

A daughter is a princess, even without the coveted Rose

By Karen Telleen-Lawton

IT turns out I had a harder time recovering from last year's near miss on the Rose Court selection than did my daughter. I was nonchalant at the beginning. How could I not be, with the chances only a few in almost a thousand?

The Court would be a fantastic experience, of course, though it would wreak havoc on long-standing Thanksgiving and Christmas plans. But Emily was highly motivated, so I supported her like a good mom.

It was a good news, bad news proposition from the start. When her quarter-final "congratulations" letter came, there was no similar mail for most of her friends. But with their support, she buckled down to the task at hand, which was selecting an appropriate outfit for the next round. My sister Cindy suggested borrowing from her sister-in-law Helene, one of those envy-provoking mothers who slides into

beautiful size six outfits while bouncing her five-month-old baby on her hip. Her fourth child, mind you.

The Thursday following the next interviews, Cindy called early in the afternoon, foraging for news. "I don't think the mail has come, but I'll check," I told her. I had actually been listening for the mail, but it had slipped quietly through its little slot into the living room. I sifted through as I returned to the phone, reporting "There's nothing here, so I guess she's not in the semi-finals."

I heard nothing on the phone line. Finally she said, "You mean they only get a letter if they make the next level?" "Well, that's how they did it the last round, but I don't know," I admitted.

Then I remembered that the postal worker stacks catalogs and large envelopes by the front door. So I rechecked, returning to the phone with a large unmarked white business envelope. "Here's something for Emily but there's no return address," I told her. "Well steam it

open!" squealed Cindy. I didn't need to; the news was revealed merely by holding it up to the light at the window. I could make out, "Congratulations." She made it to the semi-finals.

The letter inviting her to the final round arrived on a Saturday, and I'm proud to say Emily was off working on a school project, not hanging by the front door, as I was.

There was no big envelope. But there was a little one, which the rest of the family refused to hold up to the light. Instead they clamored around waiting for me to do the dirty work. We peeked and replaced the mail on the porch before Emily returned. She was crestfallen at the envelope, but when she opened it she allowed herself a joyful, "Yes!"

She was one of 29 girls in the finals. That's when the 10-day waiting period began that built up dreams from hopes to expectations to certainty. Being selected a Rose Princess would not only be an irreplaceable lifetime experience, but it would val-

idate our having moved here for a job change in the middle of high school, a risky move indeed. It would be a terrific time for her and all of us, as well as a coup for college applications, piling up in her room.

As the announcement of the Rose Court drew nearer, Emily practiced impromptu speaking while my husband and I wondered about why we were thinking about it so much. I realized that a Rose Princess daughter would validate us as great parents. I, who hate shopping and both-ering too much with make-up and attire, had obviously passed along an inner, natural beauty.

Being the mother of a princess would compensate for the three more inches in height I had always coveted and make up for Dave's thinning hair. We would be beautiful people, naturally so endowed. And so, as we and 21 other families and countless friends endured the sight of our almost-Princesses smiling bravely at the backs of the

newly chosen seven, we swallowed hard for them and for ourselves. I drove Emily to school after she changed into school clothes, returning, alone and only slightly red-eyed, to school.

Of course everyone already knew. We survived the week on condolences and congratulations for having made the finals. A week later, she and the two Rose princesses from her school were photographed together as Rose Court Finalists for the school yearbook.

Afterward, I approached her as she hunched over her desk, doing homework. "How was the shoot?" I asked gingerly. "Was it hard to see Carol and Grace after they've been away doing princess activities?"

"Oh, it was fine. They told me about their schedule this week; they've really been busy. I'm fine, Mom. I'm over it," she said easily. Translate: Mom, get a life.

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