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Remembering Maya Angelou

Remembering Maya Angelou A. Barry Rand, AARP CEO

When I learned of Maya Angelou's passing this morning, I remembered something she once wrote in *Letter to My Daughter*—"Try to be a rainbow in someone else's cloud."

Maya Angelou spent her entire life being a rainbow in someone else's cloud. Through her 31 books, her poetry, her personal appearances and her other writings, she spread her legendary wisdom throughout the world, inspiring everyone who had the good fortune to come into contact with her personality and her work.

A former Poet Laureate of the United States, she was one of the great voices of contemporary literature and a remarkable Renaissance woman. An educator, historian, best-selling author, actress, playwright, civil-rights activist, producer and director, 12 of her books became best-sellers. She was nominated for three Grammy Awards, and she received more than 50 honorary degrees from colleges and universities world-wide. She achieved ultimate recognition in 2010 when President Obama bestowed on her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Maya Angelou was a long-time friend of AARP and of people 50+. She entertained and enlightened audiences at our National Event & Expo for many years as our members listened in on her intimate conversations with luminaries such as Quincy Jones, Norman Lear, Whoopi Goldberg and others. "At 50," she told us, "you become the person you always wanted to be."

In 2010, I had the distinct honor and pleasure of presenting Maya Angelou with the AARP Andrus Award, our association's highest honor. Then 82, her body was frail, but her mind was sharp and her spirit was strong. She was certainly a rainbow in all of our clouds that evening.

Then, when AARP Foundation President, JoAnn Jenkins, asked her to lend her voice to an AARP Foundation video, she didn't hesitate—masterfully and eloquently speaking for and to the nation's most vulnerable and often forgotten older Americans.

Maya Angelou once remarked, "When I try to describe myself to God I say, "Lord, remember me? Black? Female? Six-foot tall? The writer? And I almost always get God's attention."

On this day, Maya Angelou has God's full attention. And though we mourn her passing, we will forever know that she remains a rainbow in all of our clouds.
