

Dear friends and family,

It is funny the connections the brain makes. In 1994, the Seattle Men's Chorus perform with Maya Angelou. I remember how she would be talking to the audience and suddenly you realized we were reciting poetry. When did she transition from prose to poetry?

Shortly thereafter, the Chorus went to NYC to sing in Carnegie Hall. I almost didn't go. Mom was in hospice. But Mother insisted. "I want to know that my son sang at Carnegie Hall." After the concert, I caught the first flight to El Paso. A few days later, sitting at her bedside, a public service announcement, featuring Maya Angelou, came on the screen. I said, "Mom that is the woman that we performed with two weeks ago." Mom smiled. Two hours later, she breathed her last.

I have been reflecting on Angelou's refrain "Still I Rise." (Scroll down for the poem.)

We all get a mixed bag. But how we respond... is up to us.

Nick faces his dementia with grace. His eyes follow those around him for clues on how to fit in. His social graces are carrying him splendidly. He rises to the occasion.

I aspire to be optimistic. I am buoyed by Thursday's boring MRI's and optimistic outlook by my neurooncologist. She steered me away from immersing myself on the latest studies. "The top studies today will be discarded within months. Let's wait until we have to..."

In the meantime, we concentrate on the glory of the cherry blossoms. The flowering camellias and the forsythia. The verdant leaves on the trees....

So, whatever befalls us, Still We Rise.

Two weeks ago, we trekked down to Albany for Aunt Ruth's funeral. She was 98! Always composed, never a hair out of place. She planned the mass, the music, even wrote her eulogy and obituary. Then we went to Astoria where she was laid to rest. I am sure that she has risen too.

So, as we begin to celebrate Easter, let's focus on the ways we can Still We Rise.

Hugs.

John and Nick

Still I Rise

BY MAYA ANGELOU

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.