

Essay

# Dear Ancestors

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**Abstract:** This poem explores intergenerational wounding and healing from the perspective of a descendant of the African diaspora and of people affected by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Inspired by intergenerational transmission discourse, the author reflects on the original and inherited injuries of the mass trauma of enslavement and initiates a transtemporal communication of empathy and healing with her ancestors.

**Keywords:** intergenerational healing; historical trauma; African American

Dear Ancestors,

In my silent thoughts, I hear the distant wailing of your cries.  
In my body, I feel the burden of your tears.  
I, too, would never have wanted to be ripped away from home.

Although centuries have gone,  
Our spirits still harmonize in hurt.  
We nurture our babies with those same wounds.

As the legacy of that pain persists  
It often feels as though our souls have died.

Sometimes I wish I could have bottled the antidote for that kind of agony,  
Secretly sent the cure back in time over those Atlantic Shores  
So that my momma would not have inherited the remnants of that anguish,  
And none of us kids would have had to watch this cycle of terror with our own eyes.

Better yet,  
I wish I could have intercepted the original blows;  
Made duds of every weapon of subjugation violently launched by our oppressors  
So that toxic venom wouldn't be embedded in the DNA of their successors  
Who to this day ensure  
That in addition to carrying your pain in my blood,  
I also know the direct sting of my own.

Apparently I can't depend on them to cease firing  
So You felt like my only hope.

To be honest,  
I really did try to start with begging Mama.  
I pleaded with her to care for her injuries,  
To bandage those wounds that grandad left in her body memory

But her eyes just seem to keep telling me  
That she can't do



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What she don't know.

Grandma's eyes had the same testimony.

So, I came here.

Originally because  
I needed YOU to know  
So SHE could do  
So I can make sure  
That THEY don't get dragged onto the field to fight my battles  
When they are facing a war of their own.

But on the way  
I found a stack of your narratives  
I must have rummaged through volumes of your words  
Trying to find the blueprint to bring back to show mama and 'em

Instead,  
In those pages  
I find evidence of how hard you fought to protect us  
How you persevered under conditions I could not have imagined to endure.

Because of that,  
WE survived.

Because of that,  
I hate the fact that I even had to come back here  
Desperately pleading for even more bravery than you have already shown.

So I borrowed your prayers for my trip home.

When I called out to God with this dilemma  
She reminded me that your story is far more than the transfer of pain,  
And, that this,  
This is just my leg of the journey.

When you found out that they were en route to destroy your body,  
You planted these seeds way deep inside of me

My mission  
Is the realization of your faith.

This desire for healing  
Has roots  
That are directly connected  
to your heart.  
And Mama's too.

Now that I understand  
I had to stop back by  
To leave gratitude on this altar  
For YOUR fire

I will honor it.

I will embody it.

I will pass it on.

With Love,

Your Great Great Granddaughter

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