

NEIGHBORS

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Daughter stands tall, ready for new life



Anne Marie Romer
Good Rising

By Anne Marie Romer
Contributing Writer

Our eyes met through the reflection in the mirror. The time lapse of her lifetime briefly played along the history of my heart. Yet here she was, standing tall in her wedding dress.

She looked stunning. My sister and niece tended to the dress, straightening the folds of the train, adjusting the veil and tucking where alterations still need to be done. They expressed animated admiration for how beautiful my daughter looked. For a prolonged second, all I could do was rest in a bit of tenderness. My goodness, how she has grown into such a lovely woman.

My youngest daughter is getting married in November. Part of the whole wedding experience, as many of you know, is finding the perfect dress. Several months ago, we had fun as my daughter tried on a variety of dresses, some fluffy, some blingy, some modern in style, some classic. We had fun, yet seeing her in the decided dress that reflected her personality was surreal. She stood confident and proud, and I could see her growing excitement for the day that will surely be a bridge to a new life shared with the one she has chosen. I couldn't help but reflect in how far she has come to meet this moment.

The journey through early adulthood is not easy. I remember my 20s and in some ways spent those years relearning all I thought I knew about building a life. I can still recall the angst of that time. Witnessing my children route these years was filled with even more angst. Motherhood does that,

Nigerian colors, memories inspire textile artist

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Rodriguez's day filled with creating, collaborating.

By Hannah Kasper Levinson
Contributing writer

Editor's note: "A Day in the Life" is a bi-monthly feature profiling an innovative Daytonian's daily routine from start to finish.

Yetunde Rodriguez (pronounced "yay-toon-day") has loved creating since she was a kid. Growing up in Nigeria, Rodriguez was born into a culture of DIY. "Everyone sewed, knit, cooked," she says of the women in her family. "I lived there until I was 13. My dad had been coming to the States since the '70s for university. He would go back and forth. We finally moved here when he got his PhD in West Virginia."

Rodriguez did not always pursue art professionally. After college she joined the Navy, where she worked as a dental assistant. "The military is like a town," she explains, "Everything you find in a town is in the military. Every job has a military parallel." The Navy took her to California, Rhode Island and Virginia. In Norfolk, Virginia, she met her husband, Danny, and they started a family. They moved to Dayton in 2007 and now have three children, 16, 18 and 20. In Dayton, Rodriguez developed her art practice and started producing small-batch textile designs. Her work is inspired by the color combinations of Nigerian art, as well as personal memory and research into African designs.

But first, coffee

Typically, Rodriguez's day starts early as she prepares to get her youngest child to school. She makes coffee and drops her son off, then zips downtown and gets to her studio around 8:30 a.m. Rodriguez approaches the studio like she would any work day. She starts at her computer, answering emails. She tweaks the templates she is working on for a mural project at West Dayton's cooperative grocery store, Gem City Market. This won't be the



Yetunde Rodriguez was born into a culture of DIY in Nigeria. "Everyone sewed, knit, cooked," she says of the women in her family. CONTRIBUTED BY BRIANA SNYDER OF KNACK CREATIVE

first work she has done for Gem City Market, which opened its doors in 2019. The facade of the building has a geometric design created by Rodriguez. The new mural is a collaboration between Rodriguez, fellow Dayton artists James Pate and Glenna Jennings, and Shayna McConville, who oversees Kettering's Rosewood Arts Center and brings public art to the Dayton area. Later in the day, Rodriguez will meet with her mural collaborators at either the Gem City Market or at Pate's gallery.

Chasing the light

Rodriguez has been in this particular studio on West First Street for a year. She moved studios from down the hall in search of good light. The studio is well organized, with tall wooden bookshelves full of materials and fabric samples. Along one window-lined wall sit three tidy stations set up for workshops that Rodriguez leads under the moniker StudioYay. The most recent workshop, designing a decorative mir-

ror with a DIY printed border, took place at the end of June. Despite her prolific output, she has self-doubt, just as any committed artist does. "If I do something that's not art, will people get turned off? If it's craft? I love DIY. When I hear 'artist' with a capital 'A,' it can be intimidating."

I want it to mean something

As the morning progresses, the desk work required to run a small business needs to wait because Rodriguez has the urge to jump into a project. "Sometimes I need to execute on an idea I have," she says. She is re-upholstering an old chair in her own fabric design. "I love refining something that already exists, like the chair, rather than putting out more stuff." She is trying to phase out of markets where she sells her own products like pillows and totes. "I didn't set out to make a product line. I don't want to lead with that," she says, "I want it to be something someone wants. I want it

to mean something to someone."

Community work

To that end, Rodriguez is currently deep into collaborative community projects. Besides her contributions to Gem City Market, she also works with the nonprofit We Care Arts, an organization that provides an artistic outlet to individuals with varying disabilities and physical challenges. Rodriguez has been teaching the production class at We Care Arts for the past year. Local businesses will request projects, and Rodriguez guides the artists, who are paid for their efforts to produce the work. "This flower project has consumed my life," she is speaking of an art installation she recently completed as a collaboration between downtown's Dayton Arcade, the arts fund Culture Works and We Care Arts. Rodriguez was commissioned to facilitate the production of a 24-foot wall of paper flowers with the help of her stu-

Artist continued on C8

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Yetunde Rodriguez produces small-batch textile designs, which are inspired by the color combinations of Nigerian art and personal memory. CONTRIBUTED

joined back at the studio by her kids, including her son, an artist and recent graduate of Stivers School for the Arts. He will be pursuing industrial art in college and enjoys building his own canvas frames in his mother's studio. Rodriguez's daughter, who studies in upstate New York, is home for the summer and enjoys coming

to the studio to sew.

Dinnertime

Rodriguez and her family head home for dinner. She cooks a lot and enjoys making variations on Dominican fried rice, one of her husband's favorites. She will use the ingredients she picked up at the local markets to recreate dishes at

home, like falafel or Thai food. Sometimes, inspiration strikes again and Rodriguez heads back to the studio after dinner for one or two more hours, not heading home for the evening until 11 p.m.

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then being hired in 1986 as the library's local history coordinator. He became director in 1998.

Over the years, he's seen the library collection grow, worked with automation when "little stickers were placed on every single, solitary book" and survived the move from the crammed Flesh Public Library building to the renovated Fort Piqua Hotel in October 2008.

The library has a local and regional art collection of around 300 pieces and is a popular place for tours. "That is fun, too. We can talk about ghosts," Oda said of the former hotel that sat empty for years looking for someone to renovate

and use it.

In addition to his work, Oda is very active in the community. He recalls being age 10 or 11 and going along with this father as he knocked on doors seeking donations for the local United Way campaign.

The son has followed in those footsteps with participation in an array of local boards, activities and organizations over the years such as the Salvation Army, Johnston Farm, cemetery tours, the Miami County Planning Commission, the chamber of commerce, the Piqua Players and, most recently, the county Board of Election and chair of the Edison State Community College Board of Trustees.

He previously taught at the local college for 25 years.

"I think the more you are involved in your community, the better your life will be in that community. The people who say there is nothing to do aren't really trying," he said. "I have enjoyed being a part of what is going on."

Oda, who lives nearby with his wife, Cathy, said he will miss the library staff along with the patrons of all ages. "I love this building. This building is tremendous, from the architecture to the ghosts to just its sheer size. It is great," he said.

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