

to do 04.2012

Maya Angelou

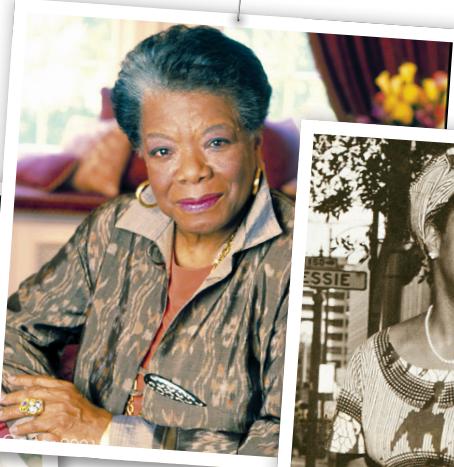
We sat down with this 84-year-old "Phenomenal Woman" to discuss her trip to Auburn this month, winning the Medal of Freedom and her new book.

BY COURTNEY RAE KASPER



When you're invited to speak at high schools across the country and people are asked to 'spend an evening with you,' what is it that you share with them?

I'll probably speak about the necessity of building courage. It's the most important of all the virtues because without it, you can't practice any other virtues consistently. To be kind, true, generous, just and so forth, all the time, you have to have courage. I encourage young people to develop courage in small ways and I encourage older people to have courage and to be able to teach it to young people by showing them the example of courage. No one is born with it. You develop it in your life. If you wanted to pick up a 100-pound weight, you wouldn't go out and pick it up. You develop muscles to do so. You'd pick up a five-pound weight, then a 10 pound, then 20 pound. One way young people can start is by not allowing racial pejoratives of any sort, about anybody to be used in their presence. Just don't allow it.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAYA ANGELOU

ending of religious persecution to have freedoms. I accept it particularly for African Americans, but I also accept it for anybody and everybody in the world who came here hoping for freedom.

We were excited to learn that you're working on a new manuscript. Can you share details with us?

Oh yes. It's called "Me, Mom and Me." It's about my mother and the impact she's had on me. I hope women will read it, and men too, and see the impact they have and could have on their children. I've been working on it for about a year and a half. In fact I'm praying to finish it this month [February]. It will probably be out in winter 2012.

Any words of inspiration that have carried you throughout your career for our readers?

You have to develop a sense that you're worth something; that you're worth the best. And the only way that you can do that is to believe it. The way you believe it is by the actions you take. If the things you do please you, you like yourself for having done this or that. If you do something that you don't like, forgive yourself. Ask forgiveness of the person you might have offended and try not to do that again. If you allow yourself to think that you are worth something, never allow someone to call you the 'b' word, you will not allow anyone to lean on you and press you down. ■



IT'S TIME TO SHOW US YOUR SKILLS.

Inspired by our chat with Dr. Angelou and as a nod to National Poetry Month, we're asking all wannabe bards to pen a poem about a strong woman in your life. The most creative and touching poem will be published in our June 2012 issue and will win a Kindle from the Fayetteville Free Library (see page 14).

May the best prose win, good luck!

Last year, President Obama awarded you with a Presidential Medal of Freedom. What was it like to receive our nation's highest civilian honor?

Thrilling. You can imagine. My people were enslaved and imprisoned with chains around their feet and wrists and I'm here to receive a medal of freedom. I also accept it for the Jews, the Arabs, everybody, the Swiss, anybody who came to this country searching for an

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Auburn Education Foundation's Inspiring Speaker Series, "An Evening With Maya Angelou"

WHEN: 7 p.m., April 25

WHERE: Auburn High School auditorium, 250 Lake Ave., Auburn

HOW: Tickets \$50; Purchase tickets online at www.auburnedfoundation.org, Auburn Downtown Books and Coffee, Auburn and Creekside Books and Coffee, Skaneateles