

Talented young artist also likes - bugs

Continued from Page 90

carrot, the child will form a triangle and color it orange. Rocco's drawing, however, shows details from the root to the core and the leaves.

"At first we just assumed that's what kids his age did," his mother says, smiling at the curly-haired boy. "We knew he was bright, but not out of the ordinary."

Winner's research assistant Jennifer Drake says Rocco has an exceptional ability to draw realistically.

Unlike most children his age, Rocco draws objects with dimension (foreshortening), and he does not draw objects separately when they are positioned to overlap each other (occlusion), Drake says.

His art captures the complex contour of the creatures he draws, she says.

Winner's study is testing the hypotheses that children with the exceptional ability to draw realistically are superior in visual memory and mental rotation, have atypically intense visual imagery and show strengths in self-discipline and openness to experience, Drake says.

"Rocco excelled on all our tasks. He showed superior mental rotation skills, superior observational skills and superior visual memory. He excelled on all the visual tests we gave him," Drake notes.

The Roths believe the researchers will continue to watch Rocco's talents progress as he grows up.

Rocco's budding talents have been exciting to watch, but they also pose challenges for his parents.

Amanda says it has been difficult connecting with other families who have children like Rocco.

"You can't just walk up and ask another parent, 'Does your kid like entomology?'" she says with a laugh.

Their search for such a community is what connected them to the Boston College research project.

"We are always on the hunt for interesting resources and stories within the field gifted education," Amanda recalls. "I stumbled upon an article about a 12-year-old boy in Maine who made very realistic drawings of the natural world and was extremely knowledgeable,



Rocco Valentino Roth, 6, sits with his family in their Beaver Springs home, from left, Nigel Roth holding Luca, 4, and Amanda Mancino holding Reed, 9 months. Rocco is a precociously gifted artist who is part of a Boston College research study.

*Sentinel photo by
MICAIAH WISE BILGER*

to boot. Because his story sounded much like our son's, I contacted the professor that was studying him for advice on how to help our own son find a community of like-minded children."

And through the study, she did accomplish part of her original mission: connecting Rocco with other young artists.

The children involved in the study are spread out around the U.S. and Singapore. To maintain the long-distance relationships, Nigel Roth, Rocco's father, says they may start an artist trading cards exchange among the children.

The idea came from artists in the Netherlands, who created own original pieces of art on calling cards and traded them with other artists, Nigel says.

"The children are going to try to create these, too, almost like artist pen-pals," Nigel says.

While most of Rocco's subjects are taken from nature, Nigel says his son has taken up drawing cartoons lately, too. Diagrams and labels also are common in his sketches, he says.

Rocco chimes in, "I like to draw people's faces, too."

His sisters, who Rocco wants everyone to know by their first and middle names, too, Luca Maura and Reed McDowell, are ages 4 and 9 months. Luca also draws and paints, often from her imagination or books. Her mother says the young girl favors impressionism, while Rocco enjoys abstract.

Though Rocco usually draws with pencil, he occasionally dabbles with paints, Amanda says, holding a colorful work based on a Salvador Dali painting. The 6-year-old's favorite artist is Picasso.

Rocco is homeschooled because of his precociously gifted abilities, his mother says; and since realizing their son's talents, Nigel and Amanda have encouraged him to draw for an hour every day.

"We spend most of our time traveling to programs and museums seeking out intellectual and artistic stimulation ..." Amanda says. "He absorbs all this information, no matter where we are."

One of Rocco's favorite places was a museum they stumbled upon in Newark

where a woman displayed insects arranged in interesting patterns, his mother shares.

Though art is central, Rocco's interests are varied but not untypical for a young boy.

Though he is enthusiastic about everything from Legos to coins, reading Roald Dahl or learning about Colonial America, Rocco usually turns conversations back to his favorite topic of all — bugs.

The largest bug in his collection is a stag beetle. When his mother asks him to explain how he knew the species, he says: "I could tell because it had horns on it. I could tell it was a male because only the males have horns."

At the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, Rocco remembers picking out a bug for his collection. But that was not the most exciting part.

"I ate mealworm salsa," Rocco says with a huge grin. He waves a hand of fingers, remembering eating a cricket cookie "with five crickets in each!"

Nigel says Rocco is very food adventurous. The boy loves sushi and seafood, and he even cooks sometimes for the family.

Rocco's parents give him a lot of freedom to explore his interests, and they say they have not really thought about publicly showing the young artist's works just yet.

After all, he is only 6.

An elegant touch for your special event!



Ruth Hunter
HARPIST

www.ruthhunter.com
ruthe@ruthhunter.com
717.463.9012



Juniata Valley Council
Boy Scouts of America
9 Taylor Drive
Reedsville, Pennsylvania 17084

(717) 667-9267
(717) 667-9798 (fax)

www.beascout.org
www.jvcbsa.org

MOLLY MAID
A Household Name Since 1979

248-8330 • (814) 238-4004



Yoga, Massage
& Bodywork Center

Yoga Classes, Massage, Cranial Sacral Therapy,
Reiki, Healing Stone Massage

5 E. Third St., Lewistown • 248-8100