

# CWIM LEADER SPOTLIGHT



**Maura Cunningham**

**Founder/CEO, Rock The Street, Wall Street**



## **WHY DO YOU SUPPORT COLLABORATIVE WIM?**

I admire those who take matters into their own hands to change “what is”. The women who started and participate in Collaborative WIM are change agents. I, too, was frustrated with the lack of improvement in the number of women coming into and staying in our industry. I decided to contravene, rather than continue to wait for the industry to change. Likewise, Collaborative WIM has also taken the bull by the horns and now has a global network of women and allies who are fomenting change in their communities and in their workplaces. It’s a beautiful thing.

## **SHARE WITH US A BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND.**

I was born and raised in the Bronx, NY. I knew I wanted to pursue a career on Wall Street when I first watched Wall Street Week with Louis Rukeyser on NPT in my teens. His array of guest panelists impressed me with how well informed they were about global hot spots and how most were related to finance. I came to better understand the statement “follow the money” - that governments and private institutions can create/cause/incentivize industrial and cultural change.

## WHAT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE HAS HAD THE BIGGEST IMPACT ON YOU?

Thirteen men in a conference room and me.

About the third year into my career on Wall Street, (age 26), I was empowered by the division chairman to conduct research on a fixed income financial product that had gone bad. The analysis included many interviews with traders from multiple firms up and down Wall Street. Given the complexity of the mathematical computations necessary to understand how the product functioned, many traders - all men - underestimated my comprehension. (Little did they know I was the only woman in my college math class.) I then presented my findings to the chairman and the top brass of my firm. Seated were six senior officers on either side of the conference table, along with the chairman at one end, and myself at the other. There were a lot of fireworks in the room as a result of my findings and in the end, I unscrambled the egg which resulted in significant changes to the department's bottom line. I was subsequently promoted to the firm's taxable fixed income trading desk. There, I continued my analysis of investment products as they (suddenly) came to appreciate my skills.

## **WHAT ARE PEOPLE MOST SURPRISED TO LEARN ABOUT YOU?**

People will be surprised to learn that I like to white water kayak. White water creeking and kayaking is an adventure sport that I've grown to love over the years. Rivers I have paddled include the Hiwassee, Ocoee, and the Nantahala.

## **WHAT ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT?**

Apart from RTSWS which controls my heart and brain, (outside of my family, of course) I am zealous about staying healthy and participating in sports as much as possible. I prioritize staying active by paddling, golfing, hiking, pickleball, gardening, and spending as much time outdoors as I can. I am passionate about the sanctity of nature and can foresee spending more of my time and effort in the near future helping to protect it.