

# OF DALHOUSIE

# WOMENSIE

by Lara Morris

Mayann Francis has recently returned to Nova Scotia to become the Dalhousie University Employment Equity Officer. After

effectively with people in most difficult situations. My mother lived in my father's shadow. I said I'd never do that because I saw the effect this had on her when my father died. Part of her died with him and she lost

teacher, and activist, and was nominated to the Dalhousie Board of Governors in 1987.

"It knocked me off my feet, blew me out of the water. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be part of institutional policy makers or even the chorus, the Greek or Maritime chorus off to the side saying, 'No you can't do that' or 'Yes, do that, but do that more' or 'Change that' or 'No, don't change that' or 'Recognize this voice, this community...,'" she said.

Although she is still finding her full place on the Board, Tynes is very clear about who she represents. She says she becomes very impatient when other members of the Board do not understand her questioning of policies affecting accessibility of programs, or financial status of students.

"We don't seem to speak the same language very often. I tend to speak a language that is grounded in the realities of life, and the struggle for people who are often seen as non-traditional and traditionally excluded.

They (the Board) seem to speak in a language that is well-grounded in conservatism and traditionalism and 'let us not rock the boat' and 'let us err on the side of fear and caution here because there's all these new black and brown and feminist and tan and disabled and whatever else voices and faces around...,'" Tynes said.

Tynes insists that there are distinct differences between the minority community and the women's community, and that there are separate dialogues which must take place. However, she emphasizes that on closer inspection, much of those dialogues dovetail and much of the struggle for full accessibility is the same.

"I'm living this life as a black and female person so those agendas are right there front and centre with me. In terms of accessibility vis-a-vis those who are physically...and otherwise challenged, that's another hat I wear. Whole winters went by when I was a student on this campus when I could not attend class...," she said.

Maxine Tynes grew up in Dartmouth, and later commuted to school at Dalhousie. She dabbled in a wide range of subjects, and graduated with a degree in English. She then opted for education, and currently teaches literature to high school students.

"It's important to me that my students see me as more than a person who counts essays and tallies marks at the end of the term. I wear my ideology, my heart and soul openly for

trade.

Her second book, *Woman Talking Woman*, is more of a manifestation of Tynes' 'womanest' self.

"This book is clearly an amplification of a voice which is truer to this woman's life that I live and it's a real sharing. I feel that I write

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-Mayann Francis

spending 16 years in New York City, Francis says she is happy to be back home again.

As the person responsible for ensuring the implementation of employment equity legislation at Dalhousie, Francis has spent the first few months in her position familiarizing herself with the workings of Dalhousie. "I've been getting to know the campus, and telling people that I'm here. I want them to know who I am and why I'm here," she said.

Francis recognizes that employment equity may be met with some resistance. "People shouldn't be afraid of employment equity. It requires change and people have to be up front with how they feel about it. So far I've had a positive reception from people," Francis said.

Francis is not unfamiliar with breaking new ground. When in New York she was the one of the first Black women to be hired as a corporate paralegal by a mid-town Manhattan law firm. She feels that she contributed to opening the doors for other visible minorities to be hired also.

Now her goal is to change the face of the Dalhousie campus. "I'd like to see Dalhousie become a multi-racial campus," said Francis.

She believes employment equity is a step in the right direction and hopes it will be accompanied by attitudinal change as well. "There's more to it than getting the numbers. It's important that you hire members of the target groups who have the proper qualifications and not just anyone to fill a quota. If you don't hire quality people then you are just setting people up to fail and negative stereotypes will continue. You're also doing a disservice to the targeted groups (visible minorities, women and the disabled)," said Francis.

As a Black woman, Francis has experienced both sexism and racism. She says sometimes it's hard to separate the two. She finds that racism is more subtle here than in New York. "People do things like avoid looking at you or they're patronizing and condescending. Sometimes I think it's amusing. Now they have the problem and not me," said Francis.

Sexist and racist attitudes contribute to the pressure to succeed. "I want to do well as a woman and as a Black. I want to please my constituents and have a positive impact. The pressure is always more for a visible minority, but you just learn to live with it and do your best," said Francis.

Many people have influenced Francis throughout her life. "My father was a church minister and influential in the community in Sydney, Nova Scotia. He inspired me a whole lot and he had an ability to deal very

the will to move on," said Francis.

Professors and community leaders have also inspired Francis. People like Linda Christianson-Ruffman, a feminist professor



photo: Rochelle Owen

**Mayann Francis**

at Saint Mary's University, Barbara Jordan, a Black congresswoman, and Maxine Tynes, a Black poet and activist in Nova Scotia. "These women are fighters and pioneers," said Francis.

Looking to the future, Francis seeks new career challenges and may someday write about her experiences as a Black woman living in New York City.

by Munju Ravindra

"I know who I am.

I know how many hats I wear on this campus, where I've always been female, I have emerged from and still belong to the working poor community of this province; I've always been black; and I've always been disabled. So, all those doors of accessibility, -I represent people who are knocking on all of them and I'm still knocking on all of them."

Maxine Tynes is a poet, writer, high school

teacher, and activist, and was nominated to the Dalhousie Board of Governors in 1987.

voice that is not validated and not amplified. To have it matter that I am a Black and female person as a teacher in...(the high school). It's very difficult to be Black and female, to be disabled in that milieu. It's quite debilitating. It's important to me to turn all of those -isms around and there is not a lot of encouragement for remaining in the trenches and being a get-up, stand-up person."

**Maxine Tynes**

from a community of women, that's where my articulation begins and continues. I live through the landscape of women," she said.

A self-described feminist, Tynes does not separate her cultural ethnicity from her existence as a female person. Tynes remarked "I have to be a feminist, or be a dust mote in the air, but even then, I'd want to be a female dust mote and if there is any such thing as reincarnation, it will be such a dirty trick on me if I don't come back Black and female!"

Although she sometimes faces resistance to her politics, this has only served to strengthen her commitment to her goals.

"To not remain invisible. To not have a

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-Maxine Tynes



photo: Shirley Robb