

are very attentive and kind. The guy at the barrier in the Exhibition Centre lets me park there no problem now! I think part of my enjoyment comes from the fact that I was never obsessed with being queen. I got on very well with the other girls but you could see that for some, particularly those who have been turning up for years to castings to be selected as candidates, winning was very important. I think there is, as with all competitions of the type, some degree of envy.

"Ever since I was chosen we have heard all sorts of accusations on the rumour mill, for example, that my brother works with Leo Martínez, my Mum is on the staff at *El Día* and several family friends were on the jury. Not true, any of it. This came my way by chance and I am just getting on with having fun and enjoying meeting so many new and interesting people. I don't see it as a stepping stone to a modelling career. On the night, to see my family and friends, many of them with giant banners and T-shirts with my name and photo, was enough of a thrill in itself".

As to the future, Alicia is not sure exactly how much work will be expected of her as the 'Reina de Carnaval' and she hopes it will not clash too much with her medical studies at La Laguna University, although she is certain a suitable balance can be achieved. Once she obtains her degree, she wants to specialise in cardiology or eye surgery "but not orthopaedics, I can't stand the thought of putting screws into people's knees and legs". In the shorter term, when things die down a bit, she also wants to find time to switch riding the current wave of fame for some horse riding, which she has loved when on family holidays in Cork in Ireland. She has already received an invite from one riding club near her home to get in the saddle any time.

News in Brief



Alice McNulty received a Queen Mother sash and crown from her pupils



Alice pictured proudly beside her daughter's giant float on Parade Night

People throughout the Canaries will be familiar with the face of the most photographed person on the island (and in this edition of *Island Connections*) in recent weeks, Tenerife Carnival Queen Alicia San Juan, but how many know about her Northern Ireland connection?

The 23-year-old La Laguna University student's mother, Alice McNulty, is originally from Belfast but through a quirk of fate (aka Cupid's Arrow) has lived for over 30 years on the island.

Alice's life took a decisive turn when she was working at Warner's Holiday Camp in Devon and coincided there with a young man originally from La Palma but who moved to Tenerife at the age of 14.

The rest can be guessed...they married in Belfast five years later and have lived here ever since.

Having trained as a primary school teacher in Jordanstown, she now works in a small school in Guamasa, not far from Tenerife North Airport. The success of the youngest of her four children has brought unexpected 'royal' fame for Alice also, including a surprise coronation of her own: "The kids at my school held their carnival party a few days after Alicia was chosen as Queen and they invited me on stage, where they sat me on an improvised 'throne' and placed a sash around me with the words Queen Mother on it. It was very nice of them, not to say touching for me. Other pupils did giant 'Congratulations Alicia' posters and put

Royal connections

Tenerife's Queen Mother

them up around the school" Alicia's headline-hitting success has also brought unexpected consequences in the form of calls from people her mother had not heard from for many years. The phone at home started ringing the following morning and hasn't stopped since, with many names from the past getting in touch to say they had seen Alicia on TV and in the papers.

Carnaval is far from an unfamiliar world for the San Juan-McNulty family, according to Mum. "When the kids were much younger we would always take them out during carnival. We particularly loved the one in Puerto de La Cruz because of the reactions on the tourists' faces". Alicia's older sister Fayna was even a member of the dance troupe 'Los Danzarines Canarios' for a couple of years.

Alice recalls vividly the night her daughter was 'crowned' Queen (the winners don't get a crown as such because it doesn't fit on their head due to the massive head-gear). "I was there among the audience of 6,000 with my husband, Andrés, and two sisters-in-law. You really have to be there to appreciate it all: the sheer size of the gigantic stage cannot be captured properly on TV. It was an excellent Gala Show and then the exciting but nervy part came.

As they started announcing the four runners-up and Alicia's name

was not among them I began thinking how we would console her by stressing how well she had done just to get selected as a candidate. Suddenly her name was announced as the Carnival Queen! What happened next was pure chaos. A rush of photographers and a general media scrum. We couldn't get near here initially and had to be happy with waving to her from a distance".

The lack of contact was a foretaste of things to come, however, as Alicia was swept from her family in a blaze of publicity that has kept her away from home near Alcampo in La Laguna for several days and nights. "I didn't see her for almost three days at first. She got back around 4.30 am after the Gala and the phone rang an hour later at 5.30 for her to go down to the *El Día* newspaper (her sponsor) for interviews. She got no sleep. I got up and went to her room to give her a congratulatory hug and from then on we were like ships crossing in the night. It has been an experience for her, a very exhausting one, which she will remember for the rest of her life."

An experience her mother is confident will be useful to her but will not change her: "She has her two feet firmly on the ground and is very determined to see her medical studies through. Her new public life as 'Reina de Carnaval' will not derail her from that".

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