

# 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, the girls’ 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.

Continued on Page 15

## 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

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

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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:

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

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- 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

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| Gulfport MAC<br>(228) 868-2311   | Pontotoc MAC<br>(662) 488-6983 |                                   |

This publication/project was supported by Grant Number 90LRLI0037-01-00 from Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Should you have any questions about MAC Center please feel free to call 1-844-822-4622.





Members of The Garden Club of Water Valley planted a tree on Arbor Day, February 11, at the entrance of the Water Valley High School softball field with the help of players. The group includes Ginger Bennett (left), President Jeanette Whitehead, vice-president Rebecca Phillips and Kayla Cofield. The pink dogwood was planted in honor of BB Thomas.

## Garden Club Plants Tree In Honor Of BB Thomas

A MONTHLY REPORT FROM  
*The Garden Club*  
of Water Valley  
by Jennifer Whitehead Lucus



February was a wonderful month for the Garden Club of WV. On Arbor Day, Feb 11th two members of the club, President Jeanette Whitehead and Vice President, Rebecca Phillips and two members of the Water Valley High School softball team planted a pink dogwood at the entrance of the softball field in honor of our past member, BB Thomas.

At a later date we are going to have a ceremony with a plaque that will be placed in front of the tree. Also, more work will be done at the softball field including planting bushes and flowers in front of the marquee.

We were so very honored to have guest speaker, Carol Bullard, at our February meeting that was held February 21 at the

Wesley House.

Our program was about butterflies and how they migrate, what types of flowers attract them, and many different interesting facts regarding the lifespan from beginning to end of the butterfly. The program was called MS Sweet Sixteen.

All members that attended enjoyed a baked potato bar, homemade butterfly and flower cookies, homemade chocolate cake, and a variety of dips and sodas. We appreciate the First United Methodist Church of Water Valley for letting us use the Wesley House and for all the members who were able to attend.

We have more in store for the next several months and can't wait to keep you posted on our plans ahead.

### Garden tip of the month:

Clean your annual and perennial flower beds. Add compost to the soil and add more mulch to the beds. Happy Gardening!



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# The Lady – The Leader – The Legacy – My Mother – Georgia Lee Ford

By Reverend Jacqueline Blackburn

Georgia Lee Ford is affectionately called “Lady G,” I, however, am most proud and blessed to call her my Momma. I am her only biological child – she refers to me as Alpha Omega. She has many other children, being a mother figure to those throughout the family, school, church, and community. I grew up sharing my mother with her students, her siblings, nieces and nephews, their children, and church and community children, near and far. Her nurturing and calming spirit attracts the innocent spirit of every child she meets. She always has words of wisdom and encouragement to give whenever and wherever needed. She is the proud grandmother to Keishia (Aaron, Sr.), DeShaun, Sr., Bradley, and Adrianna, a loving great-grandmother (GiGi) to DeShaun, Jr., Kristian, Amaya, Myracle, Shekinah, the twins – Aaron, Jr. and Angel, Brianna, and Ledgen, and great-great grandmother to K. J. and Ari.



Georgia Lee Ford is pictured at the North Panola Prom in 1999

As you see, my mother wears many hats and wears them well, not just those big beautiful “church” hats, but more specifically the blessed hats gifted to her by God. Teaching is her gift and her calling. Her love for children and her passion for learning led her right into that gifting. Just like her father, Reverend Raymond Ford, Sr., a teacher, she followed in his footsteps. For 40 years beginning with Student Teaching in Meridian, MS to Davidson High School in Water Valley, MS to Rosa Fort High School in Tunica MS to North Panola High School in Sardis, she walked in that calling serving as math teacher, assistant coach, Tri-Hi-Y / Hi-Y Advisor, cheerleader sponsor, Jr-Sr class sponsor, ticket taker, and so much more.

Teaching math and advising yet she was still imparting wisdom in life lessons by adding snippets from the Sunday School lessons. She always said to me that you must teach by example because someone is always watching and observing what you do. That is exactly what she did, taught by example. She was firm, yet fun, consistent, yet caring and concerned, she said what she meant, and she meant what she said. Her presence alone commanded respect across the board – students, faculty, and administrators.

When I would go to school events, I would hear the students say that Ms. Ford didn't play. They had to come correct in her class. The young men said that they had to pull their pants up and wear a belt and no hat wearing in her classroom. After all the chatter, it would end with, “Ms. Ford straight – she's a good teacher,” which made me smile because I knew my mother was a good teacher and I was glad they knew it too. She laid out the rules and expectations. The students' job was to follow through to completion. She always had the best interest of the students in mind and at heart. She would meet you where you were and help and encourage you to move forward to rise to your potential.

Although I didn't attend North Panola High School, those same expectations were set for me at home - no gray areas. I am so appreciative of the structure and en-

couragement that I received, which has been passed down to my children and grandchildren and in my workplace and church. While my mother was teaching in Water Valley and Tunica, I was home in Sardis with her parents, Raymond and Bernice. When she was away, she made sure that I had what I needed and then some. Her seven younger siblings were there too, and she made sure their needs were met as well. She made us all feel special and loved.

Fast forward some years, I witnessed her giving that same special care to both of her parents until they transitioned. I remember her going to the hospital to stay with my grandmother, coming home in the mornings to dress for school, and repeating that cycle daily.

She never complained nor did she miss a beat in making sure my needs were met. She did the same with my grandfather. Now she and her youngest brother live in the “home” house where she cares for him, with consistent help from her youngest sister and family who live in Oxford, MS. They make sure the love is felt and that he is wanting for nothing.

My mother has always been strong, consistent, structured, and articulate. She is a firm believer in doing your best and putting your best foot forward. She encourages everyone that she meets to do just that. This wasn't only in the classroom but everywhere she went from the schoolhouse to the church house from the grocery store to her front door. My mother believes in striving for excellence in all she does which is the legacy she continues to pass on to her family, the church, the community and everyone who crosses her path.

She has a servant's heart, and you can see it as she works faithfully in the church and her local community. Affectionately known as “The Hat Lady,” her community efforts are as diverse as her extensive hat collection. She willingly offers her time and expertise to those areas of need. With her Christian upbringing, it is evident that she is rooted and grounded in her faith in God. As she was trained and learned skills while serving as the Sunday school secretary, this has been beneficial as she continues to serve as the official record keeper for New Life Missionary Baptist Church, the Sardis District Baptist Association, and the MLK Commemorative committee. She instilled in me that serving the Lord will pay off and only what you do for Christ will last.

Family is very important to her. She is always willing to lend a helping hand or lend a listening ear. She is a wealth of knowledge, a historian for the family, the church, and the community. She comes from a legacy of strength, and I consider her to be “the family Cornerstone.” She is the anchor, the rock, that center that holds our family in the road, keeping us all together. She lives in the “home” house and that is the focal gathering place for everyone. She loves her family and would do just about anything for us. She continues to serve with a smile, showing love and speaking encouragement. In looking at “Lady G” and the influence that she has, I wanted to include input from some of the younger family members. This is what they had to say about “Lady G”:

#### Aunt Georgia is:

- Fabulous / Fierce / Fine;
- Caring, courageous, kind, Godly, optimistic – she is a leader who the family looks up to;
- Big sister, proud, family first, leader, laughter;
- Strong but tender, fiercely loyal, confident, compassionate, caring – she embodies the attributes of Christ: Love in Action; her love is as big as her hats;
- The strongest woman I know
- One of God's angels – she brings forth good fruit - Galatians 5:22 “ But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.”
- Wise, witty, faithful, Queen boss, loving – dedicated servant leader who exudes and demands excellence of herself and all in her realm of influence;

- Classy, supportive, loving, dedicated, wise – the epitome of strength, class, and commitment;
- Loving, determined, strong, funny, legendary - God-fearing loving woman who inspires through her determination and love;
- Strong, leader, fashionable, charismatic, Legend - she is rock solid;
- Fashionable, funny, honest, supportive, timeless – she is loyal and a hard-working woman who is committed to her family, her faith, and her fashion;

#### GiGi is:

- Fun, silly, loving, caring, rich;
- She is a very fun person who always makes us laugh and sends us things because she loves us'

#### Cousin Georgia Lee is:

- A woman of wisdom and knowledge, lovable, kind and sweet and she will give you her last;
- A woman of influence, integrity, and inspiration; determined, diligent, devoted – She's the REAL!

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