



Barbara Beach of Westwood learns how to make paper at a shop in Japan.

## **Her Japanese dream comes true**

By Russell B. Gutterson/Daily News correspondent

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WESTWOOD — Barbara Beach learned a surprising lesson when she went to Japan last month: Cultural shocks can also be physical.

"After going to the sauna, a woman came over to me and pointed at the water," the 16-year-old Westwood girl said. "When I felt it, it was freezing, so she poured it on herself to show me what to do."

Beach said the woman's help was only one example of how helpful the Japanese people are.

Beach said she heard about the trip through her father, Ralph Beach, art coordinator at the Boys and Girls Club of Roxbury. "Since I was 13-years-old, I've been in love with Japan," said Beach. "I saw the posters around the club and went for it."

The trip to Japan runs about every year and is open to all club members, said coordinator Greg Stoddard. Acceptance requires a rigorous application process, complete with report cards and recommendations.

Steven Dexter, vice principal at Westwood High School, heard about the trip through Sheryl Goodloe, the school's METCO director. "Barbara took the initiative on her own, which was very impressive to me," he said.

Beach is interested in different cultures and people, he said.

She took weekly classes at the club for a year to learn about the language and Japanese etiquette. The classes were fun, Beach said, but the trip was better.

She and club members left Feb. 9. Stoddard, who was chaperone, has studied in Japan and speaks the language.

The group visited Kyoto, Osaka, Tokyo, and Hiroshima. They toured shopping areas and went to ceremonies and festivals. They attended both a Japanese Tea Ceremony, Stoddard said, a tradition dating back to the 16th century featuring the exclusively Japanese art form of preparing and serving tea, and a 10,000 person festival in Okayama.

Beach said the pre-trip preparation was important because etiquette is important in Japan. Respect and politeness are everything there, she said.

"I was a little nervous at the ceremonies. I didn't want to disrespect the people," Beach said, "But after the first time, it was easier."

While in the island nation, the travelers took classes in Japanese brush painting, cooking, and papermaking and met Japanese artist Takemaka, who creates paintings by fitting carved wooden blocks into a design. Some of his work can be found at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

The travelers spent nights at hotels, youth hostels and guesthouses. But more than the accommodations, it was the people and culture that had the most impact, Beach said.

The people were, "very kind, and appreciate every moment," she said, especially when compared to manners of many people in the United States.

An example, Beach said, was going to the public bathhouses. She said being in them felt a little like being in the Westwood High girls' locker room, except for the demands of etiquette. Upon entry, one disrobes and places clothes in a locker, but that's followed by a series of procedures done in an open room with no privacy. Conditioner, soap and other items are handed to you and you have a seat while you wash up. And the water was very cold.

"It would have been easier if I had a friend with me, but I was all alone," she said. The Japanese women made up for this lack by being very helpful.

While she marveled at the people, Beach said the food was a different matter. Out in the country, she explained, tofu and soup are staples; in the cities, common snacks would be fried fish, sushi, and raw salmon, few of which she found appealing.

One of the highlights of the two-week tour was a visit to the Fushimi Inari Grand Shrine near Kyoto. The shrine, dedicated to "Inari," the deity of rice, features thousands of orange torii gates and is open 24 hours a day. After passing through the gates, she said, the travelers climbed an enormous staircase leading to a mountain summit.

At the top was an incredible view of the Kyoto skyline, a reward for the grueling trek, she said.

On Feb. 24, the group returned to the United States. Saying "sayonara" was not easy, Beach said.

The group had become so familiar with the Japanese culture and lifestyle, the return itself was something of a culture shock.

"I was almost scared to come back," said Beach, "In Japan, everyone's calm, but here, people are bigger and louder."

Asked whether she intends to return to Japan, she said she plans to go to school there.

She said she found the people's clothing there fascinating. She hopes to travel the world pursuing a career in the fashion field, including at least a couple of years in Japan, she said.