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She Shall Have Culture

Linda Ann Suddarth
Collin College

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SHE SHALL HAVE CULTURE

Linda Ann Suddarth

My teacher asked me,
and gave me a letter.
I gave the letter to my mother,
who asked my father,
and he made a decision
that would change
my life forever.
I didn't even know
its meaning
so foreign
was the assignment.
It sat lightly
on my twelve-year-old
shoulders
so engrossed was I
in my dolls,
reading, and writing
my first novel,
Women and the West!
I would much rather
he had spent
that money
towards a canopy bed
I so wanted.
He declared:
"She should have
some culture."

Since landing in the new world
I was the first
of many generations of farmers
to do it.
Reminiscent of some old
social custom
of having the girl
be civilized and exposing her.
With that, my mother
got busy at the sewing machine
to make me a dress.
So for three times,
at three dollars per trip,

I got out of school,
got on a school bus,
and rode into
Washington, D.C.
to the national theater,
into the wonder
of red velvet chairs,
the darkened room,
and watched the lights
come up
on Leonard Bernstein
and the young people's
orchestra.



PEARS Alberto Gutierrez