



RISE ABOVE VIOLENCE WITH KINDNESS

Poet, memoirist, and activist Maya Angelou has forged a life of extraordinary courage.

Today, her message remains as true and timeless as ever.

The autobiography of her youth, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), depicts Maya Angelou's coming-of-age amidst racism and segregation in Arkansas, and rape at the age of eight. Angelou's great theme: finding the strength in one's self to overcome. She worked with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights Movement. Her "Phenomenal Woman" shares her wisdom.

JD **Is there a solution to violence?**

Maya Angelou Have peace in your heart before you go out in the street. Peace begins at home. All virtues and vices begin at home, inside yourself. If you cling to (peace), it will not be easy to bring you to violence. If someone is violent toward you, do your best to get out of the way... Go to some protector. Get some help. And don't let yourself become violent.

JD **What are the dangers of remaining silent about**

"I stand up for any human being, anywhere: male, female, White, Black, Asian, Spanish-speaking, Gay or Straight. I'm an advocate of fair play and generosity, the kindness of kindness."

abuse?

MA I don't think you should be silent about anything that is detrimental to the human being. Speak up. If someone is holding a gun on you, you don't want to start shouting at him or her. If you can, find your way out of that situation, and then, speak out against violence.

If we taught that to children, they would grow up not to accept [violence]. I think corporal punishment, whupping a child, is terrible. Then the child grows up and continues the violence.

JD **How did you find the strength to rise above the violence you experienced?**

MA My grandmother loved me, and my brother loved me, and my mother, later, loved me. I was surrounded by love, a great protection.

JD **How has your experiences with violence inspired your work?**

MA I write against it. I speak against it. I stand up for any human being, anywhere: male, female, White, Black, Asian, Spanish-speaking, Gay or Straight. I'm an advocate of fair play and generosity, the kindness of kindness.

JD **What advice do you have for those are struggling with the emotional effects**

of violence?

MA Learn forgiveness. That doesn't mean condoning a violent act. But understand what a person has come through to do something violent. I take the word 'forgiveness'; I turn it around and give it form. I find a child or family who needs something, and see that the person gets it. I don't let them know I am giving but I say in my prayers "I am giving this for [the person] who has hurt [me]. I release the person and his or her deed by giving something to somebody else whom neither of us knows. I release kindness into the atmosphere."

JD **What message do you have for someone who has victimized others?**

MA Stop it. You are giving birth to an action that will come back to harm you. It already has harmed you. Just because you have the ability to do it, it doesn't mean you have the right to.

I AM... An African Classic