

# Caitriona O Connor

## Roscommon Rose of Tralee

Agnes O Connor

IN 1959, THE same year as the first Rose of Tralee festival took place in Kerry, I was born in Hyde Street, Mohill, the second youngest child of Tom and Maura Mulligan. My brother Thomas Mulligan who is a local county councillor lives at home in Hyde Street, Mohill, while my younger brother Padraig lives with his wife Geraldine, daughters Kara and Celine, sons Shane and Niall in Gortletteragh. I left Mohill after my Leaving Certificate and pursued my training in Dublin. I subsequently met and married a Roscommon man Tom O Connor from Four Mile House, and this year we celebrate our twenty fifth wedding anniversary. This has indeed been a very special year for our family, our

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only daughter Caitriona was chosen as the first ever Roscommon Rose to represent her county at the rose of Tralee festival. As it happened this year when Triona was selected at the regional final in Portlaoise she was in fact representing Connaught.

Triona is a second year architecture student at UCD, initially we were concerned that this distraction may interrupt her studies, however she continued to stay focused and complete her exams in May. Following the selection at the regional finals in Portlaoise this June, Triona worked in Denmark picking fruit on a farm, then returning to Ireland for one week to have some dress fittings. Triona and her friend then made a trip to Turkey where they travelled through the western region from Istanbul to Antalya, stopping off in the old cities of Ephesus and Olympus. They returned through the Greek islands. On Triona's return she had one week to prepare before setting off on the Rose Tour.

The family travelled to Tralee for the Rose Ball on the Friday night. This was a spectacular venue, the dome



candlelight throughout with 900 guests seated for the occasion. The following night Sharon Shannon, Jon Kenny, and Shane Mc Gowan entertained the crowds in the Dome, another terrific night. Outside of the Dome the entertainment in the town was remarkable, there were several stages erected throughout the town providing free entertainment for the crowds. One of the bands was Sean O Dowd, formerly of Sean O Dowd and Ding a ling, from Carrick on Shannon, a band I had not heard of since the carnival days in Leitrim. Anthony O Gara from Scramogue, Co Roscommon is the main driving force behind the festival. Anthony has with the support of other businessmen reorganised the festival over the past few years, to achieve the outstanding success it has become today, a fact supported by the TV ratings enjoyed this year. Anthony told me that he once lived



in Dromod when he worked for the meat factory there; Anthony is married to Oonagh, who comes from Longford. They both gave us a wonderful welcome during our stay in Tralee. On the Saturday night the Roses were paraded through the town on their floats, accompanied by bands, carnival acts, circus, and many other groups. On this night there was an unexpected guest; Catherine Lynch alias 'Bernie' from Mohill appeared on her pie-bald-pony, declaring herself as the 'Rose of women of no fixed abode'.

The festival organisers were certainly surprised and confused, calling on the security to remove Catherine and her camera crew from the vicinity of the stage where she attempted to join the other Roses. Triona told me later the American Roses were intrigued and a little afraid. Catherine approached Triona on her float and asked her where she was from, when Triona told Catherine she was from Roscommon, Catherine responded by saying 'nothing good ever came out of Roscommon'. Triona had a great laugh, as she had sussed it was Catherine and enjoyed the banter with her.

There was a large Roscommon contingent, and not to forget a considerable Leitrim presence in massive festival dome on the night. There was an approximate 2,000 guests in the Dome and the Roscommon fans certainly ensured they were heard. Many of the banners and flags and a number of Triona's friends sported fetching fashion accessories in the form of 'Rubik's cubes' a reference to Triona's party



piece. On stage Triona was relaxed and clearly enjoying the moment. Following the interview Triona completed her celebrated party piece, she completed a Rubik cube in one minute and twenty two seconds and the audience roared its approval.

Aoife Kelly the Tipperary Rose was selected as the rose of Tralee 2008, she was indeed a worthy winner and will represent the Rose of Tralee festival well in the year to come. Triona made the historic breakthrough for Roscommon by becoming the first Roscommon Rose of Tralee; she will always be one of the sparkling Roses of the 2008 Rose of Tralee. All the reports suggest that Triona was hugely impressive throughout the ten days, a credit to herself, her family and her community. It was a great night, a great festival, a great experience and Triona did us all proud.



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