

My Journey to the Miss USA Pageant

My journey started when I was crowned in October as Miss South Dakota USA 2010. No one really tells you what your journey is going to be like leading up to Miss USA until the day arrives. Throughout this process I learned a lot about my character and what I believe in. I can truly say I have grown mentally, physically and spiritually stronger. After I won, I embarked on a journey to prepare to the best of my ability for the Miss USA pageant. I wanted to make sure I did everything possible so that I would have no regrets when I looked back.

There are a lot of things you need to do before you are ready to compete: you have to pick out your gown(s); your wardrobe has to be miraculous; you have to be in perfect shape; and you need to learn how to do your make-up and hair styles. People think we just wake up and we are beauty queens — WRONG. We have an amazing team behind us to make sure we look our best.

My favorite part about this process was picking out my gown. I was in Omaha, Neb., having my official headshots taken for the Miss USA pageant by Fadil Berisha. When I was looking through the racks of pageant dresses to wear for my photo shoot, Fadil picked the dress. I looked at it and thought that I wasn't going to like it. But when I put it on and looked in the mirror, I couldn't believe it: "This was my dress for Miss USA." I felt elegant, glamorous, beautiful, radiant, and most importantly like me. I knew I chose the right dress for me to compete in.

My least favorite part was the packing. You wouldn't think it would be that bad because you are only there for two weeks. The problem was you needed 3 to 4 outfits a day. You do the math: that is a lot of outfits! Plus you need jewelry, shoes, make-up, hair product, curling irons, hot rollers, and everything else. I had one huge suitcase just full of shoes! By the time I was done packing for my two week adventure I had 4 huge suitcases, 2 big carry-ons, a crown box, my gown bag, and more that my family brought out later when they came. I needed a team of people to help me at the airport just to get my luggage to the check-in gate.

I arrived in Las Vegas a couple of days early to get a spray tan, my nails done, and to shop for last minute things I couldn't find in Omaha or Minneapolis. Finally, it was the day to arrive at Planet Hollywood to take my official photo for the Miss USA Web site and program book. I had no clue what was about to happen when I walked through those double doors to start shooting for my official photo for Miss USA.

This was the second time I met world renowned photographer Fadil Berisha, since he took my headshot for the Miss USA Web site. I had the opportunity to meet the current Miss USA, Kristin Dalton, while she was getting ready to make an appearance at the Mayweather vs. Mosely fight. She told me what our theme was: "Waking Up in Vegas" — and said that we all had a surprise coming. Wow, was she right!

If you don't know what I am talking about then I'll inform you. This year Mr. Donald Trump wanted to push the envelope a little by taking our official photos in lingerie. To my surprise I was the guinea pig and the first person to shoot with Fadil. After the photo shoot, I didn't think anything of it and was very pleased with many of my photos. All 51 contestant photos were released and the next thing I knew I was getting text messages and phone calls saying



During her time in Las Vegas, Emily had the chance to meet and talk with Miss USA 2009 Kristen Dalton (Courtesy photo).

that we were on TMZ, almost every news station and newspapers talking about our risqué photos.

When I woke up on Monday (the 3rd) at 6 a.m. I was ready for my second day to begin. It was going to be a long day ahead because we had fittings for our opening numbers, swimsuit, and shoes. We also have two interviews with NBC and Miss Universe Organization and we had to take our official photos in swimsuits, evening gown and headshot. I finished around 10 p.m. with everything and went straight to bed.

The second day was the hardest because that is when you really get to meet and talk with the other contestants. It's hard not to compare yourself to others when you are standing in a room of 51 beautiful and talented women from across the United States. After a couple days you start making friends and memories with these

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