

# Linda Goss

## *A Biographical Sketch of Our Co-Founder*

Linda Goss is an award winning storyteller, author and visionary! She was born Linda Yvonne McNear into a storytelling family. She learned the art of storytelling while growing up near the foothills of the Smoky Mountains in an aluminum factory town named Alcoa, TN. During family gatherings, Linda would sit quietly and listen to her grandfather Murphy, her parents, aunts and uncles laugh, gossip and swap stories. Since then, Linda has gathered stories from personal experience and hundreds of folktales over decades of study and performance that fill her repertoire. She greets audiences wherever she goes with bells ringing and chanting, 'Well, oh well, oh well! It's Storytelling Time!'

It was while attending college at Howard University that Linda discovered her calling for the spoken word. Hours on end, she would hold her fellow drama students spellbound with stories she heard growing up in the little town of Alcoa. It was during this growth period, Linda gleaned a new perspective of the oral tradition and came to understand the need to honor and preserve the beauty of the spoken word, as an expression of the history, traditions, principles and values of African American people.

Linda has an undergraduate degree in Drama from Howard University in Washington, D.C. and a Masters degree in Education from Antioch University. She is a proud member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority. In 1973, Linda started making her impact on the literary, storytelling and cultural community. She has written, published and produced volumes of anthologies, folktales and books of poetry. Linda Goss has become an icon and an innovator in the world of contemporary storytelling.

Linda Goss is the "Official Storyteller" for the city of Philadelphia. As pioneer of the contemporary storytelling movement, Mary Carter Smith and she founded "In the Tradition..." the National Black Storytelling Festival and Conference and later, in 1984, they together Co-founded The National Association of Black Storytellers (NABS). Linda is also Co-founder of Keepers of the Culture, a Philadelphia area affiliate of NABS and a founding member of Patchwork: a storytelling guild for the Delaware Valley. Linda became seemingly tireless of creating opportunities to get people together to tell stories, making an impact on the community, or just having lovers of Black storytelling assemble to share in the African oral tradition.

Taking one step further into the storytelling, folklore and academic world, Linda Goss is the author and co-editor of six books including: The Baby Leopard; Talk That Talk with an introduction by Henry Louis Gates which has

been touted as a source book for storytellers; The Frog Who Wanted To Be A Singer; Jump Up And Say with an introduction by Ossie Davis; It's Kwanzaa Time; and Sayin' Somethin'. Linda has two recordings with the Smithsonian Folkways archival series, "It's Storytelling Time" and "Afro-American Tales and Games".

Linda has received many awards and grants throughout her career. She has been the storyteller in residence at the Rosenbach Museum and Library in Philadelphia since 2001 where she has created three touring storytelling programs and a timeline on Africa American oral traditions.

In 2003 she received a fellowship from the PA Council on the arts as a master storyteller in traditional arts to work with an apprentice. Also, during that year Linda received the 2003 Oracle Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Storytelling Network. She received the 2005 Fellowship in Folk & Traditional Arts from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA) and the 2005 Geier Foundation's visiting professorship in the graduate program in storytelling at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, TN. In 2005, she received the Gerald Davis Travel Grant from the American Folklore Society. She was awarded studio space along with longtime collaborator, Gretchen Shannon, from 40<sup>th</sup> street AIRSPACE in Philadelphia from 2005-2006. Also, by generous donations, Linda's name is inscribed on a chair in the auditorium of the International Storytelling Center in Jonesborough, TN where she has performed as a featured storyteller many times. She is the recipient of the 2006 Leeway Transformation Award, the 2006 Parson Fund Award and Benjamin A. Botkin Scholar Lecturer Award from the American Folk Life Center at the Library of Congress.

Linda is included in the Pennsylvania Performing Arts Tour Roster (PennPAT). She is a folk artist with the Philadelphia Folklore Project, an artist-in-residence with PCA administered through the Philadelphia Arts in Education Partnerships. Linda taught storytelling to grades K-2 at the Harambee Institute of Science and Technology Charter School in West Philadelphia. She is a speaker with the commonwealth speaker's bureau sponsored by the Pennsylvania Humanities Council. In addition, Linda has been featured on the cover of American Visions and Learning Magazine which included a pull out poster. Feature articles have been written about her in Colorlines, Footsteps, Washington Post, New York Times, Philadelphia Inquirer, and Essence to name a few. Linda was also highlighted on the Today Show.

Most recently, Linda Goss is one of the curators for the exhibition "EVOKING SPIRIT, EMBRACING MEMORY," a bottle tree installation celebrating the stories and the people of North Philadelphia sponsored by the Village of Arts and Humanities. This exhibit is truly an embodiment of the core all Linda's visionary and purpose for the use of storytelling as a transformative tool. She has always been an agent for social justice and using storytelling to spark the imagination of the African American community so they can continue the ancestral ritual of passing on stories of hope and freedom within the struggle.

In October of 2007, she was made an honorary lifetime member of the Griot's Circle of Maryland (an affiliate of NABS). Linda takes great pride in that honor for being acknowledged for years of dedication to the art of storytelling and the significance of her impact on the African American community. After all, for the past 34 years Linda has always been about promoting radical, progressive and positive change within the community. Whether it is around the corner, with her hometown, in her state or throughout the African Diaspora!

Linda is married to playwright, Clay Goss who has co-authored three books with her. Together they have three children, Aisha, Uhuru and Jamaal.