

A Joyful Maya Angelou

By Patricia Morgan MA CCC

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In April, 2002 Oprah Winfrey interviewed her mentor, Dr. Maya Angelou, considered by many to be the great voice of contemporary literature. She is a poet, educator, historian, best-selling author, actress, playwright, civil-rights activist, producer and director.

In January 1993, Angelou became the second poet in U.S. history to write and recite original work at a presidential inauguration. She spoke at President Clinton's inauguration. Although she has published over 20 works I am most familiar with *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1970, *The Heart of a Woman*, 1981 and *Phenomenal Woman: Four Poems for Women*, 1995. *Phenomenal Woman* is one phenomenal poem that every woman should read.

Oprah showcased Angelou's new book *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* that describes the distress she endured through the U. S. Civil Rights movement. Two of her dear friends, Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were assassinated. She said about such situations, "Every one of us has gone to bed with fear, horror or grief and we have risen and said to another human being 'Good morning. How are you?' We more than thrive. We live with compassion, humour and style."

Angelou talked about what she learned from her two friends, about the courage to be who you can be, to agree to be no one's enemy yet to be no one's victim and to be a friend to human beings. She challenged all of us who can love one person to love all human beings. At the same time she said "You must not allow yourself to be abused." Then she added "Anyone who will not be of use is of no use." What a grand statement and she said it with such knowingness.

She pointed out that as far as we know this life is given to us but once so "Don't live a mean, little life." She spoke with great delight about maturing and aging. "Don't get older just to get wiser. Get older because its fun. The body is going but so what? My knees have gone. My hair is thinning. The breasts are interesting. They're in a race to see which one will hit the waist first." Growing older is a problem when you believe it to be so. Angelou encouraged the viewers not to have lazy thinking - to decide for themselves who they are and their life destiny. "If you put it into your mind that (aging) is fun, it is fun, especially if someone is calling you 'darling'."

Winfrey described an unusual scene from a party where Angelou had demanded that a guest leave her home after he had uttered a racist comment. Angelou added, "I will not have a racial or sexual slur or a vulgarity in my home. Therefore, I have a healing home."

The interview concluded with the introduction of Angelou's most recent project – poetic musings for Hallmark cards called Life Mosaics. Here are some of the sayings:

Family brings you home.

Only equals can be friends.

You have reason to strut. Just do that.

You had a difficult decision to make. You made it. I applaud your courage to do it.

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