

## Maria Montaro Interview

A: My name is Anna Swartwout and I am here with...

M: Maria Montaro

A: for the Queens of Slippery Rock oral history project. Can you start by telling me your hometown, majors, and minors?

M: Sure, I'm from Denwere, Pennsylvania which is by Scranton. I started off as an undecided major but ended up settling on social work as a first major and professional studies as a second major with an emphasis in nonprofit management.

A: Could you give us a biography of what you did in college?

M: I did a lot in college. The first year I was involved with House Council where I was the secretary of Building D and from that I made a lot of different connections. I started getting involved with UPB. Towards the end of the year I was involved in student government. I was one of the conference chairs for house council which mean that I went to the national conferences and was able to bring back information to NRHS. I was also involved in gymnastics club. My second year I got a lot more involved with student government and I was also the president of house council for building A. I joined a lot more clubs that year. I was involved with a club that had to do with a lot of sustainability stuff. I was also working really hard with student government with a lot of sustainability initiatives. Especially the composting on campus I really helped the ball get rolling on that one. I won the rising star award either that year or the next. I also got involved with Ameri-core through one of my professors which wasn't necessarily connected to the school but I really attribute a lot of my experience before I graduated with Ameri-core. I was in the student non-profit alliance I was a board member in that. We did a lot of great work with that. That was when it was just starting to get up and running. We were doing a lot of eyes on poverty and eyes on hunger type of events. I was in the social workers association I did a lot of charity events with that. Then I was also in the residence halls honorary society. Then I also through student non-profit alliance we started and organization called Speak Up Butler County Youth. That was an organization we started as a class project and got off the ground and we continued it. What it basically did was get Butler county youth involved in the decision making processes in their community. We ended up getting a youth on the board of the United Way in Butler County. So much of their funding goes to youth activities and so we wanted to make sure they were included in those decisions.

A: Were you working as well?

M: Yeah. My first year I started working at Aeropostale and I continued working there until I graduated. I also worked for Ameri-core. After I won homecoming I became a Pride Guy so I was doing tours on campus and then I also started working at George Jr Republic towards the end of my senior year and at one point I was doing all four of those jobs at once.

A: What does or did being homecoming queen mean to you?

M: It was a sense of assurance. I'm really big on if you're going to do anything in this world you have to be the best at it. If I wanted to run for homecoming, I wanted to be the best at it. I wanted to represent the community in a good way and be able to represent Slippery Rock in a positive light. For me it was about spreading positivity and being a good face for the university. Slippery Rock was a completely life changing experience. In high school I wasn't popular. I didn't have a lot of friends, I wasn't involved in things, I didn't get invited out. When I came to Slippery Rock I told myself I'm going to get friends I'm going to put myself out there and be involved in as much as I can. For me it was more of a self-confidence thing. Self-confidence thing as in if I win this to me it's like I did it, I made friends, I got involved. I became something when I thought four years ago I was a no one. For me it was really about confidence and being able to represent the university in the best way possible.

A: What made you decide to run? Were you nominated?

M: I was representing the student government association. I was nominated through them and decided to give it a shot. Not gunna lie I wanted to run so if they hadn't nominated me I probably would have run anyway. I think they knew it was something I wanted as well as being so involved with the university I think they could also tell I was a good representation of the student body.

A: Did you run with somebody?

M: Yeah! I ran with Alex Marida. He made the process so enjoyable and fun. He's the kind of guy that is always having fun but also super serious about everything he does. For me it was very encouraging to be running with someone I was actually friends with and not just paired with. He was a really really great running partner.

A: Could you tell us a bit about your campaign?

M: Campaigning is interesting because you try to ask people you don't know to vote for you. The only people that are really going to vote for you are the people that know you or are your friends or people who know of you. For our campaign process we didn't do a lot of going around the dorms or anything like that but we did do a lot of trying to network with our own social circles and clubs and organizations. It was mainly about trying to make sure the people we know vote for us as well as trying to make some new connections within the community. Homecoming is such a nice time for everyone to come together to meet each other. I know that through the homecoming process there were definitely a lot of people I met that I wouldn't have without it.

A: How did social media come into play?

M: We used it a ton actually. I copied and pasted a message into every one of my friends on Facebook with links to where to vote. We tweeted it, we Facebooked it. I don't use Instagram but I think Alex did. For me that was a big push. Cause you can go up to anyone and they'll say yeah I'll vote for you but to actual do it is a lot so providing them with the link and such I think helped.

A: What was the hardest part about running?

M: I don't think anything was really hard. \*Laughs\* I was just so happy to be there. I was lucky enough that when I ran I knew majority of the girls I was running against and none of it was petty or mean. We were all very supportive and trying to enjoy the process together. We were all so close and knew each other so closely that right as I walked off the field they were congratulating me.

A: Did you experience any stigma around your experience?

M: Definitely not on social media. I honestly have never thought about the negative stigma that could be associated with it but I also don't put it on my resume. I don't want them to think oh she was miss popular because I don't think me that way at all. It was something that happened and it was great but now it's over and that's okay too.

A: What did you think your chances were?

M: Oh I have no idea. I knew I had a decent chance to at least make top 5 because I was so involved in the Slippery Rock community but I don't know if I put a ton of thought into can I actually win this thing because I was just really happy to be there. I knew everyone I was running against and was so happy to be standing there with everyone who had made it that far. When I was on the field I thought that someone else was going to win and I was going to be so happy for the person who won. So when they called my name I was shocked when I won.

A: Was there any stigma or negativity around the ceremony or your journey?

M: There was really no negativity. It was such a positive experience. For me at times in life where there's room for something to become negative you have to make it a point to make it a positive experience.

A: In the end why do you think you won?

M: I think when it came down to it I just happened to get more votes. I don't think I necessarily stood out amongst the girls. Everyone that ran were such positive people. I have this outlook on life where I never want to leave someone feeling a negative way and I don't want to have negative interactions. If I'm having a negative interaction I think about how I can change that to a positive one.

A: How did your family react?

M: I don't think anyone thought I would win. They were all so happy that I was there but my mom was videotaping it and was filming the wrong girl. She was trying to get the full picture and it wasn't on me when I won. My parents made a five hour drive to see me and they were so happy and shocked. They ran down to the field and were basically climbing over that fence to get a selfie with me.

A: How did your college life change after you had won?

M: I don't think it did to be honest. I was still super involved and trying to run a ton of stuff. I think the only difference was that I was more recognizable around campus but even that faded after time like it does. There was definitely a change in my confidence cause I was so excited.

A: What was it like to crown the next queen?

M: I love Katie Hill. We have been in the same clubs and organizations since day one. She is such an awesome person and I was so happy she won. I think Katie was such a good representation of the university I don't think you could have found someone more involved at that moment. For me it was so joyous to crown someone I was close to and knew would represent the university well.

A: Do you think it had any effects on you after college?

M: Mostly internal. It's not on resume, I won't bring it up in interviews but having that confidence, especially coming from the background I did having the confidence to say yes I can make friends yes I can be a leader and be involved and do it well definitely elevated me in the work force and gave me the confidence to go out there and be involved and do other things after the safety net that is Slippery Rock.

A: Have you gone back for other homecomings?

M: Yes I have. There's been two since I was crowned and I went back for both of them.

A: Would you come back if there was something honoring queens?

M: Yes of course. I'm all about women empowerment and showing girls this is what women have gone out and achieved is great.

A: Thank you for doing this.