Handwoven, A Poem and Interview
Mama Linda’s Chapbook
The Peale, Baltimore
Recorded in March 2021

Mama Linda Goss (00:00): (singing) My bells are ringing. My soul is singing. I'm the brave singer. I'm a bell-ringer, the truth [wella 00:00:27], the story teller. Baskets are handwoven. Many things we use are handwoven. We as a people, we as a group of sisters or a group of brothers, we're all handwoven. Hand in hand, we help one another. Handwoven, handwoven in praise of sisterhood handwoven. Handwoven in praise of sisterhood.

Mama Linda Goss (01:16): My fingers ache, my shoulders feel as though they were about to break. But the sisters, you sisters, your handwoven words give us strength. Sometimes the sun burns my arms. Sometimes my hands won't stay warm, but sisters, sisters of the word your threads of wisdom gives us guidance. And when we go through things we have to say, hold onto me sweet child. Hold onto me, dear mama. Hold on to me, blessed nana. Hold on to me, my precious sister. I'm talking about four generations: the sister, the child, the mama, and the grandmamma holding on. Holding on, during a storm. Holding on during a peace march. Together we are handwoven. Together we are handwoven.


Mama Linda Goss (04:03): Together, we are handwoven. Together, we are handwoven. Handwoven together we will walk in prayer, handwoven together we walk in the light. Handwoven together we walk in prayer, handwoven together we walk day and night. We were handwoven in love and truth. We were handwoven in peace and justice. Together, we are handwoven. Together, we are handwoven in the sisterhood. Those who will come after the ancestors, those who will come after the elders, you will be handwoven. Handwoven in praise of our sisters. In praise of the sisters. In praise of sisterhood.

Mama Linda Goss (05:08): Handwoven really is a combination of two poems. The original poem of Handwoven again, was a cancer experience. Going through cancer and writing what you're going through. And I had to endure a lot of pain and a lot of suffering with my cancer because I had surgeries. I had chemo and I had radiation. But I was inspired by so many people. I was inspired by my family, my sisterhood, and I was encouraged. And so many people prayed for me, people from all faiths. Some people who weren't believers. Who consider themselves atheists and agnostics, prayed for me.

Mama Linda Goss (06:15): And one of my friends who goes to this beautiful Episcopal Church, told them to ring a bell for me every day at 12 noon. And they did, and they called out my name. Now I never heard it, but she said that happened every day. I don't know if they still do it or not, but I know they did it for a long time. And I ring bells, I'm known for ringing bells. And so just the idea that a bell was ringing for me, really encouraged me. And people would call me on the phone and pray. I would receive cards and prayers in the mail. And I received emails of prayers. And even the poem that I wrote, one of the storytellers: her name is... We call her mama, Dr. Deborah.
Mama Linda Goss (07:22): Deborah Pierce-Funkule. She wrote like a tune to this poem. And I kind of sing it, but I can't sing as good as she can. So I kind of make up my own little thing with it. But I put in the poem... How the poem was changed, is that I put in the poem, famous writers whom I admire. And this poem is featured in the chat book, Remembering Toni Morrison. And so it could... It didn't necessarily had to be about her, but it could be what she represented. It could be about her spirit. So I put in this poem, women writers who have inspired me. So that's what the poem is about.

Myles Banks (08:13): I just wanted to say, how powerful is it that us as human beings and always as a wise woman who said this. And I like to repeat it. She says, "We are spiritual beings having a human experience." I'll repeat that, "We are spiritual beings having a human experience." And I thought it was so powerful how you were saying that even when you felt you didn't have the strength, it's almost like the people who were surrounded by you or who surrounded you, gave you energy. And gave you that healing property that you needed in that time of you kind of being on a low. And it's amazing how people, when people come together, they can unite and they could give you what you need and your season that you needed.

Mama Linda Goss (09:04): Yes, that is exactly right. Because when you're going through cancer, and most people say this is true when they go through it. it's like a battle. It's like you're in the battle for your life. And I have friends who went through it, they used a holistic approach. And they didn't take any chemo or radiation or any surgery. Not at first, that is. But the ones I'm thinking of, except for two, went totally holistic with it. And people pray for them, but unfortunately they didn't survive. And that shocked me. One of my closest friends who died from cancer, I couldn't believe it because she was in great shape. She didn't have an ounce of fat on her. She was a great dancer and she watched everything she ate, and yet she didn't survive. And so I feel that I survived because, not only were people praying for me, but also because of my faith. And because I believe that I had to rely on everybody positive who was there to help me.

Mama Linda Goss (10:52): So yes, I did rely on the doctors. And I even asked the doctor, I said, "Let me see your hands." He was the one who operated on me. And he had very slender, small hands. Almost of a child. But they say that children are able to make those huge Oriental carpets. We call them Oriental carpets. But those huge carpets you see to come from Armenia and India and Russia. They say they're able to saw, and that's what surgery is all about. It's about not only cutting you open but it's also, very carefully, but it's also about stitching too. And so I looked at his hands and I told him, I said, "I'm going to pray. Pray for you and pray for your hands." And he said, "That's good."

Mama Linda Goss (11:54): He said, "Because my mother prays for me every night." I said, "Well you tell your mother that I'd say thank her. I thank her. And tell her I said, 'Asante Sana.' I thank her for praying for you. And you let her know I'm praying for you as well." And so also pray to the God I believe in. I was raised in the Christian Church, St. Paul A.M.E Church. The church it was founded by Richard Allen. And Richard Allen was a warrior. He was a freedom fighter. He was a abolitionists. He was an organizer. He was the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America. And he was also a writer and he collected hymns. And he was a very resilient. And he believed in the rights of African people because in those days in the 1700/ 1800, we weren't considered Americans. So we were still considered Africans.
So to me, he was one of the first people who really promoted, believing in oneself. Believing, having pride and where you came from. Having pride and being an African.

Mama Linda Goss (13:27): So all of that went into me battling my cancer. And I'm still battling some of the side effects from the cancer now because it's... People will tell you when you so-called are cured from cancer, you're never truly over the cancer. That experience is always with you and it stays with you. You have flashbacks. But again, I was very fortunate and I'm very grateful and I'm very humbled that people helped me. Not only did people pray for me, but people came to assist me. I had three sisters. I call them my transportation angels. They came to my home and at different times, one would take me to the doctor. One would take me to get my chemotherapy. Sometimes I would get sick from the [inaudible 00:14:40]. I would get very ill from the chemotherapy.

Mama Linda Goss (14:43): And what a lot of people don't realize is that you can die from the chemotherapy. Everybody doesn't survive, who gets the chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is very dangerous because you're literally putting poison in your body. But my family, my doctors felt that this was the best route. The best way for me to go. And so I had faith in them. I listened and that's the way I went. But the chemo would make me very, very ill. And time I would get it, in a matter of about a few days I'd have to go right back to the hospital.

Mama Linda Goss (15:26): So there were people. In my transportation angels who took me to the hospital. They took me to get my blood tests. They took me when I had to get a test dealing with my heart. They took me just everywhere I needed to go. And then there would be emergencies where it gets so sick and call them. They had to rush me to emergency, because with the chemo when you get ill you have to go through the whole process of going through emergency. Going through ER again. And then they would admit me and I'd be in the hospital for about a week. I would get out, rest up. Time I felt better, it was time to go back in and get chemo again. I think you get chemo every so many weeks. And then had to deal with the radiation in the fall. And once they said I was cured, you ring a bell. And here again, I'm into bells. I love bells. And all this happened at Johns Hopkins Hospital. And when your last day there, they had this huge bell for you to ring. And I brought my own bells from home. And so when it was time, I invited friends. The storytellers came, my transportation storytelling angels came. My family was there. My daughter passed out cookies to everyone. I rang those bells. I rang my bells. I guess you say I was in church. I shouted, I gave testimony. And some people were crying and every... And then other people started testifying. And so it was a beautiful experience.
Mama Linda Goss (17:54): So from all those experiences, you might say that poem Handwoven came out of me because when you’re going through something you... Some people can go through something alone and be okay, but it's like the song that Bill Withers sings Lean on Me. Sometimes you do have to lean on people and you do have to accept people's kindness and their generosity. And you have to be grateful and appreciative. And I am so grateful and so appreciative.

Mama Linda Goss (18:34): My poem, Handwoven. It's really, as I say in the poem, it's in praise of sisterhood. Because sometimes you're in situations where you need your sisters to come and help you. You need to cry on their shoulder. You need to hold their hand. You need them to just hug you. Now, we're doing the pandemic... During this pandemic, we really can't or shouldn't hug or hold hands. So what people are doing, they’re elbowing or as I tell people, I’m sending you loves and hugs through the email. Or through the phone or through a prayer, I'm still praying for you. I'm sending you my hugs and loves. I hope you feel them. I hope you feel what I'm sending you.

Mama Linda Goss (19:41): So I think that's what's happening with the pandemic. Because even during this pandemic, we still have to lean on each other. Even if it's not physically, we have to lean on each other spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, financially. All the different ways in which people need each other. That's what has happened or has to happen during this pandemic. During this pandemic, you can't make it just by yourself because you got to be careful. You come in contact with people. So it's definitely something that on one sense, people are isolated and separated and another sense they're still depending on one another.

Myles Banks (20:37): Yeah and spirit. That's true.

Mama Linda Goss (20:40): Yes and spirit. As I say, every time I feel the spirit singing in my heart, I will pray. That's one of our spirituals.