Songs and Stories from Mama Linda Goss: The Peale’s Storyteller in Residence
The Peale, Baltimore
Recorded in June 2020

Mama Linda Goss:
Peace and blessings everyone. My name is Mama Linda Goss, and I am the bell ringer, I am the praise singer, and I invite you to listen, to learn and to share. Asante sana.

Mama Linda Goss:
Well, oh well, well, blues lamentations for George Perry Floyd, born October the 14th, 1973 and was murdered, May 25th, 2020. Oh my Lord, did you see what they did to George Floyd? Oh my Lord, did you see what they did to George Floyd? They put pressure on his neck with their knee, poor George went on to Calvary. Oh my Lord, did you see what they did to George Floyd? So much pain, so much trauma, poor George called up for his angel mama. So much pain, so much trauma, poor George called out for his angel mama. She opened up her arms. She said, "Come on in baby, no more harm." Oh my Lord, did you see what they did to George Floyd?

Mama Linda Goss:
People came together and marched. They shouted and they torched. People came together and marched. They shouted and they torched. No justice, no peace, stop the system of racist police. Oh my Lord, did you see what they did to George Floyd? The rallying cry was hurled all over this world. The rallying cry was hurled all over this world. Thousands gathered in cities and towns, and some statues came tumbling down. Oh my Lord, did you see what they did to George Floyd? Somehow, some way, we shall overcome someday. Somehow, some way, we shall overcome someday. A change has got to come from the heart, or this country will fall apart. Oh my Lord, did you see what they did to George Floyd? Were you there?

Myles Banks:
Wow, that was amazing, Mama Linda. So I guess the most obvious question would be what inspired you to write that poem?

Mama Linda Goss:
Well, the inspiration came because I witnessed it. As they showed it on television, I, along with thousands and hundreds of thousands saw a man being killed, a man gasping for his last, last breath and calling out for his dear mama. So it just hurt me to my heart, and I can relate to the family of George Perry Floyd because my own brother, [Barrington 00:03:55] William McNear was murdered when he was 21 years old, back in 1974. So it brought back so much trauma in my own life, and I thought about my mother and father, because they are now hopefully in heaven. It just brought back so many terrible, painful memories. Also, the George Florida tragedy came on top of what had happened to brother
Ahmaud Arbery. So it's like person, after person, after person, black man, black woman, and it's just too much.

Mama Linda Goss:
It's too much for the human mind to bear, for the human eyes to bear, because if we call ourselves human beings, how can we be so inhumane to other human beings? How can we be so inhumane to trees and to the waters and to the animals, the insects? How can we continue to live? How could we continue to survive as a species if we continue to treat people this way? So I just pulled out what came to me. I just pulled it out from my soul, what came to me and that's how I came up with these lines. The tunes themselves came from really two other songs, a spiritual I heard as a child we used to sing in church, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"

Mama Linda Goss:
"Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, it makes me tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" The other song, it reminds me of a song that was popular during the war in Vietnam, and a group, I think they were called The Persuasions. They were acapella group and they used a single song called, "Look what you've done to my only son, to my only son, to my only son. Look what you've done to my only son. You made him a junkie in your war."

Mama Linda Goss:
So many men, Black and White and Brown came back from that war strung out on dope, and so I thought of those two songs. As you can see, I put them together, the rhythm and the flavor, and that's how I came up with Blues Lamentations for George Perry Floyd.

Myles Banks:
Wow. That's amazing, Mama Linda. So I just want to ask you one more question. If you could give some advice to the younger generation about how to cope with these situations? Because I'm sure that you've seen situations like these now several times, where black men are being executed and constantly dealing with racial injustices in our society. So if you could just say something to inspire the next generation to keep going, what would you tell them?

Mama Linda Goss:
Well, I say to the young people, this is young people all over the world, ask questions. If you're afraid, that's okay. We're all afraid. We're in some very trying times. Let your parents, or your sisters and brothers, or your teachers, or your Sunday school teacher, or somebody who you trust, let them know how you're feeling. It's important to get these feelings out. It's important to either write them down in a journal or keep a diary, but let your family, let someone know how you feel, what you're going through. Some of you may not be feeling anything. You might be just mute, or you may not be able to express what you're feeling, and that's okay, too. All of this is real. All of the different changes we go through when we deal with grief, they're all valid. There is no right way or no wrong way to handle grief.

Mama Linda Goss:
So if a child seems to be, all of a sudden, very, very quiet, maybe that's the time to ask them what is going on. Maybe they don't want to share, and that's okay too. So you may want to get them involved in something like reading, or listening to music, or perhaps discussing with them how they feel when they go out for a walk or when they're in school. You may want to ask them questions like if they have ever been bullied. That's a very good question to ask because my own children have dealt with bullying and I didn't know anything about it. It wasn't until they were grown that they started telling me all these stories, all these things they went through. Now, if I had known about it at the time, oh my goodness. I would have been so upset. I would have been crazy.

Mama Linda Goss:

So sometimes our children are going through so many things that we never find out about it until they're grown or until it's too late. So it's very important to discuss with your children, the issues of bullying, the issues of racism, how they feel, or do they feel anything differently when they go into a store, when they go into a restaurant? There was an incident recently here in Baltimore where a black mother took her son into this restaurant and she was denied entry because they said her son wasn't dressed properly, so they denied her. Luckily, she had her phone camera and she texted a picture of a White child in practically the same outfit who was seen leaving the restaurant.

Mama Linda Goss:

So racism is so subtle, and some people really are in denial about their racism. Everyone is racist. It's not just White folks. All people have a tendency to be racist on different levels, and all people have a tendency to discriminate. It might be because of someone's weight, or because someone has freckles, or because someone has a particular type of lifestyle. So here again, there are some important issues we need to be discussing, not only with the youth, but with all people.

Mama Linda Goss:

I think it's important to bring the youth in discussion with an extended discussion with older people, younger people, teens, college students. Because in the midst of this COVID-19, I'm sure children are wondering what is going on. I'm sure that youth are wondering what are these adults going to do? Are they going to save us? Because that's what the youth depend on, for us to save them, and right now, we're trying to save ourselves. So I think we should see if the youth have questions for us, and to see if the youth have solutions. When I think of Greta from Sweden, she has all kinds of questions and answers and solutions, so we need to listen. It's important to listen to the youth, to listen and hear what they have to say.