
VICTORIA HAZELL

Winnipeg Police's First Black Staff Member

*By Victoria Hazell with John Burchill
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Victoria (“Vicky”) Hazell was born in Aruba, an island in the Caribbean Sea, north of the Venezuelan peninsula of Paraguaná and Northwest of Curaçao. Her parents were small farmers who had immigrated to Aruba from Grenada for economic reasons.

Aruba is one of the four countries that make up the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It is a flat riverless island, so much of the drinking water is obtained by desalinating sea water. The island is relatively dry with consistently fine weather. Services form the basis of the Aruban economy, primarily tourism. The long stretches of white sandy beaches, clear water and warm climate attract tourists.

The official languages in Aruba are Dutch and Papiamentu, a creole language that evolved mainly from Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch. English and Spanish are widely used but Dutch is the language of instruction.

The local Arubians speak Papiamentu or Spanish. While Victoria spoke English at home, at school she spoke and was taught in Dutch. Today the only language Victoria speaks is English, having forgotten the other two with the passage of time and lack of use.

When she was about nine Victoria’s parents returned to Grenada, a British colony at the time (now an independent country within the British Commonwealth). Grenada is also known as the “*Isle of Spice*” because of the abundance of spices that it produces – nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, as well as cacao. Grenada actually consists of three islands – Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique. Grenada is the Southernmost island of the North-South arc of the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean Sea, about 100 miles North of Venezuela.

The warm climate, adequate rainfall and rich volcanic soil is conducive to a long growing season. Tourism is very important to the island’s economy.

Most of the population in Grenada is black, having descended from African slaves, and there is a large minority of mulattoes and other mixtures. There are also small minorities of East Indians, descendants of indentured labourers brought to replace the freed slaves; descendants of the old French and British settlers; and more-recent immigrants from North America and Europe.

Victoria went to elementary and high school in Grenada, then later to the University of Winnipeg. Part of the Canadian government's aid to the island at the time was giving scholarships to go to a specific university in Canada. Victoria was granted a scholarship to go to the University of Winnipeg, where she majored in Geography and minored in English and Anthropology. At the time Victoria recalls the black community in Winnipeg was very, very small, with the majority being foreign students from the Caribbean and Africa.

In fact, very few Caribbean-born immigrants arrived in Canada before 1966. Of the 749,155 Canadians reported to have Caribbean origins in the last (2016) federal census, the vast majority did not immigrate to Canada until after 1971 when prime minister Pierre Trudeau initiated his multiculturalism policy.

Prior to 1962 Canada had imposed strict limitations on non-European immigration. In 1962, Canada introduced new immigration regulations (1962 Immigration Act), which reduced the emphasis of people migrating to Canada based on the colour of their skin or their nationality and increased the emphasis on their education and skills. In 1967, Canada further implemented a points system. Between 1968 and 1973 landed immigrant status in Canada could be obtained by applicants who had been admitted as visitors.

Immigration from the Caribbean reached a peak in the mid-1970s. In addition to those admitted directly from abroad as 'landed immigrants', there were others who came initially on student or visitors' visas and who applied for permanent resident status after arrival. Landed immigrants from the Caribbean (including Bermuda and Guyana) represented more than ten per cent of the total number of landed immigrants between 1973 and 1978, but the proportion had fallen to 6% by 1980. The majority of Caribbean immigrants gravitated toward Ontario (67.6%) and Quebec (21.8%), while only 10.6% lived outside these two Provinces.

At the time the black Caribbean community in Winnipeg was very small. In fact, between 1965 and 1979 only 3,135 Grenadians immigrated to all of Canada with most choosing to settle in Ontario. In 1971 the federal census had no detailed breakdown of West Indians living in Manitoba as there was ten years later. The census of 1981 showed that there were about 4,330 West Indians living in Manitoba – 1,560 from Trinidad and Tobago; 1,390 from Jamaica; 810 from Guyana and 570 from the other islands whose respective numbers were not substantial enough to have them classified separately.¹

After graduating from the University of Winnipeg, Victoria returned to Grenada, married and had a daughter before returning to Canada with her family in 1974 for better opportunities (she had two sons born in Winnipeg after her return and has two grandchildren now as well). She subsequently applied for a job at the City of Winnipeg and was placed at the Winnipeg Police Department on August 18, 1975, becoming the first black member of the Winnipeg Police, hired just a few months before Allan Mayes became the first black police officer.

¹ Both terms (West Indies and the Caribbean) can be synonymous although technically "the West Indies" refers to the various islands that comprise the Greater and Lesser Antilles (especially the latter) while "the Caribbean" includes only those countries whose shoreline borders the Caribbean Sea. Atlantic island nations such as Trinidad and Tobago and Bermuda, both of which are geographically separated from the Caribbean Sea are culturally related to the peoples of the Caribbean. Today there are about 65,000 individuals of Grenadian heritage dispersed across Canada with Ontario and Quebec being their prime residence.

Victoria worked in the Records Department, Vice for a few weeks, Traffic and Finance, then back to Records where she remained until her retirement on May 28, 2016, after nearly 41 years of service to the citizens of Winnipeg. She tells me that working for the police department was a great experience. She met many people of different backgrounds and made life long friends with whom she still keeps in touch.

Former Police Chief, Devon Clunis, who also immigrated to Winnipeg from the Caribbean tells me that *“Vicky was very serious but with a warm disposition. I always enjoyed speaking with her. She was dedicated to her work and a positive influence in the workplace”*. Former Deputy Chief Joe Gallagher, echoed those sentiments saying *“she was serious about her work, but always had a friendly demeanor and met everyone she dealt with, with a smile”*.

Today, 13% of the Winnipeg Police Service staff component and 8% of the police component identify as being a visible minority. Forty different languages are spoken and nearly 400 members identify as being multilingual.

In support of Black History Month (and Valentines Day), we recognize Victoria Hazell today for her contribution to her community and the Winnipeg Police Service.



Celebrating 40-years with the Winnipeg Police on August 28, 2015.
Victoria with Police Chief Devon Clunis (who also immigrated to Winnipeg from the Caribbean).