

A Black Woman's Survival in America

By Loweta Kimball

"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." This is the opening stanza of the poem, "Still I Rise" by Poet Lauriat Maya Angelou.

I recall vividly her eloquent reading of this poem during a women's conference at the University of Denver, some years ago. Complete silence at the end of her reading and not a dry eye in the arena. This regal woman described the price of a Black Woman's survival in America. In her poetry, she speaks of generosity, bitterness, beauty and survival in America. "Does my sassiness upset you? Why are you so gloom? 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells pumping in my living room?"

As a young woman who worked hard for a real pay check, I went shopping one day for new, not second hand, clothes. The store clerk told me I had to pay for the clothes before trying them on and there were no returns. I told my friends of the incident so it was no surprise to see a Going Out of Business sign of the store window a few weeks later.

As a child I recall the excitement town folks had at the announcement of an ice cream parlor coming to our town. A real store. My dad, being the largest fruit grower in the area, was contracted to supply some of the fruit for the store yet black people would not be allowed in the ice cream parlor. That store didn't last the summer. "Do you want to see me broken, bowed head and lowered eyes, shoulders falling down like tear drops weakened by my soulful cries?"

Many times during troublesome events I was advised to stay calm and pray. I got the praying part down. "God, send a miracle." It was the stay calm part that was difficult. Such hatred, anger and bitterness thrown toward other human beings! "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 rise."

Sexual harassment on the job which supervisors ignored. Unfair pay scales which supervisors supported. Painful as a woman and doubly so as a Black woman. What kept me going? Inspirational writers like Maya Angelou kept me going then and keep me going now. "Out of the huts of history's shame, I rise. Up from a past that's rooted in pain, I rise."

I continue to pray for miracles because, "Nothing can dim light that shines from within." This land, called America, was built by and for people like me to, "Bring the gifts our ancestor's gave. I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise. I rise. I rise."