

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This is an archived edition when our program was called Leadership Landscape TV.

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Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and allow them a chance to always some keen insight as to how they see themselves the most important sports just what makes them tick. I am Kirt Jacobs host of Leadership Landscape where previous interviews have included former mayors, state politicians, nationally renowned sports writers, heads of major business concerns, community activists, and developers. Today our guest is Heather French Henry. She's the former Miss America 2000. I guess when you're Miss America you're always Miss America. I'm going to read a bit of her bio to you. sit in and buckle down because it's going to be a bit lengthy. She's a native of Maysville, Kentucky and a graduate of Mason County High School. She attained a master's degree in design and illustration from the University of Cincinnati. But it is the self-proclaimed tomboy who did not seriously compete in a beauty pageant until age 20 who wants told her mother at age four, during a gospel sing with her family, she was one day going to be Miss America. Well ladies and gentlemen she did just that. When the former Heather Rene French was crowned the title of Miss America in 2000 continuing a tradition of dominance by Southern contestants in the Miss America Pageant and winning on a Miss America platform of raising awareness of the plight of homeless veterans that made her dream come true.

Throughout her years Miss America this daughter of a disabled Vietnam veteran never forgot the pain and suffering firsthand that came with military service and she founded the Heather French Foundation for Veterans Incorporated as a reaction to the overwhelming needs facing a medic, excuse me, the American Veterans. She traveled over 300 thousand miles across the United States on national speaking tour and entitled Our Forgotten Heroes honoring our na-

tion's homeless veterans and fighting the silent enemy hepatitis C. She not only visited veterans' facilities by meeting and talking with veterans but her platform often took her to our nation's capitol to lobby members of Congress and Senate on veterans' issues and legislation. Thanks to her lobbying efforts Heather helped to influence an imperative piece of legislation for homeless veterans known as the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2001 which encourages all federal, state, and local departments and agencies and other entities of individuals to work toward the national goal of ending chronic homelessness among veterans within a decade.

Her efforts won her the Purple Heart Recognition Award in 2002 which is an award given four times a year to individuals that work on a national level to raise public awareness of veterans' issues. I love this quote in Heather's own words quote" I will always be the daughter of a veteran and therefore I will always honor those who fell by continuing to serve those who live." I love that quote. She was named 1999 Kentuckian of the year by Kentucky Monthly magazine for her Miss America win and a first by Miss Kentucky. Furthermore in a lavish wedding on October 27, 2000 she married Steve Henry who was then serving as lieutenant governor of Kentucky. During 2002-2003 Mrs Henry serviced co-host for the Louisville morning show Fox in the morning on WDRB. And if that isn't enough in her spare time Heather has authored and illustrated a series of children's books, one we have here in front of us, entitled Claire's Holiday Adventures and Claire's Everyday Adventures consisting of five titles published from 2003-2004. Hold on, still buckle in, there some more, Heather serves as president of the Rosemary Clooney House Foundation that operates the Rosemary Clooney House Museum in Augusta, Kentucky. Boasting the world's largest White Christmas movie collection ranging from costumes to other movie memorabilia from Rosemary Clooney as well as Bing Crosby. And if that isn't enough she's also a spokesperson for AAA Kentuckiana and Dean's milk.

She and her husband former Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky Steven L. Henry MD are the proud parents of two daughters Harper Rene Henry and Taylor Augusta Henry born in poetic fashion on July fourth. Heather and her family reside in Louisville, Kentucky.

That's her bio. I would like to say the best is yet to come for somebody but this act is tough to follow. So we welcome Heather to Leadership Landscape the floor is now yours.

Our first question we like to ask everyone is what drives you to do what you do?

Heather French Henry: Well you know when you read a bio like that and it's always interesting when you hear people read that and you're in the presence of that and you think about all the projects that you've done. But what really goes through your mind are all the things that you still have to do with those projects instead of resting on your laurels. You know you look to the future and think OK now that I've come this far in my life at a pretty young age. I still like to think that.

Kirt Jacobs: Right, right

Heather French Henry: What else can I use that stature to make a difference in. And one of which of course will always be my Veterans Foundation and that has turned really into a life's mission so I'll say what drives me the most especially as a mom with two children and you get up every day and you have to make the lunches and you have to get them to school just like any other mother what drives me the most is where I've come from. You know in small towns of Augusta and Maysville. Seeing what my father went through and seeing what my uncle went through as a homeless veteran. And knowing that through hard work and dedication I was able to acquire the title of Miss America. But beyond that I've seen that one person can make a difference and that drives me the most. Every morning when I get up everybody's given 24 hours a day 7 days...

Kirt Jacobs: Exactly

Heather French Henry: ...a week but what you do with that you know that's what differentiates people. So whatever you choose to do just go out there to make a difference.

Kirt Jacobs: Whom do you credit most influential in your life? I have

an idea but I'll leave it up to you,

Heather French Henry: Oh well of course I'm going to say you know my father has made a big difference in my life because I saw when he was going through night terrors with post-traumatic stress disorder. I saw his addiction to prescription drugs. I saw how it almost tore our family apart. You know thank God for my mother who has been the spiritual glue that has held my family together. My father's a wonderful man today in fact I tell my husband he does not know how my father used to be because of you know Vietnam and what that put him through. And the fact that I saw him change his life and my uncle as a homeless veteran get his life changed through government assisted services. You know that that inspires me. So dad did a lot to change my life. I'm sort of a daddy's girl. But then again you know watching my mother you know be the one that has held the family together and I mean they're celebrating I think it's their 38th anniversary coming if I'm correct. In today's society...

Kirt Jacobs: That's about how long I've been here.

Heather French Henry: In today's society that's pretty remarkable. And through all that they've been through. So I would say that my mom and dad have been a big influence.

Kirt Jacobs: That's great. What would you, what was the most defining moment of your life. I mean at this tender younger if you could armchair quarterback, hindsight 20/20

Heather French Henry: I had.. I've been blessed to have a lot of things in my life so far that have been wonderful peaks. Whether it's you know being the first in my family to graduate from college and to get a Master's. You know Masters was sort of the icing on the cake. Miss America you know at 24 well you sort of peak you know in that industry at 24. And so what else do you do after that? And of course Miss America was phenomenal..It changed my life. Changed my family's life. Then you know to get married. To have children. I mean when it all comes down to it you know I still have a Miss America Crown but I will say that my three-year-old has bro-

ken it twice

Kirt Jacobs: You put that on the air you know.

Heather French Henry: That lets you know where it ranks in the scheme of things. But having given birth to two children and seeing life through their eyes but also knowing that you're responsible for that. That's a life changing experience for anyone who's had children or adopted children to take that responsibility over. Think takes it to a new level

Kirt Jacobs: And I bet they're full of a lot of energy.

Heather French Henry: They are. At three in five and it's an ever juggling schedule and we're just now getting into the I want to do ballet. I want to take gymnastic.

Kirt Jacobs: Oh yes, Yes.

Heather French Henry: And I think am I going.. Are they going to put me through all that I put my family though.

Kirt Jacobs: You know and the role model is Ms. America who happens to be their mother you know so you know.

Heather French Henry: but they don't...

Kirt Jacobs: They don't they...

Heather French Henry: What's funny is they keep in a pretty real perspective. Now my younger daughter sings the "There She is Song" all the time. And she'll tell me be Miss America, be Ms. America. And so I'll do the little wave for her and Harper gets excited when she sees me on T.V. But they've both been to Miss America with me twice. They just don't understand that there's a new one crowned every year.

Kirt Jacobs: So they think that you are Ms. America forever.

Heather French Henry: That's right..

Kirt Jacobs: Walk out and wave.

Heather French Henry: That's right.

Kirt Jacobs: If there is one, what is your biggest professional regret? In other words, if you could look back I know again you said earlier at your young age. Is there anything you might have done differently along the way?

Heather French Henry: You know education wise. You know I finished my masters. I did two years before I won Miss Kentucky. And then came back after Miss America finished that. That was great I would love to have there's only a few universities in the United States that offer a doctorate in design and I would love and maybe still will be able to pursue that at some point you know however my children and other things sort of take priority. But I would love to have a doctorate in design. And I probably also would like to take more classes in so in social work since that's a large part of what I do with the Veterans Foundation. And I did I was able to teach as a graduate student for two years at UC and at some point I'll get to do that again. But I think the Doctorate probably is the one thing that I have left to do from the past. But I still have a chance to do that.

Kirt Jacobs: You've got time to do that. I think you can work that in. I think any school would probably take you when you send in your resume. I think I know the answer to this one and what is your biggest professional triumph? If you could name one.

Heather French Henry: Biggest professional triumph

Kirt Jacobs: It can be more than one.

Heather French Henry: Wow. Well certainly Miss America. Undoubtedly that has been... put me on the path that I'm on now. And it's interesting I sort of shudder to think what my life would be without Miss America just because your life is never the same. In

fact any Miss America will tell you we refer to our former life as the former life. You can always bring things over from that former life to the life you have now but you'll never just go back to being just Heather the student. Or just Heather the normal person although my life is extremely normal by a lot of standards. So Miss America certainly put me right up there professionally. Veterans' issues. I mean who would have thought at 25 I'd be a national spokesperson for veterans nationwide. You know FOX in the Morning. Being on the news here in town was a big stepping stone for me. After being the one on the sort of in the hot seat

Kirt Jacobs: Right, right

Heather French Henry: Like I sort of am now.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah, yeah

Heather French Henry: And being on the other side of that as the one interviewing taught me so much and I don't think that broadcasting is going to be something that will be... You know I'm not sure I want to be the next Diane Sawyer/ But certainly it's made me a little more well rounded in that avenue and I think professionally as a speaker as a personality. Wow, that was a that was an amazing year.

Kirt Jacobs: Do most Miss Americans have this active of a post Miss America reign as you do?

Heather French Henry: You know...

Kirt Jacobs: From your colleagues that have...

Heather French Henry: Since 1990 since the platform issue was first introduced most Miss America's, their platform is something that they are very passionate about. Whether it's something that's happened to them/ Whether it's or a family member or something they've been involved in since infancy almost. So we all do continue to be very active. In fact I was in Buffalo, New York two years ago just for instance and Nicole Johnson, who crowned me, was

there the week before me for a diabetes event. Then I came into town. Then a week after me the young lady I crowned Angela Baraquio from Hawaii, she was there, going to be there for a character education event. So we all do still travel I mean we're not in People magazine or on the national news all the time but you'd be surprised how many Miss America's are...

Kirt Jacobs: You crisscross

Heather French Henry: ...flying in the sky.

Kirt Jacobs: What do you find exciting about all this? Now you've built a family. You've written these books. You've talked about you started the foundation. You were Miss America. What is exciting about all that?

Heather French Henry: What's exciting is that at a young age that I found out what my mission is. And while I went to school for fashion design and you know I'm an illustrator. That knowing that taking care of veterans is really what I'm accountable for. And I think everyone needs to find out that purpose. Because I think in the end all be all that we're all going to be accountable for something like the purpose that we're here for. And I certainly think that you know taking care of our nation's veterans is what I'm going to be accountable for. And whether it's educating children through you know my children's book series or going into V.A. hospitals which is what I'll be doing in the future kind of honoring those hospitalized veterans or do a national legislation I mean it doesn't take a politician to make changes and I hope that what I can reflect to people out there even though I do have many titles but that one person can spark a fire and the ripple effect can be so great. And it doesn't take a Miss America to do that. So finding out really what my life's mission is is very comforting. It's just what has left to be done in that mission...

Kirt Jacobs: Done. Right, right

Heather French Henry: ...can be a little overwhelming.

Kirt Jacobs: What is your favorite word? That's a question we don't ask all our guests but I thought for you.. I'd like to see your answer..

Heather French Henry: My favorite word..

Kirt Jacobs: Do you have one?

Heather French Henry: You know it's not going to be a fifty cent word.

Kirt Jacobs: Doesn't have to be

Heather French Henry: Nothing very large but the word can.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Heather French Henry: ... is an amazing word. And most people I think take that for granted. Whether it's teaching your children to say I can do this and not to teach them I can't do this. But ever since I was a little girl, even though we were in a very financially challenged family, my mother always told me that I could do anything that I set my mind to. And of course the church has been a big part of that as well you know with that faith foundation that I can do. I can be what I want to be. I can be Kentucky's first Miss America. I can be the sole girl from Augusta and Maysville and achieve this goal that nobody else ever thought would happen within that industry/ And so the word can has a profound effect on me because when people tell me I can't do something then...

Kirt Jacobs: Pushes you

Heather French Henry: That's a big problem. Yes

Kirt Jacobs: Can you define leadership in one word? That's kind of the basis for this show.

Heather French Henry: Wow

Kirt Jacobs: you can be you know the English lexicon is a big... You

have lots of choices. It can be more than one.

Heather French Henry: Leadership to me and I think it takes on a different persona with every person that you're probably talking true leadership to me is being honest. And that's one thing that I hope in Kentucky's future whether it's at the local level, state level, board national leadership that we can have leaders and it's no reflection on anything that's gone on. But if you're going to be there to lead to people I think you need to be open and honest with people. Honest about the troubles that they may face ahead. Honest that you may not always agree you know on the same position but that you will honestly tell them and tell the people what they may face ahead. The bumps that are in the road.

The possibilities that can be. Because if you're not honest then what trust. I think everything starts from that honesty level and I think that's why I've chosen to live my life with a very open book with whatever has happened to me and my family. We've been very open about it. Because you know what we have faced everybody else has faced or will be facing. And what a better community builder than that common ground and so if you're honest with people I think it builds a great repor. It builds friendships and most of all it builds trust.

Kirt Jacobs: That is a great answer. I like that one. Tell me about these books. What was your motivation behind the children's books.

Heather French Henry: You know children by in,,,

Kirt Jacobs: I'll hold it up for the camera.

Heather French Henry: ... large, Certainly. Children by in large I think get left out of the picture when it comes to being educated about veterans issues. And without fail over six years of being involved in veteran's issues I have traveled to schools all across the country a lot here in Kentucky of course and right here in Louisville. And I will I ask every elementary school body what is a veteran. And without fail they always tell me it's a doctor who takes care

of animals. And I always warn the teachers.

Kirt Jacobs: I like that.

Heather French Henry: I always warn the teachers that that's what they're going to say, oh not our students. Not our students. But every single time and I was just recently in Marion, Ohio at an elementary school and I told them this is what their answer will be. So we asked the question and that was the answer. And while it's funny and it makes us all chuckle. It always stuns me how ill prepared our children are when asked a question like that. And if they don't know what a veteran is I mean do they know how important it is when they say the Pledge of Allegiance to know to put their hand over their heart or to know the words to the national anthem. That's just not some cute pledge and some cute song but it means an immense amount because the men and women who died for our country. And so I had a lot of teachers asking me how to educate their students about veterans and veterans issues and the concept of Claire with Pepper's Purple Heart which is my Veteran's Day stories. My first and most successful of my book series took about four years. From the time I was Miss America to writing the stories and doing the illustrations because I drew the pictures in the book. And then it just took off from there and now we have a Fourth of July story. A Flag Day story leading into other stories about volunteerism which I think it's extremely important. And so in a nutshell it was about the need of children to learn because there's no other Veterans Day stories out there for grades K-5.

Kirt Jacobs: Do you have some more of those you think you'll do down the road?

Heather French Henry: You know I do think because children after having children. You realize how important it is that we start this early childhood intervention of education/ And I'll probably come out with some more stories I would like to do the flip side and to do a story about my father.

Kirt Jacobs: Oh I like that. That would be great.

Heather French Henry: So we'll see. Emotionally that might be a little more of a roller coaster.

Kirt Jacobs: It might. It might. This is a question we like to ask all our guests. If you could change one thing be it in life, your life, in general what would it be?

Heather French Henry: Change one thing? Well I'm not going to be you know Miss Pageant Patty and say oh my life is perfect I'm not going to change anything.

Kirt Jacobs: Right right

Heather French Henry: I think is I think really will expect me to say that. I will say honestly I would probably build more personal friendships long lasting friendships. You know when you're in..

Kirt Jacobs: You've got time.

Heather French Henry: ...when you're in a life and that is so fast paced. You're always moving from event to event you know its kind of like Miss America every 18-24 hours. I was in a different city and a different state and it becomes... Friendships I think become the the part of you that really gets left out. You build a lot of acquaintances, a lot of work relationships, you network a lot. But as far as personal relationships you know those people who don't just call when they need something they call because they care that you're still breathing. That I would I would focus a lot more on that. I have some great friendships but I would probably cultivate those a little better.

Kirt Jacobs: That's a great answer because a lot of our guests give kind of a larger vision kind of answer to that. That one is just for lack of a better word is basically. It's kind of primal.

Heather French Henry: it's personal.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah. It's a great one.

Heather French Henry: And no matter what you said and what you've done what you've done in your life. I think friendships at the end mean you have to think it's almost morbid about when you think about it.

Kirt Jacobs: We'll get to that question.

Heather French Henry: When your on your deathbed what do you want to look back on and remember and I hope that I have by the end have a lot of friends that will remember me not just for the work that I did that for the friend that I was.

Kirt Jacobs: This is a question I'll throw out to you. We are fairly close in age. I tend to ask our older guests this question. Do you think there's a difference today in our leaders than in previous generations and maybe you can put some light on that with dealing with your father and in the veteran aspect. I was just curious what your thoughts were on that.

Heather French Henry: Well and even though I was a part of the media for some time and still consider myself sort of in the loop. I think that the media has had a lot to do especially from Vietnam on where the media sort of started to open up and there are no boundaries to what they want to cover or dig into an open records request. I think this whole idea of investigative sort of reporting which is very important in some instances has made politics this game. And I think that that has what that's been what's changed in our political leadership is I don't think you anymore get people you know like F.D.R. who just were unshakable and just move through with their convictions straight forward no matter what the left or the right kind of said. And today you've got media that can misinterpret. They can take their own bias view on things and so you find a lot of think are leaders becoming actors. And I know we've had some actors become leaders.

Kirt Jacobs: Yes we have.

Heather French Henry: But I think that you find a lot of your leaders having to be really good actors and that's unfortunate because

that can really change the way you shape policy.

Kirt Jacobs: That's a really great answer. All right now here's one I'm going to ask you. Since you're a mother and writing the books and your Miss America and you've started a foundation. If you were granted two weeks today. Someone just said, Steve said hey give me your Blackberry, your cell phone whatever. Do whatever you want call me in two weeks I know you're safe for whomever it doesn't have to be your husband.

Heather French Henry: Really?

Kirt Jacobs: Just two weeks and your kids you know I know you love them they go away what would you do with those two weeks?

Heather French Henry: Two weeks by myself?

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah

Heather French Henry: So it's not time where I...

Kirt Jacobs: Well it can be...

Heather French Henry: can do laundry.

Kirt Jacobs: It can be whatever you want. That's why I love to ask this question because I think it kind of gives some insight into your character.

Heather French Henry: Well that's that's a pretty loaded question. My first instinct, I think anyone's instinct in a busy relationship is just go off somewhere in the mountains and take time to breathe. Because I think truly when you find yourself by yourself with no interference of phones and television and whatnot and you get really back to nature. I think that you find out a lot about yourself. Now that sort of the selfish part of me saying I need a break.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah

Heather French Henry: The professional side of me would say that if you gave me two weeks that I'd probably pack up and go to Washington and lobby for two solid weeks during the session. And just have nonstop meetings with the secretary of Veterans Affairs who that ever maybe at the time. Go into some Congressional and Senate offices. You know when I go to Washington I feel like I get a lot done but I never feel like I have enough time to really make the impact that I want to make and I did as Miss America because I was there four times a month usually. And now you know because you have family and children and that all plays in you don't get those repetitive days where you get to make your mark. And so might spend the two weeks up they are sort of pounding the pavement but you know that may change you give me two weeks and you find a babysitter I don't think I could handle two weeks without the kids or Steve or our dog.

Kirt Jacobs: You just miss them. There is nothing else.

Heather French Henry: Yeah

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah I think you're the first guest ever actually want to work during those two weeks. Some want to go to Europe or someone wants to go to a warm beach you know. So it's kind of interesting.

Heather French Henry: I said that my my selfish part would say go to the mountain while a while

Kirt Jacobs: True. Alright this is a question that we ask all our guests whether they are younger or older.

Heather French Henry: OK

Kirt Jacobs: And you kind of touched upon it earlier. When the great day comes Heather, how do you want to be remembered? I mean if it all ended today you walked out of here and God forbid something tragic happened. How would you like to be remembered? I know the best is probably yet to come but we like to offer this question.

Heather French Henry: Well you know one of my favorite mentors was Colin Powell and he and I did a lot of work together because big veterans advocate obviously and he was a general at the time before he was secretary. And he told me a quote he said people may never remember what you did. They may never remember what you said. But they will always remember how you made them feel.

Kirt Jacobs: I love that.

Heather French Henry: And so because this was on my way out as the outgoing Miss America and I had asked him I said you know what will people remember about my Miss America year? Will they remember the work I did? And he said that's not really the important thing. It's going to be how you made them feel. And so I would like to think that above all the work that you do that love above all things you know I love easily all different types of people from all walks of life and whether it's you know give it to a homeless person that hasn't showered for three weeks. You know not everybody can do that and I understand that. Or whether it's you know shaken hands with you know a president or king or whatever. I just love to give love and I know that might be very sort of flower power thing to say.

Kirt Jacobs: No. No I think that's great

Heather French Henry: I would like to be best known for that.

Kirt Jacobs: I think that's a great note to end on. We could go on but I really want to thank you for being on Leadership Landscape today. It is truly an honor to have you here.

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Kirt Jacobs: Thank you for listening to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This episode was archival audio from when we were known as Leadership Landscape TV. If you have any feedback, general comments, or a recommendation for a suitable guest feel free to

email me at kirt@moxietalk.com or catch us on Facebook under MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs, or on Twitter under [@kirtjacobs](https://twitter.com/kirtjacobs) or our extensive website at www.moxietalk.com