

Schoolgirl's Footlights Dream Reality

By DAVID BARNETT JR.

What better birthday present could you dream up for a girl with footlights on her mind than a hurlyburly invitation to take off on a whirlwind tour of the Eastern seaboard and Canada with a big jamboree show?

And then frost the cake with a promised meeting with controversial guitar swinger Elvis Presley?

That is just the way it happened (albeit, a day late) for 16-year-old Alice Mulks, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Omar Mulks of Slaterville Springs.

Just to lend the final professional touch to the doings, Alice was given her registered "stage name."

That means no one else in the professional entertainment world can use the same name.

Alice explained that she could have used her own name, but for some reason microphones have a way of jumbling Mulks into remarkable distortions—as fan letters have shown—and a new name was needed for clarity.

So now, if you look for her billing, it will be Janece Morgan.

Alice—or Janece, if you prefer—celebrated her 16th birthday on July 17. That was the day the Dusty Owens unit of the WWVA Jamboree rolled into town for two performances at the Strand Theater under the sponsorship of Ithaca Post 221, American Legion.

It being her birthday, Alice was unable to catch the show here, but planned to get a look at it when it played Cortland two days later.

July 18, birthday plus one, was the red letter day. The Jamboree was all set for a Johnson City performance and Dusty Owens was at radio station WINR in Binghamton "plugging" his records.

Alice's name and talents came up in a conversation between Owens and Bob Grover. Grover is leader of the "Tunetwisters" hill-billy band with whom Alice had already played 12 weeks of a 12-week stint on WINR and a previous engagement on WENE in Endicott.

Owens was immediately interested. A phone call brought Alice to Binghamton for an audition and a spot in that night's show at Johnson City.

As things turned out, Alice never did get to see the show when it reached Cortland—she was in it.

The next day she was in Vermont and on a tour that was to last for the rest of summer vacation.

Tompkins County folks will recognize Alice as the little brunette with sparkling blue eyes, who wears a shiny white cowgirl outfit and sits with a guitar across her lap while she strums accompaniment and sings or yodels western "hillbilly" numbers. That is how she appeared at last year's county fair and in Bailey Hall talent shows.

Alice said she started singing when she was three.

She was all of eight years old



ALICE MULKS
Stage Career Looms

when she started teaching herself to play the Hawaiian guitar, however. Her father fashioned a slide bar for her from an automobile part and Alice picked out the chords with a single pick, instead of the customary three picks used on a Hawaiian guitar.

The first day she had her guitar, Alice said, she played her first number: "Candy Kisses."

Her self-taught proficiency had improved (an offer of instruction was retracted when the would-be donor discovered Alice did not need it) but her style of playing is still the same. No, she does not read music.

Alice began performing at school parties, church socials, and on Jack Deal's "Us Kids" program on WHCU several years ago. She has also been a frequent performer on the Ithaca High School "Accent on Youth" radio program.

As for the tour with Dusty Owens, Alice admitted, "I'm tired out," but emphasized she "had a wonderful time" despite such normal hardships of the road as occasional twinges of homesickness, flat tires on their car, getting some 50 miles off the route in the middle of the night, and staying at 30-odd hotels.

"People were wonderful to us," Alice said, although she is still somewhat peeved at the youngster who came back nine times to get her autograph before she realized what he was up to.

The troupe played three cities in Vermont, another in New Hampshire, four in West Virginia, and 22 in Ontario, Canada, where Alice also made radio and TV appearances. There were also two performances in Pennsylvania—one of which included Idlewild Park in Ligonier where 10,000 persons turned out.

Some of the shut-eye came on the car trips between towns. That is how Alice came to miss seeing

Niagara Falls. But that is also how Owens dreamed up her stage name. After miles and hours of discussion, Owens "went to sleep on it."

A half hour later he awoke and came up with the name Janece Morgan.

It was not all travelling and singing, however, for Alice assisted by handling some secretarial work for the busy Owens who also runs his own recording company.

The familiar white cowgirl outfit stayed packed away, Owens decreed there would be no out-door-girl role for Janece—strictly "a lady" at all times.

Janece—Alice, that is—is back with her books at Ithaca High School where she is a Senior. But the tour is not quite over. There is one more performance on Sept. 28 at Olean.

Of course, upon graduation next June, Alice is set to return to the Jamboree.

In the meantime, she will continue to practice with her Spanish guitar which she picked up about seven months ago. She is also working seriously with her brother Clinton (Clint) Mulks with an eye to forming a brother-sister act.

Clint learned to play the guitar while he was overseas on army duty, but a recent automobile accident and a hand injury turned him to singing.

Janece—Alice—also hopes for a "featured singer spot" someday, rather than "star billing. Stars 'have too many headaches,' she noted.

The more immediate concern, however, is that Owens make good his promise that she meet Elvis Presley. Alice's marks at school are part of the bargain. She has little to worry about on that score, since she is already an honor student.

It was "of the record," of course, when this reporter asked Alice why she wanted to meet the teenage sage, Presley, and Alice explained, "I want to take him down a peg or two."

Well, lessons or no lessons, no one has ever accused Alice of playing her guitar out of tune.

Driver Fined \$15

Eugene F. Rice Jr., 32, of 221 King Rd. was fined \$15 after his arraignment Friday night before Ithaca Peace Justice Fred R. Hart sock on a charge of passing a stopped school bus. The incident allegedly occurred Friday morning.

Rice was arrested Friday night on a warrant by the Sheriff's Department.



Janece Morgan 1956-09-08

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