

OP/ED



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Remembering Angelou

Julianne Malveaux
 Guest Columnist



Many people will remember Maya Angelou for her phenomenal career. She was a true renaissance woman — an author, teacher, dancer, performer, radio personality and a producer. I will remember her a sister friend, a wise “auntie” who didn’t mind pulling your coat.

She was a generous spirit who made time for virtually any who asked, a gentle and kind spirit. If you dropped by when a meal was being served, she asked you to sit down and enjoy the assembled company. If you came and it was not the meal hour, she never hesitated to offer a cup of tea and a snack. She knew before you did that you needed a hug and an encouraging word.

I’ve seen her take the hat off her head and give it to someone who admired it. She shared her work. It was not unusual to sit at her working table and listen to a poem or some wisdom she was sharing. Sitting at her table one day, I decided to put some of her words in my cell phone, thinking that I’d like to review them one day.

She very gently took the phone from me and told me, “Just listen. You don’t have to write everything down. I am giving you my undivided attention and I want the same from you.” Properly chastened, I left the phone on the table for the rest of the visit. Sister Maya loved people, genuinely and unconditionally. When asked about the greatest virtue, she said that it was courage, the courage to love. She loved everyone, the pauper and the princess.

She would often list the way she loved, mentioning the Black and White, the Asian and Latino, a one-eyed man and the woman who is missing a leg. And if you had the privilege of attending her Thanksgiving dinner, you saw exactly that — a rainbow of the peeped she loved. Each year that I served as president of Bennett College in

North Carolina, she visited the campus and gave a lecture to students.

Once, I asked her to spend time with the honor students and she told me, sharply. “I would rather spend time with the students at the bottom. They are the ones who need encouragement.”

She opened her home, the sculpture garden and the pool to a group of pre-teens from the Southeast Tennis and Learning Center in Washington, D.C. Escorted by Cora Masters Berry, the former first lady of Washington, the girls could not stop talking about her generosity and the words she shared with them.

I wondered how a woman whom most consider an icon would take the time to entertain five 11-year-olds for a couple of hours. That was Maya. The first time I remember sharing a meal with her was in 1989 when the women who appeared in Brian Laska’s “I Dream a World” were gathered for a reception. When two women I accompanied left as soon as the program was over, Auntie Maya (which she asked me to call her) graciously invited me to dine with her friends.

My 30-something self basked in the attention. Mid-reception, a man attempted to get everyone’s attention (and with a room with Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni and others, you can imagine who difficult it was). The gentleman whistled and Auntie Maya, gathered herself to full height, chided the man with a rebuke and also an impromptu poem. “You will not whistle at Black women,” she said. “We had enough of that when we were chattel. You will

respect us as the women that we are.” She went on and by the time she was finished, not a word was uttered by anyone else. “We have already been paid for,” she frequently said, recounting the horror of slave ships, the harsh conditions of slavery, the inequalities of Jim Crow, and contemporary instances of inequality.

She spoke so vividly that you could see the people crowded into a ship, with not even enough room or facilities to attend to bodily functions. She frequently quoted Paul Lawrence Dunbar: “I know why the caged bird sings.” The last time I heard the song was at dinner with San Francisco’s Rev. Cecil Williams, and his wife and poetess, Jan Mirikatini.

We loved up on each other and told stories, released and enjoyed the conversational flow. We ended the evening with laughter and fellowship. It was the kind of evening in which we reveled. Good food, good talk, good friends. As I got my walk on the next morning, I was flooded with appreciation and memories. I was in a rich space and I had been fed. I paused to appreciate Auntie Maya.

I was so very grateful to know her, not as an icon, but as a friend. At the end of her life, Auntie Maya was frail. “Getting old ain’t for sissies,” she said. As Blame Bayne wrote on my Facebook page, “No longer caged, she forever sings.” Ache Auntie Maya, Ache.

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based economist and writer and President Emerita of Bennett College.

CFSP certification for Roberts

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE



Roberts

Anthony Bernard Roberts of Lexington has recently qualified for the designation of Certified Funeral Service Practitioner by the Academy of Professional Funeral Service Practice.

A number of professional organizations grant special recognition to members upon completion of specified academic and professional programs, and CFSP is the funeral service’s national individual recognition.

To receive the honor, the practitioner must complete a 180-hour program of continuing education activities and events. In addition, the practitioner is required to accumulate 20 hours per year to re-certify. Credits

are awarded by the academy for work leading to personal and/or professional growth in four areas: academic activities; professional activities; career review (for retroactive credit); and community and civic activities.

Roberts is a native of Davidson County, a grad-

uate of Lexington Senior High School and a veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He graduated from Gupton-Jones College of Funeral Service in Atlanta and is the co-owner of Roberts Funeral Service of Winston-Salem.

Roberts is the president of the Piedmont District Funeral Directors & Mortician Association of N.C., a member of the North Carolina Funeral Directors & Mortician Association and a member of the National Funeral Directors & Mortician Association.

He is also a member of the Banks-Miller Post 255, Acacia Lodge 66 PHE and New Jersey A.M.E. Zion Church. Roberts is the father of two sons, Casey and Jayden.

Showcase

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CEO.

Anna Cho of Houston, Texas was the grand prize winner for her artwork “Global Village.” The other finalists are Aaron Ortega of Santa Barbara, Calif.; Elizabeth Vaughan of Lakeland, Fla.; and Amy Wong of Culver City, Calif.

The work of Mowers and other winners and finalists will have their work displayed at Sister Cities International’s 2014 Annual Conference

in San Jose, Calif. from July 31 – Aug. 2. Following the Conference, the artwork will go on a tour to several cities across the U.S.

The Young Artist and Authors Showcase is made possible by a donation from The Carvey Family. Founded by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, Sister Cities International serves as the national membership organization for more than 500 individual sister cities, counties, and states across the United States with relationships in 2,000 com-

munities in 140 countries. This sister city network unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats and volunteers who work tirelessly to promote peace and understanding through programs and projects focusing on arts and culture, youth and education, economic and sustainable development, and humanitarian assistance.

To view all the 2014 Showcase artwork submissions, visit: www.sistercitiesinternational.com/blr.com.



USPS Photo

Tracy Belden is awarded by National Association of Letter Carriers National Business Agent Judy Willoughby.

USPS

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ten there sooner,” he said. By all accounts, though, Farrow arrived just in time.

These days, Farrow is delivering Priority Mail packages emblazoned with images of a comic book hero, but, for Ms. Richards, Farrow is the true hero.

Farrow received the PMG Hero Award in February; on June 5, he received an additional recognition from the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC). National Business Agent Judy Willoughby traveled from Florida to present the honor, along with Acting District Manager Ronnie White and Winston-Salem Postmaster Toni Gorman.

Belden, the Greensboro letter carrier who lives in Winston-Salem, helped save the life of an elderly customer last fall after an injurious fall. Belden was delivering the mail when she happened upon an 86-year old woman, lying behind her car in her driveway and bleeding from her head. Belden went into action swiftly, flagging down a passerby and asking the driver to call 911. Belden and the other driver used a towel to stem the flow of blood until the ambulance arrived. While the

medical professionals tended to the customer, Belden contacted the customer’s son and let him know what happened.

The customer underwent brain surgery, and sustained other injuries, but ultimately went home for recovery.

“I may not have ever

seen her if I didn’t have to dismount to deliver her mail,” said Belden.

Belden also received the PMG Hero Award last fall and, like Farrow, was presented with a hero certificate and an NALC hero pin by Willoughby last week.

Backdoor Way to Lower Wages

Bill Fletcher
 Guest Columnist

There has arisen a peculiar phenomenon over the past seven years. Conservative legislatures in states such as Florida and Wisconsin have passed statutes that limit the ability of cities and counties to raise minimum wages and pass other legislation to advance the interests of workers.

This has become part of a well-oiled operation by the political Right to restrict the ability of working people to improve their living standards. This effort has emerged in response to increasing demands around the U.S. for raising minimum wages, including the achievement of what is frequently referenced as a “livable wage.”

Given gridlock in Congress and the unwillingness of the Republican

majority in the House of Representatives to do anything about the declining living standard of U.S. workers, many labor unions and other worker organizations have turned their attention to the fight at the state, county and municipal levels. Locally-based campaigns have been conducted, and frequently won, improvements in minimum wages and other employment standards.

Most recently strikes have been carried out by many fast-food workers demanding increases in their salaries. Conservative state legislators have struck back by attempting to strangle democracy at the local level. Despite all of the conservative political rhetoric about local control and local initiative, when it comes to the rights of workers, this is quickly forgotten.

Replacing local control are directives from the state capitals made at the request of business lobbies that see the only way to improve their — business — situation as being through ruining

the situation of the worker. In the November 2014 elections, there will exist the possibility, in many states, to turn this around. In addition to court action challenging such outrageous state legislative actions, the most powerful response should be success at the polls by candidates who are actually interested in representing working people. The crushing of the working person, in the name of improving the climate for business, obviously does nothing positive for working people. It also does nothing positive for democracy.

It actually represents a further demonstration of the evolution of the U.S.A. toward nothing short of a plutocracy: a society dominated by a small minority of its wealthiest citizens.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is a racial justice, labor and global justice writer and activist. He is the author of “They’re Bankrupting Us — And Twenty Other Myths about Unions.”

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