

## Pageants come with high price

■ **OUR OPINION:** Child beauty contests are potentially dangerous, and it's up to parents to decide what's right

When 6-year-old JonBenet Ramsey was found murdered in her Boulder, Colorado home on Dec. 26, the media jumped on the story — and for good reason. With a ransom note and the sheer viciousness of the crime, the murder made for compelling journalism.

But when reporters discovered Ramsey was also a beauty queen — former Little Royal Miss, Tiny Miss Beauty and Colorado State All-Star Kids Cover Girl, among other titles — they moved quickly to uncover the \$5 billion children's pageant industry's many problems.

Photos of Ramsey and other contestants in very grown-up clothes and make-up graced the covers of national magazines and newspapers. Many readers were outraged at these images, angry at the blending of adult values with youthful enthusiasm.

It's true. Children's beauty contests, which an estimated 500,000 girls under the age of 12 take part in each year, make up a profitable, strange world. And therefore, they are ripe for criticism.

Furthermore, child pageants are a prime example of a problem that sweeps through all of society. Is outer beauty more important than inner qualities? Televised pageants like the Miss America contest aside, the measure of a young girl's beauty is especially troubling. Should children barely old enough to walk be involved in such contests?

It is easy to say no. Measuring beauty solely on physical appearance is inherently superficial. And doing so at such a young age is especially dangerous. The photos printed of many of the contestants, including Ramsey, show grade-school students with heavy makeup and poofy hair who look more like ladies of the night than children of the school day.

It is important to note, however, that Ramsey is an extreme example of a world that is easily labeled as exploitative and hurtful to children. Some pageants exist solely to judge personality and involvement in activities and frown on excessive clothing or makeup.

A child gaining a hobby is rarely criticized. But it is where the hobby becomes an obsession that people cry foul. And rightfully so.

But many people say beauty pageants are no different than Little League for boys. There is always going to be the parents who go too far in their support, the coaches who ask a bit too much of their players. In the end, every Little League in the country shouldn't be abolished because of a few bad apples, right?

The parallel with baseball and pageants is questionable, but it is true every pageant should not be condemned. The important thing is that a line is drawn.

And the line should not be drawn by the girls themselves. A common excuse used by many parents is that their children like being in the contests. But every child likes being in the spotlight. Every child likes attention. Ultimately, it is the parents who must make the decision on the child's behalf. Unfortunately, it is often the parents who are involved more deeply in the pageants than the children themselves.

Like anything, perspective must be gained by the adults involved (and to a lesser degree, the children). Beauty pageants can be useful in a child's development — or destructive — but the potential for excess is always there. While a child's life is his or her own, it is the parents' responsibility to steer the child in the right direction. Raising a child responsibly may or may not include beauty pageants. But parents should be aware of the dangers of excess.

*This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.*



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

### All thumbs



#### To Sens. Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith:

The two fresh-faced senators, Democrat and Republican respectively, solemnly vow they will work together on behalf of Oregon's interests. Before Smith was inducted on Jan. 6, publicity stunts like the men's wives meeting for lunch demonstrated the former campaign rivals' new sense of teamwork.

But with the absence of veteran legislators Mark Hatfield and Bob Packwood, who brought millions of dollars to the state in a combined 70 years of congressional experience, Oregon's senatorial clout is now almost nonexistent. And despite Wyden and Smith's claims of solidarity, they disagree on almost every major issue, and that fact is unlikely to change — even if the state's well-being is at stake.

#### To rich adventurers:

Steve Fosset's failed attempt to fly a hot air balloon around the world is yet another example of rich adventurers embarking on daring feats to gain fame and glory. We say if these people have nothing better to do with their time than risk their lives for a few weeks of publicity, go right ahead. If at least it makes for interesting reading.

#### To President Clinton:

There was a lot of hope and optimism in President Clinton's inaugural Address. The next step he faces is making his words a reality. If he follows through on his promises for bipartisan politics and new leadership for the future, Clinton still has a chance to earn himself a spot in America's history books.

### Correction

In the Jan. 17 issue of the *Emerald*, the story on page one entitled, "Residency complex for UO students," contained an error. The article stated that nonresidents do not pay Oregon income taxes. Nonresidents gaining income from Oregon sources are required to file with the state of Oregon. The *Emerald* regrets the error.

### Something on your mind?

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