

:: Dana's Weekly Insight ::

11.05.07 – Cry Freedom



*The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.
Here, on the pulse of this fine day
You may have the courage
To look up and out upon me, the
Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.*

Her use of words is masterful and she speaks of them as things; as power and as creative. Words to her are alive and like the air that we breathe they go into the very fabric of her existence, finally inhabiting her body so that she can live.

I was lost the other day; caught up in a series of appropriate questions and concerns about living in this world and who I will become. Then, in the midst of my subsequent and predictable need for inspiration, I was grateful to have found myself in the middle of a Maya Angelou poem and I listened and obeyed as her words dictated hope:

*The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.*

Maya Angelou is poet and her reverence for words is the access to her genius. Deprived of her willingness to speak at age seven as a result of having been raped by her mother's boyfriend, she remained silent for five long years. Contemplating for five years in silence, the serious consequences of the words we choose to use, clearly contributed to her respect for words and has earned her the right, for as long as she chooses, to talk about the ways that people speak. Contemplating Maya Angelou for just a little while, has re-ignited in me a dissatisfaction with the way that I have, far too often, refused to speak up.

To be able to talk is a gift. To be allowed to speak up is a privilege, to be sure. And, to keep quiet when you have something important to say; when you believe in something from the bottom of your soul, should be counted among those things that cause us great concern and warrant our most serious consideration.

It happened in April 2003, just weeks after being awarded another Grammy that The Dixie Chicks, performing in London, decided to speak up because they had something important to say. Passionate about the stand that they took, they were no doubt driven by their convictions,

fully aware of what the consequences might be, yet willing however, to let the chips fall where they may.

Almost immediately after they spoke up they were met with the intense criticism of a disapproving public. Radio stations stopped playing their songs, sales dropped and their popularity plunged. As a direct result of their willingness to speak up, The Dixie Chicks found themselves paying a very heavy price - demands from the disapproving masses for them to "Shut up and sing", death threats and a lot of second guessing.

Imagine.

Ultimately The Dixie Chicks would go on to recover and regain the favor of their fans as their once unfavorable position started to catch on. Another Grammy was their reward for the song that they wrote to express their unwillingness to back down from the stand that they took. But more than a Grammy, the example that they have become as a result of their refusal to shut up and back down, has inspired a nation, lost and caught up in a series of appropriate questions and concerns about living in this world and who we will become.

There have been many times when I have taken a bold and unpopular stand for what I have believed in, and yet there have been far too many times when I refused to speak up, silenced because I thought it best, at the time, to behave.

And you?

When so much talk in this world is cheap and while people still enjoy the priceless privilege of freedom of speech -

you have the right to remain silent but you also have the opportunity to talk about something that really matters!

You are inarguably entitled to keep your convictions all to yourself, but, when keeping quiet comes as a direct response to the fear of retribution and our "rights" and "entitlements" undermine the possibility that we might become who we really are, can we authentically claim to be free?

There is definitely something to be said for quiet contemplation, especially when we pause to consider the consequences of the words that we choose to use, but when we allow ourselves to be silenced because we believe that to behave is to be left alone, and to be left alone is to be allowed to keep on getting by, we lose a little bit of our precious humanity, and humanity loses out on the contribution that will only be as a result of our courage and as a product of our sacrifice.

Words will inspire and words will also provoke with the power to create and the ability to destroy; to give life to something or to cancel out its very existence. Maya Angelou speaks in shades of wisdom and people listen because her choice of words and her arrangement of thought invite the consideration of what could be. The Dixie Chicks spoke up and earned the right to challenge a lost world to ask the questions and express the concerns; to pick words responsibly and with full

acceptance of the consequences unforeseen.

Allowing others to hear the words that we have yet to say, the words that long to linger in our collective consciousness, graciously responds to that horizon that so generously offers itself up as the space for change

- with the hope of a better day.

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