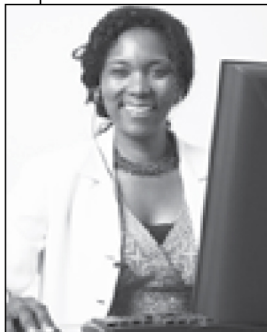


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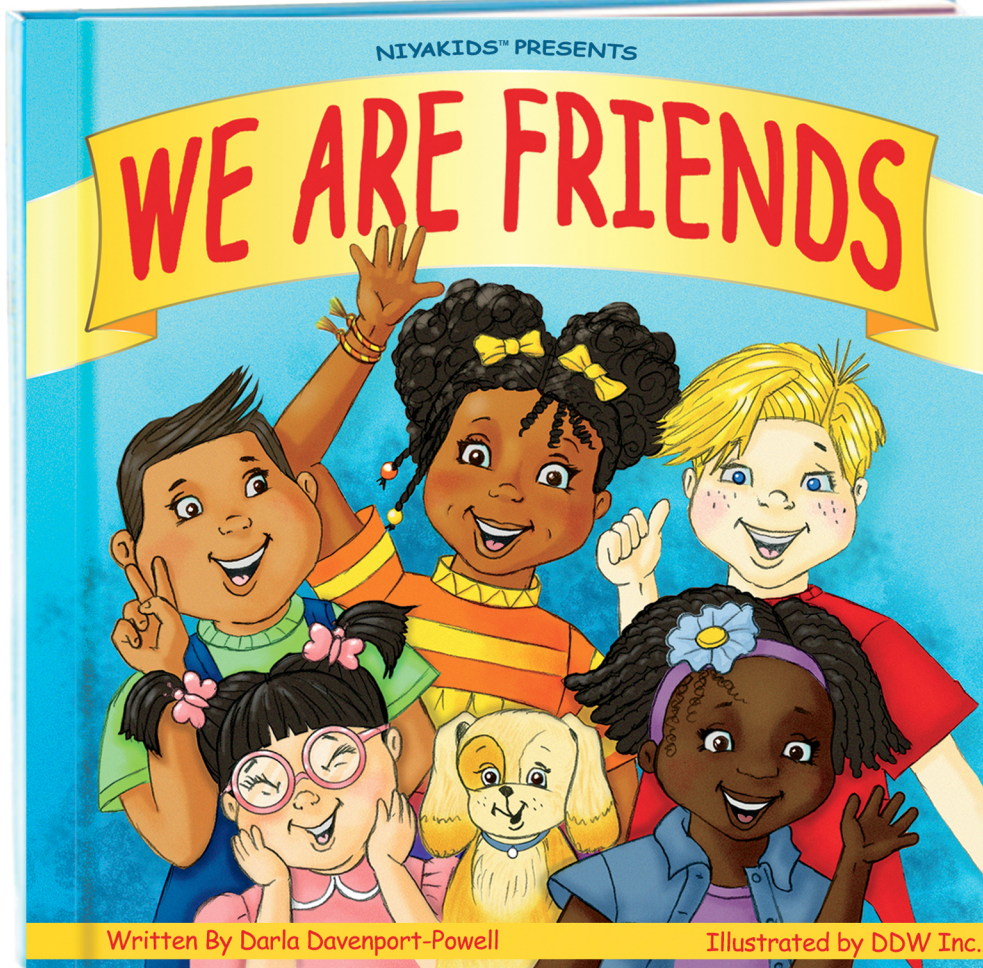
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AROUND THE REGION



The new children's song and book "We are Friends" features five friends from different cultures exploring their unique qualities and using their gifts to create an anthem of friendship, said author Darla Davenport-Powell. /Courtesy Photo.

Southeast Woman Pens Children's Book, Song

By Stacy M. Brown
WI Contributing Writer

As a little girl growing up in Southeast, Darla Davenport-Powell loved to watch Saturday morning cartoons and children's shows.

"My favorites were 'Captain Kangaroo,' 'Mr. Rogers,' 'Shari Lewis' and 'Lamb Chop,' 'The Mickey Mouse Club' and 'Romper Room,'" she said.

"I was so excited when the shows would begin."

However, it wasn't long before Davenport-Powell realized a fact that saddened her.

"None of the shows had friends that looked like me, and the lady on the Romper Room show never called my name," she said.

"I screamed at the TV that I'm

fun to play with too."

Once Davenport-Powell grew a little older, settled down, married and gave birth to her first child, Niya, she and her husband began a futile search to find dolls and books that she said looked like her and reflected the African-American culture.

"Authentic African-American dolls and picture books that portrayed positive family relationships were missing on the shelves the same way I was missing from the Saturday morning TV lineup," said Davenport-Powell, 57, who studied at Drexel University in Philadelphia, The American University in Northwest, and The Hampton Institute in Virginia.

So, in 1991, she created a doll that she named after her daughter, Niya.

Davenport-Powell, who now

lives in Northern California, refers to the doll as an ambassador for all children, and her invention speaks Swahili, Spanish, English and Japanese.

To follow up her doll creation, Davenport-Powell wrote a book, "Here Comes Niya," and earlier this month she released another book and a song. Both are titled "We are Friends."

"I always wanted to capture the world through the eyes of a child," said Davenport-Powell, who earned a top 12 finish and a \$50,000 prize for her Niya creation on the TV show "American Inventor."

Davenport-Powell's creations have caught the attention of several influential individuals, including first lady Michelle Obama, who wrote a letter

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Darla Davenport-Powell, who hails from Southeast, has written a children's book and song to promote children's literature that features diverse images. /Photo courtesy of Amy Maginnis-Honey, Daily Republic

POWELL

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of commendation to Davenport-Powell, and South African composer Lebohang Morake, who's famous for arranging and composing the music for "The Lion King" film series and stage productions.

"We are Friends' is a love note to children that says no matter the shape, size or color, they matter," said Morake, who also contributed to "Rhythm of the Pride Lands" and "The Lion King II: Simba's Pride."

Debbie Behan Garrett, who has collected black dolls for more than 20 years and wrote "Black Dolls: A Comprehensive Guide to Celebrating, Collecting and Experiencing the Passion," also praised Davenport-Powell's work.

"Along with educational attributes, Niya teaches diversity," Behan Garrett told the Daily Republic in California. "Formerly a baby doll, Niya has evolved into a young girl and can capture interest from young girls and teens whose doll interest has not yet faded," she said, adding that she believes there's a need for ethnic dolls.

"Not just any black dolls will do," Behan Garrett said. "When made as positive reflections of the people they represent, black dolls do and will sell. The only black dolls that do not sell are those that are not true representations of black people, those that are not competitively priced

"The book is dedicated to every child who has been bullied, teased or called names. It's a mirror reflection of that value in all of us and the magic that happens when we accept each other for who we are."

– Darla Davenport-Powell

and those that are not made."

Davenport-Powell said she's fulfilling a vow she made that her daughter, Niya, would see her beauty and brilliance in the books that she reads, the dolls she plays with and the animated children's shows she watches.

She said it's always been important that Niya, who's now a mother, would see herself as invaluable and not invisible because every child deserves that.

Her daughter marvels at how she has been transformed from a young lady who attended school, dance classes and choir rehearsals to a doll that speaks multiple languages and has become playmates to girls around the globe.

She said it's an honor to have a doll named after her.

Davenport-Powell – who has two other children, Na'im, 23, who attends school in Portland, and Nigel, 19, who studies at Hampton University in Virginia – said she's committed to continuing the legacy and creating material that everyone, partic-

ularly individuals of color, can relate to and learn from.

"My song and book, 'We Are Friends,' is an exciting and interactive experience that celebrates the beauty of differences and the joy of friendship," Davenport-Powell said.

She said the new book features five friends from different cultures exploring their unique qualities and using their gifts to create an anthem of friendship.

"My parents demonstrated that you love what you do and that you do what you love. That you're operating through your passion," Davenport-Powell said.

"The book is dedicated to every child who has been bullied, teased or called names. It's a mirror reflection of that value in all of us and the magic that happens when we accept each other for who we are."**WI**

For more information or to purchase the book or the song, visit www.niya-kids.com.

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