

Accomplished business lawyer is also published novelist

By John Temple Ligon

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For the past dozen years Wilmot Irvin has been writing books, six altogether. He has sold more than a couple thousand copies. He constantly reads, mostly literature on a high plane, and he constantly criticizes his own work. After all, he publishes his own stuff through local resources.

Irvin is also a lawyer who represents his clients in matters of civil litigation—contracts, employment, business dealings.

And he is a father of four children— three adults and one toddler.

Irvin was born in the old Columbia Hospital at the corner of Hampton Street and Harden Street. His father was a cardiologist, and his mother was already looking after Irvin's brother Warren, three years older. The family lived on Pendleton Street near USC, and when Irvin was five, the Irvins moved to Berkeley Road near Trenholm Road.

After Heathwood Park Kindergarten, Schneider Elementary School, and Hand Middle School, Irvin took up tennis under Bill Ellis on the green-clay Rubico courts at Forest Lake Club. He worked at it hard enough to make the Dreher High School team, holding down the No. 2 slot for his last two years.

Enrolled as a freshman at USC with the intention to major in English, Irvin began to position himself early on to take full advantage of USC's English offerings. This was the era when America's Poet Laureate James Dickey was teaching at USC. Irvin especially wanted to study with Columbia's Dr. Bernie Dunlap, a Rhodes Scholar and a recognized authority on the Victorian poets. Dunlap today is president at Wofford, where Irvin sent two of his children to college.

Irvin graduated with his B.A. in English, but he stayed an extra semester to pursue a narrow intellectual interest, including music composition, as part of what was then called University Without Walls.

He then entered law school at USC and graduated with his J. D. three years later. He clerked for an associate justice, later chief justice in the S. C. Supreme Court, and he moved on to clerk for a former chief judge of the U.S. District Court.

Irvin married Jeannie Mitchell of Greenville. Their oldest child, Wilmot, is in property management in Atlanta. The middle child, Mary Brice, lives near Asheville in Fairview. And their youngest, Ruthie, is the mother of their one-year-old grandson, and she is married to a research molecular biologist in Charleston.

With a hurt knee Irvin can blame on both tennis and distance running, he had to shift to a different and non-impact form of exercise. He spins for extended periods of time on a regular schedule.

But what keeps him active now is hovering over his three- year- old daughter at their in-town home on Albion near Dreher and at their mountain retreat. The Irvins have a barn of a home in the Saluda Mountains

Having clerked for the two judges, one state and one federal, Irvin became a shareholder in the litigation section of the McNair Law Firm. In 1987, he left to co-found the law firm of Glenn Irvin Murphy Gray & Stepp. Ten years later, Irvin opened the Law Offices of Wilmot B. Irvin. At his law office, Irvin works with Rebecca Fulmer, who teaches at the Charleston School of Law. She serves as of counsel to the firm, and the two of them add support staff as needed, holding down overhead as needed.

While working for the two judges, Irvin learned to write in whatever style suited the requirements of legal language. By the late 1990s, when he had hung his own shingle, Irvin began to write fiction.

When he and his family lived on a small farm in Lower Richland, where he had access to a quiet basement study, perfectly suitable for writing.

After he had finished his first work of fiction, a short novel, Irvin wasn't altogether sure how to go about the publishing business. He happened to hear a Charlestonian named Schwaner on NPR who explained the print-forhire side of publishing. Irvin called Schwaner at his Charleston office and took off to see him.

Another big help in getting started in the book business was Happy Bookseller's Rhett Jackson, who sold Irvin's books before Happy Bookseller had to shut down. Irvin's most recent book-signing party, however, was in the Happy Cafe, a small space carved out of the former bookstore.

Irvin's current publishing associate is Columbia's Robert Lamb, author of *Atlanta Blues* and retired journalism professor. Lamb taught at both Clemson and USC. Lamb's business is the Red Letter Press.

Lamb did not publish Irvin's latest work of fiction, a novella called *Chronicle of the Life and Times of Fletcher Lowe*. Irvin published *Lowe* by himself, although Lamb wrote a glowing review. Said Lamb, "You've heard that good things come in small packages. Believe it. This little book of barely 100 pages packs a comedic wallop out of all proportion to its size and introduces readers to Fletcher Lowe, an unforgettable character—and 'character' is certainly the word. Fletcher Lowe—not Fletcher, never Fletch, but always the whole name—is the quintessential dingbat whose brand of lunacy challenges description. If you need a barrel of laughs in a tale well told, don't miss Wilmot Irvin's *Chronicle of the Life and Times of Fletcher Lowe*."