

Maya Angelou, residing in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, quietly passed away in her home on May 28, 2014. Angelou was born to Vivian Baxter and Bailey Johnson in St. Louis, Missouri on April 4, 1928. She is survived by her son, daughter-in-law, two grandsons, two great-grandchildren, a nephew, a niece, grandnieces, great-grandnieces, grandnephews, great-grandnephews and many friends.

Throughout her life, she published many autobiographies, the first of which is "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," which brought her international fame. In total, Angelou wrote 34 autobiographies, poetry and essays, many of which were bestsellers and published in several different languages. Difficulties in her early life did not prevent Angelou from becoming an inspiration and pursuing her dreams. She was a dancer, singer, poet, actress, playwright, film director, professor, newspaper editor and activist.

In 1953, Angelou sang and danced to calypso music in The Purple Onion, a nightclub in San Francisco. In 1954 and 1955, she toured around Europe, learning the language of every country she visited, and two years later, she recorded her first album, "Miss Calypso." She performed in several major productions, such as "Porgy and Bess" and "How to Make an American Quilt."

Angelou lived in Africa with her son, Guy Johnson, during the 1960s. She diligently worked for the Arab Observer News Magazine in Cairo, Egypt, and she spent time in Accra, Ghana, where she was an administrator at the University of Ghana.

Accra is also where Angelou met and became close friends with Malcolm X. She returned to the U.S. in 1965 to help build the civil rights organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, but X was assassinated shortly after her return. Angelou was friends with other prominent civil rights activists, such as James Baldwin and Martin Luther King, Jr. Angelou has accomplished feats that most people hope to achieve in a lifetime.

In 1981, after moving back to the southern U.S., she accepted a lifetime Reynolds professorship of American studies at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, as one of the few full-time African American professors. Throughout the 1990s Angelou continued to pursue her creative career while remaining an outspoken activist. Angelou recited her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" at the presidential inauguration of Bill Clinton, the recording of which won a Grammy Award. In 1996, Angelou achieved her dream of directing a feature film, which was titled "Down in the Delta." She also directed the film "Georgia, Georgia." Angelou campaigned for the Democratic Party in the 2008 presidential primaries, giving public support to Hillary Clinton and later giving support to Barack Obama. Later in life, Angelou donated her personal paper and memorabilia, including her handwritten notes for "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," fan mail and personal and professional correspondence from colleagues to the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in 2010. In 2011, she served as a consultant for Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C., and two years later she published her seventh autobiography, "Mom & Me & Mom."

Angelou spent her life fighting for what is right while still showcasing her creativity and love for life. To say she was anything less than a voice of truth and justice would be an understatement.