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## **Recent Crystal Lake Central Graduate Publishes First Book**

**Crystal Lake** - Sarah Natale Mondello has been writing since she could hold a pencil. She graduated from Crystal Lake Central High School in 2014 and is now a published author under the pen name Sarah Natale. Her first book signing event is at the Crystal Lake Barnes & Noble on Tuesday, August 18 from 6-8 p.m. She will be reading an excerpt from her book, sharing her inspiration for the story, discussing the publication process, leading a Q&A, and signing copies of her book. The 60-page novella titled *The Kiss of Death* began as an assignment in Jerry Thiel's creative writing class her senior year of high school.

"Our assignment was to write a 7-10 page historical fiction short story called a 'docu-drama,'" Mondello said. "I chose the plague outbreak of the medieval era because it intrigued me. I did a lot of research – that was the best part. Mr. Thiel raised the bar and made it a challenge to write a story I may not have considered on my own. His feedback was detailed, meaningful and encouraging. His insight demonstrated the mastery of an English teacher of 30 years. I wasn't sure if I could meet his high expectations, but I persisted and surpassed them."

When describing his role in Mondello's story, Thiel said, "I didn't teach Sarah. I just got out of her way!"

*The Kiss of Death* follows the story of Elizabeth, a young woman in fourteenth century London, who finds herself in a struggle for survival and young love amidst a backdrop of deadly plague.

Mondello finished writing her book in class at the end of the semester, December 2013. In May of 2014, *The Kiss of Death* won the Helen Wright Scholarship in creative writing awarded by the Woodstock Fine Arts Association. After graduation, Mondello spent the summer submitting her book to literary agents. She was determined to become a published author despite receiving many rejections.

"Fast forward to winter break during my freshman year of college," Mondello said. "I submitted my story to small publisher Kellan Publishing. I had met an opportunity, and I was prepared. That was key. They asked to see more pages and I was offered a contract on Christmas Eve of 2014. I couldn't have asked for a finer Christmas gift."

Mondello commissioned her grade school art teacher, Peg Pappa, from St. Thomas the Apostle School in Crystal Lake to illustrate the artwork for her book.

"It was a meeting of creative minds," Mondello said. "Her artwork truly captures my story."

Mondello will be a sophomore at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, this fall where she will work as an on-campus writing tutor. She is a double major in Creative Writing and Public Relations. She writes for the university newspaper, two university magazines, and has served as a volunteer writing judge for a university literary award. She has previously held the position of editor-in-chief for the Orange & Black newspaper at Crystal Lake Central.

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"I have been in honors and AP English classes my whole life, and I waited three years to take my first creative writing class," Mondello said. "It was the highlight of my senior year. I remember Mr. Thiel writing on one of my stories: 'You have a sophistication of style that eclipses countless published authors. You will be published. You must be published.'"

At the end of the book there is a section for teachers: Questions for Discussion to be incorporated into lesson plans as an additional resource for English & Literature, History, Biology, and Art classes.

The Kiss of Death is available through online distributors at [sarahnatale.com](http://sarahnatale.com) and can be ordered in-store at any Barnes & Noble. Signed copies are on display at the Crystal Lake Barnes & Noble as recommended reading from the manager.

"My dream and goal has always been to be a successful novelist," Mondello said. "Now I am on that path."

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Photo included: Jerry Thiel (left) and Sarah Natale Mondello (right) pose for a photo holding Mondello's first published book that she began writing in Jerry Thiel's creative writing class at Crystal Lake Central High School.