



Video Story Transcript

Unsung Hero: How My Uncle Was Saved from the KKK

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0q5bvqNwi8>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

My name is Sadarri Saskill. It's about 1992 and my mother, she went back to her hometown of Palm Springs, Mississippi to visit. And she hadn't been there, ah, very recently and so she was taking pictures all around. And finally, my mom and my dad ended up downtown. And my dad took a picture of my mom in front of this plaque. And on this plaque were the names of war heroes that were engraved right there.

And so they came back to, to Naples, Florida where we lived, and they showed us the pictures. And when we got to that particular picture, it was crystal clear. And I remember, my mom and I, we read the names that were on the list. Then, all of a sudden, I noticed that my mother had a look in her eye and it was a look that I couldn't quite put a bead on. I didn't know what it was about but I knew that there was a, one last name that was on that plaque that ended up sparking a story. And it was a story about my mother's brother, Carl.

My uncle Carl who was almost lynched by the KKK, by the mob, by the Klan, okay. I had never heard this story before. And when I did I was horrified. I, kind of, bristled up and everything. But then when I turned and I looked at my mother, her expression was somehow softer. So I got to thinking, well, maybe it was a long time ago or maybe she was kind of numb because of all the emotion and everything. But then she told the story, I figured that couldn't be it because she was telling you so vividly, you know. She talked about the, the white mass against the dark sky and, and she talked about remembering the smells and the sounds that were in the air. It was something else that was going on.

Well, as she told the story, she told that, my uncle, he had been accused of talking to a white girl. And sometimes in some places in Mississippi, that was punishable by death. And here he was, he spoke to a white

girl the wrong way. And so people decided that they were going to be able to take action. Now what happened was that same day they put my uncle in jail. And here he was in the jail and there was a deputy that was going to watch over him.

But in the meantime, the mob was so upset, that they wanted to make an example out of my uncle. That what they did was, they decided that they were gonna storm the jailhouse. But they did not know who they were reckoning with! Mm hmm! Because when they got there, my Grandfather Bill, he had gotten together a black posse of his own. And he was going to stand toe to toe with the Klan. Now that's not something that happened in the 20s and 30s in Mississippi. It didn't happen that way. But he stood there face to face with this formidable group of people.

Well, it seemed like all was lost. And the numbers were just not even, so that the number of blacks that were there. I remember that I started thinking about them with my mother and what she was telling me the story. And I thought these men, that were black going against these men, who were white. At the time, that was something else because they were going to put their lives in jeopardy. They were going to put their families lives in jeopardy. And I remember telling my mother that these men were real heroes. And they were, because you mess with the Klan, mm hmm, and not live to tell about it. You didn't do that because the Klan, they meant business.

So here they were face to face. And the mob, they could see that they were outnumbered. So the people in the mob they decided that what they were going to do was, they were going to go back and they were going to regroup. And they were gonna come back with more men before dawn because the next day, that's when the trial was going to happen. This so-called fair trial was supposed to happen that next morning. And so when all of this happened, each group, the black group and the white group, they went in their separate directions in order to regroup. Whatever the outcome is gonna to be, we knew from this story that was being told to the family, that was going to be a whole lot of bloodshed before the sun came up.

Anyway, at dawn my grandfather, he came with all of the men that he had. But guess what? The mob had beaten them to the punch. They were already there at the jail house. And then, my mama, she, kind of, had a little smirk on the side of her face. And she told me that the mob and the deputy were fit to be tied. And you know why? Because my uncle, Carl Esko Lucas, had escaped like Houdini. They said that Carl, he was gone like a turkey through the corn. That's the way my mother put it. That he had escaped!

So you can imagine the relief, the relief that my mother's family felt. They feel so happy that he was safe. But they were a close family and they knew that Carl would always manage to be able to get a little message or something to them. But there was none. There was nothing. They waited a little bit longer. And there still was no message. So they got the wondering and they started thinking that wait a minute. And then rumors started trickling in. You know how rumors are. And the rumor had it that maybe, maybe Carl had not actually escaped. Maybe the mob had actually killed Carl and dumped his body someplace because it was plenty of rivers and ravines in and back woods that they could hide a body, you know. And the reason for that would be that my mother's family, the Lucas's, they were a good family. They were an outstanding family. They were a respected family. They never did anything wrong to anybody, in fact, they always lend a helping hand. Didn't make any difference if it was black, if it was white. They were going to help out. And so maybe the mob got to thinking that they could kill him, have their vengeance, you know. But they can appease the townspeople at the same time. And it would be a win-win situation.

Well, you know, time went on and what we ended up finding was, as the time passed, the angrier my mother's family got. Weeks went by, months went by, years went by. In fact, my grandmother, Miss Etta, she died. And then about 10 years later, look who came like somebody resurrected from the dust, walking up the road. Nobody else then Carl Esko Lucas. And when my mother told me that part of the story, I said, "What? Who? He did what?" And she said, "Yep. He came walking up the road with enough information to set the story straight."

And so Carl told the truth. He told what exactly had happened that night long ago. Long ago when those two groups of men, the white group and the black group, when they separated and they were there alone in the cell. It was the deputy that ended up helping my uncle escape. He gave 'im some food, he gave 'im a little money, he gave the names of, of white folks that could help him on his, on his trip up north. But the two men, they had to make a solemn promise. They couldn't tell a soul so that nobody's family would get killed. And my mom said that her brother told her, my uncle, that they sealed it with a hug and they never saw each other again. And it wasn't until that deputy and the members of that angry mob, until after they had either died or they moved on, that my brother, my mother's brother, Carl, felt that it was safe to be able to return. And so they could recognize that it was because of love of family that he left and it was love of family that brought him back.

Now you remember that plaque? Mm hmm. The one that my mother showed the picture of? It was that last name that was the same as that deputy's name. It was that name that was right there that triggered all these memories. And I remember, my mother, she told me that there's good and there's bad in every race. And my mother told me, she says, some people are recognized for the good deeds that they do and their names are put on, maybe, a plaque just like this. But there are other people that step up to the plate and they become heroes without anybody ever knowing about it at all. And that's when I recognize that, that look that was in my mother's eye. It wasn't the look of horror. It wasn't a look of disgust. It wasn't a look of hate. It was a look of gratitude. Gratitude for a man who was bold enough to do the right thing.