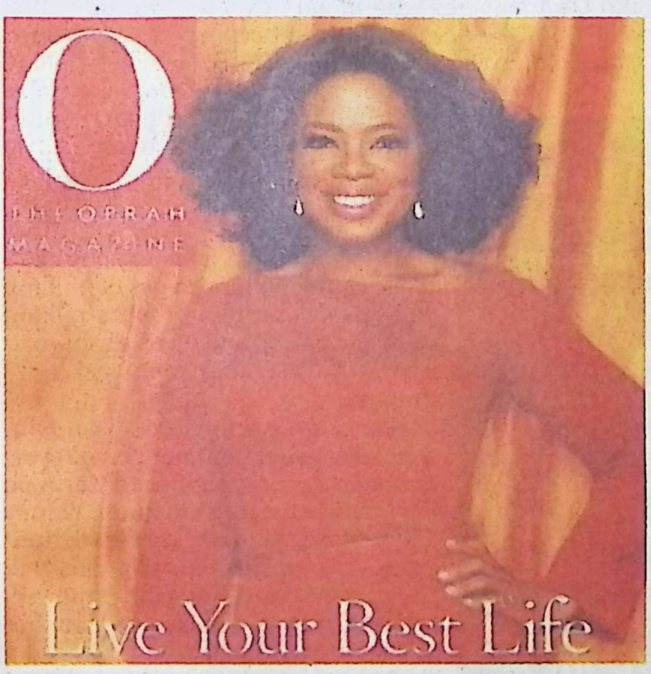
Oprah Winfrey: A Legend

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THROUGH the power of media, Oprah Winfrey has created an unparalleled connection with people around the world. As supervising producer and host of the top-rated, award-winning *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, she has entertained, enlightened and uplifted millions of viewers for the past two decades. Her accomplishments as a global media leader and philanthropist have established her as one of the most respected and admired public figures today.

Early Life:

Oprah Winfrey was born on January 29, 1954 in Kosciusko, Mississippi, to a Baptist family. She was originally named *Orpah* Gail Winfrey, after the Bible's Book of Ruth. There are conflicting reports as to how her name became "Oprah." According to a 1991 interview with the Academy of Achievement, Oprah said that when she was born, people didn't know how to pronounce "Orpah," so they put the "P" before the "R" in every place else *other* than the birth certificate. However, there is the account that the midwife transposed letters while filling out the newborn's birth certificate. Oprah's parents were unmarried teenagers. Her mother, Vernita Lee, was a housemaid, and her father, Vernon Winfrey, was a coal miner and later worked as a barber before becoming a city councilman. Winfrey's father was in the Armed Forces when she was born. After her birth, Winfrey's mother travelled north and Winfrey spent her first six years living in rural poverty with her Grandma Hattie Mae. Winfrey's grandmother taught her to read before the age of three and took her to the local church, where she was nicknamed "The Preacher" for her ability to recite Bible verses.At age six, Winfrey moved to an inner city ghetto in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with her mother, who was less supportive and encouraging than her grandmother. Winfrey has stated that she was molested by her cousin, uncle, and a family friend, starting when she was nine years old.



Despite her dysfunctional home life, Winfrey skipped two of her earliest grades, became the teacher's pet, and by the time she was 13 received a scholarship to attend Nicolet High School in the Milwaukee suburb of Glendale, Wisconsin. Although Winfrey was very popular, she couldn't afford to go out on the town as frequently as her better-off classmates. Like many teenagers at the end of the 1960s, Winfrey rebelled, ran away from home and ran the streets. When she was 14, she became pregnant, but lost the baby shortly after birth. Also at that age, her frustrated mother sent her to live with her father in Nashville, Tennessee. Vernon was strict, but encouraging and made her education a priority. Winfrey became an honors student, was voted Most Popular Girl, joined her high school speech team, and placed second in the nation in dramatic interpretation. She won an oratory contest, which secured her a full scholarship to Tennessee State University, a historically black institution, where she studied communication. At age 18, Winfrey won the Miss Blank Tennessee Beauty Pageant.

Winfrey's grandmother had said that ever since Winfrey could talk, she was on stage. In her youth she played games interviewing her corncob doll and the crows on the fence of her family's property. But her true media career began at age 17, when Winfrey worked at a local radio station while attending Tennessee State University. Working in local media, she was both the youngest news anchor and the first black female news anchor at Nashville's WLAC-TV. She moved to Baltimore's WJZ-TV in 1976 to co-anchor the six o'clock news. She was then recruited to join Richard Sher as co-host of WJZ's local talk show *People Are Talking*, which premiered on August 14, 1978. She also hosted the local version of *Dialing for Dollars* there as well.

Career and success

Television Pioneer:

In 1984, Oprah moved to Chicago to host WLS-TV's morning talk show, *AM Chicago*, which became the number one local talk showsurpassing ratings for *Donahue*just one month after she began. In less than a year, the show expanded to one hour and was renamed *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. It entered national syndication