

Wayland graduate from Japan recalls experiences

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PLAINVIEW—Several characteristics set Yoshiko Shiga Burke apart from most students at [Wayland Baptist University](#) when she arrived in 1960. For one thing, she was from Japan, and even though Wayland's international student population was growing, few Asian students attended.

Yoshiko Shiga Burke (center), accompanied by her husband, Billy (right), share her experiences while a student at Wayland Baptist University with Wayland President Paul Armes while on a recent visit to the campus. Yoshiko Burke graduated in 1963 and has run an English preschool in Japan since then.

For another, her enrollment in college at all—much less in the United States—was an anomaly for Japanese women at that time.

But even as a young woman, Burke pressed against the flow and raised the bar for others. Not only did she attend college overseas, she became a Christian and has spent her adult life making a difference in the lives of children as the owner of a preschool in Ashiya, Japan.

Burke visited the Wayland campus recently with her husband, Billy. They returned to the United States for the reunion of his Texas Tech football team from the 1950s. While on campus, she saw many changes since her days as a student 50 years ago, spoke briefly at a faculty-staff chapel service and met Wayland President Paul Armes.

All testified to her life-changing experiences as a teenager in Kyoto, a student in Plainview and a wife, mother and teacher in Japan. Burke became a Christian at age 16 through the influence of American missionaries who shared the gospel and expressed deep regret for the lives lost during the Hiroshima bombing of World War II. She was baptized in a nearby river and joined her family as believers.

The missionaries soon put out the call for someone to help them translate their message into Japan-ese and travel with them to other parts of the nation. In return, the student was offered the opportunity to learn English at the classes they taught and gain experience in the language. Burke jumped at the chance and, as a teenager, moved with the two missionaries to begin four years of service as translator and student.

“For nearly two years, I would hear them talking, and it would mean nothing,” she recalled, noting the language barrier. “Then one day, it began to make sense, and I could understand English.”



Mikage International Preschool founder and principal Yoshiko Burke (second from right, back row) enjoys spending time with teachers and students at the English preschool.

Some of the missionaries' friends, who lived in Florida, decided the Japanese young woman needed to attend an American college. They

arranged for her to enroll in Toccoa Falls Bible College, where she studied two years before transferring to Wayland on a music scholarship for the international choir and to study English and Bible. Her goal was to become an English teacher.

Burke finished her WBU degree in May 1963 and returned home to Japan, where she married her husband two months later. He was an English teacher at a Canadian academy in Japan, and Burke joined the faculty as a kindergarten teacher. The next year, she followed her passion and opened a Christian preschool in English—first in a Shinto shrine and later in a rented home she adapted for her purposes.

Mikage International Pre-school grew to about 45 children, caring for toddlers as young as 18 months up to age 6 and included an after-school program and English Club. Then in January 1995, an earthquake shook Japan, destroyed the school building and killed two teachers on site.

Burke felt she might retire and perhaps return to the United States. But God was not finished with the Burkes' work with Japanese children.

She soon sold the furnishings from the old school building and opened her home to the four students remaining with the school to rebuild her business. She currently is renting another home for the school, which now has 30 children enrolled and six teachers. She serves as the principal and oversees the entire operation.

After her husband's retirement, the couple decided to draw from his savings and build an international school for students to attend during their elementary years after they aged out of the [Mikage Preschool](#). Missionaries helped build the facility, and classes began in 2003.

Billy Burke is headmaster for [Ashiya International School](#), which offers private Christian education for children from kindergarten through sixth grade, focusing on a strong bilingual curriculum in English and Japanese.

Their son, Jay, is principal. Their daughter, Emi Burke Millard, lives in Houston with her husband and three children.



In this decades-old photo, Yoshiko Shiga Burke is a young girl (far right) in a family of eight children and one of the first Christian families in their village. Her mother converted to Christianity as the result of a missionary effort before she married.

Both facilities are English schools, a rarity at the time they started and a draw for prominent families and those from other countries who want their children to be fluent in the language of commerce. The Burkes plan to merge the two schools into one entity in April.

Even after all these years, Burke said, the work with children is rewarding.

"I love to see them grow and see them pray and be thankful for things," she said. "Children teach parents a lot too. We just plant the seed and watch them grow."

Her husband said it's evident she has a gift.

“God gave her a charisma with children. They can be running crazy, and when she comes in, they just settle down for her,” he said.

The couple has been involved in starting an international church in Kobe, where people from 12 nations worship. They also often send Japanese nationals on short-term mission trips to their daughter’s church in Houston to work with Japanese people in that area.

Although it has been 47 years since Burke crossed the Wayland stage to receive her diploma, she recalls fondly many experiences from those three years on campus. Memories of singing with the international choir and traveling to various locations remain vivid.

On one trip, she recalled, a black South American student was told he could eat in the kitchen while the rest of the choir ate in the restaurant. The choir’s director refused and told the entire choir to get back on the bus.

Burke also recalled getting food from home while at Wayland. The shipments often included home-canned vegetables with a strong smell. Since the girls in the dorms would complain of the odor, Burke and her sister, Emiko, often would eat their treats from home in the bathrooms so the smell would be carried away through the exhaust vents.

While she may be past retirement age by many standards, Burke is not looking to quit her work any time soon, even though she turns 76 this December.

“God is still using us, so as long as I live, we’ll be doing this,” she said with a smile.