



# ashley's avenue

By Ashley Murphy

When I was in middle school, about eight or nine years ago, I was very active in the youth group at my grandmother's church, South Cleveland United Methodist. I tried to attend all of the youth meetings and went on several youth retreats. There was one retreat in particular that I remember. It wasn't directly associated with the church or the church's youth group, but my grandmother was going to be working this retreat and thought that it would be a great experience for me and recommended that I go. This retreat is known as Vida Nueva, which means "new life". It is a three day retreat at Camp of Colors near De-

lohnega, Georgia and is only held during certain weekends of the year. The particular weekend that I attended was in November of 2000.

All during the weekend, every participant received palanca. Palanca are gifts given to you by your family, friends, and your new "family" that you acquired during the weekend. These gifts weren't your traditional gifts, like gifts given at Christmas or on a birthday. Most of the palanca given were very sentimental cards or letters with words of love or homemade gifts portraying the Vida Nueva theme with inspirational words and praises.

I received so many cards with praises from my family. It amazed me to see that so many people cared. I have never been an extremely open person and to have several of the members of my family tell me how much they love me, well, it was very enlightening to say the least. My mom and step-dad sent a life lessons card and then wrote on the inside that they hoped I was having a good weekend and that they love me. My step-mom sent me a sweet angel card and told me how much she loved me and how proud she was of me. The card my dad sent was very heartwarming and I loved it. After his own encouraging words he ended his note with, "I love you with all my heart and I'm always here if you need me." While most people know that their parents will always love them and be there for them, it never hurts to come out and say it every once in a while. Trust

me, just by hearing the words come from you, your kids will appreciate it more than they may show.

However, there was one letter that stuck out from the rest and that letter was from my grandmother, who much prefers to be called Nanny.

"Ashley, the day your mom went for her ultrasound and we found out that you were a little girl, you could hear me rejoicing down the hall. I was so excited. You were the sweetest thing in the world, and still are. You're just growing up too fast, but I know God is growing you into something beautiful. We love you and I'm keeping you in my prayers. Nan."

I remember not even making it through the first sentence before I started crying, but even so, I kept reading it over and over again. I pictured her laughing and crying outside a doctor's office after being

told she was going to have a granddaughter. My mind kept flashing back to all of the old photos I have seen of her holding me as a baby. In all of those photos my Nanny was always looking at me and smiling. Those photos alone tell me how much I'm loved and cared for by my Nanny. She has impacted my life in several more ways than just through this letter. She and my granddad, George, have

also been a blessing to me more in these past two years than I can ever begin to thank them for.

I don't know if I ever told my Nanny how much I love her and how much her paragraph means to me, but hopefully my paragraph will help to put everything into a small perspective.

- Do you have questions or comments for Ashley? If so, send her an e-mail: [peoplenewsdesk@aol.com](mailto:peoplenewsdesk@aol.com)

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