Achieving a dream

Super student earns a superlative summer

By PAT RHODES

Mellyn Ludlow had a summer to remember before she left her Stevensville area farm home in September for her freshman year of college at Weber State University in Utah.

The talented June graduate of Stevensville High School was valedictorian of her class, held two jobs most of summer vacation and had trips to Washington, D.C. and New York City that surpassed her "wildest dreams."

Things were set in motion early in 1991 when Ludlow won the Montana Voice of Democracy essay contest, sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. That qualified her for a week's trip to Washington filled with educational experiences and entertainment.

The highlights of the Voice of Democracy trip included a night tour of Washington's memorials and the capitol, a tour of Mount Vernon, the Vietnam Memorial, changing of the guard at Arlington Cemetery and a dinner theater. At a congressional banquet she attended, the main speaker was Gen. Colin Powell, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Persian Gulf War. At that banquet she had the opportunity to meet Congressmen John Glenn and Strom Thurmond and she still has her menu from the meal — signed "To pretty Mellyn," by Thurmond.

The Voice of Democracy award opened another door for Ludlow and, because of it, she was chosen for an all-expense-paid trip to New York in June, sponsored by the American Academy of Achievement. "It was a big deal and I didn't know how big until I got there," she said recently. "I got to see everyone I'd met in Washington plus many more."

There were 450 youngsters in all who spent the long, glamorous weekend in New York. She said Korri Bergman of Hamilton also made the trip as did two girls from Missoula. Fellow Montanan Dennis Washington is a supporter of the academy and sponsored some of the Montana girls, although Ludlow's expenses were paid by the academy.

"In New York we stayed at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and were taken to the Metropolitan Museum of Art where there was a very fancy dinner. Darcy Kistler, a star of the New York City Ballet, was there along with other artistic people." She said the after-dinner speaker that night was Ken Burns, the producer of last year's highly acclaimed PBS series on the Civil War. Jazz pianist Marcus Roberts played and "that was very cool," Ludlow said.

Symposiums for the young people were interspersed with the entertainment. "The symposiums had famous speakers who were all motivational on how to define success and become successful," she said.

The second night of the weekend was a party and tour for everyone aboard a huge yacht. "We were driven to the yacht club in stretch limos and then sailed up the Hudson River. We had dinner and there was an orchestra playing," she said. "Then we anchored by the Statue of Liberty for a fireworks show that was synchronized to the music on the yacht."

Metropolitan Opera singer Leontyne Price sang the "Star Spangled Banner" and spoke to the crowd. "That night we also talked to Oprah Winfrey, Barbara Walters, George Lucas and the Dean of Harvard. Chuck Jones, the creator of Looney Tunes, was the nicest man and talked like (cartoon character) Pepe le Pew to us."

Among the other luminaries on the yacht were the head of the FBI, who invited Ludlow to become an FBI intern, and Tom Clancy, of "Hunt for Red October" book and movie fame, who advised her "never to leave Montana." Spencer Cannard of Salt Lake City was the master of ceremonies for all the activities on the yacht, Ludlow said.

After that never-to-be-topped night, there were more symposiums and "we wandered the streets of New York," Ludlow said. "I liked it but there were big bags of garbage around." Nevertheless, she said she would like to live there for awhile at some point.

The final night of the weekend was the Banquet of Golden Plates where the Academy of Achievements awards were made for this year to leaders in business, government and the arts. "There were two dozen roses on every table and solid roses on stage," Ludlow said. "The honored people spoke and afterward I had my picture taken with Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf. He was such a nice man — and funny." Schwarzkopf attributed all the success of the American military in the gulf to the troops, she said. "He also is a person who turned out to be what he was raised to be — a military man."

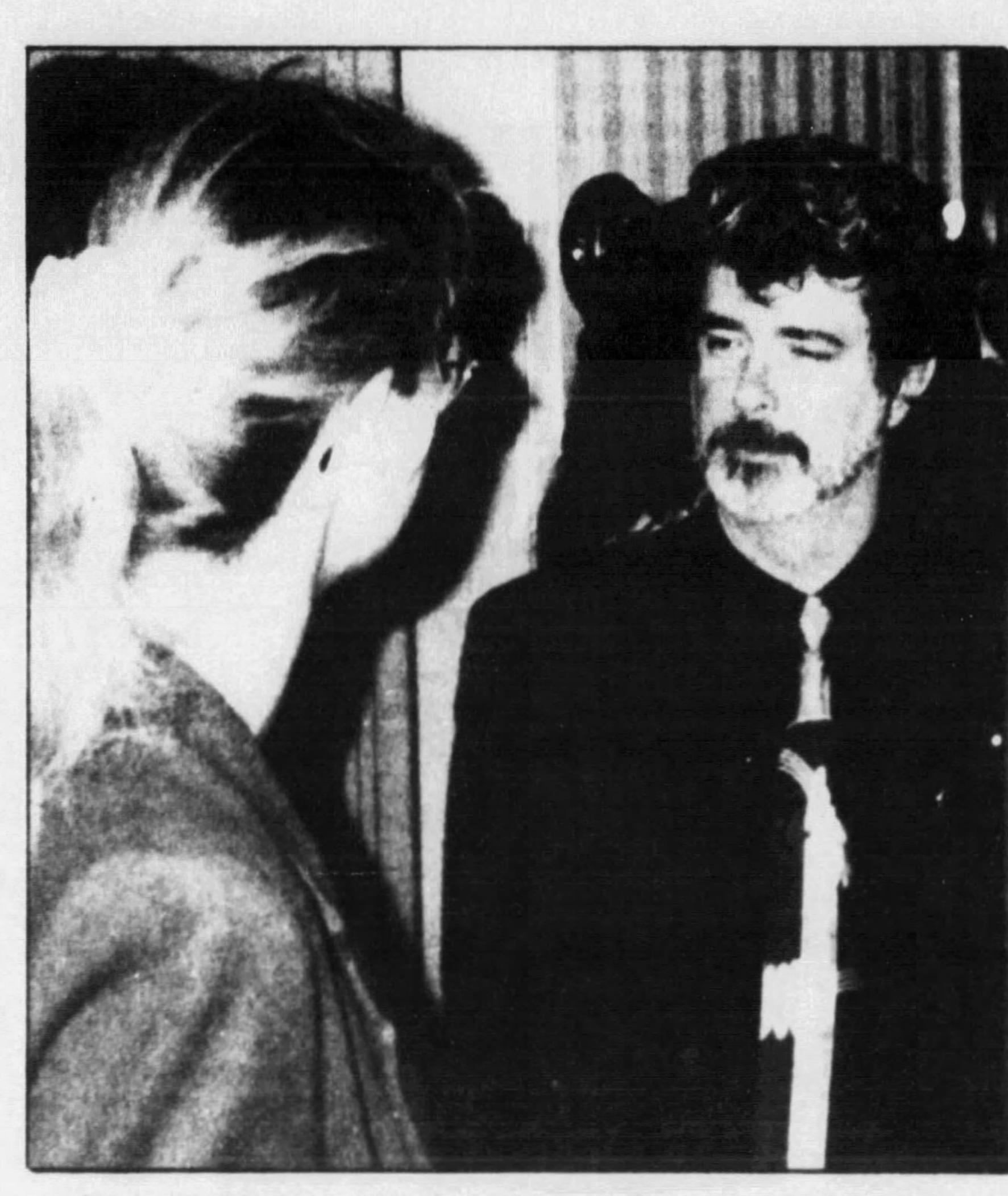
Ludlow met Audrey Hepburn, who talked to the youngsters about UNICEF, athlete Hershel Walker, jazz musician Dizzie Gillespie, United Nations President Javier Perez de Cuellar, designers Calvin Klein, Oscar de la Renta and Ralph Lauren, and soap opera star Susan Lucci as well some whose names she couldn't remember. "There was the astronomer who found the planet Pluto, Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winners, a marine biologist — some of everything. "They were all people who have succeeded at what they do and it was neat to hear all the personal stories. They told us that you have to give something back — that's what they were doing for us," she said.

Ludlow said she couldn't help but feel inspired by her experience. "I want to tell everybody. Kids get discouraged. So what. You have to get up. A lot of the people we met didn't succeed the first time. They had to be stubborn. And they made me realize that you are being selfish if you don't share yourself with other people."

With her memories of a fantastic summer intact, Ludlow has gone off to college on scholarship. She is majoring in communication with a minor in political science but said she doesn't know what might come next — broadcasting or law. And, because she is musically talented and sang with Chrysolian, Stevensville's select jazz choir and with ensembles in high school, she auditioned for the Weber choir and was accepted. That choir will tour Europe next summer, she said, so the future appears bright and challenging for "pretty Mellyn."



On her way — Mellyn Ludlow of Stevensville, the daughter of Rob and Julie Ludlow, has embarked on her collegiate career at Weber State University but only after a fantastic summer of travel and hob-nobbing with celebrities. (Pat Rhodes photo)



Lucas stars — "Star Wars" creator George Lucas shared anecdotes with the young guests of the American Academy of Achievement on a yacht ride in New York Harbor in June. (Jonathan Bresman photo)

"It was a big deal and I didn't know how big until I got there ..."

Mellyn Ludlow



A big deal — Stevensville girl Mellyn Ludlow said her trip to New York was a "bigger deal than I ever imagined." Helping make it so were New York attorney Alan Dershowitz and author Tom Clancy on a yacht ride for the celebrities and youngsters sponsored by the American Academy of Achievement. (Jonathan Bresman photo)

(Jonathan Bresman of Massachusetts was one of the 450 honor students who attended the American Academy of Achievement event in New York City in June. He is now a student at Harvard College and shared some of his photographs with the Ravalli Republic for this story about Mellyn Ludlow.)



"Stormin' Norman" — Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf was a popular figure at the Academy of Achievement honors banquet in New York City in June. Mellyn Ludlow at Schwarzkopf's right and a friend of hers on the left flank the general for an after dinner picture. (Jonathan Bresman photo)