Sandra Cravens Robinson came to Highline more than 50 years ago and broke barriers.

Cravens Robinson was recently named the Distinguished Alumna for 2016, following a distinguished career as a nurse and in the U.S. Army.

Cravens Robinson was not warmly welcomed by two nursing schools before she became the first African-American graduate of Highline’s program.

Sandra Cravens Robinson found an accepting community at Highline at a time when it was hard to be accepted as a young, educated, African American woman.

“It’s like a dream that you never had,” Cravens Robinson said of her Distinguished Alumna recognition.

Cravens Robinson was accepted into a school in Portland, but upon arriving was informed that upon accepting her, they hadn’t known she was African American. She only stayed for three months after that unsavory introduction to the school.

After that she transferred to a Seattle nursing program, where they almost didn’t allow her in because they thought her hair was “too big.”

After making it through that program, Cravens Robinson finally made it to Highline.

Cravens Robinson worked as a nurse for nearly 50 years, 20 of which she was working as a as a clinical nurse specialist in psychiatry for the US Army, as well as serving as the Dean of the only psychiatric nurse program the Army had.

Cravens Robinson worked at the Madigan Army Medical center as a civil servant for ten years after leaving the Army. She currently works as a licensed mental health counselor part-time.

Cravens Robinson had some words of wisdom for current and future nursing students, “It’s a great journey toward an optimal goal of serving others,” and that students should “stay on the path,” she said.

Cravens Robinson has definitely stayed on the path, as she is still pursuing higher levels of education to this day, at the age of 72.

She is almost finished with her doctorate in psychology from the California Southern University, while she already holds a Master of Divinity and a Master of Science in Nursing.

“I had already been a psychiatric nurse for 42 years,” Cravens Robinson said, explaining why the doctorate was a logical next step for her education goals.

Cravens Robinson said she didn’t set out to be a trail blazer.

“If that has in fact happened, I am very grateful for that,” she said.