

Student finds African American heritage, sisterhood at Bennett

Tammi McCall
Banner Reporter

Annette Peatross who was crowned as Bennett's Miss UNCF last month has a secret -- a secret she has kept from herself.

Her heritage.

Peatross was reared in a white neighborhood. She was educated by whites and her peers were all white.

Now, a student at Bennett, she has been introduced to the black world.

"I needed to find sisterhood and a strong foundation of my African American heritage," Peatross said.

After being in limbo from Rockingham Community College to the American Career Training travel school in Florida, Peatross decided that she had no future without a four-year college degree so she decided to enroll at Bennett.

"I never knew how much blacks had contributed to America," she said.

She said that her world had been surrounded by the ideals of white Americans. Her math teacher at Rockingham High School had her believing that the best thing for her was to attend a two-year college.

So she decided to attend Rockingham Community College in Eden, her hometown.

"I still felt empty," she said. "I needed more."

Peatross then moved to Florida.

"She never thought she had anything to look forward to and I couldn't understand why," said Jacqueline Peatross, Annette's old sister.

By the time Peatross was 21, she had a two-year degree from a community college and a one-year degree from a travel school.

"Annette saw herself in higher places," said Geraldine Peatross, Annette's mother. I encouraged her, but I believe her

math teacher's message tapped her conscience continually," she said.

Peatross later realized that she had been misguided.

"I told her if she wasn't feeling complete, then she should enroll in a black four-year institution."

And she did.

Peatross began her studies at Bennett majoring in Mass Communications, with a concentration in broadcasting.

"I didn't realize how much I missed out on," Peatross said.

She said that learning about heritage in African American studies and knowing her people has been an eye-opening experience.

"When I met Annette, she seemed to be a stuck up, preppy kind of valley girl," said Deanne McLeod, a friend and fellow student.

McLeod said that now she realizes how she got that

impression. She added that a person can tell by Peatross's voice and attitude toward certain types of people that she wasn't reared with a black foundation.

McLeod admits that Peatross has come a long way.

"I know who I am now, because of Bennett I know what I want to do and I know where I am going," Peatross said.

"Bennett has truly been a stepping stone to a greater me."

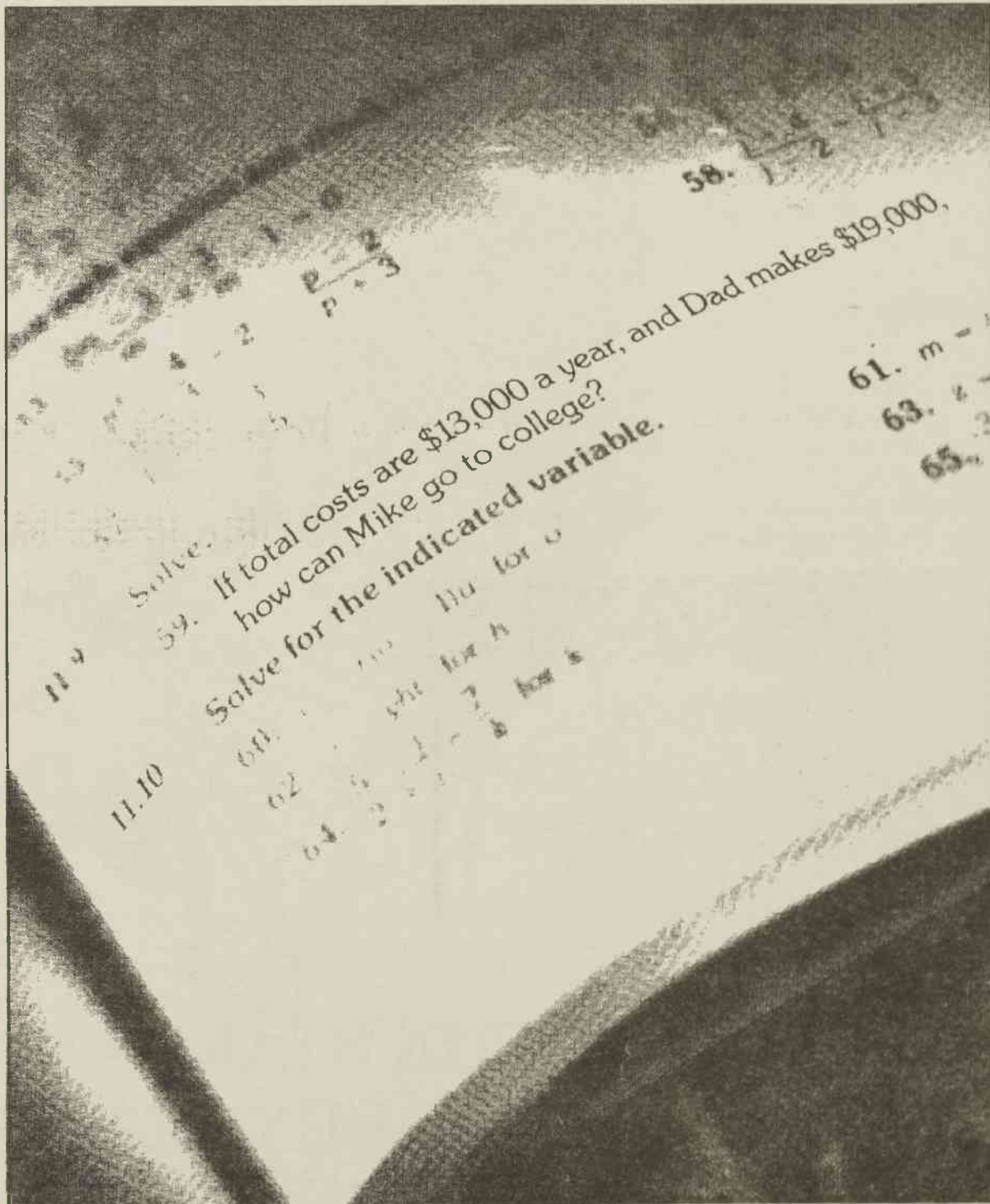


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