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Valley Voices
Writing Contest Winners**

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YOUTH POETRY—FIRST PLACE

"SUMMER BLUES"
by JORDAN SHINN

Screen doors and liquor stores
Dirty shoes and empty pockets
Incense and leopard prints
Crooked smiles and broken locket
Open books and breakfast nooks
Anticipation, coffee stains
Street lights on summer nights
Windows down and familiar pains
These summer blues are changing hues

ADULT POETRY—FIRST PLACE

"heaven"
by RACHEL JOHNSON

down the road just past
the mulberry and plum thicket
I am drawn to cross the creek
that drains spring showers
of warm droplets heated
by the emerging prairie sun

kicking grey baked cow patties
a hundred years old I skip
over fresh steaming ones
traversing across the soft buffalo
just over the rise I come upon
my Delphi, where the gods live

nowhere do I spy a post wrapped
with worn knotted weary wire
nor hear derrick jacking juice
I dare not look up fretful to scout
strips of white tails criss-crossing
across a pale pastel blue dome

but there among the long-eared jacks,
wild turks, and young bucks there
without the sound of my own voice I
am back home again, home among
those and that that carry my soul
and keep it safe until I return again

YOUTH ESSAY—FIRST PLACE

“NATURE VERSUS NURTURE”
by ANNIE ELDER

The nature versus nurture discussion has been a subject of controversy for many years. Nature refers to the genetic traits woven into an individual's DNA; whereas, Nurture is the theory that our behavior is molded by the environmental factors of our upbringing. Scientists debate frequently on this issue, because both sides have strong arguments and research to back their positions. A common question still remains: If a child were to grow up and become a doctor, would it be genetics that made him/her smart, or would it be because the environment he/she lived in influenced his/her way of thinking? These two ideas have proposed a series of thoughts, theories, and arguments in the history of psychology.

Nature does give us some genetic features that cannot be disputed. Eye color, hair color, height, smile, tone of voice, and numerous other physical features are a direct result of DNA from a biological mother and father. Often times a small child who is lost in the grocery store can be reunited with his mother or father on looks alone.

The issue of being “born gay” is one that scientists who favor the nature theory believe. An article in a 1998 issue of LIFE magazine, “Were You Born That Way” by George Colt, states that most gay people are born with the genetics to be attracted to the same sex.

Another fact of life that deserves our attention is alcoholism. Research tells us that children of alcoholics have a 25 percent chance of developing the disease in their own lives. Studies that have proven this fact help scientists that support the nature idea.

Sho Yano's story is a fascinating one that displays nature very well. At the age of two he was reading. Age three, he was writing. At the age of eight, he advanced to college level, and by the age of 18, Sho Yano earned his PhD in molecular genetics and cell biology. This may be remarkable, until it was discovered that Sho Yano's sister displayed the same kind of intelligence. Scientists came to the conclusion that genetics had to be the main factor in this kind of situation. Nurture may have played a role in the fact that Sho Yano had great parents, and they encouraged him and challenged him intellectually. Another possibility is that genetics played a role, considering both of Sho Yano's parents were very well educated. All in all though, I think both nature and nurture had a role in Sho Yano's intelligence.

A harder story to understand would be a story called Genie. She was a little girl who sat on a potty chair most of her childhood and never experienced the outside world. When she was found, talking was absent. She had a strange way of communicating with people, and the way she took to people was not normal. Scientists and psychologists had a hard time putting their finger on this one. Was Genie retarded from birth, or was the environment she lived in what made her this way? Since Genie was so rare, everyone wanted to interact with her, and because of it, they couldn't get to the bottom of Genie's case. So, it was never discovered whether nature or nurture played a key role in Genie's behaviors.

Nurture helps us define genetic characteristics by putting a personality on the features we already have. Eye color can be predetermined at conception; however, the way a person moves his/her eyes, the way the eyes look at others with warmth and affection or anger and hatred, that is a result of the environment. The same can be true for other man-nerisms. Behavior, intelligence, and personality are all impacted by the environment in which we thrive or fail to thrive.

Another nature/nurture question lies in Temple Grandin, who was born with autism. Her mother refused to accept the belief that Temple should be institutionalized; rather, her mother believed that in the right environment Temple could learn and thrive! After years of heartache, rejections, and endless perseverance, Temple's mother found a school that was a good fit for her daughter. Temple thrived under the guidance of loving teachers and family members. Even though there were setbacks along the way, Temple went on to design elaborate cattle-handling systems that are now used in all parts of the world. She is a well-known speaker and advocates for all types of disabilities, especially autism. Contrary to Temple's story are those on the flip side—families who gave up and institutionalized their young children back in the 50's. Nurture definitely plays a role in how we are molded and shaped into adults, whether we are born with a disability or not.

Another exciting event in history is that of twins Brielle and Kyrie Jackson who were born prematurely and put in separate bassinets at birth. When Brielle got deathly ill, a nurse put her in the same incubator as her sister, Kyrie. Within a few minutes Brielle snuggled up to her sister, Kyrie. Her breathing improved. Blood oxygen levels also shot up. This practice is now known as double-bedding of multiple-birth babies. These two stories along with numerous others show that the positive effect of a strong nurturing environment cannot be underestimated in importance.

Both sides—nature and nurture—are equally right. Most likely, this topic will be debated until the end of time. The reality is that genetics and environment play a role in the person that we become. That is a comforting fact in that people have partial control over their happiness, destiny, and outcomes. All aspects of development are guided by the interaction of hereditary forces, nature, and life experiences, nurture.

ADULT ESSAY—FIRST PLACE

“THANK YOU FOR THE STORY”

by JOYCE KOOPS

The ballad, in the 1700s, was the accepted form of poetic literature. Ballads were simple in design and focused mostly on romantic love and chivalry. Whose literary genius broke away from that pattern into the writing of irregular verse, dialogue, and stanza? What relationship did his work have to the development of the novel? Who is seen as the father of the historical novel?

Paul Harvey, in one of his “The Rest of the Story” segments, told that in Scotland in the late 1700s there lived a baby named Walter who was so sickly that no one thought he would live. His nursemaid, in pity, decided to end his suffering by holding a pillow over his face. “A few seconds,” she thought, “and he will suffer no more.” Just as she was ready to carry out her plan the baby woke up, looked into her eyes and smiled. The nurse put the pillow aside. So Baby Walter lived and grew. He was later known as Sir Walter Scott.

Sir Walter Scott was by profession a lawyer. Writing, however, became his real profession. Finding the structure of the ballad boring, he wrote instead in irregular stanza and rhyme.

Throughout Sir Walter Scott’s childhood he suffered from a crippling disease. As he grew he was determined to do all he could to become strong. In defiance of his infirmity he sometimes walked 30 miles a day and rode a hundred. As he walked and rode he studied the countryside and talked with the people. He learned their stories, songs, and legends, many of which can be found in his first important work, “The Lay of the Last Minstrel,” published in 1805. This poem was quickly followed by others. In 1814 Sir Walter Scott wrote his first novel.

“The Lay of the Last Minstrel” is a predecessor to the novel that is divided into chapter-like “Cantos,” and is built upon all the elements of story, namely: Introduction, Setting, Plot, Resolution, and Denouement. A quick overview shows how Scott included these elements in his work.

Introduction:

The “Lay of the Last Minstrel” is introduced by the appearance of an aged minstrel, the last of his kind:

“The way was long, the wind was cold.

The minstrel was infirm and old.

The last of all the bards was he

To sing of Border chivalry.”

Setting:

The narrative opens upon the scene of Ladye Scott of Branksome Hall mourning the death of her husband who has fallen in a border battle between England and Scotland. She vows vengeance through a Wizard’s Magic Book of Spells.

Plot:

The plot develops as her knight retrieves the Book of Spells from the Wizard’s opened grave. Upon his return to the castle he finds the Ladye’s daughter consorting with a knight from the enemy side. In an ensuing duel the Ladye’s Knight falls as dead; whereupon an evil goblin snatches the magic Book, throws the knight’s body down at Branksome’s gate, and steals the Ladye’s child.

Resolution:

All is resolved. The knight survives, the lovers are forgiven, the child is returned to his mother, the evil goblin is destroyed, and the Ladye denounces her involvement in the occult.

Denouement:

In a satisfying denouement, the priest blesses them:

"Above the prostrate pilgrim band
The sainted abbot stretched his hand
And blessed them as they kneeled.
With holy cross he signed them all
And prayed they might be sage in hall
And fortunate in field."

Scott's first published work is predictive of his later fame as the father of the historical novel. "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" is truly historical. It takes place on the English border of Scotland in the 1490s. The narrative is based on actual characters, places, and events. In 1492 Sir Walter Scott, first chief of the Scott Clan, was killed in a border battle between the Scotts and the Kerrs. His widow knew the art of Black Magic, having learned it from her father who had studied under the Wizard Michael Scott.

The Wizard, a real person in the history of the 1490s, was a man of much learning, addicted to the studies of strange sciences, such as astrology, psychology, and the occult. He studied and traveled in faraway lands and became famous as a magician and wizard. He wrote a book called, "The Mighty Book of Michael Scott."

The goblin in the story comes from the old Scottish legend of a dwarf named Gyblin Horner.

In his lifetime Scott experienced fame and fortune, financial reversals, and personal loss. Until his death in 1832 he remained always an honest and God-fearing man. Displaying the endearing nature that once saved his life, he wrote in his journal, "When thrown into society I always have and always will endeavor to bring pleasure with me."

The pleasure is ours, Sir Walter Scott. Thank you. Thank you for the story.

YOUTH FICTION—FIRST PLACE

"DADDY'S CAR"

by MADELAINE COLAROSSO

I was only a baby when my Daddy bought that car. It was a shiny black one with leather seats. Sometimes he would let me sit up on the seat, and turn the wheel all by myself. My mother didn't like it. She was always afraid I would get hurt, but when Daddy would ask to take me with him for a ride, she always agreed to let me tag along.

As I got older, Daddy taught me to drive his car, while sitting on his lap. People would wave and smile at us as we passed by in the little black car. A lot of people said the view from Daddy's lap was tiring. "Nothing to see but grass and sky," they would complain. I loved it all. I loved the sights, the smells, and the sounds; I loved Kansas. To me, the grassy hills and endless blue skies were new and different every day. The smell of the leather seats mixed with the scents of the wildflowers I put in Daddy's pockets was the sweetest scent in the whole world. The sound of Daddy's car rumbling over the roads, and my Daddy's voice telling me, "watch out for that turn, Elizabeth," was more comforting than any lullaby. To me, everything was peaceful; it was perfect. When I was with Daddy in the car, I felt as if I were on top of the world.

Then, one day when I was about seven years old, Daddy sold his car to another man in town. I cried over the sale for days. My father, upon seeing my distress, went into town and bought back the little car. I was very happy, and I hugged Daddy tightly. I always loved my Daddy, but from then on I decided that I loved him even more than before.

We had so many adventures together in that old car. Each scratch and dent tells a different story. My favorite dent happened when Daddy let me drive the car by myself for the first time. I had driven sitting on his lap hundreds of times, but I had never driven alone. With Daddy beside me, I drove down the road, around a corner... and into a tree. No one was hurt thankfully, but I was so frightened that I started to cry. Daddy got out and looked at the rather large dent in the hood of his car. He looked down at the hood, up at me, and down at the hood again. Suddenly, a big rumbling laugh escaped him. He laughed so hard that his shoulders shook.

I was so shocked by his laughter that I stopped crying to stare at him. When Daddy stopped laughing, he climbed back into the car and kissed my cheek. Then he said, "One day, I shall have a

delightful dent to show your husband when I tell him this story." Many, many years later, when my father told him the story, I remember how my husband smiled. He patted the hood of my Daddy's car and said to my Daddy, "What a delightful dent to accompany a wonderful story." I smiled.

Daddy drove me to my wedding in that same black car. By the time I arrived, I was twenty minutes late for my own wedding! My husband, Richard, met me at the door of the church. "My darling, Elizabeth," I remember Richard saying, "If I didn't know any better, I would say that you love that car more than you love me." I never answered him. After all, there are some things in life that one cannot possibly explain.

Daddy died last year, leaving Mother and me both widows. Along with his will, Daddy left an envelope for me, his "Little Lizzy." Opening it, I found a photograph. It was of me as a baby in Daddy's car. Both Mother and I understood that Daddy was leaving the car to me. The grief was very strong for Mother and me, so do you know what we did? We put on our coats, and went for a ride in Daddy's car.

ADULT FICTION—FIRST PLACE

"NOBODY SPOKE"

by KEITH SCHLAEGEL

"He was shiftless."

The women gathered around the long table which was burdened with casseroles, salads, fried chicken, pies and cakes, said nothing, allowing a passive agreement. The sun sat on the western horizon, an orange ball preparing to slide into the darkness beneath it. Above the heads of the women were the leaves of the burr oaks and cottonwoods, muting the fading light and hastening the approaching evening.

"Shiftless, mean and lazy," Ruby McMasters said again.

"May have been and probably was, but it don't do anyone any good to speak ill of the dead," Ruth Starling said after a long silence.

"Who's dead?" asked Maryann Bowers. Maryann had just walked up to the group sitting around the table in the grove of trees. "Somebody died?"

"Perhaps you are right, Ruth," Ruby said, "it probably isn't kind to speak ill of the dead but you have to admit he was shiftless, lazy and mean," as if saying it a third time would make it more true.

Ruth shrugged. "As I say, he undoubtedly was, but it was a horrible way for anyone to die." She reached for an apple cobbler with three squares cut out of it and covered it with a tea towel. In the distance a clanging noise signaled the collision of horseshoe and stake. A distant male voice bellowed an indistinct phrase either in elation or disappointment.

"Would somebody please tell me who died and how?" Maryann Bowers asked again. She looked for a moment at the women with one eye cocked, then picked up her turkey casserole that always received compliments at church picnics and pot lucks. "Well, so it appears to be a secret," she said, carrying the casserole toward her car parked a few feet away.

"Oh, it's no secret Maryann," said Ruth, "Mr. Penders...Ed Penders...he died."

"Oh...I hadn't heard that," said Maryann coming back from the car. "He died horribly? How so?"

"Chimney fell on him," said Ruth. "Sitting in the shade on the east side of his house and the chimney just crumbled and fell on him. Doctor assumes he was napping."

There was silence again until Annie Groh sitting in on a stool on the perimeter of the circle of women chimed in: "That's an unusual way to die."

A couple of muted giggles filled the silence.

Ruth nodded. "Unusual and from what I hear not pleasant."

"No, I don't suppose it would be," Maryann agreed. "I guess if it landed on his noggin, it might have been quick anyway."

"Didn't land on his head. My neighbor, Lucille Croft, her husband is a county deputy, well Lucy said it landed on his stomach. Ruptured something, a spleen maybe, and he died in agony." The women all looked at Regina Hull who had been quiet up until that point.

"Poor man. As I said, a horrible way to die," Ruth said again.

A couple of heads nodded in agreement as the women finished covering their dishes to keep out the flies which had been bothering all afternoon, putting them in baskets or carrying them to their cars and trucks.

"There is no reason to have any pity for that man. A slow, painful death would be too good for him."

All heads turned in the dimming light to look at Maude Sanders, sitting on a straight back, wooden chair. Short cropped, straight, snow white hair lay on the top of the head which was part of the 85 year old body. A stern mouth which had known few smiles in the last 20 years was below eyes which surveyed the other women looking at her.

"Perhaps he wasn't a good man Maude, but whatever sins he committed on this earth will be dealt with by the good Lord. It is not our right to judge those who die before us."

Maude Sanders stared at Ruth Starling, holding the gaze a few counts longer until Ruth dropped her eyes. "You can save your gospel for Sunday at the Methodist Church, Ruth. I only hope his painful death was the first step in his repayment for his sins on earth."

Ruth raised her eyes again to look at Maude. "That's very harsh Maude."

Annie Groh, sitting next to Maude, leaned over. "It sounds like you know something the rest of us don't."

Maude crossed her arms over her chest and looked from one woman in the group to the other. "Oh, I believe a few others of this group know also, but it isn't the type of thing to speak of in a gathering of civilized folk."

It was quiet again until Annie spoke up. "So what did Mr. Penders do?"

No one else spoke as the women in the circle all looked at Maude Sanders. Fifty yards away in the cottonwoods by the shallow river, tree frogs started their rhythmic chant, filling the awkward void. One of the women struck a match and lit a lamp setting on the picnic table. A dome of light grew under the trees, pushing back the darkness. Another clang sounded in the distance.

"It sounds as though the men are still throwing their horseshoes, so if you wish to hear about Ed Penders, I shall speak of him, but afterward I don't want to hear anyone talk of harsh judgment of the dead." Maude stared across the circle at Ruth Starling.

"If you wish to gossip about those who our heavenly father has taken from this earth, go ahead, but I believe I'll watch the men throw their horseshoes." Ruth Starling picked up a chocolate sheet cake and walked toward the open field that was being painted with copper and orange by the setting sun.

"If Ed Penders was taken from this earth, then I'm sure he had a rather abrupt trip down instead of up," Maude said. A couple of quiet laughs came from the circle of women. She watched Ruth walk away, then cleared her throat.

"It was 1919, right after the Great War. Now it's called World War I, but back then we couldn't imagine that there could be another one like it. He showed up, driving an old truck. Actually, it broke down just out east and he had to be towed into town. He told folks he had been in the war. Said he had been 'over there' and was just looking for peace and quiet. Made himself out to be some kind of hero, but as time went on most doubted it.

"Since I'm not seeing too many gray hairs in this group, I doubt any of you remember him when he first came to town. Would have been some 35 years ago and most of you would have been young 'uns. Maybe some not even born yet.

"He had a young girl in tow. Name was Harriet. Harriet was a quiet little thing. Probably not 10 or 12 at the time. Kind of a plain girl. The kind you didn't notice when she was in a room. She was Ed Pender's daughter. His only child. Her mother had died of scarlet fever or some such thing.

"He stayed around town for a few days, doing odd jobs to get enough money to get his truck fixed and eventually he started working at the grain elevator. He rented a little shack over on the south edge of town. Out in that field where Bill Devers keeps his goats now. He worked for close to a year at the elevator and then he must have saved...or maybe stole...enough money to buy an old gas station that was out on the highway a mile or so out of town to the west...there where the road bends around those hills. It isn't there anymore, got taken out by a tornado back in the summer of 1945. You can still see where it went through by all the trees that are stripped of most of their limbs.

"So anyways, Ed Penders and this girl, Harriet, they move out there to that station and make the back room of the building their living quarters. It wasn't kept up at all. Dirty, oil spills everywhere, junk cars parked around the station. Travelers from the west, those making the long trip from Goodland, or maybe even Denver, might stop there before they got into town and buy some gas.

After a couple of years, he bought an old tow truck and would bring breakdowns into his station and try and fix them. Most didn't think he knew much about mechanicing."

The story stopped as Ruth Starling walked quietly back into the circle and sat down. Maude looked at her for a few moments, a stare of ice, then continued:

"My youngest, Sue, she was in high school at the time and she always felt sorry for Harriet. She was different and children, 'specially girls, can be so mean at that age. Sue said that others would tease her because she just didn't fit in. Of course, her clothes were never as nice as most of the others and could always use a good washing. Lots of folks back then didn't have money for new clothes, but most would at least send their children to school with their clothes washed.

"And the poor thing was a little slow. Didn't seem to understand things real well. As I recall, she was put back a grade the first year she was in school here...and the others didn't let her forget that. Sue said that she knew herself, she wasn't quite like the others and wouldn't join in with the games the girls would play at recess, even if she had been invited. Would just be by herself over in the corner of the playground. Bouncing a ball or some such thing.

"Poor dear," Maryann Bowers said. Annie looked at her and nodded.

"Yes. It was a sad life she led," Maude continued. "To have to go home each night to that depressing, dirty gas station. Out there all alone. No one else to see or talk to except for that man.

"Then one day she quit going to school. My Sue mentioned that she hadn't been to school for a while. Said no one really knew where she was. Probably a few weeks after she had told me that she hadn't seen Harriet at school, Ted and I were coming in from checking cattle on pasture we used to rent at the old Callaway place, out there north and west of town. My Ted said he needed to stop at Penders's station. I asked him why on earth he would want to do that and he said Ed Penders had told him that he had some part for his tractor that needed fixing out at the farm.

"So we stopped and while Ted and that man looked at the part I went into the station to look for Harriet. It was a place that had a bad feeling to it. You know how some houses or areas don't seem right. Well, it was one of those places. I didn't see her at first, but I walked into a little room where he kept a lot of junk that should have been thrown away and there she stood, trying to hide herself behind an old oil barrel. As soon as I saw her I could tell how she was. Why she hadn't been going to school. I said, 'Oh child, come here,' but she turned and ran into the room they used as their living quarters and shut the door. I was completely beside myself and I went out and sat in the truck, waiting for Ted. Ted knew something was wrong and I didn't speak all the way home.

"I finally told him what I had seen and then it was Ted's turn not to say anything. Ted was a good man, but like most men folk, he didn't want to believe things like that. He ignored it for a while, but it must of kept eating at him, because he told me a couple of weeks later that he had told the sheriff what I had seen. Of course the sheriff, at that time the sheriff was Dick Dooley, he didn't want to do anything either, so he sent the county nurse out to talk to her instead of arresting Ed Penders like he should of. Not long after that, the nurse and her husband moved out of the county. Somewhere down around Ness City I believe. So that pretty much put an end to anyone looking into the matter.

"I don't know that anyone ever saw Harriet again until the funeral. Of course, hardly anyone attended it. One of the preachers in town, the sheriff...he probably felt guilty for not doing anything...me and Ted, a couple of the others I didn't really know, must have been some of the riffraff Ed Penders drank and played pitch with. It was so sad to see little Harriet, laid out there in that cheap wooden coffin. Her clothes didn't even look clean, unwashed just like when she was alive."

More lanterns had been lit while Maude spoke. Their light holding off the encroaching darkness and the dark thoughts that come with it. The clanging of the horseshoe game had ceased and low, muffled conversation came from the field where the men had gathered.

A voice broke the quiet: "How did she die?"

Uneasy silence hung in the night air.

"The county coroner said she drank lye. He ruled it a suicide."

"Oh my, that's horrible," Annie interrupted.

"Horrible indeed. I heard from a friend of the coroner that her tongue and mouth were burned terribly from that caustic liquid. I myself, I have my doubts it was suicide. My sister-in-law who was some kind of shirttail relative of the county nurse told me later that she had told her...the county nurse... that Harriet had gotten some crazy notion in her head from somewhere that drinking lye would get rid of her problem. 'Make her like she was before,' she told the nurse.

"I wouldn't doubt it a bit if that old man wasn't the one that put the idea in her head. Ridded himself of his problems without getting blamed."

"So you think that Ed Penders is the one who done it?" asked Annie. "The one who put her in that way?"

The tree frogs quit their rhythmic chant and the buzz of mosquitoes stopped for a moment, seeming to wait for the reply.

Maude Sanders stood up, slowly straightening each part of her body, then reached for the shoo fly pie she had brought to the gathering. "As I said, if that man died a slow, painful death, if every breath he drew was nothing but agony, then that good Lord you were speaking of Ruth, he was still giving that man a more fitting death than he deserved."

The old, white haired lady looked all around at the faces, nodded, then walked away from the circle.

No one spoke as the food was gathered and the women moved to the field looking for their husbands.

When the last woman left, the lanterns were extinguished, leaving the grove in darkness.

YOUTH AUTOBIOGRAPHY – FIRST PLACE

"SHAPED BY LOVE"

BY MADELAINE COLAROSSO

Many things influence us from day to day. Sometimes movies, music, art, or books, but most often it is people who are the most influential in our lives. Each of us can probably remember at least one person who helped us become the man or woman we are today. I happen to believe that *love* shaped me into the woman that I am today.

My mother was a youth pastor at our church when I was young, and she taught me every Bible story there is to know. She also home schooled my sisters and I. She taught me that even though I hated it, a good understanding of mathematics *was* necessary. Since I was a "gifted" student in some areas, she also helped me by promoting my gifts. She paid a woman named, Doctor Ginny Layton, to tutor me in writing, and helped me to get a job as a reporter for a magazine. My mom always told me that even though I was different, I was special and God had a purpose for me.

Daddy was a truck driver when I was growing up, so he spent three out of four weeks of the month on the road. He wasn't home on a regular basis, but when he was he taught me a lot of things. Like mom, he also encouraged my gift of writing. He would take my stories with him when he left home, and would read them while he was gone. Sometimes it would take him a long time to finish reading them, but he would take them anyway. That was his way of saying, "I love you," when he couldn't be home. Daddy got along with almost everyone. One day he told me, "Madelaine, there are only a few kinds of people I can't stand, and that's a liar and a thief." A suppose that if he taught me anything, it would be the importance of honesty and integrity.

Grandma Kay was my mother's mom. I always had fun with her. She was the most creative person I know. She loved arts and crafts, and was always making fancy things for my sisters and I. She taught me how to sew, and how to write poems and stories. What I remember the most about her is that she was also *very* organized. When I was about seven years old, she walked into my bedroom and she demanded, "Madelaine Colarossi, how can you find anything in this room?" Of course the only thing I cared about was knowing where my books were, but I realized she was right. Through her I learned the importance of being organized. Because of her, one might now say that I am a "neat freak."

Grandma Ruth was my father's mother. Because of her, I learned how to study, memorize, and debate with the information I learned. She taught me to love books, and to seek out knowledge above all other things. My earliest memory of Grandma Ruth is her sitting me down in a reclining chair with an encyclopedia, a dictionary, and a World War II biography. With those supplies, she turned on a lamp and ordered me to read. Which I did, and I never regretted it. To this day, I love learning new things, and reading new books.

Grandpa Carlo was born in Italy, and he came to America when he was older. He gave me a love for other cultures and languages. That is why I really enjoy studying Cultural Anthropology. He also loved gardening. He loved to grow fruit trees and roses. I love flowers, too, but I did not inherit his "green thumb" for gardening. Even more important than any of those things, Grandpa Carlo stood behind me and supported me. He understood me when I didn't feel like anyone else did.

Grandpa Carlo is my hero. He gave me my most treasured keep sake; it is a picture of one of his roses, a beautiful red rose. What I will always remember the most is the inscription on the back of the picture that reads, "Madelaine, I found this rose in my garden today... It's almost as beautiful as you are." Grandpa Carlo taught me two very important things. First, he taught me to love beauty. Then, he taught me that there is beauty inside of everything, even if it seems hidden. He was right.

The last person who helped me to become the person I am today is a man who gave up His life to save mine. He was the first and only man to love me so perfectly that He would be willing to give up everything for me. He left me a present when He died, a love letter. A love letter titled, *The Bible*. This man's name is Jesus, the Son of God. He promised me that even though I am just one girl, He loves me simply because He made me, and that is why He was willing to die for me.

These are just a few of the people who have touched my life, a minority of those who have guided me in the past. Through them I have learned so many different things, but in their own way each of them taught me to *love*. Grandma Ruth taught me to love knowledge, Grandpa Carlo taught me to love beauty, Daddy taught me to love honesty and integrity, Mother taught me to love God, Grandma Kay taught me to love being organized, and Jesus taught me to love Him. This is why I believe it is *love* that has shaped my life me the most, and has made me into the woman I am today.

ADULT AUTOBIOGRAPHY – FIRST PLACE

"MY DEPRESSION DELIVERANCE DREAM"
BY NILA LaREA DENTON

I do not know about you, but I find I dream a lot – in vivid, rich, and vibrant colors. After I awaken, some dreams are like wisps of curling smoke, gently floating away from my consciousness, while other dreams linger for days, months and even years, so distinct and real enough I have to stop and remind myself, it was only a dream.

A number of years ago, in 2004, I had such a dream. Yet today, I remember it as clearly as if I had dreamt it last night. It came when I needed reassurance and brought me immeasurable peace. For you see, I have dealt with holiday depression over forty years, starting as a teenager when my grandfather, Lorenzo Rea Zeigler, passed away unexpectedly on January 2, 1969. The next year, I had difficulty celebrating the holidays without Grandad Rea, as we his grandchildren affectionately called him, for you see he was the first of our immediate family to die. The following year, on January 1, 1971, my 37 year old father, Duane Brown, died in a freak pellet gun accident on our farm. After that tragic day years later, two more of my grandparents passed away a few days after Thanksgiving, so the period of my depression lengthened from Thanksgiving to January 2.

In following years, some holiday seasons were easier for me to cope with than others, however my holiday depression would hit me full force again when my 20 year old son, Kit Rea, died unexpectedly in his sleep from a blood clot in his lung, exactly one week before Christmas on December 18, 2001. The first two years after his death, I handled the holidays fairly well, but the third year 2004, for some unknown reason, brought what seemed like everything all crashing down on me. The sadness pressed heavily upon my usually positive spirit, and I felt uncontrollable despair. I really was not for sure how I was going to cope with the holidays that year.

Then one night came the dream that delivered me from my feeling of pain ridden hopelessness. For you see, whenever Kit appears in one of my dreams, he is a small boy, usually a toddler, or when his is not present with his two older brothers, Michael and Mathew are in my dreams, yet I look around for Kit in hopes of just one glimpse of him. However, that night Kit would appear to me as the young man he was when he died.

In my dream, I found myself across a small courtyard at a large building, much like a mall we had visited the summer before. The complex appeared massive to me, two stories tall at the main entrance, with gray metal framing and large windows facing the south, spread over several landscaped acres. In front, a small water fountain playfully spouted water, the gurgling noise the only sound I heard in the serene silence of my dream.

As I walked up to the large double entrance doors, I felt no alarm at the thought of entering this unknown building, which I did unhesitantly, stopping just inside the large glass doors. Within a few

moments, from the left, I saw my son, Kit, walking briskly through the spacious room around me, and I felt an urgency to catch up with him as he passed by me without even looking my way. I called out his name, but he did not pause or acknowledge me, so I hurried to his side to walk beside him. Hesitantly I asked Kit if I could hold his hand, which he extended to me without comment. In charged yet restful silence, we continued walking quickly down the large, bare hallway. I found myself afraid to say anything to tarnish or disrupt these precious moments with my son, already knowing I would treasure this time with Kit, for however long it lasted, and afterwards in my heart forever.

In what seemed too short a time, we came to a smaller hallway on our left where Kit now led me. Up to this moment, I felt his mission was of such urgency I did not want to hinder his resolve to accomplish the apparent, unknown to me, task before him, what he apparently felt needed done so I continued my uncharacteristic silence.

Shortly, Kit turned to the right into a small rectangular room. It appeared no bigger than six feet by twelve feet and gave the appearance of a small reference library. Inside the room I saw a desk on our right and straight in front of us, three shelves filled with books and notebooks, lining the entire upper half of the entire wall. Just inside the door, Kit released my hand and without breaking stride, walked up to the rows of books and without hesitation, he selected a bound notebook, opened it and intently began reading from its contents. In my amazement of such a rare treat to see Kit, I still feared that if I said anything, these moments with him would end, so I stood there silently and watched him read.

After a few what seemed like minutes, but probably were just moments, I blurted out the words burning in my soul, "Kit, are you alright?" He said, "Yes, I'm fine," as he never looked up, but continued to study the notebook in his hands.

At that moment, I woke up, startled to find myself at home, tucked away in my bed. As I laid there, I pondered this time I had spent with Kit, even though I knew it was a dream. The peace I had felt in my dream continued on as I thought of what I had dreamed. Had I been given an opportunity of a glimpse of Kit's work in the hereafter? That his eternal mission was of great importance, and he had put the things of this world behind him, even though he gently, for a few minutes, allowed me to be a part of his new world if only briefly?

Some people say they wish they had just one more opportunity to see a loved one of theirs who has died. They want to speak to them just once more to tell them they love them or ask for forgiveness or whatever words they regret not having spoken during their lifetime.

For me, I feel my dream gave me such an opportunity, and I found that words really were not important to me at the time it happened. Just being with Kit was like a sacred healing for my mournful soul, coming at a time that I hardly expected to see him again, but truly brought me some form of relief from the depression I had been experiencing.

Only later did I startling realize everything in this dream was in black and white, except for Kit's clothing, something I never remember happening to me before. And more amazing to me, Kit was wearing the clothes his widow of less than six months, Hillary, had chosen for his burial, a forest green golf shirt and khaki pants. Even these thoughts did nothing to dissipate my sense of calm assurance. For me, these seemingly trivial details only brought reinforcement I possibly was allowed a glimpse of my son, Kit, in heaven in my depression deliverance dream.