



# Library podcast

## Exploring Black Brilliance and Black Joy through Storytelling and Writing: Food & Celebration

[Amy] Hi everybody. And thank you so much for joining us tonight. My name is Amy Twito and I am the Informal Learning Program Manager for The Seattle Public Library. And I want to welcome you all to this event tonight. Once I make my quick announcements, I will hand things over to our friends at the African-American Writers' Alliance. And I am so thankful for their partnership on this program and I want to recognize the incredible work that AAWA has done in creating the content for our Summer of Learning poster available at all of our open libraries and online at that address on the screen. And also for building this program series for the library's Summer of Learning program. If you would like to learn more about the Summer of Learning program, please visit our website at [www.spl.org/SummerOfLearning](http://www.spl.org/SummerOfLearning). I also want to thank The Seattle Public Library Foundation and all of their donors for their generous support of the Summer of Learning and programs like these. I also want to take a moment to recognize that we are all living on Indigenous land, the traditional and unceded territories of the Coast Salish people specifically the Duwamish. And with that, I will now hand it over to Noni Ervin with the African-American Writers' Alliance.

[Noni] Thank you, Amy. Hello everyone. My name is Noni Ervin. I'm a proud member of the African-American Writers' Alliance. I will be your MC for this evening. We will have an hour of storytelling including original work. Then we will have an opportunity for the audience to ask any questions of our storytellers. And then after that, we'll host a writing workshop with writing prompts so that you can explore your own creative side. The chat is open, please keep it positive and energized. And we appreciate you joining us this evening.

Let's begin with some words from one of our organization's charter members, Dr. Georgia Stewart McDade, an all-around champion for Black writers and storytellers everywhere. Some of her published work includes her four volumes of poetry, called "Outside the Cave," as well as "Observations and Revelations," which are stories, sketches and essays. Dr. McDade.

[McDade] Hello. Thank you so much for tuning in. I always want people to know that the African-American Writers' Alliance is here, because when founder, Randee Eddins, came from California, she could not find a group of African-American writers. And, so, she did what many of us have come to do over the centuries. She made it herself. She founded one, and we are the result of this. So thank you so much for joining us. And check out our website where you'll find other programs all the time. We

try to do at least one something a month. And usually, we do several somethings a month. Thank you for joining us.

[Noni] Thank you Dr. McDade

Our next, or, our first poet and storyteller is Minnie A. Collins, award-winning English professor emerita. Minnie is the author of "The Purple Wash," "Palm Power: Hearts in Harmony." and Seattle's Historical Liberty Bank Building Apartments' Commemorative Plaques. Compassion for nature and equity is her mantra. Minnie.

[Minnie] Thank you, Noni, and Dr. McDade, and The Seattle Public Library and its Foundation.

Storytelling has always been a part of everybody. Some of them are secrets, some of them are no-nos, some of them are good stories that you want to share with your friends. Storytelling, for me, comes from my heart. And my heart is always grounded in my Southern experience, growing up with my grandmother in Virginia.

My grandmother was called Spec, because she expected so much from us. "No mess-ups!" She said. She was a sculptor. A chiseler, A hammerer of stone. And these stones were her grandchildren. She was stern, but comforting, sculpting us, her grand stones, to be somebody. She chiseled her grand stones to obey the Ten Commandments. Sunday school at 9; church at 10; family dinner at 2; youth service; you got to go back at 7 p.m., no matter what. She hammered those house rules into our heads. You won't believe the rules she laid out for us. And we were middle school, high school, and still following the rules. No playing cards on Sunday. No movies. And you know why? She hated giving us money to go down a lil' back alley, to go upstairs to sit in the top to see the silver screen. We grands thought we had the best seats in the house. We had nobody blocking our view. No blues in this house. That's evil music. No smoking either. Ha, ha! But we cowered outside her son's room to listen to the blues and to smell his forbidden joys. Spec even forced us to not date. "Good girls don't date!" Unless she really knew the parents, and they happen to be just across the street, not across town. School's out at 3 o'clock, you better be home by 3:30. And we had no bus. We had to walk. Stay away from that bad street, you know what I mean. Up there by that barbershop. Temptations called all of us walking from home. We even tried our own little smokes. Curiosity overruled us sometimes. But, no matter what we did, those old watchers; you know what I mean by "those watchers on the street;" they sent those gossip lines before I got home. But, it was worth the risk to be tempted a little bit outside of 3 o'clock. But that preparation for dinner. Wow, if you only knew what happened in her house on Saturday nights. On Saturday night, it was like a concerto in her kitchen.

She polished her wooden spoons for the performance, just like a maestro. Par excellence. She orchestrated onions and dill and garlic. Lemon, oranges when available. Pecans from her backyard tree. Peppers, red and black; Homemade butter, not that stuff you call margarine, but homemade butter. Sugars. Flour. And those secret, unspoken pinches of, you know, a little bit of this, a little bit of that, a pinch of this. But watching her doing her first movement. Those spoons swirled and spatulas flew, The forks tinkled nice, mix, as mixing bowls chime at rotary decibels. Little cymbals of pots and

tops jangling up and down. Then the lively second movement echoes. The glockenspiel of china, crystal, and silver chime as they move from the cabinet shelves to the laminated kitchen table. Ahh. The smell of sweet cinnamon on those baked sweet potatoes from a wood-fired oven. Butter-filled mashed potato salad. And the chords of snap bean streams, broccoli trumpets, and collard kettles. Chicken drumsticks and braised peppercorn short ribs. Ahh. So Satisfied, all those aunts and nieces and cousins that come over on Sunday 'cause they know it's gonna be a grand feast. But at the end, there's silence for the hushed and satisfied family, the patrons at the concerto. The finality of fresh-picked and hand-peeled peaches folded into a cobbler, topped with hand-churned, old-fashioned hand-churned vanilla ice cream. Stirred to cheers, and "Bravo, bravo!" to the kitchen maestro for her kitchen concerto. Thank you.

[Noni] Thank you, Minnie. Let's show Minnie some love. This is how you clap in sign language, or this, or whatever works. Wonderful.

All right, our next poet and storyteller is Rolyat Mosi, who navigates the creative world of collective words, aimed at the inside of the mind. He has been editing and revamping writings from yesteryear and expanding his events and refining his many creative compositions. Rolyat.

[Rolyat] Hello. And we're grateful to The Seattle Library Foundation and The Seattle Library system for partnering with us in this endeavor. I'm going to read two pieces from my Juneteenth series and one from my Kwanzaa story. We don't celebrate Juneteenth no more. In the years following the Emancipation Proclamation, Black folks in their local community celebrated Juneteenth robustly all around the country. Juneteenth was a holiday of jubilation in which Black folks remembered their struggle for freedom and celebrated their connection with their shared history. Surrounded by joy, laughter, and songs, these celebrations were meant both to remember the history of enslavement and to encourage Black folk to continue their fight for their political right. In the first few decades of Juneteenth celebrations, Black folks were celebrating all over, and especially in the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Black folks used the celebration to help search for lost members of their family. Many local newspapers received ads placed by Black people who were ex-slaves. As the southern Blacks moved out of their region, they took Juneteenth to other areas in the U.S. However, freedom challenges themselves started to lead to a decline in Juneteenth activities and events in the late 1890s to the early 1900. The traditional practices at home and family-taught lessons slowed, Now, state approved curriculum in classroom textbooks did the education, but stifled the interests of Black youth with less, if any, focus on the details of the lives of former slaves. They were little emphasis on old slave history. America was starting to whitewash the Black enslavement truth from Americans. These factors begin a decline in the Juneteenth activities, in the early 1900s. Public classrooms of early 1900s tout that slavery ended with Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and never dealt with the continued enslavement of Black people in Texas and other areas of the U.S. In addition down south, Black people continued to face intense threat of life, physical violence, and political oppression. In the early 1900, particularly with the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, Juneteenth celebrations became quite unwelcome and not tolerated. The Depression forced many people off the farms and into the cities to find work where economic met Black Culture causing a decline in Juneteenth celebration in the early 20th century. The Depression saw Blacks come to the

Northern and Midwest cities in droves, fresh from the farm with Juneteenth in their songs to the urban areas holding differences in appreciation for such celebration. The big city bosses had no soft spot in their heart for Negro celebration. They were even less concerned with any slave talking.

The bosses only wanted workers; cheap, hard-working workers. Employees let their Negro workers know that they could celebrate the Fourth of July as their independence holiday. The truth patriotic American celebration. Even domestic workers had it no better and found themselves working on Juneteenth, making beds with quiet reserve. There were no publicly sponsored celebration events and few, if any, news articles. Even the politicians were silent on this Negro stuff like Juneteenth. Schools' textbooks clearly proclaim that America was shunning all and any talk about Juneteenth and slavery itself.

Juneteenth is alive and well. There's no clean vanilla version of this story. There's no need for tracking dates of U.S. slavery abolishment. There's no need to focus on Mississippi's final approval of the Emancipation Proclamation; there's no poetic piece that can make it easier to emotionally swallow or to be digestively gentle. There's no analysis on how Juneteenth managed through life in American society. There is no foundation except for the old document by Lincoln. There was a downturn in the turn of the century. There was a comeback of Juneteenth to the masses of the U.S. people. As the 20th century moved on, there is a good idea of how to do and taste Juneteenth.

There are still those old slave songs from the cotton field that have risen up to be spiritual. There's plenty of knowledge on how Juneteenth look in today's society. There's good measures of dates of the U.S. state holidays. But there's no national holiday that binds us all in the truth of the Juneteenth experience. Juneteenth is alive and well.

Kwanzaa Black-Eyed Peas. Yep. Black-eyed peas made it to Kwanzaa. This dish was destined to be part of such an African cultural party experience, especially with a meal like the Kwanzaa Karamu meal. In the early community celebrations, there were welcome, traditional African culinary dishes.

Kwanzaa Black-Eyed Peas. Yep, black eyed peas made it to Kwanzaa. The dish was destined to be a part of such an African cultural party experience, especially with a meal like the Kwanzaa Karamu feast. In the early celebrations, there were welcome African traditional culinary dishes and they were pretty much mixed with soul food. The black-eyed peas were predominantly featured at the center of the table. If you add curry, the two dishes and culinary styles were almost the same. Years ago, down South, if black-eyed peas were on the menu, they were served as Hoppin' John. Hoppin' Johns were the black-eyed pea and rice dish eaten in the Old South. There, too, was the tradition for this New Year's dish that believed to bring good luck. Now, this dish has become a major dish during the Kwanzaa Karamu feast celebrated on December 31st, the last Eve of Kwanzaa. Since the Kwanzaa celebration ends New Year's Day, it only naturally coincides with the traditional eating of black-eyed peas across Black culture. The traditional dish is normally served with greens, sweet potatoes, rice, and your desired cornbread, hush puppies, or hot watered cornbread. I like to add hot sauce to mines. Eating black-eyed peas on New Year's Day has been considered good luck for at least fifteen hundred years. These peas were eaten in Africa as a staple bean. It is recorded in the Talmud over,

500 AD, that a portion of black-eyed peas was good for you. It is also a Jewish custom at the time to eat black-eyed peas in celebration of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Years that happens every fall. In the Black Southern states, black-eyed peas are a traditional symbol of the emancipation of previously enslaved Black people, officially free on New Year's Day after the Civil War. The Kwanzaa Karamu feast is traditionally held on the last eve of Kwanzaa and celebrants started early. It is a very special event as it is the one Kwanzaa event that brings us closer to our African roots. The Kwanzaa Karamu feast is a communal and collective effort. Ceremonies and cultural expressions are highly encouraged and black-eyed peas are at the center of the table for the feast.

[Noni] Thank you Rolyat Mosi, wonderful.

Up next is none other than Kibibi Monie. Kibibi is a native of Seattle and the Executive and Artistic Director of Nu Black Arts West Theatre, the oldest African-American theater company in Washington state. Kibibi is "Nana," queen mother, in Ghana, West Africa. Ghana, West Africa. She has worked with Stevie Wonder, Billy Preston, Kenny G, Gladys Knight, Roy Ayers, Hank Crawford, Brenda Holloway, Major Lance, Rufus Chandler, Martha Reeves, Ben Vereen, and Ruby Dee. Miss Monie is also the founder of The Summer Youth Education, a free program for students 4th to 8th grade, and 9th to 12th grade, from 2008 until present. Students in... studies include math, science, world history, media literacy, creative writing, and film. Nana Kibibi.

[Kibibi] Let us all celebrate the celebration. Does we-- let us celebrate our rich heritage of great kings, and queens. and all of the that in between. Those who with love, laid down the foundations for civilizations. We are they and they are we. Our relations are relative from the beginning until the end. Let our legacy ring out loud and clear because of whom we are and why we're here. Celebrate the fact that we taught the world how to think and pray, not just yesterday, but on and on until today. People today who are considered to be African-American are kin, yes, relative to the first people on this planet. We are the first people to use tools, paint pictures, plant seeds, and worship gods. When the human drama opened, Africans were on the scene and acting out the ceremonies of the first human beings on this planet. So let's celebrate the fact that Black don't crack and you can't hold us back. As the saying goes, living Black ain't easy, but being Black sure feels good. Excuse me, y'all, my name is Lynn. Do you know who invented the fountain pen? William B. Purvis, 1890. I was born a Leo, that makes me a lion. I'm glad I got an ironing board so I can iron. Sarah Boone, 1862. Check out a hound dogs ears, see how they flip-flop? [laughter] I bet you that's how they invented the mop. T. W. Stewart, 1893. Some call me the professor and I know who invented the push lawnmower. J. A. Burr, 1899. I got a friend. They call him Big Red, and he could tell you who invented the folding bed. Leonard C. Bailey, 1899. Hang your clothes on the clothesline wire or use the invention the clothes dryer. G. T. Sampson, 1892 When I get old, I will have made a mint and I'll probably be using liniment. Snowy John, 1890. I don't think there's anything greater than the man who invented the refrigerator. J. Stanford, 1881. Come on, y'all. Let's make a deal. I'll bet you all, are so familiar that you can't tell me, who invented the envelope seal. F. W. Leslie in 1897. You just yak, yak, yak because you don't want to be alone.

Ain't ya glad we got the cell phone. Henry. T. Samsung. 1971. You like The Matrix and the Terminator? Both so good they tried to exterminate her. Sophia Stewart 1981. Coded order, that's enough. I'm tired of all that beatbox stuff. Did you know that the bike frame was invented by I.R. Johnson? The electric lamp was invented by Latimer and Nichols in 1881. The eggbeater by Willis Jackson in 1884, the pencil sharpener was invented by John Lee Love in 1897. I bet you didn't know that George E. Grant invented the golf tee. And Albert A. Johnson invented the bottle cap. Dr. Daniel Daniels performed the world's first open heart surgery.

I don't mean to be rude, but I'll catch you later. I got to talk to a man about his elevator. A. Miles, 1887. I was just thinking about all the adventures we haven't even talked about.

Like ice cream, or, peanut butter, kitchen table, the gas burner, shoe soles, curtain rod. Cotton gin, street sweeper, rotary engine, stop light, the gas neck, launch quickly, horseshoes, motor, gas burner, railroad switch, lawn mower, railroad signals, chamber commode, fire extinguisher, fire escape length-- ladder, air conditioning unit. Just to name a few. Well, all I can say is all of these are inventions were invented by black men and women. Boy, what an amazing world we live in. In a world where we can use our minds and our abilities, to build a better world for all of us to live in. It's time to celebrate, y'all celebrate our greatness.

Thank you.

[Noni] Please welcome our next poet and storyteller.

Monique Franklin, also known as Verbal Oasis. Monique is a poet and teaching artist. Her poetry gives voice to social issues, human relationships, tributes to her many influences, and self-discovery. In 2014, she was selected for full core- 4Culture's touring artist roster and the CD Forum's Creation Project. Monique is the owner and operator of Inspired Child, an arts organization that has been providing arts events for youth and families since 2006. Monique.

[Monique] Thank you so much. It's an honor to be here, always amongst the company of the African-American Writers' Alliance, and I appreciate the library for creating the space for us.

On the theme of Celebration, I have a couple of poems to share.

The first is "The Celebration of Hair."

Her afro is round full of power. There must be a million, nah, a billion curls all curling down, spiraling around her afro. Her afro has bounce, bounce back from anything. Life can't tarnish her. Her illustrious crowns, sitting on top of her pretty brown head. It is real and resilient. She doesn't know it, but her fro has that perfect hold. Pat it down and watch it go. Her natural soul mocks the wind. Her hair is cocoa brown thick. Looks better than those perfectly round Afro wigs with the pick. Her hair is tight. I tell her in any way I can; I let her know. Girl, that afro you got is solid gold.

Thank you. Thank you. This next couple of pieces I'm going to share. I actually had the wonderful opportunity to take a healing trip to St. Lucia, and I wrote these.... [Distorted audio]

This is "A Celebration of Clouds."

Clouds are beautiful water transportation devices...[distorted audio] to any color of the world has to offer, reflecting black beauty of every facet. A single cloud can be both earth and sky, ocean and moon, sun. All the clouds are playing Follow the Leader, riding the flow, they are going just to go. So slow, it doesn't seem forced, but wheels. I've never seen a cloud break formation. I've never seen a cloud trying to peek back there, like, where do we come from? Wherever all the other clouds come from [indiscernible] beyond the hills and mountains? I wonder if over the ocean, clouds sees its own reflection, if it's yearning to tumble and turn and flip with power to move, or if the ocean wants to elevate, leave behind the salt of the earth and rise. Water lives many lives, like fresh and grounded, falling and floating, traveling, worshipping and trickling, flooding, rising, greeting, retreating, flow, motion, still, solid and chill. I'm grateful to witness your transformations. I'm blessed to be about a cloud, a walking ocean, a peaceful iceberg, a dancing hurricane. I'm blessed to begin again and never lose the essence of who I am.

This next piece is called "A Celebration of Breath." It's also a poem that was written in St. Lucia.

My breath shares a rhythm with the waves It sounds like water pulling and pushing the shore flowing in and out of my body, a symphony of feeling and emp--and empty. I noticed that there are soloists in the world competing with this simple orchestra of the lungs Birds chirping Hammer swinging percussion inner thoughts forming on the top of waves of oxygen as I send it out to sea, far away from me, as I exhale, leaving me to be with me, leaving me to be with each breath, with each new moment of nothing with each blank canvas, I learned the lesson of renewal. I live the lesson of choosing emptiness so I can choose to be full. I'm wrapped in the harmony of all my cells being nurtured and loved and healed and prepared for the greatness that is this day. That is this breath. That is this breath. That is the next.

Awesome. Umm, this is uh I've been working on a play for the last six.. ooh, last eight years, almost, called "Momma's News." and it's very exciting. I'm going to be producing it, a full version of it, this fall. We're trying to set the dates with the CD Forum; end of October, beginning of November. So this next piece is "A Celebration of Mothers." From Momma's News. Mommas wake up early after going to bed late, Mommas educate. Not just her own, but a whole nation. So she can later cry tears of prouds and crowds at gradu..graduations. Momma knows angels who act like hell. Momma work a full-time job and sometimes two, raising kids, working and going to school, to put her passion and priority. Mommas do what they got to do. Momma is a multitasker, queen of excellence, detail manager. Mama could go to the moon; and she would report back on the facts that NASA has missed. Like the difference between a twinkling star and a crying one. Some mommas are grandmamas and then mommas again. Mommas make apple bottom cakes and pinata. She is short on excuses and tall on projects. She is addicted to getting that good deal. Mommas are generous. Grumpy mommas can be dangerous. I repeat: grumpy mommas can be dangerous, more dangerous than approaching a pride

of lions in a zebra costume. Mommas are people, too; bold and scared, lonely and brilliant; sacrificing and selfish; flawed and favorite. Mommas come in all kinds of flavors, and that's the truth. However, no one can do what mommas do.

Alright. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. This last piece that I'm gonna share, lemme make sure I'm not.. I'm telling the truth. It is the last piece.

Oh, it's the second to last piece, [Chuckles] Okay.

As an artist, and as a celebration like in the Black community, in African tradition, there's..there's none of that without..without music. And so this next piece is a bit of a..celebration of overcoming, but also just in the metaphor of celebration of jazz music. So, I hope you enjoyed. This is called "Heaven Is Me."

Heaven is me Swinging from Duke to Basie, from star to star. I tried to do it, that duet. but I got tired of covering up scars. So I soloed outside of his ragtime composition, a cage made of bars. Held cab Callaway, the driver of my getaway car. Those big-band born hipcats allowed me to leave that riffraff on a higher note that spoke 1 inch to pitch. We finished. I sailed away on my musicianship, undiminished. My solo debut imbued my bass with hues unabused. My tune wasn't all blues. I was brand new, and feeling Nina Simone good, too. Now, I'm a smooth walking bass line. I'm plucking with no regrets, living my life upright with no frets, step-wise. I am giant steps from a time when I was too shy to shine. I find perfection in Ella's voice. Intimately imitating any instrument of her choice while scatting ♪ How High the Moon ♪ I don't know about you, but I plan to continue to find myself inside great performers. My latest news, that brother over there, blowing his horn on the corner, you see him, don't you? He moves music. Tones played and punched with body dives and jumps, sounds seemed to live and die on his fluid flesh. He is the surface of the sun hot and glowing. This jitterbugging musician is a magician tugging sound out of fat air, music hung out to dry. He plucks notes from the closing line and then throws them at the crowd as if to say there, try that on and it fits perfectly. As he arches his stanza, he bends his back, birthday notes. His labor pains are painted playing and contorted facial arrangements. It is purely possible that he could play without an instrument. But no, he is the instrument played from the inside out.

Yay! All right, this is the [Garbled audio] last one if that's all right. [Chuckles]

I mentioned jazz earlier. Sometimes my poems end up being remade as, like, new poems, and I call it like Poetry Jazz, right? So you have these different poems and someone says, will you make a poem about this? And, you know, I have about five poems about that already. Let me pull the line here and a theme here and then it becomes a new kind of poem. So this poem has grown in that way. It started off as like three or four different poems. And now it's become its own piece of jazz, that kind of alluded to other pieces. But, this is a celebration of the power of women of African descent.

Before I had a name or a form, I existed. A creative Force. Love, untethered at my in..essence. I am, I am a high priestess. Deity. A goddess divine. An ancient warrior reincarnated, transcending time. My

spirit is as tall as the universe is wide. I'm the ages unfolding into eternity. I am the sacred soul that birthed every ancient ancestor of humankind. I'm the sacred soil enriched with the memory of their voices and pregnant with their intellectual remains. I am. I am so strong. My roots traveled under the ocean and deserts and mountains. Humanity in its infancy was a beautiful, brilliant black child. They were my children. My children were the forebears of thought, the developers of science, the inventors of technology, the architects of society, the explorers of spirituality, the curators of culture, and the producers of art. My stride is always accompanied by ancestors. I'll never walk alone. My counsel is sought. My wisdom and will, when spoken, is born. I am born to lead and to liberate. My choices in my life are deliberate. As I have whispered life at the dawn of every civilization, I am a queen. Purposeful, powerful, irreplaceable, beautiful, relevant, passionate, loving, and sacrificing. A genuine genius, me. I build communities. I am unity. I am the Divine Mother. I am the more in your veins, the rhythm in your soul, calling you home whispering to you from a distant shore. You are great, you are powerful, you are the Divine One. Calling you to be great, calling you to continue to create, to be world makers. Calling you to continue to educate, to elucidate the truth, to take action. I'm a daughter, a sister, a friend, a lover, an auntie, and then, a mother in this life. I know who I am. I'm the keeper of nations.

Thank you very much.

[Noni] [Applause] Thank you, Monique. Wonderful.

[applause] Oh, thank you so much. Now, closing out tonight's storytelling is Kathya Alexander. Kathya is a writer, teaching artist, and an award-winning actor and storyteller. Her play, "Homegoing" was chosen for residency at Hedgebrook Women's Writers Retreat and her play, "Black to My Roots: African American Tales from the Head and the Heart" won the Edinburgh Festival Fringe First Award in Edinburgh, Scotland for outstanding new production. Kathya.

[Kathya] Thank you.

So, the title of my poem is "The Wedding."

"I want Mandy to be at my wedding," Evelyn say to my mama. She and I are in the living room. "I want her to be a junior bridesmaid when I get married this coming June." "And what is all of this going to cost me?" my mama say. Evelyn answer her back, "Just buy the dress and lose sight of Mama and I'll take care of everything else." "Everything else?" my mama say, "What else is there for you to get?" "I'll get the socks and bows and shoes. I want to make sure that everything matches." I hear Miss Wendy say to my mama, did she think Evelyn trying to act too uppity, trying to put on airs, with this fancy wedding. Like Evelyn is not one of them Thompsons. Mr. Thompson is [indiscernible] most pitiful drunk. He gets so drunk he cannot stand. I done seen him fall down in the ditch. That always make Carol Jean and Beverly Ann real ashamed when he do stuff like that. Everybody in school tease them about him, but they laugh at Mr. Thompson theyself. What else you gon' do when you got him for a dad? "I hope he don't even come to the wedding," Carol Jean told me. She was sitting in my tree. She liked to climb trees like I do. Sometimes she go even higher than me. But I don't care if Mr.

Thompson come to the wedding, if he sit down somewhere like he know how to act. When he ain't drunk, he just sit in his bedroom, so at the wedding, I hope he act like that. But Evelyn's mama, Miss Thompson, she is so nice. I already seen the dress that Evelyn get her. It's the dusty color of a pale pink rosebud, and it's got a lot of antique lace all over it. I can't wait to see my dress. I get so excited when Evelyn describe it. She say the lace on the top, the same color as Miss Thompson, and she say I gotta wear a petticoat up under it. I love wearing petticoats! My mama don't like it. She say when I wear it, I flounce around too much. Just cause I like to spin around in a circle and make my pretty dress flare out. My wedding colors are dark and light pink. The dresses are on hold downtown at Blast. "They're the prettiest things. Mandy, you're gonna love it!" It's got an empire waist and a pink satin sash. This wedding the biggest thing us have ever seen. Most people marry at home when they get married. Jake and Dara got married on our front porch. It was pretty and all, but it was still a small wedding. Evelyn, she getting married down the St. Luke at the church, to a man named Kendall Ray Livingston. His family is from somewhere up North; I think maybe Flint. Or maybe Detroit. Kendall, he is in the Army. He drive a Mustang and his family rich. His daddy worked for General Motors. And when he get out the Army, he gon' work there hisself. Evelyn, she got 20 people who is a part of her wedding party. It's three bridesmaids, and three junior bridesmaids; plus a best man, and a matron of honor. She got a boy to walk with every girl, but she got two flower girls and only one ring bearer, And she got the same dress as Jackie Kennedy had! Except Mrs. Kennedy's was long, and Evelyn's ankles is showing. She even got the same five tier wedding cake, and they gonna even have champagne to drink. I ain't never seen nobody have champagne at they wedding. I only seen that in weddings that be on TV. The whole long week before the wedding, I've been helping Carol and Beverly make the decorations. We put some rice in a piece of pink lace and then we make some tissue paper carnations. The rice is for people to throw at the wedding. Mama say the rice is for good luck. Everybody gonna get a little rice sack. After we put the rice in the lace, we tie it up with a little piece of pink, satin ribbon. Evelyn even got pink mints and pink frappe. That's what people gon' have at the reception. She gon' hold it down at St. Luke's basement. She even got the same wedding song that Jackie Kennedy had at her wedding. Miss Victoria is singing "I Married An Angel" for Evelyn and Kendall for they first dance. Evelyn gonna put the tissue paper carnations on the end of each one of the pews, and she gonna put some white lace all around the paper flowers. I told Dorothy Jane, I was going to collect them all after the wedding is over, and use them in a wedding for my dolls. My favorite is my colored wedding doll. She look like a chocolate princess who is dressed for a ball. [off camera buzz] I wonder if Mama gonna let me wear my hair down? I can see in my mind how pretty I'll be. I wonder if she gonna let me straighten it. I ain't never had my hair straightened before, but I think this is the perfect time. But Mama probably going to put it in a ponytail. I guess that's still better than me wearing flats. Mama treat me like a baby, and I'm 10 years old! I love the socks that Evelyn pick out. They got a puffy ring, a lace that go around the ankle and she got us all black patent leather shoes that have a rhinestone buckle on there. When I get dressed on the day of the wedding, mama let my sister do my hair. Sissy pull my hair back from off my face and clamp the top with a shiny pink barrette, and she just let it fall down my back. She use water and grease to make it curly. I ain't never got to wear my hair down before, except that one time in the professional picture that I took to show off the dress that Miss Emily got me one year for Easter, That dress was pink, too, just like my dress for the wedding, but it had pink flowers on it with green velvet ribbons. When Evelyn walked in the church that day of the wedding She's so pretty as she walked down the aisle on Mr. Thompson's arm.

He dressed in a suit and everything. I ain't never seen him in a suit before, because Mr. Thompson don't go to church, He the only person in us who do not go. Even drunk Mrs. Row; she go to church. Mr. Thompson look like he feel real uncomfortable. But he ain't drunk, that's the good thing. He walked Evelyn down the aisle without falling down. Evelyn got a big smile on her face, just like she got a regular daddy. Everything go off without a hitch. Evelyn even change into another dress when she leaves to go on her honeymoon. I think she say they going to Cancun. That's a place in Mexico. I ain't never heard..know nobody who went on a honeymoon before. When my brother, Jake, got married to Dara, they just moved in our house into they own bedroom. I got to leave right after the reception because Mommy and Daddy got to go to church. So I don't get to collect the tissue paper flowers. I asked my momma if she would let me go in the sanctuary while the reception is going on. Well, she just said, "Quit acting so silly." I try to tell her about my doll wedding and everything, but she too busy talking to Mrs. Randy. All the people in the wedding party have to sit at a table in front of everybody else. So I can't even sneak out or nothing And then I see old nasty Dorothy Jane with all the paper flowers in her hand when she go and get into they car. She hold them up so I can see them in the window when we all pulling out of the parking lot. Dorothy Jane, she stick her tongue out at me. I shouldn't have never said nothing to her about. She mad anyway, 'cause she wasn't in the wedding. So, she just doing this to try to break my heart. I slinked down in the backseat of the car. My mama asked me, "What is the matter?" I know better than to say anything about the flowers. So, I just grunt and tell her nothin'. "You got the dress. You got to wear your hair down, and still you is not satisfied," Mama say to me on our way to the church. I don't say nothing. She don't understand. Now, I can't have my colored wedding doll wedding. I feel the tear run down my face. "I know you ain't sitting back there crying," "Leave her alone," my daddy say. My daddy was the one who married Evelyn, 'cause he a preacher but not at St. Luke. He look at me through the rearview mirror. He say, "You look just like a pink angel today." That's what my daddy say. That made me smile. We get on the highway to go to Little Rock. My daddy hummin' "I Married An Angel" and holding on to my mama's heart. Thank you.

[Noni] Oh, wow. In the story. That's where you always put us, right in the story. Thank you. Miss Kathya.

And thank you to all of our poets and storytellers this evening.