



**NABS** "IN THE TRADITION..."  
 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
 OF BLACK STORYTELLERS

# SPREAD THE WORD

**National Association of Black Storytellers**

P.O. Box 67722

Baltimore, Maryland 21215

www.nabsinc.org

Winter 2012

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THIS POEM IS IN MEMORY OF  
 THE ANCESTORS OF NABS  
 AND  
 DEDICATED TO THE NABS FAMILY.

*"Wisdom of the Ancestors"*

O Great  
 Ancestral Storyteller,  
 Brother Blue  
 Whisper in our ears  
 The journey of the Butterfly  
 "Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"  
 So we Storyweavers  
 May spread our wings  
 and UPLIFT the listeners  
 to fly over the Rainbow  
 and dip their Souls  
 in the Golden Pond  
 of IMAGINATION.

*Linda Goss*

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

WHAT A TIME! WHAT A TIME! WHAT A TIME!

My mouth shall continually be filled with praise and thanks to Griots' Circle of Maryland and Festival Director, Dylan Pritchett for envisioning, organizing and producing a monumental and memorable 30th Anniversary "In the Tradition..." 30th Anniversary National Black Storytelling Festival and conference.

From the accessibility of the conference hotel, to the soul stirring concerts, uplifting tributes to our co-founders, informative workshops and the beautiful departing gift of a poem written by Mother Mary Carter Smith, the festival and conference was an event to behold and share with others. In the words of Mama Linda, "Asante Sana! Asante Sana! Asante Sana!"

In closing, it has been a privilege and an honor to serve as your president for 2011-2012. When nominated to serve on the NABS Board, I never envisioned that I might someday have the opportunity serve as your president. Thank You and I look forward to many more years of service to our organization.

My challenge to each of you is to find a way to serve our beloved organization to ensure that we will be producing great, memorable and epic Blackstorytelling events another 30, 50, 70 years or more. Let us work to make sure that our descendants will be able to say, "NABS is an institution our ancestors started for us a long time ago" and we shall continue "In the Tradition..."

Asante Sana for your love, support and prayers.

Asante Sana for your commitment to Blackstorytelling.

Asante Sana for all you have done, are doing and will do in the future.

Your brother and servant,

*Akbar Imhotep/President*

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY NABS FAMILY



NABS, "In the Tradition..." 30th, is the National Association of Black Storytellers, celebrating their 30 years as an organization. Happy Birthday" NABS Family. Greetings to you as I welcome storytellers, friends and family on our journey toward our 31th anniversary celebration.

Next year, like this year, and in the years to come, NABS will have a festival/conference you won't forget. You know how mice come out the cracks in the winter, well, Black Storytellers, come from the corners of the world in November to ascend on the city hosting the festival. Somebody's callin' our names. They say Black Storytellers are a comin' from the hills, the plains, the cities, the Bayous, the mountains, the deserts and the country sides, so you better join them or move out the way. They did just that as they came to Baltimore in full force this year.

It's fun and exciting to gather once a year to parade in our African garb of beautiful colors and flowing, ethnic cloths while showing off our latest head wraps and hair do's, dance and listen to the drums, fellowship, pray, sing ,buy wonderful things at the Market Place, listen and tell many, many lies that we call stories.

Each year gets better and better. This year brought us to the top in use of technology. We viewed a documentary of Mother Mary, our co-founder, Linda Brown, our past Executive Director, and Brother Blue, our "Butterfly". They all made their heavenly transitions not very long ago. We now honor them with the rest of our ancestors at every Festival and Conference. Mother Ruth, wife of Brother Blue filled in some of the commentary. Everyone laughed, when she said, "Brother Blue was a lover." If you attended this festival, you would have seen a life size wax figure of Mother Mary, sitting in front of the stage, as though she was watching the festivities and you would have seen Mama Linda as she was rolled down the aisle in queenly style, leading in the saints, ringin' those bells and bringin' the house down as she opened the ceremony.

There is so much to do, see and hear at our festivals. We pass each other in the halls of the hotel like we were walking down the dirt roads of Africa. We greet each other with a smile, a wave or a hug as we hurry from one workshop to another. In some workshops we make things. In some workshops we discuss things. In some workshops we learn to dance and sing and play the drums like our ancestors did. We even have workshops for children and plenty of time to listen to stories and tell stories too. We have an Elders and Welcome to NABS ceremony and of course, we take care of some things in our business meeting, even though our board and leaders do most of the work. We just show up and brag about what our storytellers did in our city that year. Everyone enjoys the "Liars" contest. Many enjoy the auction and children's show. And those that can stay until Sunday; enjoy the fabulous breakfast buffet, Spiritual time and special closing.

My favorite of all is the "Love Circle". We gather together in a continuous circle or circles, holding hands as the drums gently roll, honoring our ancestors as we bind closer together to pray that we all return again the next year. There is nothing more moving than the kinship, friendship and love that enfolds us during that time. It brings tears to your eyes. Once, you have come to a NABS festival, it will forever be on your lips and in your heart and you will come back again.

Special thanks to the Co-Founder, Executive Director, President, Festival Director, Souvenir Genius, the Board members, the Baltimore affiliate planning team, the receptionist, engineers, performing artists, the Sorority, volunteers, technicians and the vendors, for a job well done!

Love, hugs and kisses,

*Jennie Crittendon*

## A STORYTELLER'S JOURNEY AND JOURNAL

How often, especially in our youth, haven't we heard the line, "Where have you been all of my life?" Well, after attending my first NABS Festival in 2011, I could only, as the Tennessee elders would say, "sit back and wonder", "Where have I been all of your life, NABS?!" I have attended numerous cultural, literary, and historical conferences, but when my soul touched down in this particular ancestral arena, it was impacted in unforeseen ways. Upon leaving the conference, "taking to the sky on a natural high", the conference energy traveled home with me, and there it remained deeply embedded in my Spirit, causing me to join the hundreds of others who just can't wait for the next fall season to roll around to take that ancestral storytellers' journey once more to a NABS Festival.

Last year I was blessed to attend my first NABS Festival in the state of Georgia, the home state of my Grandmama Anna Pearl who unknowingly taught me the art of storytelling as a little shy Tennessee "young'un" in Knoxville, Tennessee. I was not only able to receive immense spiritual and cultural gifts from the Festival in Mama's home state but to also share the fruits of my soul through recounting as a panelist the great Black Seminoles' contribution to global freedom and the Civil War. My younger cousin, Jody Tucker, an Atlanta-based artpreneur came to take me to lunch during one of our festival breaks and decided to return back to the hotel with me to catch the Liars' Contest. So enthused was he from the dynamic story sharings there that he decided on the spot that he's going to practice up to become "a liar" and one day return to a NABS venue to participate.

This year the great African Seminoles gave me a nice NABS reward for having shared their story in 2011. I had just lost a dear sister buddy, Gloria Lowery Tyrell, a magnificent Southern-born storyteller and Black clown. As I dreamed of the next exciting and inspiring NABS adventure, Sister Bertie Newbern ("Ayanna") called and asked if I would be her roommate at the NABS Conference there in Baltimore. Here is a sister storyteller from Florida, the home of the Seminoles, and like Gloria, also a Black clown—a new friend who is indeed an ancestral storyteller's blessings. How many deep and wonderful friendships—sisterships and brotherships—have been formed as a result of NABS 30 years of gifting and gracing the planet with its cultural presence.

Each festival obviously has a distinctive rhythm, flavor, energy and unique gift to share of its own. The Baltimore Griots' Circle went out of its way to host a festival long to be remembered. As the saying goes, they "showed up and showed out!" From the edutaining historical tours and dynamic, soul-lifting opening gala to the warm, one-on-one smiles and welcoming embraces, we knew in deed and in fact that the "family" had truly arrived home. Infected across the miles by my NABS enthusiasm fever, Elaine Lee, Bay area attorney, travel journalist, and editor of GO, GIRL—The Black Woman's Book of Travel & Adventure, decided to come to visit a friend in Baltimore during the NABS Conference in order to attend some of the session festivals. She, of course, fell in love with it and is now excavating stories to tell from her own creative soul.

Why do we love and look forward to NABS so enthusiastically? Because Love lives there and the ancestral Spirit reigns there—supreme. Not only are we placed in the company of the world's master storytellers but there are the informative, inspiring workshops where one can learn to better hone one's craft and to effectively promote one's artpreneurial and/or spiritpreneurial enterprise. Our souls are touched, minds lifted, and bodies energized through sitting at the feet of great griots like NABS co-founder, Mama Linda Goss (with whom I not only share the same name and ancestral storytelling leaning but who was also born in my home state of Tennessee; and in Alcoa, my mother's birth place) and Sister Sonia Sanchez (who was my first and only writing teacher back in the 70's and whose inclusion of my poem in her workshop anthology opened the door for the selection of my work for both a Broadway production and PBS-tv feature on two occasions.) NABS undoubtedly holds personal and collective motivational stories for each teller wise and/or blessed enough to attend.

As one strolls down the street of one's home domain, you might just be the only one colorfully decked out in ancestral attire. At NABS regal, show-stopping African garments are par for the cultural course—the name of the ancestral game. And if drums touch your soul and lift the energy of the body, then those drumming sessions that precede the phenomenal evening storytelling sessions are as one of my poems states "a drink of cool water after ten long, dry desert days!" When you walk in and view those classy regally-attired culturalists smilingly dancing in the aisles to the ancestral drums, you know that your soul has indeed "come back to the Village." From the stories to the tasty cuisine to the African marketplace filled with unique literature, gifts, and show-stopper outfits to accompany one home to the "family reunion", Love indeed lives there at the NABS Festivals The ancestors visit and encourage—from those recent migrants to the Great Village like Mother Mary Carter Smith and Brother Blue—to those from "way back when" like Nana Tubman and Brother Nat. Thankfully, the youth are there to be taught, encouraged, and groomed to carry the stories and the traditions forward because like we, their elder ancestralists and story bearers and sharers, once they leave the NABS Circle to return home, ringing like Mama Linda's bells in their souls has got to be the Unity Circle refrain, "I know I been changed. Black Storytelling done called my name!"



*Linda Cousins-Newton*

The Ancestral Storyteller, Brooklyn, New York  
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## NABS 30TH ... BALTIMORE ... GRIOTS CIRCLE HOSTS COMING HOME 'NUF SAID!

NABS will only celebrate it's 30th "In The Tradition..." once and oohhhh what a time we had!! Words can't describe how we felt upon leaving, so there's no need to try to conjure up mere words to express it. All that's left to say is WOW!!!

"Coming Home...Our Family Tells Stories" was epic! Asante sana to all of the Featured Tellers who shared their craft beyond marvelous, Workshop Leaders who shared their knowledge and skill, and Moderators who pitched in where there was a need! Asante sana to the Griots' Circle of Maryland, Inc. who made us welcome from the time we arrived until we received our last hug. An even bigger Asante sana goes out to those of you who attended and those of you who could not attend but supported our efforts from afar. Without every one of you, we would not have been able to return home feeling soooo glad we came one mo' 'gin!

Our annual reunion is a huge undertaking that involves a whole bunch of planning, time, prayer and the expertise of a whole bunch of members and community support. Asante sana for all Festival Committee members for your guidance and input. I'd like to tell you about some other aspects of this year's Festival & Conference that were, moreso, behind the scenes but worthy of giving special mention. These are in no special order of significance because they are ALL significant...

Griots Circle Member Gordon "Soorah" Parks coordinated the Pre-Festival Event \* Clarence Mollock made several trips to pick up/transport several attendees to the airport, train station, shopping areas, get pizza for the Youth and crab cakes for members \* Kay Merrill and Diane Macklin "took over" the silent auction and auction in a split second! \* Deborah Pierce-Fakunle, Cheryl Hinton, Elisha Minter and Emiley Bailey did stupendous work in preparing for the Youth \* The Griots' Circle prepared "goody bags" for Featured Tellers, Board of Directors and made greeting cards for each attendee \* Charlie Brown donated bags honoring Linda Jenkins Brown's legacy \* Joan Stevenson graciously donated some of Mother Mary's belongings for the auction \* Bunjo Butler and Linda Gorham coordinated over 30 Adopt-A-Teller placements throughout Baltimore \* Caroliese Frink Reed, Executive Director Vanora Legaux and Barbara Eady work quietly behind the scenes but yet stand out front to keep the highest standards of presentation and content our NABS traditions deserve and ancestors demand \* Mama Linda Goss

and I promoted NABS on a live radio program in the Mary Carter Smith Studio at Morgan State University's station WEAA where Mother Mary hit the airwaves for decades \* Gloria Kellon was responsible for acquiring and hanging the quilts for display \* CABS donated directly to Ohio youth to help defray the youth's expenses \* Baltimore youth attended that needed to be in our presence \* Alpha Zeta Chapter of the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. assisted at our registration table throughout \* Dr. Joanne Martin and The Great Blacks in Wax Museum was gracious in making it possible to have Zora Neale Hurston and Mother Mary Carter Smith's wax figure with us \* Fellisco Keeling, Carolyn Carroll, Olayeela Daste and Eslyn Hinmon missed the majority of events due to them "holding down" registration and the Marketplace \* Baba Jamal Koram, Bunjo Butler and Mitch Capel gave of their time and expertise for the love of NABS \* Mama Linda prepared her body and spirit to be in attendance and celebrate with us in a way that she, nor Mother Mary, would have dreamed possible 30 years ago!!

This is only a sampling of the behind-the-scenes-yet-right-out-front generosity our members give which makes NABS who we are. WE HAVE THE GREATEST MEMBERS IN THE WORLD!!!! A compilation of the most beautiful Brothers and Sisters that can't be beat is what NABS exemplifies.

Let's continue to ride this wave of enthusiasm for another 30 years! Continue to support, continue to pray for each other and continue to tuck away a few pennies to get to the 31st Annual National Black Storytelling Festival & Conference in Hampton, VA. Whatever the next level above epic is named is what our next reunion will be..."In The Tradition..."

*Article written by Dylan Pritchett*





# 30th Annual Festival & Conference



# 30th Annual Festival & Conference

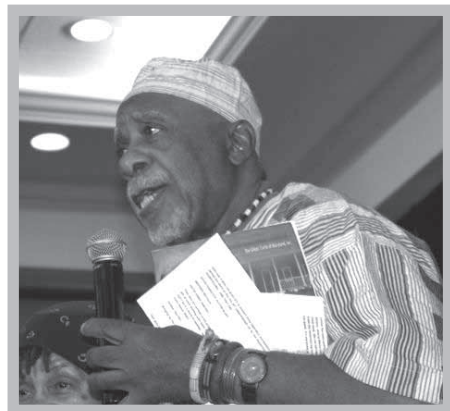


**"IN THE TRADITION..."**





# 30th Annual Festival & Conference



# MY REFLECTIONS ON STORYTELLING

By Mary J. Grant

2013 President of DABS (Detroit Association of Black Storytellers)



As a child, I gained special storytelling insight from life lessons that were taught by my father. He shared life experiences and work ethic using emotion and enthusiasm to get my attention. My father was the first storyteller I remember because of how he used storytelling as a way to communicate.

As a former classroom teacher, I used some of the techniques my father used. In my class, some of my students had difficulty staying focused. They had learning disabilities, but they tried. I told them stories to help them remain focused. They were so engrossed in my stories, they were on the edge of their seats. These students' attitudes changed after listening to my stories and poems. They felt if they kept trying, they would do better and improve. My art of storytelling had a great and positive impact on their achievements and their outlook on learning. Their social skills improved because of their motivation. Their motivation was stirred because of the storytelling.

Storytelling is an educational enabler and a powerful tool. I used storytelling in my K through 8th grade instructional technique. My storytelling made the educational process interesting and supported the students' association to the curriculum. In my kindergarten classroom, students did not want class to end.

My enthusiasm for storytelling encouraged me to pursue it as a profession. Membership in the Detroit Association of Black Storytellers has aided in my abilities and skills. I gained additional knowledge at the 2012 Storytelling Festival. I have grown.

Storytelling does that. It helps you to grow, it assists you in helping others to grow and positively impacts the lives of others in each story told.



## BEING AN AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING VOICE

*By Baba Jamal Koram, Ed.S.*

It's woefully apparent that a cultural stimulant is needed to reinvigorate the storyteller's commitment to diagnostic and prescriptive creativity. That is, the teller must place "weself" in a position where we can both analyze and interpret current events, social behavior, and cultural anomalies. In American society, the rapid influx of untested ideas, half-truths, and ambiguous characters make for a variable

shift in the cultural foundations of this nation. Questions that we should be asking ourselves are: "What are we talking about, and why? Who are we, and how are we presenting ourselves? I offer the following considerations. Our declarations of our righteous and positive selves need to be manifested in minimally, the following five ways:

1. **Identity:** We need to be African, Afrakan, Africoid, Afrakanist, Busara, Nubian, Zulu, Nuswabian, Gullah, Geeche, and other African centered named people, AND with a Pan African agenda and an American- African focus. The hesitancy and negatives associated with our defining and naming ourselves (Kujichagulia) must be resolved. Voices of negativity and nay- saying about our "Center-of-the-World" origins, (Africa, Center of the World by Roy Ayers) must be either avoided or side-stepped, or do what ever is necessary to assert our obligations as Culture Keepers, Guardians of the Word, and Bringers of our Cultural Flames of Truth.

2. **In our presence:** As we represent each other telling OUR folktales, epics, and stoetry.

3. **In our lifestyles:** as we walk in the world representing our children, our families, neighborhoods, villages, towns, organizations and cities. We must design lifestyles that allow us to walk in maturity, decency, and dignity, with sanity and traditional strength. We must develop the ability to move among any people at any time, bearing witness to the truth we talk. However you decide to be, be clear and truthful to yourself. This is important.

4. **In our associations and relationships:** as we decide who we will allow in our sacred spaces, in our special moments, in our gifted hands, in our loving hearts, and in our protective arenas. Be careful not to judge, but do not hesitate to decide and to abide by your decisions as to who you will be with. Knowing who people are, does not require background checks, in the modern sense, but do it like we've done it for centuries - - ask "Who's your family? Look in folks' eyes; feel folks' spirits; listen to your dreams and intuition. "I don't want to know where you live; I want to know where your great grand mama is from. . ." And if you don't know - - don't go. As we use to ask down south: "OO sha ka la ka tee," Who sent you?

5. **In Our Word:** words have their own history, power and intent. As storytellers, we are interpretive vessels for ideas; through words that have existed in and around this universal space for more years than we have blood cells. Most of us are running around here with our one language-no African words in our mouths-ninth grade vocabulary speaking(to a fifth grade rhythm)-cartoon csi snn soap op weather channel ball headed ball player watching don't travel nowhere no library card owning let Black Bookstore failing don't support independent black education ain't never been to a Blackstorytelling Retreat or NABS conference non church going (even on Easter) non Africa studying choke sandwich eating selves. That's a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. "Oo sha ka la ka ti!"

You get my drift. We must study us. We must study ourselves. Form study groups, if we must. Join storytelling and other professional associations to mix and mingle and learn so that we may entertain ideas transformed into words that will benefit our people. As the ancient Afrakan Egyptian sage Tehuti has said: "We must be able to speak in significant situations..."

## STORYTELLING AND THE WATCH NIGHT TRADITION IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

By Ilene Evans 2012



*Without meeting, without rituals, ceremonies, myths and symbols, there can be no great people. Afro-Americans, recognizing this...went out into the alleys and the fields and formed their own institutions and in the process, invented themselves.*

— Lerone Bennett Jr. 1968<sup>1</sup>

I have been looking back at the origins of our cultural practices as Africans in America, especially “Watch Night.” One task of the storyteller is to identify culture and preserve it. In storytelling we give context to the practices and observances observed in our homes and communities. There are traditions which must be wrenched back from alien hands which have appropriated their use without identifying, acknowledging and respecting their source. That is why storytellers must be historians and scholars as well as dynamic performers. We keep the cultural markers alive and understand why they matter and the best ways to adapt them for today’s needs. It is a way of connecting us to our ancestors’ dreams for our wellbeing and their wisdom.

We continue to reclaim folkways and rituals which have been woven into American society and are shadowy adaptations from their original soulful source. Culture is an active dynamic force which keeps the heart of a people strong and resilient. Historian, Margaret Washington Creel defines culture as the “creative, adaptive, dynamic patters of behavioral meanings which are inherited and historically transmitted through rituals, symbols, and systems of communications that represent societal understanding, awareness and conceptions of life.”<sup>2</sup> The watch night tradition is deep in African and American survival techniques. I believe the practice began long before bondage and long before the Moravians named the practice ‘Watch Night in the 1700’s’ In truth, our grandmothers and grandfathers had many many watch nights as they gathered on nights to give birth, attend the dying, reminisce, tell stories, share truths, and find ways to live life in brutal times. “Watch Night” evolved from this very old tradition in the African community.

Traditions arise out of the practices that are repeated in daily life. In oral cultures, such as ours, language references practical things – the metaphorical meanings of “grape vine,” “drinking gourd,” “Underground Railroad,” and “Watch Night,” just to name a few. For countless generations, metaphors carried their meaning across generations throughout the diaspora. Song, story, poems, rhymes, riddles, and customs arose out of a need or a practical observation in nature. Watching through the night in times of danger makes sense. Mother wit teaches about continued need for the Watch Night because we are not out of danger yet.

What started as a familiar community vigil has become an increasingly meaningful symbol in African American culture beyond the birth of Freedom on the eve of January 1, 1863. New Year’s Eve 1892 carried with it a great hope: emancipation from the institution of chattel slavery. People awaited the morning to read the preliminary document signed by President Lincoln promising a permanent end to slavery, provided the Union was restored. It also promised to arm the Black man and allow him to fight for his own freedom along with that of all future generations. Today it means even more.

“How Long Watchman, How Long?” The call could be heard in anticipation of freedom - in the dark hours before dawn, in the praise house, in the meeting house, in the barn, the kitchen, the stall. The Watchman would call out the time and say, “Oh, just a few more risings, my friends.” The Watchman symbolically stood guard over the people’s well-being. The Watchman’s response marked the steady progress toward morning and survival. We have the will to survive the darkest night. Today the Watch Night service calls on each person to renew their covenant with freedom. In some services the minister will light twelve candles, one for each month. The Church leader reflects on the past year. After the last candle is lit, the church lights go dark, and the people get on their knees to pray. The people pray for the year to come of good fortune and prosperity. They pray for the renewal of their faith and the cleansing of the hearts and spirits. What shall be left behind? What will they need for their mission in the coming year? How shall they prepare for the journey? These are the questions for the Watch Night service. Today, with each Watch Night vigil we hold, there is a chance for the birth of a genuine world of freedom, equality and justice.

What about New Year’s Day itself? Since the times which predate bondage, there was the custom of serving rice with black-eyed peas cooked with pork in a stew which came to be called “Hoppin’ John.” No one seems to know why it got that name. But the saying went if you ate poor on the first day of the year; you’d eat rich the rest of the year. Rice was the symbol for riches and peas for peace. Of course steaming plates of collard greens and cornbread were served as well and the greens stood for the dollar bills you would hope to receive. The Lord had a special blessing for you if you found the shiny new dime place in the pot of Hoppin’ John. Hoppin’ John held the symbolism for many blessings to come in the New Year, a new beginning, the new day. Check out the stories around your family traditions and pass them around the table.

<sup>1</sup> Katchun, Mitch. *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and meaning in African American emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915*. P. 16

<sup>2</sup> Creel, Margaret Washington. *“A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs*. New York, New York University Press. 1988.

Take a look at the NABS Website.....[www.nabsinc.org](http://www.nabsinc.org)

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*Pictures have been posted taken in Baltimore  
during our 30th Annual Festival and Conference.  
Asante Sana to Denise Valentine, Deborah Piece Fakunle  
and William Humes for the photos.*



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