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>> Hello, I'm Cheryl Kennedy from the Library of Congress. The National Book Festival is in its 7th year and it has attracted 10's of thousands of book lovers of all ages to the nation's capital to celebrate reading and life long literacy. This free event is sponsored and organized by the Library of Congress and hosted by first Lady Laura Bush. This year the festival will take place on Saturday, September 29 on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. festival goers will meet and interact with 70 best selling authors, illustrators and poets. There will be activities for the entire family, if you're unable to attend in person we invite you to experience the festival online. Our podcast interview series with well-known authors along with web cast from the festival will be available through the national book festival's website at loc dot gov slash book fest. Today we talk with Shelia P. Moses, one of many popular authors who will appear in the teens and children pavilion at the festival on September 29. Her latest book is the Baptism, a novel about the tradition of Baptism in her small hometown. She is a Coretta Scott King honor winner and a national book award finalist. Welcome Ms. Moses.

>> Thank you for having me.

>> What made you decide to attend a second year?

>> Well it was really a no-brainer for me, I had a wonderful time last year and what is exciting me about being a writer more than anything other than actually seeing my books on the shelf in the book stores is my time with the children in the public school system and when I arrived at the festival and I saw all of those children with their parents I was just so excited and I knew that I wanted to come back but the children really made me want to come back.

>> Well, it was obvious that the children were enthralled with your story telling, I heard you say that you were always writing as a young girl, you apparently wrote your first short story in fifth grade, why do you believe the festival is important to young readers and writers?

>> Well, two things if you save the parent you save the child, I think it's important to first of all when a mother gets up on Saturday morning and you say I'm going to the National Book Festival, come with me, I think that inspires the child. When you arrive at the festival, I was excited that was pavilion of the state and you saw all of these pavilions designed for the children but the festival is designed for all people but the children understood there would be something special there for them. So I think it's important because you were saying to the child...my motto when I walk into a school the first thing I say is the book you read today will save you tomorrow and that's what that festival is saying to the children, it's not just books for adults, they see that it's for them, you give them colorful maps, you've given them book marks, not candy, you've given them colorful book marks to take home to put in their books. It's obvious, it is very obvious. You can cure anything with love, children know when they're loved, to me the festival was saying to the children we love you and we want you to read and that's the reason it's

important for them because they understood it when they step inside the pavilion because they knew it was designed for them, very important.

>> You say that there is freedom in writing, obviously there's freedom in reading and experiencing new things through words, what do you mean you say there is freedom in writing?

>> Well, I was raised on a place in the middle of no place that civilization forgot in Rich Square, North Carolina on a little road called Rehobeth Road, not a street but a road and my mother freed us with words. When I was a little girl we couldn't afford the newspaper. On Monday my neighbor gave us Sunday's paper, on Tuesday my neighbor gave us Monday's paper, we were always a day behind in the news but we'd read it. so what my mother would do she'd take that newspaper, she would put it back together very neatly, she would read it then she would put it together not in 50 different pieces but...to make it look new for us and she would pass it to the children in the house and we all would have to read from that paper. So my first love was not writing but it was reading. So the freedom is in [inaudible] children that words are important, it's like today you think video games are really, really important well reading is the greatest gift my mother has ever given to me and I bet if you asked any of my nine sisters and brothers that they would say the same thing about that newspaper because we all love to read. It is a very important part of our life today, again if you save the parent, saving the child, my mother stopped school in the tenth grade because they moved and it was too far to walk and I always believe if she just could have made it to school she would have probably earned her PhD. And I wouldn't exist because she understood the power of education and reading and writing and she understood if she could just get her children out of high school onto college reading is a saver and it did.

>> You talked about how your parents and specifically your grandmother inspired your writing, tell us about that.

>> Well, you know my grandmother had gone to middle school, my mother never...no one was ever sure how far she went in school, maybe the eighth elementary but no further than middle school. She could not read nor write but whatever she learned at an early age by the time she was an adult she signed her name with an X. So I spoke for people who could not speak for themselves, she could not write her story, I felt it was my duty as her grandchild, a third generation Jones that I was supposed to tell the story of my people. My grandmother would sit on the front porch and she would tell the story of Buddy Bush. Oh, Buddy Bush got away from the Klan, we never see him no more. I was a kid, I was thinking who in the heck was Buddy Bush, because she was always writing but she was writing...she couldn't physically write but she was telling stories and it was my duty to my ancestors to write the words that she spoke to me. So I'd write about the Rehobeth Road and Occonechee Neck and I'd write about [inaudible] Road and picking cotton and the roads with no dirt on for the people who actually lived there and told me those stories. I write for my grandpa and his pap and the people before me, people that I don't even know their names.

>> What do you hope readers will learn from your latest work the Baptism, I know it's about 12 year old twin brothers, Leon and Luke Curry who reach an age when they must be baptized and they have a week to stop sinning, tell us a little bit about that.

>> Well, Luke and Leon are actually my brothers, Leon Moses and Larry Moses and Larry wasn't working with Luke, they are not twins but they grew up two little peas in a pod. So we...a lot of people thought of them...they probably don't look a lot alike but they certainly...they had all the makings of twins, they did everything together. You know growing up on Rehobeth Road, the great thing about Rehobeth Road and it still stands was tradition. Everything we did according to the tradition, getting baptized on Rehobeth Road was a tradition when you turned 12 years old. So all of my books to date have been about girls, I wanted to talk about the boys on Rehobeth Road so I moved the story to Occoneechee Neck to talk about my two brothers who terrorized us when we were little and what we did the week before getting baptized. The girls got their pressed, the boys got their hair cut, you definitely got a new suit, you know you had to learn versus from the Bible in case the preacher calls your name in church. It's really a story of redemption about how two little boys who were really, really bad and at the end of the day had five days to get right with the Lord and so they did. Well, I don't want to tell the story but it's a story about love and family and tradition. I feel like we're so far away from tradition, I notice young people today we always ate together at dinner time and I know the children now they take their plate and they eat in front of the TV. We could never do that growing up and I really wanted to show children we can still have fun without the TV and we could still have fun without the computer playing games, it's a tradition I wanted them to see how happy we used to be without all the things they think they just have to have, some good, some bad. Something more importantly than anything else the Baptism is about tradition.

>> Do you think the community as a whole has suffered because we've lost that connection to traditions?

>> Oh, absolutely, absolutely, I think the young are strong but the old know the way and the best gift we can give our children today is to sit down and talk to them about the way things used to be and that you don't have to have your pants...it's so sad, your pants too low and your shirt too high and your shoes too big. You know when I was growing up, this is really interesting we had three sets of clothes, everyday clothes, school clothes and church clothes, I mean that was a tradition, you could not wear your school clothes after school, you couldn't wear your church clothes unless it was Sunday and you had everyday clothes that you could wear around the house. Simple things like that we have gotten away from sitting down and eating dinner together and saying how was your day, we have gotten away from some of the most important things that made us a family.

>> Well, I have to agree with you there because my family we have a tendency to go our separate ways because we are all so very busy. Is it possible for you to read an excerpt from your book without actually giving away the ending?

>> Okay, the Baptism is written in seven days, it starts on Sunday, this is Chapter 1, the title is Sunday. Today is Sunday, the only day of the week that we don't have to work in the field, the only day of the week we get to wear our nice, nice clothes. We do not have church this Sunday so ma said we can of fishing. We have fishing clothes just like we have Sunday go to meeting clothes, there will be no fishing next Sunday morning because me and my brother Luke Curry we'll get baptized. We ain't saved or nothing like that we're just doing what mama, Linda [phonetic] Curry telling us she wants us to do, what she calls the Christian things to do. She says if that ain't reason enough for us to want to get baptized then we best remember that she is the one that put the food on the table in that old house where we live, she said for us to remember that she washed the clothes that we wear to church, school and everywhere else. The clothes the she buy with her money that she gets from washing and ironing clothes for the white folks. Money she gets from baking and walking all over town to sell her baked goods to anybody that got some money. Ma said she washed the sheets that we sleep on in the house that she pays the rent, if all of that ain't enough she says to remember that old oak tree in the back yard, on that tree there are limbs, on those limbs there are many small branches that make a perfect switch, she cuts three at a time. First she cuts them then she braids them and those switches can make you remember anything that you have forgotten. When she finishes all of her braiding she yells, all right twins these switches got your names written all over them, now that ain't Christian like at all but me and Luke Curry we get the point.

>> You're a really great story teller, how do you describe the art of story telling, what is your creative process?

>> You know they ask me questions at the festival last year and I said if you're from Rehobeth Road you have rhythm, you know I meet people all the time and they say you sound like you're singing when you talk and I think that's hilarious because I listen to my sisters talk and I say why do you sound like you're singing. But I think that goes all the way back to my grandmother [inaudible] that everybody has almost like a rhythm when they talk and they talk long, like, heeey...how you doing and you know even after earning their degrees in psychology I still flipping say heeey how you doing. I was just thinking it goes back to the voice of my people and my gift from my grandmother who could not read nor write is the ability to tell the story.

>> That's a perfect segue into my next question, what do you think we can learn from our ancestors?

>> [Inaudible section] do the right thing. If we could just...if we could be half the men and women that they were...just try to do right, not my grandmother [inaudible] spent a lot of time trying to do right. I picked up my aunt from the airport this morning and when she arrived at the house she was unpacking her clothes and she said you know I don't want to start preaching here but she said oh...I must have 2,000 books, but she says oh you have so many books, do you have the Bible? She was not impressed with the books, she wanted to know do you have the Bible, I

said I have three; she said good let me have one. That's the book she wanted when she walked in the door.

>> Um, hum.

>> So I think what we can learn from is that if we continue to try to do right and live right we can learn that it's okay to sit down at the table and have a meal together before you turn the TV on, read a book. We can...I'm sorry.

>> No go ahead, I like it, read a book.

>> Just read a book, talk to me, call, write a friend a letter, I still write letters, I still write people. The internet is a monster you know that...I mean it's good for business but on Sunday all five of us call each other on Sunday because the e-mail is not good enough for me, just go back to the old way. And modern technology is wonderful but don't forget the letters, don't forget the dinner table still has chairs around it. Just keep up with tradition.

>> Well, I have one more question, what can your fans expect to hear and see at the book festival on September 29?

>> Well, all the folks that have been down Rehobeth Road we're going to have a time. Well, you know we just want to have a good time, I like for the children...I don't know if you listened to the end of my presentation last year but I try to make it really for the children and quick, I talk and then I let them talk to me because they can turn on the TV and listen to an author on [inaudible] they have something they want to say, they have questions so I just hope that we have a time in Washington, D.C. on September 29 and I can't wait to get back.

>> Well, certainly we can't wait to hear you on September 29, this has been terrific, very exciting, I look forward to hearing more at the National Book Festival.

>> Well, thank you, thank you, take care.

>> You too.

>> The National Book Festival is free and open to the public and will take place on the National Mall between 7th and 14th Streets Northwest from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on September 29. For details and a complete list of participating authors visit [loc dot gov slash book fest](http://loc.gov/bookfest), thank you for listening.

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