Persistence Drives Ford Back To Classroom

By Dresel Ball Special To The Post Greensboro - Annie Ford walks ingerly into the classroom, drops her bulging bag on the floor and reaches for her notepad and pen. She

reaches for her hotepad and pen, she listens attentively as the professor breezes through his lecture. That's not unusual for a graduate student, but Ford is not your typical graduate student. She is a 53-yearold grandmother pursuing a master's degree in adult education at North Carolina A&T.

Five months ago, she sobbed uncontrollably as she stepped to the platform to receive a bachelor of science degree from Winston-Salem State. Ford's pursuit of an advanced degree is also atypical considering most academicians her age are either seeking tenure or trying to find a publisher for a book.

"I've always wanted to be a teacher," Ford says softly, but with conviction. "I'm only pursuing a dream.'

The dream began at an early age. Ford remembers growing up in Winston-Salem and riding a cold bus some 25 miles to a church, which had a basement that served as the classroom. She said her first grade teacher made an indeliable mark and influenced her life.

"I sat in the classroom and watched the way she conducted herself," Ford remembers. "She had total control of all the students, and I said when I grow up that's the kind of person I'd like to be."

"Annie Ford is an inspiration to the thousands of people who believe education has passed them by after reaching maturity," says Dr. B.W. Harris, area coordinator of Adult Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at A&T, "Annie Ford is to be admired for her persistence through tremendous odds. She represents a trend of matured people who are actively engaged in educational pursuits."

Ford grew up in depressed times. Money was scarce. Food was scarce, and she was unable to complete formal education. As she grew up, she fell in love and married.

Her first child soon arrived. The family blossomed and eventually totaled five boys and three girls. Ford and her husband separated and she was forced to raise the children on her own, supporting them on a meager salary generated as a



Annie Ford (center) engages in a discussion with Education at North Carolina A&T. Karen Allen and Dr. B.W. Harris, professor in Adult

study.

in psychology and sociology.

Winston-Salem State.

Ford recalls the long hours she

"It wasn't easy getting back into

spent studying while attending

the habit of studying," Ford recants.

"College is no snap. The whole

technique of studying has changed

since I attended elementary school.

In fact, I spent many hours in the

library reading books on how to

She also had to overcome the

stares and puzzled look from her

classmates because of her age. "I was apprehensive at first," she

remembers. "I really didn't know

how the students were going to

accept me. A lot of them looked at

me as if to say, 'What is this old lady

Ford maintains employment at a

Winston-Salem department store

while matriculating part-time at A&T in the graduate school. She

commutes from Winston-Salem to

Greensboro twice a week.

doing in this class?"

manager for a chain of convenient stores.

But the dream of becoming a teacher never went away. "I knew I couldn't pursue an education with a lot of children running around the house," says Ford. "I felt I had an obligation to see that they get the best education available to them."

Ford feels a degree of accomplishments as all her children have completed high school. Three of them have claimed degrees from technical institutions, one has become a word processor and another graduated from Penn State.

With her children having completed their educational pursuits, Ford thought it was time that she pursue her educational goals. So in 1980 she enrolled in Forsyth Tech.

"I felt very proud when I got the degree from Forsyth Tech," Ford says. "But I was talking with someone and I was told the degree I had was nothing more than an advanced high school diploma."

With that disclosure providing the impetus, Ford enrolled at Winston-Salem State in 1982. This past

summer, she walked on the platform ments for a master's degree in adult at the Winston-Salem Memorial education, Ford hopes to work with Coliseum to receive a degree in the elderly. applied science with a concentration

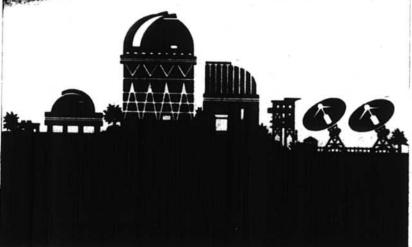
"Senior citizens in this country are getting a raw deal. I want very much to change how the elderly are perceived, and I would like to see more programs created for them instead of being cut."

But Ford's primary concern at the moment is obtaining a master's degree.

'The more education you get, the more you want," she says. After I get the master's, I'm going to shoot for the doctorate."



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When she completes the require-Local Doctor Recertified As Family Specialist

to show proof of competence in the certified every six years. Family practice was the first medical spe-



