



Couple #4 Claris and Matt

Our Official Essay Entry

My *heart* and *mind* have fallen completely head over heels for this beautiful woman, Clarisa Nicole. She is everything that I could ever ask for and beyond. This captivating young woman perfectly matches the *enchanting* rays of the New Mexico sun. She has captured every fiber of my being—my core. This is my better half. Clarisa is what I am not and what I seek in becoming as a better man. We both have naturally helped each other grow, mature and extend openness and empathy to our needs and wants. It's impossible to imagine my life without her. So, after almost four years of dating on September 4, 2007, I asked her to be my beloved wife. I dropped to a knee and proposed with the utmost of passion in front of the San Felipe de Neri Church in Plaza Vieja.

I, Matthew Allen, have lived in New Mexico my entire life. I was born in Albuquerque on June 18, 1982 and my fiancé Clarisa, on May 13, 1985. We are both *rooted*, Native New Mexicans. This beautiful, multi-cultural melting pot encompasses a magnificent value that we wish to share with our future children. Our four-seasons offer what no other can splendidly give, in addition to love as the main ingredient. Our locals are from close-knit families and always willing to extend a helping hand to anyone.

Clarisa and I enjoy dining out, especially in Santa Fe. The mountains deliver such serenity, particularly the Gila in the autumn months where we camp, hunt and fish. Our International Balloon Fiesta is another favorite; we have gone many times and allowed our hearts to float in air. Furthermore, my fiancé has been featured on the cover of *New Mexico Woman Magazine* as a Young Woman of Promise. Clarisa is a volunteer for the National Hispanic Cultural Center and was previously an associate to the assistant curator. We strive to give back to our community at any given moment.

I am currently employed in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and a part-time student at Central New Mexico Community College. This is my third deployment to the Middle East, once in the Marines and twice as a civilian. I work twelve-hour days and spend three to four hours on schoolwork most nights. I'm working diligently to serve my country and future wife while earning fair wages. Aside from this I have chosen to regain my faith by recently making my First Holy Communion and Confirmation through the Catholic Church. I requested Clarisa's spiritual guidance and asked her to be my sponsor. Clarisa is a full-time student at New Mexico Highlands University who also works full-time for the Army Corps of Engineers. She will be

graduating in December of 2007 with her B.B.A. and proceeding toward her M.B.A. As you can see, she is earning her New Mexico Young Woman of Promise title with her successes. We both pride ourselves on our education as we aspire highly in whatever we do. Our busy agenda is not an option, but rather a reality. Thus, our lack of resources and time prevent us from planning the wedding of our *dreams*. We can't wait to marry and require your assistance to fulfill our fantasy.

Cordially speaking, our story began one day when my twin, Tom, was searching for a motorcycle. He bribed me to come along by stopping for my favorite juice drink first. There is where I came across an exquisite beauty—Clarisa. She was eighteen at the time and I, twenty-one. That blue tank top with light blue flowers, white shorts and beautiful smile with her shinny braces absolutely *hooked me!* I was nervous, but I still spoke to her. I was awestruck by her splendor and intelligence and could focus on nothing else. Before long, our conversation ended and we parted ways. I could only *dream* of seeing her again—she was etched in my mind.

I never thought that the expression “*meant to be*” would apply to me, but it most certainly did. Tom and I arrived at the residence where the motorcycle was housed and approached the front door. A man introduced himself and welcomed us in. He spoke of the bike and relayed to us that it was his daughter's. Then, out of nowhere, Clarisa walked into the garage! We looked at each other, smiled and didn't say a word. So you see, one way or another that day, we were destined to meet. It was *meant to be!*

Throughout our relationship, we have witnessed others begin and end. Clarisa and I have taken the time to learn about one another rather than rushing the moment. Nevertheless, there have been occasions when we've both cried a trail of tears. For instance, I can recall being worried in Iraq that our relationship would fail due to the long distance between us. I wept and Clarisa consoled me by saying, “Be strong, you are a Marine.” I said, “Missing you has made this Marine cry.” On another note, her mother has offered us words of encouragement that will never be forgotten. She believes that “when you find someone that you absolutely care for, hold on and don't let them go, for you may never encounter their bliss again.” I am forever indebted to this teaching.

From our infant roots to our marital bliss, New Mexico is where our hearts lie. We have grown fond of its enchanting exquisiteness—the culture, heritage and the vast sunsets that captivate our love. We have traveled abroad and have yet to find a place to match the magnificence that New Mexico holds. Our ultimate *dream* is to unite in the place that we call home.

Thank you for your precious time and consideration.

Most Sincerely,

Matthew