



Al & Gail Clark: TEXAS' TOWERING TWO-SOME



by J.J. Smith

Flashback: Las Vegas, 1979. Al and Gail Clark, from Houston, Texas, are celebrating the new year when Al spots a pageant entry form touting "You Could Be The Next Mrs. America!" With a gleam in his eye he transfixes his attention on his beautiful wife and imagines. Thus the stage is set for what will become a journey of monumental success.

Once bitten by "pageant fever," the Clarks found themselves in El Paso, Texas, only a month later for the Mrs. Texas pageant. Gail won the title on her first try and a trip back to Las Vegas to compete for Mrs. America. A top ten finalist, Gail's classy looks earned her the "Most Photogenic" award. As the Clarks criss-crossed the country as a result of their new niche in pageantry, they caught the eye of the Mrs. America directors who offered them the Texas directorship. Early the next year, they produced their first pageant, as Gail relinquished her title to Carol Ann McEwen. Two months later, the trio of Al, Gail and Carol headed back to Las Vegas, and under their guidance and experience, Carol won the Mrs. America title! The elusive Lady Luck offered Al and Gail another taste of success.

Attracted by Al and Gail's successful breakthrough, the Miss USA/Universe Pageant System came calling and soon thereafter, they found themselves as local directors for the Houston area which eventually led to their being appointed the Texas state directors. In the pageant record books, Texas has accomplished an astonishing feat, having produced six Miss USA winners since 1985. And under the Clark's watchful eyes, all of their Miss Texas-USAs have made top ten at Miss USA. Impressive, considering the competition at the national level.

Last year, as the newly-crowned Miss Texas-USA Chelsi Smith began her quest for the Miss USA and Universe titles, Al and Gail took her under their wings and set

her in the direction to get her to the top. From the Miss Universe throne Chelsi told Al and Gail, "Thank you for giving me this wonderful opportunity. I am grateful for your encouragement and support from the very beginning." With Chelsi, the Clarks had produced their very first Miss USA and Miss Universe. They were truly on top of the world, but the third ring in pageantry's Triple Crown—the Miss Teen USA title—had managed to elude them. As this year's pageant season began, Al and Gail aimed to change that.

Christie Lee Woods, an eighteen-year-old beauty from Huntsville, Texas had plans this year for her own triple crowning, hoping to win the Houston-Teen, Texas-Teen and ultimately, the Miss Teen USA crowns. Thanks in part to the know-how of Al and Gail, she succeeded in doing just that, and

now reigns as Miss Teen USA. Celebrating her victory, Christie filled the void that had eluded Al and Gail. They now stand alone as the only State directors to have produced a Miss Teen USA, Miss USA and Miss Universe—pageantry's Triple Crown!

As one steps in to the offices of Crystal Productions, Inc., the Houston headquarters for the Miss Texas-USA pageant, one immediately senses that it is a special place indeed. The walls exude success and are lined with framed photos—year by year—of the fortunate few who have worn the coveted crowns. An entire wall is devoted to their current Miss Texas-USA Amanda Little, who is preparing for the upcoming Miss USA pageant. Christie has also been enshrined with her own wall—a monument to the Clark's first Miss Teen USA. The glittering Miss Universe crown and sash dazzle from within an etagere filled with Chelsi's Miss USA and Universe memorabilia. As Al and Gail greet visitors with a flair that only Texans seem to have, one realizes that success feels right at home here.

So just what is the secret of their success? "You are only as good as the people you surround yourself with," Al says, "but the key to a successful working relationship with the girls who win is communication." Referring to their close rapport and open door policy, Gail adds, "We try to share everything with our thirty local Area directors all over the state, so that they can learn from our experience and know the feeling of success." Oh, what a feeling!

The Miss Texas-USA pageant is recognized as the nation's most successful and prestigious preliminary leading to the Miss USA pageant. It has been a live, prime-time network show for over a decade and reaches over 6 million households in Texas and several neighboring states. Every aspect of the first-rate pageant is the most professional available anywhere. With its soaring television ratings, it is no wonder that it has been nominated for an Emmy Award, television's highest achievement!

As for the lucky girls who earn the crowns and titles, Al and Gail have a unique way of orienting them to their new celebrity status, to which they sheepishly grin at one another not wanting to give away all their strategies. With over seventeen years of experience, who can blame them? It is a formula that many would like to know.

From the twinkling of an eye in Las Vegas all those years ago, to the top rung of pageantry's ladder, Al and Gail Clark can best be summed up by their favorite quotation, by John Ruskin: "The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it." ■



Miss Texas, Miss USA, Miss Universe Chelsi Smith (L), and Miss Teen USA Christie Lee Woods (R).

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