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## Armstrong High twins will be co-valedictorians

By Will Jones



Identical twins Alissa and Ariel Barlow don't do everything the same way. Just ask them.

"No," they said simultaneously.

However, the 18-year-old twins will graduate next month as co-valedictorians of Richmond's Armstrong High School with identical grade-point averages of 4.47619.

Both are headed to North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro on full scholarships.

The Barlows agree that sharing the honor of class valedictorian is a fitting end to their high school years and a tribute to the support and high expectations of their mother, Helen.

"I don't mind losing to her," Alissa said of Ariel. "(Losing to) anybody else is like, 'Wait a minute! Wait a minute! What's wrong with this?'"

The twins, who live with their mother and older sister, Tiffany, in Blackwell, have been on a track to finish with matching GPAs since they received the only non-As on their high school transcripts as freshmen.

That year, Ariel finished with a B in Spanish, while Alissa got a B in both geometry and Spanish. However, Alissa's B in Spanish counted as an A because it was an advanced class. That detail has provided a dramatic footnote to their friendly rivalry.

"She's still upset about that," Alissa said teasingly of Ariel.

The twins describe themselves as best friends and they've taken many of the same classes, but they have also kept separate bedrooms and studied independently. Alissa said she occasionally picked up her cellphone and called her sister's room for help with calculus.

"I'm like, 'Ariel, parametric functions, what are they talking about?'" she said.

English teacher Cynthia McCall, who taught the Barlows as sophomores and juniors, said they have stood out as gifted students and exceptional young women. She said Alissa is more talkative but likes to direct attention to Ariel, who seems slightly more interested in writing and books.

McCall said she knew the twins had matching GPAs heading into their senior year and thought that their dual-enrollment classes at J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College might end up putting one ahead of the other.

It didn't happen.

"I like that it's ending this way, because both have been extremely dedicated," McCall said. "Now, I have to watch as they continue through college to see how this turns out."

Alissa plans to study business and eventually sees herself as a marketing executive.

Ariel is interested in engineering and plans to compete as a high-jumper on the college track and field team. In the longer term, she's contemplating a career in bio-engineering, but she also shows an interest in advertising.

If Kraft Foods is interested, Ariel has an idea for an A.1. Steak Sauce commercial.

Richmond Public Schools will honor nine valedictorians from its eight high schools today with a luncheon at the Science Museum of Virginia.

Armstrong High's graduation will be June 14 at the Landmark Theater. For the valedictory address, each of the Barlow twins will have the microphone for 2½ minutes.

"I've started my ideas for the speech. She's slacking," Ariel said, ribbing her sister.

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