

## Communities for Immunity: Stories about COVID The Peale, Baltimore | 2022

**Mama Linda Goss (00:08):** My bells are ringing. My soul is singing. Well, oh, well, oh well. It's storytelling time. (Bells shaking) Gather around my people. Well, well. Gather around my people. Well, well, well, well, well. It's storytelling time. Well, well. It's storytelling time. Well, well. It's storytelling time. Well, well, well, well, well, and indeed it's storytelling time. So, friends gather 'round, and listen to the stories.

**Mama Linda Goss (01:00):** This story is called, Great-Aunt Essie. (Singing). Nowadays, you young folks take so much for granted. That's what Great-Aunt Essie used to say. She would talk about how when she was a child, there were no street lights or traffic lights. There were no refrigerators, she had to use an ice box. She had a cold stove for years. But the weather started getting so hot year in and year out, that Great-Aunt Essie shocked everyone, when she got an air conditioner. She remembers when some folks complained about putting seat belts in their cars and they had to use them, they were so upset about that. She remembers when signs were put up and ramps were built for the disabled.

**Mama Linda Goss (02:09):** Now Great-Aunt Essie was afraid of many things, she was afraid to ride an airplane or drive a car, or even get into an elevator. And believe it or not, Great-Aunt Essie was scared of the telephone. She said that she couldn't understand how that thing worked. She preferred living in the country, on land, they had a pond. She had a dog named Shep, two cats named Muffin and Puffin, chickens, goats, a sheep, frogs and ducks in the pond. She was also a beekeeper, therefore she made her own honey and grew her own vegetables. Her husband, great uncle Jim, had passed away a few years earlier. They didn't have any children, but she had plenty of nieces and nephews.

**Mama Linda Goss (02:54):** Two of her nephews, Howard and Charles were brothers. And they lived a few miles away from Great-Aunt Essie. Howard and Charles even bought Great-Aunt Essie a telephone, but she never used it. They would stop by and check up on her, because she was getting up on in age, but Great-Aunt Essie was independent. Yet, Howard or Charles would call her every day in the morning and in the evening before she went to bed, she would hear the phone ring and just laugh. She knew it was one of them, they were the only ones who had her phone number. She had their numbers too, but she never called them. She'd even misplaced their numbers somewhere. Now, one day as dusk was approaching, Great-Aunt Essie locked up all her doors and got ready bed. Her dog Shep started barking and her two cats Muffin and Puffin hid under the bed.

**Mama Linda Goss (03:47):** "What's going on?" She said to Shep. "Muffin, Puffin, why'd you run under the bed?" Usually she heard frogs croaking in the pond and the crickets chirping in the yard, but instead she heard an owl hooting. "How come the owl is hooting, but the frogs and the crickets are not making any sounds?" Shep kept on barking. "What's the matter with you, Shep?" She checked the locks on her front doors again. Then the phone rang, brring, this made Great-Aunt Essie jump. "Goodness me. That's the last thing I need to hear, is that phone." She went to the back door and Shep followed her just to bark. "Get away from that door, Shep." But Shep refused to move. The phone rang again. "My nerves can't take this." She said. "Something is wrong." Shep wouldn't stop barking. Muffin and Puffin still were hiding and wouldn't come out from under the bed.

**Mama Linda Goss (04:38):** Then she heard some ducks quacking in the pond. "Why are they acting like that, this time of day?" Then she heard the hens cackling from the chicken coop. "Oh no." She said. "It must be a fox in the hen house. I'll go and see." But the way Shep was barking, Great-Aunt Essie was too scared to go near the door. The phone rung again. "Well," she thought, "It's one of my nephews. So I guess, I better answer it. Hopefully, this phone won't hurt me." Great-Aunt Essie slowly picked up the receiver. "Who's calling me?" She said. "It's me, Howard, aunt Essie. Are you all right?" "I don't know what is going on around here, Howard. Shep won't stop barking. The frogs are quiet and the ducks are quacking and the hens are cackling." "It might be a fox around here, don't worry, aunt Essie, Charles and I are going to come over and we're going to bring some traps. Don't open the door until we get there."

**Mama Linda Goss (05:32):** Well, Great-Aunt Essie's nephews, Howard and Charles came as soon as they could in their pickup truck. They checked in on Great-Aunt Essie and she was doing pretty good. And then using flashlights, they checked around the property and sure enough, there was a fox in the henhouse, which scared the chickens. And a beaver was making a lodge in the pond and that was scaring the frogs and the ducks. And a Bobcat was hiding in the shed right near the house, that's why Shep was barking so much. Now no animals were killed, Howard chased the fox further back into the woods. Charles set a trap for the beaver and took it down to the river, so it could build its lodge and make a dam. As far as the Bobcat, Howard and Charles used the cage trap they had brought for the fox. They put the Bobcat in the back of the truck and took it to the wildlife shelter early the next morning.

**Mama Linda Goss (06:29):** From then on Great-Aunt Essie got used to using her phone. She called up her friends and kin folks on a daily basis. Great-Aunt Essie has so much to talk about. And then she realized that she believed what made her so afraid of things, was because of her mother, Annie Mae. Now her mother, Annie Mae is my great-grandmother that we used to call Nana Annie. Well, when Nana Annie was a little girl, she was playing hide and go seek with her friends. (Singing). Well, Nana Anna wanted to make sure that they wouldn't find her and nobody he could. Well, she was in that sugar cane field for quite a long time, so she started getting scared. She started thinking about wild dogs and snakes in that sugar cane field. And her family became worried too, because they weren't quite sure exactly where she was in the sugar cane field. They hollered out for her, but she was afraid to answer back, because she was also so afraid of those wild dogs.

**Mama Linda Goss (07:46):** Luckily they found her just before it got dark. But that experience of being lost in a sugar cane field made Nana Annie so afraid of so many things and after that, she was afraid of thunderstorms. She was afraid of hospitals. She was afraid of doctors. She was afraid of nurses, electrical appliances. She's afraid of elevators and yes, telephones. Now she passed this fear on down to some of her children and Great-Aunt Essie figures, that's why she was afraid of so many things. But Great-Aunt Essie realized she wasn't afraid of the phone anymore. Mm-mm (negative), she loved that telephone. But she was still afraid of elevators and escalators.

**Mama Linda Goss (08:28):** So when she heard that her nephew Howard's daughter, Mary Anne was going to New York City, ooh, Aunt Essie became so afraid. The whole idea of her great niece going to that big city. Now this was in 1965, and at that time, New York City was the largest city in the world, woo. And this was going to be Mary Ann's first trip. Well, you know Great-Aunt Essie had to talk to Mary Ann. And so she said to her, "Child, I'm going to warn you when you go there, I want you to watch out for those big city streets. I want you to watch out crossing the big city streets. I want you to watch out for them big city street corners. I want you to watch out for those big city sidewalks and watch out for

that subway and those taxis and those buses and the trains and the planes in the sky and watch out for... Oh my gracious goodness, watch out for those tall skyscrapers."

**Mama Linda Goss (09:19):** "But Great-Aunt Essie." Said Mary Anne. "That's one of the main reasons why I want to go to New York City. I want to see the tallest building in the world, the Empire State Building. I want to ride the elevator all the way up to the top of the observation deck." "Oh my goodness, child. What about the stairs?" "Great-Aunt Essie, the Empire State Building has almost 1600 stairs and 102 floors." "Oh goodness me, you be careful Mary Anne." And indeed Mary Anne was very careful. She saw New York City and the Empire State Building and she brought back photos and showed them to Great-Aunt Essie.

**Mama Linda Goss (09:58):** Great-Aunt Essie looked at those photos and said, "My, my, my, I'm so proud of you, niocy. And you know something? I've always wanted to go to the downtown that's around here and visit the top floor of that big department store. You know it has four floors and I don't want to take the stairs." Well, Great-Aunt Essie, I will go with you and we can ride the elevator together. And after that, we can go out to lunch. How about that?" And so they did. Now when Mary Anne grew up and married and had her family, she told them stories about Great-Aunt Essie, like the one she's telling you right now. (Singing).