

Miss Illinois: Beyond the Crown

-K. Billadeau

Poise, beauty, talent, character, intelligence - all of these describe one of the most rewarding experiences in any young woman's life. These are traits that are judged to perfection in order to receive one famous title: Miss Illinois! Ever wondered what Miss Illinois is all about? Who is she, and what's her story? Ladies- want to know what it takes? Gentleman- come on, you know you're interested. I recently got a lucky chance to get the inside scoop from Miss IL 2009 herself: Ms. Erin O'Connor!

Born and raised in Evergreen Park, Erin was a very shy kid who loved to spend her Saturday mornings eating breakfast on the patio with her parents and sisters. Her own high school years were spent at an all-girls private school called Mother McCauley High School in Chicago's south side. Being shy, like so many of us, made her childhood difficult, but being in an all-girls school gave her a safe and comfortable environment. Her most embarrassing high school moment though was tripping up the stairs her freshman year! Now that's mortifying for anyone! Luckily though, a kind senior stopped in the hall and helped young Erin pick up her six heavy hardcover books. "High school," says Erin, "was my best high school memory."

Reading is one of her biggest hobbies and her guilty pleasure (drum roll please!) is TWILIGHT! Yes folks, Miss Illinois is a HUGE Twilight fan! Her other hobbies include dancing, and she is also a theater major at Western Illinois University. Her biggest pet peeve? Camera phones! "It takes



too long!" Understandable when you have so many cameras around you all the time!

The journey to become Miss Illinois is tough. One's own perseverance, strength, and sense of self are tested to the breaking point. You must be prepared to devote all your time to your cause and the people of your home state. Erin herself has sacrificed her senior year of college to go on the road, but she will be returning next fall to finish her degree. Throughout her long hours and travel, Erin has endured her chaotic schedule always coming out on top and looking great! Being Miss Illinois has changed Erin forever, and for the better. "Being able to grow as a person," she stated, "is one of the

most rewarding parts of my experience."

One of the most crucial decisions she must make before she competes for the title, Miss Illinois must pick a platform. A platform is a charity, organization, or cause that is dear to the contestants heart that she wants to volunteer her time for by using her title. Erin's platform certainly is dear to her own heart. After losing her mother two years ago to Melanoma, the most deadliest form of skin cancer, Erin has re-dedicated herself to the cause and today hopes to raise awareness in all young people all around Illinois and beyond. Also an advocate for the American Cancer Society, Erin has one bold message for us all. "There is no such thing

as a safe tan!" A message to be taken very seriously.

Skin cancer is the single most prominent in the US, with over one million diagnosed annually. One in every five Americans today will be diagnosed at some point in their lifetime. Erin wants all those who use tanning beds or don't use enough or any sunscreen to please think twice next time. First exposure to tanning beds in youth increases melanoma risk by 75 percent. The harmful ultraviolet radiation from increases a young woman's risks of early aging, brown spots, wrinkles, lax skin, and more. Erin recommends always using a sunscreen over SPF 15 every time you go out into the sun. Unfortunately, there is no way to reverse the damage done by tanning, but good quality self-tanning lotions or sprays are a much healthier substitute.

Erin's journey has only just begun. There is still so much more left to go and an even bigger contest lies ahead, Miss America 2010. After her reign, Erin plans to finish her senior year and pursue her masters degree in Fine Arts. To all of us students here at BBCHS, Erin has a few words of advice, "WORK HARD and study as much as possible. Good grades will take you a long, long way! Also be kind, treat others the way you would want them to treat you." Wise words from a very kind and wonderful young woman!

Cheer on Erin and watch the Miss America Pageant January 30th, 2010 on TLC. For more info on Erin and the Miss Illinois Scholarship program visit www.missillinois.org. For the facts and learn more about Melanoma and the risks of skin cancer visit www.skincancer.org.

The Bible, the world's best-selling book, is also the most shoplifted book.

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