

REAL LIFE Get YOU thinking

DON'T A SHO

Think beauty pageants are out

Three months ago, I scooped the title of Miss England 2011. I beat thousands of other girls to win the nation's biggest beauty pageant, and I'm still walking on air.

It's a huge compliment and I'm very proud. But maybe you think pageants are a bit old-fashioned – that they're sexist and superficial.

I know some people would call me a show pony,

parading my looks...

Yet that's not what being Miss England is all about. The competition is the opposite of all those things and I believe beauty pageants are still fiercely relevant in today's world.

Positive attributes

The first misconception to dispel is that beauty pageants are all about girls' looks. Of course they're important – it's crucial that entrants promote a healthy look and lifestyle – but they're also about so much more.

Girls need to demonstrate that they're go-getting, upbeat and selfless – all positive attributes. Being Miss England is about being a well-rounded role model for young women – something we need more of in today's world.

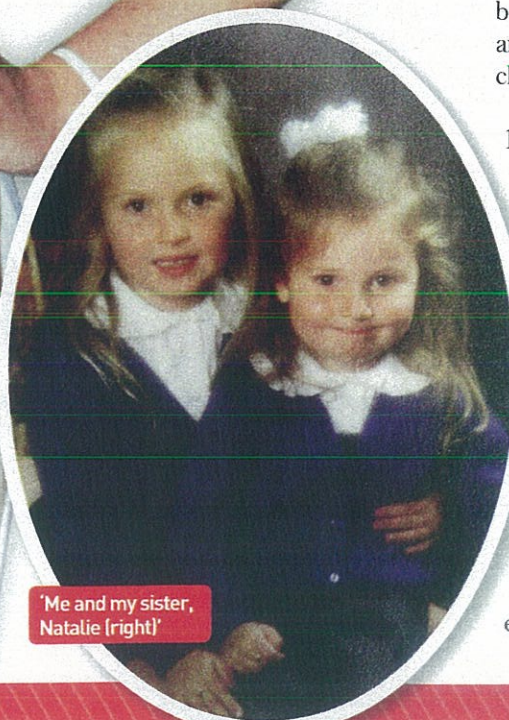
I might be a model and look good in a bikini, but I'm no bimbo. I'm academic and creative and know that hard work reaps benefits. I care deeply for others and love raising money for charity. What's bad about that?

Starting at stage school aged 10, I was outgoing, bubbly and loved dancing and acting.

So when I reached 18, I decided to take some time out from studying while I considered my future.

I moved from Llantrisant, Rhondda Cynon Taf, where I'd grown up with my parents and younger sister, Natalie, to West London and signed up with a model agency. I loved the buzz and the glamour.

A year later, my mum entered me in a beauty pageant. 'I knew you always wanted to



'Me and my sister, Natalie (right)'



CALL ME W PONY



I've raised £6,000 through charity events'

And? Alize has something to say about that...

do this,' Mum told me, and she was right. I was delighted.

Trying my luck in a pageant had been one of my lifelong dreams. It appealed to me as a good way to build my confidence and improve on my talents.

I had to parade on stage in a sparkly evening gown and talk about the charity work I'd done. I was chuffed when I came third.

'It was brilliant,' I told Mum.

Not just a pretty face

I bet some of you imagine it's tense backstage, that the girls are ruthless rivals and cold in their pursuit of a title. But it's not like that at all. I've never encountered any bitchiness – just a bunch of like-minded girls having fun.

I think all the emphasis on female beauty in our society can be divisive between women, making them jealous and low in self-confidence. But contests like Miss England positively counter that. Contestants never vie to be the best looking, and there's no competitive dieting or self-loathing.

I might be a size 8, but I never diet. I exercise, eat healthily and take care of my body, and when you feel good on the inside you look good on the outside.

You don't have to be a certain size to enter Miss England,

either. There's no swimsuit round and the girls in the final this year were a range of sizes.

It shows that girls can be confident, bubbly and inspiring no matter what their size. You'll never be a winner if you're just a pretty face with nothing to back it up – you need that positive, can-do-anything attitude to life and the evidence to prove it.

The Miss England contestants aren't all models and actors. One past winner was in the army and I've met gymnasts, illustrators and degree students. The contest encourages girls to follow their dreams and develop their talents.

I had to make an outfit from recycled materials for one round, and I covered a charity-shop dress in seashells to make a gorgeous frock. For the 'talent' round, I performed a Shakespearean monologue. See – it's not all about having a winning smile.

Of course, the way you present yourself is important. I wore a killer red dress as I sashayed down the catwalk, and tried to show I was sincere and down-to-earth.

When I found myself in the last five of the competition, I couldn't believe my luck. In the final, the other girls and I had to answer on the spot: 'What makes you who you are today?'

I was asked first, and I was so nervous I just said the first thing that came into my head.

'My grandad,' I said. 'He was a talented teacher who could turn his hand to anything. Once he made a

grandfather clock from scratch. He made the most of life, and I've always tried to be like that.'

My grandad had passed away when I was 16, and talking like that almost moved me to tears.

Improved confidence

When my name was announced as the winner, I couldn't stop shaking. Everything was a blur of lights and applause as I was crowned with a tiara, my parents clapping excitedly in the crowd.

Who wouldn't like that?

There's nothing negative that comes from these competitions. They improve your confidence, help you meet new people and inspire other young women to do the best for themselves.

The charity money that flows from these pageants is a force for good, too. Every year Miss England raises thousands for good causes. Over the past two years I've raised £6,000 through sponsored walks, runs and the fashion shows I put on. I've also worked with the Variety Club children's charity, who help disabled and disadvantaged kids.

I'm planning a fashion show to raise money for the charity Beauty With A Purpose – all while juggling my university studies in journalism. I'm hoping to work in the media eventually.

In two months I'll compete in the Miss World finals in London, and I'm so excited.

Beauty contests should never be cast aside as outdated. They benefit the contestants and the girls they inspire.

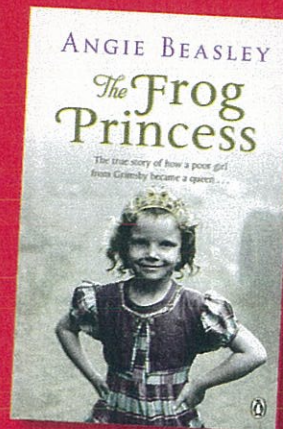
I'm proud to be a beauty queen, and always will be. ■
Alize Munter, 22, West London



There was no swimsuit round, but we got to do some modelling!

WIN

We're giving away 20 copies of *The Frog Princess* by Angie Beasley (Penguin, £6.99). The book reveals how Angie overcame poverty and violence to become a beauty queen, model and director of the Miss England competition. To enter, email frogprincess@loveitmagazine.co.uk by Wednesday, 29 September 2011. Terms and conditions apply – see page 54.



Anyone interested in entering Miss England can visit www.missengland.info.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

Do you agree with Alize, or do you think beauty pageants belong in the past? Let us know your views. And if there's something else you feel strongly about or an issue you want voiced in the magazine, we'd love to hear about it. Write to Opinions, *love it!*, 2nd Floor, Swan House, 37-39 High Holborn, London WC1V 6AA, or send an email to opinions@loveitmagazine.co.uk.