Photograph by Kathryn Riddle

Children's book author and illustrator Patricia Polacco shows the replica quilt that inspired her book, "The Keeping Quilt."

Author, illustrator Patricia Polacco delighted children with visit to HB

BY KATHRYN RIDDLE

Award-winning children's book author and illustrator Patricia Polacco enthralled her young audience at Hathaway Brown School during her recent special appearance there.

Born in Michigan where she returned after living for nearly 37 years in Oakland, California, Mrs. Polacco has written and illustrated more than 105 books for children. She shared with the second- and third-graders that although she herself didn't learn to read until she was 14 years old because she had dyslexia, she could express herself through drawing and painting even at a young age. Mrs. Polacco eventually was graduated from college, studying at Laney Community College and the California College of Arts and Crafts, the Monash University in Mulgrave, Australia and finally at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology where she earned her doctorate in art history in iconography. It was not until after raising her two children that she began writing and illustrating, publishing her first book when she was 41 years old.

"I come from a family of storytellers," said Mrs. Polacco. "My mother's people were from Russia and Ukraine and my father's family from Ireland. My mother, brother and I lived with her parents until I was five years old and every night my Babushka (Grandmother) told stories – she called it 'fire-talking' as we gathered around the fireplace eating popcorn, fudge and snow apples."

Mrs. Polacco's first book, "Meteor!" is based on the true story of a meteor landing in the yard of the family farm in Union City. The legend is that a man touching the meteor with his bare hand made a wish that came true! Mrs. Polacco carries a small piece of the meteor that each of the youngsters was allowed to touch at the end of the program. She told the children, based on her Grandpa's rules, that there are three things you cannot wish for: not for money; not to change other people "because you can only do that by how you treat them;" and not for toys. "Be careful what you wish for because it may come true!" she said.

After her beloved Babushka died and her grandfather sold the family farm, he moved the meteor, now engraved with the family surname, to her grandmother's final resting place in the local cemetery.

Mrs. Polacco's charming book, "The Keeping Quilt," is the story of the quilt her grandmother made for her of pieces of family clothing. When you miss home and the family left behind, her grandmother said, "just touch the quilt and remember those whose clothes made up the quilt." This cherished heirloom was the picnic tablecloth, the canopy at family weddings, the first blanket for new babies. The original quilt is at the University of Findlay's Mazza Museum, home to the world's largest collection of original artwork by children's book illustrators. Mrs. Polacco's family made a replica of the quilt that she now shares on her book tours.

Mrs. Polacco was as captivating a storyteller in person as she is through her delightful books for children. Among all the books she has written, there is sure to be at least one from which to choose to give those special children in your own life this holiday season.