



Personal story behind local author's learning book for kids

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Never judge a book by its cover.

That is a phrase Winston-Salem resident Tamico Jones believes strongly in. Jones says she and her 11 year-old son Ajani, whose name is Swahili for "overcomer," have already disproven many of the negative stereotypes that are placed on single parent homes. Jones, who has tutored many children in informal settings, says the youngsters she's met over the years can no more be judged by the labels placed upon them than she and Ajani can. In an effort to satisfy her own love of reading and to instill that same fervor in young people and their families, Jones, a program manager in the Behavioral Sciences and Social Work Department at Winston-Salem State University, is sharing her own son's journey to literacy with the world, through her debut children's book, "What's that Word, Ajani?"

"Reading is the foundation for everything. If you don't have that foundation, then everything else is null and void," said Jones, a native of Greensboro. "My purpose for this book really is to get parents and grandparents involved in that process."

The 24-page book is geared towards students in grades K-4. Jones says it was inspired by Ajani's experiences in learning to read. It even includes many of the words he was studying at the time. The title reflects a question that Jones said was asked of her son often in those early days.

"My family and I were always saying, 'What's that word, Ajani?' when we went out. I think it kind of got on his nerves," she confessed. "He was an excellent reader. It was just that he lacked confidence in the classroom."

Jones believes that many boys face similar challenges when it comes to reading.

"It just seems to me that oftentimes, girls kind of just get it," she said. "I just believe that with the boys you have to utilize a more creative approach. There's no real methodology, you just have to kind of meet them where they are."

"What's that Word"



Becky Carter

began as a Speech and Hearing Services project while Jones was in college at North Carolina A&T State University. She received an 'A' on the book but was told it would never be viable in the real world.

"I was actually told by one of my professors that the book was too long and no child was going to sit through the book," she related.

But to Jones, the book, which she illustrated with markers, crayons and colored pencils, using real photographs of Ajani as a guide, had an important message. Unlike her professor, Jones believed that children would relate to the real world examples such as road signs that are featured in the book, and would enjoy the literacy exercises included in the back. So she decided to test her theory.

"I started shopping it around with schools prior to the printing ... and they liked the concept," Jones said. "They were already talking about ways that they could utilize in their classroom."

Kernersville Elementary Principal Becky Carter was one of the first to order the book, which was published last June. Carter preordered 20 copies to stock the school's classrooms and library.

"I was impressed with all of her efforts and hard work," Carter said of Jones. "It looked like a book that we could use to not only guide instructionally, but there was a real positive message, too."

Carter, who has been a school administrator for more than a decade, felt the realism the book reflects would make an impression on her students.

"It's very relevant because there are real world

examples throughout of how we are surrounded by text," she said. "The graphics are really amazing, and I thought the kids would relate to the realistic nature of the book."

Carter wasn't the only one who was intrigued by "What's that Word." At least three other area schools are currently utilizing it in their classrooms. She even got an order from a preschool in Florida. Jones, who credits some of her own elementary school teachers in the book, said she was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm her work has received.

"I guess it really became surreal when people were asking me to sign it," she said of the book, which sells for \$10. "I didn't look at it as being that great, I just looked at it as being something I loved to do."

Prior to going back to school, Jones had been a cosmetologist for over 10 years. The 37-year-old, who already has a second book in the works, believes she has found her calling.

"I always knew as a child that I was a writer, I just didn't know which avenue to follow," she related. "...I think that that's what happened to me in a lot of different areas of my life; I've come full circle and gone back to where I needed to be."

"What's that Word, Ajani?" is available at

www.amazon.com, *Body & Soul on Trade Street*, www.createspace.com/3668493 or by calling 336-754-4257.

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The Chronicle (USPS 067-910) was established by Ernest H. Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974 and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co. Inc., 617 N. Liberty Street, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27101. Periodicals postage paid at Winston-Salem, N.C. Annual subscription price is \$30.72.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
The Chronicle, P.O. Box 1636
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-1636

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