

Palin and the beauty queen are spookily similar

By Michael Fullilove

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Two famous, attractive, conservative women are currently on our television screens flogging their autobiographies: former Alaska governor and US Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin and Californian model and beauty pageant contestant Carrie Prejean. The similarities between them are spooky.

Both are former beauty queens: Ms Palin was the runner-up for Miss Alaska in 1984 and Ms Prejean was a finalist for Miss USA 2009.

Both burst from nowhere with the aid of ageing patrons (in Ms Palin's case, the senator John McCain; in Ms Prejean's, Donald Trump) before crashing back to earth. Now both find themselves at the centre of their country's identity politics.

Both say they have been vilified by the media. They make this claim in interviews with fawning representatives of the media.

Although California and Alaska are not typical states, both claim to represent middle America. Ms Prejean says of her home town of Vista: "Take away the palm trees and the Pacific breeze, and Vista could be in Texas, Iowa or Georgia." Ms Palin claims to live on "Main Street, USA" and during the campaign she spoke of "the real America". Her current book tour is bypassing large (Democrat) cities in favour of small (Republican) towns.

Both have an eye for retail: Ms Palin went on a much-publicised shopping spree at Saks Fifth Avenue and Bloomingdale's; Ms Prejean was a model for both stores.

Both wear their conservatism and religiosity on their well-tailored sleeves. Ms Palin's comments on this theme are numerous. In the Miss USA finals, Ms Prejean stated that marriage only covered relationships between men and women. "Even though I didn't win the crown that night," she later told the Values Voters Summit in Washington, "I know that the Lord has so much of a bigger crown in heaven for me."

However, questions have been raised about the extent to which the reality of their lives squares with their rhetoric. Ms Prejean said that other people see her as a role model, although this was before reports of a sex tape. When Christianity Today magazine asked if her breast implants might be incompatible with her faith, she replied: "I don't see anywhere in the Bible where it says you shouldn't get breast implants."

In her book, Ms Palin writes that "there's no better training ground for politics than motherhood". Yet the unmarried father of her grandchild, the caddish Levi Johnston, claims she leaves home-making to her children.

Both women have demonstrated curious judgment in the way they conduct themselves in public. If you were Ms Prejean, and knew an ex-boyfriend was lurking somewhere with a tape, would you publish a book advocating traditional values? If you were Ms Palin, nurturing presidential ambitions, would you give up your gubernatorial office and its political advantages before completing a single term?

Both women have also displayed hubris in infamous television interviews. In response to a soft-ball question from CNN's Larry King, Ms Prejean accused the genial host of being "inappropriate", removed her microphone and started talking to her PR rep. In a campaign interview with Charlie Gibson, Ms Palin said she "didn't hesitate" when Mr McCain asked her to join his ticket. "You can't blink."

This from a novice candidate who plainly had never found the time to acquaint herself with the difficult issues facing the US.

These two women are not unaware of their synchronicities. Ms Prejean writes that she has been “Palinised”. Earlier this year, Ms Palin called Ms Prejean to offer her support, saying: “I can relate as a liberal target myself.”

There are, however, important differences between the two women, and they have nothing to do with field dressing a moose. Unlike Ms Palin, Ms Prejean was never the vice-presidential candidate of the Republican party – the party of Abraham Lincoln. Unlike Ms Palin, she is not a major force in that party, actively throwing her weight behind candidates from its conservative wing. Unlike Ms Palin, Ms Prejean has no ambition for the highest political office on Earth.

So while Ms Prejean’s new book is of no importance whatsoever, Sarah Palin’s narrative has to be taken very seriously indeed.

The writer is director of the global issues programme at the Lowy Institute in Sydney and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington