

Maya Angelou (Writer/Actor)

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 24 February 2013 14:21



Born Marguerite Ann Johnson on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri is an American author and poet. As the second child of Bailey and Vivian Johnson, Angelou's older brother, Bailey Jr, nicknamed her "Maya" possibly meaning My or Mya Sister. After the divorce of their parents, they lived with their maternal grandmother. Due to harsh times, at the age of 8, Maya and her brother was returned to live with their mother where she was raped by her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. He was found guilty but was jailed for only one day; four days later he was murdered possibly by Maya's uncles. Maya became mute for almost five years believing her voice killed him because she told his name. She and her brother moved back and forth with relatives and finally back to their mother when she was 14. Maya studied dance and drama on a scholarship at California Labor School. She had moved through a series of relationships occupations and cities attempting to raise her son without job training or advanced education.

In 1951 Maya married a Greek electrician/inspiring musician named Enistassious (Tosh) Angelos despite the condemnation of interracial relationships during that time. She took modern/African dance classes and performed at The Purple Onion nightclub; at the suggestion of managers Maya changed her professional name "Maya Angelou"

Maya Angelou's 1969 autobiography, *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, was nominated for a National Book Award and made her a symbol of pluck and pride for African-American women. In the 1950s Angelou had been a dancer and stage actress, and she was active in the civil rights movement (she became a coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, thanks to a request from Martin Luther King, Jr. During the 1960s she spent five years in Africa, working as a journalist and a teacher. Angelou returned to the United States and in 1969 published *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*.

In 1972 she was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize for her collection of poetry, *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diie*. She was nominated for an Emmy for her role in the 1977 miniseries *Roots*. Since then, Angelou has continued teaching, writing, acting, producing, recording (she won Grammy Awards for the spoken word for the years 1993, 1995 and 2002) and collecting honorary degrees from across the United States. Since 1981 she has been the Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. At Bill Clinton's

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request, Angelou wrote a poem -- On the Pulse of Morning -- for his 1993 inauguration as U.S. president. Maya Angelou is 84 years old.