

# 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

## Real change is made in silence (part )

By Alvin C. Hill IV, MBA  
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

In January of 2003, less than three months after my 18th birthday, I found myself sitting in the Oakland County Jail (OCJ), facing 20 to life, confused about what to do and not able to trust anyone I was in contact with. This was not my first run-in with the law. I'd caught my first juvenile case at just eleven and had spent the better part of that time in and out of juvenile facilities, foster homes, boys' homes, and family members' homes. I had never felt like those seven years were the worst years of my life, but I didn't want the next whatever to be the end of the story, so I vowed to fight for the best deal I could get.

I went into the situation cocky and unaware of how green I was. I had always found my way to the top of the food chain, no matter where I was. I didn't consider how much time some of the older men had spent and how much they'd picked up along the way. I had played spades with my family growing up and became pretty good at it in juvenile, but once I sat down with the big homies, I consistently lost everything my family sent and whatever else I could hustle up on. It was becoming embarrassing, and I was starting to feel like a sucka.

About four months into my county time, I found myself in the hole for "Citing a Riot". What really happened was, I asked the guard a question, he cursed me out, and I wrote a grievance. The next day, he told me to pack my s---t because I was going to the hole. The guys in my cell refused to leave when asked, but I told them to let me handle my business. I walked out to physical abuse, curses, and handcuffs, but I eventually ended up in the hole.

I only spent 30 days in the hole, but those were the best 30 days I'd spent in OCJ up to that point. I had gone from the streets to the holding tank to a ten-man cell and had yet to find the peace and quiet I found in the hole. I was able to get my hands on some books, and I actually took the time to sit down to read something. I was introduced to the classic urban novels, like Donald Goines, Iceberg Slim, and Claude Brown. I had never read a book from cover to cover in my life, but in those 30 days, I read probably four or five books.

Something shifted in that concrete box. Without the constant noise and posturing, I found space to think. For the first time since I was eleven, I wasn't performing for anyone. Those books were mirrors. In every character, I saw pieces of myself. In every bad decision on those pages, I recognized my own choices. But I was reading their endings while I still had time to write a different one for myself.

When I got out of the hole, I didn't announce my transformation. I just started moving differently—choosing my battles more carefully, observing more and reacting less. I started reading everything I could get my hands on and paying attention to the older guys who moved quietly, who had genuine respect rather than fear.

When I got my deal, I was sentenced to prison. I spent close to nine years locked up, continuing the work I'd started in that hole. I read voraciously, took every program, mentored younger inmates, and built a reputation as someone who had his head on straight.

By the time I walked out, I had earned respect from both inmates and staff. I had recommendations, certificates, and a clear plan. People saw a transformation. I believed I had done the work, put in the time, and now the world owed me something.

That belief became the crack in my foundation.

I came home with expectations. Job applications went nowhere the moment they saw my felony record. Apartments wouldn't rent to me. People who promised support faded away. The world didn't care about my transformation. It only saw my past.

I got bitter. Real bitter, real fast. What was it all for if nobody was going to give me a chance? I'd paid my debt, hadn't I? That entitlement was poison, but I couldn't see it. So, I went back to what I knew. Not because I wanted to, but because I felt like I didn't have a choice. The streets welcomed me back with open arms.

I told myself it was temporary. Just until I got on my feet. But those "just until's" stacked up, and before I knew it, I was right back in the life I swore I'd left behind. Except now I was older, supposedly wiser, and carrying the weight of knowing better. You can't unknow what you've learned. You move through the streets with a constant nagging feeling that you're capable of more. But I pushed that feeling down and blamed everyone except the person I saw in the mirror.

Looking back now, I can see what I couldn't see then: nobody owed me anything. The universe doesn't operate on cosmic debt. Real change isn't made in nine years of prison programs. That's preparation. Real change is made in the silence of your choices when you come home and face reality—when you let go of entitlement and embrace starting over from the bottom.

But here's what saved me, what's kept me grounded for over twenty years since I first went into that hole: I learned how to go back. Not to jail, but back to that space of silence and solitude. I learned how to create my own "hole" as a free man.

When the world gets loud—and it always gets loud—I know how to silence it. When disappointment hits, when I feel that old bitterness creeping back, I go back into my hole. Not a physical one, but a mental and spiritual one. A space where I can check myself and realign with who I'm trying to be.

This isn't about running away. It's about creating intentional space to think clearly when everything around you is chaos. The hole isn't punishment anymore. It's medicine. I've learned to recognize when I need to go there—when I'm reacting instead of responding, when I'm moving out of ego instead of purpose.

Some people meditate. Some pray. Some go to therapy. I go back to the hole. I shut out the noise—social media, opinions, expectations—and in that silence, I find clarity. In that solitude, I find strength.

This practice has been the key to maintaining dignity and respect for over two decades. Not the respect that comes from reputation or fear, but the kind that comes from being solid and consistent. The kind people can feel even if they can't articulate why.

You can't maintain dignity in the noise. You can't build real respect when you're constantly performing or reacting to every provocation. Dignity comes from knowing who you are when nobody's watching. Respect comes from being that same person whether you're in the hole or on top of the world.

The world will always try to pull you out of yourself. Success brings noise. Failure brings louder noise. But the ability to step back, to get silent, to return to that space where it's just you and your truth—that's power. That's what's kept me from going back to prison, physically or mentally, for over twenty years.

I teach this to young dudes who remind me of myself. When they're caught up in drama, reacting to everything, I tell them about the hole. Not as a scary place, but as a necessary place where real growth happens. A place you can create anywhere, anytime, if you're willing to get quiet and do the work.

Some get it. Some don't. The ones who do, they change. They become more measured, more intentional, more grounded. They learn what I learned: that the hole isn't punishment—it's preparation.

That eighteen-year-old kid in Oakland County Jail didn't know how the story would end. He thought transformation was the ending. He didn't realize it was just the beginning. The real test wouldn't be in prison—it would be on the outside, when nobody was watching, when resentment was easy and humility was hard.

But that kid learned something in those thirty days that would serve him for life: silence is where transformation happens. Not the forced silence of incarceration, but the chosen silence of someone who understands that you can't hear yourself think when the world is screaming.

Real change is made in silence. It's made when you feel like the world owes you something and you choose to show up anyway. It's made when you swallow your pride and do honest work. It's made when you let go of bitterness and embrace gratitude for another chance.

I had to learn that lesson twice. Once in a cell at eighteen, and again years later when I realized all the work I'd done inside didn't matter if I wasn't willing to honor it outside. And sometimes, you have to fail at change before you really understand what it means.

The hole taught me that. And the ability to return to that space as a free man whenever I need it has been the difference between surviving and thriving, between getting by and building something meaningful.

Over 20 years since I first went into that hole, I still go back regularly. Not because I'm locked up, but because I choose to lock out the noise. Not because I'm being punished, but because I'm preparing myself. Not because I have to, but because I understand that maintaining dignity and respect isn't about what you do when everyone's watching—it's about who you become when you're alone with yourself in the silence.

That's the lesson. That's the practice. That's what's kept me solid for over two decades.

Real change is made in silence. And the wisdom is knowing when to return to that silence, again and again, for as long as you're trying to become more than you were yesterday.

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