

**Episode Title: HOW TO “BEE BRAVE”**

**Guest: Michelle Simmonds**

**Episode Link: <https://grownasswoman.guide/episode174>**

**Jackie MacDougall:** Everyone knows February is Black History Month. But do you know the origin? In 1926, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the founder of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, was the first to establish Negro History Week during the second week of February.

That was the week that celebrates the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, both men being great American symbols for freedom. The week was a time to recognize the contributions of black people in American history.

It wasn't until 50 years later, in February, 1976, that President Gerald Ford first officially recognized Black History Month, calling upon the public to, "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

10 years later, in 1986, also the first year we celebrated Martin Luther King Jr's birthday as a national holiday, the US Congress designated the month of February as National Black History Month.

While the importance of Black History Month is undeniable, if you grow up like me – white in the 70s and 80s – you can count on one hand the number of lessons we were taught in regards to Black History. Black History is our history. It should be taught in our schools and be represented in all aspects of our lives; on our televisions, in our books – and definitely, in our own communities.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Black History Month is a beautiful thing; and I love to see everyone selling Black History Month, because we have made so many contributions – and we continue to make as we evolve forward will be, not just what happened between 1619 and 1964 or 1968... it's beyond that. It's up to this very moment.

We are continuing to be Black History because we are continuing to be black in America, and we're continuing to create history and continue to make history. So, it will always be part of the fabric. And I just want to be a part of ensuring that we're remembered for our contributions and that it doesn't get swept under the rug.

Lots of ethnicities and lots of people have made contributions to America. It's not to say black people are the only people that made significant contributions, but we laid obviously a foundation for everyone else to make their contributions on literal backs.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Michelle Simmonds spent 18 years in Human Resources before she took a giant leap of faith, left her job and launched the Bee BRAVE Movement as a platform to inspire and encourage people who want to do something about racism to actually do something, by way of practical tools and tips.

When you talk with Michelle for even just a few minutes, you know she was meant for greatness.

**Michelle Simmonds:** I was born on April 4th, 1968, which is the same day that Dr. Martin Luther King was killed. I share birthday 40 years apart with Maya Angelou. And Beyonce and Jay-Z – also, two icons – got married on my birthday.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Wow. April 4th is a powerful day.

**Michelle Simmonds:** April 4th is a powerful day, but Martin Luther King and Maya Angelo are two of my heroes – my heroes and sheroes. So, I just want to give honor to them and also to my ancestors on American Black History Month, and where I come from in the south was the last court that slave ships were brought to.

So, the 110 slaves who were brought to Mobile Bay illegally after the slave trade was declared illegal, were brought to that port illegally, they were the last 110 souls that were brought into Mobile. So, I just want to give honor to my ancestors who sacrificed a lot for me to be here to talk about being brave.

**Jackie MacDougall:** This is The Grown-Ass Woman's Guide. I'm your host, Jackie MacDougall. In early 2022, I was invited to become part of WeWil Collaborative, Women Empowering Women In Leadership. The mission of WeWil is to empower women with professional development, growth and connections through supportive workshops and community. That's where I met Michelle Simmonds, one of WeWil's founding members.

**Michelle Simmonds:** We all kind of used our skillsets and our strengths to develop the platform that WeWil is today. And we're happy to have you and a few other newer women to our group. And we've been doing amazing workshops, empowering women throughout Santa Clarita Valley and nationwide because of the Pandemic. So, we were able to broaden our audience definitely through the last couple of years. WeWil is pretty awesome.

**Jackie MacDougall:** WeWil is pretty awesome. And Michelle and I live in the same community. However, because of when you got started at the beginning of the pandemic, everything's online. So, you ladies had already been doing workshops; I jumped in early last year, became part of the group.

If someone's listening right now, it's not like, 'Oh, I don't live where they live,' come on, join us for these workshops because they're all under the umbrella, sort of, of like professional development and women in leadership – but they're really like personal development skills.

And I've learned so much from our speakers, and I hope that anyone who's listening might want to join us for the next one. We are though, doing our very first live event March 8th, which is International Women's Day, right? Where we live in Santa Clarita – and it's at a bar owned by two women, all the sponsors are women.

**Michelle Simmonds:** It's at a badass bar,

**Jackie MacDougall:** It is at a badass bar. It's going to be so much fun; raffles and gift bags – and it's just, it's a celebration. And we're also honoring three local women who make a huge impact worldwide, really, and some of the things that they do. So, I'm really excited. So, anybody who wants to join us, I'll put the link to buy tickets in the show notes – and join us, for sure.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Absolutely. And it's our first in-person. I'm so excited about that. Can't even--

**Jackie MacDougall:** I know. You worked in HR for many, many years. Yes?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Yes. 18 years to be exact.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Wow.

**Michelle Simmonds:** 18 years.

**Jackie MacDougall:** And you got out--

**Michelle Simmonds:** Yeah, the Morality Police for 18 years.

[laughter]

**Jackie MacDougall:** This was a lot. Everybody needs HR. Obviously the pandemic HR was still successful, you know, like people who worked in HR because you can be laying off a variety of different areas, but that makes HR even more important.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** What made you jump ship?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Okay, so, you know, I love being HR. First of all. I think it's a fantastic career, and I'm happy to give feedback and mentor people who want to be in HR. I think it's a valuable and important way to service people.

I learned so much about policy, procedures, leadership, business, cultures, you know, working in different environments in different industries such as; entertainment and litigation, law, music. publishing, promotional marketing, nutritional marketing. So, it was a really vast and deep learning experience.

After 18 years though, it's also a difficult field in terms of all the different genres of HR and aspects. Some people think, 'Oh, I know HR,' because they know how to do one segment of it.

But my true work experience was as a generalist, and that kind of means I knew a lot about a lot of different things or little about everything, you know, so always having to be up on; policy and Department of Labor, laws, and lot of areas of conflict and Employee Relations.

And so, I thrived in all of that for a very long time. During the pandemic, there was a shift for me emotionally and mentally and physically; like everyone else, I was very taxed with, Whoa... life just got shaken up really badly, like really broadly.

And so, I started to feel a little of the burnout that can occur in a position where you're taking care of everyone else. And so, I was trying to figure out how to take care of myself as well as everyone else in my organization, after 18 years or 17 years at that time.

And so, I kind of started to develop a little bit of inspiration around my creative side. And, you know, between me and my spouse, we kind of figured out a way for me to further explore my creative side and dial back on the HR for my own peace, my own sanity.

And, you know, we didn't know if the end was coming or not with the pandemic. It's like, 'How long do I have?' [laughs] 'Do I have done two weeks or two years?' You know, you better do... whatever it is you want to do, you better start doing it.

So, after seven years with my firm Director of HR, I kind of decided it's time for me to step off into something new; so, be brave enough to step off into the unknown and develop my passion. This is the first time I've kind of delving into a creative passion in my life besides raising my children.

So, HR, it gave me everything. I gave it everything. And I'm leaving it on the table, mic drop; I'm ready for the next adventure. I'm ready for the next part of my life that hopefully involves my passion, purpose, and prosperity. Yes.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yes. And you know, I don't think people think about how difficult HR can be. I mean, it's sort of like a babysitter, a counselor; there's a lot to be said.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Yeah. And Jackie, it's a lot of risk mitigation. It's a lot of getting out of head of things. So, you're constantly-- Even in my personal life, it overflows. And that's one of the reasons why my spouse is like, 'Yeah, maybe it's time for change because--'

I'm HR at home too. You know, I'm HR to my kids; they're like, 'Enough already.' But you're always out head of things and having to know what the answer is before the question is even asked; and that's a lot of responsibility.

And like I said, it's a wonderful career though, I think for the right people in the right-- You have to love people; that's one thing I would definitely say about HR and the *why I was able to thrive in it for so long*, because I do love connection with people.

It's important to provide space for people in their workplace; they're there more than they are at home, you know? So, I always wanted to be a safe space for anyone in my organization to come and present, you know, whatever their issues are.

And they're not always problems; sometimes they're just, they just want comradery or they just want to feel heard, they want to be seen. And I was that person in my organization and I'm proud of that. And I want that for other people in their organizations. So, you HR people out there who are people 'people', who are true people 'people'... hang in there. It's a great career.

**Jackie MacDougall:** So, you mentioned your passion. So, you've left your job and you've started something. And you also mentioned being brave, can you share-- What would you call it? Would you call it an organization, a movement, a nonprofit? How would you refer to 'Bee BRAVE'?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Thank you for introducing Bee BRAVE. Bee BRAVE, okay? So, the word 'BRAVE' is acronym is four, because racism affects virtually everyone. I call 'Bee BRAVE', a movement for the sake of securing my web domain, number #1.

But technically it's a platform; and it's a platform of resources essentially for people who are already in touch with their humanity and want to do something – do something [the operative word, *do something*] around anti-racism... to be intentionally anti-racist.

It provides tools and tips for being intentionally, which means making effort – actual intentional effort towards anti-racism. So, that's Bee BRAVE's purpose. The website is [www.beebravemovement.com](http://www.beebravemovement.com).

And that's where all of the information about what 'Bee BRAVE' is about is there with the tools and tips mapped out into different categories – so how you can be brave, you can be anti-racist, inclusive... at work, at home, at school, in the community, at the rally.

It's really self-explanatory. I'm not teaching people how to be anti-racist. I'm merely providing suggestions for how they can get involved and get off the fence, you know, or be allies in action – or be even better allies... continue to be allies in action for life.

You know, racism is a big subject; and it's a trigger for many people emotionally, but we have to talk about it. And so, 'Bee BRAVE' is the way that I contribute. It kind of came to

me in 2021, actually my whole life has been a build up to 'Bee BRAVE'. So, I don't want to just say, "Oh, I got this light bulb, you know, around racism in 2020."

Of course, George Floyd's murder and protest and uprising and paradigm shifts around the conversation of racism, and everything, was forefront for me in many ways – emotionally, mentally physically.

And so, I wanted to see; *what can I do? What can I do from where I am in my life, in my daily life?* And kind of when I started to feel that emotion of that question, Bee BRAVE manifested as a thing.

One of my friends and colleagues, dear friend, who had joined a committee to address kind Human Relations in her city, and she was getting some pushback and some negativity around that contribution.

And I wanted to support her and inspire her to keep going, and I said, "The work that you do matters, 'Bee BRAVE'." And I wrote on a little note to her, "Bee BRAVE because racism affects virtually everyone". And that's the first time-- That was in July of 2021.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Wow.

**Michelle Simmonds:** First time I ever written that word down. And ever since I wrote it down, like all the feels around; what this could be and how I could explain it to people, and how I could inspire people, and how I could give people content around racism in a way that hopefully they receive it and know that the core of Bee BRAVE is love.

The core of Bee BRAVE is unity. The core of Bee BRAVE is racial harmony. And opening up minds to understanding that we're all human, we're just different colored crayons in the box, but we're all made of the same stuff.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right.

**Michelle Simmonds:** And when we worked together, we create beautiful pictures.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. And you know, I think it was 2020 the first time I heard that it's not being racist or not racist; you know, it's being racist and being anti-racist. So, being willing to speak up, being willing to do something... as you said, 'do something'. So, when you think you want to help people do something, what does that look like?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Well, first it's educating yourself about racism, about a racist history in America that negatively impacts predominantly the lives of black people present day. So, educating yourself.

And like many people have already heard, it's not on black people to educate everyone else about racism; and that's not what I feel my platform is about. It's more about you educate yourself and, how can we put this into action?

So, you know, for instance, you know; encouraging your children to build friendships with children of color, equipping yourself to be prepared for conversations about racism by seeking knowledge on the subject – you know, at work, providing your colleagues... you know, or at school, your students... with the tools that they need on an individual basis to succeed according to their unique and individual needs. And that's where, you know, equity comes into play.

And these are basic tools and tips. These are not, you know, high-level PhD certified, you know, conversations. These are something for everybody is on Bee BRAVE.

And I encourage people to also, you know, send us what brave looks like to them – but also having and holding fireside chats kind of like you and I are doing, holding coffee in fireside chats or dinners, or invite your neighbors who live in your area to come over and talk about racism at some point.

I would love to see BRAVE dinners, you know, where people get together and literally talk about; how they can show up, how they can do things... do something from where they are. You know, you don't have to become a politician because, trust me, Bee BRAVE is not a political stance.

It's a human stance, you know, to deal with human beings. Everybody's got their lane when it comes to either being for racism or against racism or somewhere in the middle.

Everyone's got their lane; and my lane is about the love that supports evolution of our being so that we can work together and my color doesn't have to impact your color negatively... and your color doesn't have to impact my color negatively, that's kind of the goal.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. One of the things you mentioned was kids, and encouraging them to have friendships with kids of color. And that's what's so interesting to me, is like I don't have to; in my particular home, in my particular community and their school, my kids have friendships with all different types of kids – kids from different racial backgrounds, kids from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Michelle Simmonds:** That's a blessing.

**Jackie MacDougall:** You know, they may go to school with kids with, you know, multimillion dollar homes – but they also may go to school with kids who live in a one bedroom apartment and they may go to-- You know, kids with all different religions and nationalities and races.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Yeah. We start with the babies. We start with the children; you know, they teach the adults.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Racism is a learned behavior. Its choice at the end of the day. You know, I had a few negative experiences with racism when I was growing up. And, you know, it sticks with you your whole life. You just learn to put it in a place where, you know, it doesn't continue to impact you... hopefully, with little counseling.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Michelle Simmonds:** You got to get to the children because they don't know to not love you until you start teaching them that. So, you know, you're really blessed to have your kids in an environment where they see the diversity. Now, do you have conversations around normalizing the fact that they are in a diverse environment – or is it just that they are?

**Jackie MacDougall:** That's a great question. I think it's always a source of discussion, especially being four-fifths of my family is white – and one of my son's is Asian. So, racism is absolutely a conversation that we have all the time because some of the things that are said to him – just the microaggressions, you know, like on a regular basis from a variety of different kids. Like, so racism is definitely something that we talk about. But I'll be honest with you, like, if he weren't a member of our family, would I be talking about it as much? I don't know. And you know, one of the things I really appreciate about our friendship is that you and I can have conversations; and, you know, one of the things I've said to you, and I think I've said it on this podcast before, is like *that fear of getting it wrong*, right?

I grew up in the suburbs of Boston in, you know, the 70s and 80s and heard and saw plenty of things. And, you know, we are the product of our upbringing, but we can also shift that, we can-- We don't have to be that, you know?

And so, I know that what I experienced and what I've heard is not something that I repeat or that I live by, but there's bias. We all have bias. We all have all of our past experiences. And so, you and I, even in Big Bear, like just sitting and chatting and listening to your perspective and listening to this not... new movement.. but your unique new movement.

**Michelle Simmonds:** It's new to me.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. That this is the big one for me. And I'm fully admitting in the past three years, it's like not expecting you to be the teacher – not expecting you to sit in

a room of like the seven of us. So, there are eight of us in WeWil, you know, the rest of us are white

**Michelle Simmonds:** Aren't the only one.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. And not expecting you to stand up and like educate us all – and teach us all about diversity, equity, and inclusion... you know, doing our own work... having those conversations, which is amazing. But I'm really inspired and motivated to do my own learning and then bring that to the conversation versus the expectation that, 'Oh, well, it's your experience, you tell me everything.'

**Michelle Simmonds:** Right. Like, I'm not setting this up for you to sit at my feet, 'Well, I, let me tell you all about being black and America.'

**Jackie MacDougall:** She opens up the big book, you know?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Right, right. But it is my experience being black in America; and I do have a full experience and I had a really eclectic and interesting childhood... and what developed into me as this person that you see now is a very diverse and interesting experience.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Well, I think that's the combination of doing our own research, doing our own reading, and then also being open and interested in hearing the perspective from other people. You know?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Mm-Hmm.

**Jackie MacDougall:** That can be in regards to race, that can also be in regards to a variety of different things like sexuality and gender and special needs and all of that stuff. Like if we all understand to not put that person in the spotlight as like, 'There's my educator.'

**Michelle Simmonds:** Right. Yeah.

**Jackie MacDougall:** I think that that's important.

**Michelle Simmonds:** I mean, most people perceive life based on their experiences and their environments. So, my experience and my environments were consistently

changing and very diverse growing up in LA in the 70s and 80s. And I'm really thankful for that because it kind of broadened my viewpoint about people, in general.

You know, I can't say that I trust everyone that I meet, but I'm at least open to getting to know them regardless of their race. And just to give you an idea of that, my mom and dad divorced when I was two, and my mom hooked up with her guitar player in her band.

She's a singer-songwriter, entertainer; and hooked up with a guitar player in her band who's white. So, from my childhood, from the age of 4 to 17, I was raised by my mom and a white man. So, I was raised under an interracial relationship in Los Angeles.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Ooh.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Yeah, that's where my perception was broadened through-- And a lot of their friends were in interracial relationships, were interracial couples; and their children were biracial, and black or white. And my best friend, one of my best friends when I was five years old, was Asian. And I had just the melting pot, and that was my normal.

And so, that's where I-- That's what I'm imprinted with. And that's why I feel like I'm still like, you know, all the neighborhood kids, no matter what color, shape, size, you know, dimension they were – I was like, 'Come to my house, my mom will make us sandwiches.'

That was-- I was that girl, you know? And so, that little girl is still inside of me – and still wants to see everyone get together... and everyone work together to be happy, you know. And it's not a kumbaya – but it's a, this can, *this is possible*.

It's possible for us to be in community together in a normal way. I had a few racially charged experiences as well from white people who might've called me N-word in public or made it clear that they didn't want to be my friend because I was black; I had a lot of those experiences as well.

But I had more experiences of love and acceptance and unconditional love from people of all different races growing up. So, the good definitely outweighed the negative when it comes to race relations for me, personally.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right.

**Michelle Simmonds:** And that's why I have a broader view at this point in my life.

**Jackie MacDougall:** What kind of response did you get when you would come home from school or these things would happen – and you have a black mom and then you have this, sort of, fill-in white parent? Did you feel like you got the same – and not to like

call out your stepdad or anything like that – but like, did you get the same response or support? Like, did you see a difference?

Michelle Simmonds: Well, Jackie, remember when I told you that my parents were entertainers? They didn't have time to talk to me about racism.

[laughter]

**Jackie MacDougall:** You weren't on the radar.

**Michelle Simmonds:** I was not the girl. I was not on the radar. And that's why I'm saying I had a lot of time to think – and processing in my own, you know, hamster wheel about everything that I experienced.

I mean, it would have to be something really tangible; I had only one fight my whole time, you know, growing up in school and that was in the fourth grade – and that was not, you know, it wasn't a fight with a white person or anything.

So, no, I didn't have these discussions with my parents. You just moved on. You're like, we had other fish to fry. You know, like, *where are we going to live? What are we doing?* Food on the table, looking for gigs; you know, that wasn't the priority.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Did you have an adult or anyone that you could talk about this stuff with?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Nah. No, I can't say I did. You know, you just move on. You just internalize it... you know, you move on. And like I said, there were more very specific incidences... I can name them on, you know, one hand, kind of, the ones that really shook me.

You know, the one that really rocked me. Like, I was playing with a little Armenian girl in fifth grade, so it makes me around 10. And we're playing at her house, just having fun. And her mom's there, and then, all of a sudden, her mom goes...

You know, and she said something in their language and they put me in a closet in their house because her brother who lived in the home with them – the little girl's uncle, who was her mother's brother – was coming home from work unexpectedly, and he didn't like black people and I couldn't be in their house.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Oh, wow. I didn't know this until I'm in the closet waiting for them to let me out so I can run home. So, you know, that was a very traumatic experience for me as a child. And you know, I don't even remember what I told my mom; I'm sure I told her.

But there wasn't a sit down, 'Honey, let me tell you about--' because we're living in a interracial relationship – and of, course, I'm sure she probably said something like, 'It's not you, it's them... you know, they're ignorant, don't worry about it.' But I never went down to their house again, I'll tell you that.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right. Oh my gosh.

**Michelle Simmonds:** So, that really, kind of, it stirred something like, *you can't trust every situation, all situations are not safe*. You know, I think that was a big lesson for me because back in those days, we played outside until the lights went out, you know?

I'd leave the house in the morning and me and the neighborhood kid get to play all day long; and we just happened to go over her house and play for a while, and I end up being locked in the closet because I'm black. You know, it was pretty traumatic.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Michelle Simmonds:** But like I said, that's one isolated incident over many years of being in very different diverse situations. But you never forget it.

**Jackie MacDougall:** I can imagine not. I'll be sitting around with some of my girlfriends, mostly white; and we might talk about things that happened in our childhood, like this happened, or maybe there was abuse with one person or whatever it was.

And so, I think that there's this shift in mental health where people are sharing some of their experiences and like why they are who they are – or, you know, what contributed to who they are. And we understand people a little bit more, but I still think that racism... like walking into a classroom or to a job, and it's just all white people and everyone turn--

**Michelle Simmonds:** Been there.

**Jackie MacDougall:** I don't think that we acknowledge or create space – and this is the shows for women so we're going to just talk about women – but women of color who have had these experiences since their childhood and maybe even continue to. I don't think that we're sitting down and talking about those the same way we're talking about like, other childhood experiences. Would you agree with that?

**Michelle Simmonds:** I do. And there's an intersectionality that, you know, it's me having those experiences – me being, you know, as a black little girl, as a little girl

whose parents are in a mixed environment who doesn't have access to her natural father.

You know, like the intersectionality of all the things that I bring into this new work environment now, we all carry our baggage. It's not just black women that carry around their baggage with them--

**Jackie MacDougall:** 100%.

**Michelle Simmonds:** -and we shouldn't be penalized or looked at differently for having a certain set of baggage. But it's real for us because we don't get to be neutral when we walk into a space. And we have to, oftentimes, over-prove and over-show and overcompensate just to be seen and just to be heard and just to be accepted.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Michelle Simmonds:** And that's something I think some people don't understand.

**Jackie MacDougall:** And I think that's kind of what I'm saying, is like, I could sit down in this circle and talk about the traumatic things that have happened or things that have contributed to who I am – you know, positively and negatively. But I think when we sit down and we talk about racism and how that contributes to somebody, I'll speak for myself and, you know, white people.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Jackie, you going to speak for all black people?

**Jackie MacDougall:** I'm going to speak for all white people.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Don't do it. Don't do it.

**Jackie MacDougall:** I'm just f'cking with you. I'm just f'cking with you. There's that guilt that white people – well, that I – you know, previously would feel. And it was like, 'Oh, this is so uncomfortable because I know it's people who look like me that cause that.'

And so, I can no longer talk to you about that, Michelle, because; I'm feeling attacked, I'm feeling vulnerable, I'm feeling all of the things. And it wasn't until, like I said, the growth over the past few years and still growing that it's not about--

You know, if somebody says they were abused by their mom, and I'm like, 'I'm a mom, you're blaming me.' Like, that doesn't happen.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Right.

**Jackie MacDougall:** If you're talking about your experience that people who are white caused in your life, it's really important for a white person to not go, *but, but, but, but not all white people*, and allow you to express that experience.

**Michelle Simmonds:** 100%. And not only that, the silence around it can be assaulted too, because it makes me feel like you're not holding space for me and all that comes with me. Like, I try to hold space for other people and all that comes with them; I want the same utter, you know, in my experience with the people that I interact with as well.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah. And you are brilliant at it.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Oh, thank you.

**Jackie MacDougall:** You're brilliant at holding space for people. I mean, you are like, genuinely-- I don't know if it's that HR training, but you are just like this kindhearted... like when someone is around you and they're talking, they know that you are just holding that space for them. It's a phenomenal gift that not a lot of people have, Michelle.

**Michelle Simmonds:** I appreciate that, Jackie, the psychic told me that once; no, I'm kidding. I'm kidding.

[laughter]

**Michelle Simmonds:** She did say-- She did say I was a healer in a past life. So, that might have something to do with it.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Right?

**Michelle Simmonds:** You know, Jackie, there's a space – there's anger, there's fear, there's love. Sometimes I'm in all of those spaces, but I know the predominant space for me is love and what that involves, you know? So, that's kind of where I tend to spring; my being from, my interactions from, my intentions from.

And it's not, again; I get mad like the rest of them, I get disappointed, I get hurt, I get angry – but I have to channel that into something positive or else it will consume me, I

know that for a fact.. You know, like Whoopi Goldberg, I remember she had her one-- Did you ever see her one-woman show, came out decades ago?

**Jackie MacDougall:** Like in the 80s, different characters, right?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Different characters. Yeah, she does these different characters. And she says, I-- One of her characters is a junkie. And this just stuck with me for so long where she's a junkie and she says, she's talking about racism essentially, and she said, "I get high so I don't have to get mad."

You know, and I was like, wow. You know, I was a teenager when I heard that, but it stuck with me. And I realized, yeah, you have to put that energy into something – that for me, it's put into something good, so that you don't get mad about the pain that you're forced to see with all the worldly BS out there and people choosing hate and people choosing oppression – and people choosing to keep contributing to systemic racism and all that that goes with that.

And people choosing to stay silent, and people choosing to squash down the voices that are screaming and dying to be heard. I don't want to be in that. I don't want to be in that. I want to be in-- We need our Malcolms – our early Malcolms – and we need our Martin Luther Kings; we need everybody. We need everybody on board, because racism is a disease; and we all have to deal with it. You know, like my acronym says it affects all of us.

**Jackie MacDougall:** It does. So, if someone's listening right now and they're like, 'Well, racism doesn't affect me,' how are they wrong?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Oh, they're wrong because we're in a community where we're all together. And so, we've got racism-- It's with through policies; it affects housing, it affects education... and affects employment.

And when people are not being treated fairly; businesses suffer, the economy suffers, people suffer... they suffer them in medical, there's disparities in healthcare. So, if people are not being taken care of and people are hurting and people are angry, how is that not impacting you?

On some level, if you're existing in our economy on any level, what affects one affects the other. You may not see it, but you may feel it in your tax-paying – you may feel it in your... when the protest and demonstrations happen and your building's getting burnt, down and you're worried about your insurance rates going up because, you know, something happened that was triggered by a racial event.

Fear, do you want people against you because of the color of your skin? Do you want to be fearful to walk down your street because of the color of your skin? Which happens to a lot of my people, a lot of people of color.

So, I don't think there's a way to separate us when it comes to racism. And so, that's why I'm really hoping that someday, maybe not in my lifetime, that we're all able to pull together.

In BEE BRAVE, we'll have a whole list of ways that racism affects everyone. But you know, physically with the disparities and the use of technology, segregation; there's still, you know, lines being drawn throughout cities to keep people segregated.

So, if we can't be in harmony with each other – like live together, work together, play together – we're denying each other our humanity... we're denying each other the opportunity for friendships, we're denying opportunities for innovation. We're denying opportunities for diversity and education and sharing our knowledge. So, I think, better together.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah, absolutely, better together. You have lots and lots of resources on your website for people to go over. There are books, there are things for kids and teens, website, YouTube videos, audiobooks, podcasts. I mean, my goodness, you have so much allyship, but tell me about the Bee BRAVE Ambassadors Program. What, like, how do you see that working?

**Michelle Simmonds:** People say, what do you want people to do in Bee BRAVE? And I say, "I want people to Bee BRAVE." Our principles are easy, they're; don't be racist, treat each human being with dignity and respect... learn how to provide a whole space for people of different races, colors and ethnicities – and invite someone to Bee BRAVE.

So, everyone that I want to touch comes to this website, reads what it's all about, looks at the tools and tips, implements those tools and tips into their daily life, and shares the website. You can put the link to the website under your email tag, that's an easy way to be an ambassador. You know, I have these cute little cards that have the Bee BRAVE mission statement on them.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yes, I love them.

**Michelle Simmonds:** That you can live in a space where you go to a restaurant or you go to the library, you go anywhere publicly... you can kind of leave this card sitting somewhere because it reminds people that racism affects virtually everyone. Ambassadors can do these things.

You know, you don't have to sign up and say, "I'm an ambassador." Bee BRAVE is about being and doing. So, you're spreading the word, essentially. And you know, I have t-shirts made and merchandise; and so, you'll wear your t-shirts, you'll wear your merchandise, and you're kind to people – you know, you're just kind to people regardless of their race. And you talk to anyone else who listen to you about what Bee BRAVE is about, which is about being intentionally anti-racist.

**Jackie MacDougall:** I love that.

**Michelle Simmonds:** So, those are the things that an ambassador really does. It's not a job, but it's a being; it's a way that you show up in the world and that you express your intentional anti-racism – and intentional efforts towards it, towards inclusion and racial harmony and equity.

**Jackie MacDougall:** And you have so many different cards too, they're so fun. Like this particular one – if you're watching the video, you could see that on social media – but in the back it says, "The Bee BRAVE Movement is a call to action to promote racial harmony, equity, and social justice through personal empowerment."

And then it goes on to... what you believe, and all of that stuff. And it's got the email address and the website. And so, it really is brilliant to like, how can people get these cards, so if they feel inspired to hand them out--

**Michelle Simmonds:** Oh, sure. You can reach just at info, [I-N-F-O@beebravemovement.com](mailto:info@beebravemovement.com) (info@ beebravemovement.com) and just make sure you put the extra E in the BE. So, remember the Bumblebee show.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yes.

**Michelle Simmonds:** The Bee, there's Bee BRAVE.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Bee BRAVE, I love it.

**Michelle Simmonds:** It's got to be catchy or people won't remember it.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Ain't that the truth?

**Michelle Simmonds:** Right?

**Jackie MacDougall:** All right, cool. I'm hoping that, you know, people will go over and check out your website and--

**Michelle Simmonds:** I hope so.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Take one step, one step today to be intentionally anti-racist because even half of the people in this country, if we made the commitment to doing one thing, that will create a ripple effect.

Just watching you leave your job and start something that is so passionate and knowing that you are not this like extrovert person who's like wanting to get all this attention – that to me too is like, you know that this is a movement that matters to you when you... who does not want attention... is out there talking about it and feeling it and living it because it's so much more important than your safety.

**Michelle Simmonds:** 100%.

**Jackie MacDougall:** I mean, like your safety from being exposed. For me, I'm doing this stuff and like I put myself out there. But for you, you've always made an impact, but kind of quietly behind the scenes

**Michelle Simmonds:** 100%.

**Jackie MacDougall:** I know that you're leading by example as well, because it can be difficult to have these conversations. It can be difficult to even in this podcast episode that I'm like, 'Oh, I don't want to sound like an idiot', you know, I grew up a certain way and, *what if I ask the wrong questions* or things like that. But like, you provide the space for everyone that you touch to ask the questions.

**Michelle Simmonds:** I say it's better to ask than not ask.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Yeah.

**Michelle Simmonds:** You know, Jackie, the reason why I think that I was able to do this despite everything in my being that wanted to say, *"No, no, no, just keep quiet, be quiet, be quiet, keep quiet"* – I didn't want to disappoint my future self.

You know, Bee BRAVE came to me in a stream of consciousness – and just content after content after content, it wouldn't let me rest... it's somebody's idea. And like, you know, Elizabeth Gilbert said in *Big Magic*, *"An idea is out there and it lands on someone. And if you don't accept it, if you don't embrace it, it'll find someone else; it'll give you time to process and if you don't do something with it, it'll find someone else"*.

And so, I couldn't bear the thought of this actually leaving me and me seeing Bee BRAVE out there in the world somewhere else and being disappointed that I didn't take this on.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Wow.

**Michelle Simmonds:** I've done it, I did it; now it has to take its wings and fly.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Absolutely. And I am here to support in any way I can. You know, all the WeWil ladies are here to help you elevate your message and get it out into more people.

**Michelle Simmonds:** Thank you, Jackie.

**Jackie MacDougall:** Of course. Look, and you survived; you survived your very first podcast episode. You're feeling little queensy.

**Michelle Simmonds:** But now, I appreciate it. I appreciate you in making me come on here and explore what this exchange will be like because if I'm asked, you know, to talk more about this, obviously I can.

But I also would love to partner with organizations or companies that are already doing the work of DEIB – you know, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging – who have a bigger platform or bigger foundation for Bee BRAVE to be a part of what they're already doing.

You know, I'm not here to recreate a wheel; it's just I'm in a lane that was created from my heart, and I want to share it. You know, so that's what I hope is next. And also developing BRAVE kids as platform, because I want to really help kids feel comfortable in their space... and help other kids create space for kids who are not like them to be welcoming and be in a more loving space when it comes to anti-bullying, which is huge.

And give kids a voice and a way to talk about racism because people are trying to squash it and make it so kids can't talk about it, but kids are living that experience. So, how we can say, "Oh, we can't talk bad about you, but you can't talk about it." You know? So, let's teach kids how to be inclusive – how to not make racism a bad word, but make it a bad thing.

**Jackie MacDougall:** To find out more about the Bee BRAVE Movement visit [beebravemovement.com](http://beebravemovement.com); that's B-E-Ebravemovement.com. Huge thanks to my guest today, Michelle Simmonds, thank you for your courage, your friendship, and for trusting me with your very first appearance on a podcast. You are amazing. And thanks to you for listening.

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