

MY STORY FROM NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL

ROSE OF TRALEE EVENT



By JUDEENA CARPENTER



What started as a bit of a dare on St Patrick's Day from several of my Irish workmates has turned into a bit of a whirlwind adventure for me. When Laoise Condon contacted me with an entrance form for the Christchurch Rose of Tralee competition (after some covert emails from my friends) I had no idea that less than 3 months later I would be crowned the NZ Rose of Tralee and frantically planning for the International festival in Ireland in August. The Rose of Tralee is something that I actually knew very little about prior to my involvement with the festival here. Now, I'm so glad I have been a part of it despite my initial reluctance- the Rose of Tralee provides a great opportunity to challenge yourself, build confidence and connect with your Irish culture.

My Dad emigrated from Co. Louth to Christchurch in 1960. His first job was working on the construction of the Lyttleton Tunnel before he travelled southward to work on the Manapouri hydro-project. He moved north to Auckland in the 70's and established a small drainage contracting business that he continues to operate today. My Mum, a social worker at Auckland Hospital, emigrated to New Zealand in the late 70's, she met Dad in the 1980's and I was born in 1987. I grew up and attended school and University in Auckland, completing a Bachelor of Engineering and a Bachelor of Arts. When the Christchurch Earthquakes hit, I wanted to be involved and felt like I could give something back to help the communities who had been affected through my work as a structural engineer. I have been working down here on the rebuild for over a year now.

I don't think my parents expected I would do anything like this, however as any parents would be, are extremely proud. They attended

the regional finals held at the Irish Society in Spreydon and had a fantastic time. Dad especially loved meeting all the young Irish people who have come to the city and both were impressed by all of the contestants. The win was completely unforeseen and just over two weeks ago my parents and other family members, as well as a number of friends from Christchurch attended the National Finals in New Plymouth.

The Taranaki Irish Society put on a wonderful weekend despite the inclement weather. The regional Roses were kept busy- we visited a children's hospital ward, went ten-pin bowling, were entertained by traditional Irish music and enjoyed High Tea at Pukekura Park. On the Friday night, a cocktail party was held and each of the Roses performed a small 'party piece'. The talents varied from singing to dancing and even playing the Irish flute. Having no musical talent and not wanting to endanger the ear-drums of the audience, I recited a poem 'Digging' by Nobel Prize winning Irish poet Seamus Heaney. On Saturday evening the 'Rose Ball' was held with over 240 in attendance and on-stage interviews were conducted before the winner was announced. Somewhat behind schedule, the winner was announced close to midnight and I was beyond surprised when my name was read.



I feel extremely honoured to have been chosen to represent New Zealand, and especially Christchurch (my adopted city) at the festival in Tralee. The Rose of Tralee journey has been fun, exciting and incredibly educating. I hope that I am able to do my best to represent the resilient spirit of the Christchurch people and the laid-back friendliness of New Zealand. I'm looking forward to my first trip to Ireland, seeing all the

festivities and visiting the places where Dad grew up. In between now and then, there is a lot to organise for the special, extended 12-day festival in honour of Tourism Ireland's, 'The Gathering' - the girls at work have already got me practising my Kerry accent in preparation for Daithi O'Se!