



Black Storytellers Alliance Affiliate Report 2020

Black Storytellers Alliance was just going along as usual after the very historical 37th Annual “In The Tradition” ... Festival and Conference November 6 – 10, 2019, themed “Looking Back, Moving Forward”! It was moving and historical given all of the museums dedicated to our past history here in the United States! I must say, having lived through and under segregation and “Jim Crow”, I was unable to manage all of the museums. I remember listening and looking at a recording of Faubus (white supremacist and vile governor) and it was too much! I went outside crying uncontrollably and hitting the wall! Vusi was trying to calm me and as I tried to calm down, I saw this white girl, a high school student perhaps and she is sitting on the curb nearby but she is laughing and slapping her leg! I wanted to grab her throat and wipe away the laughter because to me there was nothing to laugh at! Needless to say it took all Vusi had to get me to our car and not go to jail for murder and mayhem! I am thankful for the festival and if I get a chance, I will go back and try to endure it all because it is our history and we prevailed.

For the month of December we did several Kwanzaa presentations for area schools and organizations.

During the month of January BSA did a Rosa Parks reenactment presentation to Mastery Charter School grades k – 5. We also made an MLK storytelling presentation to the Kofi program in St. Paul for at risk African-American students grades 4-6. We also did a Civil Rights presentation (during the week of MLK’s birthday observance) to high school students at Breck a private, mostly white school.

February, as usual, was very busy with presentations in libraries, schools, colleges and churches. The high light being the spoken word residency with a suburban school where the majority of the students were African-American. We also took Sojourner on the road to four presentations!

More libraries in March and Africa Night at the University of St. Thomas! Having received a grant from the Metropolitan Regional Art Center (MRAC), we began our “*The Art of Oral Storytelling from an African/African American Perspective*” storytelling classes at the University of Minnesota’s Robert J. Jones Urban Research and Outreach Center (UROC). Then Covid - 19 hit! We begin teaching the classes via zoom using Master storytellers Valerie Tutson, Oba William King, Jali Atiba Kwabena Wilson, Beverly Cottman, Nothando and Vusi as the Guides. In the middle of the scheduled weekly class sessions, we lost one of our most outstanding students, Sister Saleemah Shabazz Salahud-Din, to complications from Covid 19.

Then Minneapolis became the epicenter of systemic racism on May 25, 2020 with the murder of Brother George Floyd. Again, the impact on each of us was traumatic. BSA members were involved in the protests and part of the Home Going Ceremony in Minneapolis for Brother Floyd, most notably Brother David Hurst and his family provided the music and songs. Rev. Al Sharpton came to Minneapolis to render the moving, powerful eulogy that was televised around the world. The murder of Brother Floyd by four members of the Minneapolis police triggered a world-wide



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response to the continuing murder of primarily African American people by the police in Minnesota and elsewhere in the country. Persevering through this trauma, the classes lasted through June.

So, for April and May we did a few more storytelling events via zoom. We also began the seed pick-up and preparations for the Karamu Community Communal Garden.

In June we participated in two Juneteenth presentations via zoom; participated in Village Telling with NABS; taped three library shows with Idream tv! The taped shows were available for libraries during June-August. And by this time, we had concluded that due to the ravages of the pandemic, we could not safely produce the 30th Annual "Signifyin' & Testifyin'" BICK Master Storytelling Festival! Reluctantly we have postponed - with permission from funders (Minnesota State Arts Board and MRAC) - until Spring 2021.

For October and November we've continued to shelter in place with intermittent telling via zoom for libraries and groups. We still write proposals and collaborate with other entities such as An Education Summit and the wind -up of the book - *How Not To Be A Racist*. We also prepared to participate in the 38th Annual "In The Tradition..." Festival and Conference virtually!

Our best wishes to our NABS fami;y . We hope you take every precaution to stay safe.