

BEYOND MISS WORLD-AN ELECTRONIC CONVERSATION WITH JENNIFER HOSTEN.

Three cheers to you Cousin Jennifer
The fairest of all that is what you are
Charm and mannerism
With poise and magnetism
And stepping in style
With a lovely smile
Oh, how we love Cousin Jennifer
And we are all very proud of her
She is the most beautiful
Yes, the most wonderful
The most beautiful girl in the world.
-The Mighty Sparrow, "Jennifer"

Socrates: A man put me in difficulty by asking me more or less this question with great arrogance. "Tell me, Socrates, how do you know which things are beautiful and which are ugly?"
Plato, Hippias Major(or What is Beauty).

Jennifer Hosten's capture of the 1970 Miss World title occurred just as the "second wave" of feminism began to hit its stride. Significantly, the birth of this second wave of feminism was heralded by a fiery protest at the 1968 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City which, over the years, has been misrepresented as a bonfire of bras. Vehicled by the civil rights movement, by French philosopher Simone de Bouvoir's "The Second Sex" (1953), and Betty Freidan's "The Feminine Mystique" (1963), among others, the new feminism demanded equality and, not surprisingly, it viewed the beauty pageant as a glitzy emblem of women's oppression.

Though Ms Hosten is far too modest to make the claim, it is fairly safe to say that her Miss World victory magnified our dot on the world map and probably helped to undermine the racial fantasies tenanted in the hard heads of South Africa's apartheid rulers who sent two contestants to the 1970 show: one white, one "coloured". The coloured South African was first runner-up to Jennifer.

The Miss World victory was of course a huge personal triumph for the then 22-year-old Jennifer Hosten. It

represented both Arrival and Departure. Arrival because the title of " most beautiful girl in the world" opened many gilded doors to international celebrity; Departure because the lofty heights of international fame furnished other vistas to success and self-fulfillment.

Jennifer Hosten carried out her Miss World duties with dignity, and in the years following her 12-month reign she got married, served as Grenada's High Commissioner to Canada, raised two children, worked as Canadian diplomat in Bangladesh, and as a technical adviser on trade to the St Lucia-based Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS):we concede that this does not read very much like the career path of a former Miss World.

And nearly forty years following her 1970 coronation Jennifer returned to that glittering night in London, where she invoked her Miss World victory only to transform it into a backdrop against which she recounted her story. She tells this fascinating story (with some help from her husband, Shaun) in an autobiographical book entitled Beyond Miss World.

We heard that Ms Hosten was preparing to hit the road to promote her book, so we got in touch with her and asked for an interview. She responded rather promptly, " no problem".

Our interview with Jennifer Hosten roamed quite a bit of territory: childhood, the meaning of beauty, academic achievements, feminism and more. By the way, Jennifer gave us an interesting definition of feminism , the kind that will be endorsed by Professor Camille Paglia. Jennifer's feminism is a *laissez faire* feminism; a feminism that does no hue to what Paglia will call "the pary line".

What follows is the transcript of an electronic conversation between Jennifer Hosten (JH) and Caldwell Taylor (CT)

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CT: Jennifer, "Beyond Miss World" is the title of your new book. Is the title your way of saying "Been there, done that". Or is it, in the words of one reviewer, an expression of your rejection of the temptation of the world of entertainment"?.

JH: Well, Caldwell, the title: Beyond Miss world was chosen because following my "year" as Miss World I began to take a completely different path. My road had been filled with variety and challenge. In any event, the Miss World title is only for 12 months and can only happen once. Had I been offered an interesting and lucrative movie role, things might have been different. I would not use the word "rejection" in the circumstances. The book talks about the opportunities to pursue different paths resulting from personal experience. In my case, I believe I have been lucky to build on natural strengths and interests that have contributed to a meaningful life. I consider myself fortunate to have had these experiences.

CT: How do you respond to people who say beauty pageants are both demeaning and sexist?

JH: Well, once again, this is clearly discussed in the book. Feminism is all about choice. The choice to determine one's own path to self-fulfillment and personal development. This does not preclude beauty pageants.

CT: Okay, let's talk about judging beauty: The much maligned Russian judge gives a mark of 9.5; his miserly Grenadian counterpart awards a score of 5.9. Is beauty really a quantifiable phenomenon?

JH: I believe that judging physical beauty is a very subjective thing. It is also influenced by culture. For instance, in Africa, much of the Caribbean and Polynesian, women are regarded as more attractive if they tend to be larger. This is not necessarily so in Europe and North America.

The Forward of Beyond Miss World was written by Swinburne Lestrade, former Director General of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). He quotes the actress Jacqueline Bisset who said: "Character contributes to beauty. It fortifies a woman ... a mode of conduct, a standard of courage, discipline, fortitude and integrity can do a great deal to make a woman beautiful" I very much agree with the statement. In my case, the Singer/ Actor Glen Campbell, who was a judge at the 1970 Miss World Contest, said that my sincerity made the difference. I took that as a great compliment.

CT: Stendhal, the nineteenth century French novelist, defined beauty as the promise of happiness. Do you agree?

JH: Not at all. I can think of many beautiful persons who have not led happy lives.

Neither does the pursuit of wealth make for happiness. I believe the challenge is to realize that physical beauty is often just skin deep while true beauty is something that radiates from within and is often the result of depth of character and the achievement of personal development.

CT: Let's return to *Beyond Miss World*. You have written this book with assistance from your husband Shaun Sarsfield. Was writing through autobiographical materials easy to do with Shaun?

JH: We were living in Bangladesh where I served as a Canadian diplomat and CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) representative. We bumped into a United Nations representative quite early in our stay who came originally from Trinidad. She could not believe that I was working in Bangladesh in the Aid field and found it intriguing knowing my background. It was her surprise and encouragement that I should write about my life that gave my husband, Shaun, the idea. As he was less busy at the time he offered to begin writing, provided I recounted my story. This is how it began. Later on I took over much of the writing but we collaborated on all of the chapters. Shaun's writing style is a bit different from my own but all in all I believe we were able to achieve a fine balance.

CT: Peggy Antrobus has described your childhood as having been both "privileged and disciplined". Do you agree? Can you tell us a thing or two about your childhood?

JH: The second chapter of the book talks about growing up in Grenada. It describes how different things were then from today. As children we had no television. Radio played a more important part and we occupied ourselves in a number of creative ways. I was a self-motivated child who found work to do in the summer and Christmas holidays and did not let

obstacles get in my way like the time I wanted to purchase a pair of Indian slippers that was in vogue. My parents did not believe in giving us things which, in their opinion, we did not need. Undaunted, I decided to make a pair of slippers myself.

END OF PART 1