

Delusions of illusions

Photos and copy by Catherine Campbell



Connie Johnson is the first pageant alternate ever to participate in the opening performance.

Backstage at the Miss Texas A&M University Scholarship Pageant: Say it isn't so! Tanning gels, tanning centers, "falsies," body-binding tape (ouch!) and fake fingernails...it's not easy or inexpensive to be beautiful these days. However, not all of the twenty A&M pageant contestants tried to improve on a good thing.

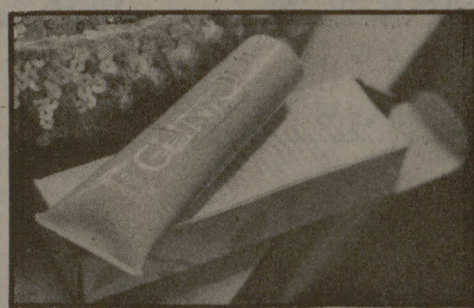
With the exception of two women, eighteen contestants padded the upper portion of their bathing suits for the swimsuit competition of the pageant. The number was higher for those who padded for the evening gown competition.

But it's no scandal. The pageant contract each contestant is required to sign, spells out that padding the chest, using bronzing gels, taping to elevate the buttocks and binding the waist with tape in order to appear slimmer is legal.

Although the choice is left up to the contestant, sometimes the desire to win or have the "perfect body" creates pressures.

As one contestant said, "If everybody else is doing it and I don't, then I'm not going to look so good in comparison."

The A&M pageant is a division of the Miss America pageant which emphasizes contestant talent. The Miss USA pageant, however, is appearance-oriented and doesn't allow their contestants to enhance their assets.



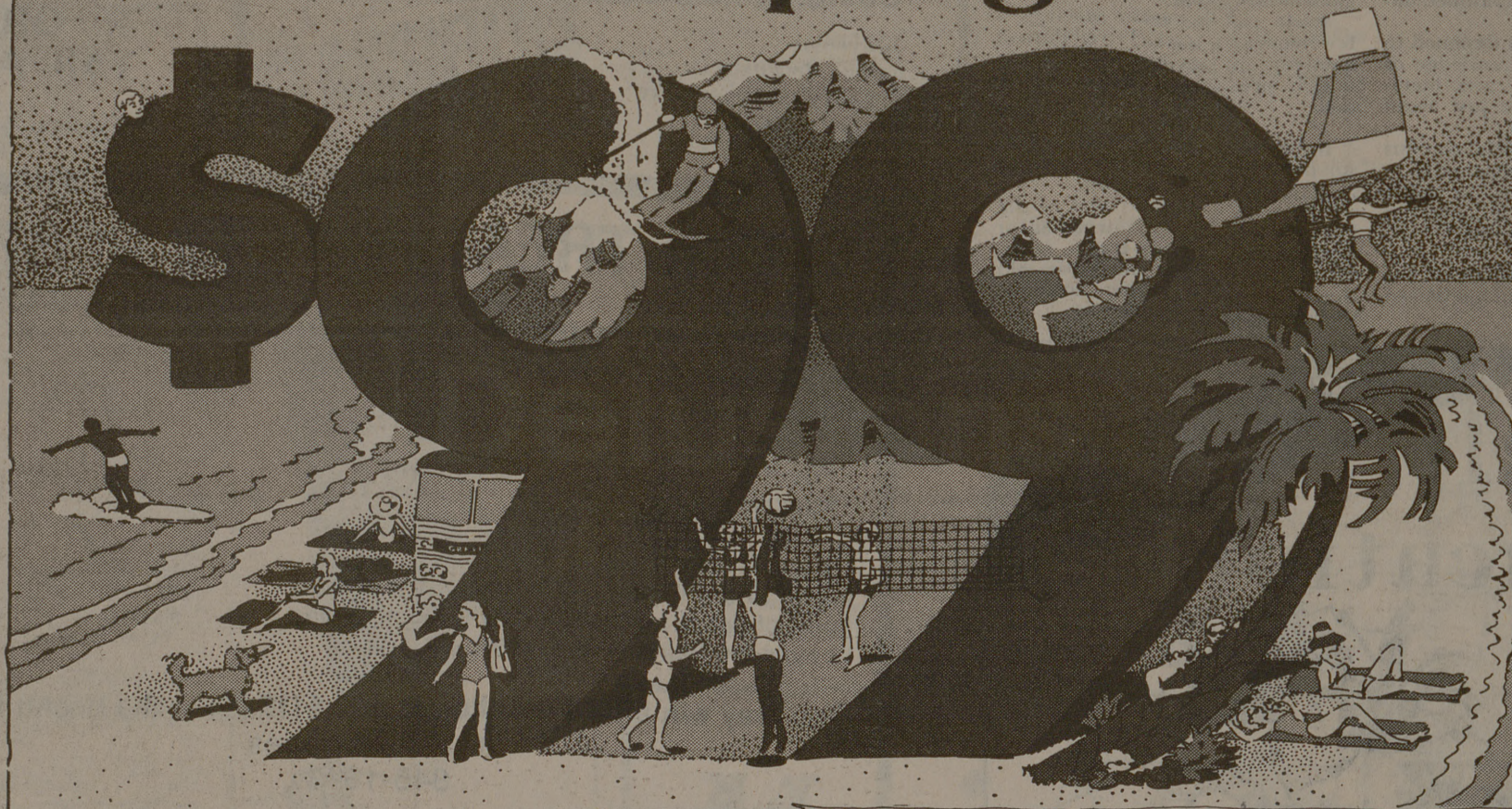
Rhinestones and hot rollers: Even Rome wasn't built in a day.



Mascara and a patient roommate help Carrie McElroy achieve that "naturally curly" look.



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