

Interview Transcript: Claire Ratidzo Dangarembwa Morgan (Ratie D) and Michael Klindt

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Michael 00:00:00

Michael K Media is your host today for the Springfield History Museum Illumination Project. I have the honor and privilege of sitting down today with our Ratie D. Ratie, how you doing?

Ratie 00:00:14

I'm doing good. Thanks, Michael. How are you?

Michael 00:00:17

I'm doing well. Looking forward to this conversation. And so, the first thing that I'd like to ask is what is your origin story of coming to Oregon and then eventually making your way over here to Springfield?

Ratie 00:00:34

Okay. Well, I'm originally from, from Zimbabwe, but I moved to the United States in 2014 while in a band. And so, I have family that live in Eugene, and whenever I would be on break from my tours, I would come to Eugene. And I just loved this space. And then fast forward to meeting my husband. We then moved to Springfield and our two children have been born here. So that's the deepest connection I have with Springfield right now, the fact that my children were born here.

Michael 00:01:10

What, what brought you from Eugene to Springfield?

Ratie 00:01:16

Well, and the price of housing, you know, renting, it seemed more affordable to live in Springfield compared to Eugene for what we were looking for in terms of the size of the backyard and the house and everything. So, we decided why not take a chance and try Springfield. And it worked very well for us. Yeah.

Michael 00:01:43

Talk to me about some of the main differences between Oregon and Zimbabwe, where you're from.

Ratie 00:01:55

Wow. Well, I just wanted to say that I only started being aware of the fact that I'm Black when I came to the United States before then, you know, I was just one of the citizens in Zimbabwe because everyone else who's around me is just the same skin as I am. And there's about maybe 2%, two or 3% population of, you know, people who are not Black. And so, coming here I was... I realized that I was the minority and that was a little bit uncomfortable. You know, still something that I have to process every day. But I would say the biggest difference would be community not feeling like I am not... I don't really belong, you know, back home it's a community kind of feeling where you go next door and everyone is happy to see you. You don't have to, you know, text someone, say, hey, can we meet, you know, in next week or something like that. You just go and everyone is very open and welcoming. So, I feel like the difference is that how people kind of just treat themselves or carry themselves as individuals, not part of a community.

Michael 00:03:15

Have you been able to find that sense of community anywhere here among a certain group of people or certain activities or...

Ratie 00:03:29

I think for me, I'm so blessed because of the music. The music has put me in spaces where I am able to meet new people and connect even with more African people than I, than I thought I would because of the fact that I am on this platform where I share music and then people see me, and then people feel drawn to come and talk to me, and then we exchange numbers. And as the years have gone by, my I feel like my community has grown bigger. And also, there's, you know, there's organizations mostly in Eugene that are intentionally coming together to invite women of color and the children so that the children have playdates and enjoy being around each other. So, it's becoming... It is growing little by little.

Michael 00:04:21

Do you do you find those same sort of community opportunities whether gathering places and with the kids or music and stuff in Springfield or do you find that you mostly have to go to Eugene for that?

Ratie 00:04:34

I mostly have to go to Eugene. The Springfield Library, though, has been very wonderful because I have been given opportunities to share my music with the audiences in Springfield. So, that also has exposed me to a different group of, you know, African Americans or Africans that I do find even in the library when I visit with my children. So, I feel like as time is going. The community or people around us are realizing the importance of coming together. You know, so hoping that that happens for Springfield more than it is right now.

Michael 00:05:21

Yeah. Because that's... That's, that's a question I was going to ask later. But it sounds like a good time to ask now. What would you like to see happen in terms of specifically developing the Black community in Springfield?

Ratie 00:05:35

Well, I think it takes people like us, you know, to take that initiative and to take those positions where we create the spaces for us to mingle. You know, like, for example, we can't think of possibly... How can I say this? Maybe being the ones who hire the artists. I know that there's efforts, indeed, to include the people of color, but then there aren't many people of color in those positions who are actually doing the hiring and all of that. So, it does have a sense of, you know, like I'm not sure if people want me to perform here because they love what I do or because they want to highlight that they were able to find someone of color and, you know, put me on a pedestal or whatever, you know? So, yeah, it would be nice to see more people of color in those positions. You know, power away. Where we, you know, we bring each other, you know, bring each other in.

Michael 00:06:43

What are some of your most impactful memories being in Springfield?

Ratie 00:06:49

Well, having my babies. Yes. I was fortunate enough to be able to have my first daughter at a birthing center, which, you know, is a very has big thing to work with midwives as a... As an expecting mother. Because midwives kind of cut out the risk of, you know, or all the... The invasive medicine or, you know, like into introducing medicine into the body, so that the midwives encourage things to go naturally. So, I'm very thankful that I had the opportunity to work with midwives in Springfield as well as for my second born. So, it was more in the hospital at Mackenzie Willamette. But then I was able to bring my midwives with me in the hospital. So, I'm thankful that, you know, I had access to that.

Michael 00:07:48

Is that the more customary way to give birth back home as well, or is, is... Because you said everything's more community? Is that... Is it more common to give birth with within the community or is it more like go to the hospital?

Ratie 00:08:08

That's a good question. It's more you have to go to the hospital. And for the longest time back home, people couldn't even bring their partners in the... In the, you know, birthing room. So that's another challenge that, you know, the medicine... The medical section back home still needs to improve in that way, where they provide services like midwifery, where people feel supported. You know, so unfortunately, that's not the case back home. Yeah.

Michael 00:08:47

Also, you know, being that your impactful memories are having your children here. What are some of the things that you're excited about? Raising your children in Springfield and what are maybe some of the concerns that you have raising your children in Springfield, assuming you stay here?

Ratie 00:09:08

Right. Well, I'm excited to see the Black community grow. That's one thing. The fact that we are here, I feel like I've been noticing more families around me that are Black. Small, But I'm hoping that, as we... You know, if we decide to stay here. We, the community grows. And that one of the challenges is I remember one day at the park, my daughter, she wasn't she couldn't find children to play with. And she came to me and she said, "Mama, I don't know if the kids going to play with me because I'm different in... My... I have dreadlocks and my skin is brown." And so that was really hard to hear my five-year-old saying that, you know? So, that would definitely make me want to move. But then I feel like, that's not going to be a solution. I think that the more people come to Springfield, I mean, I've had good experiences here, so I would encourage, you know, people to come out more if they are there in Springfield, they should come more out of their houses so that we can see each other, be there for each other, because we do need to see ourselves, you know, like, yeah, just around the community. It really feels good when we come across each other in the parks, you know, or in the store. I'm like Hi! I try to talk to everybody, you know.

Michael 00:10:43

I guess this is, it's a related question but stated a little bit different. But what do you think the biggest opportunities are here and the biggest challenges being here in Springfield?

Ratie 00:10:57

And I would say the big opportunities would be just to be yourself. I feel like now more than ever, people of color are having their opportunities are provided. So, it's a matter of us taking those opportunities and making the best out of them instead of shying away, you know? So, I'm learning that as well as I go. That, you know, if an opportunity presented, I shouldn't second guess, you know, my skills or my myself. So, trying to make sure that we go for those opportunities, I think it would help to, to take advantage of those opportunities that are presented or that are there. But maybe we don't we just don't know that those opportunities are there because we're not looking always still stuck in feeling like we're not being included enough.

Michael 00:11:51

Yeah, because you're your family is supported through entrepreneurship, right? You... You. own a business?

Ratie 00:12:03

Yes. My husband owns Organic Roots, which is a landscaping company in town. So, you know, just the fact that he's out there doing it, you know, working is very respectable. And a lot of people respect him, you know, and appreciate his knowledge of how to take care of the earth

and... Which is also an avenue that isn't really explored much by people of color, you know. So, he's also trying to show that we can do these big jobs, you know, or it's it doesn't have to only be a fancy, you know, like kind of job that will, you know, get you to a position of power. He's, he's doing pretty, pretty well for, you know, for himself and our family. So I'm really thankful for that.

Michael 00:12:55

That's awesome. I feel like I saw somethin' along the way somewhere where we were like showing people how to, like, grow their own food or somethin' like that.

Ratie 00:13:06

Yes, So, we, we took a chance with building a garden back home in Zimbabwe. We, we went to the... At the last visit that we had. And the goal of that trip was for me, to you know, connect with the community on the musical side and for him to get connected, the community in the garden where we're trying to empower young children to... Young people to grow their own food. And, you know, I feel like it's so easy to wait for things to be handed to you, but then I feel like equipping young people with the tools that will help themselves to, you know, grow their own food is going to be more sustainable at the end of the day. So that's, that's how we kind of merge our, our talents, where I bring in the music, bring people together, and then at those kind of events he talks about the importance of growing your own food and, yeah, living a sustainable life.

Michael 00:14:10

And then also you're you as a... As a musician, don't just do it to entertain people, but you are music educator as well, right?

Ratie 00:14:22

Yes. I mean, I do my best to share my culture through the music. I held some workshops, classes where I teach the language through song and also teach people how to harmonize, which is a very healing thing as well, where people are in the groove and singing together. So yes, that's, that's, that's my path where music kind of helps me to release and also heal myself and others.

Michael 00:14:56

Do you believe being Black has shaped your experience in Springfield?

Ratie 00:15:04

Yes, I do. I strongly believe so, because I... I feel like I'm fortunate enough to be here at a time where the Black people are being try... People are making efforts to uplift us and we are also having a realization of our own strength. So, by... So, by so doing, realizing our own strength, I feel like, like it's really sitting in our awesomeness, in our queendom and receiving, you know, that... Receiving all the blessings that we, we we've always been entitled to, you know. So yeah, it is, it is a special time to be here on Black because I feel really uplifted and I, I'm thankful to the ancestors who worked very hard to make that happen. Otherwise, it wouldn't have happened. This... I wouldn't be sitting right here or I wouldn't be out there, you know, sharing

who I am freely. Fo yeah, it is. I feel respected. I feel loved by the community around me. So, yes, I think people are realize... Realizing that we are amazing human beings.

Michael 00:16:28

Are there some people in particular, that helped carve the way for you to be able to come here like maybe some people from back home that came here like ahead or... Like, how did you first get the opportunity to come?

Ratie 00:16:50

So, initially I was in an a cappella group back home, but then whilst I was performing with them, John Mambira who was owner of Bongo Love, a local band back home, he wanted some backing vocals for his album, and so he invited me to, you know... Share some, share some music, and we worked together and we recorded an album. And then a few months later, he was like, "We... We're going to the United States!" I was like, okay, I guess this is awesome! And so, I would say John Mambira is the one who helped. He had been traveling many, many years to Oregon to do some tours, and then I was lucky enough to be chosen to be part of the band. And that's how we came out here to, to Oregon.

Michael 00:17:47

And do you notice in Eugene Springfield, is there a significant diaspora from, from Africa and this area, or it's like not that many?

Ratie 00:18:02

Well, the numbers are growing and I think we have the University of Oregon to thank for that, because a lot of Africans coming in are coming in through the University of Oregon. So I would say that the numbers are growing for sure. Yeah, the numbers are definitely growing. I remember in 2014 looking around and not really seeing much of us, you know? But as the years have been going by, the numbers are growing. And we are also noticing each other and wanting to be there for each other. So, it feels really good to, to see that those changes happening, and being part of those changes. It feels good. Yeah. Being part of those changes feels good (laughs).

Michael 00:18:50

So, this is for the Springfield History Museum. So, we're making history right now.

Ratie 00:18:57

Yes.

Michael 00:18:59

So, assuming that as a part of that canon, there's people in ten years and 20 years and 30 years watching this and looking back at this moment, what message would you like to leave them with?

Ratie 00:19:18

Oh... Wow. We can! We're so capable. You know, if we just free ourselves from our own minds, it can help us to really step into a realm, you know, a realm where nothing can stop us, you know, and there's no reason for fear anymore because we are free. You know, our ancestors paved our ways for us to be here. And there's a reason why we are here. And so the community is growing. I feel like it's only going to continue to grow. And it's I feel like some positive changes are coming for this area. Spring... Eugene Springfield. And I'm hoping that, you know, we'll be able to see it, you know, years down the line like, you know, there's, there's more of us and we've made these positive changes and we are in this place of power, you know. So that's what I can say that... We can, and we are capable of being those people.

Michael 00:20:22

I think I think one more thing too, is because, you know, we're doing a lot of reflecting on, you know, the Black community and our interactions and opportunities and stuff. What message might you have for the non-Black folks around here in terms of... Just it seems like there's more and more people that are open and curious, that they're like, you know... It's almost like they get awkward when they interact with you because like they want so bad to like, do the right thing and, you know? Like, like what message might you have to, to, to people that want to be more open and embracing, but maybe just haven't been around as many people of color around here?

Ratie 00:21:20

Well, what I would like to see is... I think, honestly, it's more of a humanity thing. Like I'm saying, I'm from Zimbabwe and we there's a lot of tribal issues, you know, where a certain tribe feels more superior than the other. And that doesn't have anything to do with the skin color. So I... I... I try my best to encourage people around me that I do interact with that. It's not... It's not really about the skin. It's about how we treat each other as human beings. If you're coming to me with positive intentions, then it's... It is all good. But then if you have some negative ideas or, you know, agendas, then it will get uncomfortable. You know? And I think accepting what happened in the past will also help the people who are not, you know, of our race to... To, to know how to approach us with respect and love and appreciation of us is just as human as they are. So I would say just have positive intentions. You know, if, if your intention is to love and to share, then I feel like there's nothing that can hold us back from uniting and being just a people more than just like Black and white. So yeah, just be more aware of the history and the history, learn the history, know what happened, you know, and accept it and just be the positive change by showing love and being that light. That's what I can say.

Michael 00:23:14

So, you heard it from Ratie D. Learn that history. Come with that love and those good intentions and we'll be able to look back at this moment, this time in history, as... As a, as a pivotal point where more uniting, more love happens.

Ratie 00:23:38

Yes.

Michael 00:23:39

This is Springfield History Museum Illumination Project, where we're just shedding light on those who have some, some roots or have interfaced with The Springfield community getting different perspectives. And today we heard from Ratie D. It's been an honor and a pleasure.

Ratie 00:24:03

Thank you for having me Michael...

Michael 00:24:04

Thanks for being here. Michael K Media signing off. Shout out to M5 snappin' pics. Until next time.