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Aspiring model proud of her Cuban roots

Susana Lopez sets her sights on becoming Miss Latina Canada

Kim Arnott, Special to the Post
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A picture might be worth a thousand words, but the truth is that most people cringe when a camera comes into sight.

Many of the most sophisticated and seasoned interview subjects -- people who can tell their stories beautifully in words -- become bashful and awkward when posing for a photo that might appear in the newspaper.

With 17-year-old Susana Lopez, however, it was the camera of Post photographer Ron Kuzyk that brought the story alive.

An aspiring model, the Grade 12 Notre Dame student was telling the story of how she was chosen to represent Burlington in the upcoming Miss Latina Canada World 2006 pageant.

A graduate of a local modelling school, she was looking for opportunities to showcase her talents, when she came across information about the Miss Latina competition on the Internet.

Although she was born in Canada, Lopez's parents and grandmother are Cuban immigrants and the Burlington student thought the pageant would offer a chance to highlight her Cuban cultural heritage and celebrate Canada's ethnic diversity.

She was chosen for the competition based on a selection of photos and a written essay outlining why she would like to be Miss Latina Canada.

"Since my parents are Cuban and I was born in Canada, I kind of have the best of both worlds," she said.

As Lopez was explaining her thought that she might like to pursue a career in architecture or interior design when she finishes high school this spring, the Post photographer arrived on the scene.

For the next half hour, Lopez posed, smiled,



Ron Kuzyk, Post photographer

'MODEL' STUDENT Notre Dame Catholic Secondary School student Susana Lopez's Cuban heritage and her pursuit of modelling made participating in this month's Miss Latina Canada World pageant a logical choice. The Grade 12 student qualified as a finalist after submitting photographs and an essay about why she would like to become Miss Latina Canada. Should she capture the title on Jan. 27 in Brampton, Lopez would be invited as a special guest of the upcoming Ms Latina New York USA pageant and would qualify for the Ms Teen Latina World pageant, to be held in Texas in July.



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tilted her head, turned her body, leaned forward, held props and even changed her outfit once.

The furniture in her north Burlington living room was rearranged, her pet parrot got into some of the shots and the flash of the camera was dizzying.

It was truly the preparation for a model in the making.

After the excitement of the photographs, Lopez said she would be excited to serve as Miss Latina Canada because it would give her a chance to travel the world and tell her story.

She will compete for the title, which was awarded for the first time in 2005, against eight other women from around the GTA. Each contestant is expected to give a two-minute speech in front of a live audience about what it means to be a Hispanic woman in Canada.

The pageant will take place on Jan. 27, at the Tropic Salsa Nightclub in Brampton, with the winner travelling to New York as a special guest of the Ms Latina New York USA pageant. If Lopez is selected as Miss Latina Canada, she would move on to represent the country at the teen level against 65 other countries in the Ms Teen Latina World pageant in Texas July 1-3.

"I think of this as an opportunity to get my voice heard," says Lopez.

And odds are, probably those thousand photographic words heard too.

For more information on this month's Miss Latina Canada competition, visit the website www.misslatinacanada.com.