

STORYTELLING

Chipanshi shares her Zambian heritage



Mary Chipanshi, a Zambian storyteller, tells a story during Little Stories on the Prairie, a multicultural storytelling event held at City Square Plaza in Regina on Saturday. *MICHAEL BELL/Regina Leader-Post*

Preserving cultural history

ASHLEY MARTIN
LEADER-POST

Shortly after a strange bird showed up in a Zambian village, crops and animals started to go missing.

The king blamed the bird and decided the community had to be rid of it. He called on some young men to chop down the tree where the bird was living.

As the first axe bit into the tree, there was a rustling of leaves and fluttering of wings, and there appeared “the most beautiful bird you’ve ever seen, and out of its mouth came the most beautiful song you’ve ever heard,” Mary Chipanshi relayed.

The bird sang in Nsenga, “koni maiwe,” and the men went weak. They returned to the village without having cut down the tree.

The next day, the king sent some children to do the men’s job.

When the bird started singing, its song didn’t faze the kids, who “were chopping, and chopping, and chopping the tree.” The tree fell and the bird flew away, never to be seen again.

There’s a lesson here, said Chipanshi: “You shouldn’t think that because kids are small ... they can’t contribute to the community.”

Chipanshi told this Zambian folk story on Saturday at Little Stories on the Prairie at the Regina Farmers’ Market. The event was co-hosted by the Saskatchewan Writers’ Guild, Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan and the Regina Multicultural Council in honour of National Multiculturalism Day on Sunday.

Chipanshi learned these traditional stories from her grandmother, whom she called Ambuya, and from her husband Aston, who remembers stories from his own grandmother.

Chipanshi, who grew up in the capital Lusaka, was six when she started spending school holidays in her grandmother’s village of Mungule.

Around a bonfire, after supper of nshima corn porridge and stew, the children would beg their grandma to “please tell us a story.”

Most had a moral or lesson, but others were just for fun — like her favourites about Kalulu the trickster hare, one of which Chipanshi shared on Saturday.

“If you are telling a story to a child and there’s a lesson in that story, it’s easier for them to understand than saying ‘Don’t do this,’” said

Chipanshi. Though she grew up hearing them, Chipanshi only started telling stories 20 years ago, somewhat by accident.

Living in Saskatoon, she was at a function and there was a lull in the entertainment. She was asked to tell a story for the children.

“They liked it and the audience loved it,” she said. “The rest is history.”

Chipanshi knows about 10 stories by heart; others are mentioned in the book *The Leper Who Became A Prince and Other Stories*, co-authored by her husband in 2007.

A second book may be in the works after their trip next month to Zambia, where Chipanshi plans to meet with an oral storyteller.

“In Zambia, all the people are moving into the city and leaving the villages, and the old people who know these stories are dying,” she said. “The young generation doesn’t seem to be interested in these stories anymore.”

She wants to help preserve the culture and the history, and share them with people in Canada.

“I enjoy storytelling and ... I love sharing my culture with as many people as I can. That would keep on the stories going,” said Chipanshi.

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KIDSPORT FUNDRAISER

Mikes gather in Regina in quest of world record

ASHLEY MARTIN
LEADER-POST

Mike Jensen’s mom loved the king of pop so much she named her son after him. “She was a big fan” of Michael Jackson, Jensen said. “I don’t tell that to many people now.”

Jensen was one of hundreds of Mikes at the Rider Fan Fest at Mosaic Stadium on Saturday.

Mikes gathered for the Mikes Unite event, a KidSport fundraiser hosted by Mr. Mikes SteakhouseCasual restaurant.

The goal was to unofficially break the record for largest same-first-name gathering, which was set in 2005 in Dubai by 1,096 Mohammeds.

“It was a pretty ambitious goal,” said Mike Cordoba, CEO of Mr. Mikes.

“We’ll set a record for sure no matter what, in terms of most Mikes in one location.”

As the company CEO, Cordoba was “just lucky” to be named Mike — the restaurant was founded 55 years ago in Vancouver by two Greek brothers.

The name Michael had a



Left: Mike Giesbrecht, left, and son Kole smile for a group photo at Mikes Unite at Mosaic Stadium in Regina on Saturday. The fundraiser for KidSport attempted to break the world record for a gathering of people with the same first name.



Right: Mike Cordoba, left, CEO of Mr. Mikes SteakhouseCasual speaks with Regina mayor Michael Fougere at the event. *MICHAEL BELL/Regina Leader-Post*

five-decade streak as a popular name for boys. From 1954 through 1998, it was No. 1 (except in 1960, when David bumped it to No. 2).

Last year, it was the seventh most popular name in the U.S.; in Canada it sat at No. 28.

The name’s popularity made Saturday’s event possible. And even though someone shouting “hey Mike” in the sea of green was sure to turn more than a few heads, most of the Mikes don’t mind sharing their name

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MIKE CORDOBA

with so many others.

“I kind of find it cool when I run into another Mike,” said Cordoba.

“I love all the Mikes. Bring ‘em on,” dittoed Mike Erlandson from Craik, who knows four other Mikes.

They’re in good company:

Some favourite Mikes include Canadian funnyman Mike Myers, boxer Mike Tyson, hockey’s Mike Comodore, baseball’s Mike Saunders, and the Arizona Coyotes’ Mike Smith, who “puts in a lot of hard work and represents the name

very well,” said Jensen.

“Everybody knows a Mike,” said Mike Wong, who has five Mikes in his group of friends. They go by nicknames — he’s Asian Mike; another friend is Big Mike.

“It’s a lot of fun,” said Wong, who was named after St. Michael the Archangel.

Nicknames are handy when you share your name. Erlandson goes by Wash Tub (“It’s a long story,” he said). Jensen went by Jenny in his 100-student high school, where there were two other

Mikes. Cordoba once had three co-workers named Mike, which was “really confusing.”

“You go by Mikey or Michael or Mike or Mike C. You just have to start really figuring out how you’re going to name yourself,” said Cordoba.

Mike Morris (named after his grandfather) works with a few other Mikes; they simply address each other by their full names.

Mike Chase (named after St. Michael) has been in the same “challenging” situation — they used nicknames.

Despite the name’s ubiquity, none of the Mikes would change theirs.

“I’m pretty happy with Mike,” said Jensen. “It’s simple, everybody can pronounce it and it’s really hard to mess it up when you go places.”

“Mike’s the name,” agreed Mayor Michael Fougere. “It’s pretty obvious it’s a great name; I don’t need to go into detail. It’s strong personality, strong character, reliable, all those things.”

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THE CITY BEAT

RCMP ceremony

RCMP Sunset-Retreat Ceremonies start Wednesday at Depot Division.

Ceremonies also go on July 7, 14, 21 and 28 and Aug 4 and 11.

Each ceremony starts promptly at 6:45 p.m. on the Parade Square and lasts approximately one hour.

Doors will open at 5:30 p.m.

Art gallery

A Sublime Vernacular: The Landscape Painting of Levine Flexhaug is on now through Aug. 9 at the MacKenzie Art Gallery.

This exhibition features more than 450 paintings by Levine Flexhaug, a “speed-painter” from Climax who travelled the highways of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta from the 1930s to the early 1960s.

Canada Day

Celebrate Canada Day with the lieutenant-governor at Government House.

The event runs from 1-4 p.m. on Wednesday and features Rory Allen with his 11-piece band. Also featured will be KAOS Dogsports, the Discovery Ranch horses, and the face painters from Street Culture Kidz.

Admission is free and everyone is welcome.

Let Us Know

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If it involves a not-for-profit event or endeavour in the Regina area, send it along for consideration.

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