

Chula Vista grows very own beauty queen

Miss California Christine Acton raised and educated in South Bay

By SANDY PASQUA
Star-News Family Section Editor

What crossed Harriet Acton's mind as her daughter Christine was crowned Miss California were her pediatrician's words when the girl was in junior high school.

Tall and gangly, Chula Vista-raised Chris wondered if she'd ever mature. And National City's Dr. Carol Dresselhaus told her:

"Christy, you are going to be a late bloomer. But if you look at a rose, the late bloomer lasts the longest."

Late bloomer physically, per-

daughter for the preceding week. Contestants are shielded from outside distractions, and that includes parents.

They haven't seen her much since her crowning, either, for she is being groomed now for the Miss America Pageant Sept. 9 in Atlantic City.

"I don't know how she's going to have time to do everything," Harriet wondered, "... picking a new number, practicing until it's perfect ... But I know Chrissy and she'll do it."

HARRIET WAS referring to the flute number Chris will play

LITTLE CHRIS Acton was not a predestined beauty queen. She was a cute little girl with freckles and strawberry blonde hair in a pixie cut when she started at Rosebank Elementary School.

Born at Balboa Hospital in 1954, Christine was almost a birthday present for her sister Nancy. But she waited just long enough to be born Oct. 8 instead of Oct. 7. (Everyone in the Acton family was born in October, including their new son-in-law Alan Lee Caldwell, Nancy's husband, and their license plate reads OCT KID.)

"When she was a little girl," Harriet recalled, "she and her sister did Hawaiian dancing. They even appeared on television, and often entertained the folk over at Fredericka Manor." They also sang duets all over town.

CHRIS BEGAN playing the flute because her sister played that instrument. She wasn't forced to play it, "let's just say I steered her that way," Harriet chuckled. "I said play something you can carry in your purse."

She had a few flute teachers, beginning with Harrison Melhorn, who owned what later became Harper's Music Store, and ending with Frederick Baker, first flutist with the San Diego Symphony.

Chris grew up in a home at 265 Nixon Pl., Chula Vista, very close to Fredericka Manor, and she worked there one summer, serving three meals a day to patients. She worked another summer as a motel maid in Del Mar and many other summers she spent babysitting.

SHE WAS A loving little girl, her mother remembered, giving her parents handmade cards on appropriate occasions. In 1967 Chris entered Harriet in the KCBQ Mother's Day contest, and Harriet didn't even know about it until she received a letter saying she hadn't won.

In those days Christine wore her sit-up length, turned light brown hair in two thick braids. She trained and even showed her now aged Boston terrier, Christine Sir Tiffany, who still guards at the Acton home though his showing days are over.

"She didn't want to do to him what she has now done to herself," said Harriet laughing, "the judging and all."

ALL THROUGH Hilltop Junior and Hilltop Senior high schools Chris was active in music, studying, playing and singing. She played flute in the Civic Youth Orchestra and the San Diego Civic Youth Symphony. And she was one of the organizers of the flute choir in her Bethel 146 of Job's Daughters.

"Both girls were flutists — or flautists," Harriet chortled. "When she was a little girl trudging off to school she was a 'flutist' but when she became Miss California suddenly she was a 'flautist.'"

When Chris left Hilltop Junior High where she had been first flutist, she moved right into the chair her sister had kept warm at Hilltop Senior as first flutist.

"She earned that," Harriet said. "It was because she was good and she worked hard for it."

SHE WAS always a good athlete and a good student, her only bad subject being math. But



BABY CHRISTINE BORN OCT. 8, 1954
A long way from beauty pageant days.

haps, but Christine Acton was always a rase — always a daughter her parents were proud of. And when the five-foot, seven-inch hazel-eyed brunette was crowned number one in the Miss California Pageant in Santa Cruz last month, her parents were there.

JIM AND HARRIET Acton, known in Chula Vista for their tireless efforts for band and music students, had not seen their

in the talent segment of the upcoming pageant.

Chris has been quoted in newspapers throughout the state and on talk shows since her crowning as saying she isn't beautiful, rather she's talented.

She is beautiful, of course, "but she's never believed that," Harriet said. And she is talented, too — extremely so. For the Miss California talent competition she played the flute which she began studying when she was 10.



PROUD PARENTS HARRIET AND JIM ACTON
They are with Christine after crowning in Santa Cruz.



CHULA VISTA'S HOMEGROWN BEAUTY
She will reign as Miss California until June 79.

that, Harriet says, runs in the family.

For four summers while she was in high school Chris attended music camp at the University of Redlands where she earned her bachelor's degree in music in 1976.

Chris was quoted in a San Diego newspaper as saying she isn't a feminist, but she believes in equality for women. She practiced that philosophy while she was a student at Redlands as an employee on the school maintenance team.

She even painted the neat green and white house with the "A" on the garage door where her parents still live on Nixon Pl.

WHEN CHRIS was crowned Miss San Bernardino last February, she was playing in symphonies and orchestras in the Redlands area, giving private lessons and teaching in the Lancaster Schools.

"She loves to teach children," Harriet said, "and she is so good with them." But Chris didn't want to be a teacher until recently when she decided to return to school for her credential.

So far Chris has received a few gifts of merchandise and \$3,000 that will be held in trust until she uses it for education.

"If she doesn't use it for that," Harriet said, "it will stay there for the next person."

THE MISS California Pageant is based mainly on talent, and Christine won the talent competition to earn 50 of the possible 100 points in the contest. Another 25 points is awarded after an oral interview with judges on the basis of personality, poise, ability to present her talent, etc.

The last 25 points are divided equally between evening gown and bathing suit competition.

"We questioned the bathing suit competition," Harriet said, "and we got a good answer. Only in a bathing suit can judges see how physically healthy the body is."

The Actons don't know Christine's point total, only that she had more points than any other contestant.

AS COMPETITION progresses, Chris stands to get from \$2,000 for those judged talented contestants to \$20,000 for being selected Miss America.



SECOND GRADE PIXIE
At Rosebank Elementary

"Her father fell off the ladder the first day," Harriet said, "so she painted the house. There is nothing she can't do — she even chalked the football field at Redlands as part of her maintenance work."

CHRIS WAS always popular with boys and girls, her mother said, "one of the gang." She didn't have much time for dating when she was studying music and playing with different groups, but her junior year in high school she attended the prom at every high school in the district.

She currently dates a medical student at University of California at Los Angeles, but she won't be seeing much of him (she doesn't want to identify him) for the next year.

Never a beauty contest entrant before, Chris was encouraged to enter the Miss California Pageant by the 1977 Miss California, friend Connie Haugen. She did it mainly for the outstanding educational benefits that accrue for those who place in the Miss America Pageant.

She will stay in Santa Cruz with three chaperones until the Miss America Pageant. If she does not win there she will return to Santa Cruz where she will live with a selected family until she completes her state reign in June.

And if she does win ... well, Harriet doesn't know what will happen then.

Except that they are interviewed and appraised of all the rules, parents don't have much involvement with pageant life. They will attend the pageant Sept. 9, staying in a now hard-to-find motel room since gambling has gone to Atlantic City.

SOMEDAY Chris will return to the Redlands community where she has a sound music reputation and will continue her education. It was in Redlands where she earned the outstanding symphony award and the honor of playing in the summer symphony series there one year.

Christine's parents are busy and well-known Chula Vista folks. Harriet is chairman of the Lower Sweetwater Fire District and is very active with the Chula Vista Woman's Club.

Jim left active duty Navy life to be with his family more. He works at National Steel and Shipbuilding Co. and is commanding officer of a Navy reserve unit.

Their daughter, Christine, did bloom far beyond any expectations they had. Now they are waiting to see what happens next.



BAND WAS WAY OF LIFE
At Hilltop Jr. and Sr.



SHE WAS A CUTE KID WITH ORDINARY IDEAS
Riding a giant tortoise was in keeping with her personality.

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