**LISA COHEN\_FINAL SCRIPT: “CAN YOU IMAGINE?” ACT 1 as of 5-11 8p**

**[Music]**

**Deloris: “It’s time.” Dad: “Thank you. I’m getting up.”**

LISA: That’s the sound of my friend Deloris, waking up my Dad. Or trying to.

**Dad: “In a minute…in a minute.”**

LISA: Deloris and I have known each other for decades. I trust her with my life.

**Dad: “Good morning dear.” Deloris: “Good morning Grandpa.”**

LISA: Not just *my* life but the lives of my loved ones. In fact, for the past seven years this tiny, ebony-brown woman with flashing eyes has spent her days waking up my dad, putting him to bed, and everything in between.

**Dad (Singing): Good morning, we’ve danced the whole night through.**

LISA: My dad has severe dementia. He’s forgotten just about every minute of his 98 years…

**Dad (singing): …Good morning**

LISA: Well almost everything.

**Dad (singing): …good morning to you.**

LISA: Deloris and my dad start every day with a backrub and a song.

**Dad: “Oh that’s good.” Deloris: “Did you have a good sleep?”**

**Dad:  *“*Yeah. I'm tired.”Deloris: “Hmm..” Laughter**

LISA: My dad lives in Philadelphia, in what they call a senior “independent-living” complex – where he is anything but independent. The fact that he’s still with us at all… is because of Deloris.

**Deloris: “You going to brush your teeth first?” GP: “Ok” Water running.**

**DELORIS: I basically do most of the things of daily living.**

**Deloris: “Turn around!”**

**DELORIS: Be his hands, his ears, his eyes.**

**Dad: “Can I sit down?**

**Deloris: “Uh uhm.”**

**DELORIS: Doing things for him that he loves to do for himself, which is a little bit harder to do now.**

**Deloris: “Rinse your face.” Dad: “I can’t hear you.”**

LISA: But this isn’t my father’s story. It’s *Deloris’s*. And although we’re pretty close, we’re also pretty different. Different races, different religions, we come from different universes. I’m also her boss; I pay her salary… which *always* complicates friendships. And storytelling.

**[MUSIC]**

But I’ve decided to tell her story anyway - because as you’re about to hear, there’s actually NO one quite like Deloris.

**[MUSIC]**

LISA: This is True Stories in Sound. I’m Lisa Cohen.

**[MUSIC]**

LISA: So I’m starting this story back in early March of 2020. I’m a hundred miles away - in New York - which means Deloris and I are on the phone almost every day.

**phone call Deloris: “Hello”** **Lisa: “Hi.**

LISA: It’s Friday. Friday the 13th for the record. She and I were figuring out the weekend ahead. Basically up to this phone call, Deloris had been living with my dad during the week and weekends, it was home to Brooklyn. To a pristine two bedroom walk-up with a glorious wall of immaculately tended plants.

Every Saturday she’d cook Jamaican food to bring back for the week, and all day Sunday she’d sing the praises of Jesus in her Pentecostal church in Prospect Heights.

**Preacher: “God we pray that you would just open up our ears.” Deloris: “Yeah”**

LISA: She recorded the services and brought them back to Philly too.

**Preacher: “...the Lord is mine…”**

LISA: She sometimes stayed in Brooklyn on Mondays to run errands. But this March 2020 phone call was a marker, everything was about to change.

**phone call contd**

**Lisa: “You said you canceled your your dentist appointment for Monday?” Deloris: “Yeah.”**

LISA: New York City was rapidly becoming Covid’s epicenter. People weren’t *going* to New York, they were fleeing it.

**phone call contd**

**Lisa: “You're not thinking of going home this weekend? Or are you?”**

**Deloris: “No, that's why I canceled. And I didn’t make any other appointment, she said just wait and see.”**

**Lisa: “I honestly think that at this point you’re safer where you are.”**

**Deloris: “Yeah”**

LISA: We were afraid if Deloris went to Brooklyn, she wouldn’t be able to come back, trapping her in New York’s widening health crisis, and leaving my helpless father alone in his apartment.

**phone call contd**

**Lisa: “Have you heard what they're saying now in New York? That in the next 24 hours…(overtalk)”**

**Deloris: “yeah, yeah, yeah.”**

**Lisa: “Mayor de Blasio may mandate shelter in place.”**

**Deloris: “mm hmm”**

**[MUSIC]**

LISA: She stayed in Philly, with my dad. We thought she might be stuck there for a few weeks, but we all know that’s not how things turned out. Deloris didn’t go back to Brooklyn for over two years.

**[MUSIC FULL]**

LISA: COVID happened. The pandemic, the fear, the dead, over a million in the US, millions more around the world. All those nightmares that were unthinkable in March 2020. They happened. And the people most affected, the elderly, the immune-compromised, people of color? Well, together my Dad and Deloris checked all the boxes.

**DELORIS: I just say, you know what? This is it. Lockdown. Yep.**

**LISA: Didn’t you feel like a prisoner, weren’t you going crazy all locked in there like that?**

**DELORIS: I didn't feel like a prisoner because If I wasn't here, then I would have to worry about going home. On the subway. Meeting all these people in a crowd. It's not just for him. It's for me.**

LISA: My dad was especially at risk. Just days before that March phone call, he’d been released from the hospital after his fourth bout of near fatal pneumonia in as many years. He’d been sent to a nearby rehab unit to be stabilized. There was little hope of recovery. The rehab was overcrowded and understaffed. Days passed with Deloris at his bedside, listening to the news about Covid’s spread. Finally she took drastic action.

**DELORIS: And I said no I don't want to stay in here no more. It was dinner time and they gave me his dinner. I say, we're going to take it with me. And I told the nurse, I said, give me something to sign so that they don't say I steal him. I just put him in the wheelchair. Wrap him up, with his clothes and stuff and his dinner, and I take him home and that was it. The next week the whole place was shut down.**

LISA: Dad would have been locked in the rehab and Deloris would have been locked out.

**DELORIS: if I wasn't there, he don't remember sometime, they're short staffed, people is getting Covid, maybe he wouldn't be here today.**

**[MUSIC ]**

**LISA: And you just had this feeling.**

**DELORIS: Yes. Because it is like, you know, it's going to rain and why you know it's going to rain because it get cloudy, it get dark. So is that kind of feeling I have, like something bad is going to happen.**

**[MUSIC]**

LISA: Before my dad, Deloris spent some 30 years *listening* to those instincts, as a nanny. That included a decade helping to raise my own two kids, who are now grown. My dad is her first elder care job. Deloris is 67 so it might just be her one and only.

**DELORIS: I hope this is my last job because he spoil me.**

**Deloris: “Ok sit now.”**

**DELORIS: Everything you do for him. He tell you a million thank you.**

**Dad: “Thank you.”**

**Deloris “uh hug”**

**DELORIS: ‘Thank you for taking such good care of me .’**

**Dad: “Thank you dear”**

**Deloris: “You’re welcome”**

**DELORIS: You're washing him, he tell you thank you, like oh my, forever. He is so grateful.**

**Both singing: “Heaven I’m in heaven, “**

**Dad: “and my heart beats so that I can hardly speak.”**

**[MUSIC ]**

LISA: When Deloris rescued my dad from the rehab back in March of 2020, he was still in pretty bad shape. She and I both figured he was simply coming home to die in his own bed. His doctor said it was time for “comfort care.” Deloris and I both cried our way through that classic conversation, you know - the “he’s led a good long life, it’s time to let God’s will take over” kind of talk. Then we filled out the at-home hospice paperwork.

A few weeks into lockdown, even the hospice nurses stopped coming to the apartment.

**DELORIS: Nobody was coming here. It was just us two.No housekeeper was coming in here. They put his food at the door, in the evening I go and get it. We just stay in and do what they say.**

**Dad sings: “Sunday is gloomy in shadows I spend it all…”**

LISA: But there’s my dad again… Singing… He survived. Deloris *kept* saving him. She added her own brand of nutrition to those meals they left at the door. Her Jamaican cornmeal porridge. Tea from the herbs she grew on his postage stamp balcony. The lemon-ginger-garlic-cayenne- who-knows-what-else concoction she brewed by the gallon. Dad put on weight and the urgent coughing slowed.

The hospice nurses came back one more time - to kick him out of the program. With a combination of Deloris’s vigilance… and his endurance … my dad gained back his strength.

**LISA: It's funny ‘cause I think in a way. Covid was good for him because he was very protected.**

**DELORIS: That's 100% absolutely the truth. COVID do him a favor.**

LISA: He wasn’t the only one. Tucked away in their sterile cocoon, just like the rest of us Deloris began to adapt to this new world order. And even appreciate some of its surprising upsides.

**Online preacher: “Someboday shout Hallelujah!”**

LISA: Like on-line church. She’d always shunned the internet. OK, that’s a mild way of saying it. She detests it. I’ve seen her curse it and throw her phone in frustration. But now, she could attend services anywhere in the world.

**Online preacher: “My God I pray right now, that whatever is happening oh God in Jamaica, that you Lord God is still in control. “**

LISA: Sundays found her transported to Jamaica, or with her daughter in DC. And since it was virtual, she could do both – at the same time.

**Deloris sings: “our time…”**

LISA: It was a joyful noise.

**Deloris sings: Blessed be the name of the Lord…”**

LISA: And there was another upside she never expected.

**DELORIS: Because of Covid I was able to save, because I wasn't going to the store. I wasn't buying any clothes, my friend bring food for me like two time a week.**

LISA: There were no more weekends off, no more clocking out. Deloris was working 24/7. More hours meant more pay - a lot more. Since she could no longer deposit her paycheck in person at the bank, she asked me to help, and little by little I became her defacto admin; her banker – with a twist. She asked me to hide the money. That was her word. *Hide* it.

**DELORIS: …where I can't see it. Where I can't know the amount. And then I remember you saving and saving and saving. I remember one day you said you're sure you don't want to know? And I said, no.**

**LISA: Did the idea for the house come because you had all this money saved up? Or…**

**DELORIS: No, you know what? One night, I remember one of the nurse bring up Grandpa meds. She said girl, you here? You didn't go home? I said, no. She said, You here all this time? I say, Yeah. She said, Girl, if it was me, that would be a down payment. And I say hmm.**

**LISA: Are you kidding me?**

**DELORIS: Just like that.**

LISA: And just like that, in an instant, all those years, decades, of living paycheck to paycheck, of sending anything leftover back home - it all gave way to a dream. One with four walls, and just maybe a big herb garden out back.

**DELORIS: I said boy. God, you really work in mysterious ways.**

**LISA: Wow**

**DELORIS: Yeah. It's like a blessing in disguise. Because when you look at it the other way, you would say, oh, how could you say it's a blessing when so many people die?**

**So many bad things happen. But is like, God take the bad. And turn it around for my good.**

**LISA: Does that make you feel funny sometimes?**

**DELORIS: No. It makes me rely on him more. And trust God more. Knowing that he can take the impossible. And make it possible.**

**Deloris sings: “the name is…”**

LISA: Deloris might give all the credit to God, but her sheer will to take what He’d handed her and actually *realize* this dream? Well that’s a whole other story. It’s coming up next.

**Deloris ends song: “Blessed be the name of the Lord. OK.”**

**ACT 2 OUTLINE:**

Deloris and my dad are locked down and glued to MSNBC for news of the outside world. Deloris watches as George Floyd’s murder rocks the country and leads to a reckoning on racism, both today and in America’s past. Deloris gets a crash course - events she never heard about - and it’s a troubling one. As the months pass, the right wing violence and political chaos that culminates in January 6th push Deloris further, to consider for the first time ever that she could be driven out of this country, or want to flee on her own. A retirement in Jamaica is now looking likely, something she never imagined before. Covid has helped her to save enough money, and she starts to look for her escape hatch. A childhood friend helps her, and not far from her more humble beginnings, they discover a “dream” house, except it’s beyond even Deloris’s wildest dreams. When the purchase goes through, and the pandemic lifts enough to venture out, she starts to prepare for next steps. She returns to her Brooklyn apartment to pack up her life in the U.S. and prepares for a trip to Jamaica, to finally see her new home face to face.

**ACT 3 OUTLINE:**

Deloris arrives in Jamaica and explores her new home. The reality of the dream is inevitably more complex, and she realizes how much work there is to do and how many adjustments she must make. But she revels in the prospect of returning to her passion for the outdoors and looks forward to a future tending her new gardens. She also explores her past there, with a trip to her old home and a reunion with fellow returnees who have enthusiastically embraced their new/old lives. As she takes in the ease and comfort her old friends now enjoy, she passionately reflects on the struggle and the perseverance it took to get them all there. Their success paints a picture of what she could soon have.

**CODA:**

Deloris is back in Philadelphia, waking up my dad to celebrate his 98th birthday. As she books her flights for her next visit, she’s enmeshed in new plans - to quickly paint the house’s exterior, slowly furnish its interior, and the million other tasks of a new homeowner. But she’s not giving up on her adopted home - she vows any future in Jamaica will include a flight *back* to the U.S. to vote in every important election.