

Kate Culverhouse- 2nd Place

Congressional District Two

Teacher: Mrs. Jones

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“The Best Marriage I Know”

It was a blind date on Halloween in 1964, in Meridian, Mississippi, when my grandparents met. My grandmother, Nicki, grew up in Meridian in a middle class family. My grandfather, Duke, grew up in a very poor family in a small cotton gin town in Georgia. In 1959, at age 18, my Papa Duke enlisted in the Marine Corps. In 1964, he was accepted into the Marine Aviation Program, and was eventually stationed in Meridian.

So that they could concentrate on their studies, the young marines were discouraged from getting involved with the local ladies. They were especially discouraged from getting married. On March 5, 1965, less than 6 months after they met, everyone thought Duke and Nicki were going out on a regular date. But they really went to visit a Justice of the Peace, and they secretly married. That night my Gigi went back to her parents’ home and my Papa Duke went back to the base. For the next 6 months, they kept their marriage a secret from everyone, including their parents.

Over the past 45 years, my grandparents have been in many difficult situations. My Papa Duke has been in several wars, has been on military deployments for 6 months to a year at a time, and had the dangerous job of flying jets for the Marine Corps. They had to move over a dozen times throughout his military career. Through all this, my Gigi learned how to make a house a home for her husband and their two daughters. She sometimes had to be the only parent to their children, and she also had to learn to live with the fear that comes from being married to someone with a dangerous job. But together they learned the importance of communication; from the cassette tape recordings they mailed back and forth to each other during times apart, to the sweet notes they leave for each other for no reason at all.

Communication is what makes my grandparents’ marriage great. Over the past 45 years together they have learned how to take time to understand what each other is really saying. They communicate not only with spoken words but also with written words and actions. My mom still treasures the letters her dad mailed to her while he was in the

Persian Gulf War. I also enjoy the special times I get to spend with my grandparents, whether riding in the car with them or talking on the phone.

As they've gotten older and my Papa Duke's hearing worsens from years of flying jets, it may be harder for him to hear what my Gigi is saying, but great communication is more than just hearing. Great communication is taking the time to listen and making sure you understand. It is also interacting with love and caring for the other person.

Being around my grandparents has taught me that it is important to take the time to communicate with ones you care about. Someday I hope to have a great marriage like theirs.