

1986

In "All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes," Maya Angelou tells of being swept up in the Pan-African movement of the 1960s. She leaves the United States to live in Ghana, West Africa. There, new and interesting people come into her life. Angelou weaves her experiences with the people

and the country into a page-turner that, like her previous autobiographical volumes, has become a gem to both readers and critics.

Angelou labels herself and the other black Americans who "returned" to Africa during this time period as "Revolutionist Returnees." She tells of how she and other expatriates often met in Ghana to discuss their experiences and juxtapose them to the plight of their brothers and sisters

back home. She writes with great detail of when her good friend Malcolm X visits Ghana after he makes a hijra to Mecca. He tells Angelou that he has parted ways with the Nation of Islam and Elijah Muhammad, and has befriended some whites.

Angelou also writes about her stormy relationship with an African man, her son's transition to manhood, of how being American - black skin or not - was not always embraced in the motherland.



2002

"Her writing is as gentle as a mist and as powerful as daybreak."

That is what a Chicago Sun-Times reviewer said after reading "A Song Flung Up to Heaven," the last book in Maya Angelou's autobiographical series.

Angelou starts the book writing about her return to the United States from Ghana. Not long after touching down on American soil, she copes with a series of personal tragedies.



She is there when Watts and other parts of Los Angeles go up in flames as a result of riots. In 1965, her friend Malcolm X is gunned down in Harlem. Three years later, she is devastated when Dr. King is assassinated on her 40th birthday.

Their deaths are part of the reason that Angelou starts to compile the stories of her life. She writes about how the publication of her first autobiography, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," comes to be when James Baldwin invites her to a dinner party where guests insist that she tell her story.

Angelou also writes about her search to find a career away from performing. That search would eventually lead her to Winston-Salem and Wake Forest University, where she has been a member of the faculty since the 1980s.



File Photo
Maya Angelou, seen here at one of her many appearances at Special Occasions, signs one of her children's books for two local kids.

TRIBUTE TO A ROLE MODEL

When we met Dr. Angelou, we never imagined the role that she would play in our lives. She was unmistakable, maneuvering the Silas Creek Par Course; Ed, always impulsive, asked for her autograph. It was spring 1983, and we were enjoying a break from the classrooms where we taught. Neither managing a business nor owning a bookstore had entered our thinking.

As life unfolded and we entered the entrepreneurial arena, we were drawn to Dr. Angelou. Perhaps it was the encouragement that she gave our fledgling venture, maybe it was her almost magnetic attraction whenever we were in her presence or it might have been the open arms that embraced us when our paths crossed.

For example, at a national bookseller's convention in Miami where she was the featured author, imagine our elation when she exclaimed "Winston-Salem! Home people! My friends, the McCarters!"

Our connection, however, goes beyond outward/visible actions. The book signings, publicity, introductions, invitations, suggestions and opportunities that we shared have undoubtedly contributed to the longevity and success of our business, for which we are extremely grateful. Equally significant, however, is the private/personal bond that has been established; the life lessons that she teaches as a citizen of the world; the indomitable pride that is so much more than the title of a poem; the loyalty to friends; the empathy for the plight of the unfor-

fortunate and her dedication to Godly service are a few of the messages that she conveys, not only to us, but to everyone with whom she comes into contact - meek and lowly, high and mighty. The unique affection of her friends calls them from throughout the nation and abroad to feast, not only on perfectly prepared food, but to share her wisdom, condor, talent and the exquisite beauty of belonging.

Dr. Angelou's influence in our personal and professional lives is heartfelt and intricate. We have truly been enriched by what began as a chance encounter. We endeavor to share with others the richness of our experience with a truly phenomenal woman - another lesson that she lives.

Ed and Miriam McCarter are community activists and owners of Special Occasions, a popular East Winston book and gift shop.



Ed and Miriam McCarter