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# OPINION

## A Passionate Leader Who Inspired Others

The legacy of Charles Washington will live on

BY MINDY COOPER

The first time I met Charles Washington, I had longed to see his face and talk to him about a job. I had moved to Portland and on a whim one day, I picked up the Portland Observer, the most prevalent newspaper within my new northeast neighborhood.

I had just graduated with a degree in both journalism and anthropology, and all I knew was that I wanted to work for a publication which held integrity at its core. So as soon as I walked through the doors of the Portland Observer office on Martin Luther King Boulevard, instantly I knew I'd found one of these rarities—and I persisted until I met with the “boss” face to face.

I didn't know who or what kind of people rest within the office walls. But in the lobby, I could see a picture of a glowing middle-aged black woman, whose smile was one certainly intended for all to see when visiting the office, soon to become my home for nearly two years.

I learned the woman's name as Joyce Washington, the beloved and respected mother and community

champion for change. Of the small, yet hard-working staff, her sons had become an integral part of the newspaper that worked tirelessly to ensure the voices of individuals throughout the community continued after her death, and Chuck was the leader of the fight.

Charles “Chuck” Washington, publisher, boss, family man, and friend, will always go down in my history as the epitome of what it means to be a ‘heart man’. The impact he had on my life will never cease to be remembered, and I will carry his passions and beliefs for a better tomorrow, for a community he truly loved and cared for, everywhere I go.

Though he knew there would be a point in the future, when I needed to experience a new path, looking back on all of our conversations, I truly believe he was much more of a visionary than anyone could ever know. He let those in his presence fill in their own conclusions, and independent thought was valued within his conversations. Still, his mission to bring more equity to the community was one topic he never



Charles Washington

had a lack of words to express.

To me, Chuck was a true wordsman. His sentences, and often time rants, always emphasized the inevitability of change, and the importance of carrying what you learn with you and sharing your experiences.

When I decided I needed a change in my life, he encouraged and supported my decision to find whatever it was that I was looking for. He always inspired those around

him to be at their fullest potential, and I know I am truly blessed to have been a part of his world. “Wherever you go, don't forget about us,” he would say.

He certainly taught me to be a stronger journalist, and through this, a more resilient woman. Chuck had a way to make you feel like when you care you become a part of something extremely important.

While at the paper, Chuck would say he wanted the hard and meaningful news to be publicized. Frustrated with the media today, which doesn't always highlight the difficult truths of the city, he wanted people to like what they read every week, but most of all, he wanted the paper to stand for something.

Chuck strived for honest and good press about the African-American and minority populations.

He strove to inspire those around him to keep their passions alive, while simultaneously harnessing what it is they truly feel strongly about.

Chuck was always looking out and beyond the current state of how our society worked, and he

never stopped seeing what life could be. He supported those around him, and at the same time inspired individuals to grow their own wings. He believed in community, and no matter how hard days became, he never seemed to stop believing in its potential to be great.

He carried a lot of responsibility. To this day, I will never actually know how much work goes into being a publisher of a family-run, independent newspaper dedicated to minority voice, in a time when money is hard to find. I can only hope he was as proud of the work being done in the office as I am. I am truly honored to have known him.

But his legacy will live on. He taught me this; to always remember what is important and the experiences you live, and carry these lessons and stories with us wherever we go. Chuck, you gave me so much. Thank you for changing my life. You will always be truly missed by all those who knew you.

Mindy Cooper is a recent reporter for the Portland Observer who continues on her path in journalism.

## Dear God! When Will it Stop?

Stand up, speak out and organize

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

The horrendous news from Newtown, Conn. has pierced our hearts. A black-clad man in his 20s with semi-automatic guns made an elementary school for kindergartners through fourth graders the scene of the worst mass shooting in a public school in American history. Twenty children were shot and killed. Seven adults were shot and killed. Dozens of parents are experiencing the worst nightmare any parent could imagine. More than 500 young children in the school are traumatized.

Once again we are faced with unspeakable horror from gun violence and once again we are reminded that there is no safe harbor for our children. How young do the victims have to be and how many children need to die before we stop the proliferation of guns in our nation and the killing of innocents?



The most recent statistics reveal 2,694 children and teens were killed by gunfire in 2010; 1,773 of them were victims of homicide and 67 of these were elementary school-age children. If those children and teens were still alive they would fill 108 classrooms of 25 each.

Since 1979 when gun death data were first collected by age, a shocking 119,079 children and teens have been killed by gun violence. That is more child deaths in America than American battle deaths in World War I (53,402) or in Vietnam (47,434) or in the Korean War (33,739) or in the Iraq War (3,517). Where is our anti-war movement to protect children from pervasive gun violence here at home?

This slaughter of innocents happens because we protect guns, before children and other human beings. Our hearts and prayers go out to the parents and teachers and children and the entire Newtown community that has been ripped apart by each bullet shot this morning. We know the community will never be the same. The Newtown families who lost children will never be the same. The families of the

teachers who were killed will never be the same. Every child at the Sandy Hook Elementary School will never be the same.

Each and all of us must do more to stop this intolerable and wanton epidemic of gun violence and demand that our political leaders do more. We can't just talk about it after every mass shooting and then do nothing until the next mass shooting when we profess shock and talk about it again.

The latest terrible tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary is no fluke. It is a result of the senseless, immoral neglect of all of us as a nation to protect children instead of guns and to speak out against the pervasive culture of violence and proliferation of guns in our nation. It is up to us to stop these preventable tragedies.

We have so much work to do to build safe communities for our children and need leaders at all levels of government who will stand up against the NRA and for every child's right to live and learn free of gun violence. But that will not happen until mothers and grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers, sis-

ters and brothers, aunts and uncles, and neighbors and faith leaders and everybody who believes that children have a right to grow up safely stand up together and make a mighty ruckus as long as necessary to break the gun lobby's veto on common sense gun policy.

Our laws and not the NRA must control who can obtain firearms. It is way past time to demand enactment of federal gun safety measures, including ending the gun show loophole that allows private dealers to sell guns without a license and avoid required background checks.

We must reinstate the assault weapons ban that expired in 2004, and require consumer safety standards for all guns.

Why in the world do we regulate teddy bears and toy guns and not real guns that have snuffed out tens of thousands of child lives? Why are leaders capitulating to the powerful gun lobby over the rights of children and all people to life and safety?

I hope these shocking Connecticut child sacrifices in this holy season will force enough of us at last to

stand up, speak out, and organize with urgency and persistence until the president, members of Congress, governors and state legislators put child safety ahead of political expediency.

We must aspire and act together to become the world leader in protecting children against gun violence rather than leading the world in child victims of guns. Every child's life is sacred and it is long past time that we protect all our children.

Albert Camus, Nobel Laureate, speaking at a Dominican monastery in 1948 said: “Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children.” He described our responsibility as human beings “if not to reduce evil, at least not to add to it” and “to refuse to consent to conditions which torture innocents.”

It is time for a critical mass of Americans to refuse to consent to the killing of children by gun violence.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.