UAF alumna helps women 'dare to be darling'

By Leona Long

Rosemary Berg has emceed the World Eskimo-Indian Olympics, traveled on mission trips abroad and competed in beauty pageants. Through it all, she has drawn strength from her experiences at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Berg began studying rural development at UAF in the 2011-2012 school year, at a time when she felt she needed to rediscover her worth, identity and purpose. For the few years before, she endured abusive relationships, sexual assault, post-traumatic stress and depression. She had no idea that those struggles would become a stepping stone for encouraging, inspiring and empowering women across the nations.

“I always dreamt about inspiring others to live their best life but didn’t feel that I knew exactly what to do or where to start,” said Berg, who represented Alaska at the Miss United States and Miss Globe United States national pageants in 2016 and 2017. “My rural development classes helped me gain that confidence and pushed me past my fear of messing up. The support, discipline and community I gained in my RD classes helped me discover my voice and still helps me when I share my message of hope.”

Berg was studying at UAF when she was approached by leaders and elders in the Tikigaq community to represent Point Hope at the 2012 Miss World Eskimo-Indian Olympics pageant. After dazzling judges with her knowledge of Alaska Native culture, she walked away as Miss WEIO.

For the next year, Berg traveled statewide talking and learning more about the beauty of Alaska Native cultures, while also sharing her personal story. She talked about the various obstacles that made her feel unloved or unworthy and how she dared to face the things that challenged her the most.

“I refused to be brought down by the negative situations in my life,” Berg said. “It was important to me to share with others that they could follow in my footsteps of overcoming trauma and fear while stepping into their dreams.”

Although Berg was traveling across the state, she still participated in classes that helped her earn her bachelor’s degree. In 2013, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in rural development with an emphasis in community research and indigenous knowledge.

“I didn’t want to have to choose between higher education and sharing this message," Berg said. “Taking audio conference classes allowed me to earn my degree and travel without missing a beat. It was a lot of hard work, but completely worth it to grow in my classes and pour into my people.”

When her reign as Miss WEIO ended, Berg continued traveling and sharing her story, this time with an international audience. She moved to Hawaii with a worldwide Christian ministry and participated in volunteer community development in Brazil and New Zealand. Berg’s favorite experience was when she spoke at a citywide youth conference in Rio De Janeiro about discovering one’s worth, identity and purpose.

In 2016 and 2017, Berg competed in two national pageants as Miss Alaska United States and Miss Globe Alaska United States, using the phrase "dare to be darling.” Her platform was to encourage, inspire and empower women in Alaska to discover their worth, identity and purpose. “Dare to be darling” was inspired by the Bible verse: “You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you."

“I was so inspired to utilize the pageant platform as a way to pour into the lives of women across the state of Alaska," she said. "I realized that as I discovered my own worth, identity and purpose, it naturally inspired others to do the same in their lives. And I’m so thankful for the opportunity to share the beauty, knowledge and strength of our Alaska Native communities that I learned from our people and my education."

Berg graduated from UAF in December 2013 and is still putting what she learned in the rural development program to use. She has opened her own business, Rose Janae, in Charlotte, South Carolina. It helps women “dare to be darling” as they pursue their personal, professional and fitness goals.

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Cutlines:

*Photo courtesy of Rosemary Berg*
Rosemary Berg, who earned a degree in rural development from UAF, worked to empower Alaska women as part of her platform while competing in pageants.

*Photo courtesy of Rosemary Berg*
Rosemary Berg competed in the Miss United States pageant representing Alaska.