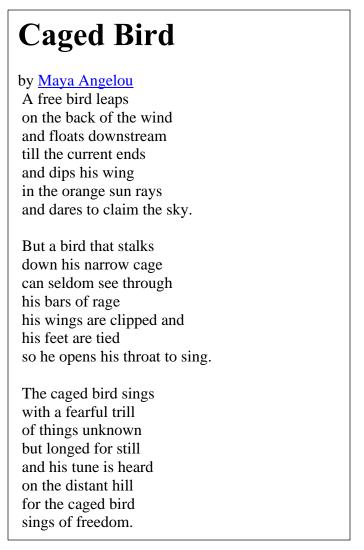
I really did have a parakeet named Charlie and he was not very nice, but his crimes were limited to repeatedly screeching at me and my father and biting my fingers whenever I added water to or cleaned his cage.

He was the only nasty bird I ever had. His polar opposite was a great and friendly parakeet that my sister raised. His name was Tiny Tim. Charlie was mostly blue and TT was mostly green. I'm not sure that affected their moods. TT used to land on my finger and fake-box with me. He loved landing on my shoulder and showing me bird emotions.

The irony came in the final time I saw each of them: Charlie flew out an open kitchen window (mistake?) and Tiny Tim flew out our front door in my sister's marine housing when a sudden gust of wind blew the screen door open. (It should have been closed with a hook.) That was a tragedy.

I salute Maya Agelou's "Caged Bird" --- even though I understand her extended metaphor very well and agree with the strongly expressed sentiment absolutely



The free bird thinks of another breeze and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream his wings are clipped and his feet are tied so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom.