Good Morning My Brother

Edward Earl Bell
“I can feel it; I am the world greatest. I’m the star in the sky; a little bit of hope; my back against the wall, but I made it. I’ve been changed; I won’t go back to the way it used to be. I won’t go back.”

Greetings to each of you, and thanks to Mr. Richard Hinton for making this all possible.

A special thank you Dr. Turner for the welcoming letter and to Dr. Doutova for facilitating the necessary arrangements for my being here; special thanks to the graduation committee.

In many ways, I am home. Home, I mean, I spent some time teaching at Craven Correctional Institution via the Craven Community College, teaching inmates, Assertiveness Training; former social work for delinquent youth; group home direct for troubled youth; and with two degrees in Criminal Justice; now, I am at Polk Correctional Institution, and I am glad to be here with, graduates, family, staff, and friends. I am glad to be here.

To the Graduates: On this June 18, 2015, on this Thursday, I stand and you sit to offer words of celebration, praise to you, for your achievement, as a 2015 graduate.

You have done your work; you are a 2015 graduate. Working is honorable; it produces achievement! Today, you have done that!

Most important, I must offer words of determination and direction. If not, I would violate my scared responsibility, which is to fulfill the role of Harriet Tubman. I come here to free you, from the shackles of hopelessness and lead you in a direction of hope, with my lived experiences and realizing that: In the words of Terence, a Roman slave: I am a man; I consider nothing that is human alien to me. I am familiar with you as a human; all humanity is human---as a human being! You see, I am your brother! I must free your thinking, so that you, too, can soar and achieve, regardless of your current state, freedom is possible! You must travel as did Harriet, with the will to be free, to achieve and to grow.

Education is your freedom; education, a key to a changing world! But, you must do your work! You have begun your work---as demonstrated here today. There is more work to do.

In the words of James Russell Lowell

No man is born into the world whose work is not born with him. There is always work,
And tools to work withal, for those who will;
And blessed are the callous hands of toil.

As I look at you, the graduates, I see possibilities and hope. Hope lives because I see you and you see me. Possibilities are possible only when you realize your opportunities, which have been brought and paid for. No matter what got you in this place, doesn’t have to become your life’s reality.

Remember, mistakes don’t have to be your destiny; change your thoughts; and your actions beg for self-respect and pride; realizing that you are the hope and the dreams of so many; you are my hope.

I hope for your best; understand that chances give hope for the dawning of a new day; in the words of late Dr. Maya Angelou: Here, on the pulse of this new day, June 18, 2015, You have the courage to look up and out and into your eyes, into the eyes of others, into your soul, reaching down into the core of your being, understanding the road that you traveled; And say simply, Very simply, With hope and determination, Good morning.

Today, is your good morning; morning gives hope; morning gives another opportunity; morning gives us a chance to think with clarity, to reason with understanding, and to begin fresh! This is your morning.

I love to tell stories; storytelling is an oral tradition. Often, a story can teach a lesson or make a point. I shall do both; here is one of my stories: A young boy spent about 10 years living in the housing projects. Both parents weren’t high school graduates. The little boy was slightly above “average” student; he was on free and reduced lunch while in school; he wasn’t perfect; he was mischievous, talkative, and verbally challenging.

The little boy realized that he needed a “good morning.” As you heard, through the introduction, I was that little boy. I graduated in 1981 from high school--that was a good morning--- when I received my AAS in criminal justice, in 1984, that was a good morning---- when I received my BA in criminal justice in 1985, that was a good morning. I received my Master’s in counseling in 1995---that was a good morning; when I received my doctorate degree in education educational leadership, in 2009 that was a good morning. When I was named Tar Heel of the Week in 1994, by the News and Observer, that was a good morning; when I received the Nancy Susan Reynolds Award by the Z Smith Reynolds Foundation, in 1993, with a 25,000 prize, that was indeed a good morning. You, too, can have good mornings.

Education, Key to a Changing World! It is necessary and required. Dream beyond your current situation; be awakened to life opportunities; learn from experiences; sit among dreamers; prepare for peace and self-respect; honor the commitment to those who have paved the way for you; and beyond this place can be your good mornings! Let go of the shame, the guilt, let it go! Have a spirit of forgiveness; don’t allow anyone to live rent free in your mind---let it go!
Remember, the world doesn’t owe you, you owe it! Frederick Douglas reminds us that knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave. I say, education makes a man worthy of hire and respect.


Another story. Lived Experience. “Uncle Earl, that’s me.” “I want to move to Raleigh.” I said, “For what.” “To get to a job.” “I said, to do what?” “Something”. I said.” “What skills do you have?” Do you have a high school diploma or a GED?” He replied, “NO!” Education is necessary—a changing world.

I share these stories to impart to you the seriousness of Education; perhaps, not a wall of degrees, but going beyond this educational achievement to more education is the key to your success. I couldn’t stand here today, without an education and the opportunities it has provided me.

You were built to achieve; it is up to you to build and construct your life full of productivity and positive contributions to mankind. I ask you: How do you want to live? What do you want to do? How do you get there?

You might be scared and bruised, with opened wounds; may have been lied on and despised, talked about and cheated---and you may have done the same; move beyond the shame and the pain; but the blessing of wounds, is that a wound can heal! With healing, comes another chance: take another chance on life; take another chance for a good morning! I do understand your plight; I may not have lived it. I made mistakes. But, the mistakes didn’t make me.

Forgive yourself, for allowing myself, to be fool beyond understanding.

Realize today and beyond that there are good mornings for you; understand your past choices—don’t not have to be tied to your future destination. Beyond this place, lies another opportunity; embrace it carefully and nurture it with thanksgiving; be thankful you can have another chance.

Forgive myself, for allowing myself, to be fool beyond understanding. Let it go!
Dear Brother,

Life is hard, that I understand. Things may not have turned out as they should. I get that.

Trouble came your way, and you when with it.

You can’t change the past---but you can look for a brighter future.

While I don’t understand your actions or your ways, you really need to change them.

As I write you, I think about historical struggles. I think about overcoming odds. I think about friends who didn’t take advantage of the gains that were won. I think about those who are looking for the quick buck; those fast talkers trying to beat the system.

I often remind them that they can’t beat the system; it was designed to beat those who dared to beat it. I think about seeing guys on the street, just looking hopeless----I talk to some—and some have a spirit of being broken, families turned from them, and school being unfriendly. Some even take about, difficulties finding work----some even talked about not knowing how to be a man. Some want a better life, but have lost hope.

I think about, those who drop out of school. I think about mass incarceration. I think about those who were made to survive and thrive, but didn’t. I think about hopelessness---and despair. I feel you! Understand you----but can’t appreciate your path.

But, today, I think more about you! I think about your good mornings to come. I think about your possibilities beyond this place. You have the ability to succeed. You are better than incarceration. You weren’t made for it; you allowed it to happen. But, with good mornings to come, you can do what others said you couldn’t.

You must focus and see deep inside of your soul, that you are worthy; you are capable----and you have the tools to build a productive and successful life. Life is hard----yes. Every morning that I get up, it’s a boxing Day. I don’t mind the box, for I am prepared for the match.

But you must forgive yourself, for allowing yourself to be hurt. Forgive yourself----and move towards a life devoid of incarceration, but a life full of freedom and determination. You weren’t built for incarceration. You were built to overcome. In face of disappointments, in face of biases, in the face of hurts or pass experiences, discrimination, and being picked on; you can make it. But, must forgive yourself----for allowing yourself to be hurt. Forgive yourself.
“I can feel it; I am the world greatest. I’m the star in the sky; a little bit of hope; my back against the wall, but I made it. I’ve been changed; I won’t go back to the way it used to be. I won’t go back. I won’t!”

In the words of the late Dr. Maya Angelou, I would take nothing for my journey now! For your journey, take your experiences and be shaped and transformed into a new person; with new thoughts, new friends, and new ways---and say very simply----in the words and voice of Maya Angelou----Good morning---My Brother!