

Graduates

from page A1

includes full tuition coverage and a semester of study abroad.

"I don't know what it was about Salem but I fell in love with it," Frimpong said. "I just felt comfortable there. I just felt like I belonged there, like I had been called there."

Though she was not initially enthusiastic about the idea of attending a women's college, Frimpong, who spent all four of her years on campus working in the admissions office, said the all-female environment has stimulated her growth beyond her own imagining.

"Most of us go not really knowing the benefits of a women's college and not really knowing that, four years later, we'll come out so empowered and ready to take on the world," she declared. "You get so used to being a powerful woman on campus that when you leave campus it's still there with you."

During her time on campus, Frimpong, who is a member of several honor societies, became a student



Photo courtesy of Salem College
Ama Frimpong (center) poses with fellow grads Sarah Fowler (left) and Elizabeth Ganshaw.

leader and activist, railing against indignities she says she and other minority students faced from time to time there. She stayed in

close contact with school administrators, keeping them in the loop of what was going on on campus. Frimpong, who will start

law school at Wake Forest University in the fall, believes Salem is becoming more intentionally inclusive and she, in turn, is becoming more confident as an agent of change.

"Salem really helped me to find myself. It really was at Salem that I learned that I had a voice," she declared. "I had to learn to fight. I learned just how much power I had."

Gisenyi, Rwanda-native Swenson had just completed her sophomore year at St. Fidel College when the horrific genocides broke out in her native land. Two of her brothers were killed. Swenson, the seventh of eight children, says no one in the nation was spared from the crushing grief that accompanied the conflict.

"I lost only two brothers," she related. "There were whole families that were completely wiped out so I consider myself lucky."

Swenson and several of her surviving siblings spent a year in a refugee camp in the Congo. Swenson describes the experience as "Horrible. I feel like it's one year wiped out of my life," she stated. "That's what it feels like."

In 1996, Swenson and another Rwandan girl were sent to live with a pastor in Raleigh. The pastor helped Swenson and her comrade find jobs and get on their feet. Swenson worked briefly as a cashier and took some computer courses at Wake Tech Community College in Raleigh. It was there that she met her husband, Ryan, an IBM employee. The two married and Swenson gave birth to a son, Eric and a daughter, Kayla. For several years, Swenson was content to pour all of her time and energy into the thing the Rwandan genocide had taught her was most important: family. When Kayla started kindergarten, Swenson's thoughts turned again to her education.

"My father used to tell us the only one gift you can give yourself is your education and no one can take it away from you," she commented. "I always knew I was going to get my college education."

Swenson found Salem College's Fleer Center for Adult Education, where she majored in economics and was able to complete her degree in less than three years. She hopes to be able to go on to graduate school, but before she does anything else, Swenson says she has to take care of her first priority. For the first time ever, she is taking her young family to spend a month with her mother in Rwanda. After years of hard work, it will be a triumphant homegoing for Swenson.

"This is a big accomplishment," she said of obtaining her college degree at long last. "I've wanted it for a long time and finally I can say I'm done."

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