Praise Song in Tribute to Cicely Tyson, A Poem and Interview
Mama Linda’s Chapbook
The Peale, Baltimore
Recorded in February 2021

Mama Linda Goss (00:00): Praise song in tribute to Cicely Tyson (December 19th, 1924 to January 28th, 2021). The light was dim. Silence, please. The play is about to begin. The houselights dim, fade to black. The curtains open, stage lights are on. The spotlight is on center stage. The announcer’s baritone voice announces, "Ladies and gentlemen, actress of sound, screen, and stage, actress for the people and sister queen mother, Nana Cicely Tyson." Thunderous applause. The audience rises to their feet. Enter from stage right. She enters. Ms. Tyson humbly bow before them. She recognizes them all, her luminaries. She greets her audience with smiles, tears, and gratitude. Okay, I'm going to say that part again. She greets her audience with smiles, tears and gratitude. Ira Aldridge, Bert Williams, Canada Lee, Paul Robeson, Frank Silvera, Ivan Dixon, Chad Boseman, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee.

Mama Linda Goss (01:48): Florence Mills, Josephine Baker, Hattie McDaniel, Diana Sands, Gloria Foster, Beah Richards, Diahan Carroll, and so many more black thespians, crafters and masters of the Western theatrical scene, who had to fight racism as they memorized their lines. Cicely Tyson was 96 years young. The internal youth of light burned within her. She said, "I would not accept roles unless they projected us, particularly women, in a realistic light and dealt with us as human beings." She played her roles with strength and dignity: Harriet Tubman, Coretta Scott King, Miss Jane Pittman, Rebecca, the sharecropper in Sounder, Binta, mother of Kunta Kinte in Roots, and so many more. She said, "I don't Uncle Tom to anybody. I don't care who it is. When I smile, I smile. I do not grin." Ancestor nana queen mama has left us an eternal light of hope, endurance and courage within our souls. Remember her smile. Remember her smiling light. Remember the smiling light within. The show must go on.

Myles Banks (03:47): Powerful, very powerful. And you said you've been up writing this poem all last night.

Mama Linda Goss (03:56): Yes. That's why I'm so tired. Once my husband told me she had passed away, I immediately started writing it. And then I could send you ideas for the second poem and none of them were working. And I remember you saying, "you could do something for black history month." And I said, "well I have one poem, The Tiger Swan. So for black history month, I said, brother-in-law has given me a challenge. And so you did. And so I hope I have lived up to it because the inspiration was Mama Cicely. So Mama Sicily is still reaching out. She's still encouraging people. And so she gave me the courage, you gave me the challenge.

And so I kept writing, working on this poem in my sleep I'd wake up, go a few words. Because most of the time when I write a poem, I write it in my head first, it's all in my head. And then I start putting it down on paper, and so I did and things were coming to me and I was just thinking about Cicely. The first time I heard her really was when I was a teenager. She was in a TV show called East Side/West Side, starring George C. Scott, and I loved that show. It only lasted about a year or so, but there was a great show.

And then when I went to college, I went to Howard University, I studied drama and it had this album there called "A Hand Against the Gate" and the album had songs and stories and poems, featuring black actors and actresses, and she was one of them. And she did this piece called "When Melinda Sings" by Paul Laurence Dunbar. And, also in the poem I wrote about her, I mentioned Ira Aldridge, who really was the first African-American to achieve fame as an actor. He was known for his Shakespearian roles.

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theater at Howard University's drama department was called the Ira Aldridge theater and we had an Ira Aldridge rule. And so the first thing we had to learn when we got to that family department was who Ira Aldridge was. And Ira Aldridge had two daughters, and both of them were opera singers. One was a very great opera singer, and she broke color barriers. But because of racism, she didn't get a chance to blossom like she could have. And the other daughter's voice became weak due to laryngitis, so she became a very famous teacher.

**Myles Banks** (06:52): Wow, man, Mama Cicely was not from my generation, before my time, but I still can account on several movies that I saw. She was just so impactful.

**Mama Linda Goss** (07:10): Yes. Oh yes. She was in How to Get Away with Murder. She was excellent in that. She was in a lot of stuff, TV stuff, stage. In her elder years, she won a Tony for stage, I think for her betrayal in The Last Confederate Tells it All. I think she got a Tony for that and I think she won two Emmy's. I know she got an Emmy for Miss Jane Pittman and I think she got an Emmy for the episode of Scandal. So she was something to be reckoned with. She was fierce, baby. She was fierce.

**Myles Banks** (07:56): Definitely. Definitely. If we can go back to the poem real quick, I had a question about one of the lines. It says Diahann Carroll, and so many poor black thespians. What do you mean by that term, thespians?

**Mama Linda Goss** (08:17): Thespians is a word meaning actors, when you're in the theater. See the theater used to be really faddish, really center stage. I mean the movies and television took over from the stage. But in those days, an actress was like a diva, like the opera singers. And so the term thespian means you are an actor and basically you may be an actor of the stage and you might do the classics like Shakespeare or the Greek classics. So you're taken seriously.


**Mama Linda Goss** (09:03): And some of those names I mentioned, I purposely mentioned some particular names, because I know people may not have heard of them or they may have forgotten about them. Especially Canada Lee, who was a great actor and his life is very interesting. He started out as a classical musician and he was very good at it, but he ran away from it. Then he became a boxer. He fought a lot of fights and he won all of them except about 10. And so he ran away from that. And then he kind of ran into acting, became a great actor. But because he was black and because of the blacklisting at the time, he had a hard time. But every movie he's in, he's very good in it, and he plays his roles with dignity. Like Cicely Tyson said, he don't Uncle Tom, he didn't Uncle Tom any of his roles. He plays a real black man.

**Myles Banks** (10:09): That's good stuff.

**Mama Linda Goss** (10:12): I purposely mentioned those names.

**Myles Banks** (10:18): One thing that I've recently stumbled upon in my journey and in my walk is realizing that the fact that the flesh and the body may age, but the spirit doesn't age.
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Mama Linda Goss (10:32): That's right. That's right. The spirit doesn't age and the soul grows wide with wisdom. The soul cannot be destroyed. That's how our ancestors were able to survive in this country, because they tried to crush our spirits and they tried to destroy our souls. But like our music says (singing) So that's why we survived because of our faith, our spirit our soul. Again, we climbed those hills, we climbed the mountains.

Myles Banks (11:21): Definitely. Definitely. All right. As we close Mama Linda, I want you to do me a favor.

Mama Linda Goss (11:28): Uh oh, what is it?

Myles Banks (11:37): All right. I want you to start from the last paragraph. This time, I want you to read just the last paragraph until the end of the poem. But this time I want you to-

Mama Linda Goss (11:46): Cicely Tyson was 96 years young. Okay. But this time, what now?

Myles Banks (11:52): Now this, I want you to imagine that you're reading her obituary and that you were chosen to read her obituary. And I want you to say it as if you're speaking at her funeral.

Mama Linda Goss (12:11): Mama Cicely Tyson was 96 years young. The internal youth of light burned within her. She quoted, "I would not accept roles unless they projected us, particularly women, in a realistic light and dealt with us as human beings." She played her roles with strength and dignity. Harriet Tubman, Coretta Scott King, Miss jane Pittman, Rebecca, the sharecropper in Sounder, Binta mother of Kunta Kinte in Roots and so many more. She quoted, "I don't Uncle Tom for anybody. I don't care who it is. When I smile, I smile. I do not grin" Ancestor, Nana Queen Mama has left us an eternal light of hope, endurance and courage within our souls. Remember her smile. Remember her smiling light. Remember the smiling light within. The show must go on.

Myles Banks (13:54): Ashay.

Mama Linda Goss (13:54): Ashay.