

PRESENTATION

Of Christina Lowe at the second international Conference Women of the Mountains

While serving as Miss Utah for the past six months, I have come to understand the dynamic, resourceful, mountainous region that we live in. I have traveled every inch of the state and spoken to leaders in almost every city. As I returned from Miss America, I found myself quickly back in classes at Utah Valley University while still trying to maintain a schedule of public service. Funny that my first day back I ended up in one the most intriguing classes about Sustainable Mountain Development. My professor, Baktybek Abdrisaev, is the former ambassador from Kyrgyzstan to the US and Canada. He brings a new perspective about our mountainous region that many of us most likely never think about. That perspective includes recognition that Utah has grown and sustained itself extremely well the past 150 years—despite the challenges that mountainous regions face.

I was raised in a family of eight children. My father was a teacher and my mother stayed home and raised us. I was always encouraged to be involved and participate in a lot of different extra-curricular activities such as student council, a competitive soccer team, debate team and I took private vocal lessons. My community was a small one that continually interacted with one another through various gatherings and celebrations. As children, we were taught to participate in these events—town clean ups and service projects to name a few.

Utah Valley University hosts a second international conference called The Women of the Mountains. It is a conference that highlights the importance that women play in helping maintain and create sustainable development in mountainous regions around the world. While at Miss America, I discovered that many of the participants were accomplished and well educated women. However, I wondered why these women were involved in something such as this. Many of the women participated because of networking opportunities, financial reasons, or because they had the whole package—beauty, intellect, and leadership qualities. Personally, I participated for scholarship opportunities and I just kept winning. While most of the girls were educated and very intellectual, they were showcased for one thing—beauty. But that doesn't make sense. Why would you portray beautiful, smart, talented, accomplished young women as strictly just beautiful? Maybe because the audience that watches Miss America cares less about those things and more that a woman is nice to look at. I returned from Miss America with a desire to better understand societal perceptions about women. I attended many women's conferences that reiterated the importance of educating women. I felt that this was a theme that I really wanted to research. The Women of the Mountain's Conference ended up being a great segue into this research.

The women around the world who participated in the conference intrigued me. Women from all walks of life shared their stories. They spoke of their educational experiences and their backgrounds. The various challenges they had overcome and the problems that women face in their respective countries. I enjoyed listening to all of these women because it opened my eyes to new ideas and challenges that we all face. I was pleased to

learn that many women are interested in obtaining an education. Many of these women also want other women to have that same opportunity. We discussed how education liberates women and lifts them out of poverty. Education helps women in their various roles, whether it is with their career or family. UVU was pleased to host dignitaries from all over the world and a total of five ambassadors. I was able to talk with many of them about women in their countries and about issues of sustainable development.

However, The Women of the Mountain's Conference is just a small one that accentuates gender issues on a global scale. It is part of a bigger organization called the Mountain Partnership, loose alliance of global institutions interested in promoting mountain cause internationally.

I was glad to be among the first who created the Mountain Partnership student advocacy group at UVU to lobby all interested in working jointly on agenda of sustainable mountain development agenda in the state of Utah entities. And we lobbied hard to make Orem, Park City, and Salt Lake City new members of Mountain Partnership in addition to already existing one, such as Utah Valley University, Gruppman International Violin Institute and others. We are also pushing for the State Legislature to support the same resolution that would make the whole state of Utah a member in the Partnership. By passing this resolution and becoming a member of The Mountain Partnership, Utah would have the opportunity to send representatives to conferences, exchange economic, ecological, and infrastructural ideas with countries all around the world. This would

additionally, create jobs for the citizens of Utah abroad, improve our own state's economic policies and infrastructure all while gaining political clout on a global level.

As Miss Utah, I have traveled the state and I have met the incredible people that live here. I know the potential that Utah has and I understand the importance of this partnership for Utah. As a strong woman, I am also an avid advocate for educating women. It is important for the women of Utah to see their role in creating these sustainable policies and changes that will inevitably follow a partnership such as this. I am not a typical pageant girl, but I am grateful for my participation. It has led me to the conclusions that I have shared. In the future I hope to continue my education and to encourage other women to do the same.

In life, it is less about your circumstances and more about what you do to change them for the better. Ultimately, I want to help women understand the importance of education. Education enables an individual to make more choices. More choices allows for greater growth and self-actualization. All individuals are powerful, but the first step is realizing that. Women are powerful individuals—gender does not change that.