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Virgin Islander Wins Miss Veteran America, Prepares to Advocate on Behalf of Homeless Female Veterans

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Elesha George **November 14, 2022**

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Liliana Byrd crowned Miss Veteran America on October 30th in Orlando, Florida.

A week after being crowned Miss Veteran America on October 30th in Orlando, Florida, Virgin Islands National Guard member, Staff Sergeant Liliana Byrd prepares to carry out her mandate to provide resources to assist homeless veteran women in the United States.

For the next 12 months, Ms. Byrd will be engaging in community service and speaking engagements to raise awareness for the needs of women veterans.

As part of her role as Ms. Veteran America, she will serve as a national ambassador for Final Salute Inc., an organization that provides resources to homeless women veterans and their children.

“Women veterans are the fastest growing homeless population and there are few resources available for homeless women veterans and their children. As the national ambassador for Final Salute Inc.,” she told the Consortium.

Unlike traditional pageants in which each contestant chooses their own platform to run on, in the Ms. Veteran America competition all contestants run as advocates for Final Salute Inc.

Ms. Byrd explained that the linear platform is part of what contributed to the level of camaraderie among the cohort of finalists.

“Yes, it was a competition, but we were all working toward the same mission,” she said.

The proceeds from the show will help to provide housing and resources to women veterans and their children who may be experiencing homelessness.

A total of 100 women had signed up to participate in this year’s Ms. Veteran America. By the final round, that number dwindled to 25 finalists.

So when the 28-year-old music teacher entered the pageant, it was because she wanted to “try something new,” and having never before entered an event of that kind, it was cause for jubilation when she beat the 24 other women to claim the title and win \$15,000 in the process.

“I chose to participate in the Ms. Veteran America competition because I wanted to try something new, meet new people, and support a cause I believe in,” she said.

Making her victory possible was her husband, who she said did everything from booking her flights to taking up additional tasks at home.

She said, “I have the most supportive partner imaginable. During my campaign as a finalist for Ms. Veteran America, he did everything from booking my flights, to helping with lighting while I recorded advocacy videos, to running sound for my big fundraiser.”

Ms. Byrd explained that he did all this in addition to doing laundry, maintaining their vehicles, and grocery shopping. “He is a gem,” she remarked.

The reigning queen also heaped praises on her mother and sister who she said were essential in helping her achieve her "look" for the competition.

“Both of them brought accessories and helped do my makeup for the event. Between my partner, mom, sister, and additional family who flew in for the event, I couldn't have felt more supported,” she recalled.

In addition, Ms. Byrd believes that her personal development was part of what allowed her to succeed.

Apart from her mother, she credited her growth to persons like to Cindy Hill, Kim Lemmick-Snyder, Alfred Watkins, Ken Bodiford, and Lutricia Fields to name a few. These mentors, she said were vital in helping her develop as a musician, leader, teacher, and the person she is proud to be today.

Her professional career

Lilian Byrd spent her first four years out of college serving on active duty in an Army band in Washington DC.

After completing her time on active duty, she moved to St. Thomas to continue her career in music education.

She was hired by the Virgin Islands Montessori School to revamp and rebuild the music program. After three years of teaching music at Montessori, she was able to grow the program substantially and now teaches a variety of music education options to students aged 5 through 9th grade. Depending on grade level, students sing, play ukulele, percussion, and brass instruments.

In addition to her career in music education, Ms. Byrd is still heavily engaged in her military career as a member of the 73rd Army Band in the VI National Guard.

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