasn't sure how to go about the pageant process, but after going to the dress shop "Sassy and Chic," she received insight on the basics.

Mahaffey said she enjoyed picking a dress because she got to try on and compare 30 different dresses.

"I ended up getting the opposite color than I thought I would want — yellow," she said. "It stood out the most."

Sophomore **Linden Hoffman** said she has learned a lot about pageants through Mahaffey.

"I learned that pageants are a lot more serious than just dressing up," Hoffman said. "There's a lot more that goes into them, and there's a lot of things you have to do to get ready for the pageants."

Because National American Miss was Mahaffey's first pageant, she said she didn't have high expectations going into the competition.

"I really didn't think I was going to do that well because most of these girls have been doing it since they were six," she said. "Meeting new friends is what I thought I was going to get out of it."

There are four main categories in pageants: Personal Introduction, Interview, Evening Gown and one optional category such as Spokesmodel, Talent, Casual Wear, Most Photogenic and Actress.

"I liked casual wear the best because it was the most relaxed," she said. "You got to be yourself."

Mahaffey said the pageant seemed to be going great until she went to receive an award in formal wear, and her dress ripped.

"My dress ripped seven to eight inches, and it kept getting caught on my heels," she said. "One of the queens offered to get scissors and help me. Then my straps broke for my talent dress, so it kept falling down."

Despite the mishaps, Mahaffey received numerous awards, outshining the rest of her competitors. She won awards for Most Promising Model, third runner up for Most Photogenic, second runner up for Casual Wear, Ms. Personality, the Portfolio Award winner, first runner up for the whole pageant and a few others.

"At the award ceremony they just kept calling my name," she said. "I had no idea that would ever happen."

Hoffman said she was not surprised by how well Mahaffey did.

"She has a fierce attitude," she said. "She's really confident, and she works hard."

From the pageant, Mahaffey received

the title of Ms. Leawood and qualified to compete in a national pageant in Anaheim, California called National All American Miss.

"It's a whole new level of competition," Mahaffey said. "They not only judge you on your personality, but also how you present yourself and how you look."

Hoffman said she has seen a change in her friend since Mahaffey began doing pageants.

"I've seen [Mahaffey] develop and become a little more outgoing and confident in herself," she said.

Mahaffey said she isn't sure how long she will pursue pageants, but she hopes to attend a few more throughout high school.

"I will probably stop when I go to college" she said. "But I really want to go to different pageants, other than National American Miss, to get more experience."

Mahaffey competed at Nationals from Nov. 18-20. She said although it wasn't her best competition, she enjoyed the memories she made in California.

"I did OK," Mahaffey said. "I did better at State. I felt like this was more of a vacation than a competition. I got to go to Disneyland and walk around the [Los Angeles] area, which was really cool."

Mahaffey said despite the hard competition, she walked away with a few more awards.

"I got Spirit of America, which is an award you get when you do well in all your categories," she said. "And I got the spirit stick, which is given to whoever does the best picking up the dance the quickest."

Mahaffey said due to the overwhelming amount of girls at the pageant, she met a lot of new people.

"There were 150 girls in my age division, so I ended up making a lot of new friends," she said.

Mahaffey said she is grateful for the experience and all the lessons she has learned along the way.

"It's not just the gowns and bikinis and whatnot," she said. "It's actually learning life skills like getting up in front of crowds and being more confident in yourself."