

Standing on the Backs...

I am reminded daily that I stand on the backs of so many women and men who have gifted this earth with their presence, accomplishments, struggles, quest for freedom, and fight for equality. Creative by nature, the arts present the greatest inspirations to me. Grandma Edna inspired me with her love of life and her fierceness and courage to stand for what she wanted. My Grandfather was a great welder, and his creative gifts of sculpture and rock polishing were transferred to me, heart-to-heart and hand-to-hand. My Mother was a great seamstress and tailor, and her love and gift of sewing is entwined in my DNA. She also taught me how to smile through anything, trusting that God would bring me through life's many challenges. Daddy was my favorite, and the inspiration that he gave to me came from his language of survival and his assurance that I could do anything that I set my heart to accomplish.

On my birthday in 1959, a combination of the qualities of these four amazing parents and grandparents, led my Daddy and me to the El Paso Concert Hall to see and hear Marian Anderson! I can remember my small hands wrapped in his as we walked up the steps to the entrance—he in his black formal suit, and me in my fluffy, frilly dress made by Mommy.

Marian Anderson was born in 1897 and one of the most celebrated contralto singers of the twentieth century. Most of her singing career was spent performing in concert and recitals in major music venues throughout the US. Ms. Anderson was a dynamic force in the struggle for black artists to overcome racial prejudice in the US during the mid-twentieth century. As quoted from Wikipedia, “In 1939, the [Daughters of the American Revolution](#) (DAR) refused permission for Anderson to sing to an integrated audience in Constitution Hall. The incident placed Anderson into the spotlight of the international community on a level unusual for a classical musician. With the aid of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and her husband Franklin D. Roosevelt, she performed a critically acclaimed open-air concert on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Anderson sang before a crowd of more than 75,000 people and a radio

audience in the millions. Anderson continued to break barriers for black artists in the United States, becoming the first black person, American or otherwise, to perform at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City on January 7, 1955.”

Among her many honors and achievements, Anderson was a delegate to the United Nations Human Rights Committee for the United States Department of State, participated in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, and sang at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Anderson was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Kennedy Center Honors, the National Medal of arts, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

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