

# Georgia Lee Ford – More Than Just A Great Schoolteacher Recognition Of Women’s History Month

“Lady G Ford” announces the cell phone greeting of 81-year-old Ms. Georgia Lee Ford, a retired schoolteacher. Lady is most appropriate for I do not know any high school girls in my hometown who were not in awe of Georgia Lee Ford, our math teacher in the sixties at Davidson High School in Water Valley, MS. She wore high heel shoes every day and beautifully tailored dresses that I heard she made herself. This model-like, intelligent black woman was someone we could relate to and admire. A disciplinarian, her authority was rarely questioned. (I somehow managed to avoid her classes and would have been embarrassed for her to see my limited math skills, which haunt me to this day.) Truth be told the young men at Davidson also respected Ms. Ford, appreciating her immaculate style, beauty, and confidence.

Georgia, the fourth of 11 children, was born on September 11th, 1940, to Reverend Raymond and Bernice Ford in Batesville in Panola County. Five sisters and three brothers are still living, and all 11 attended college. Her sisters, Thelma Willingham and Margaret Gibson are also retired educators. No surprise since their dad taught school for 46 years having graduated from Rust College, where her mother also attended.

Georgia graduated second in the 1958 class from Batesville Colored High School. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics in 1963 with a minor in Natural Science from Mississippi Valley State College, now University, located in Itta Bena. In the summers, she earned continuing education certifications from the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State University and Rust College.

Georgia’s first teaching job was at Davidson High School in Water Valley, where she stayed for five years. Not owning a car, she had to live with other educators in Water Valley. Our small southern town had no hotels or apartments. Any local accommodations that did exist were segregated. “Most of the teachers who did not live in the area had to commute or rent a room in the home of a black family,” she explained. “I lived with John and Merline Dowsing, John D. and Louise Campbell, Mose and Doll Ann Henderson and their families while teaching at Davidson from 1963 to 1968. At the end of the week, I would ride home with Mrs. Joe Green, another teacher who lived near my home in Panola County.” During her tenure at Davidson, Georgia worked under two principals, John Dowsing and Joseph Ford. It was Mr. Ford who eventually acquired a house where teachers who were not residents could live in walking distance from the high school.

At Davidson Georgia taught geometry, algebra and physics and found time to work with the Tigerettes’ basketball team, and other organizations. In 1968 she moved to her next assignment at Rosa Fort High School in Tunica, MS where she worked under principal, Jimmy Walker. Mr. Walker had been the principal at the black schools in Oakland,



Georgia Lee Ford

MS prior to their closure and merger with the Coffeerville, MS schools as part of the integration of the two systems.

Though Georgia was at Rosa Fort for only one year, she made a big impression on my college classmate Kenneth Weedon, who was thrilled to hear that I had finally located and spoken with one of his favorite teachers. “When I saw Ms. Ford, I was able to associate brains and beauty. She was smart as a whip and beautiful,” he said. “Her dignity and intellect gave her an even higher level of respect. She gave me a whole new perspective of what a successful black woman could be.” After adding trigonometry to her repertoire, Georgia began her final educational assignment in 1969 at North Panola Technical High School in Sardis, MS where she retired in 2002 after nearly 40 years.

Today, Georgia often encounters former students who remind her about something she said or did. For Walter Polk, Davidson Class of 1966, it is her snappy retorts when he asked go to the bathroom far too many times. Betty White Milledge, another student in the 1966 class and a leading scorer on the Tigerettes basketball team noted that while Ms. Ford “was down to earth with a keen sense of humor she was genuinely interested in our learning and getting an education. She was a wonderful teacher and she let us know that she was the instructor and that we were not to ‘get it twisted’. She kept us focused on the academics and would put in the time and efforts to make sure we understood the work.”

When I asked Ms. Ford about her fondest memories of teaching high school, she said she always followed the rules

and made the students follow the rules, such as shirts tucked in pants before being allowed to enter her classroom. Standing in the classroom doorway, she barred any offenders from entering until they complied.

“My go-to response over the years in tough situations with students was ‘the Lord is’ because I knew He would take care of me and any issue at hand. Thus, my motivation is and always has been if I can help somebody, as I pass along then my living shall not be in vain,” she said. Georgia has a multi-talented daughter,

Reed is a native of Water Valley and graduated from Davidson High School in 1970. She published a series of articles in the North Mississippi Herald from August, 2018, through July, 2020, sharing the stories of unsung black women who made or are making a difference in Yalobusha County. This week she announces part two of the project, which will also feature black men. She can be reached at (678) 825-2356 or reed2318@bellsouth.net



By Dottie Chapman Reed

[www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com](http://www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com)



Georgia Lee Ford and her daughter, Jacqueline Blackburn

Jacqueline Blackburn, a minister and a musician, four grandchildren, nine great grandchildren and two great-great grandchildren. Reverend Blackburn (next page) provides more detail about her mother’s life including her many activities on behalf of the New Life Missionary Baptist Church in Batesville.

In addition, other family members share their thoughts about a woman not born in Yalobusha County but one who left her mark on Davidson students as much more than a good schoolteacher.

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## NOTICE OF ELECTION

Notice is hereby given that Mayor and Board of Aldermen of the City of Water Valley, Mississippi have authorized, pursuant to House Bill No. 1606, 2020 Regular Session, an election to be held on the question of placing a 2% tax on the gross proceeds of the sale of prepared food and beverages sold for consumption in the City of Water Valley, Mississippi, for the purposes of being used to promote tourism and parks and recreation for the City of Water Valley, Mississippi.

Said election shall be held on Tuesday, March 8, 2022, during the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. on said date. All qualified electors of the City may vote on the question of the approval of said tax. Qualified voters shall vote in the polling places utilized for elections of Aldermen for the City of Water Valley, and all registered voters of the City of Water Valley shall be allowed to vote on said question.

Given by Resolution and Order of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen of the City of Water Valley, Mississippi on the 4th day of January, 2022.

City of Water Valley, Mississippi  
By Donald Gray, Mayor  
Attest:  
Vivian Snider, City Clerk,  
City of Water Valley, Mississippi.

Publish dates: 2/10, 2/17, 2/24, and 3/3, 2022

## Are You a Caregiver and Need a Break?



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Call 1-844-822-4622 Mississippi Access to Care Center and speak to a resource specialist to receive assistance with completing an application or to request an application from your local office.

**Who is eligible?**

Mississippi caregivers providing unpaid care for a dependent person of any age with a significant disability, or chronic illness requiring 24/7 care

**How does the Respite Voucher Program work?**

These vouchers may be used to pay an in-home care agency, an Adult Day Center, or a private individual to provide respite care.

Initial Vouchers are provided in the amount of \$300.00 per household to approved family caregivers. Once approved the caregiver can reapply for a REPEAT respite service in the amount of \$290 after approximately six months from the initial approval date.

Caregivers can also apply for EMERGENCY respite to receive a one-time payment of \$590:

- an emergency or unusual circumstance that is an unplanned situation that prevents the caregiver from providing the care required to the care recipient;
- an unplanned event that threatens the health and safety of the care recipient or caregiver;

Vouchers can only be used to pay for breaks (respite) for caregivers. They may NOT be used to:

- Pay the family caregiver directly for the care he/she is providing
- Pay for care that occurred before the voucher was issued
- Pay medical bills or purchase medical supplies
- Offset the cost of paid care already in place

**Find Your Local MAC Center**

Greenville MAC (662) 537-2105	Jackson MAC (769) 777-7319	Hattiesburg MAC (601) 545-2137
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Gulfport MAC (228) 868-2311	Pontotoc MAC (662) 488-6983
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