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Q&A: Miss USA 2011 Alyssa Campanella makes first visit to Boston

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Four months after being crowned Miss USA, 21-year-old Alyssa Campanella visited Boston this week for the first time in her life in order to advocate for breast cancer research and education, a cause that has impacted millions of families including her own.



(Nathan Fried-Lipski)

A native of Manalapan, N.J. who enjoyed acting from a young age, Campanella she decided to give pageants a try five years ago and was crowned Miss New Jersey Teen USA 2007. She went on to represent her home state, placing 1st runner up at the 2007 Miss Teen USA pageant. The exposure helped launch her modeling career, and she moved to Los Angeles in May 2010.

She won the 2011 Miss California USA Pageant last November and in June was crowned 2011 Miss USA. Last month she placed in the top 16 at the Miss Universe pageant held in Brazil.

To read a full story about Miss USA's visit to Boston, [click here](#).

Q: This is your first-ever visit within metro Boston. It's been a short stay, but what do you think?

Campanella: I love history and especially Colonial History. I grew up in New Jersey and so my neighborhood had a ton of Colonial houses that are still standing and a ton of farm land and old battlefields. I want to come back to Boston and really take in more of the culture here and the history here. Since, after all, it was one of the very first colonies in the United States – one of the very first places that pilgrims came to was obviously Plymouth so I definitely want to check that out. ... I absolutely [plan to come back to Boston]. And if they don't let, well I'm going to sneak out anyway.

Q: You're a Vancouver Canucks fan?

Campanella: Actually, today marks one year

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ago that I went to my very first hockey game. It was in Vancouver. It was the Vancouver Canucks against the Colorado Avalanche. And, we won [4 to 3 in overtime]. We won, of course. Ever since then I've got the hockey bug. I follow hockey now more than any other sport. I think I find it the sportiest of sports now. That's like real adrenaline-pumping, speed-filled.

Q: Were you upset when the Boston Bruins defeated your team on their home

ice in the seventh game of this past season's Cup Finals to win hockey's ultimate prize?

Campanella: Yea I was. The Bruins, they got lucky. We at least won the President's Trophy [awarded to whichever NHL team ends each regular season with the most points]. The Bruins couldn't even get that so they weren't even the top team of the year. Whoever wins the President's Trophy is actually the top team ... Everybody knows I'm a Canucks fan. And they know it in Boston, so they're making fun of me for being here. And, I'm like 'hey, you guys are just lucky I didn't bring my Canucks jersey.'

Q: What are some common misconceptions you hear about what people think it's like to be a pageant contestant and Miss USA?

Campanella: Well, they think that we live in tanning booths, and that we live in hair spray. I can tell you right now that I don't like to tan and I choke on hair spray. I think I've filled my quota with hair spray at Miss Universe. People think we're beauty queens and they think, 'oh, they just sit on the back of a car at a parade wave and they do this typical beauty pageant wave.' But there's so much more to it and the Miss Universe Organization is all about embodying the modern woman. Yea, it's a beauty pageant, so they look for a pretty face, but they look for a very well-rounded girl who can handle the types of organizations she'll be working with because she'll be introduced to a lot, a lot of different charities and a lot of different people who can't share the same stories she does. They're not as fortunate. They're not as lucky. So, learning all about this, Miss USA is not just, 'oh, hey look at me, I'm on a red carpet, pictures, flash, makeup, hair.' It's not all Hollywood glam. It's hard work and volunteer work.

Q: People have been calling you Miss USA all morning long. Rarely has anyone actually called your real name. Does that get old?

Campanella: It's finally set in that I'm Miss USA. I mean if you kept calling after me, 'Miss USA,' when I first won, like in June or July, I probably wouldn't have turned my head, I would've just kept on walking because it didn't hit me yet. But now I think since I've gotten back from Miss Universe [in September], I think it's really sunk in what my title is and what my job is. And that I did win Miss USA, and I'm Miss USA, 2011, the one and only. And, I guess now when people say, 'hey, Miss USA,' I do turn around now because I know, 'yeah, that is me.'

Q: You placed in the top 16 during last month's Miss Universe pageant held in Brazil. What was that like?

Campanella: Brazil was a little cold because it was winter. We were there for a very long time. And I had a great time with all of the girls. It was great to meet people from different countries, countries that I've always wanted to go to. It's really cool getting to sit with somebody who's lived there. So it was awesome getting to have that one on one experience and getting to say that I was Miss USA at Miss Universe. I never saw that coming in my life. I kind of thought about it, but I never actually envisioned that it would end up coming true. I was anxious to come back to New York though and basically have what we call, 'post-pageant depression.' After three weeks of nonstop go, go, go, and

competition mode and hair spray and evening gowns and swimsuits, suddenly, it's bam, you're back home, and it's over. And it's post-pageant depression. We just sit there sleeping on the couch for 24 hours and we wake up and we're like, 'now what, there's no schedule for today.'

Q: What advice do you have for young girls considering pageantry?

Campanella: Don't let anyone tell you to act a certain way on stage or be a certain way with the judges. See, a lot of my friends are pageant coaches, but I actually advise against them because they train them to pose a certain way and walk a certain way and to speak a certain way. If I was a judge, I would want to choose a girl who was the most untrained, one who's just there being themselves and can handle the job the best. So, I would just say to girls, 'just stay true to who you are and don't go crazy with the hair spray.' And, just remember that it's basically like you're in an audition, but a fun audition. I mean, this is a trip and a dream of a lifetime. ... I did not [have a pageant coach]. There really weren't any mentors for me. When I competed at Miss New Jersey Teen USA and I won I had no mentor. When I competed at Miss California USA and I won I didn't have a mentor. For Miss USA, my director, Shanna Moakler, she basically prepped me for Miss Universe, not for Miss USA. She wanted me to go all the way, which I did. But she would basically prep me with interview questions. She really didn't be like 'pose like this, and do this, and do that.' She really was just like, 'be yourself, but when they ask you this kind of question, here's what's going on in the world, figure out an answer for it.'

Q: What do you think of child beauty pageants like seen in the TLC TV show "Toddlers & Tiaras"?

Campanella: I don't watch it but I know about it. It's too young. My kid will not be doing that. I can tell you right now that if they tell me when they're four that they want to do a pageant, I'll be like 'you have to wait 10 more years, when you're old enough and mature enough to handle that type of a competition.' You're so young. The thing is if a young girl all she knows about is getting glammed up and being beautified, all she's going to think the world cares about is how you look on the exterior. And I think that a lot of the girls become more shallow that way. And also girls, if they keep losing pageants, they're going to think that they're never going to be good enough for anything. And then you have the girls that always win pageants when they're a kid, they're going to think that they're the best at everything that nobody tops them. And that's the wrong attitude, too. Not a win-win situation. I just think that those types of competitions, it's too young. Sports is one thing because you're a team and you work together, that's different, and plus you're getting exercise.

Q: You started out in acting at age 6, how did you transition to pageantry?

Campanella: Well I like being on stage. I was doing theater and so I enjoyed being on stage and the fact that with the pageant I could be on stage and dress up, that's what totally like keyed me in and lured me into doing pageants and I just had fun with it.

Q: You attended college, New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts in Manhattan. Did you graduate?

Campanella: I didn't actually graduate from there. I ended up going to a different school. I studied history and anthropology for one semester and then I ended up just fully going into the acting and modeling because I was told when you're young is when you have to do it. And, you know what, I can always go back into school. I can't always go back into modeling and acting. It doesn't work that way. So I figured, do it now. Keep myself educated. I read a ton of books. So, later on when I'm done with everything, we'll see. I'm currently looking into going to a culinary school where I can really learn more about food and nutrition, and I'll see where that goes.

Q: How have things changed for you since you started pageantry and

started winning these contests?

Campanella: My life completely changed. I mean there are so many doors that are being opened for me and I'm kind of discovering new things that I never thought that I would have a passion for before. So it's starting to open my eyes to a lot of new, exciting adventures. Kind of giving me a little bit of a clue of what I might want to do after my reign. So it's really helping me kind of foresee my future a little bit. ... I'm meeting people I never expected to meet. I've done a lot of stuff with the Food Network, with TLC, so making the right connections and meeting the right people and learning the right stuff is really helping.

Q: What are your plans for future?

Campanella: I know I want to do something in front of the camera, but what I want to do is yet to be determined. It could either be something with food, or it could be something with travel or it could be acting or modeling. I'm not sure which road I'm ready to go down yet. I'm still trying to make that decision.

Q: Do you get a lot of free time? Do you get to see your family and friends?

Campanella: I don't get a lot of free time and when I do I really want to see my family and friends first and foremost. Of course, my parents, my sister and my boyfriend come first. Because they mean so much to me and their support for me has been nonstop. And, basically, they've been put through this, too. It's not just my life that's changed. It's their lives that have changed, too. But I see them every chance that I get as far as free time goes. But if I have free time, but not enough free time to go and see anybody, I like to just have fun in my kitchen and whip up some really cool recipes.

Q: There are two cell phones on the table in front of you that you were pretty focused on a few minutes ago. Are you on those a lot? Is that how you keep in touch with friends and family back home?

Campanella: I have my iPad actually in my other bag. So, I Skype with them a lot. Two cell phones: one for work, one for personal and then I have an iPad and that's like my traveling computer. I have a laptop back at the computer. BBM is a great invention.

Q: You're naturally a blonde. Why'd you dye your hair red?

Campanella: I dyed it when I was 15 years old. I dyed it for a part in a play. I was Cherry Valance in, "The Outsiders." And, my director, he gave me the option. He said, 'you can either wear a wig or you can dye your hair red.' And, my mother had dyed her hair red years earlier, back in the 90s, and I always wanted to look like her. Obviously, who doesn't want to look like their mom. Then, I saw the movie "Titanic" and I saw the movie "Moulin Rouge" and they had red hair and I just thought it just fit me best. I can see myself being a red head. So when I got that part in the play and he gave me the option, of course I chose, I'm going to dye my hair red. So, I did and I just kept with it because I knew that that was the hair color I was supposed to have. And, actually, I do think I have some red in me because when my blonde roots come in, there are actually strawberry blonde strands. So I think my body is realizing, 'yes, Alyssa, you were supposed to be a red head.'

Q: Will you ever let your hair return to its natural color?

Campanella: I'm curious. Sometimes I'll wonder. Maybe I'll try. Maybe I'll just throw everyone for a loop one day. It depends on what type of job I have. But, maybe one day. The problem with going from red to blonde is it requires a lot of bleaching and it can damage your hair. So that's the one minus for doing that.

Q: You're a "Star Wars" fan. Which film in the series is your favorite and who is your favorite character?

Campanella: My favorite movie is “Return of the Jedi.” I love the end, of course, when they destroy the emperor. My favorite character goes back and forth. Of course, I love Padmé. But, actually, I have to say I like Anakin and here’s where my history nerd is going to come in. I compare Anakin Skywalker to Mary Stuart, [a 16th Century] Queen of Scotland. And the reason why is because they have a very innocent childhood. You never would have looked at these people when they were kids and thought ‘wow, they’re going to be evil when they’re older and make bad decisions that lead to their downfall.’ They had very innocent childhoods and you wouldn’t think that one mistake that they make would change the rest of their lives and basically turn them into different people and ultimately lead to their downfall. So I compare the two of them and that’s why I think I kind of favor Anakin because I look at him and I’m like, ‘oh, wow, that kind of reminds me of Mary Stuart.’



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