

Local teacher takes position in Japan, shares African culture with students

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Community Correspondent

Wanda Robinson-Caton left in August for Yokohama, Japan, where she teaches kindergarten children at the U.S. Navy base there. Robinson-Caton, a former kindergarten teacher at South Lexington Primary School in Lexington, has taught kindergarten at the Richard E. Byrd Elementary School on the naval base. She now works at Sullivans Elementary School. She applied in February 1987 for a teaching position at a Department of Defense dependent school whose students are the children of American military personnel stationed there. She and her son, Robbie, went to Japan together.

Wanda heard about the program in 1980 through a co-worker and another friend involved in the program. She first applied in 1986, but no positions were available. She tried again successfully in 1987. Robinson-Caton had no idea where she would be stationed. Her first choice was Australia, a country she has always wanted to visit, but she was selected to teach in Yokohama.

She lives in the Japanese community, not on the base.

"This will give me a great opportunity to learn about the Japanese culture," she said.

Although she does not speak Japanese, she communicates well with those in her community. For the past four years, she has taught English lessons in the homes of Japanese students for extra income. "I have become so attached to the children," she said.

Wanda has also organized various activities in the school and community to bring African-American culture to Japan. Because the children did not have any after-school activities, Wanda founded a school chorus. They



Wanda Robinson-Caton's students at Sullivans School in Yokosuka, Japan, dressed in African attire as part of their study of African heritage.



Wanda Robinson-Caton teaches kindergarten at the Sullivans School in Yokosuka Japan.

sing gospel music, spirituals and other inspiring genres of music. In 1994 she produced and directed the Youth Fashion and Talent Show at the Benny Decker Theatre in Yokosuka, Japan. It was sponsored by the Kanto Plain Afro-American Heritage Club (KPAAHC), MWR, and WRC Productions, which Wanda manages.

In addition, Wanda participated in the Navy Exchange (NEX) Black History Month celebration. She gathered a group of people to model the African heritage clothes at the showcase as live mannequins. Chris Bennett, buyer for the NEX, had started getting African heritage merchandise such as women's, men's and children's accessories. The umbrellas, giftware items, table cloths, luggage items and pot holders add greatly to the Homeland Authentics Shop

inventory. What is more, Wanda Robinson-Canton includes African-American history and customs in the curriculum. The students dressed in African attire as part of their study of African heritage. According to Wanda, the students and their parents are very receptive to information about African culture.

In order to further educate the community, she organized the Negishi Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Observance Banquet in 1989. According to S. Howell, commander of the fleet activities Department of the Navy in Yokosuka, Japan, the banquet "provided the community with an opportunity to salute the life of this great American." He attributed the success of the program to her "many long, hard hours of work to coordinate the myriad of

details."

Wanda has share many ideas with the Japanese educators. She served as a hostess for the principal, the teachers and parents of a visiting American school. They were of Japanese descent. She met with the parents and teachers to share ideas at the end of the day. The Japanese teachers were very impressed with the decor of the classes at Sullivans Elementary School. In 1992, 1993, and 1995, the district superintendent of Japan, Richard F. Osner, presented her with a Special Act award for her inspiring and dedicated efforts in the schools of Japan. He described her efforts as "an incentive to other educators" with the Department of Defense Schools (DODDS). In fact, she was the DODDS Pacific nominee for the 1993 Eagle Award.

Robinson-Caton attributes her

success to the fine training she has in Winston-Salem, where she grew up. She is especially grateful to Laura Walls, a teacher at Paisley High School, which she attended. She received her bachelor's degree in early childhood education from Winston-Salem State University. She completed master's work at LaSalle University. She is certified to teach in the North Carolina Public Schools, Department of Defense Dependent Schools and the Commonwealth of Virginia public schools. In addition she has a certificate for defining effective instruction for bilingual and multilingual students. Having served as a classroom teacher for 18 years, Wanda has been selected by administrators for seven years to be grade level team leader. She is a key-holding member of Phi Delta Kappa who has served as one of

the fellows of the North Carolina Writing Project.

Wanda said she has gained great respect for her expertise in the local area. When she left for Japan, Jettie Moore, then president of the Winston-Salem State University Alumni Chapter of Lexington, wrote a letter of fond farewell in her local newspaper. "Indeed, it makes a great difference when one who has worked so tirelessly and diligently to help our young people to enhance their education, that we are losing, but yet gaining in knowing that her efforts will now extend abroad," she wrote.

A parent from Lexington, Gerard J. Roche, wrote a letter of commendation to Wanda for her enthusiasm as an educator, comparing her to educator Marva Collins from the Westside Preparatory School in Chicago.

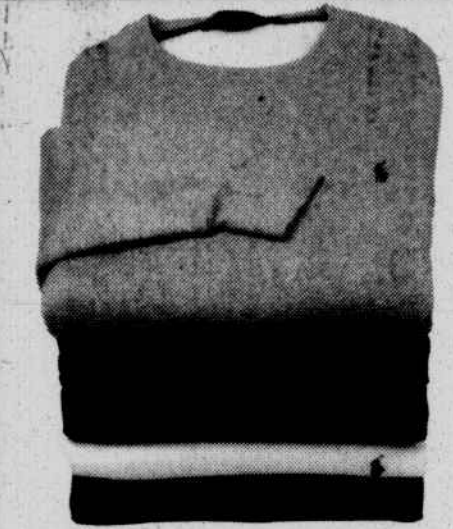
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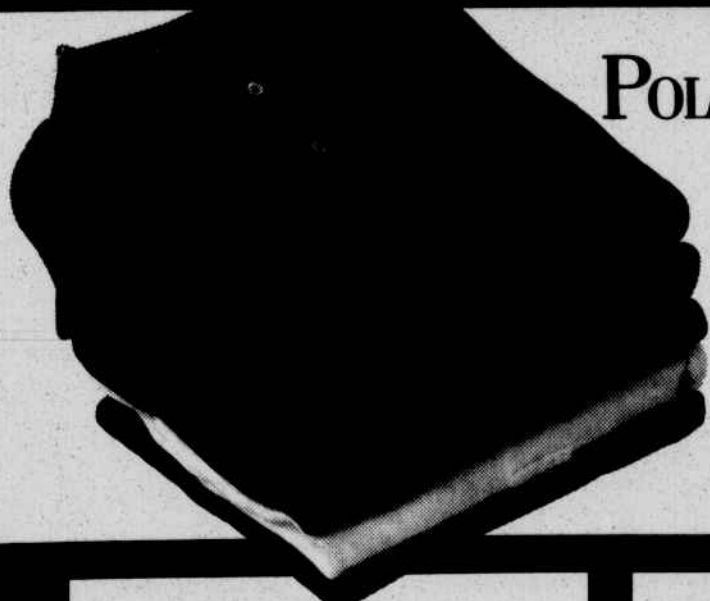
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