

# Messages from the Mound



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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

## Shorthanded

By Raymond Carr  
SPECIAL TO THE SUN



At once upon a time, employment within the MDOC was highly sought after. However, after eliminating the pension and reducing benefits for new employees the job became less attractive for many.

The Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) is 1,000 officers short and are losing about 1,000 a year to retirement and other departures.

The President of the Michigan Corrections Organization, Byron Osborn solution for the

staff shortage, is to ask Gov. Gretchen Whitmer for the National Guard to provide immediate custody support. This solution would only be a temporary fix, only putting the MDOC in a deeper hole.

In the letter to the Governor Byron Osborn said, "They are still being forced to work exhausting, demoralizing numbers of mandatory 16-hour overtime shifts per week. They are not allowed to have a normal, healthy life with their families. None of your other state employees are being subjected to these conditions."

Osborn said in the letter to the Governor, that there is a significant gang problem in the prisons and violent incidents are worsening due to policy changes that have resulted in reduced use of solitary confinement. Osborn also said, "It's just a matter of time before someone gets seriously hurt or killed."

Osborn and other MDOC staff are use Fear Mongering tactics, to get what they want. It is easy to target those incarcerated as the worse of the worse or as bogeymen to accomplish ones agenda. The truth of the matter is Michigan's prison population is one of the mild mannered populations in the country.

For the most part those incarcerated within the MDOC, have not been problematic. How else do you explain the MDOC being understaffed and there are not any riots or major disruption by prisoners?

In fact, prisoners within the MDOC have used great restraint in the face of being taunted to respond negatively to justify Osborn asking for the National Guards assistance. Prisoners are mistreated by staff, given poor health care, served poor quality of food or not enough food, activities are delayed or cancelled such as: school, classes needed for release/parole, yard, gym, when there is enough staff to run them.

Michigan has about 33,000 prisoners in 26 prisons, this population can be safely reduced by releasing prisoners who do not pose a threat to the public safety through the Second Look Bill if passed, to close prisons so that the MDOC could consolidate its workforce eliminating the staff shortage.

When making the decision to do something different, you can't defend old practices nor can you expect a different result by doing the same thing over again, that would be insanity.

## You are the CEO of your life

By Toby R. Davis aka Naeem Nusaga  
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Imagine your life as a motion picture; except it's in the production phase and not yet ready to be viewed on the big screen. But you are indeed the sole 'Chief Executive Officer' of your life movie therefore you have the reserved right and authorization to edit the scenes in the movie how you see fit. So begin now by exercising your power in the director's chair. Remember: You control the narrative, the plot, and storyline. There may be some scenes you may need to delete, revise, or simply rearrange by changing up the scenery or the characters in it. You may even feel the need to holler "Cut!" or "Take 5!" just so you can reassess the footage you already have to make sure it conveys the right positive message and shot at the perfect angle. You may also want to fine tune your camera lens to make sure it is picture perfect.

Without a doubt this is the biggest film you'll ever produce in your life! So use this time to take pride and ownership of it. Take it all in. Be grateful for this opportunity and for your life. Slow down, and bask in the moment. Reflect. Dare to dream outside the box (or block), reminding yourself that the best scenes are yet to come. Be careful who you allow to be a part of it. Consider it sacred. Take the time to meticulously select each scene and carefully vet each character before offering a role. Look for quality

of style, grace, integrity, showmanship, potentiality, star performance and sheer drive to contribute meaningful content to your featured film.

A line of actors are auditioning all around you right now, mostly as your family members, friends, associates, coworkers, and a plethora of others known as "fill-ins" - which are the ones you really have to be watchful of. A fill-in could be an understudy; or simply someone to fill in a certain part in the movie. They're not really all that talented and will require a lot of practice, therefore, they should only be used if necessary.

As the quality of your film will be determined by the quality of performance given by each actor on the grand stage of your life. Keep in mind that not everyone is worthy of a role in it and business is never personal. So take the time to streamline your film and write poignant parts that others can relate to, because no movie is guaranteed a sequel.

As the executive director, you call the shots and ultimately decide who will get the leading role and who will be part of the cast based solely on your subjective observation. Control your set and lead by example, exhibiting professionalism at all times and make adjustments when necessary. Because this isn't just the movie of your life, but also the chance of your life. Don't allow your movie to be a low budget film when it has the potential to be a blockbuster!

Lights! Camera! Action!

## The debt we owe

By Taj Muhammad Ali El  
SPECIAL TO THE SUN

When you hear the word investment what comes to mind? One directing time, resources, money into something? The most powerful investment we can ever make is to invest in another human being.

At some point during my incarceration, I came to realize that my family members and friends were making huge sacrifices for me on several levels at the same time. As I came to understand the depth of love that was being exercised by my family members and friends I was extremely humbled and in awe, I still remain so till this day. It was at this time that I came to understand that I owe a huge debt.

Of course, I owe those who invested in me, yet the one I owe the most to is myself. I owe it to myself to be the best version of myself that I can possibly be no excuses. In doing so I feel that I can start to repay some of the debt that I owe to my loved ones.

While being held on various plantations across the state of Michigan my family and friends would make time to travel across the state to visit me, the many collect phone calls I placed to them would always be accepted and words of strength and upliftment would be administered to my soul, money would be sent to me so that I

could purchase the things I needed from the prison store and catalog, mail would be sent to me letting me know that although I was gone for a moment I was never forgotten. My family and friends saved my life, when I had no more left to give they gave of themselves to ensure that I could carry on. They never gave up, so therefore I could not give up. Do you see it now? What my loved ones were doing was investing in me, riding in those cars for hours across this state (investment), sending me their hard-earned money (investment), accepting calls (investment), Secure Packs (investment), attorney fees (investment), etc. (investment)!

All of those sacrifices came out of love and knowledge of this is what I needed from them at this time, and without it I could not make it, I would not make it. So today many of my decisions are shaped in the mold of me knowing that I owe a huge debt to myself and to my loved ones due to the sacrifices that were made for me to even be here and have another chance at life, without that level of love and support there is no doubt that I would not have made it or I would have made it out yet I would be a very different sort of person today. Understand that you owe as well, for sure to yourself, and to others that have been there for you. God knows your heart. Stand on your square at all times!

## We can never give up

By Justin Bennett  
SPECIAL TO THE SUN



I have been in prison now for 13 years. I am a first time offender of a violent crime. I was imprisoned at 22 years and now at 36, I am praying for a second chance to see my kids on the other side of these gates.

I do not want to spend the rest of my life in prison. For the last 13 years I have been doing everything in my power to right my wrongs. I have obtained my GED, written a book (called "Thoughts From a Prisoner" available on Amazon), gained my paralegal degree, and learned a trade. But more importantly, I'm a facilitator who teaches many classes: criminal thinking, relationships, reactions and overall thinking errors.

I also teach younger and older inmates about traumatic circumstances and how to avoid them. There are many good people locked down in prison due to mistakes made under the influence of drugs or alcohol but it seems no matter how much these men and women rehabilitate themselves the system refuses to give them a second chance. Prison is designed for punishment for the crime that you committed. On the flip side, it is

made to correct which it is why they call this place a correctional center. A prisoner who is serving life without parole but has subsequently been rehabilitated has shown sufficient remorse and remain committed to continually improving, should one day be given a second chance. No person is the worst thing that they ever did. Pursing change without the opportunity of a second chance, can cause a person to lose hope and ultimately give up. I always motivate guys in here to have faith.

The substance of faith is a thing hoped for but not yet seen. If we hold on, freedom can be ours, just as it was for those before us who fought decades for their freedom. So ultimately, we can never give up. We must continue to hold on to our commitment to ourselves and for the communities that we've negatively impacted. Our families and communities hope that one day we would change our criminal ways, and now that we have rehabilitated ourselves, all we can do is call upon society to not give up hope on us. Even those like me serving life without parole are worthy of a second chance.

With this said, I hope that you will call upon legislators, parole officers and state governors to help change some of our legislation and use their state of power to give hope of a possible second chance to those, like me, who have changed and strive every day to do better. Until then my friend I encourage each and every one of us to keep hope alive. I implore you to remain hopeful in what seems like a hopeless situation.



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