

Dr. Mary Harper Is "A Special Kind Of Person!"

By Audrey C. Lodato
Post Staff Writer

It takes a special kind of person to become an achiever. Achievers are people who strive for excellence, who want more than to just get by, who are excited by challenges, who have the courage to test how far and how high they can fly.

One such person is Dr. Mary Harper, Associate Professor of English at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Dr. Harper, who has been teaching at UNCC since 1971, comes from a family of educators. "I always knew I wanted to be a teacher," she says. "When I was a young girl and played school, I was always the teacher."

Her early decision to teach was reinforced in college by a professor she admired. Too, the state of society at that time further confirmed her choice of career. "In the Fifties, there were not too many options opened to black women," she points out.

Harper, who grew up in Greensboro, received her A.B. degree from Livingstone College in Salisbury, her M.Ed. in English from UNC-G, and her Ph.D. at Union Graduate School in Cincinnati, Ohio. She has also done advanced studies at Duke, the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, the University of Iowa, Harvard, and Atlanta University.

In her early years of teaching (she started in 1955), Dr. Harper taught French and music, as well as English. Prior to her work at UNC-C, this Achiever's career included positions at Lincoln County's Newbold High School, York Road High School (now Kennedy Jr. High), Myers Park High School, Barber-Scotia College, and Johnson C. Smith University.

What does it take to be an effective teacher? "You certainly don't enter this profession for the money," Dr. Harper laughs. "You need patience, a love of



Dr. Mary Harper
.....Renown educator

people, a love of knowledge, the realization that learning is continuous, and the understanding that all knowledge does not come from books."

Dr. Harper's favorite aspect of teaching is being able to interact with students and "seeing their eyes light up when you finally reach them. They accomplish something they thought they couldn't or understand something they thought they couldn't." Part of the reward is in helping to mold young minds or inspire someone to pursue a particular goal. "It's rewarding to see their accomplishments, to think that in some way you might have influenced them," she says.

Post reporter Jalyne Strong is a former student of Dr. Harper. "She mixed all the right ingredients in her teaching and exposed us to things outside the classroom. Dr. Harper made it just difficult enough and interesting enough to make the whole experience memorable as

well as enjoyable."

After teaching for nearly 30 years, Dr. Harper has been able to affect the

educational experience of more than one generation. "By now I'm teaching my students' children," she remarks. "I have a student now whose mother I had in high school."

Despite its many rewards, teaching - like any profession - has its stressful times. For Dr. Harper, frustration comes with not being able to reach a student. "Some students in high school are going just to satisfy the law," the educator notes. "Even in college, some are there because it's fashionable or because Mama said so. They haven't figured out for themselves why they're there. It's frustrating when students don't use their abilities."

Besides occasional unwilling students, some frustrations arise from paper work or meetings. "You always feel there's never enough time," Dr. Harper comments.

Although time is at a premium for the professor, she maintains her involvement in the community. Harper was a co-founder of the Afro-American Cultural Center; is a member of Alpha

Kappa Alpha Sorority, First United Presbyterian Church, the NAACP, the Community Relations Committee, and the WFAE Community Advisory Board; and belongs to several professional associations, including the National Council for Black Studies.

Dr. Harper likes to relax with a good book. "I like to read black fiction," she reveals. "I'm interested right now in black contemporary women writers."

Dr. Harper and her husband, Joseph (Assistant Principal at E. Mecklenburg), have three daughters. The eldest, Delcia, is Assistant Principal of Instruction at Sharon Elementary and was a finalist for Teacher of the Year. Lisa is in her second year of law school at NC Central in Durham.

Youngest daughter Jonette, her mother says, "is a wise senior at Mecklenburg High School."

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