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THE PHILADELPHIA SUNDAY

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SUN

***A Perfect
Balancing
Act***

**Former Philadelphia
City Councilmember
Blondell Reynolds Brown's
memoir "Walking a Tightrope
Backwards in High Heels"
chronicles her journey
through both the competitive
world of the arts and the
minefield of local politics.**

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'Walking a Tightrope Backwards in High Heels' -- a memoir

By Constance Garcia-Barrio

Former Philadelphia City Councilmember Blondell Reynolds-Brown's memoir, "Walking a Tightrope Backwards in High Heels" (Wordee Publishing), sketches her early years and centers on her work in the sometimes bruising arena of City Hall politics. With a savvy that packs the pages, Reynolds-Brown could have called the book 'A Woman's Guide to Grace Under Fire.'

"Women can lead in spaces where others may not envision us, but the double standard that exists for women in general is intensified for Black and Latinx women elected officials," Reynolds-Brown said in an interview.

Born in Sumter, South Carolina, Reynolds-Brown, at age 5, moved with her family to Philadelphia's old Black Bottom, an area that once stretched from 33rd St. to 40th St., and from Lancaster Avenue to University Avenue. Reynolds-Brown's father, who worked in construction, and her mother, a teacher, had seven children, of whom Blondell is oldest. The family managed with slim financial resources but possessed a wealth of faith and belief in hard work. Those values proved crucial after Reynolds-Brown's mother became a widow at 37.



Blondell with her mother 'Nana' Sadie Reynolds and her daughter, Brielle Autumn Brown, Esq.

Photo courtesy: Blondell Reynolds-Brown

"My grandparents were farmers who instilled in their children the merit of hard work and perseverance," Reynolds-Brown said, adding that her mother used to speak of "eating organic" long before Madison Av-

enue's ad men hijacked the phrase.

Reynolds-Brown recalled other special moments from her formative years.

"One of my favorite childhood memories is walking from home to the Zoo," she said, "And every New Year's Eve, my mother would require us to kneel around her bed while she prayed for us."

On Saturday nights, the family would watch "The Lawrence Welk Show," whose dancers dazzled Reynolds-Brown. At 16, while a student at the Philadelphia High School for Girls, Reynolds-Brown began working at a Gino's restaurant to pay for her dancing classes.

"It was very, very late to start training as a dancer," she said, but the investment paid off. During her junior year at Penn State, where she majored in elementary education and eventually earned a master's degree in that field, Reynolds-Brown was invited to audition for the university's Jazz Dance Theatre.

Performing in that group proved a steppingstone, after graduation, to Philadanco.

"I danced with the company for about 7 years," said Reynolds-Brown, who also sparkled on stage in Atlantic City casinos. She segued into teaching in Philly's public elementary schools in 1985.

In the mid-1990s, Reynolds-Brown remade her life.

"I got married, bought a house, and had a baby," she said.

Then she used the poise and patience gained in performing and teaching to catapult herself into politics.

"On February 11, 1995, I announced my candidacy at a standing-room-only gathering at . . . District Council 1199C," she writes.

That first campaign resulted in a narrow loss. Reynolds-Brown learned lessons from that defeat and won five subsequent elections. She would go on to serve on City Council for 20 years.

The memoir describes candidly the nuts and bolts of running for elected office.

"Money is the mother's milk of campaigns," Reynolds-Brown writes. "You can't run a campaign and raise funds at the same time. You have to have a solid team of professionals with you."

The memoir encourages potential political candidates but cautions them that campaigning exacts its pound of flesh in grueling work.



Blondell Reynolds-Brown at two years old.

Photo courtesy: Blondell Reynolds-Brown

"There is no smooth runway if you are an African American or Latinx woman," Reynolds-Brown said.

Smarts, allies, and intuition remained critical after winning, Reynolds-Brown writes. During her freshman year, she learned "... whom to trust, [and] which council members would take advantage of novice legislators."

Conflict comes with the territory. "Opposition is part of the legislative process," she writes. "Expect it. Embrace it."

Years of teaching had given Reynolds-



REYNOLDS-BROWN WITH HER SISTERS at City Hall (from left to right) Angelina, Alesia, Blondell, Yvonne and Pandora.

Photo courtesy: Blondell Reynolds-Brown

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Pennsylvania AG Dave Sunday announces takedown of large-scale cocaine trafficking enterprise in Philadelphia



ATTORNEY GENERAL DAVE SUNDAY and law enforcement partners discuss charges against numerous members of an upper-level cocaine/crack cocaine-trafficking enterprise that operated primarily in Philadelphia, with extensions to surrounding counties, September 5, 2025.
(Photo/pa.gov)

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. — Pennsylvania Attorney General Dave Sunday and law enforcement partners announced charges last Friday against numerous individuals, along with seizures this week of drugs and firearms connected to a high-level cocaine/crack cocaine trafficking organization that operated primarily in north Philadelphia.

Among those charged are Jimmie Torres, the alleged leader of the organization, and his son, Matthew Torres, who oversaw the enterprise when his father was at his home in Puerto Rico.

Last week, the Office of Attorney General charged 21 individuals, and, along with partners from Philadelphia, Bucks, and Mont-

gomery counties, executed numerous search warrants on cellphones and at residences and vehicles.

Sixteen individuals were arrested last Thursday at various locations in the Philadelphia area. All have been arraigned — bail was set between \$1 million and \$5 million.

Investigators seized 12 kilograms of cocaine and 50 pounds of marijuana, as well as 19 firearms, some which were possessed illegally due to prior felony convictions. The firearms were connected — all of them, allegedly, were tied to the criminal activities of this organization.

Investigators also seized approximately \$275,000 cash in alleged proceeds from

criminal activity.

“A high-level, drug-trafficking organization in Philadelphia was crippled this week with arrests and seizures of narcotics and illegally possessed firearms — the roundup a culmination of a long-term, sophisticated investigation,” Sunday said. “This highly profitable criminal organization operated not unlike a factory assembly line with each member having their designated roles. This illegal trade was an all-hours operation with dealers on the street every day and night.”

“This is a case study in how law enforcement collaboration should work,” said Philadelphia Police Department Deputy Commissioner James Kelly.

“The takedown of the 5th and Cornwall Drug Trafficking Organization is proof that when we work together, we get the job done,” said Philadelphia Sheriff Rochelle Bilal. “Our residents deserve safe neighborhoods. Today, we showed that together anything is possible when the goal is protecting and serving all our communities.”

In addition to Jimmie Torres and Matthew Torres charged are: Johnny Bartolomey, Tomas Montanez, Nestor Diaz, Hector Diaz, Rolando Ortiz, Angel Pizarro, Steven Andino, Ruth Andino, Jose Ramos, Iris Inostroza-Torres, Kevin Cade, Miguel Ramirez, Hector Tanon, Raphael Castro, and Joshua DeJesus. Charged but not in custody are: Miguel Nazario, Myron Booker, Javier Rodriguez, and John Cade.

Assisting in the investigation and search and arrest efforts this week were: Bucks County District Attorney’s Office, Montgomery County District Attorney’s Office, Philadelphia Police Department, Philadelphia Sheriff’s Office, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, FBI, Homeland Security Investigations, Pennsylvania State Police, Bensalem Police Department, and Bristol Township Police Department, Liberty Mid-Atlantic HIDTA, and law enforcement partners in New Jersey.

The cases will be prosecuted by Deputy Attorney General Catherine Pirolli. Criminal charges, and any discussion thereof, are merely allegations and all defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

Memoir *continued from page 5*

Brown a keen sense of the needs of children, and the birth of her daughter, Brielle in 1996, sharpened it. As a new councilmember, Reynolds-Brown, with the support of then-Mayor John F. Street, brokered the deal during sports stadium negotiations in 2000 that established the Fund for Children. Thanks to that agreement, the Philadelphia Phillies and the Philadelphia Eagles donate \$1 million per year per team for 30 years to pay for children’s programs and activities.

Likewise, one of Brielle’s science courses led Reynolds-Brown to spearhead creating the Mayor’s Office of Sustainability, which works with partners to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Over the years, Reynolds-Brown has garnered awards from the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Philadelphia Young Playwrights Advocate Award, Girls Inc., WDAS Radio Women of Excellence Award, the School District of Philadelphia and more. Yet, as poet Langston Hughes put it, “Life ain’t no crystal stair.”

Reynolds-Brown’s divorce hit her hard.

“After a painful divorce, you learn to live a new norm,” she writes.

The memoir also covers the “major career firestorm” that resulted in a hefty fine from the city’s Board of Ethics.

The book shares some of Reynolds-Brown’s guideposts for navigating troubled times. She turns to quotations for insights. Readers find quotes like “Commitment . . . transforms a promise into reality,” from Abraham Lincoln, and “In the midst of winter, I found in me an invincible summer,” from French philosopher Albert Camus.

Books also help steer her through difficulty. Reynolds-Brown mentions works like “Getting to Yes, Negotiating Without Giving In,” by Roger Fisher and William Ury, and “Learning to Trust God,” by Deborah J. Kern.

The memoir also includes her personal playlist comprised of evocative songs like John Lennon’s “Imagine” and Alicia Keys’ “Girl on Fire.”

“You can endure during tough dark years,” Reynolds-Brown writes.

“Walking a Tightrope Backwards in High Heels” is available on Amazon, at independent bookstores, or through Reynolds-Brown’s website at: <https://www.moxiebrb.com/>.

Reynolds-Brown will give a free book talk and signing at the Central Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia on September 17. The event begins at 7 p.m. For more information, visit: <https://freelibrary-foundation.org/events/blondell-reynolds-brown-walking-a-tightrope-backwards-in-high-heels/>.