

# The Jr. Miss Halton Hills controversy

**'Incensed' at Fall Fair's stereotyping**



The fate of the Georgetown Fall Fair's first "Junior Miss Halton Hills" contest, proposed only a week ago, is being challenged by a vocal contingent of residents disappointed and, in many cases, appalled at what they consider to be a blatant example of sexual stereotyping. Three-year old Bernadette (above) is not eligible for the contest since her father, Jim Barrett is organizing the event, but many Halton Hills girls aged three to five - and their parents - are waiting to see whether a substantial letter-writing campaign will affect the decision of the Georgetown Fall Board and contest sponsors. (Herald photo)

To the editor of The Herald: I will do my best to make this letter as coherent as possible, although I am presently so incensed that I am not sure I will succeed. I am referring to the article on the front page of The Herald of August 20.

I cannot believe that in 1980 anyone would seriously attempt to run a "Junior Miss" beauty pageant! In an age where countless towns and cities in North America are phasing out or changing beauty contests, it is inconceivable that such a contest would be introduced in Halton Hills. My husband and I are trying our best to raise our two young daughters to believe that their God-given intelligence, honesty, and hard work, are the makings of a rewarding life and that physical looks are not as important as how beautiful they are inside.

The article was the discovery that the Service Clubs approached as sponsors were all-male clubs. I am a member of a very prominent female auxiliary Service Club and we were not asked to sponsor, as I doubt any of the many other Women's Clubs and Sororities in this community were.

Please do not misunderstand the motive for this writing. I am not trying to spoil anyone's fun or discourage the enthusiasm for the Fall Fair. I am trying to give another perspective to the suggestion that Halton Hills needs a beauty contest for little girls to "revitalize the Georgetown Fall Fair".

Surely there are other alternatives!

Sincerely,  
Marny Malcolmson.

Halton Hills calls itself a growing, progressive town, but it will indeed be a step backward if we allow a contest where young girls are introduced to the sexual stereotyping, and vanity that can hinder their growth as important, vital members of a community. In many cities, there is now a combined male-female contest where the merits of both sexes are taken into consideration. Perhaps a contest where both little boys and little girls are judged on their looks would be more acceptable to the many parents who will be offended by this pageant as it now stands.

What irritated me most in

**'Very much opposed' -mother of 3-year old**

Mr. and Mrs. J. Barrett,

As a mother of a three-year old girl and a former primary school teacher, I feel it is my duty to write you and tell you that I am very much opposed to "Beauty Contests" for children.

Such a competition would teach our children that all adults place a great emphasis

on a beautiful body and face. Nonsense! Imagine losing a contest based on such superficial qualities at the tender age of three!

Since "Beauty Contests" are the product of the adult mind, then it seems only right that consenting adults be the only participants. Why should naive children be put through all this phoney baloney just to

please a few over 18's?

The exhibition of children does not belong at a traditional Fall Fair. Bring on the livestock and let them be oohed and aahed and prodded at - Not our daughters!

Sincerely yours,  
Susan Schmeier  
17 Eleanor Crescent,  
Georgetown.

**'What will they learn from this?'**

To the editor of The Herald: Today I felt depressed after reading the article regarding "Junior Miss". Are we supposed to stand by and allow our town to show these young children, not

much more than babies, what is important in life? Not if it shows them that beauty is what is important. What will these children have learned when the judging is done? The winner will

learn how beauty will have people interested in her. It brings adulation. The losers will realize they didn't make it because of something they cannot change. They just aren't good enough.

Please Georgetown, haven't we come further than this?

Sincerely,  
Margaret Peyton,  
377 Delrex Blvd.,  
Georgetown.

**Ex-teacher questions 'lessons'**

Dear Mr. Barrett:

I was appalled to learn of your intent to stage a Junior Miss Beauty Pageant at this year's Fall Fair. I wonder if you realize the exploitation, sexist and unfair nature such a competition has and the warped values it teaches our children.

1. Self-worth can be measured by color of hair and eyes, body shape and size and one's ability to "look good".

2. Someone who is physically attractive is a "winner". Someone less attractive is a "loser". There is no need to investigate further as people, particularly women, are easily judged by appearance alone.

3. Physical beauty is an attribute more valuable than all others (kindness, fairness, intelligence, etc.) and therefore deserves the time, effort and expense required to keep up a "fashionable front". It doesn't matter that the winner may be a selfish, whiney, bully as long as she looks good.

4. Sex, as well as physical attractiveness can be used to gain an objective, particularly if one is female and the prospective benefactor, male. (Why else are the contestants girls, the judges men and bathing suits a part of the contest?)

5. Exploiting others for your own entertainment is fine. Adults do it all the time. In this case, a few girls will feel embarrassed parading themselves in front of crowds; a few will feel clumsy as they are asked to display grace and poise beyond their years; a

few won't understand why they should smile when they don't feel like it and doubtless, a few will cry and feel awful when they lose. But it's necessary because the grown-ups like it - see them clap and laugh and smile.

Are these the lessons you really want to teach, Mr. Barrett? I don't think so. Please reconsider your idea for a Junior Miss Beauty Pageant.

Yours truly,  
Gail Rutherford,  
63 Eleanor Cres.,  
Georgetown.

**'Contest ignores kids' qualities'**

To the editor of The Herald: Dear Sir,

I appreciate the concern for the welfare of the Fall Fair that has been addressed

by the Barrett family. However, I am disappointed that the means to inject interest in a community activity is one that ignores the true qualities of children.

My children - and I have a 5 year old daughter - are being raised to appreciate the worth of all people, regardless of appearance or handicaps.

I trust that the Barretts will enjoy living in Georgetown and come to appreciate all our children.

Sincerely,  
Cheryl Lightowler

**'No winners in this kind of contest'**

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Barrett,

I hope that you will reconsider your reported suggestion that a beauty contest be held at the Georgetown Fall Fair with the participants three to five year old girls. I believe that any competitive situation is difficult for children of this age to cope with. However, a

contest based on factors over which they have absolutely no control, i.e. their appearance and talents - is potentially very damaging to their developing sense of self-worth.

It must be emphasized that this type of contest encourages in children and adults of both sexes an attitude which women

the world over have been battling for years - i.e. that their worth as human beings is based on their physical attributes. If an adult, it is often called "sex appeal" in this contest it will probably be called "cuteness". It is none the less exploitation of the worst kind. My dictionary

defines the word "exploitation" as selfish or unfair use. It describes this situation very well indeed.

I feel sure that if you think this through carefully, you will agree that there can be no winner in a contest of this nature.

Sincerely,  
Eunice McGowan

**'Contest is for parents, not kids'**

To the editor of The Herald: Dear Sir,

As the father of a little girl who would be "eligible" for the fall fair beauty contest, I must express my objection to such an event. It is one thing for

adults to compete in such an event when they understand the meaning of competition. It is quite another when adult judges are going to decide and tell small children which is prettier. The idea is absolutely

stupid. This is not a contest for the children, but for the thoughtless parents who wish to live their fantasies through their children, to the child's expense. If this is the best idea the fall fair board can

come up with, then they should forget the whole thing.

Very disappointed,  
Murray McIntosh  
P.S. A copy of this letter has been sent to Mr. and Mrs. Barrett.

**'Will boycott fair and contest'**

To the editor of The Herald: Dear Sir,

I was dismayed to read about the proposed beauty contest for little girls at the fall fair. I consider it ludicrous to

take advantage of a little child's natural desire to "dress up" by putting them in a contest dressed in bathing suits and evening gowns. This is child exploitation of the

greatest kind!

I will personally boycott the fall fair if they persist with this freakish suggestion. I also feel that any group or individual who believes in children's

rights should boycott a fair that would subject children to such a tasteless, demeaning event.

Sincerely,  
Janet McIntosh

## Letters to the Editor

**'Grave implications ahead for children's development'**

Editor's Note: Following are open letters to Jim Barrett concerning the proposed Junior Miss Beauty Pageant.

Dear Mr. Barrett: I wish to register my belief that you have been ill-advised in proposing a "beauty contest" for preschool children at

the Georgetown fall fair. While many people find contests of this type repugnant and ridiculous, the contest proposed presents grave implications

for the cognitive and emotional development of the contestants.

Children at the ages you desire to have compete, three to five, are at a critical stage of development and their needs will not be met in a contest of this sort. Children at this stage are very egocentric, they are attempting to discover their self-worth. Success is very important at this stage because it comes infrequently. What has been proposed will deny success to all but one of the contestants. The disappointment of failure will cause stress and stress is the major hindrance to development, both cognitive and emotional.

Children at this age are also striving to develop, in Piaget's words, the symbolic function of objects. A contest of this sort will reinforce certain stereotypes of beauty and worth, or in the child's view, what is good and what is bad. The situation might also lead to the

child forming a resentment towards her parent, other competitors and adults in general when she fails; and all but one fail.

The idea of a talent competition for preschool children is both grotesque and ghoulish. These people are lacking in gross and fine motor skills. Judging "talent" at this stage of development means that their sincere and purposeful attempts to please will be held up to adult ridicule (under the cover of "Isn't that cute.")

What you are really proposing, sir, is an instance of children being used as non-comprehending objects in an event designed to amuse the adult mind. As a person who works with children, and as a parent I urge you to reconsider the purpose and the advisability of your idea.

Sincerely,  
John G. Currie, M.A., MLS  
5, Albert St.  
Georgetown.

**'Contest could cause loss of self-esteem'**

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Barrett: I feel compelled to inform you how strongly I disapprove of the proposed baby show and "Junior Miss" beauty pageant.

Competition is widely recognized by child psychologists as being harmful for all children, but particularly so for the age of the children suggested for the beauty pageant. They have no ability to handle the feeling of rejection and worthlessness brought on by losing. The resulting loss of self-esteem could have serious and long lasting effects on a child's ability to relate to others and on cognitive development.

Furthermore, the decision to enter the contest will be made not by the child, but his parents. In effect, these children are being used as pawns to gratify their parents' ego.

The "Junior Miss" contest would appear to be planned as some grotesque parody of an adult beauty pageant. The resulting spectacle would seem to be humiliating and patronizing rather than

entertaining.

Finally, we arrive at the whole ethical question of the distorted values embodied in a beauty pageant. We teach our children that everybody has worthwhile qualities and that minor physical differences have nothing to do with a person's real value, while at the same time they are exposed to the sight of babies and young children being judged on their beauty and

charm. Surely no loving parent would allow their child to participate.

As a professional who worked with young disadvantaged children for many years, and as a mother, I strongly urge you to reconsider your decision to stage these events.

Sincerely,  
Margaret Currie,  
5 Albert St.  
Georgetown.

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