

Friday, February 12, 2010

OU grad inspires love for learning on foreign shores

By *Katie Land*, news editor

When Joann Washington decided to broaden her horizons with a master's degree from Oakland University, she had no idea it would take her across the world to South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

As the general director of the Yemen American Language Institute, Washington creates, develops and teaches "soft skill" courses to improve the language and personal presentation of future international businessmen.

Born and raised in Detroit, Washington was a single mom working and trying to make it in 2002 when she completed her degree in reading and language arts. After graduation, she took a position teaching at Wayne County Community College, but felt that something was missing.

"I have always had a high energy level and love what I do," Washington said. "It is important to me to prepare my courses as a blended learning experience, but I felt that my students didn't care to learn. I wanted to do more."

The next day, she received a letter in the mail advertising for open teaching positions overseas. Two hours after sending in her resume, Washington was on the phone with recruiters and within three days the job was hers.

She packed her bags, kissed her grown children goodbye and became a teacher in South Africa. There, she met people who were poor, hungry and sick and children that hugged her and begged that she stay in classes longer.

"It changed my life from the inside out," Washington said. "They were so appreciative of everything you do. I want to give back to people who want to receive."

Soon, Washington was hired by a school in Saudi Arabia, in an area vastly different from the one she left behind. There she taught extremely wealthy girls who brought their maids to carry their books to class.

In what she calls the "roughest, toughest lesson of my life," Washington did her best to teach not only the subject matter, but lessons in responsibility and accountability. These are values that she used to great effect as a student at Oakland.

"I had very tough teachers at OU. They were very hard on me," she said. "But really, they gave me discipline and taught me how to prepare for the future. OU gave me the necessary skills to be successful and I wouldn't change one thing."

Washington's Oakland degree has opened many doors and is a great source of pride. The habits and practices that she learned in Rochester are the same that she carries across the globe. "OU is an internationally recognized university," she said. "It has distinguished faculty that are research-based. These creative teachers taught me how to be successful."

Washington has penned an inspirational book about her experiences. "The Road to Yemen," details how becoming an international educator changed her life and will be published sometime in 2010.

SUMMARY

Joann Washington's degree from Oakland University helped take her across the world to South Africa, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Created by David Groves (groves@oakland.edu) on Friday, February 12, 2010
Modified by David Groves (groves@oakland.edu) on Friday, February 12, 2010
Article Start Date: Friday, February 12, 2010