

Teen fights to live normal life

By MICHAEL SWEENEY
Cooperstown News Bureau

COOPERSTOWN —
Conni Laymon, a 19-year-old who fractured her spine after falling off a cliff at a teen-age beer party last year, said her spirits are steady and her condition is improving.

"My main purpose now is to improve my physical condition," she said. "It is a slow, hard thing."

On May 31 last year, Miss Laymon walked away from a camp fire in a wooded area of



CONNILAYMON

Cherry Valley and fell off a cliff, injuring her spinal cord. She was left paralyzed from the waist down.

In June she underwent an operation on her arm to allow her greater finger mobility. Last year she was unable to pick up smaller objects, but since the operation she has been able to do so. She is still confined to a wheelchair.

Miss Laymon said she will be returning to Sunnyview Hospital and Rehabilitation Center in Schenectady for continued therapy in the fall. She was released from that hospital last December.

At that time it was reported she fell 40 feet and then tumbled another 30 feet. Miss Laymon said measurements taken since then

show that the full height of the cliff was 150 feet.

"I am still the same person I was before," she said. "I will still go out and carouse," she said.

Miss Laymon said much of her life now is no different than that of any teen-ager. In the day though she is confined indoors usually and she spends much of her time watching television.

Though Miss Laymon intends to attend college at some point, she she has set no date so far. Miss Laymon lives with her father, Gordon Laymon, in Hartwick Seminary. At the one-year anniversary of her accident she visited the site.

"It was something I felt I had to do," she said. "The day I visited the place there was

despite paralysis

still a fire burning from the night before," from other teen-agers holding a party there, she guessed.

"Nobody seems to be trying to prevent it from happening again. There is no way they will be able to stop people from going there. It could happen again any day."

Miss Laymon said she believes the land is privately owned by New York City residents.

"I never tried to sue them," she said. "I figured it was my fault," but she still believes something should be done about the parties there.

A performer at the Glimmerglass Opera Theater Company in Springfield, Brian Steele, recently announced that he is donating the profits from a recording he made to help Miss Laymon pay expenses. Steele, who will

sing the title role in the theater company's production of Verdi's "Falstaff," lives in Kansas City.

The record album, called "In Times Like These' and Other Favorites," will be available for \$7.95 at Augur's book store, the Methodist Church and at the Glimmerglass box office in Cooperstown.

Miss Laymon is optimistic that her condition will continue to improve.

"I have a wonderful boy friend," she said. He will be starting college in the fall.

Otherwise, she said she is doing "as well as can be expected," she said. Later in the year she will undergo another operation to remove a metal plate that was inserted in her back after the accident.