



~ *Welcome from Valerie A. Crooker Clemens* ~  
National Association of Miss America Pageants, President  
Miss Maine Scholarship Pageant, Inc., President  
Miss Maine 1980

Dear Friends,

Twenty-five years ago, I began an active involvement with the Miss America Organization. Years before that, I was blessed to be born and raised right here in Brunswick, the community that nurtured the life lessons of spirit, service and success I carry in my heart each and every day. I am thrilled to see the Miss Maine Pageant and the Brunswick Community coming together. It's great to be home again.

I have been asked many times what keeps me involved with the Miss America program. The answer is quite simple; it's because of each of you. I have always felt a desire to "give back" to the program that gave so much to me. I mentor young women from Maine and across the United States because the Miss Maine experience helped me become the woman I am today. Like other young girls, I was active in Girl Scouting, The Brunswick Music Theater, Richard J. Paradis School of the Dance, and after school activities such as cheerleading, student government and fund raising projects for Brunswick High School. Encouragement from advisors, teachers and leaders in this community have helped young people, like myself, dream outside the box and pursue their goals. The leaders of this area make dreams come true. This year the Miss Maine Program is proud to announce the "Lady Dragon BHS Basketball Boosters" as our 2005 Community Partner. These dedicated families and friends help raise funds to provide athletic and educational opportunities for our local youth, and we are proud to be able to help in their fund raising efforts.

Tonight, I thank some of my mentors; Gene Gagne, Gerry Menard and Anna Dugan, all who care so deeply about the youth in the state of Maine. I also thank Mamie Fortin, who not only supported me but was Miss Maine's State Traveling Companion for 13 years. She chaperoned our state representatives to the Miss America Pageant and gave both her time and heart to our program. Many of the people who have made a generous and significant impact on me, as well as, the state of Maine and the Miss Maine Scholarship Pageant are no longer with us, but deserve our thanks and recognition. People like, my hero and my Dad, Harry C. Crooker; former executive director of the Miss Maine Scholarship Pageant, Avella Vercelles from Bangor; and my dance instructor, Richard J. Paradis, who produced many dance routines for the Miss Maine Pageants in the 1970's are remembered tonight. I thank them, and many others, and I miss the wisdom and talents they shared with all of us.

Now, I ask each of you to look towards our future, and become an active advocate of this scholarship program. In doing so, The Miss Maine Scholarship Pageant will continue to grow and serve the needs of our communities and our state. As a spokesperson, Miss Maine promotes her platform and has a state wide speaking tour dealing with self-esteem and making right choices in life. I encourage you to learn more about our organization and make Miss Maine part of your next seminar, convention or school assembly. It is a win-win for you and the title holder. Life is about giving back. Brunswick and the state of Maine gave me and many others the opportunity and the support that made a difference in our lives. I will always be grateful.

I would like to thank Audrey Findlen, our new executive director, and the Board of Directors for their leadership and active role in the Miss Maine Scholarship Pageant. This volunteer organization contributes 100% of funds raised each year to the contestants and the New Miss Maine each year, to further their educational needs. The Miss Maine Scholarship Pageant is also thankful for the Midcoast Chamber of Commerce and Catherine Glover for embracing our program and making us feel so welcome. We are proud to have their support.

In closing, I give special thanks to my wonderful Mother. Mom, you always encouraged our family to reach for the stars. Your strength and the volunteering spirit you and Dad taught, is alive and well and continues on. You lead by example. Who could forget 30 years of showcasing the greatest talent show on earth with "Crusade Capers"? You made stars of the whole town. To my family and friends, thank you for the many contributions you have provided the Miss Maine Program and the support you have given me.

To my husband Al, my daughter Coco and my son A.J., you are my blessings each day. You fill my life with the "zippity" in my "do da". Your support this year has given me the strength to lead and serve the National Association of Miss America State Pageants Organization and to do my best, as I ask of you. Thank you for your love and patience. I am so proud to be your wife and mother.

I began this letter to acknowledge the many individuals who have made major contributions in my life and for the Miss Maine Scholarship Program, I end by thanking all the families and friends of this wonderful community who make a difference in the lives of the young women of the state of Maine. Thank you all for giving us this opportunity to share and to shine.

Enjoy your evening.  
Respectfully,  
*Valerie*