

Messages from the Mound



In 2007, I began my prison ministry where I facilitated my Relationship First Aid spiritual based personal development classes at Mound Correctional Facility in Detroit. After Mound closed in 2012, I continued to communicate with the inmates through newsletters, birthday cards and attending/speaking at events at various facilities. It is suspected that the facility got its name because of the many ancient mounds that were found all over Detroit, and I believe the most concentrated and/largest ones were along what is now known as Mound Rd.

"Messages from the Mound" is named after the newsletters that I send out to the inmates since that is where we all initially met. Because the classes that I was teaching them focused on spiritual elevation allowing the negativity within them to die, thus ultimately elevating their consciousness, I thought it an appropriate name because a "mound" is defined as: an "elevation" formed of earth overlying ruins, a grave etc., a heap or raised mass. The following articles are from men that are currently incarcerated or released and this serves as an opportunity for the voiceless to have a voice. If you have a loved one that is currently incarcerated and would like for me to send them newsletters, please forward their contact information with a MDOC number to: Relationshipfirstaid@yahoo.com or contact me at: Relationship First Aid, Attn: Ma'at Seba, P.O. Box 1934, Belleville, MI. 48112

Raymond Carr



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Interview with Raymond Carr

By Ma'at Seba
SUN COLUMNIST

"Message From the Mound" is dedicated to the voiceless and it gives a rare opportunity to give the incarcerated a voice. In my prison ministry for over 20 years (with about 100 men in Michigan and Missouri facilities), I have had the honor to meet numerous men who are talented, brilliant, and have hopes and aspirations to give back to society. I felt it was important to showcase them as a person and not as an inmate, as well as giving society a glimpse of some of the men and the positive changes that they have made during their incarceration. The men being interviewed have been contributing writers to the Detroit Native Sun Newspaper, who has so graciously dedicated a whole page to their articles. This interview is with Raymond Carr.

Enjoy!, Ma'at Seba

BACKGROUND AND PRE-INCARCERATION LIFE

Q. Can you share a little about your life before incarceration?

A. At 8 years old, I was molested by an older cousin. I witnessed years of my parents' Domestic Violence. Then, at 10 years old, my parents divorced. I didn't know how to process or express how I felt about these events, so I began to cry out for help, but these cries were misunderstood as 'I was just being bad'. During this time, I was placed in Special Education and diagnosed as Learning Disability & Dyslexia.

Q. What was your upbringing like?

A. My parents' divorce was a nasty one, where I was caught in the middle as a casualty of war. I lost my mother to Anger. My mother was really strict on me, I felt she didn't love me. Then, my mother married my father's high school rival who made my life hell. I lost my father to Substance Abuse. It was hard for me to deal with my friends and people in the neighborhood knowing my father was on drugs. I felt alone and abandoned. I became angry with my parents and in my genius thinking, I called myself getting back at them by misbehaving, but I only hurt myself.

Q. What led to your involvement with the criminal justice system?

A. At the age of 15, I decided I wanted to be a big drug dealer like Tony Montana in the movie Scarface; but I acted like I didn't see the end of the movie. Then in 1992, I ate some dumb-cookies and had a brain-fart, which led me to the worst decision I've ever made. Which was to pick up a gun to victimize fellow citizens, for the purpose of robbing them, but robbing them of more than their material possessions, which I'm ashamed and embarrassed of.

Q. Did you have any prior experience with the justice system before your incarceration?

A. Yes, shoplifting; assault & battery; curfew violation; and skipping school.

INCARCERATION EXPERIENCE

Q. How did you initially adjust to life in prison?

A. I learned to fake it, until I made it.

Q. What were some of the most challenging aspects?

A. One of the hardest things to do is to maintain healthy relationships with people on the outside.

Q. How did you cope with isolation and the loss of freedom during your time in prison?

A. In the beginning it was substance abuse, then I began to do the work to repair myself and rest on the hope for a better day.

Q. What was the relationship like with fellow inmates and the correctional staff?

A. I treat people how I want to be treated, for the most part I got along with everyone.

Q. Were there any personal moments of growth or realization that you had during your time incarcerated?

A. Like the Prodigal Son, I came to my senses and realized who I was and who I belonged to. And I began to transform my thinking.

REFLECTIONS ON THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND REFORM

Q. How do you feel about the criminal justice system today, based on your experiences?

A. My experience over the last 32 plus years is this system has depended on the 'lock them up and throw away the key' as the run-away solution.

Q. Do you think the current system does enough to rehabilitate inmates?

A. No

Q. What changes would you advocate for?

A. Make classes available for everyone when they enter the system.

Q. What advice would you give to someone who is about to be released or is currently incarcerated, looking to turn their life around?

A. Forgive yourself, those who hurt you, let go of the past, and keep moving towards your goals. Your goals need your intention, not your distractions.

REHABILITATION AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Q. Did you take part in any educational programs, vocational training or therapy while in prison?

A. GED; TPC Training System - Bloodborne Pathogens & Blood Spill Clean; Landscaping Maintenance; Custodial Maintenance Technology, Victim Awareness, Chance For Life program: A member and facilitator of Communication Skills - Parenting & Mentoring Skills - Substance Abuse Awareness, Grief and Grieving, and Mediation Skills Training, Leadership Development, Facilitating CFL Tier 1 Classes

Cage Your R Rage, Emotions Anonymous, Creative Writing Class, Substance Abuse Education Program, Empowerment: Inmates With Children, Personal Enrichment & Parole Readiness, Tree Of Love Prison Ministry/Youth Deterrent Training, Legal Assistant: Job Opportunities in the Legal Field 12, Parenting From Prison Family And Parenting Lifestyle Program.

YOUR GOALS

Q. What are some of your personal goals?

A. * Regain my physical freedom and began the journey of productive citizenship.

* I plan to get married and establish a loving family.

* I plan to embark on a career as a motivational Speaker, establishing a platform to deliver the message of peace and hope that raises above conditions of hopelessness and strife.

* Establish an organization and collaborate with existing organizations that work towards Justice Reform.

* I will volunteer with Bishop Mbiyu Chui, helping at-risk children/teenagers. The mission is to help our youth avoid the perils of bad decision making, decrease violence and prevent incarceration.

* I will volunteer with Karen Duffie, in the effects of healing, understanding and answers for victims of crime.

YOUR SUCCESSES

Q. How do you define success, and how do you see yourself achieving in going forward?

A. Success is accomplishing my plans and goals. I see myself executing the vision I worked so hard on while I was incarcerated, and failure is not an option.

Q. What have your achievements been during your incarceration?

A. I have developed a new belief and value system which has equipped myself with the tools necessary to live as a citizen in our communities. I have discovered the art of writing and am a featured writer for the Detroit Native Sun Newspaper, under the "Messages From the Mound - Prison Ministry" page which dedicates a whole page to the incarcerated and the 5 books that I have published. My biggest achievement is that I changed my stinking thinking to a Critical Thinker.

Q. Would you like to share a closing thought?

A. Prison is where society sends its failures. However, society is where prison sends its success stories!

PERSONAL GROWTH AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Q. How would you describe the changes you've made in yourself since your time in prison?

A. I found the real me trying to be someone I wasn't.

Q. What are your goals and aspirations for the future?

A. Regain my physical freedom and begin the journey of productive citizenship. Get married and establish a loving family. I plan to continue in the career path as a writer, as a published author, I have published five books: "The Power of Love; The Quarterback Handbook; Things Ministers Should Think About, When Ministering Behind Prison Walls", "Mass Incarceration: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly" and "400 Years Of Hands Up, The Rise To Black Power" (available on Amazon.com) (available on Amazon.com) I plan to embark on a career as a Motivational Speaker and establish an organization that deters gun violence. I will volunteer helping at-risk children, I will also volunteer with victims of crime.

Q. Is there anything you wish the public knew or understood better about former inmates and the challenges of reintegration?

A. Perpetual punishment does not make us better as a society, once a person pays their debt to society, they should be allowed to be a productive citizen.

Michigan roughly releases 10,000 prisoners annually and a large number of Returning Citizens are doing the right thing.

Q. What message would you have for people who may be judgmental or skeptical about someone who has been incarcerated?

A. They are not the worst decision they made, people can and do change. We all are one decision away from possibly falling, so treat others like you want to be treated.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Q. If you could change one thing about your past, what would it be and why?

A. It would be that unfortunate night when I took a man's life. I do not want to be the source of someone's pain nor the reason someone's loved one is no longer here.

Q. What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with life circumstances similar to yours?

A. The roads of life may have many bends and turns, but if you find yourself at a fork in the road or on the wrong road of life, know that you can make a U-turn and turn your life around. I wished I would have listened to the wealth of guidance that I abandoned, and I didn't allow an abnormal culture and negative behavior to take root. I hope that you make the decision to get the vital information to help you make good choices, so that you know you have healthy options with confidence to reach your Destiny safely.

And remember, People who have nothing to lose may live reckless, but People who have something to lose protect it. I also wish it didn't take me going to prison to get my life back on track.