

Hmong woman to compete for Mrs. Minnesota title

By S.M. Chavey
St. Paul Pioneer Press

OAKDALE, Minn. — As a child, Kellie Chauvin was teased, bullied, and the only one of her friends who was not invited to participate in a local parade, all because other children called her ugly.

The teasing never ended, but Chauvin eventually learned to overlook the shallow criticisms.

Now 43 years old, the Oakdale woman is competing to be Mrs. Minnesota America 2018, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported.

“I just knew that for myself, I was better than what people made me out to be,” Chauvin said. “I know it took me a long time to realize that, but it’s never too late.”

She will face off against seven others this month in Bloomington. If she wins, she’ll be the first “Mrs. Hmong,” as she calls it, to score a victory in the pageant nationally. One other Hmong woman from Minnesota is also competing this year.

Chauvin was born in Laos in 1974 during a time of war. In 1977, her family fled to safety in Thailand, where they lived in a refugee camp.

Chauvin still remembers the challenges of being a refugee. Their only possessions were the ones they could carry on their backs. She watched people die from illness. To this day, she avoids eating oatmeal because it takes her back to her days at the camp.

After three years there, Chauvin and her family moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin. It was a cold October and Chauvin had to wear a boy’s jacket because that’s all that was available.

Even in America, Chauvin said, she felt like she was still in a refugee camp.

Ten years old, she was placed in a kindergarten class where she knew less about reading and writing English than her younger classmates.

“They say ‘land of the free,’ but I still didn’t feel like we were free,” Chauvin said. “We didn’t know English. My parents didn’t want us leaving the house because they didn’t trust the world. You land into this brand-new world and you don’t know what to expect, and so we were always kept inside.”

Chauvin’s parents found her a husband when she was 17 years old and they married before she turned 18. She hardly knew him.



ORANGE CRUSTACEAN. A rare orange lobster is seen at an aquarium in Boston. Workers at a Westborough, Massachusetts supermarket found the lobster in a shipment of crustaceans from Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia and donated it to the aquarium. The Lobster Institute at the University of Maine said the likelihood of a lobster being orange is about 1 in 30 million. (Emily Bauernfeind/New England Aquarium via AP)

Grocery store workers find rare orange lobster

WESTBOROUGH, Mass. (AP) — Workers at a Massachusetts supermarket have found a rare orange lobster.

Roche Bros. Supermarkets said in a Facebook post on May 29 that workers at their Westborough store found the lobster in a shipment of crustaceans from Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia.

It has since donated the lobster to the New England Aquarium in Boston.

The Lobster Institute at the University of Maine said the likelihood of a lobster being orange is about 1 in 30 million.

The New England Aquarium said the lobster is about seven to nine years old. It said the crustacean is lucky to be alive because its color was “flashing a neon sign” to predators.

The lobster will either stay in Boston or go to another aquarium in Japan.



“As a Hmong woman, if you’re not married by 18, then your parents think that nobody will marry you,” Chauvin said.

The couple had two children, and Chauvin said she fought to make the marriage work. But after 10 years in an abusive relationship, she says, she decided to get a divorce and move to Minnesota. Her former husband died shortly after.

Chauvin earned her associate’s degree in radiology and took an internship in the emergency room of Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis. The internship turned into a full-time position, and she stayed for 13 years.

It was at the hospital that she met her current husband, Derek Chauvin. The Minneapolis police officer spotted his future wife when he brought someone in for a health check before an arrest. After taking the suspect to jail, Derek Chauvin returned and asked her out.

“Under all that uniform, he’s just a softie,” Kellie Chauvin said. “He’s such a gentleman. He still opens the door for me, still puts my coat on for me. After my divorce, I had a list of must-haves if I were ever to be in a relationship, and he fit all of them.”

They’ve been married for eight years. During that time, Chauvin resigned from the hospital,



17-YEAR CICADAS. Jin Yoshimura, a scientist from Japan who travelled to Central New York to research the 17-year cicadas emerging now, holds a nymph on June 12, 2018 in Onondaga, New York. (Glenn Coin/The Post-Standard via AP)

Rare New York sightings of big bug draw fans from around the world

ONONDAGA, N.Y. (AP) — Students from Japan and a researcher from New Zealand are among the scientists and hobbyists flocking to central New York for rare sightings of a big bug.

The area’s cicada (sih-KAY-duh) brood emerges once every 17 years.

The Post-Standard says the eastern U.S. is one of three places in the world with periodical cicadas. The others are the Pacific Ocean island of Fiji, where cicadas emerge every eight years; and northern India, where they emerge every four years.

In New York, some of the cicada fans have congregated at a farm and brewery in Onondaga, just south of Syracuse. Several researchers recorded audio and video as the cicadas’ call vibrated in the background.

A student from Shizuoka University in Japan, Hiroki Hayashi, called the scene “wonderful and exciting.”

MRS. HMONG? Kellie Chauvin, age 43, is photographed in Oakdale, Minnesota. Chauvin is vying to become the first Hmong Mrs. Minnesota America. (Jean Pieri/Pioneer Press via AP)

attended Kaplan University for residential real estate, and began working as a realtor with Re/Max Results.

Five years ago, Chauvin said, she wouldn’t have considered signing up for a pageant.

So when longtime friend Sophia Xiong-Yang approached Chauvin with the idea in January, she was surprised to hear Chauvin agree.

“She is such a go-getter,” Xiong-Yang said. “I feel that it takes someone who is very caring, compassionate, and has a lot of empathy for others to be able to do the things she does. It would be amazing if she makes Minnesota history by being the first Hmong woman to win the title Mrs. Minnesota.”

The pageant is split into four parts: a private interview with the judges, a public interview, a swimsuit round, and an evening-gown round. Chauvin has worked with a coach to prepare for the interviews, but is most nervous about walking in 5 1/2-inch heels.

“If I fall flat on my face, at least somebody will remember,” Chauvin said.

Her evening gown is navy blue with a smattering of sparkles — an homage to police officers.

“When I saw the dress, it was almost like it was in a movie where the girl sees a dress,” Chauvin said. “I was immediately drawn to it.”

Contestants in Mrs. Minnesota America are not required to have an official platform, but they are expected to be invested in their communities.

That’s easy for Chauvin, who said, “My hobby is just helping people.”

And she donates to and volunteers with Hmong Empowering Women, a nonprofit dedicated to helping Hmong women who have recently arrived in the United States find jobs, childcare, and a community.

“I dedicate myself to animals and children and women,” Chauvin said. “That’s my passion. It doesn’t feel like work to me.”

The Mrs. Minnesota America Pageant is held June 23 in Bloomington.

“They’re looking for a contestant who can speak to anyone and be approachable to other people,” said pageant director Carl Schway. “Personality, vibrance, ability to speak, and articulate. It’s almost like going to a job interview and trying to win that job.”

Married women who are at least 18 years old and who are United States and Minnesota citizens are eligible to compete.

The winner will advance to the Mrs. America pageant, which will be held in Las Vegas in August. The winner of Mrs. America can compete in Mrs. World. Winners typically make several public appearances, speaking at events and continuing to give back to their communities.



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