

Interview Transcript: Jonathan Hayes and Michael Klindt

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Michael [00:00:00]

It's Michael K. Media here, West Springfield History Museum Illumination Project. Right now I'm talking with Jonathan Hayes. Jonathan, how you doing?

Jonathan [00:00:10]

Doing great. Doing great. Glad to be here.

Michael [00:00:12]

All right. Good to have you. So my first question would be just what is your personal or your family origin story for Springfield?

Jonathan [00:00:21]

Actually, my origin story for Springfield as far as my family is just me, coming out. I've been in this area for about seven years. I came here from Savannah, Georgia, originally from Greensboro, North Carolina. However, I wanted to come to the West Coast for a better professional opportunities and training and safety in my profession, which is a firefighter paramedic. And so I'm the first one. I didn't know anybody before I came here. So I'm kind of, you know, blazing the Oregon Trail is how I kind of joked about... Joked about it with my friends and family when I was coming out here. So I'm going to be the first one here, and then I'm trying to get my family to kind of come out here, come experience to the Pacific Northwest, too.

Michael [00:01:03]

Have you been able to connect with good people since you've been out here?

Jonathan [00:01:07]

Well, interestingly, I met a young lady when I came. Understand, when I came here, I was coming to work. I was about to travel, you know, do a lot of these things that I had on my list. But, I ended up meeting a young lady that's in a similar profession, she's a nurse, and I ended up getting married in 2018. Which I... I did not plan on doing that. But I think, you know, I thought I was coming for, for my career. But I think the reason I came here was to meet her, because she kind of changed everything. And so, establishing a relationship with her and professional relationships have really been my focus up to this point. So I joined some

committees and things at working with the cities to try to meet some... Some different people in the community. So, this is one of the one of the first things that I've done to try to reach out to, to meet some different people in our community so...

Michael [00:01:55]

What... Having that perspective of coming from, from Georgia, what, what are some of the main differences of being in Springfield that you notice from, from where you're from?

Jonathan [00:02:12]

I'll say one of the main differences is the difference in the color palette. I know if you think about an artwork, you know, it's a lot of the one color out here. Which, you know, one or having a singular resource is usually make things kind of bland. So coming from the south and the East Coast, it's... It was a completely different demographic as far as cultures and people are concerned. And so coming here, you know, it is primarily one race here. I see some pockets of different races, but my in my career field, it is largely like that. It is largely Caucasian males that are in our in the fire service. And so I kind of had some preparation for it. I didn't realize it at the time, But it kind of prepared me for the community here. Not in a negative way. I have long understood that we have a lot of strength in diversity. There's a lot of people with different ideas and experiences that can enhance my own, and my experiences can help enhance the lives and experiences of other people. And so coming here and just being not only surrounded by that singular races at work, but having in the community, that was... That was a little bit different. But what I have realized is that people here are not raised... People that are not African-American or people of color. They are not raised with a idea of hate or racism as they are in different parts of the country. And so, they don't... When they're dealing with me, it's kind of they don't really know what to do. They're not really sure how to act. And so their behavior is based on just did not knowing versus these ideas that have been passed on to their family, their generations and the norms thereof, we just don't like this group with that group because of how they look. And so here it has been interesting trying to initiate conversations and broach that gap and just, you know, kind of talk to people so they kind of know what to do, which is just treat me like a human. That's all we all... That's all we ever really need. Just treat me as though I'm somebody that you care about and everything will be fine. Is also interesting going into some you know, I know going into some homes, you know, here during emergencies. That is the first time a person of color have ever been in these folks home before. You know, that's not really something you're thinking about at the time. But, you know, I usually go in, I try to be professional, courteous and, you know, leave a good impression, you know, because I just feel like, you know, I am representative of this... My entire race, you know? Because this is the first personal interaction folks have had. And so I've use that to really try to, again, broach those gaps and let folks know I'm just a person, too, you know, and I have things to offer just like you do. So...

Michael [00:04:59]

Yeah, that's... That's interesting. And I never thought about that in public service that a lot of times people in the community don't really have to interface with people of color.

Jonathan [00:05:11]

Right.

Michael [00:05:12]

But in your in your situation, like you said, a lot of people are encountering an African-American in their own home. A lot of times for the first time.

Jonathan [00:05:23]

Right. Yeah, kind of just makes a level playing field, you know. So in that case, I think that is probably the purest moment of, you know... I don't care what you look like. I just need help, you know? And that's I mean, it's no better place. Nobody's going to be like, well, we need help, but, you know, not your help. So I've never experienced that. I doubt that I would. And so I think that gives people an opportunity for some self-reflection later, you know, after the emergency is over, after we've done whatever care we've done, you know what? After their family member has recovered, and back home to kind of think about that? Wow... You know, every time, you know, we think about this situation, we think about this individual that was here. And I want to know more about him and more about his... His race or his people, you know? So I think that it's a great way to kind of introduce that thought process to people.

Michael [00:06:13]

So you mentioned that you were prepared for being here by the fact that in your profession, it's not typical to have black folks in that profession in general. Right?

Jonathan [00:06:25]

Right.

Michael [00:06:25]

Why do you think that is? Why... Why do you think that there's not more black folks within that profession?

Jonathan [00:06:34]

I think that is not a... It's not a profession that is really advertised to minorities or people of color. It's not when you think about the jobs that people tell you that you should get as a youth, as I only be a doctor or a lawyer or this... A lot of times people don't say a firefighter or paramedic, unless they have had experience with like someone came to their home and saved their father and that made them want to be, you know, part of this line. Or especially on the East Coast, it's like a family tradition. It's like if grandpa was a firefighter, then and then their son's going to be a firefighter, and their son. So it's kind of familial. In fact, it's very difficult to get into some of those departments if you don't have like that family connection somewhere along the line. And so it was not I know of that for me, even in North Carolina, it was not a profession. I didn't have any idea. I even thought about it. I had no it was just like it didn't seem real. Like I would see firefighters on TV, but it's not something that my guidance counselor ever talked about. Nobody in my family has ever been in public service, nobody that I knew had ever been in public service. So as with many things, we had that separation where we didn't know

what we didn't know. You know? And so... Because I think it's a fantastic career for anybody that wants to come in and help people and provide for their family. Now... And so I just think that it not being... Not as being as in the community, because in our, in our neighborhood, we didn't have as many fire stations just like with the schools and tax, you know, it's just the same thing. You know, you going to have the better schools and some of the better stations in the nice neighborhoods where I did not live. And so I can't even think of where the closest fire station was when I was growing up. And so here we see fire engines all over the place, not only because we have a lot of stations, but because we respond to emergency medical calls as well. So that might be something else that has led to that, because back when I was growing up, fire firefighters only responded to fires. But as the needs of community grew and budgetary restraints happened, we need to kind of make firefighters more able to handle different types of emergencies. Versus just this just very niche, oh we can put out the fire if it's going on. And so it's good for the community that we made that, but that wasn't around when I was a youth. So I think that just getting the information out, then people know the opportunities that are available. It's not just about running in the burning buildings. In fact, we run far more medical calls than we do fire calls. I'm... Hands down. I'm talking probably 95% of our calls of are EMS calls. And the fire calls that we do get not all of those are actual fires. And so if you look at the percentage, it's... It's a real relatively safe profession. You know, if you do the... If you do the training, and take care of your equipment, so on and so forth. And it allows you to really do anything else that you want to do. So I think just the lack of getting that information out to young folks, them not having that family connection, departments not reaching out to those lower income neighborhoods or underserved communities to let them know about the opportunities. I think those things all have all contributed to that. Interestingly, though, we had the opportunity to recently visit Alabama and like all the stations we drove by, it was the reverse. It was a lot of African-American people there. And that was just because that's the community that they lived in. So that was like their pool is larger. Obviously there's more African-Americans to choose from that apply for that position. So, the demographics of the community also lead to that.

Michael [00:10:17]

Sounds like, you know, us in the education system could maybe do a better job interfacing and getting that information to young people and letting them know, like this is something that especially for, for like the young black folks and like the students and BSU and stuff like that, like this is the option. This is some... This is something else that you could look into doing and becoming. Right?

Jonathan [00:10:41]

Right.

Michael 00:10:43

Let's go ahead. And if you could talk to me about what some of your most impactful memories are in Springfield, like since you've been here, some of the most impactful experiences that you've had?

Jonathan [00:10:57]

I would say the most impactful experiences. I keep talking about my job because it's we're so involved in the community in so many different things. Again, it's just being looked at as someone that can help. So just going out and actually helping people in a way that's fulfilling for me. It's not like somebody borrows fifty dollars that I'm never going to get back, or I help... Help them move a sofa, you know, that helps them. You know, I don't mind helping them, but in the long run, it's not as fulfilling. And so being in the being in public service, it allows me to fulfill that need to be needed without, you know, getting taken advantage of. You know, it's kind of how I look at it. So when I go in, when I'm at work, that's usually when I have my most impactful moments because I know without actually eliciting a change. I mean, there are people that are alive because of, you know, my crew's actions. Other than that, I would say just being out and about, you know, I have not had any issues in the city as far as like not being welcomed. Like I'm not treated a different way because of how I look or for any reason that I can really get. I can really tell. And that's good, you know. Additionally, the city itself, both cities, Eugene and Springfield... And I only mention Eugene because since the fire department merged, I'm technically a city of Springfield employee, but I can be a part of community... Community efforts... And community efforts for both cities. So that's kind of a unique another... I'm about, you know, bridging those gaps. It's another opportunity to... To do both. And the leadership of both cities, the way that they acknowledge we have this issue with diversity and we need to do something about it. It's been very impactful to me how the upper leadership, the executive leadership are all in. My... I'm on the committee with Mindy in the city of Springfield for diversity. And like Nancy Newton was at almost all the meetings that I was at, you know? When we're a part of equity board meetings with the city of Eugene, like the city manager, and the assistant city manager, and attorneys... All the executive leadership were there with... With... If you've dealt with committees long enough, you realize that one of the biggest downfall of committees is that they inform the committee, we have these ideas and they eventually kind of just dwindle down and people get discouraged because all that work they put into it and nothing came to fruition. But the problems and issues are still there. So it's been impactful to me that the leadership here has embraced these... Identified and embraced solutions to resolve these issues, especially the ones around diversity.

Michael [00:13:32]

So then do you have a sense that there's, from your perspective, a continuity between Eugene and Springfield, or do you notice any... Any significant differences between Eugene and Springfield?

Jonathan [00:13:48]

No, it's... Eugene is a little further ahead. Just because they have more resources and they have committees and departments that have are dedicated to these things. Whereas the city of Springfield is like committees that people volunteer to help with. I can't remember the name of the office in Eugene is like the Office of... I guess like community involvement or something like that. And it is like that is what their job is, to be out in the community, identify these issues. And Springfield doesn't have quite as large a group of people that are being paid to do it. You know? And so again, with committee work, it's just all about how can we find the time, how

much personal time we going to ask people to put into this. But again, having people that work that can interact with both cities kind of helps that. So I can take ideas from Eugene and bring it to Springfield. It's no use in doing that work twice. And so, I know Mia [Melissa], she just went... Carino [Melissa Cariño], she just went to City of Eugene. And so she was in Springfield, so she kind of knows where we were at here, what we're trying to do with diversity. And now she's involved in that office and community involvement there. And so that's going to be another resource that we can use to kind of keep the information flowing and make it a circle versus, you know, just Eugene or Springfield having their own ideas and keeping it apart.

Michael [00:15:09]

So I think that's a good segue for my next question, which is what do you see the biggest opportunities and the biggest challenges are being in Springfield, Oregon.

Jonathan [00:15:19]

I think the biggest opportunity and challenge is just getting information out. A lot of people... Again being here, a lot of people just aren't... Have not... A lot of people have not lived anywhere else. I mean, there are folks that I work with that have never lived anywhere else. They've only briefly visited other places. And so they just... They have no idea what it really is to deal with folks that are in under-served community or how... What they can do about it. It seems like when you bring up diversity, people instantly like, I'm not racist, it's not me, not my problem. I got nothing to do with that. Well, it's like, well, you're kind of part of the problem or part of the solution. So you may not have done this or known about it, but this is... These are the impacts of these things throughout history. And these are things that you can do to try to help change that. So shifting that, taking away making people feel guilty, like I didn't own any slaves, what are you talking about. Yeah, I've had people say that to me. It's like, well, no, you didn't, but slavery did happen. These other things did happen with these different cultures, which has brought us to this point, is that we can go forward for that. So just letting people know I'm not... There's no blame. You're not responsible for that. But there's something you can do to make it better. And trying to approach it like, do you want to make things better for everybody? Because if you do, you're going to make... Ultimately make it better for yourself as well. And so just giving people the information and finding a way to reach different people who have, have a narrower mindset when it comes to diversity, and racism, and growth, and things like that - I think that's the biggest challenge. But it's going to be the biggest opportunity as well, because once you are able to reach those minds (incomprehensible) recently. So once you free those minds, you know, then they will be able to they may be able to reach people that I can't because no matter what I'm saying, they still may have a difficult time listening to me for whatever reason... Because they don't know me that well, because may hair looks great (rubs bald head) and they're jealous, or whatever that may be. But if they're talking to someone that they trust and more likely to receive that message. And so, you know, making those conversations and reading the messages out to as many people as we can will allow us to kind of overcome that.

Michael [00:17:34]

What about... What would you like to see happen as far as developing the black community in Springfield? And I guess before answering that question, do you living in Springfield have a sense that there is much of a black community?

Jonathan [00:17:49]

I don't... You know, when we started this Illumination Project, you know, I learned about some of the black business owners here and it was like, that's great. It's like again, with as if that's the most African-American people I've seen in the gathering at one time since I've been here. And I mean, I'm sure there are things that happen... Like, I know there a Facebook, a Facebook group with like black business owners in the area. But I don't... I don't see that every day. So, just getting the word out and just having more venues where we can meet together and just be together... Doesn't have to be a specific purpose other than just fellowship. You know? That's really what it's about. Is letting us know each other, know that we're here... Here are the resources we have, and here's how we can help each other. That's really, I think, will be a big, big thing. I know for me, because, I mean, I do a lot of things. My wife does a lot of things. I know other people do a lot of things. Just listening to like some of you all stories about the businesses you've done and things you do in your community involvement. Well, I was like, I'm interested in all of those things. You know?. And so, I think that having more opportunities to... To get together and not one thing I've always struggled with is sometimes being a part of black, you know, African-American, fill in the blank. African-American Firefighters Association, African-American this... Is just want to be a part of an association that allows everyone to come in. Because I almost feel like sometimes using those is kind of I won't say taking advantage... I mean, I understand I am African-American and I can certainly be a part of that. But I've always been more interested in being part of a group that involves everyone. Because it's almost like by making it African-American firefighters, now we're excluding everybody else. And that's that's what we're fighting. I guess I understand the reasoning behind it, because we needed at different points in history, we needed something like that to take care of ourselves. But in 2023, going into 2024, you know, I think that, again, we can learn from everybody. Sometimes is what to do, sometimes what not to do. And so I think having more events that we are informed about that we can, as African-Americans, be involved in in the city of Springfield, would be a way to overcome that.

Michael [00:20:06]

So it sounds like less... Less about forming specific fact like black organizations and more just having more opportunities to just fellowship, share space, share resources, check in, that sort of thing.

Jonathan [00:20:22]

Yes, in general. And we could certainly that doesn't mean we can't have the, you know, African-American discussion. You know, all cultures have their own thing, you know. But... And it can still be the African-American this... But all the welcome to attend. Because I mean how are others going to learn about our culture if we don't let them in? And so that way we can have our space. Everyone likes... Feels more comfortable around people that look like them and understands kind of where they come from and things like that, but, you know, sharing that

information so that more people feel comfortable about that can't hurt us. It can only help. And so I just don't... I think that more inclusion would be the way to get more people involved. I think that would be great for the city.

Michael [00:21:02]

I noticed that, too, working here at Springfield High School. Just how when we do certain activities where we have it's primarily African-American students in the room and but all are welcome. And so you have a handful of white students, (and) students from other backgrounds, and that's the first time that they've been the minority in the room. And that's in itself, I feel like since a valuable experience for them to be able to know what it feels like to maybe be the minority in the room, and to be able to have more empathy for other student's experience.

Jonathan [00:21:37]

Absolutely. We... I was on the interview panel recently and one of the interviewees was a young Caucasian lady, a young woman. I think she's maybe 18, 19, maybe 20. And we all... You know, there are always diversity questions on interview panels. And in her answers, she said, you know, I had a chance to like, do some study, work study or something in Ghana. And she actually used those words. She like, "It's the first time that I was the minority." And she's like, "It really changed my whole outlook and made me think about different people differently after that, especially myself." So, yes, she's like, "I had to just adjust to that." And she said "It wasn't hostile or anything. Everybody welcomed me. But it's just that feeling of, wow, I'm the only one here that looks like me." And so it was interesting to see her and it was a great opportunity, obviously, for her. And so it kind of changed her whole outlook on her life in a great age for her to kind of move forward with that so...

Michael [00:22:32]

So this this project is a part of the Springfield history Museum. So, I mean, this is making history right here. And I'd imagine that in ten and 20 and 30 years, people want to understand the history of Springfield. They're going to be watching this and looking back. What... What message or what insight would you like to leave the people with that are that are looking back at this time?

Jonathan [00:23:00]

I would say that I really believe that knowledge hoarded is knowledge wasted. And so uplifting Other people and using that knowledge to, to bring people forward is really how to leave a legacy. It's not about how much money you make and you know how much popularity you have. It's about what do you leave? What are you leaving for your children or your neighbor's children? Because if you don't share that knowledge and it goes away, it's just... It truly is.... It goes to waste. It's no reason for people to have to go through the same struggles and suffer through the same things that I did. I've already done that. So if I'm able to share that and find a way to share it in such a way that they are able to accept that communication, I think that's the way to go. I've heard, you know, the saying, what is it? I just drew a complete blank. I've heard the saying a thousand times, but it's about learning from your mistakes. You know, a smart person learns from their mistakes. But I think that a wise person can learn from the mistakes of

others as well. It's no reason to go through... And coming up in African-American community with parents that weren't well-off, they struggled. You know, we didn't know a lot about credit or anything like that. And so a lot of those lessons about credit and finances, I had to kind of learn the hard way, you know, i.e., you know, was going to be... It's a seven year lesson, because with that late payment, it's going to be seven years until that's gone. And really, I didn't understand the impact really. It's on my credit, big deal, no problem. I really understand how that translates into building wealth or owning homes or doing anything really. And so that's just one example to be able to give that information to someone. In our... In like our fire academies I talk to folks about finances and resilience on one of the days. And we talked about compound interest and, you know, how to how to retire and be wealthy, be able to actually retire. And that's just knowledge and information that I didn't have. And so we try to give that, so that now they can they can benefit from it. You know, whether I get anything out of it or not, what I get out of it is know that I'm helping them, and really understanding that you can climb the ladder to success without using people as rungs. You know? And that I would rather go halfway up the ladder and bring my whole team with me then get to the top by myself. So just having a broader mindset of community and helping as many people as we can, I think probably the message I'd leave.

Michael [00:25:29]

All right there you just heard that from...

Speaker 3 [00:25:32]

I have a couple....

Michael [00:25:33]

Okay.

Speaker 3 [00:25:33]

Ok, so with you, and by no means do you have to answer this. I know being firefighter you can probably see people at their not happiest moments, I guess you would say. But on the opposite side of that, do you have any stories about like some calls you went on that were actually really funny? Like (incomprehensible) I guess a call when you got that is almost comical as far as not being anything serious but like, look at what's happening here?

Jonathan [00:26:01]

We... We go on a lot of calls like that. I don't know just have people get themselves in some of these situations. You know one of the funniest ones when the kids poked they head through the stairwell banisters. You know, the head goes in when they can't get it out, you know? So everybody's they're freaking out and you just come and just kind of opened it up and get the head out. That's always a good one. I see a lot of the funnier calls, just people doing silly stuff, and it's like, oh, they think they can jump on a trampoline after they've had a couple cases of beer. And you go out they're just all tangled up in the springs of the trampoline. It's just like, okay, we're going to you don't need a medical... It's not a medical emergency. I think it's a kind of a life coaching emergency. So let me help. Stop. Drinking is bad. But yeah, in this area we

haven't have it don't have a ton of those calls, but it's usually involving either young people or drunk people that do that. Or they'll tell us, some say like, I think I overdosed on Gatorade, what should I do? I don't know, go pee? I guess I don't know what to do, what to do. I can't help you with that. So, to us, a lot of times it's funny you try not to laugh because to them it's serious. It's like I went to the Scandinavian Festival 5 hours ago and I think I'm having a heat stroke. And it's sitting on the couch, like, covered in a soaking wet blanket. You know? They're like, help me. It's like, I think you're fine. I think you're good. Have some more water and you'll be all right. So we try not to laugh at stuff like it's really challenging sometimes, but we still try to treat people respectfully because in their mind this is a really big deal. But to us, it's like you really call us for this? And at 2:00 in the morning you have this foot pain and you have for 13 years. But 2:00 in the morning is when you call 911 for it. Awesome. Go ahead and prop that up and go see your doctor tomorrow. That's it.

Speaker 3 [00:27:50]

Do you have any stereotypical cats in the tree calls?

Jonathan [00:27:52]

No, fortunately not because the way I get cats out of trees is frowned upon. And we got water hoses. Spray them off. Well, we just tell people, have you ever seen the cat skeletons in trees? No, that cat will come down when he gets hungry. He'll be just fine. But I think some people have had that here. I've heard stories about people in the past actually use the hose now to try to get the cat out of the tree. So not the best (laughs). Put some food at the bottom he'll come on down.

Michael [00:28:22]

All right. So we just spoke with Jonathan Hayes. This is the Springfield History Museum Illumination Project. Michael K. media as your host. We're illuminating the rich and diverse stories, perspectives, experiences of black folks here in Springfield, Oregon. It's been a pleasure speaking with you and signing off. Until next time.

Jonathan [00:28:52]

Oh Yeah.