

Today

Newly crowned Miss American Angus Katie Gazda shares her speech delivered during the 2008 contest in Louisville.

by Katie Gazda

“Congratulations!

Today is your day.

You’re off to great places!

You’re off and away!

You have brains in your head.

You have feet in your shoes.

You can steer yourself

any direction you choose.

*You’re on your own. And you know
what you know.*

*And YOU are the guy who’ll decide
where to go.”*

—Dr. Seuss, *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

▶Katie Gazda, Athens, Ga., was crowned 2009 Miss American Angus. Katie, the daughter of David and Carolyn Gazda, will represent the Angus breed at numerous beef industry events during her reign. The American Angus Auxiliary sponsors the Miss American Angus contest, conducted annually at the NAILE. The competition includes a written quiz, an interview and public speaking before a panel of three judges. Gazda is the 41st Miss American Angus, and will travel the country as an ambassador for the breed.

As we gather here in Louisville, we celebrate two distinguished milestones in the history of our breed. The vision that our Angus forefathers had 125 years ago when they formed today’s American Angus Association, and the vision that the American Angus Board of Directors had 30 years ago when they established the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) program have affected every Angus enthusiast, and I am no exception. In fact, a similar vision has brought me here today, and I attribute this vision to shaping the history that I have made and am continuing to make for myself.

In an effort to simplify 18 years of experiences into a mere few minutes, I chose to split the word “today” into a five-part acronym: T-O-D-A-Y.

“T” stands for tradition. My family’s involvement in agriculture stretches back more than five generations. But even more significant in my life than agriculture has been my involvement in the Angus industry.

One might think that my connection to the breed is one-sided, as I am the daughter of a 20-year-strong regional manager for the Association. However, my family’s history with Angus cattle didn’t originate with my father. Instead, it began in the mid-1970s with my mom, as she was active in the Georgia Junior Angus Association.

I have also followed suit in my family’s academic tradition, as I am the third generation to attend the University of Georgia in pursuit of a higher education in agriculture. My ultimate decision to pursue a degree in agricultural communications, my time spent in and out of the showing, and my die-hard devotion as a Georgia Bulldog were independent of the influence of my family.

Only I can make my personal choices, and only I can continue to expand my family’s traditions both in and out of agriculture, Angus and academics.

“O” represents outsider. From 1995 until my high school graduation this past May, I attended a small, urban private school where I was considered anything but normal. In an environment where a weekend trip to the beach house was a

more common destination than one to the state fair, I definitely stood out among the crowd.

Even though there were times when I doubted it, despite the different lifestyle I portrayed in comparison to my classmates, I honestly feel that I was the one with the true advantage. Upon graduation, I found my name in the Honors Day Program followed by numerous individual scholarships, all undoubtedly there because of my passion and involvement in something considered “uncommon” at your typical private school.

“D” is for determination AND dedication. Fourteen years ago, Christy Bell Page stood before a similar crowd with the same intention to serve as Miss American Angus. She made history that year, becoming the first young woman to serve as Miss American Angus from Georgia. When the January 1995 edition of *Angus Topics* was released with her freshly-crowned face gracing the cover, she autographed a copy and gave it to me. At that point, becoming Miss American Angus became a paramount goal of mine, as Christy served as a role model in the Georgia Junior Angus Association, even to someone as young as I.

Christy’s influence on me as a young child prompted my determination and dedication to making my own history. When I was 12 years old I sat down and mapped out what I hoped would be the next 10 years of my life. This list was my vision, similar to that vision that our Angus forefathers had so many years ago. On my list were admission into the University of Georgia, serving as Miss American Angus and being elected to the National Junior Angus Board of Directors.

There have been successes along the road, but there have been bumps and failures as well. However, my determination and dedication to that list I created has never faltered. Through my pursuit of those goals and ambitions, I mapped out my history, and it has led me here today.

“A” represents awakening. A year before putting my goals on paper, I had an awakening that ultimately led me to establish my vision. The summer prior to

my sixth-grade year, I had decided that I wasn't going to tell people that I showed cattle. At this point in my scholastic career, I wanted nothing more than to blend in with my classmates and to do the same things they did. I decided that sixth grade was the perfect opportunity to leave my cow-showing life behind ... or at least to the weekends.

In the essence of bad timing, my family won the Clarke-Oconee Cattle Family of the Year award only a couple of weeks into the school year. On Sept. 6, 2001, our local paper published an article titled "A Family That Works Together Wins Together." My teacher pinned the article to the bulletin board outside the classroom. My secret was out!

The article that was originally intended to highlight my family's achievements in the cattle industry instead underscored my struggles with living a double life as a sixth-grade student at a private school and as a competitor in the Georgia Junior Livestock Program. The remainder of middle school, I wasn't known as "Katie," but instead as "Moo Cow."

During a brief identity crisis, I begged my parents to let me quit showing cattle so that I could mold myself into the predictable private school "tween." Today I am thankful that my parents didn't give me that option because I can think of nothing as beneficial as my involvement in the Angus industry. At some point that year I had an awakening that transformed me into the young woman standing before you today.

Finally, the letter "Y" stands for you. It is up to you to live your life and to make your history. No one else can do it for you. I am making history today because I am the only person who has ever lived my life. No one else has and no one else ever will. I am unique, I am an individual, and I have a vision that has and will continue to broaden my horizons and develop me into a successful young woman.

The American Angus Association and CAB are at the top of their games today because of the roads they have traveled pursuing the visions of intuitive cattlemen and women. Likewise, the road I have traveled to the spot I stand in this afternoon is a result of the history that I have made in pursuit of this lifelong dream of mine.

Whatever the outcome is tomorrow, Dr. Seuss leaves us with one more thing that will remain true for each and every person in this room, but even more significantly to each young woman participating in this contest: "Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is YOUER than you."



► Five young ladies competed for the title of 2009 Miss American Angus during the 2008 North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) Super-Point Roll of Victory (ROV) Angus Show Nov. 17 in Louisville, Ky. They earned the right to compete by winning the American Angus Auxiliary's scholarship competition that was announced at the 2008 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) earlier this year. Pictured are (from left) Katie Gazda, Athens, Ga.; Katrina Frey, Quarryville, Pa.; Megan Ahearn, Wills Point, Texas; Krystin Bachman, Lancaster, Ohio; Kaley Bockhop, Belmont, Wis.; and 2008 Miss American Angus Danielle Foster. This year's contestants competed via a written quiz, impromptu questions, personal interview and a prepared speech. Gazda was announced as the 2009 Miss American Angus prior to the selection of grand champion bull.

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Diamond Sponsorship: Gift of \$1,000 or greater

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- Official Miss American Angus banner/crown/wardrobe/stationery & postage allowance — American Angus Auxiliary
- All-American Angus Breeders' Futurity travel allowance for show, Ernie Bingman, Illinois
- Miss American Angus leather scrapbook and book *Angus Legends – Volume I* — American Angus Hall of Fame, Tom Burke, Missouri

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- Miss American Angus custom leather tote — McCurry Angus Ranch, Cecil McCurry family, Kansas
- Atlantic National Angus Show, lodging expense for show — Harry Bachman, Maryland

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- Miss American Angus Montana Silversmith custom belt buckle — Jill (Sommers) Harker; Janelle (Sommers) Deatsman; and Sharon Sommers, Indiana
- Miss American Angus "official pin" — 2008 Miss American Angus, Danielle Foster, Michigan