



A child's talent to endure stems from her ignorance of alternatives.

Everything of value takes work, particularly relationships. If a mother and daughter don't understand each other, and further don't have sympathy for each other's lack of understanding then the task is to build a bridge across the chasm of misunderstanding.

Home is the nest where children are raised and the place where they are the most important inhabitants. In homes in which this is not true, the parents are not making the sacrifices which are necessary.

I believe that one can never leave home. I believe that one carries the shadows, the dreams, the fears and dragons of home under one's skin, at the extreme corners of one's eyes, and possibly in the gristle of the earlobe.

I love my son and I loved him when he was growing up, but I was not in love with him which means that I did not dote and I was willing to make the hard decisions. One should never let the love of one's child prevent or hinder the vital and necessary work of parenting.

If our children are to approve of themselves, they must see that we approve of ourselves.


Independence is a heady draft, and if you drink it in your youth it can have the same effect on the brain as young wine.

It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength. We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter their color; equal in importance no matter their texture.

Of all the needs (there are none imaginary) a lonely child has, the one that must be satisfied, if there is going to be hope and a hope of wholeness, is the unshaking need for an unshakable God.

Parents who tell their offspring that sex is an act performed only for procreation do everyone a serious disservice.

The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.



Our young must be taught that
racial peculiarities do exist,
but that beneath the skin,
beyond the differing features,
and into the true heart of being,
fundamentally, we are more alike,
my friend, than we are unlike.

The Black child must learn early to allow laughter to fill his mouth or the million small cruelties he encounters will congeal and clog his throat.

The command to grow up at once was more bearable than the faceless horror of wavering purpose, which was youth.

This is no longer my house, it is my home. And because it is my home, I have not only found myself healed of the pain of a broken love affair, but discovered that when something I have written does not turn out as I had hoped, I am not hurt so badly. I find that my physical ailments, which are a part of growing older, do not depress me so deeply. I find that I am quicker to laugh and much quicker to forgive.

What child can resist a mother who laughs freely and often?

When I was young I often wondered how I appeared to people around me, but I never thought to see myself in relation to the entire world.



BLACK IDENTITY





Although as Black people we had a dignity and a love of life, those qualities had to be defended constantly.

Although there was always generosity in the Negro neighborhood, it was indulged on pain of sacrifice. Whatever was given by Black people to other Blacks was most probably needed as desperately by the donor as by the receiver. A fact which made the giving or receiving a rich exchange.

Black Americans of my generation didn't look kindly on public mournings except during or immediately after funerals. We were expected by others and by ourselves to lighten the burden by smiling, to deflect possible new assaults by laughter. Hadn't it worked for us for centuries? Hadn't it?

Black entertainers have had to be ten times better than anyone else, historically.

Black women whose ancestors were brought to the United States beginning in 1619 have lived through conditions of cruelties so horrible, so bizarre, the women had to reinvent themselves. They had to find safety and sanctity inside themselves or they would not have been able to tolerate such torture. They had to learn quickly to be self-forgiving, for often their exterior actions were at odds with their interior beliefs.

Despite the harshness of their lives, I have always found that older Black women are paragons of generosity. The right plea, arranged the right way, the apt implication, persuade the hungriest Black woman into sharing her last biscuit.

How could I explain a young Black boy to a grown man who had been born White?

I do not believe the N word should be used at all . . . It is time to retire the N word and rely on our vocabulary to speak to people without calling them any racial pejorative at all.

I don't go for that hate talk. Negroes ain't got time to be hating anybody. We got to get together.

I was born to work up to my grave


But I was not born

To be a slave.

I, with millions of other Americans, have the same dream Martin Luther King Jr. had; when I wake up I wish some of the things I dreamt would be true. I wish that little Black and White boys and girls would hold hands without being shocked at their nearness to each other and say in a natural way, "We have overcome."

It was a traditional ruse that was used to shield the Black vulnerability; we laughed to keep from crying.

Malcolm X was America's Molotov cocktail, thrown upon the White hope that all Black Americans would follow the nonviolent tenets of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Prejudice is a burden
which confuses the past,
threatens the future,
and renders the present
inaccessible.

Most Black Americans ridicule and revile the Uncle Toms they see on film and television or read about. What they don't realize is that these people stepped and fetched in a nation and time that it was hard for Black people to survive, much less find a decent job. Rarely is consideration given to the sacrifices these people made in order to feed their families, what it cost them in self-respect to make sure the next generation survived. It is these circumstances that make Mr. Paul Dunbar's poem, "We Wear the Mask," so poignant.

My people had used music to soothe slavery's torment or to propitiate God, or to describe the sweetness of love and the distress of lovelessness, but I knew no race could sing and dance its way to freedom.

Since we were descendants of African slaves torn from the land, we reasoned we wouldn't have to earn the right to return, yet we wouldn't be so arrogant as to take anything for granted.

The Africans say that "Only a fool points to his history with his left hand." What this means is that you must know and respect where you came from. How can you truly respect yourself if you do not know or understand the struggles and trials your people surmounted for you to be here?



The drums began. The audience pounded out the rhythm, moving it, controlling and possessing the music, the orchestra, and me.

“Uh, uh, oh huh.
O yea, freedom,
Uh huh. Uh huh.”

As the song ended, the small crowd thundered a hot appreciation. Even as I bowed, I knew the applause was only in a small part for me. I had been merely the ignition which set off their fire. It was our history, our painful passage and uneven present, that burned luminously in the dark theater.

*The man who is a bigot
is the worst thing God has got.*

Through the centuries of despair and dislocation, we had been creative, because we faced down death by daring to hope.

Unbidden would come the painful reminder—
“Not all slaves were stolen, nor were all slave dealers European.”

Unfortunately, fortitude was not like the color of my skin, given to me once and mine forever. It needed to be resurrected each morning and exercised painstakingly. It also had to be fed with at least a few triumphs.

We are not our brother’s keeper; we are our brother and we are our sister. We must look past complexion and see community.

We must ask questions and find answers that will help us to avoid dissolving into the merciless maw of history.

Whites had been wrong all along. Black and brown skin did not herald debasement and a divinely created inferiority. We were capable of controlling our cities, our selves, and our lives with elegance and success. Whites were not needed to explain the working of the world, nor the mysteries of the mind.

