

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

Mama Linda Goss (00:08): (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. And, indeed, it's storytelling time, so friends gather round and listen to the stories.

Mama Linda Goss (01:00): (Singing). Gifted hands and gifted minds are helping humankind. Gifted hands and gifted minds are helping humankind. Gifted hands and gifted minds are helping humankind. There helping all over this land. Gifted hands and gifted minds are helping humankind. Gifted hands and gifted minds are helping humankind. Gifted hands and gifted minds are helping humankind. There helping all over this land.

Mama Linda Goss (01:30): Hello, everyone. My name is Mama Linda. I am a storyteller. I am known for ringing my bells, but today I'm ringing my school bells. Come with me and we're going to visit the sixth grade class of teacher Paul Best. Today is Friday the last day in the school week. It is Mr. Best's last period for the day. The students enter the classroom, very anxious and very excited, not because it is almost time to go home. You see, Teacher Best makes learning so interesting. He calls the class together by saying, "I go." The class responds by saying, "I may." I go," He calls out and again, the class says, "I may." "Thank you," Teacher Best says.

Mama Linda Goss (02:28): "Good afternoon class. Since we have some new students in the class visiting us today, we would like for someone to explain to them what I go, I may means." A student raises her hand. "Yes, Sharon, you may share." "I go, I may is a call and response greeting from the Akan language spoken in Ghana. Ghana is a country in West Africa. When someone calls out, 'I go,' that means, they're saying they need your attention. And your response is, 'I may,' which means yes, you have my attention. "Thank you very much, Sharon. Very good," said Teacher Best. "Now who remembers what the assignment is that I gave out last Friday for you to bring in today?" Jamal raises his hand, "Today, it is time to play, do you know who this is? Can I make you say gee whiz? Our homework was to share information about Black pioneers in the medical field that we may not know about." "Thank you, Jamal. That is correct. Excellent. Well, who wants to go first?" said Teacher Best. Tyrone raises his hand and says, "I do, Mr. Best. I go." The class responds, "I may." Tyrone begins.

Mama Linda Goss (03:45): "This person is one of the USA Today's women of the year honorees for 2022. She has inspired so many people, especially women and people of color. She has inspired them to study science, technology, engineering and math. She says that to be living in this moment where she has the opportunity to work on something that has intimate global importance is unbelievable. Do you know who this is? Can I make you say gee whiz?" The students were stunned. They couldn't figure out who it was so Tyrone continues, "She was named by Time Magazine on their Time 100 Next list. Mr. Best, she's even younger than you are." "What?" said Mr. Best. "Gee whiz," said Mr. Best. The class laughed. Tyrone continued, "She was born January 26th, 1986 in North Carolina. Now this is your last clue, Dr. Anthony Fauci said that this person is an African American scientist who is right at the forefront of the development of the vaccine." "Gee whiz," says some of the students.

Mama Linda Goss (05:01): Tyrone then said in a loud, proud voice, "She is Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett and she likes to be called Kizzy. Dr. Corbett is a viral immunologist, who is the scientific lead on the team who developed the COVID-19 vaccine for Moderna. She works at Harvard University, yet she takes time to visit communities who are hesitant about taking the vaccine. She eases their fears by addressing all of their concerns. She has dedicated her life fighting for equality in healthcare. Thank you for listening." "Gee whiz, gee whiz," is heard throughout the classroom. The students clap for Tyrone. "Thank you so much," said Mr. Best.

Mama Linda Goss (05:49): "Tyrone, that was great. Who wants to go next?" said Teacher Best. "I go," Aisha calls out. "I may," the class responds. Aisha begins, "This person was born in the 19th century and she passed away in the earlier part of the 20th century. She was known during her time, but not for her contributions to medicine. She had learned remedies from her mother and during the Civil War, she became a nurse and took care of the sick, wounded and the dying. She took care of Black soldiers. She knew how to treat smallpox, dysentery, malignant fevers and other infectious diseases. She used roots from water lilies and made herbs from cranesbill. She made a bitter tasting brew and gave it to the soldiers to drink. This brew was healing and many soldiers were restored to health. Who is this person?" One student named Chris, raised his hand, "Is it Harriet Tubman?" "Yes," said Aisha. "Gee whiz," he said, "I know her as the Moses of Black people and I know her as a conductor on the Underground Railroad but I didn't know that she was a nurse."

Mama Linda Goss (07:06): "Oh yes," said Aisha and she continued, "her dream was to have her own hospital or to have a home that would take care of the elderly, the sick and the homeless. Now in spite of the hard work and care that Harriet Tubman gave to the Black Union soldiers, she didn't receive any compensation. The United States Secretary of State pleaded her case before Congress, asking them to give her a pension. Her case was rejected. In 1899, she received a widow's pension because her second husband, Nelson Davis, served in the Civil War. This pension was increased from \$8 to \$20 a month. Harriet Tubman using what little money she had and donations she received from supporters, saw her dream come true in 1908 when the Harriet Tubman Home for the Elderly was built near her farm in Auburn, New York. There, she took care of the sick and the elderly until she herself passed away there in 1913. Now can I make you say gee whiz?" "Gee whiz, gee whiz, gee whiz," the class says and they clap for Aisha. "Thank you, Aisha. That was excellent" said Teacher Best. "Who wants to go next?"

Mama Linda Goss (08:30): "I go," Bernard calls out. "I may," the class responds. "Bernard, you may begin." "Thank you, Teacher Best. Indeed, the United States has experienced many epidemics and pandemics such as smallpox, yellow fever, typhoid fever, polio as well as COVID-19. I share with you a story about two Black men who lived in the middle part of the 18th century, through the early part of the 19th century. They were great friends. They founded an organization together. They were preachers who founded their own churches. They were abolitionists and leaders in their community. They were also instrumental in fighting against the yellow fever epidemic in 1793 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which at that time was the capital of the USA. The president was George Washington and he and his family had to flee the city, as well as many other well to do people. Now, these Black men didn't flee the city. Instead, they did a good rate service for the people of Philadelphia, yet they received no credit for it. Do you know who they are? Can I make you say gee whiz so far?"

Mama Linda Goss (09:44): "Gee whiz," said one of the students. Bernard continues, "I'm talking about Richard Allen and Absalom Jones. Now a pamphlet was published which contained misinformation and false statements about Allen and Jones, as well as about other Black people who had helped the sick and

the dying of the yellow fever. It stated that Black folks couldn't even catch yellow fever. However, Richard Allen caught the yellow fever and luckily he survived. He and Absalom Jones together, published their own account of how much Black people did. Black people, free and enslaved, cleaned the streets. They nursed the sick. They transported the sick. They fed the sick. They washed their clothes. They dug graves and buried the dead. They performed tasks that oh one else wanted to do. Most of them received no compensation or even a thank you for their services. Richard Allen and Absalom Jones were storytellers like the griots you have told us about Mr. Best, who documented the history, the truth and the story of their people. Everyone is needed during a crisis, from the caregiver to the gravedigger. Can I get a gee whiz up in here?"

Mama Linda Goss (11:05): "Gee whiz, gee whiz," the class responds to Bernard. They give him a thunderous applause. "Thank you, Bernard. That was great. Well class, we have time for one more. Who wants to go next?" "I go," Laura calls out. "I may," the class responds. "Thank you. This person was born in West Africa. We believed he was born in Ghana and was part of the Akan people. We don't know his birth date. He could have been born in the 17th century or in the early 18th century. We don't even know his real name but what we do know, he was brought to this country as an enslaved human being and he brought with him the idea of inoculation, which came before vaccination." "What?" said some of the people in the class, "Gee whiz," said Teacher Best. "Wow."

Mama Linda Goss (12:15): "Now this unknown, enslaved African was given as a gift to Cotton Mather. That's right, that's the same Cotton Mather who was part of the Salem Witch Trials. Now Cotton Mather gave this enslaved person the name Onesimus and Onesimus is spelled O-N-E-S-I-M-U-S. Onesimus was named after an enslaved man from the Bible who gained his freedom. Let us travel now to Boston, Massachusetts, to the summer of 1721. Many people were dying from smallpox. Those who did survive, were left scarred. Ministers, as well as doctors, were trying to ease the suffering of others. Cotton Mather, a minister, happened to ask Onesimus if he had ever had smallpox and he answered, "Yes and no." Onesimus then told Cotton Mather about the procedure his people in West Africa used, where they would take some of the affected pus of smallpox and place it into the wound in the skin. It would make you sick but you would recover and once you recovered, you were immune to smallpox. This is what Onesimus had experienced himself and this was known as inoculation. Cotton Mather was astonished by this and so he told his friend, Dr. Boylston about the procedure."

Mama Linda Goss (14:04): "They in turn inoculated hundreds of people during the smallpox epidemic, all over Boston and all these people survived except for six. Cotton Mather published his findings. However, instead of the people of Boston hailing him as a hero, they loathed him. A newspaper published by James Franklin said misleading statements against Mather and made the people afraid to even take the inoculations. James Franklin had a younger brother, named Benjamin, who also worked for the paper. That's right, that's the same Benjamin Franklin who would become a scientist, inventor, a writer and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. But during that time, he was influenced by his older brother. The Franklin brothers continued to print horrible things about Cotton Mather. The things were so bad that they said, that one of the readers of the newspaper tossed a lit fire bomb through Mather's window. Luckily, no one was injured. Benjamin Franklin did not inoculate his children and sadly in 1736, his four year old son died of smallpox. That terrible loss caused so much grief and suffering to Benjamin Franklin, he changed his views and encouraged parents to get themselves and their children inoculated."

Mama Linda Goss (15:44): "Now years later, Edward Jenner would become known as the father of immunology and he is credited with inventing the world's first smallpox vaccine in 1796. Now he had read about Cotton Mather and Onesimus, yet Onesimus did not receive any credit and has been left out of the history books. But if it had not been for him, many Americans would not have been saved from smallpox. Onesimus' name means useful and helpful and indeed he was. We must remember him. Remember that name and remember what he did for this country. Thank you." "Gee whiz," said the class. They applauded for Laura. "Wow. Thank you, Laura. That was excellent," said Teacher Best. "Raise your hands if you have learned something new today." The entire class raised their hands. "Thank you. Now next week's assignment is Black pioneers in the field of innovation and inventions. Class, share with our visitors what our motto is." The class proudly says, "Keep researching, keep asking questions, keep on learning, keep on keeping on." "Excellent," said Teacher Best, "class dismissed."

Mama Linda Goss (17:17): (Singing).