



## JOYCE M. DAVIS JOURNEY FROM NEW ORLEANS TO WITF

By Mikell Worley

“Spicy! It’s just spicy!” Joyce M. Davis exclaims as she describes her hometown. “My community was very diverse. I was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. We had the cultures of France and Spain as well as the dominant African-American and European cultures, the Creole and Cajun.” She continues, “I lived on Gravier Street in the heart of the city and it was resplendent with culture, from the variations in styles of music to flavors of the foods.”

Joyce now lives in Harrisburg with her husband and 14-year-old son. They were drawn to this area by an interest in being part of the community and by the stellar reputation of WITF, Inc., a public media center in Pennsylvania. She is currently the senior vice president of content at the renowned institution, where she oversees the PBS station WITF TV, as well as WITF FM, a National Public Radio (NPR) and Public Radio International (PRI) affiliate. This Louisiana native also super-

vises WITF’s Internet site, [witf.org](http://witf.org), and *Central PA*, its monthly culture and current affairs magazine. Her experiences as a foreign correspondent, editor, and acknowledged expert on political Islam and terrorism bring a new perspective to the critical need for educational programs that are current, global, and unbiased.

The journey from New Orleans to Harrisburg evolved slowly as Joyce’s interests and talents in journalism developed. Joyce’s passion for truth, commitment to justice, and authenticity were the values that drove her forward. Early in her career Joyce frequently found herself at the center of global news events and present for a number of international developments. It didn’t take long for her to garner international attention and respect. It didn’t hurt her career that she is also fluent in several foreign languages including French, Spanish, Czech, Modern Greek, German, Arabic, and Farsi.



Joyce's career in journalism began at the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* when she was a college student in 1972. She had every intention of staying with that periodical for the remainder of her career. Yet after 18 years, in 1990, she realized that God had other plans. Initially, she had written columns about tourist attractions, food, and the lighter side of travel, but later her articles began to address more serious issues. She interviewed world leaders including Yasser Arafat, then head of the Palestine Liberation Organization 1989, at his headquarters in exile in Tunisia. Her work caught the attention of NPR a year later and they recruited her to lead their coverage of the Middle East. "At that time, pre-1990s, NPR was an alternative news source – funky with a different perspective," she notes.

For seven years Joyce worked for NPR, based in Washington, D.C., where she was the lead editor for the organization's coverage of the Middle East and Africa, spearheading its acclaimed coverage of the first Persian Gulf War. In 1993 she was promoted to deputy foreign editor, and later served as senior foreign editor and director of news staffing. She traveled extensively and became an authoritative voice for the events of the Middle East. Joyce's dedication to authentic journalism was in-

strumental in NPR's evolution into a respected major news source. Policy makers and politicians began to refer to NPR for accurate and current information. Other listeners followed suit and NPR is now considered equally credible with the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

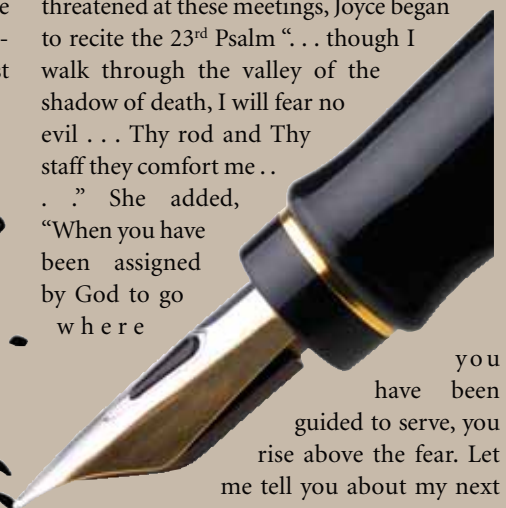
Knight-Ridder Newspapers, Inc., then the nation's second largest newspaper organization and owner of more than 30 of the most respected newspapers across the country including the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Miami Herald*, *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, and the *Detroit Free Press*, hired Joyce in 1997 as deputy foreign editor. In that position she supervised foreign reports and staff, assigned and edited reports, and oversaw the budget of the foreign bureaus as well as writing and editing special projects.

In addition to her journalism career, Joyce is the author of two books. Her first *Between Jihad (War) and Salaam (Peace): Profiles in Islam* (1997) is a collection of interviews

with more than a dozen Muslim leaders. Joyce obtained these interviews by building trust through her reputation as a fair and honest journalist. The interviews were conducted in 1993 and 1994 when few Westerners had access to leaders in the Middle East.

When I asked if she ever felt personally threatened at these meetings, Joyce began to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm ". . . though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil . . . Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me . . ." She added, "When you have been assigned by God to go where

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you have been guided to serve, you rise above the fear. Let me tell you about my next book, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance and Despair in the Middle East* (2003). For this book I visited refugee camps in Lebanon to speak directly with terrorists."

*Martyrs* is an attempt to understand the rationale of suicide bombers. "In addition



to interviewing terrorists, I spoke with the mothers of those who had lost their lives as suicide bombers, and those who planned to eventually participate,” Joyce recalls. *Martyrs* was written in 2001, right after the September 11 bombings of the World Trade Center in New York City, and before she left the United States to become the associate director of broadcasting for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Prague, capital of the Czech Republic. There she supervised American-funded radio, television, and Internet services to the hottest spots in the Muslim world.

This was Joyce’s last stop before coming to Harrisburg. As associate director of broadcasting she was directly responsible for the management of personnel, budgets, and programming for broadcast services to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, North Caucasus, and Central Asia. This gave her yet another opportunity to observe diversity up close. “As an African-American woman I was a humbled person on our globe. But when I entered the room in Afghanistan, because of respect for my position, everyone stood, smiled, and bowed. The Iranians were not so demonstrative. I realized that it was more about culture than about me. It didn’t mean that the Iranians had less respect,” she adds, “but that as a part of their culture they did not demonstrate it in the same way.

“All over the world people are fighting for dignity, survival and freedom. There are issues being played out in many different ways,” Joyce comments, “we have tools to fight for our rights in the United States but those tools are not available to everyone throughout the world. It opened my eyes to a different perspective.”

Clearly truth, dedication to journalism, and the opportunity for all people to have an equal access to unbiased information form the basis of Joyce’s career. Those principals ultimately led her to WITF, Inc., and to Central Pennsylvania. The station’s tag line “Trusted Information” could well be used to describe the guiding force in Joyce’s life work.

“We at WITF are facing a very real threat right now. If government continues in its current direction, our budget will be cut by \$900,000. This could be disastrous. Programs such as *Sesame Street*, which encourage equality, integrity, and respect for people of difference are threatened.” Joyce adds sadly, “This will have the greatest effect on those who don’t have the money to send their children to programs that will instill these values.”

WITF’s service to you is at risk. Please go to [witf.org](http://witf.org) to find out why and what you can do. As an advocate for WITF you can join Joyce Davis in her commitment to trusted information, a privilege we cannot afford to lose. ❀



Mikell Worley is the founder and president of Mikell’s Treasures. She has spent more than 20 years designing and delivering self-improvement trainings, has had several cover stories in various magazines, and recently illustrated her first children’s book. She is an advocate for women and children.