

Kimberly Aiken Cockerham

LIFE AFTER THE CROWN

by Perdita Savage Belk

At the tender age of 18, Kimberly Clarice Aiken wooed millions by becoming the youngest person to win the Miss America title. And if that wasn't enough, she still is only the second beauty to be crowned from South Carolina – almost 40 years after Marian McKnight brought home the crown in 1957!

Now, six years after walking down the runway, a charming Kimberly fondly remembered the impact her reign had on her life.

"My year as Miss America really helped me to grow up," reflected Kimberly during a telephone interview from her home in Cincinnati, Ohio. "I had never been away from home and all of a sudden, everyone wanted to hear my opinions and was really interested in my cause." She continues to promote homelessness education and credits the crown with continuing to open doors for an issue that is dear to her heart. "During my reign, I was able to lobby on Capitol Hill and speak with various groups and organizations about the impact they could have on homelessness," she emphasized. "To this day, because of the title, I can still encourage solutions to the problem of homelessness."

Swept off her feet and married to Proctor and Gamble executive Haven Cockerham in September 1998, Kimberly transitioned smoothly from Miss America to career woman and wife. "I took a year off after my reign to travel and speak before I returned to college," noted Kimberly, who graduated from New York University with a degree in accounting and presently works as an accountant with Ernst and Young, one of the big five international accounting firms. "I

was engaged during my senior year of college and felt very prepared to become a wife and accountant."

Having traveled in some of the same circles as former President Bill Clinton, Whoopi Goldberg, and Denzel Washington, in addition to being interviewed by the who's who of the TV enter-



tainment circuit, does Kimberly miss the spotlight? "People will often say, 'I've seen you somewhere', and I'll finally get around to mentioning the Miss America title," she chuckled. "It's nice to still be recognized, but I really enjoy my life. Haven and I are very social and love to get together with friends. We have a very rewarding and busy life."

With close family ties in the Carolinas, have Kimberly and Haven considered moving back to the Palmetto State? "Right now, our careers are established in Ohio, but we'd both like to move closer to home at some point." And children? "The baby of our house right now is Stella, our 2 year old boxer," laughed Kimberly, "but we're definitely considering expanding our family when the time is right."

When asked about the future, Kimberly gently teased that, "If I had to make a prediction, I'd say that 2001 will be a year of change for me. I'm anxious to experience other opportunities in life, so check back with me in the summer!"

But the future can only be bright for this phenomenal young woman, who is confident in herself, in her life and confirmed that, "I'm exactly where I want to be." ■