



**NABS** "IN THE TRADITION..."  
 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
 OF BLACK STORYTELLERS

# SPREAD THE WORD

**National Association of Black Storytellers**

P.O. Box 67722

Baltimore, Maryland 21215

www.nabsinc.org

Fall 2008

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## STORYTELLING:

### *Medicine for the Spirit, Healing for the Soul!*

*(From "A Storyteller's Rap" in Talk That Talk)*



Dear NABS Family,

During the early days of September as the leaves were beginning to fall, I began receiving phone calls from several friends expressing their frustrations and anxieties about the 2008 Presidential campaign. One morning, the calls began around 8:30 AM and by noon I was feeling so overwhelmed that I was jumping every time I heard a ringing sound.

Then I received a call from our Executive Director, Linda Jenkins Brown, who informed me that a storyteller named Susi Wolf, from Albuquerque, New Mexico, had made a contribution to NABS in appreciation for the great stories from "Mother Africa."

Later that evening, around 9 PM EST, I phoned Susi to thank her. When she answered I said, 'T'S STORYTELLING TIME!' From that point on, a doorway opened before us and we were led on a path of mysteries, dreams and fables. We talked for about five hours....until 2AM!

Susi Wolf is a powerful storyteller who has a calming and soothing way of sharing a story. She is Cherokee and tells healing stories from around the world. 'How deeply I honor the stories from Mother Africa,' Susi Wolf said. 'A story is a living spirit,' she continued on. Then, Susi told me a profound tale she called, "The Leopard's Revenge." The story is about the accidental killing of Leopard's child by Elephant. But, because of Elephant's size, Leopard blames the death on the goats. My friends, you can imagine the ending. The story struck a bell in my mind. I felt I had heard it a long time ago.

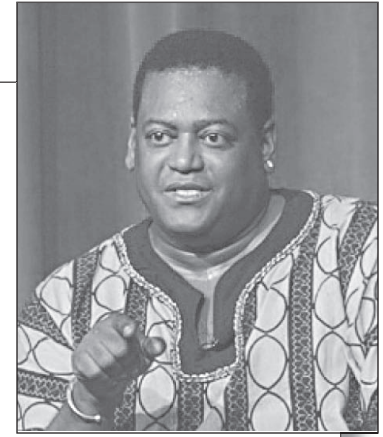
The next morning, I went to my bookshelf and did my research and picked up Harold Courlander's [A Treasury of African Folklore](#) and found the story in a section called, "The Sense of What is Just – Five Ethiopian Tales." In this collection, the tale is called, "The Goats who Killed the Leopard." All five of these Ethiopian tales are meaningful to today's times and come from an earlier anthology, [The Fire on the Mountain](#) and Other Ethiopian Stories by Harold Courlander and Wolf Leslau.

I am indebted to Susi Wolf for sharing her precious gift of storytelling. Together we create a circle that I am passing on to you!

As we follow the drinking gourd and celebrate the heroes and sheroes of freedom at our 26th Annual "In the Tradition..." National Black Storytelling Festival and Conference with the good folks in historic Cincinnati, Ohio, let us remember to share our ancestor's stories of justice, struggle and survival. Let our storytelling serve as a guidepost for generations of all races. May the circle be unbroken!

**Spread the Word!!!**

*Linda Goss*



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Mother Mary Carter Smith, Mama Linda Goss, Jerry Pinkney, Ella Jenkins, Julius Lester, Jackie Torrence, Brother Blue, Zora Neale Hurston, Alex Haley, Sonia Sanchez, John Hope Franklin, Louise Bennet-Coverley, a.k.a. "Miss Lou," Ivan Van Sertima, Hattie McDaniels, Nat Turner, Dr. Carolyn Mazloomi, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Jackie Robinson, Harriet Tubman, Harry Moore, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Phyllis Wheatley, Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, Edgar & Myrlie Evers, Imamu Amiri Baraka, Fannie Lou Hamer, Arna Bontemps, Marian Anderson, W.E.B. DuBois, Billie Holiday, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, Oscar Brown, Jr., Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, Carter G. Woodson, Nikki Giovanni, Negro Baseball League, Sojourner Truth, Irene Morgan, Hiram Revels, Rosa Parks, The Little Rock Nine, Grandma, Grandpa, Momma, Daddy.....*

Honoring our ancestors is easy! Some things come naturally from the heart, spirit and soul through the lips. The stories we share should be considered a tradition, a continuance, a fulfillment of the visions of freedom and purpose that has been instilled in us by family, community and our sense of responsibility to the progression of cultural awareness. The groundwork has been laid by many of those above Heroes and Sheroes, and the countless number of unnamed, who have given us the challenge to keep the story...their story...our story...alive!

We all know the power of Black Storytelling. That's why we're members of such a powerful organization as the National Association of Black Storytellers, Inc. Knowing what we know, and feeling what we feel when we get together, you know the value of coming together every year. That is why we are encouraging every member to be vigilant in becoming a part of our membership campaign to increase membership. There is enough room for everyone in the NABS family. We'll grow as they blossom!

Baba Jamal Koram said at the closing Unity Circle last year, 'We reach around 5 million people annually.' I've thought of the truthfulness of those words and the awesome responsibility that rests on our shoulders as Black storytellers and story lovers. The work and programs presented individually, by affiliates and within the NABS family reaches millions. That realization speaks to the importance of educating, instructing, sharing and supporting Black storytelling and NABS. That is what our Co-Founders Mary Carter Smith and Linda Goss intended. That's what we're committed to continue.

We are so excited about our 26th Annual Black Storytelling Festival and Conference, "In the Tradition..." *Follow the Drinking Gourd: Celebrating Heroes and Sheroes of Freedom* in Cincinnati, OH. Come! You are in for a treat...in spirit and honor!

Peace & Blessings!

*Dylan Pritchett*

# 26th Annual NATIONAL BLACK STORYTELLING FESTIVAL AND CONFERENCE

Vanora Franklin Legaux, *Festival Director*

Wherever we go, NABS generates excitement within the community. People want to know who we are, where we come from and how we came to be. In all of the cities where our festivals have been, we have left an indelible impact upon the community with our storytelling concerts, workshops, Adopt-A Teller Program, and the many changes in lives that we have influenced with our membership. NABS is unique in so many ways and it is our devoted, committed membership and supporters who have helped us along the way.

This year the city of Cincinnati has embraced us significantly. The distinguished citizens of the city volunteered to be a part of our first Honorary Committee. Honorary Co-Chairs William Billingsley, Executive Director, Association of African American Museums; Dr. John Fleming, National President, Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and Rev. Damon Lynch, Chairman of the Board, National Underground Railroad Freedom Center have supported us in all of our endeavors.

The time is upon us and we hope that you are making preparations to attend the 26th annual "In The Tradition..." National Black Storytelling Festival and Conference, November 19-23, 2008 at the Westin Cincinnati Hotel. This year, in honor of our ancestors our theme is "***Follow the Drinking Gourd: Celebrating Heroes and Sheroes of Freedom***". The Spirit of our ancestors is reminding us of their struggle to be free. Much is being planned in hopes of making this year another banner year for NABS. Reg Online is the quickest way to register and receive your confirmation within minutes. NABS website [www.nabsinc.org](http://www.nabsinc.org) is up-dated with the latest information. Include the African American Heritage Tour to Wilberforce, Dayton and Springboro, Ohio, in your registration.

National Youth Director Elisha Minter is requesting that we bring all of our youth. Let them experience the Elders leading the way. Share with them information on their heritage. Observe them as they visit the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center's genealogy room to learn how to research personal family histories and tour the center.

New this year... Award winning author, playwright, poet, activist Zora Neale Hurston award winner and Presidential Fellow Sonia Sanchez has graciously agreed to an pre-festival event Wednesday evening "A Evening with Sonia Sanchez"

at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center... the Opening Gala Dinner and renaming the Love Circle in honor of Mother Mary at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center with time for viewing exhibits... A Master Class with Sonia Sanchez... Luncheon while Cruisin' and Tellin' On the Ohio River with Masankho Banda... hear Scholars Dr. John Fleming "The Importance of story telling in relating family history: A SUMMER REMEMBERED" and Noted Author and Afro-American Studies Professor Paula Giddings... Attend the lecture of Dr. Carolyn L. Mazloomi, Independent Curator, Writer, Artist "The Cloth Speaks"... Sign-up for Anansi Stage formerly known as Preview Stage, a main stage opportunity for members. Members are invited to sign up on a first come, first serve basis to perform.

- Nine adult and youth workshops to choose from on Thursday; four mini workshops for Affiliates on Saturday
- Akwaaba Gathering for new members and first-time festival attendees will be hosted by the Membership Committee on Friday evening
- Prepare your greatest Tall Tale for the Liar's Contest on Saturday

Inductees into the Circle of Elders for their years of involvement and commitment to the African Oral Tradition and for their honored presence in the storytelling community are Esteemed Elders Dr. Joyce Duncan, Gwen Hilary, Gloria Kellon, Gomez Payne and Thelma Ruffin Thomas

Zora Neale Hurston Honorees are Sharon M. Draper, Dr. John Fleming, Alice McGill and Diane Williams. Nya Russell will receive the Youth Award.

Featured Tellers are Lyn Ford, Baba Jamal Koram, Oni Lasana, Joanna Maddox, Alice McGill, and Bobby Norfolk.

This is a not-to-be-missed year, so make your hotel reservations NOW.

If you can, bring an item or two for the auction.

Spread the Word!

# What is a HERO?

by David A. Anderson/Sankofa

Daddy say that man in the picture, all them white curls runnin' 'round his head and chin, name Douglass.

Daddy say Mr. Douglass somebody special; say he a leader. I ask Daddy what he leadin', and Daddy say, "People, son; Frederick Douglass a hero; he led his people."

Daddy tell me a whole lotta things about Mr. Douglass. I say "Daddy, Daddy!" Can we go see Mr. Douglass, Daddy? Can we, Daddy?"

"Son." (That's what Daddy call me when he serious, serious.) "Son... Frederick Douglass is long gone; he died when I was a little boy like you."

I am serious, serious, too. I say, "Dang, Daddy; that ain't hardly right."

"Well, son," Daddy say, "it was a long time ago. Frederick Douglass was in the struggle to help our people all his life. He was a hero. He did all what he was supposed to do, so it was time for him to move on."

Me and Daddy doin' more man talk when Mr. Rivers come. I sure do like me some Mr. Rivers. Daddy real tall like Mr. Rivers, but Mr. Rivers got big muscles; way bigger than what Daddy got. Mr. Rivers got these big lines runnin' round his arms. Call them lines, "veins." Say, them veins come up 'cause a him rasslin' bulls (somethin' like a cow, only it's a boy cow). Say he got the rope what's hooked up to the bull wrap' 'round his arms. Bull pull one way, Mr. Rivers the other way, and when he unwind the rope, them big veins rise up. All of this happen when Mr. Rivers a big boy down in Florida where he live before he come to Cincinnati. Before he come to Cincinnati, Daddy in Alabama. Now, they got bulls in Alabama, and Daddy say he had to deal with them bulls, too. But them Alabama bulls did not give Daddy no veins and no muscles like what Mr. Rivers got.

Daddy and Mr. Rivers got to go on patrol. I want go, too, but Daddy say he and Mr. Rivers got to do it, and that I cannot go. I say, "Dang, Daddy; how come I can't go?" and I wrinkle my face, tight.

Daddy say, "Son, some mean folks runnin' through our community, messin' with our people, and Mr. Rivers and me must try to stop that meanness. That's so, Mr. Rivers?"

And Mr. Rivers say, yes, and that him and Daddy and "some other good brothers got to do something to stop our people from getting hurt." Then him and Daddy tell me again about how Mr. Sanford get beat up and robbed. Oh, man, I still I feel bad. Mr. Sanford, he like everybody; even now say he love his people. You hear him 'fore you see him. He be pushin' his peanut-mobile with one hand, while he holdin' his penny-whistle to his mouth. He play that thing so sweet, everybody happy. Everybody wanta buy a bag of his hot roast' peanuts; or some cracklins'.

Roast them peanuts in the shell, and they taste some kinda good – better than them little bitty things what Momma buy at the five and ten cents store.

Mr. Rivers say one night, two guys grab some peanuts off Mr. Sanford' wagon, and when Mr. Sanford want them to pay, one guy knock Mr. Sanford down. Other one kick him. They grab Mr. Sanford money box and run off. Don't reckon they like sweet penny-whistle music.

Mr. Rivers say, last week, dude come rollin' down his car window; call Robert Lee (Robert Lee, he go to school), yeah, and dude want Robert Lee to show him where he can get "a good clean colored girl." I heard about that before Mr. Rivers say it. I Don't know what Robert Lee say to the dude, but I do know some folks in the neighborhood what got big girl children, say that same kinda thing happen before. Daddy and Mr. Rivers don' have no girl-children, but they say they got to get people together so they can stop dudes rollin' up in here to mess with us children. Say, our people got to do what they call, "organize."

"Son," Daddy say, "That's what Frederick Douglass had to do: organize our people."

"Your daddy right; Mr. Rivers say. "We got to organize; we got to respect ourselves so we can get the respect that is our due."

I don't rightly know what all that mean, but I like them talk man talk to me. They like Mr. Douglass. They even now say Mr. Sanford like that too, Say, that when they see him at the hospital, Mr. Sanford say he going back to selling his roast' peanuts and cracklin'. They tell him maybe he ought to be cool for a while, 'til they get things organize'. He say, "No." Say, he love being with his people in the Cincinnati West End. Say, he would not let no outlaw keep him away from his people. So, they say if he got to do what he got to do, they will do what they got to do, which is to help look out for him. So, every Friday night when we hear the penny-whistle, we know it's Mr. Sanford with hot roast' peanuts. Yeah, and Daddy and Mr. Rivers somewhere close by. And maybe what they call, "good brothers" be watchin' for dudes lookin' for "a good clean colored girl."

Daddy and Mr. Rivers went on out to patrol. Left me thinkin' 'bout why they got to do what they got to do. But, I feel good, 'cause they talk man talk with me; let me get close to them. When I grow up I want to get me some muscles and veins just like Mr. Rivers, so I can get to where I do what I got to do.. Going be hard, 'cause I don't want nothin' to do with no bulls... Shucks, bet I be like my daddy when I grow up... I get me a friend just like Mr. Rivers. I can be like Daddy **and** Mr. Rivers, both. Yeah.



# What is a SHERO?

by Emily Hooper Lansana

*"If I didn't define myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive."  
— Audre Lorde*

## ***A verbal libation to the elders, the sisters and the visionaries...***

Mama, Nana, Mama Dorine, Aunt Rubie, Aunt Indiana, Aunt Mildred, Aunt Luberta and their mothers and the mothers who mothered them.

These elder/ancestors are Sheroes because they were nurturers through difficult times. They found a way to raise up the children, to teach us where we had come from and help us to envision where we were going. They knew how to pray and to plan. They knew what we must remember and what we needed to forget. They had patient moments but at just the right time, they hurried us along because they understood the length of the road we needed to travel. They came into a world that tore them down and rarely lifted them up yet; somehow, they knew how to encourage us and to give us a sense of the depth of our purpose. We are because of their sacrifice. They are queen mothers whose castles were humble, whose gowns were work clothes and whose jewels were the sparkle they found in the eyes of their children and grandchildren.

In your names we say Ase.

Sister Dawn, Tahira, Sylvia, Paula, Zahra, Caroliese, Justine, Shanta, Kendall, Diane, Gwen, Andrea and their sisters and their sisters who extend their arms across our people.

These sister-friends are Sheroes because they walk with style and grace. They are daring enough to speak their vision into being. They manifest beauty and boldness. They love our brothers and fathers and sons enough to be themselves and to teach their daughters and granddaughters to be fiercely committed to the wholeness of our families and communities. They have faced seemingly insurmountable mountains, climbed down the other side and remembered the path in order to pass it on. They have chosen gratefulness over bitterness and recognize the sacredness of this and every moment.

In your names we say Asante Sana.

Mary Carter Smith, Linda Goss, Jackie Torrence, Harriet Tubman, Waangari Maathai, Biddy Mason, Elder Lucy, Zora Neale Hurston, Sonia Sanchez and their sisters, mothers and daughters and the ones who inspired them.

These visionaries are Sheroes because they are a garden of creative soil blossoming over. They have been courageous, and bravely spoken the truth. They maintain a high standard of excellence and inspire others to dig deeper. They have never forgotten the needs of our people and work tirelessly to make sure that we remember our stories as well as when and how to laugh and cry in the face of danger. They have been willing to make individual sacrifices for the collective healing and transformation of our people.

In your names we say:

We see further because we remember where we began.

## **Recipe for a Shero**

*1 cup of abiding faith  
2 cups of vision and brilliance  
1/2 cup of ancestral memory  
1/2 cup of historical memory  
2 T. of grace  
A dash of fierce wisdom  
1 tsp of angel's tears  
Flavor with sacred laughter*

*Mix ingredients well in a vessel with curves and firmness. Transfer to a pan prepared to endure well and release easily. Check constantly until it rises. Let cool carefully. Frost with determination and decorate with abundant love.*

*Serve to those who need to remember.*

# PAST FESTIVAL REMINISCENCES

## *'Abhhh! NABS Festivals. We remember them well...'*

1991, Ninth National Festival of Black Storytelling in Horry County and Georgetown County, SC, with Beulah Priest White and me as co-directors, Zack as director of media relations, and hundreds of volunteers. I addressed the NABS membership for the first time as NABS president. I saw Mother Mary (a senior citizen) LEAP as agile as a cat off the top of a banquet-sized table to the floor to punctuate the ending of a story. That Saturday night I experienced the miracle of seeing and hearing Mother Mary, NABS co-founder Linda Goss, Jackie Torrence (our Zora Neale Hurston winner), Tejumola Ologboni, Jamal Koram, Janie Hunter (our other Zora Neale Huston winner), and Doug and Frankie Quimby “tell” in the same place on the same night to an enthralled audience.

*- Eleanora E. Tate, Children's book author, folklorist, creative writing teacher  
 and was NABS National President 1990-1992*

**Kansas City (1994)** was unique because the hotel floors were named after famous Black Jazz musicians and they honored Black sports heroes of yore. **New Orleans! (1990)** The FOOD! Those very tall “walking men” in masks and learning the history behind them. **Horry and Georgetown Counties, S.C. (1991)** was the absolute best, without question. The NABS festival was the only thing happening in this town and everyone (all races/cultures) turned out....**Milwaukee (1993)** this gave the Detroiters an idea of what goes on in planning a Festival, it was maddening, but fun. **Detroit (1995)** our first Festival, the Cake Walk Contest that kicked off the Festival at the Renaissance Center was fantastic. **Cleveland (1996?)** for Donna Willingham's (CABS member) hilarious story about the “Jackson Family” in the Liar's Contest. **Orlando, Fl (1998)** Visiting Zora Neale Hurston's home and having Ossie & Ruby Dee amongst us. **Rochester, NY (2000)** visiting the cemeteries of so many of our prominent ancestors... **San Diego (2006)** Absolutely spiritual. The walk to the ocean.. There's so much more we could say...

*- DABS Members: Elaine Jordan,  
 Amy Jackson, Ivory D. Williams*

### **NABS Festival and Conference in San Diego, CA (2006)**

I can tell you one of the best moments I had. It wasn't scheduled or planned. It was spontaneous and just what my soul needed. A few friends from my neck of the woods and I decided to head out to the Pier 57 (??? The famous one with all the shops). We laughed, sang, ate, and looked around. We even spent some time lollygagging in a hammock shop. I never knew there was such a range in hammocks. We listened to the water and just took our time to be together which we rarely get to do back home.

*- Diane Macklin*

NABS Festivals are like spiritual retreats and family reunions all rolled into one celebration of life and love. I've got to see those faces again and again and again. I've got to feel that spirit of oneness the envelopes me when I enter into that sacred storytelling space. I learn, laugh, and feel nourished and energized when I come to NABS Festivals. All of my cares seem to vanish if only for a weekend or is it that I feel so alive at the festivals that my problems don't seem so insurmountable.

*- Janice Curtis Greene*

## PAST FESTIVAL REMINISCENCES

In Kansas City I went to my first NABS festival. Ah! The wonders of first loves. There is little NABS can do to run me away from future festivals after the “first kiss” and “intimacy” experienced and shared in Kansas City. NABS was the first experience since adulthood that felt so much like all that was warm and comfortable from my grandparents’ dinner table... NABS is sitting in a room of people who look just like me, who value all that is our heritage written and spoken, and seeing someone(s) who look just like me do good things! NABS for me is a reunion and a revival of my intellect, my heritage, by blackness, my humanity! Thanks to all who make NABS a viable organization and do so much for those who seldom speak!

- *Sheila Plummer*

I had been warned that California is weird, but I went anyway, spent two-three days in Oakland that November, 1984. Oscar Brown, Jr., had more than lived up to my expectations, and have mercy, the Black storytellers was taking me back to the Homeland and down home, too. I was ready to sign on with the National Association of Black Storytellers, Inc., but was running short on scratch. So I figured to get to my checkbook in Rochester and seal the deal...On the long flight back to Rochester the revelation came to me that I was culturally deprived. That label was one of several that sociologists and school authorities had been quick to lay on the Black children they had failed to teach. I concluded that the term better suited me. Until then, I had but vague notions about the many and varied roles and situations our forebears engaged in...I vowed to step up my studies of who we be, and to tell it wherever I could catch holt of an ear.

- *“Sankofa” David Anderson*

Congo Square, masquerades, blue grass bands and African markets. Beat-nicking and free styling with like souls in the twilight and poetry slamming till dawn. The warm welcome of New Orleans and Tampa Bay school children. The joy, the peace, the cheer, the sheer bliss of the NABS Storytelling festivals!... NABS festivals lift one up to soar and glide through time, cultural boundaries and ignorance, generation gaps and the common misconception that family, is only limited to those who share your same DNA... An age old expression goes as follows: “One generation plants – the next enjoy the shade.” And I must admit, that I have very much enjoyed the “shade” of each person that I’ve met, each story that I’ve heard and each memory that I’ve cherished through my attendance and participation in this one of a kind festival.

- *Misty Saskill*

***“When the heart overflows,  
it comes out through  
the mouth.”  
- Ethiopian Proverb***



Photo by MoonSong

## 25TH ANNIVERSARY GIFT TO

*Co-Founder*

*Mama Linda Goss*

*Give honor when honor is due!! The NABS Board of Directors, our dedicated members and faithful followers surprised Co-Founder Mama Linda Goss with a once in a life time gift during our 25th Anniversary "In the Tradition..." National Black Storytelling Festival and Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. We announced our plans to have a wax figure of her placed in the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. In tears, she said, "That is my dream. Since Mother Mary's transition, I have longed to be beside her in the museum."*

*Asante Sana to all who have made contributions and pledges to realize the \$25,000 for her enshrinement. NABS Life Member Diane Williams at the 25th anniversary festival pledged to raise \$500 and she did. She is the first to fulfill a pledge. How did she do it? She appealed to her family and friends for a holiday donation and the rest is history.*

*The NABS BOD has committed to raise \$12,000. We are well on our way to achieve our goal. Please consider making and sending your tax deductible contribution to :*

*NABS*

*PO Box 177*

*Glenwood, MD 21738*

*More information to come...*



Photo by MoonSong



## *NABS is pleased to announce ...*

**August House Publications** has entered into a partnership agreement with NABS!! This is truly a historic moment in our organizational history. Our partnership is centered around a collaborative effort in promoting each other in the world of storytelling and abroad.

This agreement will give NABS first refusal for any African American books for which there may be a surplus and help in the distribution of NABS marketing materials for our national festival and conference. In return, we will reciprocate in helping them “Spread the Word” with web links and recognition of our partnership in our marketing materials.

August House is the highly acclaimed and award-winning multimedia publisher of children’s stories, folktale anthologies and resource books. Over the last 25 years, August House has developed one of the most respected collections of stories from around the world. Parents, teachers, and librarians love these stories because of their integrity and authenticity.

August House is committed to developing strategic relationships with corporations, foundations, individuals, schools, public libraries, museums and agencies serving children. They chose to include NABS in their broad-reaching generosity. All the more reason that NABS and August House creates a good fit.

Be looking for more exciting news and opportunities that this partnership will afford NABS members as we begin our mutual relationship in helping “Spread the Word” and promote literacy, publication and storytelling.

Please visit their website for more information about August House at :

**[www.augusthouse.com](http://www.augusthouse.com)**

## **ASE: The Chicago Association of Black Storytellers – “Spreading the Word!”**

*Emily Hooper Lansana, ASE President/NABS Board Member*

This year the historic DuSable Museum hosted the Association of African American Museums Conference in Chicago. As part of this extraordinary weekend, Ase: The Chicago Association of Black Storytellers was invited to serve as part of the host committee for the conference.

Ase members brought stories to life throughout the weekend. The opening reception was held at the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum. In the Spirit helped to welcome the honored guests with a freedom story. It was truly a beautiful sight as members gathered in the round to experience history interpreted through our traditions.

The next morning, the DuSable hosted a minister’s breakfast where Mama Edie poured libation and two of our outstanding youth members shared a biblical story. This was an excellent opportunity to introduce a new audience to the transformative art of black storytelling.

That same evening as part of the “Taste of Black Chicago,” a select group of tellers gathered in the small theater to give “A Taste of Black Storytelling, Chicago style. Ase provided a pre-show mini-concert featuring; Gwen Hilary as emcee and as Ida B. Wells. Andrea Fain performed a poem on Black Storytelling. Tony Brown and Kucha Brownlee performed a piece on the Illinois Black Codes and Velma Gladney performed the Cow-Tail Switch.

This was a wonderful opportunity to connect with a national audience of scholars and practitioners who are truly, “keepers of our culture.” Ase looks forward to an expanded relationship with the DuSable Museum.

# BLESSID'S TELLER LIFE

by Blessid

My oldest memories of storytelling was when I was watching my mother, (Mama Koku), tell stories to a big crowd. I think I was about 3. As I got older, I was inspired watching her with so much energy and excitement and enthusiasm. She always looked like she was having fun. My favorite story that my mother told was "Whose in Rabbit's House". I also liked "Why Hyenas Don't Wear Jewelry." Both of the stories were very funny.

Going to performances with my Mom was sometimes very tiring. But I got use to it. One thing that made it fun was hearing different stories told by other storytellers. I always liked Deborah Strahorn's hat story. She had a stack of different color hats on top of her head. It was really funny. Once I went with my Mom to Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was an awesome experience. Especially staying in the hotel! One of my favorite storytellers at that festival was Teju. I really liked the story song "Hambone." It goes all the way back to slavery. Another one of my favorite storytellers is Valarie Tutson. I love her story about Brer Rabbit and Brer Dog fighting over Miss Safroni.

I love hanging out with all the storytellers. They are always so fun, and cool, and nice. I use to love going to the Green Apple with all the Kuumba Storytellers and watching them take turns telling stories. I love eating peach cobbler and chicken wings with Grand Daddy June Bug in Minneapolis.

I finally started telling stories at the age of seven. I joined Kuumba Youth Storytellers of GA. Miss. Esther (Esther Culver) and Sister Yomi (Yomi Goodall), were our coaches. My first performance was at Callanwolde Fine Arts Center in Atlanta. I was very nervous until my Mom calmed me down. I told "Whose in Rabbit's House", and "Silly Sally." That was one of the most exciting nights of my life.

Since then I've performed at Youth Tellabration, and was a featured Youth Teller at the NABS festival when it came to Atlanta! Now that, (NABS), was really awesome! Seeing all the different storytellers I had never seen before was so cool. Especially Autumn Saskill. She was an amazing storyteller, and not much older than me!

A few months ago, (May), I went to the Tale Spin Festival in Chattanooga Tennessee. One of the new storytellers that I met was Noah Lepp. He was a great seven year old storyteller. Another person that I met was Judith Black. She told some of the best stories I ever heard. I was the opening act for Judith Black and Queen Nur. It felt really good to be on the same stage as Queen Nur. I remembered her from the NABS & Minneapolis festivals. It made me feel important & special. At TaleSpin I also told a story with my Mom for the first time. We told the story of "Liza Lou and the Yellow Belly Swamp."

It was hard work going from tent to tent telling stories, but it was still so much fun. I wish I could go back to Tennessee and do the whole thing over.

We invite any and all who have items for our Youth Newsletter to send articles for a proposed electronic newsletter. We ask all affiliates to respond to the call and any who can volunteer to work with our National Youth Director to "Bring a Van or a Bus" and meet us in Cincinnati.

## BRAGGIN' RIGHTS; RAISING A TELLER

by Blessid's Mama, Mama Koku

My daughter is a blossoming storyteller. I gotta say, I'm very proud. When I was Blessid's age, (now 10), I was barely talking. I could speak, but playing quiet and shy was a great way to get attention. At about the age of 12, quiet and shy was played out, and I flipped to quiet and shy, except in front of a paying audience! I had caught a bad case of Theatre!

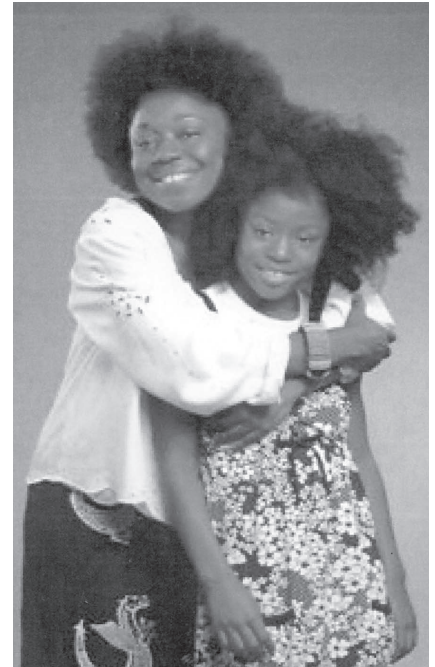
Anywho....back to Blessid.... Her experiences and participation in and around the art of storytelling has benefited her in so many ways. She is far, far away from quiet and shy. When it comes to expressing herself in front of an audience she does quite well. Of course she gets nervous sometimes, but most days she exudes confidence and self assurance. It always makes me smile to attend a school assembly and see and hear her present her self in this way.

Academically, Blessid does well in all subjects, (school is always number one, one, one and one.) But when it comes to reading, language arts and writing, she excels. I know it's because of all those stories she's heard. All that beautiful language and the many ways she's heard it being turned, and flipped, and stretched; Not just from me, but from all the tellers who ever stood in front of her round face with two afro puffs on each side. Eyes big, ears open, taking notes! All those storytelling CD's and tapes we'd listen to on long road trips to North Carolina. No FM radio, JUST STORIES. She'd be in her car seat listening to Jackie Torrance, or Diane Ferlatte. And of course I would run my mouth too! At the age of two, she stepped into day care for half days. Her teacher would tell me... "She just listens so well".

In utero, Blessid would be kicking and turning cart wheels inside my belly! But as soon as I greeted the audience, "A Story A Story!", she wouldn't move a muscle. All rotation would cease. Every librarian in the Atlanta -Fulton County Library system will tell ya about the baby carrier front row center, and how that little Baby Blessid, inside that carrier, two months old, would sit there!, sucking on a finger or a toe! Listenin'! It was amazing! This ain't no tall tale, this is true life! I was always scared to pieces, thinking, "Is she gonna be OK? Is she gonna stay quiet?" And she did! (stayed quiet that is). And the rest is "tag along", "me and my shadow" history. Mama gotta work, baby gotta go too!

Recently, there was a little buzz at Blessid's school. Some little 4th grade child had made a perfect score on the reading section of the Georgia State CRCT ( big test). Why it was Blessid! I knew why she'd done so well. All those stories and all that language, floating around in her head from since when she was a baby up until now. Ten years old and almost taller than her very own Mama.

When ever I have to convince teachers and administrators to hire me, and that storytelling is not just "entertainment", I give them this list: (1) Improves and develops listening skills (2) lengthens attention spans (3) Expands vocabulary (4)Broadens word recognition (5) Creates better readers & writers (6) Helps develop imaging and creative ability, (7)Teaches the concept of beginning, middle and end (8) Introduces listeners to a body of literature that might not be found in books! Then I start bragging about my daughter, the storyteller, ..... "Her name is Blessid"



**Take a look at the NABS Website.....[www.nabsinc.org](http://www.nabsinc.org)**

If you haven't visited our website lately, you should! Pictures have been posted taken in Atlanta during our 25th Anniversary celebration! Asante Sana to Clarence Mollock, Moonsong and JoAnn Shorter for their photo-bug eye! Also, a loud ASANTE SANA!! to our web administrator, Executive Director, Linda Jenkins Brown, for her diligence in making our website second to none!!

Take a few minutes and visit our website for important information. If your picture is not there, you weren't either!

**ATTENTION NEW MEMBERS  
*and*  
FIRST-TIME FESTIVAL ATTENDEES!!**

New members are in for a treat! The Membership Committee will meet and greet new and first-time attendees to the Annual Black Storytelling Festival & Conference! Be looking for more information in the program itinerary for the time and place. We're honored to begin this exciting introduction to NABS!!



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