

CALL ME BY MY NAME

Sandra Seaton
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Good Afternoon, my name is Henrietta Lacks.
I was born in Virginny
Roanoke, Virginia
On a tobacco farm.
It was hot that day.
The first day of August, 19 hundred and 20.
About the time the asters and black-eyed susans
and sunflowers make a big show.
See that bed over there?
That's where I took my first breath.
Laying up there with my mama.
Safe in her arms.
Black-eyed susan.
Sweet as I could be.
They say I came out perfect.
Not a mark on me.
Said I was the only one ever come out that way.
That's right.

See that hospital bed.
Great iron bed.
The one in the corner.
That hospital bed was my home.
Doctors, nurses, all in white
They found this knot in me.
A big tumor, shiny, bright, the size of a new born baby's fist.
They didn't ask me.
They just kept it.
Took little pieces of it and gave 'em away.
I never knew a thing about it.
You all know.
You know the story.
I just heard about it
From you.
I was sick
Sick as a dog
Had a Cancer.
With a mind of its own.
I fought it.
And I fought it hard.
So weak.
Seemed like nothing, water, food, none of it made a difference.
Just kept drying up.

October 4, 1951
The day I passed.
The tobacco was ready.
Leaves turned yellow with brown sugar spots.
Big beds of asters showing their stuff.
I left five babies.
Sweet little children.
They kept my tumor.
Made a big harvest
Out of a crop of my cells
Looking for a cure.

No one asked me.
No one called me by my name
Invited me to tea
In their high toned homes.

Now don't get me wrong.
Those doctors operated on me.
Big fancy hospital.
They tried to save me, but they couldn't do it.
That tumor had a mind of its own!

So they started growing me in a lab to see how far I could go.
I never knew a thing about it.
You all know the story.
I heard about it
From you.

Until I came along any cell they tried to grow
Those lil cells, little baby things
They died after a day or two
Just like that.

How far can you dream?
Can you see millions?
No.
Billions?
No.
Trillions of itty bitty cells?

Growing 'em in a lab.
Looking for a cure.
Making money right and left off my cells
And I didn't get a penny.
Not one penny!

Dividing and dividing and dividing.
Soon as one died, another one took their place.
Dividing and dividing and dividing
Lord ha mercy!
You ever listen to mysteries.
Those shows on the radio.
(a radio turns on in the background then turns off)
Well to this day.
They don't know.
That's right.
Still a mystery.
How come Henrietta Lacks cells keep dividing?
Nobody knows!

Henrietta Lacks
Call Me Hela.
Call Me The Cure.
Call me Polio
Call me HIV
Measles
Mumps
Ebola
HPV

I'm the cure!

Call me Henrietta Lacks
HELA
HELA
Say it over again and again
HELA
Quiet now.
HELA
Try it again
And again
And again.
If you want to know the truth about
(shouts each name)
Polio
Or
AIDS
Or **(quietly)** Cancer
Call Me
Call Me By My Name.

THE END

