A challenging path to pageant

By COURNTY SHERWOOD
Columbia staff writer

As a homeless child, Jacqueline Brown worried more about where she'd rest her head at night than how to do her hair. As a 16-year-old seeking legal emancipation from her mother, she aimed to impress the judge with her good grades and budgeting skills, not her singing voice or fashion choices.

But when she's introduced to American TV viewers Saturday night, her hair, her voice and her poise in an evening gown will all be center stage. So, she hopes, will her personal story.

Brown is the first Clark County resident to become Miss Washington in 20 years. Local friends, family and pageant boosters believe she has the potential to go even further, to win a $36,000 academic scholarship and best surprise others in the quest for Miss America's crown.

"I've been very touched by Jacqueline because she's real and she goes through her own," said Lois Elaine Smith-Zolt of Vancouver, who has been active as a judge, coach and fan of the pageant world for more than four decades. "I think this girl is going to do well."

Brown was also upbeat early in the week of competition, which began Monday and culminated with final judgments beginning at 9 p.m. Saturday on KATU Channel 2.

"A lot of people think pageants put women back in time and limit them. I don't think so. They give opportunities to women." - Jacque Brown

Miss Washington

Jacqueline Brown answers on-stage questions during Miss America preliminaries.

Homeless as a child, Vancouver's Jacqueline Brown will vie for Miss America crown Saturday

Jacqueline Brown of Vancouver is introduced as Miss Washington during preliminary contests at the Miss America competition in Las Vegas.

and other resources, and she continued telling her story, hoping to make a difference.

Great opportunity

By that point in her life, Brown was working as a waitress to support herself, buy her meals and pay her rent, all while attending Evergreen High School.

In 2009, at age 16, she entered her first pageant — and at the same time, entered an unfamiliar world. She placed third runner-up, and she was hooked.

"A lot of people think pageants put women back in time and limit them," Brown said. "I don't think so. They give opportunities to women. Miss America has given me so much money for school — I wouldn't be able to afford college if it wasn't for the pageant; or I'd be extremely in debt. And I'm not in debt."

She entered several more pageants in the years that followed, and in October 2008 was named Miss Greater Vancouver, receiving a $3,000 academic scholarship to fund her studies at Clark College. That victory gained her entry to the...
Carving out a niche

Sui has carved out a niche in romantic, bohemian dresses that double for daytime and cocktails, as long as the wearer is young and hip. But she also broadened her appeal with a Target collaboration, fragrances and cosmetics.

"What people look to me for is a whole look," she says. "People come to me for icing on the cake, not a basic stretch pant."

Sui was there with Madonna when she wore a sheer black babydoll at the Gaultier show, linked by mutual friend and top photographer Steven Meisel. "She came out with a coat on, and I couldn't wait to see what she was wearing. I thought it would be some outrageous outfit, and then she said, 'Anna, I have a surprise for you.'"

Madonna also wore Sui when she was photographed by Meisel in 1992 for Vogue.

Meisel, along with other high-wattage friends, including Campbell, Evangelista, Christy Turlington, Sofia Coppola, and Jack White and his wife, Karen Elson, certainly help part of the cool crowd seems a bit at odds with cherub-faced women up her Garment Center with her own keys for morning interview and her down time in a Durb with her parents.

She also doesn't wear glasses when she talks at the end of the fashion season, so the faces in the crowd

Pageant:

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Miss Washington competition, which she won in July 2010, bringing her total scholarship award to nearly $15,000.

Her schooling is on hold while she serves as Miss Washington; if Brown is named Miss America, she'll extend that academic leave until next year's pageant (and will receive another $50,000 to pay for school).

She dreams of ultimately earning a degree at the University of Washington in Seattle, then pursuing a career in broadcasting.

By the time she walks on stage Saturday night and her image is transmitted to homes around the country, the judges will have already scored Brown on a range of metrics, including her talent (singing), an interview, her poise in an evening gown (by Jovani Couture), and the respect she has won from other contenders.

At the same time as the rest of America, she'll learn whether she's made it to the top 15 and, if she does, she'll then learn on live TV how much further her pageant dreams will go.

Brown wants to win, but even if she heads home without the tiara, she said she'll be grateful for her role in the pageant.

"Who would have thought that a girl who was homeless and told that she was worthless would have a chance to compete in the 90th Miss America?" she said. "This week, I have to be proud of myself and thankful for everything I have."