

00:00:13 Robin:

Hi, it's Robin here. Welcome to the Espresso Talk Today show. It's always great when our community of amiable intellectuals get together for another uncommon conversation. And I can tell you today's show is definitely uncommon and special and unique, and a lot of other adjectives that are all going to add up to exciting. So I'm glad that you're here to share the excitement with me.

What am I excited about? So, so, so glad that you asked. I'm excited that we have a master storyteller on the show today. Mitch Capel, also known as Granddaddy Junebug, will join the Espresso Talk Today team for an Espresso and an amazing discussion about storytelling. And yes, to tell us a few stories too before we get started, let me properly introduce our special guest, Mitchell Capel.

Yes, also known as Granddaddy Junebug, often says good storytelling is like poetry to your ears, and good poetry is storytelling at its best, and Mitch Capel is great at both. By the way, he also says that golf is a lot like storytelling, but that's another story, and pun intended, I couldn't resist.

I don't know exactly where to begin or how much to tell, but besides being a storyteller, Mitch is also a recording artist, poet, actor, and author. He has graced the stage and screen with luminaries, southern luminaries such as Ruby Dee, Ameri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez. He has appeared in documentaries, performed in theatre productions, and is considered the national expert on the works of the great poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. You're going to hear a lot about Paul Laurence Dunbar on this show, and I promise that you're going to leave with a new appreciation of this great poet. Even if you already loved him, you're going to love him even more.

Mitch Capel was born in the small town of Southern Pines, NC. His parents and grandparents strongly encourage Mitch and his brother to learn and recite poetry. His grandmother was very interested in the works of Paul Laurence Dunbar, and that's where he got the passion for Dunbar as well.

00:02:56 Robin:

I won't say anything more about this part of his life since Mitch is going to tell you the real story and of course, you want to hear the story from the actual storyteller. I'll just conclude by telling you that Mitch travels throughout the country performing and he performs abroad to sold-out and spellbound audiences. Mitch even performed at the 2008 inauguration of President Barack Obama. We are so lucky that he is so generously agreeing to participate on the Espresso Talk Today show. And I'm sure that you're ready to hear Mitch Capel now. You're ready to hear Granddaddy Junebug, and you're ready to hear the storytelling, I'm sure.

My grandmother, who we all lovingly called Big Mama, used to say "ain't nothing left but the telling.

Robin: " I have been really curious as to what inspired you to become a storyteller and what your journey has been, You know, to master storytelling.

00:04:02 Mitch Capel:

Well, what inspired me was my grandmother. Actually, both my sets of grandparents and my father and mother especially were great storytellers. But what really got me on the journey was far back as I can remember, at the age of three, 4-5 years old, visiting my father's mother every other weekend.

My dad was a pretty successful salesman selling cookware door to door, and so he would go to conventions and go to stuff every weekend. Seemed like so we would stay with different grandparents. But when I stayed with my father's mother, Elnora Lee Capel, she always would pull out this old worn-out edition of The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar. And when I was old and worn out, this book was I guess it'd been passed down from generation to generation from the late 1800s through my family.

And I mean pages missing, no cover. But she would pull that book out and she would start reading to my brother and a cabin tail about a weasel and a bear. And the way she read it, the fact that she could read first of all was amazing to, you know, for that generation and just the way that she read it and she was tickled to death and I didn't even know what a bear was.

The largest animal I knew was a German Shepherd. So I had my visual, a German Shepherd. But when I, I, I, I got away from it, grew up, started playing sports in high school and went on to college and returned from college and started actually working with my father in his business. And he would tell me stories from the Creek, from windblow, a little town he was from.

And he would start telling me stories and he knew how much I loved hearing him tell those stories. And one day he said, man, "if you love those Creek stories," that's what he called. And he said "you'll love this." And he handed me that book that my grandmother had used to read to us. And when I got it, I'm going through this book and first of all, I looked at it, I'm going, this is the most loved book I've ever seen in my life. I mean, you could just feel the energy from it, from my ancestors. And when I found that story, I started reading it and I realized this was the story my grandmother told me when I was three that she read to us. And so I started reading it to my kids and they want to hear it every night. So by repetition, I memorized it.

00:06:21 Mitch Capel

And I was with a friend one day, I was selling cars, and moved from cookware to cars because I needed the car and I figured the best way to buy a car was to sell them.

And so it was raining one day and I was sitting in the car with a friend of mine and we were talking and I said check this out and I went into the story and he was laughing, he was laughing.

He said, "Man, I'm headed the entertainment committee for this banquet coming up Friday. I don't have anybody. Can you come and tell that story?"

And I was like, "what me really like?"

"Yeah,"

So I did. There were teachers in the audience. They wanted me to come to the school and it just snowballed from there. So my my main thing was to start memorizing all of Dunbar's work.

00:07:00 Mitch Capel

And so I just started picking out stories I thought would be great for kids and just created the character Granddaddy Junebug because I thought an older person should be telling the stories.

And my goal was to memorize all of his work. And I guess I have about 70% memorized. And then I started finding other writers and and other people from his because I found Grainger's index of first lines. And then I found dialect. And I started looking at all these dialects first lines. And then I started finding other writers like Henry Franklin, Bryan James, David Carruthers, started finding all these different writers and started using it work. And then I started writing some of my own stuff. And so that's how I began. And then and then and then I said, you know, I went into a school, actually, I take that back.

00:07:50 Mitch Capel

I I saw a storyteller was coming to the library where I lived, Madoffo, Lloyd Wilson. And I said, you know, I'm going to go see this guy. So I went to see him and listen to him tell stories and he's finished. I said, hey man, I'm thinking about taking on this journey as a storyteller. And he said, OK, this is what you need to do. And he pulled out all this stuff. He showed me his brochures. He said I needed to get some ink. I need to do something somewhere so the newspaper would cover it and just start doing it that way. So I did.

00:08:22 Mitch Capel

I. Another guy asked me to come to his daycare center, and I went there and the newspaper covered it. It ended up being on the front page of the paper, and it was that was it. So I started from there. It's been a great journey. 37 years of storytelling now.

00:08:39 Robin

Every seven years. And. But when you went to college, you hadn't planned to actually become a storyteller then. So what did you study in college?

00:08:47 Mitch Capel

Well, I did. I I actually, I studied theater, speech and theater, and I hadn't planned on being a storyteller. You're right. First college I went to was A and TI wanted to be an architect. And I was sitting in class as a freshman and the Dean walked in and he said, look around, there's only maybe two of you going to graduate out of this thing. And I thought, wow, I didn't like my odds. So I left and I went to speech and theater and immediately went into a play and just fell in love with the theater. And so that was my first love, actually. But I did not like ensemble because it was so much, so much drama. And not to be, no pun intended, it was so many people had issues, you know, they didn't know their lines or they wouldn't show up to rehearsal or, you know, and they would make me look bad.

00:09:39 Mitch Capel

So I was like, OK, so I became a one man show because I know I'm going to be on time, I'm going to know my material and we're going to have a good time. So.

00:09:49 Robin

Well, I mean, Marlene, I mean as a yeah, as an as an actor and a producer. I mean that's Al mean that must really strike you because you do. I think you did a lot of ensembles.

00:09:57 SPK_3

Yeah, I definitely do a lot of ensemble work, but I completely understand what you mean. You say people make you look bad because it's one thing to do an ensemble show for a company, you know, like or like for a school production where things are required and you know where those people are going to be and you know and to really be all in for those things. But when there's no stakes and it's, you know, a theatre company and you really want to put on the show, you invited everybody and you know that one or two people who just don't have the same priorities as you, it really can't just mess the whole thing up. So I'm all with it. I, I, I love the ensemble, but I understand what your trepidation is. My question though, after you know because you've done this for a while, what would you say with your training? Included are the qualities of a good storyteller.

00:10:58 Mitch Capel

Well, first of all, I think the best qualities of a good storyteller is someone who is engaging, first of all, and someone who knows their material, Second of all, and most important, someone who is going to shift your paradigm, Someone who's going to move you to a point where you came in there thinking one way and you walk out a better person. That's that's what I think a good, good storyteller, great storyteller does. And if you can do that, if you can move people to become a better person, I think you discuss or you can move somebody into, you know, for example, I've done schools all over the country and sometimes I'm in a school district and I'll come back to that area later in life. And one time this kid came up to me, He was in, he was in middle school and he came up to me after my show and he said, I just want to thank you. And I said for what? He said I saw you when I was in elementary school and I was really going down the wrong path. I was disrespecting my teachers. I was disrespecting my elders, he said. I was leaning towards getting into a gang and just going the wrong path and your show really put me on the right track and I'm a student now and I'm doing this that and I'm like wow man, I started crying because I shamed someones life for the better and I hugged him and thanked him for the information. So and I've always said if if one person, if I take one person's life and turn into something, that's my reward as a storyteller.

00:12:28 Mitch Capel

I don't do it for the money. Even though the money is very good. I don't do it to boost my ego up. I don't do it for any of that stuff. I do it because first of all it's my passion, it's what I love. But I most of all, I do it because I want to change lives.

00:12:43 SPK_3

And what do you think sets you apart from other storytellers? Like, why would why would people come see your show versus?

00:12:51 Mitch Capel

Because I am a storyteller, 90% of the stories I tell are in rhyme. So I'm different than anybody else. If people are putting on a storytelling festival, it's like making gumbo. You got to have, you know your shrimp, you got to have your okra, you got to have this, you got to have that. You have different parts. Now, there are a lot of storytellers who tell Ananzi stories. There are a lot of storytellers that tell Jack tales. There are a lot of stories tell us who do, who tell the same stories. I don't. I mean, I had to.

00:13:20 Mitch Capel

I tell some of the Spike, the some of the storytellers that I've come across over the years. I've heard them tell stories that I fell in love with, and I would retell their stories but in my version of it, but always giving them credit. But at the same time, my stories are mostly in rhyme, and they're only few people who have to do storytelling and rhyme. There's two that I can name off my top of my head, Waddy Mitchell in Texas. And what's her name? She's going to kill me if I can't call her name, but she's the other one and I'm the other only other one that does it in rhyme. So when people are putting festivals together, they want to have a variety of different types of storytellers. And so I'm picked a lot because my stuff is different and I do different shows. I have different, I have kids shows, I have stuff historical work. I have.

00:14:10 Mitch Capel

I try to, I try to have material for any group. I always tease and say if the Ku Klux Klan wanted to bring me in, I would, I would have something for them, you know, so and then that's another thing, you know, you have to know your audience. I used to, I used to write down what I was going to do prior to being there, write down a list of stories I was going to tell, and I get there and none of these stories would work. So when I get there, I always get there early, at least an hour earlier, hour and a half early. And I'm watching and I'm standing out in the lobby or wherever I'm performing and I and I watch the people coming in and I listen to the people come in and I listen to what they're talking about. And nine times out of 10, they will tell me what they need to hear. And then I'll go backstage and I'll pull out my list of stories and I'll pull from those stories, those titles, the stories that I know is going to move this audience and and they're going to appreciate it. And then I try to put them in a order that they flow, so that the whole show flows and, you know, so they're just you make them laugh, make them cry, make them laugh kind of thing.

00:15:12 SPK_4

But then from there, I I do actually have another question because you mentioned that the style you use in terms of, you know, adding rhymes to your story, it makes a big difference. How important would you say technique is in general for storytelling or for poetry? In that sense, the.

00:15:30 Mitch Capel

Technique is huge. Because you know, my thing is this, I if a story moves me, it's gonna move you. I don't just get up there to tell stories just to be entertained. And I have to. I have to move you. Like I said, it's shifter paradigm. So if it moves me, if it makes me go wow, if it makes me think, which makes me laugh, if it makes me cry, it's going to make you think it's going to make you laugh. It's going to make you cry. So when I learn a story, especially if I'm learning like Paul Laurence Dunbar's work or any other writers work, if I'm memorizing it because with rhyme there's no ad libbing. I have to stay on script because, you know, the next line has to rhyme with the next line.

00:16:14 Mitch Capel

So it's a layering process for me. And every time, once I once I memorize it and get it down, I run it back and forth and back and forth and it's like I said, it's a layering process. So every time I tell it to myself, driving down the highway or wherever I am, I don't look in a mirror. I just do it laying in the bed at 4:00 in the morning. I run it through my head. It's a layering process. It gets deeper and deeper and deeper, the meaning of the story for me. So when I get on stage and tell the story now, the audience is going to feel they're going to understand the meaning of the story. They're going to stand. And Dunbar was so deep that sometimes I would say, why is he using this word?

00:16:49 Mitch Capel

This ain't the right word to be used in here. But I realized later, after I layered it, man, this Did he pick the right word for this, you know?

00:16:57 SPK_4

Well, that process actually sounds very like sounds very structured and very intentional. Did someone teach you that or actually did you have like an intellectual guide so to speak? We showed you this kind of process. Who helped you kind of refine your ways of telling stories.

00:17:14 Mitch Capel

You.

00:17:14 SPK_4

Mentioned your grandmother and all of them but.

00:17:16 Mitch Capel

Yeah, it was on the job. You know, I learned it as I went. I I learned it as I watched other storytellers that moved me and and saw the passion and saw how they left everything out on that stage. So yeah it was just it was just that and then then then you get the feedback from the audience. Once you're on stage you know if they're engaging with you or not. If you got a Amen corner over there, you know that you feel that you're that you're feeding off of and and just the good vibes of it. But no it's not. It's just something self-taught to me because, like I said, I have to. I have to memorize it. I have to get it in my computer up here.

00:17:54 Mitch Capel

And then I have to run it over and over and over again to make sure it's programmed in there. And I used to joke that I had AI, had a photographic memory, but now it seems like I'm running out of film. Yeah.

00:18:12 Robin

I'm sorry, I heard that you. Yeah, memorize 70% of of of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poems or his his writings, his.

00:18:21 Mitch Capel

Yes, I remember press. Did I lose? Y'all? Yeah, I memorized 70% of it. And oh, there we go. Yeah, As well as other writers. Henry Franco Bryant. Like I said, James David Carruthers, my man from Chicago. Good Lord. Oh, what's his name?

00:18:46 Mitch Capel

I'm having a senior moment right now. Oh, who is this? I can only see these. Anyway, they'll come back to me. But there's, you know, different styles different different people. Haki Mahata, booty. I've memorized some of his work. Yeah. So just and like I said, writing my own stuff. And it's just, it's just to have enough material, you know, just to have stuff.

00:19:18 Mitch Capel

Anytime you get ready to do a show, you want to be prepared. And you know, I've got a group of environmentalists getting ready to come to my park and camp out and they want storytelling. So I have stories about trees and OK environment.

00:19:35 SPK_4

Relevant.

00:19:37 Mitch Capel

Yeah.

00:19:38 SPK_4

But that's that's that's interesting that you have some always kind of have something in mind, like in 9th grade, No, 10th grade, we had an English teacher who always said to like, memorize certain quotes from the things you read, 'cause you know, you never know when you can use it as like a party trick or to actually keep these things as profound Nuggets.

00:19:58 Mitch Capel

So to speak.

00:20:00 SPK_4

But I do actually have a question about Paul Laurence Dunbar, because personally I haven't actually read any of his work, but as looking through his biography and things like that. One particular work did come out from him, and it was majors and minors. So could you explain a little bit of that to us, or like what it meant to you, or just some key points that you think people who haven't read anything by him should know?

00:20:25 Mitch Capel

Well, that was the 2nd book he's published. The first book he published was Okon Ivy. The second book he published was Majors and Minors, and he called it Majors and Minors because the poems that were in standard English was supposed to be the majors, and then the dialect pieces were the minors, so that's why he named it that. But Dunbar was such a prolific writer of his time and he was a genius literary genius and and people he gets a bad rap because of the because of the dialect and the problem was at that time that's all the publishers were were were buying that's all the people were buying at the time. But even in his dialect he stood for social justice and he stood up for black community, even in his dialect.

00:21:12 SPK_4

And I got to ask what which dialect we talking? We're talking Southern dialect, Southern Black dialect.

00:21:18 Mitch Capel

Yeah, we're talking. Yeah. Well, his mother was from Kentucky and she was born on a plantation in Kentucky. And she was allowed to listen to her so-called master as he read poetry to her at night, as she as she read, as he read poetry to his wife, she was allowed to sit and listen. So she fell in love with the poetry. And when after emancipation procrastination was signed, she went to she went to Dayton, OH and set up house. And she was so determined to learn and read and write. She would bake cookies and cakes and pies and trade slices of pies and cakes with children coming home from school for the ABC's they had learned. And she took the ABC's and taught herself to read and write. And so when Paul was born she wanted him to get the best education possible.

00:22:05 Mitch Capel

So. So she instilled in him the, the, the, the joy of first of all that she had for poetry and for education and taught him how to read and write and made sure he went to Dunbar High School. He was the only African American at Dunbar High School. In 1890. He graduated with the right. Well, the Wright brothers didn't graduate, but he was classmates with the Wright brothers, and he wrote the school song. He he was head of the Philomathian society. He was just a literary genius at such a he wrote his first poem at six years old, and his mother kept all his poems that he wrote. So finally when he was ready to publish, he went to her and said, Mama, where's all that? And she went and got all the poems that he had written over the years.

00:22:47 Mitch Capel

And that's when he started putting together his first book. He was on an elevator, his work. He couldn't find a job. So he was on, he was an elevator operator in the Callahan building and was, was, was, you know, selling his books. He spoke to the Western Writers Association. And then he went back to the elevator and was working the elevator, people looking for him going, who was that guy that just spoke, you know, so, so Dunbar was, was, was brilliant. I mean, his Frederick Douglass called him the most promising young colored man in America. William McKinley had him in his parade. You know, the Wright brothers gave him a bicycle that's in his house up there in Dayton, OH. So he wrote volumes of poetry, Not only poetry, but he wrote musicals, songs.

00:23:35 Mitch Capel

He was friends with Rosamond Johnson and John James Weldon Johnson that wrote, you know, lift every voice and sing. He travelled with the the, The This Jubilee Singers. I mean, his brother was bad and he died at 34.

00:23:50 SPK_4

Oh man.

00:23:51 Mitch Capel

A young man from 1872 to 1906.

00:23:57 Robin

I mean, one of actually somebody about two years ago gave me a book that was long to her mother who was a, who's a white woman. She's a teacher in an inner city. She was only the only taught black students. She really wanted to learn poetry and she wanted to teach them about black poetry. So she gave me, I'll just show you, this fantastic book and called Poetry of Black

America Anthology of 20th Century. And that's where I was first introduced to Paul Laurence Dunbar. With this poem, we wear the mask.

00:24:27 Mitch Capel

Yes.

00:24:27 Robin

And that one, to me, wow, I see really captured. Yeah. I think what black people feel and and how we, you know, how we walk through life every day.

00:24:38 Mitch Capel

Yeah, Where the master grins and lies hides our cheeks and shades our eyes. This debt we pay the human guile, The torn and bleeding hearts. We smile and mouse with myriad subtleties. Why should the world be over wise and counting All our tears inside. Nay, let them only see us. While we wear the mass. We smile. But oh great Christ our cries to be from tortured souls arise. We sing, lift every voice and sing. But oh the clay is vile beneath our feet and long the mile.

00:25:18 Mitch Capel

But let the world dream otherwise. We wear the mask.

00:25:27 SPK_3

I hope. I hope you're charging big money for your shows.

00:25:33 Mitch Capel

Yeah, that's that's one of my favorite poems of his. In fact, Maya Angelou, I did a program with her years ago and and she did that and that's how she did we wear the mask. So I've been like, she's putting on a mask the whole time. Yeah. And.

00:25:49 Robin

There was also one about the caged bird sings too. That was one of.

00:25:52 Mitch Capel

Them. Yeah. And that's where Maya got her her first line. It's called sympathy. The poem is entitled Sympathy, And that's where. And So what happened to Maya? You know, she was abused as a child and for seven years she did not speak, did not utter a word. So what happened was, though, during those seven years, she took Paul Laurence Dunbar's book and read his book and studied his book the same way I did. I studied. I wasn't abused, but I read the book.

00:26:20 Mitch Capel

I kept that book with me for seven years, just read it and anybody that would listen. She kept that book for seven years and studied that book for seven years. And when she finally spoke, when she finally spoke and came out of everything. And when she finally wrote her Antha Biology. When she writes what? What is it? I'm having autography. Thank you. When she wrote, yeah, autobiography. When she finally wrote to autobiography, she took the title.

00:26:46 Mitch Capel

She took that line from Dunbar. I know Why the Caged Bird Sings. And that's from the sympathy. That's from the poem Sympathy.

00:26:53 Robin

Oh yeah, I was wondering. So that's just.

00:26:56 Mitch Capel

Yeah, that's another favorite poem. That's a tough one too, man. Yeah.

00:27:03 SPK_3

We we're talking about all these these really great pieces. But my another question that I have is what stories won't you tell? Or like what kinds of stories won't you tell and why?

00:27:19 Mitch Capel

Well, I won't tell stories like, OK, let me let me back up some of Dunbar's stories. Some of his poems, like I said, are written in dialect and some of the terminology he used back then, like picking any darky whatever. Even though the story's a great story, I won't use those terms. I'll change it to the beautiful brown baby or whatever. I just won't use the terms. And I'm sure he wouldn't use them now if he, you know, were living or or he wouldn't use them then if he didn't have to. But again, that's all that was selling. I won't tell. I won't tell stories that degrade us as a race. I won't tell any stories that degrade a woman.

00:28:00 Mitch Capel

I won't tell any stories that that are buffoonery, you know, that make it look like someone's doing a minstrel show. I know the storyteller that does that and it it just turns my stomach to watch it work. But you know, it's again, all my stories have to be positive. They have to move me. There's a big thing going around right now about Joel Chandler Harris stories, Burr Rabbit and all of that. And I don't like the fact that that he had stole those stories from an African American and, you know, changed him up a little bit. So I won't tell those stories. There are people who do, and God bless him, but I won't tell those stories. I've got enough right now on my plate to tell. And all of them are positive.

00:28:59 Mitch Capel

All of them his a lot of historical stories. Dunbar Dunbar's father was in the 5050 Fifth Massachusetts regiment and so he he told him the stories of of the Civil War and Dunbar wrote them down in 41st. I mean when they listed colored soldiers D colored soldiers whistling Sam and and you know they're from a first person. You know this was actually so you can that somebody was actually there in that war, you know, just the words and just the way that he describes everything and it's just so powerful to hear it from a first person or not hearsay of someone else And then a lot of facts and all that stuff. Now this is, this is a story that somebody told him first hand that he wrote down. And that's that's why I love Dunbar, because all this stuff is is first hand, first hand knowledge. It's not washed down or anything like that.

00:29:56 Robin

His wife opposed to a a poet or storyteller too, wasn't she? What's her name? Alice.

00:30:02 Mitch Capel

Alice Alice Ruth Moore. Yeah. Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar. Yeah, she was a poet. She was from New Orleans and they met by. She started writing to him and you know, they didn't have text back then, so she was writing to him and send a picture and they fell in love and he went. They got married against his mother. His mother didn't care for it. His mother thought she was gold digging, just wanted to use his name to make herself famous. It was not a good marriage as I understand it.

00:30:36 Mitch Capel

And she didn't attend his funeral. But anyway, yeah, she she, I have her works as well. I've collected her works. I have all of Dunbar's first edition books except for Majors of minors. That's the one that says that has eluded me over the years. I have Oak and Ivy. I have all the others, several copies of some of them. A lot of good stuff with this. Yeah. But yeah, she's great.

00:31:01 Mitch Capel

She, she, she did an anthology of poems and there was actually a poem in there that I fell in love with. It's called The Funeral FUNAL, The funeral of Bruce Smith or the Knights That Are Rising Star. It's the funny poem, if you can find it, I mean. And then the problem was I memorized that poem and then I actually found, because she had found it somewhere and redid it for her anthology. But then I found the original version and it was, it was different. It was more to it. So I had to relearn it. And yeah, I've got it on Avhs type somewhere I can't. I tried to one night I tried to pull it out. I was going through it and I got stuck at a certain part and I couldn't remember what it was because I think about me.

00:31:55 Mitch Capel

A lot of my stories I don't tell, but once every 10 years, sometimes like like Christmas stories, I don't tell those every Christmas. I'm not invited to tell, so I don't tell them. It might be three or four years before I'm invited to do something with the sympathy or something where I'm telling those Christmas stories. It's not every year I do the colored soldiers. It's not every year that I tell do certain stories, so I have to brush them off every now and then and.

00:32:24 Robin

So you spoke at the inauguration of of Barack Obama. So what did?

00:32:28 Mitch Capel

You.

00:32:29 Robin

What did you prepare for that and how did you? Yeah.

00:32:32 SPK_4

I'm very curious about this also.

00:32:34 Mitch Capel

Well, I was planning on going, of course, because it was a historical, monumental occasion. And I'm making plans and trying to figure out how I'm going to do this, and I get a phone call, Scott says. Hello, my name is James Alexander Robinson. I'm with Smithsonian. We'd love for you to perform for the president's inauguration. Barack Obama. I said come on, man, don't be playing

with a brother like that. He said no, I'm serious, man. I started to hang up on him. He said, he said I met you at the Black Storytelling Festival and I said, Oh yeah, right, right.

00:33:04 Mitch Capel

So it was cool. They brought me in. And Onamoomi Gene Moss from Amherst, MA. She and I performed in the Smithsonian Castle leading up to the festival. Every day we were in there doing like 2 shows a day and it was just amazing. So the stories I told were historical stories. My, my father's favorite going back by Dunbar, told that one and a few others. And then the one that I wrote the night that that President Obama was elected. That's the one I always finished with every day. And so it was fun.

00:33:49 Mitch Capel

Wow. Wow. Yeah. So my name is up there. Not to brag, but my name, my name is on there with Aretha Franklin. I mean, you know, everybody else was.

00:33:59 SPK_4

Like, well, but like I got, I got asked how was your family's reaction when you like, when you told them that, hey, I've been invited to speak at the inauguration of Barack Obama.

00:34:09 Mitch Capel

They were great. They were thrilled, Excited. It was the coldest day I've ever experienced in my life, The inauguration itself. But it was great. I mean, everybody out. It was. It was amazing. There's hundreds of thousands of people there, and everybody was just as nice as they could be. Excuse me. I'm sorry.

00:34:29 Mitch Capel

OK, All right, all right. I'm sorry. Would you like to see it? I mean, it was amazing. And I I lived in DC for a while and I've never seen anything like it. I mean, this lady literally left her pocketbook on the ground and came back 45 minutes later in her pocket. We were still sitting there. I mean, that kind of situation, yes. I mean, it was like nobody bothered anybody. Everybody was just as nice as they could be.

00:34:50 Mitch Capel

It was a lot of fun. And we were freezing out there. It was cold. So. But it was worth it. It was worth it to witness. Oh.

00:34:57 SPK_4

Fuck, man, that's great. And also, yeah, I think with Biden's inauguration too, there was another great poet. I forgot her name, but she was really good. She was incredible.

00:35:07 Mitch Capel

She was amazing.

00:35:08 Robin

Gorman.

00:35:09 Mitch Capel

Yes, yes, yes.

00:35:12 SPK_4

Oh yeah, And people, a lot of, at least people my age and everything. We were talking about her for a long time. Like people that aren't even that into poetry were just completely moved by what she did. And I think, yeah, it's just special when you have all these people doing that.

00:35:27 Mitch Capel

Yeah, it was special. Yeah. Yeah. She's amazing. Amazing poet, Yeah.

00:35:33 SPK_4

But what would you say? Like, OK, so personally, like, I haven't been doing as much poetry now just I haven't I have at school and things like that. But what would you say to someone who's into storytelling or writing poems or even writing? Yeah, doing creative writing. What advice would you have for them to either progress in general or to refine their skills in particular?

00:35:59 Mitch Capel

I'd say refine their skills in particular and to be truthful and honest to yourself and you know, don't listen to naysayers. Just be you know. Be yourself and and and and and follow your heart. When you write, you know a lot of times you know, you know, you know, you know when the muse hits you, you have to get up and do it. I mean, I could be riding my tractor, cutting grass, and if something hits me, I got to stop right then. So I right now. That's right, you know 3:00 in the morning. If I wake up in there, it's there. If I say, oh, I'm wait till I wake up later on do it, It's gone, gone. It's not.

00:36:37 SPK_4

There. Can't force it. Can't force it either.

00:36:38 Mitch Capel

Yeah. If you got to force it, you can't do it. So you got to take it when it's there, man. And and and and run with it and yeah. So I encourage you to whatever you feel, whatever, whatever direction you want to go with it, go with it and trust it. Who? Yeah.

00:36:57 Robin

You know, I think I'm people always, always love stories. They love to hear a story, how it's told in different ways, could be in a movie or could be in a poem or a sonnet or something. But it does seem as though storytelling, the the art of storytelling of a person standing up and telling a story and acting it out and really performing it like that artist really, I think making a resurgence now. I mean, not just in the black community, but I think I'm just seeing it around more everywhere. Yeah. What do you agree with that or.

00:37:28 Mitch Capel

Absolutely, Yeah. I do agree with, you know, there's the National Association, black storytellers, which is huge, as well as storytelling. Down Jones for Tennessee, they've been at it a lot longer, but I think we just had our 37th year annual festival and in fact there's a webinar tonight or something going on with the storytelling. But yeah, it's just you know what it is. You make that connection with the audience as a storyteller. And you know, I used to use props and I still use props for the kids and stuff, but not a lot. But that's why storytelling is so powerful, because you get to use your imagination. If I That's why the That's why the book is always better than the

movie. Because when you see the movie, you see Steven Spielberg's version of what he thinks that should be, what the picture should be. When you read the book, your imagination use you.

00:38:24 Mitch Capel

You use the references that you have. Just like when my grandmother's reading the The Cabin tale about the weasel and the bear, my reference was a German Shepherd. That's all I knew. So that's why the that's why storytelling is powerful, because people get to go into their own mind's eye and create the characters that somebody's talking about, yeah.

00:38:45 Robin

And I mean, I hate to say this, but I'm just seeing a lot about with the Gen. Z Ers that they don't seem to have the, you know, use their and not allowed to use, I'll put it this way, not allowed to use their imagination as much as we were because we didn't have, you know, we had scooby-doo, we had TV, but and mostly I was reading books and I think that brought out more imagination. I think that there's less reading now. OK. I'm sorry to attack the whole generation. Yeah, it's like.

00:39:12 SPK_4

Come on, y'all. Like, for real. This is ageism. Ageism.

00:39:15 Mitch Capel

At its mind.

00:39:17 Robin

But but with the Internet and and apps and and YouTube and all of these, these other visions and versions of of people, you know, getting into your brain, how can people?

00:39:29 SPK_4

I I, I have to like, strongly disagree.

00:39:32 SPK_3

Trouble now?

00:39:32 SPK_4

Because I think our generation is actually very, very creative and very, really values creativity and making art. I think sometimes we, a lot of us are kind of going against, you know, just going into that nine to five type of thing and really value doing things like, I don't know, comedy on the side or making some music, 'cause now it's become so easy to make some music and become associated with an app and then just start putting things up there for free. I think maybe the imaginative part that you mean is. Yeah, like purely reading. I imagine that has gone down just cause of TV shows and all that, but I think the imaginative part is definitely still there.

00:40:13 Robin

OK. It it it you really could be, but let me ask Mitch.

00:40:18 Mitch Capel

OK.

00:40:19 Robin

Is your which age, level of audience do you find to be the most engaged? You know, the the most. It's really craving, you know, hearing a story.

00:40:29 Mitch Capel

For me and again I don't want to sound like I got a big head but every audience had to we had kids or middle-aged, seasoned, seasoned, seasoned folks. You know senior citizens. I don't like to call them senior citizens, seasoned citizens you know all of them because because I think my stories are are heading home to them and and and I can't remember the last time I didn't get a standing ovation. I can't remember the last time I didn't get invited back. I did. I did Lincoln's, Abraham Lincoln's home. I forgot where it was. I had to fly into this airport and then drive, rent a car and drive like an hour and a half or two hours to get to where I had to go. And they've been doing this program for 99 years. Guy told me that was the first time anyone's ever got a standing ovation at this place.

00:41:25 Mitch Capel

We're doing the program about Abraham Lincoln and all I did was pull up all the stories that Dunbar had written Mitch and Lincoln and all the stories that I had memorized that actually mentioned Abraham Lincoln. And anyway, it was fun. So I just, I, you know, all the all the audiences that I've been involved with have been engaged. I can't remember one that that wasn't. There might be one or two people sitting in there that have attitude and don't want to participate in, but eventually they end up doing. I've gone to prisons or going to juvenile detention centers where the kids are sitting there all hard, like, you know, they don't want no part of this. Next thing you know, there's they're jumping up, pulling a yam with, you know, everybody's raising their hand. They want to participate. Let me play this part. You know, so you know, you know, people warm up to you after a while if you're honest and not tell storytellers this.

00:42:18 Mitch Capel

If you, if you're honest, if you get up there, kids can. Kids can figure out real quick whether you're lying or if you're fake. They can figure that out real quick. But if you're honest with them and you talk to them and you speak to them on a level and give them respect, I don't. Never call them boys and girls. Nah, they're young adults. I mean, I I give them the respect right off the top so they appreciate that. And then you have to speak their language. You have to listen to some music. You know, I'll listen to some rap music or figure out who the top rap artist is.

00:42:48 Mitch Capel

And if I throw their name out, I'm golden. He knows the baby. Oh man, you know what I'm saying?

00:42:54 SPK_4

Yeah, it worked, yeah.

00:42:55 Mitch Capel

Yeah, you know what I'm saying? I'm speaking that language now. They can listen to everything I say. So yeah.

00:43:03 SPK_4

That's cool. But then I'm curious actually, do you have a story for us which you would mind performing? I think our viewers would love to hear hear something.

00:43:14 Mitch Capel

Yeah, absolutely. Would you like would you like some Dunbar or would you like some my stuff what you want?

00:43:20 SPK_3

I want to see some of your stuff.

00:43:22 Mitch Capel

It's on my stuff. Yeah. All right. This is the point I wrote the night President Barack Obama was elected president because it was so euphoric. It was such a monumental occasion, monumental occasion. I couldn't sleep, so I got up 3:00 in the morning and got a pencil and paper and I sat down at the kitchen table and this is what I wrote, and I called it the election slide as opposed to the electric. Here we go. The ancestors are dancing with the living. Even those whose decision it was to drown in the Atlantic are aesthetically sliding electionally on the Ocean's floor to a syncopathic Babatunde African drum beat with a spattering of Ella scattering while Negro Spiritual sing back up on drums is Roach monks on piano with his Thelonious Approach. Miles's on horn with Dizzy and Satchmo chanting hypnotically is Geronimo, while Mr.

00:44:36 Mitch Capel

Bojangles and little Sammy and even old Uncle Ben and I Ain't Your Mammy or Smiling as they filing down the Soul Train line. This time is now. This time is here. Muddy and all those who feared the dogs and the hoses and the whips have a new dip in their hip and a new glide in their stride as they slide and move with the audacity of a Hope Group, realize while singing the chorus, Yes we can and yes we did as a new day dawns over pyramids. With the prophecy fulfilled, we are the ones we have been waiting for.

00:45:14 Robin

Wow.

00:45:16 SPK_3

Wow.

00:45:17 Robin

Thank you so much. Wow. Wow that.

00:45:20 SPK_4

Was great. I love the musical stuff that you added to it. It was like a like a celebration, really.

00:45:26 Mitch Capel

Yeah.

00:45:26 SPK_4

Yeah, obviously celebration that was so well done and.

00:45:29 SPK_3

So unexpected too. So fresh So.

00:45:32 Mitch Capel

Fresh. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, that's that's what wrote itself down that night that morning, you know? Yeah. So it was a celebration. I just imagine everybody that will celebrate this, this great occasion. So but, yeah, but but Dunbar, man, y'all got well. I gave you a little Dunbar earlier.

00:45:55 Robin

I would buy a little more Dunbar.

00:45:57 Mitch Capel

Little more Dunbar? Yeah, please. So he wrote some of the love stories. The spelling bee is a great one, but it's too long to tell right now. But another one that he wrote was the It's called the old Apple Tree. There's a memory keeps running through my weary head tonight, and I see a picture dancing in the five flames. Ruddy light. It's a picture of an orchard wrapped in autumn's purple haze, with the tender light about it that I loved in other days, and a standing in the corner. Once again, I seem to see diverted leaves and branches of an old apple tree. You perhaps would call it ugly, and I don't know that it's so.

00:46:52 Mitch Capel

If you look the tree all over, unadorned by memories, glow. Why, its boughs are gnawed and crooked, and its leaves are getting thin, and the apples of its bearing wouldn't feel so large a bend as they used to. But I tell you, when it comes to pleasing me, it's the dearest. In the orchard is that old apple tree I would hide within its shelter, settling in some cozy nook where no calls or threats could stir me from the pages of my book. Oh, that quiet, sweet seclusion in its fullness. Pass its words. It was deeper than the deepest that my sanctum. Now for boys. Why the Robins and the jaybirds? They was hand in glove with me as they winked at me and warbled in that old apple tree.

00:47:53 Mitch Capel

It was on its sturdy branches. Then, in summers long ago, I would tie my swing and dangle and contentment to and fro. Highly dreaming childish fancies building castles in the air. Making of myself a hero of romance is rich and red. I can shut my eyes and see it just as plain as plain can be. That same old swing, a dangle to that old apple tree. There's a rustic seat beneath it that I never shall forget. It's the place where me and Hallie little sweetheart, used to set when we wandered to the orchard so no listening ones could hear as I whispered sugar nonsense into her little willing ear. Now my Gray old wife is Hallie, and I'm grayish still than she. But I'll never forget our coating hate, that old apple tree.

00:48:53 Mitch Capel

Life for us ain't all been sunshine, and I guess we've had our share of its flitting joys and pleasures and a sprinkling of its care off the skies have smiled upon us. Then again, we've watched them frown, but our load was never so heavy that we longed to lay it down. But when death does come, we'll call you this. My last request shall be that they'll bury me and Helen beat that whole apple tree. Thank you that.

00:49:35 SPK_4

Was good.

00:49:36 Robin

Thank you. Thank you so much. Wow. Wow. I heard so much of the emotion in the Yeah, in your voice how you. Yeah, you really crescendo to that. I'm.

00:49:47 Mitch Capel

Gonna thank you, Yeah.

00:49:48 SPK_3

You're sharing your.

00:49:50 Robin

Yeah.

00:49:51 Mitch Capel

Great imagery that he writes with his pen, yes.

00:49:58 Robin

Well, I am so sorry to say guys, but I have finished my espresso.

00:50:03 Mitch Capel

Yeah.

00:50:03 Robin

David had a double this time and you know so.

00:50:05 SPK_3

It was good to say I thought you were working on getting a bigger cup.

00:50:10 Mitch Capel

That.

00:50:12 Robin

Yeah. Well, thank you so, so much Mitch. I really appreciate your your coming on the show and to. Yeah and sharing your your thoughts and ideas and and your performances with us too. I mean, we feel very.

00:50:26 Mitch Capel

Thank you so much. Thank you, Marlene. Ben.

00:50:29 SPK_4

Thank you. God you. Yeah.

00:50:32 Mitch Capel

Keep up the great work. You guys are awesome.

00:50:34 SPK_4

Thank you. Appreciate it.

00:50:36 Mitch Capel

Nice to meet you. Nice to meet you. Maybe one day in person.

00:50:39 SPK_4

Yeah, we.

00:50:41 Mitch Capel

Could really have some espresso and break some bread together. Yeah, that's OK that.

00:50:45 Robin

'D be great Mitch Gabel, master storyteller, and thank you and Ashay Ashay.

00:50:51 Mitch Capel

OK and.

00:50:57 SPK_5

Thank you for listening to this episode of Espresso Talk today. I hope you enjoyed today's show, so let's have an after coffee summary. We want to thank Granddaddy Junebug for sharing his journey into storytelling and how he developed his focus on the works of the great black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. His performances were inspirational and educational, and we were honored that he shared his skills and interest with us. This discussion showed how storytelling connected us with our roots in Africa, where the oral tradition was used to remember family history, acknowledge special events, and teach societal rules. Whether written or oral, storytelling is a culture based and value driven art form that entertains, educates, and uplifts children and adults alike. Storytellers like Granddaddy Junebug help us to honor this tradition. Now, we always want to hear what you think, so share your thoughts and questions with us by emailing us at team@espressotalktoday.com. You can also visit our website, espressotalktoday.com For more information about our show and episodes. Join us on Facebook at the Espresso Talk Today forum or on Twitter at Espresso Talk Today.

00:52:29 SPK_5

We also have an Espresso Talk to the YouTube channel to watch short educational videos. You can listen to our episodes on Spotify, iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you listen to your podcast. Next week we will definitely have another interesting talk, so be sure to bring your espresso. You might even want to double see you next time. Ciao.