



From Commoner to Royal

Who says Kate Middleton gets to have all of the fun?

Photos & commentary by Katie Gazda

When wedding bells filled Westminster Abbey and Prince William wed Kate Middleton in London this spring, young girls' hearts near and far instantly shattered. I shamelessly admit that across the pond in Athens, Ga., I was one of the hopeless romantics who couldn't peel their eyes away from the TV, watching the coverage of anything and everything regarding the royal couple — three months later, I still can't.

A few friends and I made an occasion of the Royal Wedding, pulling an all-nighter and reminiscing over Will's and Kate's romantic, fairytale love story through the Lifetime movie, the live coverage and the nuptials themselves. Sleepy-eyed and in awe of the grandeur and majesty of their tale, as the two said "I do" in the wee hours of the morning, I found that I was a bit resentful toward the commoner, much like myself, who had just become a real-life duchess.

While raising and showing cattle will

more than likely not result in a bid to Kensington Palace (although Prince Charles and Queen Elizabeth are, in fact, patrons of the Aberdeen-Angus Cattle Society), I have learned throughout my years as a member of the National and Georgia Junior Angus associations that we, as Angus enthusiasts, are eligible for the next best thing: Angus royalty. And while I would consider giving my right arm to live a day in the life of the newest British royal, I would be remiss if I failed to recognize the endless benefits that I, and many other young ladies, have received from being an Angus royal.

Ambassadors of the industry

Across the country, state Angus associations are represented by queens, princesses and ebonettes who serve as ambassadors to the Angus and beef industries on all levels. Similar to Kate Middleton's tale, state Angus royalty

programs give the girl next door the opportunity to become an icon. While serving many of the same duties, such as passing out ribbons or speaking on behalf of the breed, each Angus royal takes something different from her experience.

Catie Hope, for example, had her future in mind when she tried for the title of Virginia Angus Princess. With the encouragement of her mother, she decided it would be a good way to build her network.

"It gives me more friends and connections through the American Angus Association," Catie says. "It gives me the opportunity to represent my state."

Laykyn Rainbolt, Arkansas Angus Princess, decided to try for the title of princess because she thought it would be a good learning experience, and a chance to represent the Angus breed in her county, district, state and region. Her favorite part of serving as Angus royalty has been the

► **Above:** Serving as an Angus royal requires much more than a pretty smile and a sparkling tiara. These young ladies serve as ambassadors for the breed and agriculture as a whole.

opportunity to meet new people from Arkansas and other states.

"I have definitely gained self-confidence by putting myself out there," she says. "It is a great opportunity to grow as an individual."

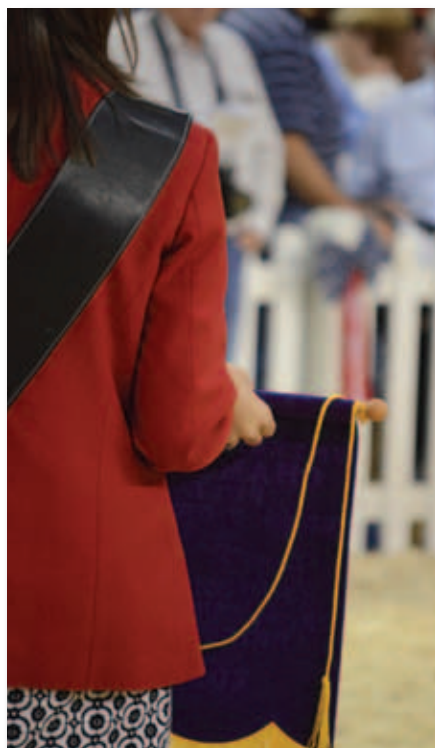
A few states to the east, Shelby Eidson reigns as Miss Georgia Angus. While she, too, enjoys being an ambassador for her state, she plans to go a step further and apply what she has learned from her experience to her future career.

"Serving as state royalty has been a tremendous benefit for me, as my career goal is to be an agriculture education teacher," Shelby explains. "I've learned so many things about the Angus industry, and I'll be able to use this information as a resource with my students that choose to exhibit livestock."

Not just sparkle

On the outside, Angus royalty appear to be girls with pretty faces and sparkly tiaras. After all, as Maryland Angus Queen Jessica Clarke puts it, "It's not often us girls get to dress up at a cattle show!" However, the girls who serve as Angus royalty have attributes that are much more than skin-deep; they're chock-full of Angus knowledge. In fact, most states require a contest to determine who will represent their association.

Pennsylvania Angus Queen Lindsay Upperman had to go through a selection process consisting of an application, speech and interview before she could be crowned.



►Paige Wallace of Missouri serves as 2011 Miss American Angus. She represents all entities of the Angus industry at various events in the signature Miss American Angus jacket and sash.



►State queens, princesses and ebonettes join Miss American Angus ringside at regional and national shows to assist with awards and gain invaluable experience.

In addition to her application and interview, Shelby had to take a test that challenged her knowledge of the Angus breed. While each state may do things a bit differently, they all aim to have the cream of the crop representing their organizations.

Like Shelby, I once served as Miss Georgia Angus. My time as Miss Georgia Angus prepared me for 2009, when I was blessed with the opportunity to serve as Miss American Angus. My classmates and sorority sisters had a hard time grasping the concept of my life as a "cow queen," but my experience was nonetheless unforgettable.

"I got to be the girl I admired from the sidelines of every showring and wished I could be," says Sierra Day, Illinois Angus Princess. "The royalty program is a great way of helping you step out of your box. I encourage every little girl who admires the royalty in the ring to take advantage of this amazing opportunity."

As I retire from my junior career, I have to agree with Sierra. Serving as Angus royalty helped me get out of my comfort zone, and when I graduate from college next year, I'll be ready to take on the world. From Georgia Angus Princess to Miss Georgia Angus, to the familiar red jacket, when I look back on my career as an NJAA member, serving as an Angus royal will forever top the charts. The industry knowledge, self-confidence and speaking skills I gained by serving as an Angus royal, on all levels, has been irreplaceable.

In today's society, the ability to positively portray the beef industry, and agriculture as a whole, is vital. The Angus royalty program can, and will, instill such expertise into young girls from coast to coast.

When I turn on my TV I will continue to

see pictures of Kate Middleton. I am painfully aware that I will not inherit the British throne. And yes, I confess I may feel a twinge of jealousy from time to time.

All things considered, though, riddle me this: Kate and Katie sound a lot alike, yes? And over in England, Kate is busy adjusting to her new life in the limelight, similar to the adjustments I made to fit my new title two years ago. Finally, is it just me, or is it a coincidence that when I served as Miss American Angus, my mom was nicknamed the "Queen Mother?"

That's what I thought: Maybe we Angus royals aren't that different from Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, after all.

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►Author Katie Gazda of Georgia served as 2009 Miss American Angus. She attributes her time as an Angus royal on both state and national levels to developing her into the young woman she is today.