

MONICA CHERTOK #1564



Winnipeg’s First Black Female Police Officer

By Monica Chertok with John Burchill, Vice President, Winnipeg Police Museum, and James Ham

Monica Chertok (nee Naherny, Stothers) was born in Jamaica, immigrating to Canada at a young age. She grew up in Transcona. After attending Murdoch Mackay Collegiate, she joined the Winnipeg Police Service on February 1, 1988. At the age of 20, she became the first black female officer to join the Winnipeg Police.

Monica became interested in law enforcement from watching the original Charlie’s Angels TV series that ran from 1976-1981. She found it inspiring and fascinating that these women were smart, beautiful and tough enough to be detectives. She learned from watching the “Angels” that women were just as capable as men at investigating crime and catching the ‘bad guys.’ Looking back at it now, she finds it amusing that she was so enamoured by the show and how much she got into it by role-play the different lead characters. She would pretend to be one of the detectives investigating and breaking a case open.

While none of the “Angels” were black [in fact, there wouldn’t be a black Angel until the short-lived reboot of the series in 2011 and last year’s movie remake], Monica noted that role models come in all colours, shapes and sizes. What she saw in the show were “women” doing something important. Something that as a woman, she could do too.

Her childhood dream became a reality when she learned that the Winnipeg Police was making it a priority to better reflect the community by hiring more visible minorities. It was time for a change, and she wanted to be part of that change. She gives credit to Wade Williams, a well-known

I first got to know Monica, at least of her, in early 1988 as our Recruit Classes overlapped at the old William Russell School on Monterey Road in Windsor Park. The school, which served as the Winnipeg Police Academy at the time, is now home to the Louis Riel School Division Resource Centre. Our career paths would never really cross again, however Monica was always in the public eye from her work in Community Relations to the Public Information Office.

I greatly appreciate the time that Monica took to speak with me for this article about her life and career, both before and after policing.

John Burchill

Winnipeg activist who fought for racial equality in the hiring of visible minorities to all levels of government in Manitoba. She knew that with her passion, tenacity, and drive, becoming a police officer was a real possibility. She learned there were no black female officers employed by the Winnipeg Police at the time as she had done her own “investigation.” She found out that if she were hired, she would be the first. Applying was both a challenge and an opportunity.

Monica was also a single mother to a one and a half-year-old son. With the support of family and friends, she would make it work. She arranged for a private daycare for her son while she was in recruit class, and at night she juggled parenting and studying. Her best friend Pearlene (who was dating and later married future police chief Devon Clunis) would help her prepare for exams by quizzing her, and would also shine her police boots to help alleviate just one of the extra duties she faced while studying and looking after her son. Even with the added challenges, Monica successfully graduated from the Winnipeg Police Academy on September 16, 1988.

Monica’s first assignment was in Division 11, Winnipeg’s downtown division, as a foot patrol officer before moving into a regular patrol car. Following her tenure downtown, she was transferred to another busy district, followed by an assignment within the new community policing model, where she could focus on longer-term causes of crime, including the unintended consequences of poverty, addiction, homelessness and mental health.

After community policing, Monica joined the Community Relations Unit, where she became a



Winnipeg Police Recruit Class 110, graduation day, September 16, 1988

Inset: Former Winnipeg Police Academy, Monterey Road in Windsor Park, c 1999 by John Burchill

school resource officer, responsible for 52 schools. She also served as one of the Service’s diversity officers, where she represented the Service at many community events such as recruitment symposiums and outreach forums.

Monica was subsequently promoted to the rank of patrol sergeant, where she was responsible for about 27 subordinate police constables and civilian support staff. The Winnipeg Police Executive, impressed with her organizational skills, transferred her to Organizational Development and Support (ODS), the Service’s policy and planning division. There she was charged with completing the Service’s effort to become re-accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).

“I enjoyed my time in ODS,” she says. “I remember when the posting was published for the position of Accreditation Manager and Audit Supervisor (accreditation status is



Patrol Sergeant Monica Stothers (as she then was), Public Information Officer, c 2012

conferred to deserving agencies by CALEA), I looked at it for about a second and deleted it. However, it was my good friend Devon, who contacted me and told me I should apply for the position. He told me working in ODS would give me a wonderful birds-eye view of the entire Service, which would be very helpful for me in understanding how the Service operated”.

Having a good grasp and knowledge of the Service would put Monica in a better position to compete for further promotions. So she took Devon’s advice and applied for the post. After a number of interviews, she was the successful candidate. During this assignment, she learned how to write routine and general orders with a clear understanding for the readers. It was, she says, *“a challenging position because the job was, in essence, one where the manager ‘policed the police’ by ensuring the Service complied with the policing standards set by CALEA.”* No police member ever wanted to hear from her she says, *“because if I was calling, that meant I was asking for them to do something or provide*



Governor General of Canada, Police Exemplary Service Medal

documents proving their division was complying with CALEA standards.” She loved the job with all its challenges. “I am proud that our team worked to ensure we achieved re-accreditation with one of the smoothest ‘re-accredits’ since the Service earned initial accreditation.”

In 2008, after completing 20-years of service with the Winnipeg Police, Monica was awarded the Police Exemplary Service Medal by the Governor General of Canada. The award, created on August 12, 1983, recognizes police officers who have served in an exemplary manner, characterized by good conduct, industry and efficiency.

After the successful re-accreditation of the Service, Monica transferred to the Public Information Unit. There, she served as a public information officer (PIO). In that role, she represented the Service to the public, liaising with all the major media outlets, from print to radio to television. She remained in this position until her retirement in May 2013.

Today Monica resides in Satellite Beach, Florida, with her husband Alan, a retired police officer. Alan worked for 11 law enforcement agencies, in all the ranks from patrol officer to chief. After retirement, Alan worked as a law enforcement consultant in the U.S., Central America, the Caribbean Basin and Africa. Outside law enforcement, he practiced law and served in the U.S. Navy Reserve for some 26 years, retiring from there as well.

Monica and Alan jointly consult with U.S. police agencies by writing promotion examinations for officers. She also works as a licensed Florida Realtor® and holds an associates’ degree in public relations.

While she enjoys living in Florida, Monica reminds me that she misses Winnipeg and all the fantastic friendships she made while growing up here. She tries to return as often as possible.