

77-Year-Old Alfreda Graduates

At age 77, Alfreda Johnson got her high school diploma. On June 22, she came with Center for Literacy (CFL) to the Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma Citywide Graduation, hosted by the Mayor's Commission on Literacy. It was her second graduation ceremony. Her first graduation ceremony, with coverage by [CBS 3 TV](#), was on June 8 at South Philadelphia High School, where she also attended her prom.

Born in Jacksonville, Florida, she dropped out of school at age 17 because she had a son to take care of. "In those days, parents did not allow you to go back to school after the birth of your children," she said. "And schools did not allow young girls to come to school when pregnant." She moved to Philadelphia not knowing anyone and began employment at a hospital as a food service worker. She became interested in food service and wanted to be a dietician. She then started back to school at Temple and got discouraged. Years passed, but her desire to get a diploma was still there. Her favorite subject is American History "because I witnessed the material that is covered," she says.

Alfreda once more began her journey to get her high school diploma in her 60's, when she enrolled in classes at CFL. But she was not consistent in coming to class. "I had to work and something always came up with three kids at home to take care of," she recalls. "I loved the teachers at CFL, especially Vann Delaine, who took the time with me to make sure I got it. I was sorry to leave CFL because of budget impasse."

Alfreda stayed with us until November 2015, when CFL had to shut down classes for two months because of the state budget impasse. She went to South Philadelphia High School, under the Educational Options Program (EOP), School District of Philadelphia, to complete her credential.

At the South Philadelphia graduation ceremony she was the star. William R. Hite, Jr., superintendent of School District of Philadelphia, said this about her: "Ms. Johnson never forgot the high school diploma that she left behind in Florida way back in 1955. Never stopped believing that her graduation date would come."

Alfreda echoed what Hite said: "I'm 77 years young, and never stopped until I got it [high school diploma]."

Alfreda will never stop learning. She is thinking about going to Community College of Philadelphia to get her associates degree in nutrition.