# Education 101: Secrets of the Violets

Sit with Anne and Lori Burks, and you will get an education.

Whether it’s a short lesson on school integration, an inside look at Fayette County’s educational system, or Kappa Kappa Iota, America’s oldest organization for educators, Anne and Lori have much to share.

Anne and daughter-in-law Lori have been teaching for a combined total of 62 years, but their journey into education began even earlier—in Anne’s cases, from the cradle!

Daughter of an educator, Anne tells of her father, one of eight siblings, five of whom became educators. Anne began her career as a child, teaching paper dolls and corralling neighborhood kids for “Anne’s School.” As an adult, she taught in five schools in the Atlanta school system.

Lori’s mother, a nurse, inspired her daughter to become a pediatrician. A summer job as camp counselor confirmed that Lori loved kids; another summer at a hospital confirmed she was *not* cut out for medical school. Lori changed majors, graduating in 1981 from Emory with a degree in education. She began teaching in a private school, then at Montessori, and finally entered the public school system, teaching at three schools in Clayton County, and one in Henry County. In 1990, she met and married Anne’s son, finding a kindred teaching spirit in her mother-in-law.

Anne loved teaching middle school, and for most of her 40-year career, taught 7th graders. “Not me!” says Lori, who prefers little ones. “Second graders are my favorite.”

A lay person might consider any venture into a classroom terrifying. Anne’s steel showed during the years of integration, when teachers were solicited to enter African-American schools. Anne volunteered, eager to learn about African-American culture. Her first lesson was daunting: opening the classroom door to leave one day, she was blocked by a band of angry men.

“Y’all need to leave now,” she said. (“I was probably scared,” she confided, “but I don’t remember.”) No one moved. Another group of men encircled Anne, tire irons in hand, threatening trouble if any harm came to her. There were no further incidents.

Lori’s most dramatic moment was more personal: when she gave birth prematurely to her son—who weighed in at 1 lb., 14 oz., and fit in her husband’s hand. “He looked like ET!” Anne declared. Life quickly transformed from scholastic schedules to NICU visits. Lori recovered at home while baby Branden remained in the hospital. Two months later, she was able to bring him home—with a heart monitor. Fortunately, Anne had retired earlier that year, and assumed babysitting duties, freeing Lori to resume teaching.

Lori returned to school with a two-pound bag of sugar and a yardstick, to show her 2nd graders the weight and length of her tiny baby (now a healthy, strapping 16 yr. old athlete).

Both Anne and Lori are members of Kappa Kappa Iota—a sorority that evolved into a professional organization for educators. Its purpose is “to promote the advancement of education by providing an effective network for the exchange of education and teaching practices by educators.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Active chapters exist in 24 states; membership numbers in the thousands.

Formed in 1921, Kappa Kappa Iota began when a group of public school teachers and college professors in Stillwater, Oklahoma, gathered to share teaching ideas and socialize. The sorority—originally calledthe Blue Blue Violets—grew to state and national level, reorganized as a non-profit three years ago, and is headquartered in Tulsa OK. Kinship between local, state and national sisters is strong; members travel all over the country, from Savannah to Hawaii, to attend national conventions.

Anyone working within the educational system is eligible to join. Membership is considered an honor, and includes not only active educators, but retirees, a cafeteria manager and a bus driver!

Anne, invited to join in 1985, sponsored Lori, who followed in 2001. Both women have served as state president (Anne twice), overseeing Georgia’s various chapters (currently 6). The presidency requires a significant commitment: for six years, potential candidates move annually through various positions on the executive committee, ending with the presidency in the sixth year.

Kappa’s insignia retains the violet, its five petals symbolizing love, courage, faith, honor and loyalty. A yellow circle surrounds the violet (yellow for truth, a ring for good fellowship and fraternal cooperation). At the heart of the insignia lies the Kappa motto: “As God is the center of our being, so light is center of our Order...light which…shines on opportunities for service. A lamp for our pathway and Light for our feet.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Kappa light shines into communities across the country, as Kappas support a variety of causes to improve children’s lives, including The Kempe Foundation (Denver, CO) for abused and neglected children.

The organization provides a number of scholarships to further the development of educators. Members actively raise funds, through silent auctions, personal donations, and purchases of Kappa merchandise. Lori herself has benefited from two scholarships, and earned her master’s degree.

Pearls in the Kappa Kappa Iota pin symbolize “ideals by which educators strive to lead youth into purposeful living."[[3]](#footnote-3) Ann and Lori, both retired now, continue to advocate for the organization, passing on their passion and commitment to children, education, and teachers. Fayette County is honored to be represented by two Kappa Kappa Iota members, investing in the next generation of educators.

1. <http://www.nationalkappakappaiota.org> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. From Kappa Kappa Iota flyer, “Explanation of the Kappa Kappa Iota Insignia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)