

To The Alliance,

I am overwhelmed with emotions. The civil unrest in our America touches me; my community (prison), my neighborhood, and our children now than ever need their stewards to guide them. They, the children, need us to make sense of all this. At least to the best of our ability.

Lately, I've been thinking of a story that a friend of mine once told to the men here at Pelican Bay. She too was an Alliance member. The story was of the "Bullhorn Elephants" in Africa. If you will humor me, I'd like to provide a little context:

A herd of elephants needed to be moved to another location. They moved the female elephants baby elephants by helicopter. But the big bullhorn elephants could not be transported in the same way. Without the male elephants in their lives it was discovered that those baby elephants were acting in unusual ways. They were killing rhinos. Because of this they moved all the elephants back with those bullhorn elephants and upon seeing this new mischievous behavior those bullhorn elephants kicked the baby elephants around and essentially taught them how to conduct oneself.

(Victoria Pratt)

The Judge, my friend and teacher, reminded us that we (The Mavericks) were the bullhorn elephants of this society. She told us that our youth needs us and the knowledge we possess. We needed to get home.

As a "natural born hustler" and incarcerated person who is learning entrepreneurship principles, I've diagnosed a problem, but how do I fix it? How can I as a growing man who has the experience of feeling the way the world feels today help our children cope with their anxiety and pain and fear? All while not being present the way Judge Pratt suggested.

I think we must embrace the awkward. It's time to have these discussions with our youth. They look to us for answers. We must provide it even if those answers is none at all. I think it's a beautiful thing to look our kids in their eyes and admitting we do not have the answers. You do not have to be "black" to contribute. You do not have to fully understand. I just ask that you take the time to explain – from the BEST of you – what they see on TV. We cannot allow them to assume or think it is NOT their issue. This is their America. They will have to deal with it.

For those of you who do not have kids, I ask that you be brave enough to indulge in conversations amongst yourselves. Silence does not help. Ignoring it does not help. Know that the Mavs who has inspired me, should inspire you to care – about them, about yourself and our world.

This (attached) is a personal letter I wrote for my son. He is 13 years old. After discussing the state of our country with a few of the Blacks in my section – one of them being Joyful Jermaine – and telling them that I can no longer wait to approach this discussion with my son, it inspired them to speak with their kids/nephews and nieces and those they are close to.

To me, this conversation may save the life of my child. To others, it will provide them an outlet – I want to be intentional, to tell my son that I too feel all sort of emotions. That is ok to feel confused and scared or just full of anger. I offered them the only thing I knew how to do – I told them to breathe. I gave them a part of me, my voice, my ear, my love.

I hope you will do the same. I hope the letter attached inspires you to be courageous, too. It's sloppy. It's raw. But it's truth. Don't hide from it.

Love, K

My son. What is life for you right now? It is full of mystery and wonder and hurt. I want you to know that all of that is ok. Are you angry? So am I. Are you scared? I want you to know that it is ok to be scared. I have just turned 32 and I'm more scared than ever. Son? Son, look at me, son. It is that very place, the place where fear and uncertainty is, that valor is formed. Do not run from injustice; run towards it. It can only survive in the depths of darkness; shine your light on it.

It would make me so happy to know that you can live a life unharmed. What parent would not want that? Unfortunately, that is not your reality. So I won't promise that you will not feel pain or get hurt. I will promise you that I feel your pain and hurt with you. I promise you that I will fall and fail and stumble, all for you to witness. I will do it so you can see and learn how to get back up. For life is not about wins, mostly life is about failures and the journey it took to get there. The triumph is the result of all those things. I promise that when you fail I will not help you back up – although I want to – I will not rob you of that opportunity to be resilient. I will be there waiting for you, however. That's the greatest gift I can dream.

I'm breathing now. When you are out and about with your friends, know that you are still in the hood and that's a worry I face that's more dangerous than prison itself. Your friends are Black. Cambodians are not exempt. In our city, we get the same treatment. If you get pulled over – DON'T reach for your phone, don't argue with the police – I want you to breathe. If you are anything like me you are both intelligent and passionate. Just breathe. That breath you take, cherish it, THAT is life. Your inhale, your exhale – ALL life. Life to fight another day. Live for the day when I will get to you.

I can't tell you that your life will ever return to "normal." Look what's going on. In 2020 alone with the coronavirus and THIS. I promise you this change will take some time to get used to but sometimes it's good. Sometimes it hurts; sometimes it hurts us, but we grow because of it. This, too, is ok. Hey, son, I want you to know that your voice is valuable. YOU matter, and despite the banners saying "Black Lives Matter," you and I know that systemic racism and systemic prejudice has no preference on who it affects like the coronavirus. You, your people, us, Cambodians are NOT invisible. Last year, my friend was killed by the cops. The year before that, another died in the same way. One was Laos. The other Cambodian. Their lives mattered, too.

It's ok to feel unheard, confused, misunderstood. That's how I feel. I sympathize and empathize. I also feel mad because our voices are not heard. It's ok. It's about collective actions. No matter the banner, no matter what the chants are, we fight for peace, we fight for justice. What you are seeing I your world around you is people, us, fighting for our right to breathe.

I'll conclude with this, son. Breathe and have compassion. Compassion works like ointment to the troubled soul. Not all police officers are racist. Some are just stupid. Some are just as scared as you and I (and they should not be permitted to possess weapons). Do not prejudge them. We see too much of that already. Prejudice will not fix prejudice. It permeates like cancer. Show them compassion. Some of them do not hate us. Some of them do. Superiority complexes happen. I'm sorry, son. I know all

you want to be is a kid, but circumstances force us all to grow. It might be absurd for a child to show an adult this, but adulthood is not the mark of intelligence and it may just take radical LOVE – in the face of fear and adversity – to remind people of their capability to show and have some compassion. That’s your potential. Reach it. Know that your place is with the stars, casting your light to the world.

I love you, son