

00:00:00 Michelle Obama: You stopped waking us up,

Craig Robinson: Early.

Michelle Obama: Very early.

Marian Robinson: I think I bought those alarm clocks when you started school. In kindergarten. If you remember, I said, you can lay in the bed if you want, I already have my education.

Michelle Obama: Well that, that message, Craig, rings through my head everyday. Every day. It's like, I better get up.

00:00:25 MUSIC

00:00:49 BREAK 00:01:14

00:01:20 Michelle Obama: Hello everybody. I am Michelle Obama and this is The Michelle Obama Podcast. On this episode we're gonna talk about the first and most foundational relationship in anybody's life—the relationship between a parent and child.

My parents provided me and my brother with unconditional love and support. The ability to think independently and to learn and grow and fail on our own.

Now, my mom is not someone who likes to do a lot of interviews. She does not like the public eye. So I asked my brother, Craig, to come back on the podcast and join us as well for this conversation.

00:02:08 Michelle Obama: Marian Robinson is with us today, yeah yeah we're gonna give you applause, [clapping] grandma.

Marian Robinson: [laughs] Thanks guys,

Michelle Obama: Because, look, I have to tell the world, that, getting you to do this, you know, is like, a m, a miracle,

Marian Robinson: A miracle.

Michelle Obama: It's like, it's like baby, baby Jesus, comin' res, from the resurrection. We saw it, she showed up, she came down from the mountain top, to speak with us, today.

00:02:38 Michelle Obama: But I thought, you know since we are in a pandemic that we'd start there, I mean, how you doing, how you feelin', how how does this time feel, for you, just you know, straight up?

Marian Robinson: It's strange of course, but the, I have to say that, because I live alone, I think I'm enjoying it more than most people, [laughs]

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Marian Robinson: I don't have anyone to answer to, [laughs] and I don't have to listen to other people.

Michelle Obama: You don't miss us?

Marian Robinson: Well, actually, no,  
[all laugh]

Craig Robinson: You had to ask, you had to ask.

Michelle Obama: Well, I wanted to put it out there, I wanted the world to know, where we get all this from.

00:03:19 Michelle Obama: How did you think about parenting us?

Marian Robinson: So I, always felt like, little people, and my sister and I we used to call our kids little people, had a lot to say. [laughs] And you start out with conversations, and ev, if you recall, we talked all the time. Dinnertime, and you all talked. And I always say I learned so much from you guys, because, you had things on your mind that we were listening to. I mean, we would talk, and, we would talk about, how you might've been thinking wrong, or you might've been thinking differently from us, but it was never so bad that you had to, be told, to just be quiet. But I always said, that, uh, our discipline was really just conversation.

00:04:18 Michelle Obama: We were free to ask questions, to debate, to disagree, but do it respectfully, we were part of the discussion in our house, we weren't just ancillary people listening on the sideline. Where did, where did you and dad, get that, especially when you were raised in a generation where that's just not how, you know, folks your age, were raised?

Marian Robinson: I remember it not feeling good. You know I felt like I wanted, to say something. But I couldn't. And I always felt like, I people thought maybe I didn't have sense enough to, to have an opinion, and I think that's what it is. If you, if you all recall, I used to tell you, to question me. And I always said, and you all sure did run that into the ground, cause,  
[all laughs]

00:05:16 Michelle Obama: Well you, well you invited it, [laughs]

Marian Robinson: And then I, I got a little nervous about the questioning because I thought, I should know all the answers and then I decided, you know, I don't have to know all the answers. That's when I started my count to ten when you asked me a question that was

uncomfortable. I decided, I didn't have to answer right away. So, when y, count to ten, you give yourself a chance to calm down, with this question, and you think, and then, before you know it, you not even answering it, you're having a conversation with this person, [laughs] You know, why do you think you should do that, or did you think about doing so and so. But it's funny, how, parents think, they have to know all the answers. And nobody knows all the answers. And I was very comfortable saying I don't know.

Michelle Obama: Yeah.

00:06:17 Michelle Obama: With all that you gave me, and all that I knew about love and talking to kids, there were just still the physical act that nobody can prepare you for. For bringing a life that you love into the world, something so precious, and you just have this baby, looking at you, whoo!

Craig Robinson: Yeah, well I I would say that, I was so, nervous, I'm trying to read every book I can find, what to expect when you're expecting, go to Lamaz and all of this. I was like Rob Petrie from the Dick Van Dyke show, I was going to bed, every night with all my clothes on, thinking this is going to be the night. And finally, Avery came, and everything was fine. And you remember we used to live, like, two miles from the hospital. It took my forty minutes to get home, cause I was doing about four miles an hour the whole way.

00:07:16 Michelle Obama: My what to expect when you're expecting, which was the, our modern day bible. Now they, they have it on iPads and iPhones and they have apps and all this stuff, but my book was so dog-eared, because it was like every day, I read, OK zero to three months. I would, I would, study it, when Malia was asleep, I'd go the book and be like OK am I getting this right? Is the bottle working? I get what you're saying, it's like that feeling of being over prepared, but then there are things that they don't tell you, at least for a mother, is like they make it look all easy, like, breastfeeding is just gonna be this natural thing, you know, and mom you didn't breastfeed,

Marian Robinson: No, I did not,

00:07:57 Michelle Obama: You also, and mom is also kind of a, she doesn't remember a lot of stuff. So while she talked, you know I remember, when we, it's like well, what should I expect in the delivery and she was like Ma, she was like don't worry about it, they just knock you out. 'Cause you came up in the time when they just gas you out, right ma, we were born, like you were, that's, that,

Marian Robinson: Right, right, give me drugs. [laughs]

Craig Robinson: And by the way, by the way, it's a good thing we didn't breastfeed, cause we'd have been suckin' on high balls and nicotine.

Michelle Obama: Oh it was a whole different thing. As I I tell mom, Craig, it's like, if she had just like focused, we could've been somebody, you know, I mean that, we were born in the time when people didn't stop smokin', people didn't stop drinkin', they didn't drive around with seat belts, like you enter this world, and you enter the world of an adult,

Marian Robinson: You're on your own, [laughs]

Craig Robinson: I could've been seven feet tall if she wasn't smokin' so much

Michelle Obama: Could've been!

00:08:53 Michelle Obama: So here we come, you know, with all the rules and all the guidebooks, and, you still feel unprepared, you know,

Marian Robinson: Yeah, yeah. Bringin' home a new baby, the one thing I remember, is that first, day home. I felt alone. Because I had this big responsibility. But I soon got over it when it was time to make the formula, [laughs] it was like OK you got stuff to do, lady, you know,

Michelle Obama: Mmm hmm, so what did that lone, what did it, cause I felt, I felt sad too, I mean,

Marian Robinson: It was a huge, responsi- the responsibility was overwhelming. When you thought I had this little, you're looking at this little baby that can't do anything, for themselves. But I soon got over it, because I was busy. You know I had diapers to wash, I had meals to fix,

00:09:47 Michelle Obama: You know I wonder mom, you know, when you looked at, looked, sometimes how we parent and what we worried about, did you think we were overdoing it? Did you think we, [laughs]

Marian Robinson: Yes, I certainly did, [laughs] it was like, calm down! But you had to do it your way, so I didn't push it, you know, everybody has to do things the way they think it should be done.

Michelle Obama: I always appreciated that. Because you were a hands-on Grandma, I mean from day one, cause first of all, you love little babies, you love your gran, alright I always joke that mom loves Craig more than me. She loves all of our children way more than either one of us. I mean,

Craig Robinson: That is facts. fact.

00:10:32 Michelle Obama: And all our kids had a ritual, it was at least one weekend out of the the month, where the girls would be like I wanna go to Grandma's, and you'd have a sleepover, and that was a big biggest night of the week, because you'd get them food that they shouldn't be eating and couldn't get with me, you know, they slept in your bed, they kicked you out of your bed, I can't believe it, you let them tear up your house and make forts out of the couch, I mean,

Craig Robinson: Staying up til all hours,

Michelle Obama: You let them sleep with the TV on! Go to bed with the TV on!

Craig Robinson: What?! I remember mom saying, well, this is, these kids are easy as long as you can give 'em back.

[all laugh]

00:11:14 Marian Robinson: That was the thing I got mad with you about cause I felt like you were too strict,

Michelle Obama: Hmm, yeah, well, they're, you know, OK. So. I swear to god I didn't do one thing that you didn't do. Where'd you, that's why I was like, where'd you think I got all this stuff from?

00:11:33 Michelle Obama: Well we, we talk a lot about you, but, our hero in our lives, Craig, is, Frasier Robinson. Who, you know is not with us, but is with us every single day. Um, and, you know, we had mom as a great, guiding, consistent force in our lives, cause she was able to stay home, cause dad worked a shift job, and, you know, so she was with us, and could invest that time. But I know I got so much from my dad, I got, as a young girl, I got, a feeling of empowerment, because my dad respected my voice. He treated me as, your equal, as his equal, you know, if he taught you to do something, I learned how to do it, there was no, girls can only do this, boys can only do that, I mean, the expectations he had of me and his love for me, I think, was, my first, he was my first role model of what it meant to have a, a supportive loving man in my life.

00:12:35 Marian Robinson: He always felt like there was something good in absolutely everybody. You know how he took up with his drunk uncle, or his unemployed, I mean he just thought everybody had something goin' for 'em. [laughs] You know, and, I think that that's an important lesson for people to learn. You have to look at people, that look like they're bad people, they're not. That was Frasier's thing. That everybody has issues. And that's one thing I liked about him. He understood that everybody, was, basically decent. That they had lots of thing happening, like your story, their story, will help you understand why a person is where he is, at this point in their life, and Frasier always understood that.

00:13:33 Michelle Obama: But, you know, did you agree on everything?

Marian Robinson: We both felt the same about you guys, and I always said that Frasier and I pretty much thought alike. We thought the same things were important.

Craig Robinson: And did you know that when you guys first met, or you kind of grew into that?

Marian Robinson: No, you, you grow into it, because you don't, I always tell the story about when we first got married and moved in together, our first argument was, which way to hang the toilet paper.

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Marian Robinson: Some hang it over backwards and some, and we came from two separate households, and I decided then that I refused to get in an argument over toilet paper. And ever since then I been hanging it his way. [laughs]

Craig Robinson: Which, for those of you out there, it is the where,

Michelle Obama: Under.

Craig Robinson: It it, comes under. Not over the top, it comes underneath and that is how all of our households are now.

00:14:32 Michelle Obama: Well no, I'm an over person.

Craig Robinson: What happened? How did you become an over person?

Michelle Obama: I don't know! I don't know, I was thinking that as you were saying that it's like yeah, I know that it's under, but ours is over.

Craig Robinson: So you decided not to argue about it too, huh.

Marian Robinson: I just felt like that was just too trivial to get into a discussion about. Especially when it's important to the other person, and it doesn't cost you anything. It's easy to acquiesce.

00:15:04 Michelle Obama: With each generation they're making parenting harder, they're making the bar crazier, like, for what a parent is supposed to do.

Marian Robinson: Everybody's on, online talking talking talking. What's good and what's bad, and the, they forget there's a hundred different opinions out there. And raising children you can play that by ear. Nobody has a, a workbook, I mean you talk about your dog-eared copies. But the best thing to do is play it by ear, and, that's when you find out, when you have more than one child, they each need something different from a parent.

00:15:48 Michelle Obama: Playing it by ear in the way you say it, actually requires a bit more focus, but not on like books and theories, but on your particular child. And so in order to do that, you've got to know your baby, you know, you've got to treat it like it has a distinct personality, because, babies do. I saw in Malia and Sasha who they were, you know, their core personality showed up really early.

Marian Robinson: Right.

Michelle Obama: You know, like they were infants when you could see, if you were paying attention, and spending time, and really, listening like your baby has something to tell you, which they do. Then, you can actually, wha, so what you mean by playing by ear, is you've got to know your kid,

Marian Robinson: You've got to know, yeah, playing by ear is dealing with things as they are.

00:16:45 Michelle Obama: How were Craig and I different. What did you see in us when we were little?

Craig Robinson: [laughs]

Marian Robinson: Oh, my god, Oh my god, well first, Craig always looked like he was worrying about something, I'm sure some of that had to do with Dad's help. But ever since he was little, his pictures, you'd look in his eyes, and you could see like a worried little child. And, but then when you came along, I decided, I made him too nice. And I decided that, well, you remember you used to have temper tantrums. [laughs]

Michelle Obama: No, no, we don't need to talk about that,

Craig Robinson: [laughs] She came that way.

Marian Robinson: And you came that way. And it was like oh, she busted her head, just from bein' mad.

Michelle Obama: Yeah, I did. I have a scar, mmmm hmm. mm hmm.

Marian Robinson: And I took you to the hospital, and they start questioning me like I had done something to you.

00:17:40 Michelle Obama: Almost got you reported to DCFS! [laughs]

Marian Robinson: And the next time you did that I said, OK, let them come take you and let you live in somebody else's house, you keep that up. And when I said that, you stopped throwing yourself around when you were mad. [laughs] But you seemed like, you just wanted to do more, not that Craig didn't, you just were determined. You were gonna do it your way, and that's just the way, Craig was acquiescent, he would say oh, yeah that sounds like, what dad said sounds like a good idea. You would say, well why'd you do that, what'd you do that for? You know and it's just, uh, I always tell people that I stopped raisin' you when you were about nine years old.

00:18:32 Craig Robinson: And you know what I remember, I remember you sayin' when I, when Meesh would be talking about doing some things, and I'm like, how you gon' let her do that, and and, um, I remember you saying, you probably don't even remember this, you were like, well when it comes to Meesh, I have to give her two choices, both of which I'm OK with, cause she's liable not to take my advice. And I was like, whoa. That's, [laughs]

Michelle Obama: That's some jujitsu parenting!

Craig Robinson: Whew!

00:19:07 Craig Robinson: You have a group of close friends that you guys always, sort of relied on each other, that I thought, was, admirable, but, but but important.

Michelle Obama: Especially as Barack was running for office, and he was away more, cause sometimes you don't want to be away from your kids, but it's nice to be with your kids with other adults. Cause all you're doing when kids are little, is like you're you're hoping that you're not messin' em up. You're learning from what everybody else is doing. So, a whole Saturday with my girlfriends and our kids, are spent, well, well, what time is your baby going to sleep, or what are you feeding them? You know you can just ask a series of questions, and what you learn, mom, is what you talked about, is that, you know what, everybody's doing this parenting thing a little bit differently. Some people are very on top of making sure they only eat whole grain foods, and healthy, some people are like look, I you know I gave my baby a chicken leg, and she was fine, you know, I mean, it's just a little bit of every, some of, some of us worked, some of us didn't. 00:20:12 You know, some of us had, had partners, some of us didn't. But all of these kids, that we raised our families with, these kids all turned out great.

00:20:21 Michelle Obama: You expected us to be, responsible, for ourselves, at a very early age, um, setting our alarm clocks very early, I mean, making our beds, all that stuff.

Craig Robinson: Chore, any kind of chore, doing our own laundry,

Michelle Obama: You stopped waking us up, um, very early.

Craig Robinson: Early.

Marian Robinson: I think I bought those alarm clocks when you started school. In kindergarten. If you remember, I said, you can lay in the bed if you want, I already have my education.

Michelle Obama: Well that, that message, Craig, rings through my head everyday. Every day. It's like, I better get up. I mean, that was also the beauty of you and dad. Is that you made our successes and our failures, our own. 00:21:12 You know, you were always there for us, but, you believed that, you get good grades for you. Not for me, you know, you know so you guys never celebrated our, our victories too much, or you never wallowed in our failures too deeply, and I always felt like, I'm getting up for me, I've got to get ready to go to school, because, my, it's not because my mom is making me do it, but she's told me that I'm responsible for my education. I'm responsible for my homework. But mom, it takes a lot to let go.

00:21:46 Marian Robinson: I think, first you got to realize, that, a two day old baby is a smart person. You know. Frasier taught me that. He decided you all were smart when I first got pregnant. It wasn't a question of whether or not, or maybe, he just decided he was having the smartest kids on Earth, and uh, that's the way I thought of you, I thought of you as people. Who could learn things. And I still say that about every single child. I think everyone, is smart if their parents think they're smart. And treat them as if they're smart, and treat them with respect.

00:22:33 Michelle Obama: If you are looking for a child to be self-reliant when they're 21, 22, you have to make them practice that as early as 5, and six and seven years old, so, it's like, if you don't teach a kid how to wake up on their own when they're young and it's easy, yeah, you could be waking them up, for the rest of their lives, because you don't make them practice it. One of the things that I had to learn how to negotiate was creating these boundaries with my kids in the White House, you know, I mean, you talk about, a, being raised, in a totally different world than I ever knew? It's like, pluckin' these little girls out of our normal life on the southside of Chicago with Craig, and mom, and our way of doing things, and our community, and then, putting them in a historic mansion with butlers and maids, and florists, and, and gardeners, and secret service, and then trying to make sure that they understood boundaries, understood responsibility. 00:23:44 Trying to live by the values, raise my kids by the values that I was raised with, I won't say it was challenging because I believed in it, but, mom you saw this, you had to basically upend the system of the White House to get them to make sure these girls had some semblance of normalcy, right. [laughs]

Marian Robinson: Yeah, and I didn't push it nearly as hard as I should have, because of bein' a grandma. but, I, I tried

Michelle Obama: Well, I mean. But that's the other thing, it's like, that wasn't your job, you know, I mean, so, while we tease you about being lenient, I mean, the point is, is that, having, being able to be that grandma for them, in that environment, where somebody was always their advocate, and sneaking them a little extra candy, and letting them stay up, you did that, as you always said, because you knew, that I was being the disciplinarian.



00:24:41 Marian Robinson: I think the girls did really well with what they had to deal with, you know. They ended up being, they, with all the secret service and all, they pretty much, just went about their, school work, as just a normal child, you know even though the secret service was standing outside their door.

Craig Robinson: Yeah, I think they just,

Marian Robinson: And they just walked by 'em, and go on and,

Michelle Obama: I really think it's a real testament to all three of you, you, mom, Meesh, Barack. That they ended up being so well adjusted behind all of that. Because I, it's, you know, we, we, got a taste of it from afar, right, but I can't even imagine being there all the time. Because it was stressful for us to come visit! So I just don't know what it would be like to raise children in that sort of, official-ness, and pomp and circumstance, and so I, I think you guys have done a wonderful job. Because both Malia and Sasha have turned out to be wonderful young ladies, and uh, very well adjusted giving, given what they, what they had to deal with right at a very important developmental part, point in their lives.

00:25:59 Michelle Obama: I always tried to make sure that I wasn't pouting, in front of the kids when Barack wasn't there. Because they didn't, they loved him, but it was like, well he travels! He's not here, right now. this is, what he does. If I had made a big deal out of it and said oh my god your dad's not here again! Oh he's missing this, or oh I just wish, and I, wish, then that's the signal to them, well this isn't normal, then, I should be upset about this. Dad's late again! You know, but, I found that, especially in the White House, when there was a demand, it's like, we, we, worked, even as Barack being the president of the united states, he worked his schedule around their schedule. They weren't waiting until 9 o'clock at night to eat because dad was running late. They didn't, they never, couldn't, not go somewhere or do something because of dad. 00:26:55 You know, I never wanted them to resent the presidency, or resent what their dad did. And I always thought, well they would, if their lives were put on hold, for things that he had to do. So they adapted, to him being gone, him traveling around the country, they adapted to me being campaigning. They were like yeah, this is what we do.

00:27:24 Anna Holmes: More on the Michelle Obama Podcast. After the break.

00:27:41 BREAK 00:28:11

00:28:15 Michelle Obama: We're at the end of our parenting uh, uh, careers. Well, no, I am. Because you're an old dad. Yeah.

Craig Robinson: Wait a minute, I'm an old dad.

Michelle Obama: We, we, Craig is, uh, president, and CEO, chairman of the old dads club.

Marian Robinson: That's right, Charter member.

Michelle Obama: Charter member. But you, at least have experienced that point in parenting that I'm at, where, kids are, well we were supposed to be empty nesters [laughs], but, how, how does it feel, Craig, seeing Avery and Leslie, your older adults, to see them at the end of that cycle with all the hard work that we talked about, all the love, all the, teaching and the caring, to see them, then, enter into the world, because Avery is a grown man.

00:29:06 Craig Robinson: Well now, now that I can sort of look back, on, what it's like to raise adults, kids who have become adults, I realize what mom used to always say to us, about, I'm just gonna give you all I can, up, and then at a certain point you guys are on your own. And, to have two that are on their own, and able to take care of themselves, they both are, are capable, and are, are good people in good relationships, uh, it, there's a sense the, you know, Kelly and I talk about this all the time, there's a sense of satisfaction that we've got those two going, and it really makes us feel good about the little two.

00:29:51 Michelle Obama: For us there was that, just that emotion, when, it's like the actual goodbye, I mean the process of getting them ready, and droppin' 'em off, college was the next natural step. They had outgrown everything else about their lives, and they were ready to go, and you know that, and that felt good. But there is that, la-, that actual when you, leave them, drop them somewhere, and you leave, right.

Craig Robinson: And you pull off.

Michelle Obama: And you pull off. You know, with Malia, you know. We, we held it together, you know, sort of. We have, Barack and I have two different ways of dealing with that anxiety. I just had a list of things to do, I was unpacking the room, we're making the bed, we're cleaning, we're getting the dorm room ready. We had things. We were, you know I was occupied. And Barack, was, he was, all out of it, because he really didn't have a job, you know, so we had to, we had to give him, like a make job, like, 00:30:50 Hey, why don't you try to put this lamp together, like the lamp was already put together, you know, it really just needed to be screwed, and you know,

Craig Robinson: The shade screwed on top,

Michelle Obama: Yeah, yeah, and he was thinking, yes, yes, I have this assignment, and then he realized, this is just make-work, cause, cause he completed his assignment in like five minutes, and then he was like, you know, OK, now what. But we took Malia to to lunch, and then we were leaving, cause you know, with all that we brought to college campus, having us stay longer was not gonna be helpful, so we were pretty much in and out, in fact they let her move in, a day early. To, so that, you know, our, commotion wouldn't be in the midst of everyone else moving in. But that moment when she left the restaurant, and we got in our car to go to the airport, 00:31:41 we tried to hold it in, and, then I heard Barack over on the side just, [sniffs] you know that sort of, you know, and, and and Allen, his agent, passed a handkerchief, back to him, he was like thanks man, um, and we both just you know, that, we we both shed some tears, not just him, but me, cause there was just something about the actual leaving her, even though she had been to sleep away camp, and she had traveled, and she had, there's just something about that baby is now, like, she's gone. Little did we know they'd be back so soon, but, uh, given the pandemic, um, and then we were better with Sasha. But, still, right at that, that same moment when we are departing, and all of us are leaving, and

she is staying, there is that little choke up, that, wow, this is, this is a real milestone in their lives. 00:32:38

00:32:40 Michelle Obama: Being a parent has taught me so much about myself. I think that so much of who I am, is not just about the parenting that you gave me, but the experience of trying to pass on these things to my daughters, who are these two very individual people, and and, and learning about me, through them. That has been one of the most import, over any kind of job, any kind of education, any kind degree, that I have ever had. Being a parent has been, the, the biggest growth point for me,

00:33:21 Craig Robinson: Being a parent is such a, pleasant surprise. It's been such a pleasant surprise. Because there is something, now, dad wasn't alive to see any of our kids. But there is something about each and every one of them that reminds me of dad somehow. And that's just the culture that we've sort of built, that's he's, he started.

Michelle Obama: Well and I think I want, you know, particularly, because I know we have a diverse audience, and as we're in the midst of these protests, and Black Lives Matter, you know, this is the frustrating thing for, for, for for Black people. Because what we know is our truth, which is, we are, the norm. We, our family, is, what Black families are, what Black neighborhoods are,

00:34:11 Marian Robinson: And we're, I don't want, I don't want to interrupt you, but if you remember generations before, we bought into the propaganda they were teaching us about ourselves!

Michelle Obama: Mm hmm.

Marian Robinson: You know what they said about us? Uh, a lot of people believed it!

Michelle Obama: Mmm hmm. Even us.

Marian Robinson: And reacted, in, in that way. So, we are getting to the point now, where, we know who we are, we know what we're capable of, and all of that, that stuff, that you were pitching, just isn't true.

Michelle Obama: But what do you make of what's going on? You know where we are as a country, you know how these young people are out in the streets protesting, the whole, you know, the whole issue of police brutality, because we've, we've talked about these kind of issues growing up. The time that, Craig you were about ten. had your new ten speed bike, that mom and dad had bought you, I still see it vividly, it's yellow, it was your first ten speed, it was,

00:35:14 Craig Robinson: From Goldblatt's,

Michelle Obama: From Goldblatts.

Marian Robinson: Right.

Michelle Obama: But you were ridin' down the street and you got stopped by the police, and they accused you of stealing your own bike. And they would not believe you, to the point where you were like, take me to my home, because, you know,

Craig Robinson: Yeah. No, it was, it was terrifying only because, the poli, I was always taught that the police are your friends, and it, and they'll believe the truth, and I was tellin' 'em the truth and this guy would not believe me. So this guy, grabbed my bike, and he wouldn't let it go, and I was like oh no, no, and I was so innocent, I was like oh you got this all wrong, this is my bike. Don't worry, this isn't a stolen bike, and he would not believe me, and I was absolutely heartbroken, and I finally said to him, listen, you can take me to my house, and I will prove to you, this is my bike,

00:36:11 Michelle Obama: And how old were you?

Craig Robinson: I was like 10, I was like 10 or 11. So they put the bike in the trunk of the police car, put me in the back, drove me home, I got out, mom was waiting at the front of the gate. And I started explaining and she, mom was, you know how mom is, mom was like, go in the house. You know how, when she's ready talk to somebody, she's like all right go in the house. And all I could think of was this dude's about to get it.

Michelle Obama: Mm [laughs]

00:36:41 Craig Robinson: And I saw her talking and I couldn't hear anything, but I saw her hand pointing, and she had that tight lip, and,

Michelle Obama: What did you tell the police officer, mom, what were you telling him?

Marian Robinson: I found out that they knew the people who were accusing, Craig of taking the bike. They were friends with him. And what they came and did, cause they actually came, they ended up comin' inside the house. To sit down. And I said, uh, what you did was cancel out a whole lotta things that we had been teaching them. And I think you need to come back here, and talk to them. And at least admit you made a serious mistake. So that, you won't cancel out everything we've been trying to teach our children.

00:37:33 Michelle Obama: Yeah. When when black folks, you know, what, what a lot of folks who are not in our position don't understand is that, this is such a way of life, when it comes to interacting with the rest of the world, it, it doesn't matter, you know who you are, and what kind of values you have, you know, nobody, thinks about, you know, the fact that, we all come from good families, that are trying to teach values, but when you leave the safety of your home and go out into the street, where being black is, is a crime in and of itself, we have all had to learn how to operate outside of our homes with a level of caution, and fear, because you never know. And we grow up, having to have conversations with our children, because almost everybody I know has had some kind of incident where they were doing, just minding their own business, but, living Black, and and go accused. Um, of something. And Craig, what does that do to you as a kid, at ten?

00:38:40 Craig Robinson: Yeah, well, I, I tell you, I was absolutely heartbroken, because I could tell they were trying to ask me questions that would trip me up. If I wasn't so sure that that bike was mine and showed any kind of reticence, I could see them, taking me off to the police station, not calling mom until after I've been, you know, booked or whatever they do. And it just made me acutely aware, at a young age, what dad had always, what mom and dad had always talked about. You have to be very careful when you're out here, not just dealing with the bad element, that you have to deal with, when you're living in a black neighborhood of, you

know crime, gangs, that kind of thing, but you have to worry about the police too. So you have to walk this line, where you can't make a mistake on either side, or you could get sucked up.

00:39:39 Marian Robinson: And you know what I, when I called him and he came back over, you know, you know what he said? He said you know, I knew that was his bike, the minute he said take me to my house. And then I said well why, did you let it go that far? You are actually messing with a ten year old's, mind. As far as the police are concerned.

Craig Robinson: Now I didn't know that part, I didn't know that he admitted to knowing that it was my bike, but, it's, that's the perfect example of what all of these young, black people are dealing with now, because, this was, almost fifty years ago?

Michelle Obama: Mmm hmm, yep,

Craig Robinson: Just think about that. I, I can't imagine, what these young folks are dealing with now. When they go out somewhere.

00:40:31 Marian Robinson: And, just the fact that, the way they were acting, lets you know, that it's part of a culture. Because those two policemen were black. And they were acting exactly the same as any other policeman.

Michelle Obama: Mm hmm.

Marian Robinson: It's it's almost like, this is what they thought they were, how they were thought they were supposed to act.

Craig Robinson: But Meesh I'm, I'm hopeful, it's sad, but I'm hopeful for a couple of reasons, one this young group, they're so energized, from a movement standpoint. This social media has enabled them to be able to congregate and engage quickly. Uh, that's one thing. The second thing, the, what everybody's been talking about. The diversity of the group of people who are out there marching and out there protesting, and doing it peacefully, it has, struck a chord, with everybody over the globe. 00:41:32 You know, and I, I been sayin' all it took was for one of these white women to get shot with a rubber bullet, and people are like whoa what is goin' on?

Marian Robinson: Well don't forget the, uh, the recording of the whole incident,

Craig Robinson: Um, and and and that was, uh, that was that was gonna be my next part

Michelle Obama: Right the fact that we, that we had to actually see it happen, you had to see it.

Marian Robinson: Because you're talking, I'm talking all my life, to whoever I run into, white black, whatever, and telling these stories about how, every black person knows a black person who's been put in jail because they were standing on the wrong corner at the wrong time of night. And they end up in jail. You say that, but, when you say that to people, they sort of look at you like, oh that couldn't be that bad.

00:42:22 Michelle Obama: Right because it would, it would never happen to them,

Marian Robinson: Right.

Michelle Obama: You're taught, you know, people are gonna assume the worst of you. So you've got to be better than, you've got to be ten times better than. And when we were in the White House, we didn't, we, we could've never gotten away with some of the stuff that's going on now, not because of the public, but our community wouldn't have accepted that. You, you worked, you did your best every day. You showed up. And we did it in the White House, but there are people and jobs all over this community, all over this country, all over this world, who are doing this same thing, because that's how we were raised. We have to be better, to just be, equal, um, so, the fact that there're people out there that treat us less than, when we're working so hard to be better than, that's where the pain comes from. 00:43:15 That's where the, that's what these young people are so angry about. Because they're doing everything right, everything they are told, and it's doesn't matter. A police officer will still stop them, and accuse them of stealing a bike that their parents worked hard to get. That hurts. If you have a good foundation, you are so strong, that you can overcome that. You know, because you are so resilient, because you have had to learn so much empathy and so much self control. So the notion that people are out there wondering about these protests. It's like, do you, do you know how much it takes, that it takes to get up everyday, and be accused of being, less than what you are? 00:44:00 But it's because we come from families like ours. We have mothers and aunts and grandmothers and fathers like ours, you know, we have communities that stick together, and church groups, and, you know, little league teams, we're, you know, piecing together a life with duct tape and glue, and a lot of love and a lot of empathy. So when people doubt us, it is, it's frustrating, and it's painful, and it can make you angry. But we want to make sure that, you know, at least you and me Craig, we can take a moment to acknowledge the Marian Robinsons out there. Um, the, the millions of 'em, that are raisin' amazing, people. And putting 'em out there on the planet.

00:44:49Michelle Obama: Well thank you guys, thank you, mommy,

Marian Robinson: You're welcome sweetie,

Michelle Obama: This is, this is gonna be good.

00:44:59 Michelle Obama: Well, that was a very fun conversation for me, and I hope it was for you, too. I want to thank my mommy, Marian Robinson, and my big brother, Craig, for coming on today and sharing their stories and their wisdom, and their amazing senses of humor.

And I also want to thank all of my guests, who came on throughout the season. I couldn't be more thankful for the conversations we've had here, on this podcast. While we've had to navigate the reality of this pandemic, doing some of the conversations over Zoom, or sitting at least six feet apart from each other to maintain social distancing, each episode really felt like a true reflection of the kinds of conversations I've always had with these special people in my life.

We just got to talking, and then we forgot that the mics were even there. We were sharing stories, and laughing at each others' jokes, and most importantly, connecting with one another in a way that fills and sustains us, no matter what we've got going on.

00:46:06 So, I hope that these conversations have been meaningful for you, too. Conversations like these help us understand ourselves better. And when enough people are having enough of these kind of conversations, we will gain a better understanding of each other. In our families, our social circles, and our communities.

That's how we begin to break down these barriers that too often get in our way. By opening up. By listening to one another. So I want to thank all of you, for being here, for listening. Thank you for being a part of these conversations. Thank you for the conversations you're having in your own lives, with your own girlfriends. With your mentors, with your own parents and partners. These conversations couldn't be more important. Thanks again everybody. I will talk to you again soon. 00:47:06

00:47:09 Anna Holmes: The Michelle Obama Podcast is a Spotify Original, presented and produced by Higher Ground Audio in collaboration with Dustlight Productions.

From Higher Ground Audio, Dan Fierman, Anna Holmes and Mukta Mohan are Executive Producers. Janae Marable is our Editorial Assistant. Adam Sachs is our Consulting Producer.

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The song you heard at the beginning of this show is "Fragile" by Eryn Allen Kane.

Thanks for listening to The Michelle Obama Podcast.

00:48:40 BREAK 00:49:00