

## DETROIT

## NATIVE SUN

#00-75-08

By Ma'at Seba  
SUN COLUMNIST

away parts of my life in those boxes, would he have been a little more compassionate towards that "garbage"?

After I moved, I finally took the time to go through and consolidate boxes full of papers. I ran across old accounts, photos, my children's report cards, awards, marriage license, divorce papers, old mortgage papers, bills and obituaries. Magazine articles, news clippings, letters from friends and old loves, birthday and Mothers Day cards, class transcripts from courses that I'd forgotten that I had even taken, journals, hospital records, poetry, certificates and event programs.

As I sat there going through my history, I realized how much I had already done and gone through in my life. But I also realized how much I had not yet experienced and I didn't know if I ever would. I re-lived old pains, joys, regrets, guilt, anger, accomplishments and pride. I began to realize that I had regretted not continuing to play the piano, dancing, drawing and experiencing a myriad of other pleasures because I was stuck on this roller coaster of life that I had created. "Created" in the sense that I began to dishonor myself by losing sight of who I was and was aspiring to be. And, I was becoming what society had molded me to be, a working machine (which happens when there is no consistent vehicle of self-expression, creativity or a channel for pinned-up energy).

By the time I finished consolidating, all the important papers that I kept were now in one box. My life, my history, was now in one box! Just then my sister called, and I told her jokingly and hurtfully that I had just fit my life into one box. She said, "Well, look at it this way, you got rid of the things that you don't need anymore, and kept the things that you do need. Now you have room for something new!". She did have a point. I was so busy dwelling on the past (what I could have done, should have done, and wishing that I hadn't done), that I should have been using that same energy to manifest what I do want to do, can do and will do.

Nowadays, most people live and function in survival mode everyday. They go to work, come home, take care of the children, pay the bills, and fall out dead tired at night and start the cycle all over again the next day. Once you get on that roller coaster of life, it doesn't stop until you stop it. How much of your time is spent on fun or doing some of the things that you "used to do", or reflecting on what you have done in your life, or the things that you still want to do in your life? I acknowledged that since I created this roller coaster in my life, I would have to put the breaks on and stop it, because only I could.

Many times people have expressed to me that their life is so hectic that they can't take any time off, or that there is no room in their schedule for anything else. They rationalize to themselves that "one day" they will be able to do it, but not right now. I used to think that same way until one day there was a family crisis. I instantly had to rearrange my schedule to accommodate the crisis. The crisis moved to the top of my priority list, however, I still had to work, my children still had to be picked up from school, dinner still had to be made and the bills still had to be

paid. But, a way was made to do all those things because they had to be done. There were still only 24 hours in my day, now with more things to do within those hours, but I made a way.

It occurred to me that my whole schedule had completely changed because I had made something a priority. It also occurred to me that I was not even on my own priority list; so, I had to make myself a priority to me. I found the time (and money) for concerts, movies, as well as regular time for prayer, meditation and sitting quietly by the river. My schedule instantly changed when my priorities and more importantly, my mindset changed. I soon realized that the new life that I had created would only be temporary and I would end right back on that old roller coaster if I did not have a life's plan.

I then sat down and began to recreate my life's plan, which now placed me on my own priority list. I still am not playing the piano, dancing or drawing as yet, but I have finished my first book, I'm teaching, I have a product line and I have a lot more time to spend joyfully and peacefully with family, friends, my beloved, myself and God.

Life is what you make out of it, and everyday you "get to" rewrite your life's script if you choose to. If you do not like how your life is going and are having problems, remember that "Every problem has a solution", but you have to invest the time and energy into finding the solution. You might rid yourself of some things or add some things into your life, but only you can change your life and make it into what you want it to be.

From time to time I run across that one box of my history neatly stored away, as I place new boxes beside it. One day I will have to go through those boxes too, some things I'll keep, and some things I'll set out on the curb for garbage truck #00-75-08.

Ask yourself these questions?

1. Are you on your own priority list in life? If not, why not?
2. How much time do you spend on the things that you enjoy?
3. Are there things that you used to do, which brought you enjoyment but you do not do them anymore?
4. If so, why have you stopped doing them, and will you begin to do them again?
5. Are there things that you still aspire to do in your life (i.e. further your education, travel, change careers etc.)?
6. Are you still planning to do them? If not, why not?
7. Has your life become like a roller coaster that never stops?
8. If so, what adjustments can you make to allow you more free or personal time in your life?
9. Do you feel that you can not find the time (or money) to do some of the things that you enjoy? Why/ why not?
10. If you re-wrote your life's plan, what types of things or people would it include? Why?
11. What types of things or people would you have to add or remove in your life? Why?
12. What types of things are you sacrificing in your life by not honoring yourself (i.e. your health, relationships etc.)?
13. Do you feel that you have lost a sense of who you are or who you want to be? Why?
14. Where do you see yourself 5 years from now? 10 yrs.? 20 yrs.?

Ma'at Seba is the founder and facilitator of RELATIONSHIP FIRST AID, a program which uses spiritual principles as the tools to identify and resolve the causes of unhealthy, toxic or stressful relationships, whether it is with your mate, children, friends, co-workers as well as yourself. Ma'at can be reached for speaking engagements, classes or lectures at: [Relationshipfirstaid@yahoo.com](mailto:Relationshipfirstaid@yahoo.com) or [Maatseba@gmail.com](mailto:Maatseba@gmail.com)



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Her requests were denied; but little did she know that she would face another conflict at home.

Wounded from a Humvee accident combined with severe reactions to immunizations required to serve overseas, Busch was medically discharged from duty shortly before reaching her 3 year anniversary.

"I was literally at pre-deployment on my way to deploy as an individual attaché (alone with a unit that I had never trained with), when I received my first ever MRI," she explained. "I was instructed that I would not be allowed to deploy as I could possibly put my fellow soldiers in jeopardy if I fell, stumbled, or couldn't pick up a fallen comrade that was on my 24th birthday. I had started having problems after a service wide change in physical training curriculums for Army soldiers, severe allergic reactions to some of our immunizations needed to go overseas and a Humvee accident used in our training for 'deployment settings'. I had never experienced falling for no reason, not being able to stand and walk, losing my words, incredible pain in my head, and forgetting how to add and where I put things. I was an athlete, dancer, weight lifter and was used to sprains, bruising, pulled muscles and tired body, but not this. I joined the Army as a weight lifting, dancing, running, jumping, and healthy woman. I did not enter with any medical waivers or allergies, without heart, lung, vision, bone, muscle or speech and vision issues."

Busch's health further deteriorated, limiting her activity.

"Being in your duty station it is frowned upon to have a profile that limits what you can do exercise wise," Busch said. "It is expected of you to put on your big girl pants, don't complain, drink water, take ibuprofen, and strap in your bootlaces. I can still remember the day something went pop, and I couldn't move, walk up to my barracks room, dress myself and even (experienced) the embarrassment of losing control of my bladder."

During her active Duty, Busch underwent several medical treatments that included removing her reproductive organs and having brain surgery.

Just as painful as her ailments were the remarks she received from civilians and military personnel.

"I was devastated that I could not go on my deployment and still receive negative stigma from civilians, even other service members and some veterans for not really being their personal version of what a 'real' veteran is. I am doing my part and working with other women veterans to help foster a positive correlation between your identity as a woman veteran and as a civilian and break the stigmas associated with those negative thought patterns."

A return to civilian life has not healed Busch's injuries but has enhanced it. She has been denied medical treatment at the VA Hospital and has to fight for military benefits. As a result, this has led to her experiencing homelessness and fighting for custody of her children.

Busch is not alone on the battlefield.

According to statistics released by the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, "for any veteran with dependent children, being identified as homeless creates a threat and fear of youth protective services assessing the situation as dangerous and removing the children from their parent."

Women currently make up 8% of the total veteran population and 14.6% of the active duty military, increasing to an estimated 16% by 2035. The number of homeless women veterans has doubled from 1,380 in FY 2006 to 3,328 in FY 2010.

Monique Gardner, who served in the Army for 7 years and in the Persian Gulf War, is also fighting for veteran rights. Upon return to civilian life, she encountered new challenges.

"Once I arrived home, my mother and sister kept saying that I was not the same and that I acted different. I ignored them and moved far away," Gardner said. "After getting home, I did recognize that I had a problem with authority figures and listening to others and my attitude was bad. I was like a ticking time bomb. Years later and two husbands later, I am currently married and he began to tell me that I needed to get some type of assistance. He was almost my 3<sup>rd</sup> divorced husband."

Gardner thought that things were getting better when she was "offered an opportunity of a lifetime."

"I was offered a position making \$98,000. I thought that I had struck gold. They had only spoken to me on the phone," Gardner said. "They had never seen me face to face. My husband and I decided to relocate to Murfreesboro TN and I accepted the position. After arriving we found us a place, and it was time for me to report to work. When I got there, I was excited. When I arrived I looked upstairs on the landing and saw two Caucasians standing and talking. I sat for 30 minutes, and then finally a young lady came down and called my name and said that the position had been filled. I was crushed. I was the wrong color."

The disappointment led to Gardner abusing pain pills and constant bickering with her mate.

"I was so confused. We came back to Detroit with nothing. We lost our furniture and all of my belongings that had been sold in a storage unit that we could not afford to pay. My life took a spiral. When we came back to Detroit, we slept in the car for 1 year. There were times when we ate only two pieces of chicken on Tuesday at Church's Chicken. My husband ate the thigh, and I ate the leg. We drove a BMW that I could no longer afford, so you know that the finance company was looking for it and insurance was thing of the past. We had family, but I certainly wasn't asking anyone for help. My husband stuck it out with me and got some odd jobs, so we could get a room and take a bath. Most of the time, we would pull in at an abandoned home. He said, 'baby you need to go to the VA', and I said for what. I have done my time. They don't owe me anything. He said they will help you and I say no way."

Like Busch, Gardner had to fight to receive benefits rightfully owed to her. It became a 2-year battle, before Gardner received help.

Unlike male veterans, there are very few shelters and programs offered to their female counterparts.

"The playing field is unlevelled, when it comes to female veterans," Alexis Derriso, of the Motown Women Veteran Association, said. "Male veterans are given housing and medical benefits. Females have to fight for it. There is only one shelter near Detroit servicing female veterans, and they just opened. That's why I'm fighting hard for female veterans."

To help win the war against homelessness, greater awareness and resources are needed. Also, some may have to deprogram from the military's belief that asking for help is a sign of weakness.

"Address the mental issues. Don't just push them to the side, as they will never go away without assistance. Ask for help," Gardner urges. "We veterans are very prideful. Put the pride aside and ask for help. We need people. I know that we were taught a lot of things in the military but we have to ask for help. We need each other."