Peace and Blessings from the Executive Board, Council of Elders, and Membership of Keepers Of The Culture, Inc. the Philadelphia Affiliate of NABS, Inc. We send love and gratitude to our ancestors who came before us, to our co-founders Queen Mother Mary Carter Smith and Queen Mother Linda Goss, and to the current leadership of NABS Inc., President Janice Curtis Greene, and the NABS Board of Directors. As this year has been full of ups and downs, we continue on the life-calling of telling our stories, but realize that we must also take the time to rest and care for ourselves, for we can only be of good to others, when we are good to ourselves.

October
KOTC continues its partnership with the African American Museum of Philadelphia and Franklin Square Park for “Griot Tales Saturdays”, storytelling for children.

November
KOTC supports the President on the transitioning of his father, Calvin T. Best, who loved KOTC. KOTC hosts the Homegoing Services on its YouTube channel.
KOTC hosts Family Day, a 24-year tradition with the Free Library of Philadelphia for their Sundays On Stage Series. The theme was UBUNTU: Stories, Songs, and Spoken Word on being human.

December
KOTC spends New Years Eve partnering with WURD 900AM Radio, Philadelphia’s Black radio station for a three-hour radio program. They make history this year by having the first recorded Black Storytelling Radio Marathon. KOTC taps in 28 Black Storytellers from NABS Affiliates and Black Spoken Word artists from around the country! The theme was “I Love My People”, inspired and used with permission from Oba William King’s anthem, “I Love My People”. It was a great success. Just in case you missed it, replay it here!
KOTC President Paul D. Best and his mentees Zakee, Zakim, and Haki create Kwanzaa videos, telling stories based on the Kwanzaa Principles.

KOTC President represents KOTC giving a virtual lecture for the Penn Museum on Kwanzaa and the Black Roots of Storytelling.

LIVING ROOM LECTURE

Honoring Kwanzaa and the Black Roots of Storytelling

Tuesday, December 22, 2020
5:30PM - 6:15PM ET
January

February
Due to the multiplicity of events that take place in Philadelphia during Black History Month, KOTC members devoted their time to collaborating with various schools and community organizations to produce virtual programming.

KOTC partners with sales software company Highspot of Seattle, Washington and puts on a Black History Happy Hour for their 400 Millennial employees. Themed “Black House Rules" KOTC Storytellers tells stories about life in a Black home, and the many meaningful and humorous nuances they contained. The event is a great success, creating an initiative to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for the People of Color within the company.

President Our Sun Paul represents KOTC at the United Missionary Baptist Church in Philadelphia, performing a one man show crafting three monologues as a tribute to Hymns of the Black Church and Rev. Charles A. Tindley.
March
KOTC partners again with the African American Museum of Philadelphia to put on two virtual workshops on Black Women’s History, and stories on the importance of tea in Black culture. The event is directed by Irma Gardner Hammond and Carla Wiley.

KOTC throws a virtual birthday party for Co-Founder Jawara Bishop’s 75th Birthday!

April
KOTC Treasurer Nashid Ali, begins weekly appearances on the “Groundings with Brother Shomari” Radio Show. Throughout the show, he tells stories from the character “Pop Pop Grow Somethin” based on his grandfather. Nashid opens the opportunity and KOTC members come on the show to tell stories throughout the year. Listen in on Sundays from 6pm to 8pm EST on WURD Radio.
The KOTC Teller Development Committee begins a series of workshops to refresh and newly train members in the craft. Sessions topics included Storytelling Basic, Telling using Technology, and interpreting the KOTC Ishara (logo).
KOTC continues its residency at Franklin Square with the African American Museum of Philadelphia, telling stories of Mother Earth for Earth Day.

June
KOTC reemerges with its first in-person event since January 2020, teaming up with the Stenton House Museum of Historic Germantown, creating a Juneteenth Festival for the public. The day was filled with original stories and reenactments from Our Sun Paul and Irma Gardner Hammond, and performances by the Women’s Sekere Ensemble, and Universal African Dance & Drum Ensemble.
July 2020
KOTC creates programming for its corporate collaborator Highspot of Seattle, Washington once again in observance of Juneteenth. The company was closed for the weekend of Juneteenth, and request the program be presented the week of the 4th of July instead. Nashid Ali, Our Sun Paul, and Shani Carrington tells stories of Juneteenth, the Underground Railroad, and excerpts from Frederick Douglas’ essay “What Is The Fourth Of July to The Slave?”

August
KOTC takes its annual month of hiatus to rest and regroup for the upcoming season.

September
KOTC returns from hiatus. The Watoto of Joy are reformed after a three year hiatus through enrolling the students of the SAHGE Academy into the Growing Griots Program of NABS Affiliate Griots Circle of Maryland. Thirteen students from Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and St. Louis enroll.

October 2020
KOTC members join the Spirit of the Drum honoring veteran KOTC member Atiya Ola and fellow mother of the community, Mama Kay for their extensive contributions to the Black community for over fifty years. Enthroned on the Elders Stool, they are officially recognized as Black Elders of the Community.
Conclusion
This year was a learning curve for Keeper’s Of The Culture, Inc. The pandemic of the COVID-19 virus led many to a state of anxiety and panic. But being true to our culture and faith, we used the tragedy to triumph, turning straw into gold, and dirt into diamonds. We were reminded of the many stories of our people that speak to our resilience and strength. The opposition of not storytelling in person created opportunities for us to try new things and start on a path of innovation. Our perceptions were shifted. All this time on our hands was a gift; time to worry shifted to time to work on things that we had tabled for so long. Time that we often complained of not having enough of was all of sudden plentiful and gave us the time we needed to rest. As Keepers Of The Culture, Inc. moves forward in these changing times, I am reminded of an old hymn of the Black Church, saying “Hold to God’s Unchanging Hand” We are Black Storytellers, and as the world changes, our narrative of hope, strength, and an indomineable spirit will forever remain true.

In Spirit, In Love, In Culture,

Paul D. Best, “Our Sun Paul”
President
Keepers Of The Culture, Inc.

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