

**PH.D.**  
**GROWING UP BLACK IN DC AND BEATING THE ODDS**  
**Nettie's DC Story of Perseverance, Hope and Determination (PHD)**

by Gwynette Ford Lacy, Ph.D., MBA

**INTRODUCTION**

Every Ph.D. has a story. This one is mine. This is my story of how I beat the odds: how an underprivileged black girl, from the inner city of Washington, DC, grew up to obtain a Ph.D. Some people don't even know what a Ph.D. degree is. Basically, a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree is the highest academic degree in the world that one can obtain in one's professional field. Historians, scientists (such as chemists, biologists, and pharmacists), mathematicians, and in my case, an MBA (Master's of Business Administration), can all seek a higher degree in one's field, called a Ph.D. Medical doctors, anthropologists, and sociologists can also seek a Ph.D. The Ph.D. is considered a terminal/research degree, which qualifies a person to teach at the college or university level. Ph.Ds. are usually the graduates at large universities who, instead of standing up, getting applause and sitting down, are the ones called to the stage, their names are called, given their degrees, and congratulated by the president of their university and others. That's how important the Ph.D. degree is.

Some people are often curious about what motivates a person to seek the highest academic degree that exists. Some people think that you have to be a genius, super smart, or just plain "crazy" to put in all of the hard work and time that it takes to climb to top of the "food chain" when it comes to educational attainment. Others feel that you have to be from a high socioeconomic ranking, super rich, or well off financially to even think about obtaining a Ph.D. degree because it is so expensive. None of this applies to me. I believe that you have to be smart enough to do what it takes and crazy enough to put in the time and go through with it. The rest is all about perseverance and what many experts call an "affinity for high achievement".

**My case has been very different than most Ph.Ds. As I travel around the country or as people read my resume or bio and/or my first and last name, they often expect to meet a white Irish woman, or someone with a French background, my first name being French and my married name being Irish. When a black, African-American woman shows up, they are often a little surprised. And when they read that I am a native Washingtonian and attended DC public schools for my basic education, I am often asked what motivated a person of my “background,” (or what gave me “the gall”) to seek the highest degree that is possible to obtain in the world. I don’t fit the profile; I don’t fit the mold.**

**So here is my story; the story of how the great, great, great grand-daughter of a female slave named Sookey Jubeter became the first and only African-American female to earn a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin- Madison in her field of Labor-Management Relations. She goes on to become the first and longest-serving, black female tenured professors in the School of Business at Howard University in Washington, DC, where she was born. She also held several high administrative posts at Howard, and is now a national/international management consultant. My story is about a young black girl who overcomes tough times, a broken home, bullying, the mean streets of inner city Washington, DC, the DC Go-Go scene, and a product of a mostly segregated school system, who survived and thrived despite her background. This is a story about a black girl growing up in the 60’s with the joys and the pains of the times: the Civil Rights Movement, government politics, the Viet Nam War, protests and marches, assassinations and riots. Yet it is also a story about triumphs, the music and college life of those times, DC Go-Go, and the story of a great love affair.**

**This is a story about finding one’s self in the 70’s; about Afros and dashikis, about studying and hard work, stress and strain, illness and pain, and about finding the answers to life and creating a life that matters. It is a story about race, the racial divide and racial and gender inequality, yet it is also about racial pride and tolerance. It is a story about perseverance, hope, and determination (PHD).**

My case has been very different than most Ph.D.s. As I travel around the country on as people read my resume or bio and/or my first and last name, they often expect to meet a white woman, or someone with a French background, my first name being French and my married name being Irish. When a black African-American woman shows up, they are often a little surprised. And when they read that I am an African Washingtonian and attended DC public schools for my basic education, I am often asked what motivated a person of my "background," (or what gave me the "guts") to seek the highest degree that is possible to obtain in the world. I don't fit the profile; I don't fit the mold.

So here is my story: the story of how the great, great, great-grand-daughter of a female slave named Sojourner Truth became the first and only African-American female to earn a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the field of Labor-Management Relations. She goes on to become the first and longest-serving black female tenured professor in the School of Business at Howard University in Washington, DC, where she was born. She also held several high administrative posts at Howard, and is now a national/international management consultant. My story is about a young black girl who overcomes tough times, a broken home, finding the mean streets of inner city Washington, DC, the DC Go-Go scene, and a product of a mostly segregated school system, who survived and thrived despite her background. This is a story about a black girl growing up in the 60's with the joys and the pains of the times: the Civil Rights Movement, government policies, the Vietnam War, protests and non-violent resistance and riots. Yes, it is also a story about triumphs, the music and college life of those times, DC Go-Go, and the story of a great love affair. This is a story about finding one's self in the 90's about AIDS and lesbis, about struggling and hard work, stress and strain, illness and pain, and about finding the answers to life and creating a life that matters. It is a story about race, the racial divide and racial and gender inequality, yet it is also about (white) pride and tolerance. It is a story about pain, perseverance, hope, and determination (PHD).