

Once in lifetime experience may be just that . . .

By Charles Taylor
News Leader staff writer

Eighteen-year-old Yuranda Harris of Powhatan County said the Miss Teen USA Pageant is probably her last beauty contest, but she may have a future judging the events.

"I picked all of the top 12 except for Miss Georgia," Miss Harris said today in a telephone interview from her room at the Royal Gulf Hills Resort in Ocean Springs, Miss. Bridgette Wilson, of Oregon, won the title last night at the pageant broadcast live from Biloxi, Miss., on WTVR-TV, Channel 6.

"I was shocked that I didn't make the top 12," said Miss Harris, who represented the state as Miss Virginia Teen USA, because she thought her interviews with the judges went very well. But she was not disappointed. She said the competition was based on personality, poise and appearance. She did not have to perform a talent, she said.

"I didn't come to win. I just came to have fun," Miss Harris said of her second beauty pageant.

A fashion merchandising major at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College in Richmond, Miss Harris flipped a coin with her identical twin sister, Yurunda, to decide which of them would enter the Miss Teen Virginia Pageant, which she won in May.

Miss Harris and her twin sister designed one of the gowns she wore last night.

She said it's just as well that she didn't make the top 12. "If it wasn't meant for me to win, I didn't want to go through all the stress" of being a finalist.



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Yuranda Harris (left), Miss Virginia Teen USA, tugs with identical twin Yurunda at 1990 Miss Teen USA pageant. They had flipped a coin to see who would represent Virginia.

A lot of the girls cried backstage after being eliminated, Miss Harris said, but she said she took being cut in stride and tried to console others who took their loss harder.

Miss Harris, whose friends call her Randa, got to meet pageant hostess Sandy Duncan — "really, nice and down-to-earth" — and Leeza Gibbons of "Entertainment Tonight" — "I played with her baby," she said.

Despite her brush with the stars, Miss Harris said she most enjoyed talking with the pageant's backstage production crew and the "people behind the scenes." She said the other girls spent a lot of time talking with each other, but she talked mostly with "older people."

While Miss Harris admitted being "so tired" after two weeks of grueling rehearsals and last night's pageant, she sounded fresh and alert before 8 this morning. The girls rehearsed daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. — and from 1 p.m. to 10 p.m. the final days before the pageant.

Miss Harris said she probably will not enter another beauty contest.

"I don't think I'm pageant material," she said. "There's too much stress involved worrying about whether I'm going to win or not."

Miss Harris lives at home with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Abel Harris. In addition to her twin, who also attends J. Sargeant Reynolds, Miss Harris has two other sisters.