



[Social Soles]

Interview by Kiley Fischer
with Introduction by Faith Bennett

ELENA LAQUATRA

Miss Pennsylvania USA 2016

The Social Soles interview series is based on the saying, "You don't really know someone until you have walked in her shoes." We thought it would be interesting to begin each interview asking our guest to bring a pair of shoes that are significant to her. They can be the little ones she wore her first time performing on stage; The ones she wore the day she received her hearing back after an illness tried to steal it away; The heels she wore when she won The Miss Pennsylvania Teen title; The pair she wore the first time ON AIR reporting; Those she wore when she won The Miss Pennsylvania USA title; The set she was wearing when she passed the title on; A pair we would have never guessed...What shoes will she bring?

We associate shoes with memories: good and bad. The question steers the path of the conversation. This route will show us a side usually not seen in the one we are talking with. A more personal side. We are excited to see in which direction we are lead - by the choice in footwear and the memories stirred. Come. Let's take a confidently beautiful walk...

January is a month of fresh starts and new beginnings. The month feels like another chapter, full of anticipation of - what will this new year hold? This month we asked Elena LaQuatra to join us for a stroll. Memory lane was good to her, and we know she is already planning the road ahead. We had the pleasure of spending time with her back in September (the OTHER new year when you live in a college town!) when she emceed Social Butterfly Magazine Fashion Week Downtown. She is beautiful both inside and out, and her energy is so upbeat, it's contagious. What better vibe to start the new year off with and who better to bring it?!

Social Butterfly Magazine: We're so excited to get to spend more time with you! Tell me about the shoes that you brought?

Elena: I brought my Chinese Laundry Tippy Top nude heels size 9. They're very symbolic to me because they're my pageant shoes. I bought them for the Miss Pennsylvania USA pageant which I competed in almost exactly a year ago. I won the title of Miss Pennsylvania USA in them and they made their way with me to Las Vegas to compete at Miss USA. Throughout the year, I've worn them for various charitable events, photo shoots, every time I practice walking, the modeling routines I was doing on stage at both Miss Pennsylvania and Miss USA, so they're very important shoes to me. I wear them all the time.

Winning was really an overwhelming feeling. I was proud of myself, honored to have the title. I had about 80 people in the audience cheering for me: friends, family - I have a huge family, my coworkers, just a huge, huge crowd of people. Hearing them screaming, my parents were crying, I was crying, it was a very overwhelming feeling.

SBM: You've worn them throughout the year, did you wear them when you gave up the title or did you wear a different pair?

Elena: Nope, I wore this pair. I did get a new pair when I went to Miss USA because Chinese Laundry is the official

shoe sponsor so they gave us a new pair, but I was like, "Nope, these are my lucky shoes." I have the ones they gave me at Miss USA crisp and clean in the box still.

SBM: That had to have been a whole other set of emotions then, wearing them this year.

Elena: Yes. (nods) Yes. This year, giving up the title was kind of like my last time wearing them on stage as Miss Pennsylvania USA, so it was definitely emotional. I cried during my farewell speech. It was such a fulfilling year. I did everything I could have imagined, everything I wanted to do. I traveled - I put tens of thousands of miles on a brand new leased car - I flew all over the country and it really hasn't stopped.

One thing that has been nice is even though I gave up the title to the new girl - her name is Cassandra Angst - all of the opportunities are still kind of presenting themselves. I'm still doing a lot of charitable work, fundraisers, photo shoots, just as Elena LaQuatra.

SBM: So it really is like you have all of this momentum rolling into the new year and new experiences.

Elena: That's exactly it. Everyone's like, "What's next? What's next?" and I'm like, "Well, this chapter really hasn't ended quite yet because I'm still doing so many things that started while I was Miss Pennsylvania USA.

(Elena explained that the day after her visit to The Cocoon, she was hopping on a plane to Sacramento to speak at Children's Choice for Hearing and Talking's annual fundraiser. At age 4, Elena lost her hearing due to bacterial meningitis and had to learn to speak and hear with a cochlear implant. Elena also has sponsorship opportunities around the area.)

SBM: You'll always be Miss Pennsylvania USA 2016, but looking at 2017, what kind of things are you looking forward to?

Elena: I currently work for WTAE which I love, and I definitely want to do something full time. My degree is in broadcast journalism so that may mean moving to a smaller market to pay my dues and then quickly make my way back to Pittsburgh. That's my main priority once things slow down a little bit is finding a reporter position so I can hurry back to Pittsburgh.

I'd be kind of intimidated to immediately hop in here. Going live from a murder scene, you're live reporting on a gruesome, violent murder. There's ethical issues, legal issues. Pittsburgh's a top 25 market and you can't make those kind of big mistakes. I don't mind paying my dues in a smaller market first.

SBM: How did you decide to get into reporting?

Elena: I was really set on being a doctor my entire life, a neonatologist specifically, and then I thought about how many years I would have to go to school to achieve that. Getting into pageants showed me how interested I was in the on-camera stuff. I was always good with the microphone and speaking. I met a lot of the anchors and reporters when I was Miss Teen Pennsylvania USA back years ago and they were all like, "You should get into broadcasting, you'd be really good."

When I started studying this in school, I thought, "This is perfect, this is exactly what I want to do."

SBM: You're making all of these huge decisions, if your pageant shoes could say anything to you, what would they say?

Elena: I love this one. They would probably say, "What a year it has been." All the cities, all the states, all the stages they've walked on. I think they'd have a lot of fun stories to tell because they've really been there with me through everything this past year. They've always been right there in my suitcase.

SBM: Even though your own shoes have amazing stories to tell, who else's shoes would you want to walk in?

Elena: Quite a few people. There are so many people I'm interested in. Maria Menounos, I think she has a fantastic career as an entertainment reporter slash host, I would love to walk in her shoes. If moving to LA was something I could see myself doing, I would love to have a career like her.

Aside from that, pageant wise, Olivia Culpo. She went from Miss Rhode Island 2012, then won Miss USA, then Miss Universe, the only three pageants she's ever competed in. Now she's a

campaign model for Kipling and CoverGirl. She just has the life. She's young, too, younger than me. It would be fun to walk in her shoes as a pageant girl who really succeeded and won the highest, most prestigious title you can win and now has a successful career as a model and host. It would be nice to walk in her - very expensive - shoes.

(In chatting, Elena explained that a friend was performing in "Hairspray Live" that evening.)

SBM: That's obviously a huge memory for her, what have been some of the biggest memories for you been?

Elena: Oh man, there's so many. One of my most unique appearances was February 2, Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney. It was like nothing you could imagine. The people, how into it they are - it's hard core. They had me host it to an extent at five in the morning in 10-degree weather. The national media was there - The Weather Channel, CNN - and I thought, "This is nuts." So that's probably the most unique. This is where the party is. It's the most Pennsylvania thing.

As far as Miss USA goes, that was singing with the Backstreet Boys.

SBM: (This 90s-girl's heart skips a beat) Whaaaaat?!

Elena: Yeah! They chose five title holders out of all 52 of us, before the final show that was aired nationally on FOX, and said, "Girls, come with us, we're gonna do a little video and edit it really fast to air it during the show." We had no idea. They said, "We're gonna have you lip synch one of the Backstreet Boys songs." At our age, all the girls knew all the songs.

SBM: I'm internally screaming right now.

Elena: Exactly. We knew all the words. We're singing along and then out of nowhere, they come out. They pop into the video and start singing to us and we're all like (throws hands up and mock screams) freaking out. That was incredible. They were my crush growing up, Backstreet Boys posters all over my room. I was like, touching them and they're like, "please stop touching us," but I'm like, "I love you so much." That was my favorite memory from Miss USA.

My favorite Pittsburgh appearance was probably at a Pirates game. It was in May, I was the fan of the game and I changed third base and went up to the ROOT Sports broadcasting booth and got to be on national TV. It was so cool. It was very Pittsburgh.

Of course all of the charitable work I've done and events I've emceed and schools I've visited. The kids I've met, they're all so cute. They all follow me on social media. Every memory I cherish, I really do.

SBM: Talking about the kids that you see, what kind of advice would you have for them?

Elena: For Miss USA, there was no tolerance. When they say, "phones away," it's away. Not only just because it looks bad on you, but they're



looking at you saying, "You can't be Miss USA if we can't even tell you to put your phone away and it's not away."

Following rules, listening. Overall advice... one of the reasons I think I've been successful is because I tried to get involved in as many things as possible and I've always been that way. When I was really little, my mom had me in everything. Theater, singing, dancing, percussion ensemble, community events, modeling. At that point, I was listening and obeying my parents. I wasn't one of those kids who after school said, "Okay, bye, I'm going to go play with my friends." I was like, "okay, I have dance, and then percussion lessons, I'm going to an event with my mom."

Listening is a good quality and talent to have. People will respect you if you can do that. As an adult, you don't want to be dealing with kids that - I used to teach dance class. The kids that were like, (grabs hair) "Oh my God, stop," were the kids that were like (waves hands in the air and makes funny sounds). It's like "everybody, please pay attention." It made it difficult.

My best advice would just be to get involved in as much as you can. That will make you disciplined and motivated, just being busy and needing to be on schedule. That's how I run my life today, I'm like back to back to back and I love it. ✨