

A Coweta Queen

Young Woman Overcomes Much, Gains Title

By Derek Wilson
World Staff Writer

COWETA — As she heard the other contestants' names being announced, Heather Cochrane told herself that it was just time for the other girls to have their recognition. After all, she had won the talent competition at last year's Miss Fall Festival pageant, no small feat for a high school sophomore who was competing with seniors.

But when they announced the winner's name of the Miss Fall Festival pageant for 1997 it was Heather Cochrane.

"My immediate reaction was, 'Are they sure they called the right name?'" Cochrane said. "I felt honored but I was really, really shocked."

Cochrane, a 16-year-old junior at Coweta High School, was selected to be a representative of the city of Coweta and the Chamber of Commerce at ribbon cuttings and other activities.

"Really, I just do whatever they call and leave on my answering machine and tell me to do," Cochrane said. "I just pray that I can fulfill the duties and make the town proud to say that I represent them."



Cochrane

Cochrane said she felt her straight forward demeanor played well with the judges.

"I feel like I can talk to anybody," she said. "I was just really honest with them (the judges)."

Cochrane also has a talent for vocal music. In addition, she participates in student council, Future Homemakers of America and Students Against Drunk Driving but all who know her can testify that her passion is being active with her church youth group, Frontline Youth Ministries at First Assembly of God.

"Church is just a major part of my life," Cochrane said. "There are a lot of Christian people in this town."

Though she's had success at the previous two Fall Festivals, Cochrane said that she won't try out for either Miss Coweta or Miss Oklahoma.

Nine years ago, Cochrane and her brother, John, were racing John's motorcycle down a dirt road. Blinded by the dust from a truck in front of them, John weaved to get away when an oncoming truck in the other lane ran them over, sending the two siblings into opposite ditches and killing John, who was two years older than his sister.

Cochrane herself received third- and fourth-degree burns over 80 percent of her body and her aorta had been severed.

She was immediately rushed to the hospital where she spent four hours undergoing open-

heart surgery.

To date, Cochrane has undergone more than 100 surgeries and she still has some to go.

It's definitely been a long road for Cochrane to Miss Fall Festival.

"God just really proved himself to me and my family," Cochrane said. Nowadays, Cochrane spends time at Tulsa Area Burn Survivors, counseling others who have been burned. But she still is just taking things one day at a time.

"When I won the pageant, I thought, 'If John could just be here,'" she said. "But, to me, he's still alive—he's still here. I don't think a person dies until we let them."