

Portland, Oregon

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Wanda Irving: Director of Communications, Bureau of Environmental Services. A Profile

Special Edition!

When asked what it was like being black, female and a member of Dartmouth College's first graduating class of women, Wanda Irving pauses briefly then laughs softly as she compares her experience to pioneering.

"It was like being one of the pioneer women coming West," Irving says. "The professors at Dartmouth didn't want women there. Many of the professors didn't think women or blacks could handle the academic load of an Ivy League school. So it was bad enough being female, but being black and a woman I was caught in a double jeopardy. It was an uphill battle all the way."

But Irving was more than prepared for the academic load. She was a Dean's List student at Middlebury College in Vermont before transferring to Dartmouth. Irving had completed her American major in two years at Middlebury and entered Dartmouth as a junior selecting English Literature as her new major. She was one of 50 women, and one of two black women, who graduated from Dartmouth College in 1975.

Today, as Communications Services Director for Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services, Irving says she accepted the job because "it was different from my past work experience and I never run away from a challenge."

And run, she never has. Irving's personal and career life has been punctuated with challenges that combined would make good material for a best-selling novel.

By the time Irving was 19-years-old, she had already lost both of her parents in sudden, tragic deaths. She and her 14-year-old sister, Edna, were suddenly on their own. Irving was completing her first week at Middlebury College when her mother was killed in a car accident while driving to the school to be with her daughter on her 18th birthday. The following year Irving's father died of a kidney disease.

"That was a very difficult time for me. But, it was really hard on my sister who had cared for my dad since she was 13-years-old. She was with my dad during his illness and after his death she had to grow up fast."

"I was left in quite a dilemma. I had to finish college but I also

had to take care of my little sister," Irving explains. "We were a small family with no other living relatives to stay with Edna, so I arranged to have her enrolled in Northfield-Mount Herman boarding school in Northfield, Mass." Edna later entered Harvard University at the age of 15 and graduated at 19.

Academics, discipline and striving for excellence were qualities that were instilled in Irving and her sister at an early age.

"My parents trained us to deal with a situation as we found it," Irving says of her upbringing. "We were told that when things go wrong, don't just sit there and whimper. You get up and try again. At first, after my mother's death I thought—why bother? But then I remembered that it wasn't easy for my parents to buy land in Dalton, Mass., and live in a town where we were the only black family. But they were very strong people and set a good example for me. When things got rough I reminded myself that if they could do it, I could do it. I'm made of the same stock."

Irving's parents moved to Dalton, Mass., in the 1960's. Her father, owner of a construction company, bought about 500 acres of land in Dalton and built a housing development. Her mother was a school teacher who had graduated from Tuskegee Institute and earned her Master's at Columbia University.

Both parents worked hard at exposing their children to as much of life as they could. It was important that their daughters have a good education, be culturally aware and know something of their ethnic heritage.

Irving's family traveled extensively during holidays and summer vacations and attended numerous plays, operas and other cultural events in nearby New York City. Irving especially enjoyed traveling and recalls one visit to her paternal grandmother when she was five years old.

"I was very young so I don't remember exactly where we were, but we all got into my father's brand new 1958 Buick to visit my grandmother who was an Indian," Irving recalls. "I'll never forget that trip. We arrived at the Indian reservation, got out of the car and

walked past all of these teepees. She died shortly after that but I'll never forget her."

Irving had her first professional job in communications at the age of 16. She worked as a radio news reporter at WBEC in Pittsfield, Mass. Before graduating from Dartmouth she was offered a job in Seattle, Wash., as a television anchor woman. However, she turned down the offer, put her career on hold and married her college sweetheart, Samuel Irving, Jr., a 1983 Willamette Law School graduate.

After graduation, she and her husband moved to Portland. Irving settled into a buyer's position at Meier and Frank's department store and was later promoted to a branch manager. She subsequently resumed her career in the communications field. She held a variety of positions including work as an advocacy specialist for Multnomah County, special events coordinator for Willamette University, program coordinator for Rogers Cable and Oregon Public Broadcasting, and public relations person for a Los Angeles Lakers basketball player. Irving has also been nominated twice to the Marquis' Edition of Who's Who of American Women.

Irving says her current position as Communications Services Director for the Bureau of Environmental Services is challenging. She has held that post since Nov. 1987.

"I'm enjoying the job because it's different and outside of my past experiences. The technical aspects of this position constantly intrigue me," Irving adds.

The Bureau of Environmental Services handles the City's sewage and wastewater treatment system. Irving is responsible for planning and implementing the Bureau's publicity and community relations program. The technical aspect of the job involves Irving breaking down engineering jargon and concepts into laymen's terms that the general public will understand.

"Each day is different," Irving explains. "One day I can be sitting at my desk with the phone stuck to my ear for eight hours and the next writing brochures for one of our divisions. No matter how I plan my calendar, some-

thing always comes up at the last minute so whatever else is on my schedule for that day must be set aside."

It's not uncommon for Irving's day to begin at 8 in the morning and end at 8 in the evening. "Sometimes I have lunch delivered to my office or skip lunch altogether," she says.

How does she balance a demanding job with the equally demanding job of being a mother?

"It's not easy," Irving says with a soft laugh. "I do a lot of bribing." She has a son Sam, 11, and a daughter Shalon, 8. Irving's son Simone Marcus was killed in a tragic car accident two years ago at age 20 months. "I just hope Sam and Shalon will grow up to be independent thinkers and be all they can be. I tell them daily how important education is and that if they want something, all they have to do is set their mind to that goal and work hard."

When she's not enjoying time spent with her children, Irving is active with a variety of community groups. She is a commissioner for the Cable Regulatory Commission and a member of the North/Northeast Business Boosters, an organization dedicated to renovating inner city businesses.

When asked who her heroine is and who she tries to pattern her life after, Irving replies, "I can't think of anyone besides maybe my mom. At the same time that's sort of a dichotomous answer for me because my mother always told me 'not to walk in anyone's shadow.' She would say 'You stand tall and let someone else walk in yours.'"

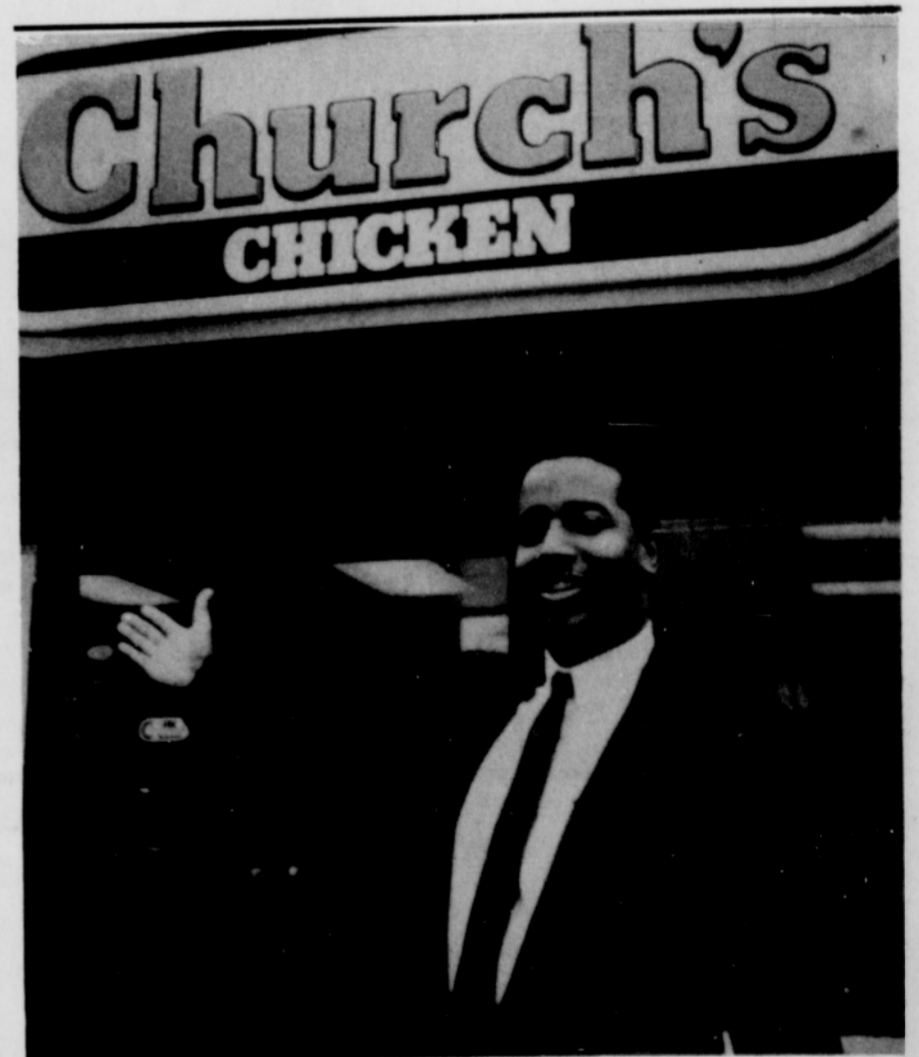
Irving's a fighter and a determined woman. She's overcome tragedy and great odds in her life and still maintains a positive outlook. The innate drive Irving possesses she attributes to her mother.

"She said if you get knocked down, you get right back up again," Irving recalls. "And I've been knocked down many, many times. I just keep getting back up."

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Minority Business Enterprise

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ENTREPRENEUR ERIC L. HOLOMAN, 28, used management training and savvy to turn an ailing Church's Chicken franchise into a profitable venture.

During the recently held National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's 53rd Annual Convention (NANBPW) in Washington, D.C., William Richardson (right), Vice President/Urban Market Development of Schieffelin & Somerset, is shown making a contribution to the NANBPW Scholarship Fund via National President Jacqui Gates (left).

Schieffelin & Somerset Company is the sole importer of Johnnie Walker Scotch Whiskies, Moet & Chandon Champagnes, Hennessy Cognacs and Tangueray Gin.