

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

"Wisdom Guides Decision Making"

By Savante Johnson
SPECIAL TO THE SUN



I once heard a judge say before sentencing, "Criminals are stupid! In fact, it is that same stupidity that is responsible for the very lapses of judgment that factors into your decision to commit a crime in the first place."

I disagree with his assertion that "criminals are stupid". First of all, this judge probably doesn't know anything about "real criminals" because most of the people that show up in his courtroom have failed in their endeavors to commit crimes. They got caught. Therefore, they are not cut out to be criminals. Most of them are poor and can't afford lawyers. I make no

excuses. We all have to answer for our bad choices. However, we are held accountable in a system that is rigged against the poor and the ignorant. The laws in this country are written in such a way that only lawyers and the well-educated can understand them. Yet those same laws are being applied to and used against the common folks.

In this culture of corruption in both the political and corporate worlds it is not difficult to see who the real criminals are. These people are definitely not stupid. They have longevity, they make a lot more money and they can afford the best lawyers. They occupy positions of public trust and they betray that trust. They are the real criminals. Though I disagree with the first part of the judge's statement, I do, however, understand the main point. Ignorance can lead to poor decision making. What you don't know can hurt you.

Your choices in life is only as good as your knowledge. Knowledge informs our decisions. Wisdom guides our decisions. There is a proverb that says "Wisdom is the principal thing". Why is it the principal thing? Wisdom provides the judgment needed in decision making. Decisions determines circumstances. Decisions determines success, health, and wealth. Sometimes when people say "God is in control" it takes the responsibility for decision making away from the individual and places it on something outside of yourself. If the Creator wanted to control everything why do we need teachers? Why prosecute lawbreakers? If God controlled every situation then no one should be punished for wrongdoing because God made it happen.

The truth of the matter is that God is within us. Therefore the power is in us. This includes the power of decision making. If decisions got you in a mess then decisions will get you out of it. More next, time God willing.

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 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 so graciously dedicated a whole page to their articles. This interview is with Joseph Green.

Can you share a little about your life before incarceration? I was arrested when I was 21 years old. I was a college student at WCCC for nursing as I worked a full-time job. As well as helping my grandmother and mother with things around their homes. I was living on my own for the first time away from the area in which I spent most of my life. My life was surrounded by drugs and violence.

What was your upbringing like? My upbringing was rough being direct. Ever since I can remember I have been around drugs and violence growing up. My uncle was a major drug dealer and founder of the 50boyz. Which birthed the Black Mafia Family. My mother kept a shield around us and didn't allow us to see too much of that lifestyle. My mother battled drug addiction for most of my life while raising 3 young boys. Our fathers were not present however we did know them and saw them on occasions. My mother began to change her life around by first getting and staying clean. Moving us back to her beginnings, my grandmother's home. She made me the man of the house and taught me how to grocery shop, get money orders to pay bills, to cook for my younger brother, to clean cloths and how to survive as an adult.

Did you have any prior experience with the justice system before your incarceration? Yes, In high school I got into an altercation that lead to me being charged with felonious assault for a fight. And another situation in which I was driving in a car that had a gun inside and I was the only adult in the car. I was given HYDA (Holmes Youthful Deterrent Act) probation for that offense.

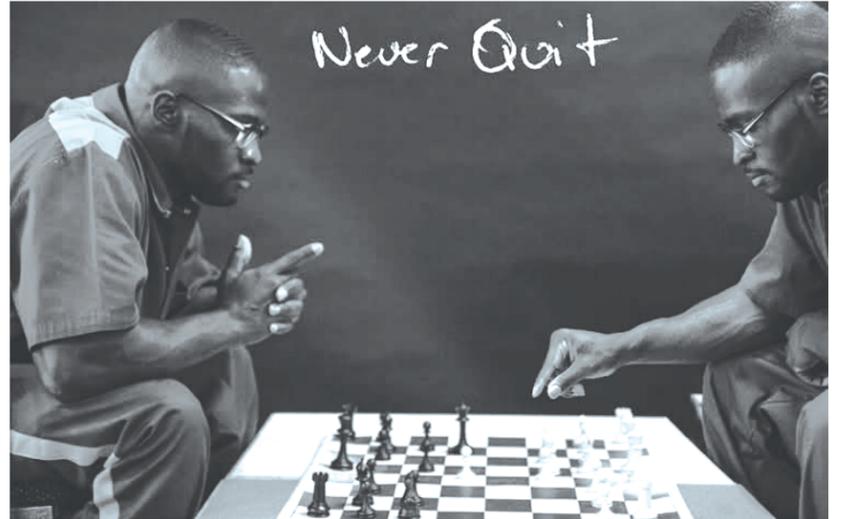
How did you initially adjust to life in prison? I spent 556 days in the county jail fighting the charges against me. By the time I was convicted my mental state was already prepared for the unknown/known because I interacted with men coming and going to prison on a daily. The biggest adjustment I had was the 23 hour lock down and open 10-man showers. And the fact that you hear people talking ALL day. I mean literally there was never a moment of pure silence.

What were some of the most challenging aspects? Some of the most challenging aspects were the unwritten rules on how to conduct yourself as a prisoner. It was very challenging to do the right thing when you had to establish yourself as being a man who can hold his own. You are placed in an environment that preys on the weak and ignorant.

Were there any personal moments of growth or realization that you had during your time incarcerated? Yes, I have had many, many moments of growth and realization. A moment of growth was when I encountered a situation that forced me to think as a man. That realization that my choices affect so many others. A great realization moment would be the essence of GOD being manifested in me. Understanding that my thoughts intertwined with my words and cultivated by faith will manifest. I manifested my exoneration with faith.

Did you take part in any educational programs, vocational training or therapy while in prison? Yes, Prison through my lenses became my university. I addressed my mental health. I signed up for any and all classes that I knew would aid in my evolution and growth. I became a mentor to young man who were sentenced under the HYDA and a program called (G.O.A.L.S) at Thumb Correctional Facility. I have trained 6 leader dogs with the P.A.W.S program, geared at helping those in the community with disabilities. I have attended numerous PCAP classes.

Interview with Joseph Green



How did they affect your outlook on life? In a very positive way. I was a nurse before I came to prison, so I had a natural desire to help others. It took me a while to garner the confidence to walk in my godship. I know the power of words and how they can change lives. My outlook on life became no matter where I am I must be active in giving back.

How do you feel society views former inmates? I feel that society views former inmates as determined and outgoing people with very optimistic views on life. Intelligent and persistence is a common quality.

What advice would you give to someone who is about to be released or is currently incarcerated looking to turn their life around? For the individual about to be released, my advice would be to become a student. Be open-minded about alternative ways to get money. Keep your creative and out of the box thinking. Be patient with the change and most of all stay optimistic. Trust your plans and your abilities. For the man currently incarcerated my advice would be to know who you want to be and what it takes to get there. Submerge yourself in self-awareness. Stop living your life based on others' expectations. Man is here to prove and bear witness to the truth however he can only prove God by bringing something out of nothing.

How would you describe the changes you've made in yourself since your time in prison? Astro-nomical is how I would describe my change. I wasn't a bad person or a menace to society. I lacked a lot of knowledge that could have aided in my success. I'm forever grateful for this journey and experience. It has led me to be a public speaker and mentor to the youth. I've been given a divine task to tell my story knowing that my words will aspire and encourage others. I'm a leader amongst other leaders striving to change the world one person at a time.

Is there anything you wish the public knew or understood better about former inmates and the challenges of reintegration? Embrace and support our new found ambitions. Stop projecting your fear on us. Allow us to make mistakes and learn from them. We have reentered society with a new perspective. We have planned and thought about every possible outcome to our ideas. Support us and encourage us to strive to make a difference. Encourage our desire to be great members of society. Give us an opportunity.

What message would you have for people who may be judgmental or skeptical about someone who has been incarcerated? My message is don't be judgmental or skeptical. We all make mistakes in life but I don't allow it to define me for the rest of my life. Be the best example of the people you wish to encounter.

If you could change one thing about your past, what would it be and why? I would change the information I was given and taught. Because I now know that if I was given the proper information about finances, education, housing etc. I would have made different choices in life that would have changed the trajectory of my life.

What advice would you give to someone who is struggling with life circumstances similar to yours before incarceration? Prioritize your love and loyalty. Put yourself first and live for you. You have the ability to create the life you desire if you garner the right mindset. Know that your mindset is crucial to your success. Know that you are what you say you are. 'I Am' should be your motto!

How do you define success and how do you see yourself achieving it going forward? I define success as a consistent attainment of achievements leading to a never-ending goal. Going forward I see myself reaching and obtaining every desired goal I set for myself. I want to help others and bring hope to everyone I encounter.

People Can Help Me By Going To:
GIVESENDGO.COM/EXONERATEJOEGREEN



Office: (313)964-2525
Fax no. (248)438-6724

Cell: (248)672-2303

Kathy Lynn Henry
Attorney and Counselor at Law
P-41314

Law Office of Smith & Henry, PLLC
615 Griswold Street, Suite 925 • Detroit, MI 48226
Email: AttnyKathy@aol.com