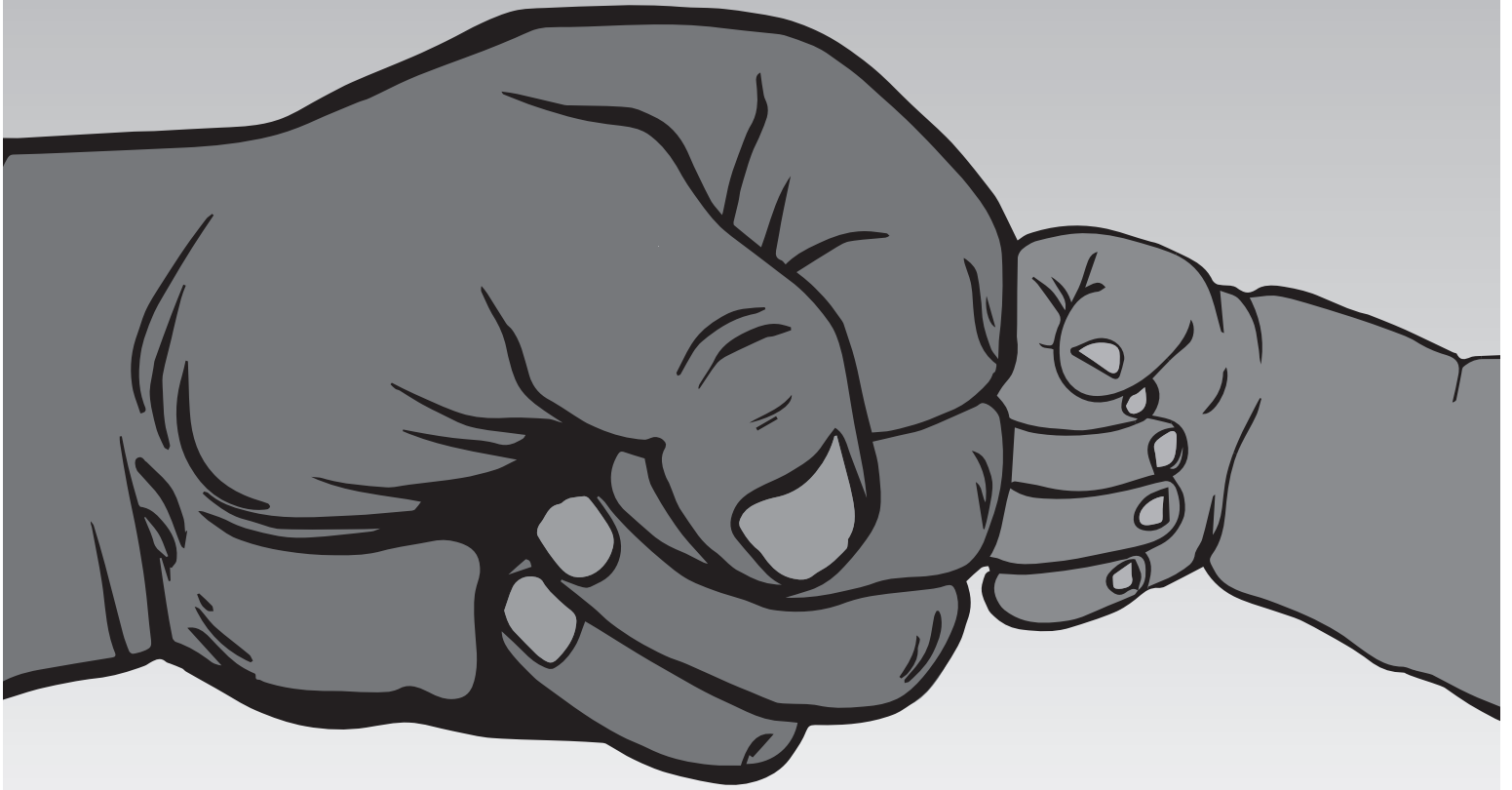


September/October 2018
Vol. 7, Issue 5

Free minds Connect



PARENTHOOD

**FATHER SHOWS LOVE
FOR HIS DAUGHTER ONE
LETTER AT A TIME**

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Free Minds Connect

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We are ALWAYS looking for new contributors. Write or draw something for our next issue and send it to us! (Pieces not published in the *Connect* may appear on our Writing Blog and at a Write Night Event!)

Please write us when you are transferred so we have your up-to-date address as soon as possible!

Free Minds Book Club
1816 12th St. NW
Washington, DC 20009
(202) 758-0829

Next Issue's Theme:
Journeys

TALK BACK WITH TARA

Happy Fall, Free Minds Nurturers,

As I write this in a coffee shop in Columbia Heights, I'm hearing on the radio a lot of tips from safety and weather experts on how to prepare for Hurricane Florence (hoping all FM members in the storm's path are safe ♥). This makes me wonder why there isn't more official preparation on parenting. I mean after all we have to take tests to get a driver's license and take on other major responsibilities in life.

Well, once again our sharing and caring FM circle of support comes through as this issue of Parenthood is filled with wise and uplifting stories that will speak to you both as a parent and as a child of parents. It's a perfect follow-up from our last issue on healthy communication because the two go hand-in-hand like chicken and mumbo sauce. Mmm...



Chicken and Mumbo Sauce

The stories inside this issue will soften your heart and inspire you as we hear from Free Minds Member Donte who met his long lost father who was literally right next to him in the same unit of the same prison facility. It's a story of expansive love that will lift your soul. Writing was the bond that allowed Michelle, a good friend of Free Minds, to feel the strong support and love of her father even though he was thousands of miles away serving a life sentence.

Our own Tia shares the challenges and joys of co-parenting with an incarcerated partner. FM member David is making his family proud as he gives us a glimpse into the life of a barista – the job he landed the week he got home.

The poems you all sent are a true gift. I find myself reading them over and over to find insight and comfort. My own journey around parenthood is one of grief and acceptance as for many reasons (divorce, finances, home size) I wasn't able to give birth to, adopt, or foster my own children. It was hard because when I was growing up I internalized outside messaging that womanhood equaled motherhood. When it didn't work out, I had to grieve and find a new identity. I have now found peace around it and great joy with all the children whose lives I get to be a part of (nieces, nephews, friends' children, beautiful FM Members' babies), but I've had to overcome a lot of feeling left out of a society that doesn't often include childless women in an understanding way.

It's been a deep lesson in learning that love truly is boundless and we can all be nurturers in many ways. This issue will confirm what we've known all along – parenting is not just about being physically together but showing interest, love and support, which break through all bars!

Until next time
Tara

*May the long time sun shine upon you
All love surround you
And the pure light within guide your way on*

FREE MINDS HQ

All the latest updates on what's going on at the Free Minds office

By Melissa

Moved to a new home

We moved our office from Dupont Circle to the U Street area! We're off to new experiences at the historic building that we now call home, the Thurgood Marshall Center (named after Thurgood Marshall, the first African American Supreme Court Justice). Don't forget to send all your mail to our new address: **Free Minds Book Club, 1816 12th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009.**

Tomodachi DC – Japan Youth Exchange Program

This is our second year hosting an On the Same Page event with this group. The students from DC and Japan shared

their cross-cultural experiences. One topic of discussion was about the prevalence of gun violence in the states, particularly in DC, and how Japan practically doesn't have gun violence at all. Very interesting perspectives from two different sides of world!

The Congressman John Lewis Fellowship Celebration

In July, we had a successful fundraiser for Free Minds that embodied the spirit of Congressman John Lewis! James, FM Member and our first Congressman John Lewis Fellow*, shared how his own heart was opened by reading Congressman John Lewis's memoir. "Reading the *March* series opened my eyes to the powers of positivity. I take my role as a positive, nonviolent influencer very seriously."

Congressman John Lewis wrote a letter to all of our members too! "I am proud to witness a new generation of bold leaders, like the Free Minds Poet Ambassadors and the first Congressman John Lewis Fellow. You are all courageous and you are leading the fight for what is fair and just."

*Stay tuned for more details about the fellowship in the future.



Pictured to the left: Art by FM member SH. Inspired by the *March* graphic novel series about John Lewis's life.

QUOTE-I-VATOR

"We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future." – Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States (1882-1945)

"I think that being a parent has expanded my writing, expanded my understanding of my characters, and has added a depth and richness to my work." – Jesmyn Ward, author (*Men We Reaped*, *Salvage the Bones*) and assistant professor of English at Tulane University, National Book Award for Fiction recipient 2011 and 2017 (1977-)

"There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other, wings." – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German writer and statesman (1749-1832)



Jesmyn Ward

FREE MINDS MAILBAG

We love getting mail from our Free Minds family. Here are some of your thoughts on the July/August 2018 Connect on Healthy Communication.

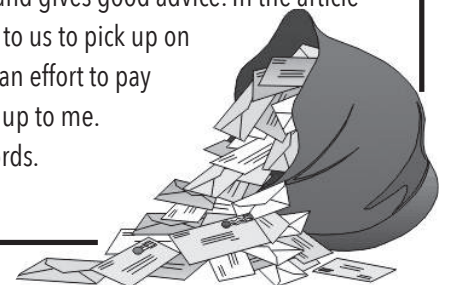
AS: Communication seems to be my biggest weakness, but something I want and must improve. What a great idea because of the juice I receive from reading the paper, from great poems, which is my favorite part, to Elijah traveling to Spain (how cool to explore new cultures but to be a part of another family with their ways. And chickpeas! He's straight gangsta 'cause I would've said "thank you, but no thank you" lol).

How deep was "Speak Child Speak" by MS?! They did that. Or RJ who seems to want to say so much more, but he's okay with keeping it short because you can read between them lines. It's saddened my heart the amount of pain we go through, but brightened it also because we are so strong... Finally the discussion of Tony Lewis Jr's book. Good, real good. People learning how to feel and relate. Big ups to everyone in the issue. Very proud.

VC: "Expressing Instead of Aggressing" was very insightful and I can relate. My outside environment as well as the prison environments I've been in have always influenced me negatively regarding responses to encounters. I was never aware of healthy communication because it wasn't present in my upbringing. I acted in an effort to relieve myself of the abundant anger, pain, frustration, and disappointment that lingered within me. Inevitably, I turned to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism. My lack of healthy communication skills is what made me familiar with not only physical violence, but emotional violence too. In my past, I always dealt with conflict according to how I thought others dealt with theirs. Now I know just how imperative healthy communication is. With it, you can build more bridges than walls.

JL: Really enjoying reading this issue of the *Connect* as it is educational, eye opening, inspiring, and gives good advice. In the article titled "Understanding," AC mentions, "Not everyone knows how to speak from the heart so it's up to us to pick up on body language, facial expressions, and other hints." Since reading these words I've been making an effort to pay close attention to the "hints" AC mentions and a whole new world of communication has opened up to me. People really do speak through body language, especially when not communicating well with words.

Thanks for the insight, AC!





A FATHER INSIDE, A FATHER OUTSIDE

Meeting my biological father for the first time while locked up

By Donte, FM Member

Note: Names have been changed to protect privacy.

Growing up, I always called my father "Mr. Mills." It didn't seem strange to me at all. Everyone called him Mr. Mills. He came every morning to take me to school.

"Your father's here!" my mother would say.

He came in the evenings after he got off to make sure I had a hot dinner. My mother drank. By then she was either drunk or sleeping. He never wanted me to be hungry or without.

Almost none of the other kids in my Southeast Washington, DC, neighborhood spent time with their fathers. A lot of them didn't even know who their fathers were. I had a father and he cared about me. I felt special.

I loved school, but I always got into trouble. What's crazy is I was smart. But I was still young and dumb. The worst part of getting in trouble was disappointing Mr. Mills.

When I was 16 years old, I was charged and convicted as an adult for armed robbery. Even when I went to jail, my father never gave up on me. He wrote to me every week and put money on my books.

I came home when I was 19. One day I was with my father and it struck me how small he was at 5'5" tall. I'm 6'1". I started looking at him to see if I could see a resemblance between us. I couldn't. Then one day, I had an argument with my mother. I mentioned my father. She looked at me like I was stupid. She said, "Boy, Mr. Mills ain't your father!" I didn't want to believe her. I had such a deep relationship with this man. He had to be my father. But she had tricked both of us. I was torn up inside. I felt like a boat without an anchor.

The only thing I knew for sure, was that if Mr. Mills wasn't my real father, and I ever came across the man who was, I wanted to kill him for leaving me.

It was only a few months before I caught another charge. My senses were on high alert, as a CO led me to my unit in federal prison. The heavy door rolled open and I could feel all eyes on me. One man stood off to himself. He looked dead at me. I looked away first and made my way to my cell.

Later, one of the guys took me around and introduced me to other dudes from DC. He motioned to the man who had stared at me. "That's Yusuf. He's from DC, but he's Muslim, and he don't really talk to nobody," he said.

Over the next few weeks, I watched Yusuf. I'd notice the way he did things. For example, whenever he used the microwave, he'd let everyone else line up in front of him. He'd just be patient and wait. I'm the same way. Sometimes, I'd catch him watching me too.

One day, I asked Yusuf, "Man, why you always watching me?" He didn't usually play, but he laughed. So I said, "Yeah, you think it's funny, but you better stop watching me." He looked at me and gave me a laugh like, "I can watch you all I want, this is my unit!"

From that day on, we started kicking it. I don't know how, but I started hanging with this dude every single day. I was drawn to him. I was working

ASK HF ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Dear HF,

I am just 18 over at the DC Jail. Most likely, I'll be sent out to the feds sooner than later. What tips do you have for me on how to handle myself in the feds? Especially if I wind up in a max unit. I know it's different there and I won't say I'm nervous, but I want to be ready. Also, I've heard from Free Minds about how you changed your life around. How did you do it? What steps did you take? What should I be doing? Good luck and I hope you get to go home real soon.

Sincerely,
DC

Dear DC,

The first step to success, whether in prison or in life in general, is to begin with the end in mind. You cannot be afraid to dream, to have a vision for what you want your life to be. Even though you may not be able to see right now how you will be able to get the things that you want in the future, you have to be fearless in your ability to "see" and "claim" EVERYTHING that you desire.

To handle yourself in the feds, and anywhere in life, whether in a max or minimum prison, you cannot be afraid to be yourself. How do you want to handle yourself? You cannot be afraid of your answer to that question, to do you, to handle yourself the way that you want to live.

Either you will follow the DC Homie "car" or you will drive your own destiny. How did I do it? Unapologetically! I never cared if the homies did not care for me because of how I chose to live my own life. I was not afraid to be alone if I could not be accepted for my decision to control my life. What should you be doing? You should be doing YOU!

Sincerely,
HF

towards my GED. Every night, he made me read to him and study. We worked on my math and he taught me Arabic. I felt special because of the attention Yusuf paid to me.

I could talk to Yusuf about anything. He would tell me about growing up in DC back in the day. He'd been deep in the streets, but he would tell me how wrong it was.

In prison, a lot of guys will grab another guy around the neck and say, "This my son!" The guy could be the exact same age, and they'll still play with each other that way. Yusuf started doing the same thing to me. "You know you're my son, right?" he'd say. I'd always laugh at him. One day, he asked my mother's name. I told him her name is Lisa. He said, "I've been with a few Lisas!" Yusuf was at least ten years younger than my mother. "Well, I know you never knew my mom!" I told him.

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CONVERSATION WITH TIA

The column where different members of the Free Minds family – staff, volunteers, interns, members, and more – share their perspective on the theme

By Tia, FM Job Coach

Hey Free Minds Family!

I'm really excited about writing my first piece for the *Connect*. I'm currently writing this from the Free Minds office, with a big water bottle – it's important to stay hydrated and I'm trying my best to take advantage of how close the water cooler is to my desk.

This parenting theme is near and dear to my heart for many reasons. Everything about raising children without the fathers due to incarceration has pushed me in ways that I never imagined. I'm happy to have a safe place to unpack some of what I've been dealing with as I learn my way through these experiences.

Every single day of my life, I'm reminded that I primarily parent alone and that the fathers of my children are not here to help. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think of, cry about, get angry with, or feel completely defeated because of my current parenting status. I've held a sh*tload of guilt and have felt personally responsible for choosing unavailable men who weren't who they needed to be for our children and who would be away for many years of their lives. I lost my dad at a young age, and I've always wanted my children to have existing and strong relationships with their fathers, one that they would speak proudly about and cherish as they grew older. I wanted them to have an experience that I didn't get to have.

Unfortunately, our cards were dealt differently.

For so long, I carried hatred towards the fathers of my children. What would our new normal look like if they weren't here to be a part of raising them? What would life be if I had to manage this work-life balance on my own? I didn't know the first thing about maintaining relationships or building bridges that would connect them to their children. I was angry. I was hurt. I was in a lot of pain. I suddenly found myself single and parenting alone, and I didn't like this overwhelming feeling that seemed to stay with me.

However, I knew I had to make the right choices in order for my children to have their dads involved in their lives. It's never been an easy decision to make or thing to do, but we would eventually figure out how to stay connected and continue to build as family. Believe me, it's a work in progress every single day.

I've been shamed for continuing to be in relationship with the dads and allowing them access to their children. Some folks felt it was an improper thing to do. I decided against what was suggested and chose to leave the door wide open for the fathers of my children to establish and maintain relationships with the kids. Like I said, I didn't have my dad for the majority of my life and I wanted different for my children.

I knew I was responsible for making the right decisions to strengthen these relationships and create a space for co-parenting, no matter how different or untraditional it looked to others. I also knew if I made the wrong decision that it could have a lasting and negative impact on everyone involved, most importantly the kids. I had to quickly adjust and get to a point where the needs of the children came first. It was less about how I felt in those moments of discomfort, pain, and overwhelm, and more about how our children would feel for the rest of their lives if they weren't given the opportunity to know their fathers, even behind bars.

So, I begin to think differently about the ways in which we could raise our children together, despite their address or mine. I thought about ways we would build meaningful and positive connections that would carry on for years to come. I made my kids a part of the process and allowed them the access they needed and wanted, no matter the time of day. If my son wanted to send an e-mail with 100 Ds ("dddddddddddddd"), he did that. If my daughter wanted to research high-*ss flight prices (that we may never afford) to California or draw pictures in the middle of the night, we did that. It didn't matter that we had guards in between us, limits on the phone calls, or even lock-downs that would disrupt the flow of our visits. We made it happen, and I knew our efforts and sacrifices would lead to my children not feeling forgotten by their dads, and the dads feeling appreciated and loved by the children, and me.

It hasn't been an easy road, but it's one we climb slowly every day. I have struggles and challenges that I face daily. I've learned that because I was able to have an open heart and think differently about my situation, I was able to create a space for the relationships between my children and their dads to thrive and have real meaning. That means the world to me and all of these sacrifices meant it was all worth it.

I want to encourage anyone who feels they may have lost the connection to their children. It's a two-way street and you're still the parent. Find ways to re-connect with your children on a consistent basis and know that you can only work with what you DO have. Continue writing letters, sending birthday cards, and involving the children in your everyday world. No matter how small you think it may be, it's a huge impact on how your children feel. Believe me.

Other ideas you could implement are explaining your accomplishments with your children by sharing how you won a sports match or successfully completed a class. You could reinforce the importance of making good decisions by providing an example on how you worked together with someone to solve a problem. Also, make them a part of the prep process for life after. If you know you're coming home soon, have the children help you create smart goals that would lead to successful reentry.

Parenting can be successful, even while you're away. Start with what you CAN do and focus less on what you're unable to do at the moment. Remember to always keep the lines of communication open and clear with your children, no matter what you may be going through with the mother. It will make a world of difference as it has with my own children.

I'm forever standing with you, Free Minds Family!





MEMBERS *CONNECT*: PARENTHOOD POEMS

Why I Write? By AL
Responding to "The Write Way"
in Vol. 7, Issue 4

I write to bring us closer together
by spreading love to all races,
I write in celebration of the woman
the Mother of all Nations.

I write for Black Lives To Matter
to the Blue Lives that protect us,
I write so that All Lives Will Matter
and our enemies will one day respect us.

I write for the parents who lost a
child to senseless gun violence,
I write for all the lost souls
in a benediction of silence.

I write for those struggling from both sides
of drug addiction,
Those addicted to the money and
those who suffer from its affliction.

I write for those not strong
enough to scream ME TOO!
I write for the misunderstood
who identify as LGBTQ

So, when the dark clouds part
and the sun shine bright,
I free my mind, and proceed
to write.

Listen to Your Mother By SW

One time I told my mother I hated her
And I wished my father was still alive
I wish I could have told my mother how I feel
Instead of saying I hate her
But I always tell her I love her
I wish I would've listened
When my mother told me not to go outside
I would have never turned to da' streets
And I wouldn't be here now

Talkin' to Ma'Ziyah (Part 2) By MP

It's been four years now,
50 months to be exact
But the pain I feels in my chest from
not being able to be by **your** side
Is enough alone to make me never come back.
No visits at the time being,
because they got me way out west.
Pictures and letters is regular, though
but hearing your voice is the best.
I cherish your laughs and your
"Daddy, I love you"

My princess forever and only Allah above you!
Cute is an **understatement**;
Beautiful **describe her!**
No woman alive, or even diamonds,
Can outshine her.

I'm glad you love the gifts and cards
I sent home,
Even though it ain't much.
I just want you to know, Daddy's constantly
"thinking of you"

And no matter how far I'm away, you
feel my touch.
Princess, "Allah loves patience."
So I'm just waiting patiently for my return
to you.

You don't have to worry about nothing
when I touch down
because everything I earn and do is
only for you.
I could care less about money, sex, fame,
and power,
Them things all come cheap.
My daughter, Ma'Ziyah, will forever
Mean the world to me!!!

Dear Orlando By BKC

I wanted to take the time to say I love you
as a son,
I look at you and see a reflection of me
back in my youth but you're
more motivated than me.

I hope you never fall on my path.
I want you to grow up and be a better
man than me,

If you don't do anything else in life,
you should complete high school,
Raising you has been a better part of my life,
If I could rewind my life I would avoid the
path that led me here just to be
able to walk you to school.

I love you and wanted to tell you I will always
be here for you no matter
what happens between us,
Just to let you know you're on my mind.

Dear Son By KB

I wanted to take the time to say, *forgive me.*
I look at you and I feel guilty for leaving your
side when you were four years old.

I hope you never feel sadness like the
sadness you felt when they took me away to
jail. Another way of saying this is, *Son, may
the best of your todays, be the worst of your
tomorrows. I love you.*

I want you to know that I try. I try to be
involved in your life as much as possible.
Maybe, I'm not trying hard enough. Maybe,
Allah has different plans for us. Allah knows
best son.

If you don't do anything else in life, you
should build a relationship with God. Get to
know who He is, son.

Raising you has been a bundle of joy and
excitement for me. It's cliché, but it's true.
When I think of your young, precious innocent
smile, it warms my heart.
So much so that it melts it.

If I could do it all again, I would put you first.
I would put you before the money, before the
drugs, and the lusts of this world.

Moments with you are special because they
are moments that we create together. You and
Me. Father and Son. Like father, like son.
You and I.

I love you and wanted to tell you that you
are the greatest thing that has happened to
me. You never leave my mind. You have built
a kingdom there. Be smart, be safe, and
be good.

A Living Death By TTB

The worst pain I've ever felt
was looking at you, reach for me
through a video screen and I couldn't
touch you; right then, I knew
what it felt like to die, a living
death –
A haiku from a father to his youngest son.

MEMBERS *CONNECT*: PARENTHOOD POEMS

Dear Annie Mae *By QS*

I want to take the time to say "thank you"
for all you do.
I look at you and praise God for blessing
me with such a loving mother as you.
I hope you never go a day without having
joy in your life.
I want you to know I acknowledge and
appreciate all you've done for me,
The dreams you had to sacrifice.
If you don't do anything else in life,
You should take the time to watch
a beautiful sunset;
Such a breathtaking wonder.
Being your son has been an absolute
blessing, privilege and honor.
If I could I would give you a star from
the heavens above.
Moments with you are special because
that's when I get to experience
pure unconditional love.
I love you Mom for being such a loving,
supportive, and nurturing parent.
And my best friend I might mention.
When the two of us are both dead and
gone, these words will live on forever,
Letting whoever reads them know that
a mother by the name of Annie Mae
Was truly loved by her son named Q!

Dear Mercedes *By EH*

I wanted to take the time to say I'm sorry
for not always being there
I look at you and I cannot believe God
blessed me with you
I hope you never do the things that I've done
I want you to know when I see you again
I'll be a different person
If you don't do anything else in life, you should
be your own person independent
Raising you has been a blessing that I took
for granted
If I could change the past I would be with
you every day
Moments with you are special because
you're my heart and soul
I love you and wanted to tell you how much
I miss you and want to be with you
Just to let you know you're on my mind

Dear Grandchildren *By RTC*

I wanted to take the time to say you
all are truly missed and much thought of
I look at you and I feel the absence as well
as the good of you all's positive progress
I hope you never lose hope and/or give in
to what is best left alone
I want you to make up for my absence in
a way that is beneficial to and for us all
If you don't do anything else in life, you
should do as best you can for all concerned
Raising you has been beyond me because
I was not physically present
If I could I'd turn back the hands of time and
be a responsible person
Moments with you are special because
we haven't had many and you
all are so important to me
I love you and wanted to tell you how
much and show it full scale in my actions
Just to let you know you're on my mind.

Untitled (My Mother and I) *By PJ*

My mother is a testament
to contradictions; she's a model
of commitment
She is:
tolerant of my misbehavior,
but mindful; in pushing my moral
compass.
She is:
Like any human being, complex;
many sides make up her character.
She is:
My longest standing confidant;
there, before, I could confide in others,
understanding my wants.
She's
an individual; with wants and needs.
My mother has her own life; which, at some
point, dawned on me.
She's
somehow, though, found a balance between:
herself; her kids; her insecurities, her fears;
being who
She is,
and being my mama...
Thank you God for my mama;
Yes! That
She is.

Changing Thoughts *By DK*

As I sit here tired, alone, but peaceful
in my cage
It gives me time to reflect and to let go
of the rage.
I see so many guys, different races,
different colors,
Makes you wonder why we all messed up,
leaving behind our children, lovers,
and mothers.
What were we thinking while committing
our crimes?
Look, it's left me here... trying to write you
this rhyme.
I'm so sorry I left you, so scared and alone,
I'm so sorry I left you in a fatherless home.
I sit here and reflect in all the things that I did,
And how I, not anyone else, cause me
a 25 year bid..
So I give you the promise of a much
better man,
'Cause in 12 more years I'll be armed
with a real plan.
I'll always be there for you in a time of need,
I'm starting now to plant the positive seeds.
Seeds that will flourish into a beautiful flower,
Giving me the strength and knowledge
to help empower.
Just because I made mistakes, and lost
my way,
Doesn't mean because you're my daughters,
you're destined the same way.
So keep your heads high, be proud,
and strong...
Daddy will be home; it seems like forever,
but it's really not that long.





THE WRITE WAY

The Untold Story

The column where writers share writing tips and prompts to inspire your creativity

By Chelsea, FM Reentry Book Club Facilitator

Maya Angelou said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside." What does she mean by this? Let's break this down. Agony means pain or anguish. That feeling of having something to say, but not knowing what will happen. This is agony. If you are reading this, the answer to my next question is also very simple. Here's the question: do you have a story to share? As I said, the answer is quite simple: yes.

We all have stories to share. We all have experiences that shape us and make us into the person we are today. We've shared these stories here and there, but have we ever shared these stories in their full extent? In fact, the best way to grow is to allow others to hear our stories and experience the energy release from telling that untold story. There is no better feeling than the moment you are free from your own story and allowing others the opportunity to hear it.

So, the next question becomes, how do we tell that untold story? The first step is to start with you. Start with your life. I call this a journey map. Take a pencil and draw a straight arrow on a sheet of paper. On that arrow, map out 6-7 moments that truly changed you or had an impact on you. We will call these moments **turning points**. A turning point is a significant moment in your life that changed you. Turning points are good, bad, and ugly - we all have them, and now is the time to map them out.

For example, if I am going through this activity, I am drawing an arrow on my paper and writing 6-7 moments in my life that stand out to me. I might choose to write: my brother's death, my high school graduation, winning a championship game, the birth of my daughter, my friend's battle with cancer, my first teaching job, the death of my uncle, and the list goes on. Now, go ahead, it's your turn!

Next, take that same pencil and put a star next to three turning points that you think are the most critical in your life and shaped you into the person you are today.

For those three moments, answer the following questions:

- 1) What happening in that moment? Describe the moment.
- 2) How did you and your life change as a result of that moment?

For example, if I am taking this next step, and I select my first teaching job as one of the top three moments in my life, I would then answer the following questions. 1) I was 21 when I first started teaching and walked into my first classroom. I felt nervous and excited all at the same time. 2) Teaching changed my life because I realized I had an opportunity to truly change the trajectory of someone's life and make someone see a different future for themselves. I also realized I had so much to learn about myself and my students helped push my own thought and growth.

Ok, now it's your turn! Go ahead, answer the questions for the three turning points you selected. You can do this!

Now, it's time to put it all together and write that story that you have been waiting to write and share. Think about the three moments as three chapters in your book. Get some fresh paper, and on the top of the paper write your first chapter title. Then, start expanding on that first turning point you selected. Do not worry about structure, grammar, or style. Just write about the moment, how you felt, and how it changed you. Then, do the same thing for the next two moments. If you feel like the pencil can't stop, you're on the right track! If you want to write about more moments, keep writing!

The first step in feeling truly read for your next steps and feeling that moment of full freedom is sharing that story inside of you. The time is now to do so, and there's no better time than now! So, go ahead, write away! We all have stories inside of us, and now it is time for those stories to come out!

WHAT IS THE DC CORRECTIONS INFORMATION COUNCIL?

Hey there Free Minds Members!

I hope everyone is keeping it breezy and remembering we are thinking of you all back here in DC. As I was sitting here thinking about this month's theme, I just knew I had to give a major shout-out to my mom (she would never forgive me if I didn't give her props!).

My name is Laura and I work at the DC Corrections Information Council (CIC) as the first "Senior Analyst & Liaison." As you may already know, we are an independent DC government agency that inspects, monitors and reports on the conditions of confinement at facilities where DC residents are incarcerated, including the BOP, CTF, DC Jail, and the halfway houses. In my new role as Liaison, I am now tracking individual concerns and notifying corrections agencies.

I started at the CIC in 2016 and since then have inspected close to 16 facilities. It has been so great to meet some of you and learn from your experiences, to help support amplifying your voices back here in DC. I think a lot of people are not aware of what actually goes on or the types of incidents that happen. It is my hope that these reports we write help educate individuals back here in DC (and everywhere, honestly), but I can't do it without you! We can't provide individual assistance, but with your help, we can start getting the word out and informing the DC community. It's your voice they need to hear.

Please feel free to reach out and share a bit about the conditions wherever you're at. You can call me: (202) 445-7623; email me: laura.delascasas@dc.gov; or write to me through Special Mail:

DC Corrections Information Council

Attn: Laura de las Casas, Esq.
2901 14th St NW, Ground Floor
Washington, DC 20009



PAYING IT FORWARD: GENERATION HOPE

Helping Teen Parents Go to College

By Emily, FM Intern



Hi guys! I'm Emily, one of the Free Minds summer interns. This Connect issue is about parenting, so we're highlighting Generation Hope, a nonprofit based in the DMV that provides scholarships, mentors, and other financial and emotional support to teen mothers and fathers. It was started in 2010 by Nicole L., who got pregnant as a senior in high school. Even though only 2 percent of teen mothers graduate college by age 30, Nicole graduated in four years while taking care of her daughter. She then decided to found Generation Hope to try to help other teen moms and teen dads be able to attend and graduate from college. I got a chance to talk with Michelle A., Generation Hope's Volunteer and Outreach Associate, and she told me a bit more about what Generation Hope offers and why they do what they do.

So, what exactly does Generation Hope do?

We basically support teen moms and teen dads going to college. One way we do this is through financial support. If they go to community college, we provide them \$1,200 per year until they graduate. If they attend a four-year university, we provide \$2,400 per year until they graduate. We also pair them up with a mentor who corresponds with them once a month and also checks in with them via text, email, or calls. It's someone who keeps them accountable, someone who cheers them on, someone who they can talk to and get that emotional support.

What other services do you provide?

We try to provide a holistic approach. We have case managers called Hope Coaches that help our scholars navigate through anything they need to navigate and let them know what resources are available to them. We also have volunteer tutors available, and an emergency fund.

What is that for?

So, for example, one of our scholars' car broke down and it cost \$600 to fix. This teen mom was 19, she's a single mom, works, goes to school full time, and she just didn't have \$600 to fork up for her car. We were able to provide that emergency fund for her so that she could get her car fixed and not have to stop school or be distracted in any way.

I know this organization was founded by a teen mom.

Do you guys help teen dads as well?

We've been trying to focus our recruitment on teen dads. Obviously, the majority of our scholars are teen moms, but we really want to get more teen dads into the program. We thought [the Connect] would be such a great way to let any teen dads know that, "Hey, if you get out of prison and you want to go to college, this is an opportunity to get a scholarship."

I know a lot of our members will have a lot on their plates when they get out and college is a huge time commitment.

We try to emphasize with our scholars that college is a sacrifice because you have to study, you're working, and you're being a parent. But if you can

just stick it out for those four or five years, it is so worth it and it opens up so many opportunities.

In the moment, it's really hard to make those decisions.

It is, it really is. And that's one of the reasons Generation Hope comes in to provide that support to get them through college.

What is your recruitment process?

I go out to high schools, homeless shelters, nonprofit organizations that work with teen parents, churches, the Department of Social Services, and various places to do college readiness workshops because a lot of the time, teen parents are not given information on college. There's this assumption that more than likely they're not going to go to college. We feel that's not the truth. They just need to have the knowledge because knowledge is power. At the end of the day, they decide whether they want to go to college now, but at least we give them that information that college is possible.

People often have negative things to say about teen parents.

How do you break down those stereotypes?

When we give presentations we like to tell the stories of our own scholars and how resilient they are. Yes, they had a child at a young age, but they are trying to get degrees, they are working full-time, they're trying to be a parent and to balance everything out. We feel that sharing stories of this population is so important because unfortunately there is this stigma of being a teen parent. We want to show that we have teen parents that have graduated from college, that have come through our program and gone on to work for NASA, that have become teachers, that have gone on to do amazing things in their lives. They just need to have support, someone who believes in them to know that they have potential.

Do you have any advice for our members returning home?

To consider college, to never give up, and to see if college is for them. Of the teen parent scholars who have graduated from our program in the last six months, 92-94% have either found an amazing job or gone on to grad school and are living above the federal poverty line. We firmly believe that higher education changes lives, so we encourage them to pursue their passion of whatever they want to do, whether it's tailored to be a chemist or be a teacher or be a doctor or a lawyer. It opens up opportunities. It's a sacrifice for those four or five or however many years you are in college, but it's so worth it.

If you or your partner had a baby or became pregnant before age 19 and you will be 25 or younger upon your release, you may be eligible to apply for the Generation Hope scholarship. Write to us for more information.





RE-ENTRY CORNER WITH MISS KEELA

By Keela, FM Reentry Manager

Greetings and salutations Free Minds Fam!

It's time to *Connect* again, and I am so siced (so old school right) to be able to give all of our parents and soon-to-be parents awesome information and resources that can make the toughest job in the world just a little bit easier! I can say so many things about parenthood, but I think that we can all agree that it is like working 500 hours of overtime each week with no pay. However, it can also be the most rewarding experience in the world! Although you don't get a tangible paycheck, you wouldn't dare quit this gig because your heart won't allow you to and you know that one of these days, you will get a return on your investment!

One of the realest quotes I read about parenthood completely summed it up for me. It says: "Being a parent is learning about strengths you didn't know you had and dealing with fears you didn't know existed." I love that quote so much because it's so true, there's no such thing as a perfect parent. That parent never has or ever will exist.

The parenthood experience will mostly definitely come with pain in some aspect or another. It's unavoidable, however it's like the experience of living life itself ups, downs, disappointments, celebrations and throughout it all gaining wisdom, knowledge and the one virtue you need most of all in parenthood PATIENCE!!

Throughout it all, as you rear your children, you grow and learn right along with them about what it takes to be the parents your kids need you to be, not the perfect parent, but the parent that your particular children need.

I want to be really transparent and add that I know that you guys are raising your kids from prison and I understand how challenging that can be, but take heart! You can still have a meaningful connection with your children. From experience (I have six kids) and research, I have found that what children need most from their parents is love, encouragement, consistency, emotional support and a listening ear, and your children can get all of these things from you right now. Through letters, emails, phone calls, and visits, you can build a strong bond with your precious children, which I am sure all of you guys desire.

As I stated earlier, I have six kids and one of my sons is currently incarcerated with a daughter of his own. He has been incarcerated since she was only a few months old and I have to admit that there have been some painful phone calls and visits. However, throughout it all, they have been able to stay connected, and my granddaughter knows that her dad loves her very much, and she absolutely adores him so I am truly speaking from experience.

Okay, now for the fun part, below are those parental resources that I mentioned so many paragraphs ago!

The Family Place

3309 16th St. NW
Washington, DC 20010
202.265.0149



The Family Place provides a welcoming, multi-cultural environment, with programs that help meet emergency needs; provide education and training; and offer access to information and other social services. We put the needs of our clients first by striving to develop programming that is both relevant and all services are free to DC residents! The Family Place focuses on family literacy, family wellness and family stability. The Family Place holds a clothing drive once a month, additionally distributing books, toys, car seats, strollers, diapers and furniture if available.

Mary's Center

2333 Ontario Road, NW
Washington, DC
202.438.8196



**Mary's
Center**

Mary's Center, founded in 1998 is a Community Health Center that provides health care, family literacy and social services to individuals whose needs too often go unmet by the public and private systems. Mary's Center uses a holistic, multipronged approach to help each participant access individualized services that set them on the path toward good health, stable families, and economic independence. The Center offers high-quality, professional care in a safe and trusting environment to residents from the entire DC metropolitan region, including individuals from nearly 50 countries, through 8 locations.

Well family, as always, I hope this information is useful, until we *Connect* again
- Ms. Keela

FAMILY TIES (CONTINUED)

continued from page 4

Then one day, I was on the phone with my mother and I saw Yusuf watching me. I don't know why, but I asked, "Ma, you ever know a dude named Yusuf?" I gave her his last name. There was this long pause. "Ma?" I said.

"Boy, that's your father," she said. I just sat there. I couldn't say a word. Tears fell down my face. I looked at Yusuf and he just stood up and walked to his cell. I hung up and followed him. When I got inside his cell, I swung at him. He was stronger than I was, though. He just grabbed me and held me and I started crying. I didn't know what to think. I was still trying to hit him, but he just held me harder.

"I already know. Just let it all out," he said. I was out of control, just sobbing. That messed me up. I was so angry that I'd been lied to. At the same time, it was like this window into my identity had just been burst open. In a way, it was like seeing myself clearly, for the first time. In the days to come, amidst all of the anger, there were also times I woke up and felt so much joy. It was like, *Wow! I found my father and he loves me!*

I was confused about my relationship with Mr. Mills, though. Did he know that I wasn't his son? Did Yusuf know that while he was gone, another man had raised me as his own?

Yusuf told me he was already on his way to prison when I was born. Once he found out about me, he stayed in touch with my mother and wanted to know everything about me. I was the only thing in the outside world that he cared about. He heard I was in prison, but it wasn't until someone on the unit called me by my government name in front of Yusuf that he knew for sure I was his son. He still didn't say anything though. He didn't want anyone with an old grudge against him to know that we were related. He also didn't want to take anything away from Mr. Mills because he was grateful to him for raising me.

I spent three years with my father in prison. We made up for every single day we had missed together. The day I was released, the COs woke me up at 4AM and walked me down the tier. When I got to my father's cell, he was waiting for me. He was standing at the door with tears just coming out of his eyes. It killed me to leave him there. I miss him like crazy.

Since I got home, Mr. Mills's health has gotten really bad. He's in an assisted living facility. I haven't told him about meeting my father. I don't know if he knows I'm not his biological son. I don't want to hurt him, but I just wish he could know that blood doesn't matter. I have two fathers. I'm not lost anymore. They both love me and I would do anything in the world for them.

PERSPECTIVES ON PARENTHOOD FROM OUR YOUNGEST FM MEMBERS

We asked members of the book club at the DC Jail (mostly 16-17 year olds) to provide their perspectives on Parenthood as well. Here are some of their responses.

DC: When I'm a father and have my kids, I'm not whippin' they a**. I got whipped with switches, plunger sticks, you name it. It didn't change my behavior one bit. It just hurt me and made me mad. If my kid does something wrong, I'm gonna ground them. They're gonna get tired of it eventually and start doing the right thing.

I used to love going to the movies with my mom. That's the last thing I ever did with my mom before she died. She took me, my sister, and my cousin to see the movie Cars. I'll definitely take my kids to the movies all the time.

RJ: I wish my mother had made better decisions. She never had any money to take care of us. She always left us at the house. My mom and dad didn't get along. They were always arguing. I also wish my mother had been honest as a parent. I want to have between 2-4 kids. I read the book *Enrique's Journey*. In that book, the mother left the boy in El Salvador to come to America and make more money to take care of her kids. She sent money, but she wasn't there for him. You have to be there both physically AND financially. I want my kids to trust me more than I trust my parents.

DEK: I have a baby girl due this week. I want to do Daddy-Daughter day. I'll take her out to eat and go to the movies and we'll take pictures. Little girls need love from their fathers. If they don't get it from their dad, they're going to look for it in the wrong places. My dad didn't spend any time with me. So I'm going to take my daughter out all the time. I'll take her to one of those little places to get her nails done. I'm going to take parenting classes. There's so much that I need to learn because I've never experienced this before.

My favorite memories with my mom are when she used to take us to Jeepers, the carnival or Chuck E. Cheese. I loved it mostly because we did it all together as a family.

NB: I have a son who is 2 months old. But I'm in jail, so I still don't feel like I've been able to be a father yet. But I know that I don't want to keep going to jail on my son like my father did to me. It meant he was never there for me and I believe it's why I ended up in the streets. I want to do everything with my little boy – basketball, baseball, go-carts, skating – EVERYTHING!

My favorite memory was when my father took me to the basketball court. He really didn't know how to play, so I was teaching him. It's the most time I ever got to spend with him. We were together for like three hours!





MEMBERS *CONNECT*: PARENTHOOD ESSAYS

CM's 12 Tips for Parenting From Prison

By CM, FM Member

As a parent in prison, we have to be unselfish in many ways in order to have an impact on our children. We have made a mistake in our lives by having children and not being there to take care of them and teach them what life is all about. We can turn this thing around.

1. In order to stay in your children's life, have constant communication with them. Reach them with respect at all times and tell them the truth about you and what they have to do in order to be a successful citizen
2. Write at least one letter a week or use emails if possible to have some type of impact on them
3. Dedicate most of your 300 minutes to your kids
4. Let your kids know how much you love them. And that as a team, you and your kids can make it through this hard time in life.
5. Ask them to forgive you for not being there for them
6. Work on yourself in education, arts, religion, and send them the results of your achievements.
7. Have to have a healthy relationship with their mothers or guardians
8. Listen to them and understand them before giving advice. We have to feel their pain and help them get through the experience of real life
9. Reward them at birthdays, Christmas, and when they make achievements. Start a "small gift account" by sending what you can afford
10. Celebrate their success on the phone, letter, visitation, and thank them for their hard work
11. Always let them know that you tell people about them, how good they are doing, and that you are very proud of who they are becoming.
12. Ask a family member to bring your children to visit you. This is one of the most important parts of communicating with them in order to build a bond with them as a family

Dear Ashley and Alyson

By DK, FM Member

Note: This is an abridged (shortened) version of the letter FM member sent to his daughters Ashley and Alyson.

I wanted to take the time to say to you both that there isn't anything more beautiful than seeing both of your big, bold, gorgeous smiles. I am envious of your ability to endure from the tragedy of your dad causing himself to be placed in prison while you both were still so very young, but now you both are excelling in your own lives, as parents yourself. I'm sure the most enriching relationship you had in your life is with your mom. She's a very strong woman with a heart so full of many treasures. Even though we've not been together in what seems like an eternity, she's one of my greatest friends.

Create and learn every minute of every day.

Happiness will follow, and nothing will make you better. Create the lives you experienced—mostly due to your Mom – for my grandbabies, and they, too, will be as strong as you two are. I hope that neither one of you does like I had done and screw up your life with impulsivity, with a lack of compassion for others, with a lack of respect for the law and the rights of others as I did (I have changed that behavior now).

I hope you never have to lose a home, a husband, or a child. I hope neither one of you loses hope or your desire to dream and to live out those dreams. I hope in my lifetime, neither one of you leaves this earth before me (because God knows I won't be far behind you). I hope neither of you falls prey to fake friends or to those wanting to tempt you with drugs. I hope neither one of you ever disrespects your body or allows anyone else to do so.

Please don't ever RELY on other people besides your Mom and I to give you affirmation; it's a recipe for unhappiness. Trust me, I know, especially if those people are men. (Most give it to get what they want; I used to be one of them).

I want you both to know for a fact that the happiness you have, lives deep down in your heart and soul, and in your brave spirit. It will always belong to you. And I want you to let it grow every single minute of every single day until your happiness and compassion radiates so strongly that it is an undeniable force of everything you are. Find what you love to do, no matter what mountains you will have to climb, ALWAYS believe in your dreams, and fulfill them. Set your goals, make them realistic, and then make it happen for yourselves, for my grandbabies. And ALWAYS, ALWAYS, have a plan B, work your asses off. Love life; love the life you live.

When I look at your photos, I see the fire in your eyes, and I'm so extremely proud of you both. Because despite your not having me there since you, Ashley, were just a little past eleven years old and you, Alyson, since exactly a week before your tenth birthday, you both have survived despite the odds (having a dad in prison), and you both fight every day to just be at peace with that fact. That fire in yourself burns, so please don't ever let it burn out – that fire is so breathtaking.

Raising both of you, up until the point of my arrest, you both gave me the confidence I needed to be a great man. If I could do anything over again, I would have spent a lot more time with you both, read a lot more books, put you before my job a whole lot more (I was a workaholic). I would have been a better dad – I would be there now, instead of here in prison over 400 miles away.

Here's the truth Ashley & Alyson – you both are beautiful young women now, and I love you completely. It's the most uncomplicated love I have ever felt. What's even stranger about it is that I don't need you to love me back. I don't care if you love me as much as I love you. I will love you and give you everything I possibly can while here in prison no matter what, and I will be happy about it. Stay strong and know that dad loves you more than anything anyone could ever offer me. You two ARE my life, you are my breath, my heartbeat, my eyesight, my entire reason for living. I love you.

Love, Dad

An Hourglass Running Out of Time, Expecting My First Child

By James, FM Outreach & Reentry Assistant

From the time my daughter's mother told me she missed her cycle up until now where we're down to the last weeks, it has been a rollercoaster ride. I've been told, "Be careful who you have children with!" I now understand that because even though you love a person, you may not be compatible with that person. The tornado of emotions and disagreements are very stressful.

Throughout this whole process, I've been keeping a level head because the way I see it, you can't stress over a situation you have minimum control over. Everything from the doctor's appointments to the diet of your baby's mother down to the mood swings are all serious factors.

I remember the first time I saw a sonogram of my baby and she began moving! It had me like *wow, this is really happening*. Then it went from seeing her move to feeling her move in the womb. Watching the mother of your child's stomach grow and grow is equivalent to watching an hourglass run out of time. Within that time, there's a lot of planning and decisions that have to be made.

Although I look forward to being a father, the closer I get to obtaining that title causes different emotions. I want to be her friend, the cool dad, but at the same time, I know that I have to be the one to guide her through life to the best of my ability. I had a one-on-one with a cousin of mine and made a joke about her not listening to me because I may be soft when it comes to her. She may get away with it all, because I refuse to be an aggressive parent, but at the same time, I needed advice on how to go about drawing the line between father and friend.

I catch myself envisioning her as a teen, but I know I can't rush the process. It's a little scary knowing I'm responsible for a life for the rest of my life. I'm prepared to dedicate my time, love, and efforts to her in order for her to be great. As of late, I've been having dreams about babies and it's crazy because it feels so real. I woke up out of my sleep one night because I thought I heard a baby say, "Daddy!" I just smiled knowing my time was coming soon.

To be honest, I didn't realize how serious the situation was until the baby shower. Seeing all the diapers and baby clothes was a wakeup call to say the least. Mental preparation is a crucial part of this whole process and even if you think you're prepared, you need to prepare some more. All I can do is wait for the time to come and put my best foot forward.

Since writing this, James has become the new father of a baby girl! We're all thrilled by this new addition to the Free Minds family!



MEMBERS *CONNECT*: PARENTHOOD ESSAYS

Breaking the Cycle By AL, FM Member

I can still vividly picture my aunt, Chocolate, standing in our living room telling my mother, "Girl, that boy going be just like his father." In jail or dead by sixteen. To this very day, my mother and aunt do not speak because of those comments.

Yet, I was blessed to have my oldest son when I was just sixteen years old. To many that is a very young age. Hell, I was basically a child myself, living by the false concepts of who and what makes you a man. Truthfully, I always told my mother that I didn't want children, due to what I perceive to be the atrocities of my own childhood. I thought, why burden a child who didn't ask to be born with the life of poverty, violence, and the promise of death?

However, on September 30, 1999, my son was born and I couldn't be happier. I can still remember being woken up by the staff at the residential facility I was placed in as a juvenile.

I must admit there is something about being a parent that makes you start to care more about what you do in life and how you go about doing it. Though I was incarcerated at the time, I made all types of promises of what kind of parent I would be. First, I would raise him better than I was raised. I made the conscious decision never to put my hands on my child. I most importantly promise to treat him like a human being and not a thing to be possessed.

That mindset was well over eighteen years ago, and I still hold firm to those principles. Now that I am the father of three wonderful children, I understand the importance of what my mother was instilling in me. I still don't agree with her form of discipline, because I view whippings as a slave owner mentality. However, I realize that she raised my brother and myself the best she knew how with the very best she had. I further understand that as a parent, communication with your child/children is the most essential part of being a parent. Allowing them to express themselves in positive ways helps them to build those dreams that turn into reality.

My only hopes and dreams for my children have been for them to be the best that they can be. And while I have been incarcerated for the past fifteen years, my bond with my children is much stronger than that of the one with whom they live with. My two youngest (who are sixteen years old) both made honor roll, while my oldest (eighteen) is preparing to become a DC firefighter. So, I am proud to say that the cycle is broken in my family, and hope that you can keep an open and free mind to do the same.



"Daddy, When Are You Coming Home?" by JB, FM Member

When you're a father in prison and you're communicating with your child, you can always bank on that "one" question to come up which is, "Daddy, when are you coming home?" That question right there is the most important question a father in prison will ever have to answer because it's the one answer that your child will believe in and will be waiting on.

My name is Jay, I'm a proud father of three wonderful children, two daughters, Princess (13) and Diva (12), and one son, lil man, who is 8. I've been guiding them from prison since 2010. It's been a journey that continues, but I managed to gather tools along the way.

Being a father from prison, you find many challenges due to the absence of your physical presence. One of my challenges was getting my kids to understand our situation and the reason why I'm in prison. But before I was able to do that, I had to come to grips with myself and the actual reality, which was, I'm here in prison with a 57-year sentence. It's a hard pill to swallow but nonetheless one that was prescribed to me. By fully understanding my reality, I was able to build a vision that gave me a creative deliverance to assure my kids that we will get through this, because just saying everything will be alright isn't enough.

Once I felt that my kids understood our situation, I then started to look for ways to be active in their lives. Building a strong "parentship" with your kids' mother is a must! Keep it respectful and concerning the kids. I wanted to be involved in my kids' dailies so I capitalize on all communication: telephone, email, letters, cards, other family members – any way I could send my words, I would sent it!

Also, I became more active in their lives by listening, because 70 percent of understanding your child is by audio. I soon started to learn their likes and dislikes. I also was able to gain awareness about my kids from listening to their usage of words. Just the other day I asked my daughter how her day was and she answered "good." Now knowing my daughter from listening to her in the past, she's a young lady with many words. "Good" is not a word she would normally stop at, so asking her for a rundown of her day, I soon found out that her "good" was actually a problem with another girl while walking home from school. We were able to talk about it and come up with a solution, but problems like this do occur and I have to be very mindful on how I handle them because that anger could build up consecutively due to two reasons: one, she's having a problem with this girl and two, I'm locked up. Those two different problems can become one major problem if not properly defused, which is why communication and listening is very important.

Because I have three children, one of my tasks is to bring them the quality time that's needed. Although my physical presence is absent, I'm far from gone, so what I do is use every emotional avenue that I can possibly take. My kids are big fans of everything that I touch, from artwork to letters, so I make it my job to send them something from my hands every month. Nothing can ever compare to a

hug and kiss each morning, but that reaches from my hand to theirs, pulling us closer each time.

I also like to set up projects with my kids. We'll read books together, do reports, write poetry and songs, or sometimes just write to each other a new idea, even send a drawing here and there, but as the time passes, we've created this hidden goal and that's to someday get me home. My first challenge was to bring understanding to my kids about my situation. At this point, I believe that I have the understanding clear with them and can now assist them on reaching their goals.

What I want as a father is to leave a legacy, no, not Jay the inmate, or Jay the poet with the sweet tongue. How about that name my daughters call me: pops! I'm sure they got a story to tell, and as for that "one" question about me coming home? "I can feel the wind, I can smell the air, the sun is yet to see... but it's near." ☺

A Father's Love By JL, FM Member

When sentenced to serve decades in prison, I promised myself that I was not going to allow any term of imprisonment to keep me from being a father to my children. Even though I haven't been able to be a father in the traditional sense, my love has poured forth to my children despite the walls and distance between us. Cards, letters, phone calls, hobby crafts, visits (I'm blessed to have a mother who's been willing to bring my children to every prison I've been in) all have played a part in me expressing my love (and apologies) to my children.

Please don't get it twisted. My incarceration has definitely been hard on them in one way or another, and I've had to tolerate their feelings of disappointment and suffering due to my absence. I've always encouraged them to express how they feel to me, and they trust me enough to do so. That's just one of the ways to show my love for them – to let them speak their mind.

Nearly twenty years later, my children and I still have a close bond. Can't imagine them not being in my life somehow just because a judge with a gavel sentenced me to decades in prison. Guess a father's love can conquer anything – even time.





DC PHOTOS OF THE MONTH

This DC Photos, we're featuring places in Washington, DC, where parents can take their kids to do fun, educational, and free activities.

By Emily, FM Intern



All of the Smithsonian museums on the National Mall are free and open to the public, including the Air and Space Museum. You can walk through a space shuttle, do fun science experiments, and learn something all in one place! Source: Smithsonian Institute



These cute pandas are just two out of the over 1,000 animals that live in the National Zoo. You can go visit for free any day of the week! Source: Parade Magazine



Have you ever wanted to learn more about the night sky? The Rock Creek Park Planetarium has many free programs, including some especially designed for kids. Source: The Meanest Momma Blog

Have a request for the next issue's DC Photos? Write us at 1816 12th St NW, Washington, DC 20009 and let us know what you'd like to see!

"I NEVER PLANNED TO BE A SINGLE MOM"

By Erica, FM Friend

Growing up I thought I'd never be a single mom.

I've seen too many people go through the same stuff and said "not me." Now that it is me, I just accept it.

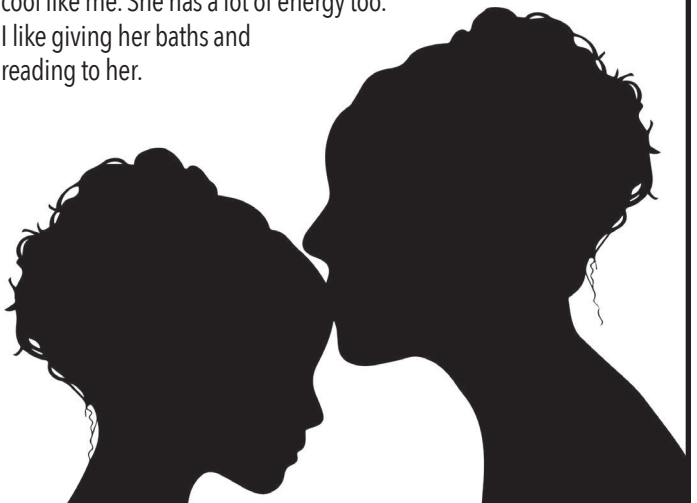
I wanted to have a family with a mom and a dad together, but it didn't work out that way. I was 18 when I got pregnant with my daughter Chloe and she's two months old now.

I didn't plan on getting pregnant, but it just happened, and I don't believe in abortion. I wasn't ready to be a mom, but I've dealt with it. Parenthood is a lot more than I expected. I love my daughter so much, but it's a lot of hard work. I didn't expect that I would have to stay up all through the night and be really tired all the time. Chloe never seems to want to sleep. I also didn't realize I can't do what I want to do now. I need to focus solely on her. I'm so used to doing whatever I wanted, and it's been a hard adjustment just to focus on her and not myself.

At first it bothered me that her father wasn't in my child's life. He just doesn't care, but I've gotten over that. It's me and her. I'm going to raise her myself. I'm used to being responsible, because I had to grow up fast myself.

I think a lot of dads don't realize what it takes to be a parent and how hard the mom works. They just want to come and pick up the child and not deal with the mom. That's not fair.

The best part of being a mom is that my daughter's cool like me. She has a lot of energy too. I like giving her baths and reading to her.



FATHER SHOWS LOVE FOR HIS DAUGHTER ONE LETTER AT A TIME

By Michelle, FM Friend

The first time I met my dad, I was nine years old and he was in prison in Illinois. I remember him being very nice to me and calling me "his baby girl." I also remember the prison guards patting me down and me screaming "don't touch me!" I had never been to a prison before. It turned out his family was only a neighborhood away from mine and I didn't even know it. My aunt came and told me about my dad which I hadn't heard much about before. My mom was really young when she had me and my dad was a lot older than her. I was raised in a very loving home by my grandparents on my mom's side.

It was great finding out I had all these cousins. We started playing together and I would go over to their house and stay. My grandparents house had more rules than my father's family did. When I was there everyone was always saying how much I looked like my dad.

He was released when I was in the seventh grade and we hung out a lot but it didn't last long as he ended up killing one of his lady friends that summer after a bad argument. He told me outright what he did, and said she stabbed him first. He was on the run and said he was going to California, where he used a cousin's name. (That cousin used to come and take me to breakfast. I wonder if my dad told him to look after me.)

My dad was very intellectual but he had a bad temper. When he was in California, he started taking very strong drugs, and one night he got really high and killed a store owner. He was arrested and sentenced to life.

He came back to Illinois from California for the trial for his first case. I went to his court dates with my grandfather. At trial was the first time I heard that my father was a "menace to society." I quickly figured out what that meant. I had heard that my father was dangerous. I knew he went from zero to ten immediately, but I was never fearful ever around him. It was hard to understand how he could be two ways.

After he was sentenced to life, I'd write him but I would go through periods where I wasn't in touch as much. I did care, but I was young and I had a lot going on in my life during my teenage years. It was hard. But he never gave up on me. He stayed in contact always.

He was a real charmer and had a way with women and always seemed to have more than one girlfriend. He would have them send me birthday and Christmas gifts. He never forgot important events in my life.

I was lucky that both he and I liked to write. He was such a good writer. I looked forward to getting his letters. They made me feel so special. When I was younger, he taught me new vocabulary words. He really stressed the power of words, and that's something I've carried with me my whole life. I often think how would it have been if he had not liked to write or written in the way that he did. In his letters, he always asked about my life. He was truly interested in me. I felt that. That made all the difference. It was amazing how many times in my life he helped just through letters. He always wrote that he loved me. I felt so connected to him even though he was so far away in such a different world.

I didn't see him again until 18 years later. By then, I had gotten married and had two sons. I didn't initially visit him in California because I hadn't flown in an airplane and was afraid to fly, but eventually I overcame that fear, and took my sons, who were 11 and 4 years old at the time, to go see him. We

flew into LA, then took a bus far out of the city into the middle of nowhere. The prison was so remote, that I remember seeing tumbleweeds for the first time while on my way to visit him. My youngest son wasn't allowed in, but a volunteer group from the prison watched him while me and my older son went.

In the end, I visited him four times over the years. He sent me a letter that he had lung cancer and only had two years to live. I took time off to visit him one last time. They had him in a medical ward. I couldn't believe how skinny, sick, and bad he looked. He always took pride in his appearance. He was very fastidious, and it was hard to see him like that. The next day, they had taken him to the hospital, where I had to get special permission to see him. It was hard to keep my composure seeing him so sick. I gave him some water for his cracked lips. He was in handcuffs and shackled to the bed. I thought to myself, *why did they have to do that? What was he going to do while that weak?*

He was desperate to give me a lot of stuff, but didn't have it with him. He did have a gold necklace with a cross on it, and I put it on. Then, they told me to leave as prison visiting hours were over. I called my husband, crying and crying on the phone.

That was the last time I saw him. My uncle called one cold January day and said, "your father has died." Even though I knew it was coming, I was still shocked.

At the funeral, I sat in the back and was really sad. I didn't have to express my feelings for my dad in a public way. I knew how much he loved me and I loved him. I truly felt the care he had for me and was so grateful. His brother and other members of his family did everything they could to keep him out of jail, but he just couldn't manage his temper. I often wonder if he got the help he needed when he was a child, how much loss and pain would have been prevented; what he could have done with his life. He was so smart and kind.

We have a lot of similarities. I know I disengage with people sometimes because I know what I'm capable of if I'm really angry. I don't want to get into it with people who want to escalate the situation. I can't risk that. I learned that from my father. I am really intentional on curbing my temper. I'm like my father, too, with my love of learning. I went to college, got my master's degree, earned a doctorate from an Ivy League institution, became a principal, and now I run a nonprofit.

I share my story to say to other incarcerated fathers, just because the bars separate you doesn't mean your hearts can't be connected to your children. I truly felt my father's love and presence in my life, and he was behind bars for the majority of my life. No amount of steel, concrete, or distance can stop love.

You are me; only a Female ---
Hey, I was really glad to again, behold
you in the flesh; most of the time, I
could not tell anyone was in the room
with us; I can never pay attention when
my Baby is near; never could.
Baby, I am extremely proud of you; don't
let anything, especially, what I've done keep
you from excelling. You've earned it, in
spite of humble beginnings. You be well
and give the Boys my Love.
I'll write more later
Thank you.



THE REAL WORLD OF WORK WITH DAVID

From Behind Bars to Behind the Tea Bar!

By Kelli, FM Book Club Manager

*Kelli talks with Free Minds Member David, who describes the journey that took him through more than seven years in federal prison to becoming a beloved **barista** (bartender who serves drinks, usually coffee or tea) at Washington, DC's favorite tea bar.*

KELLI: So, let's start at the beginning. When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?

DAVID: Oh, man! The first thing I really wanted to be was an archaeologist. As a kid, I was just fascinated with digging in the ground, finding old coins, and all that. Even when it was just worms I was digging up, it was just fascinating to me that there was life, and like memories, underneath the ground! I used to get a dollar from my mom, and I would bury it and then come back and dig it up 30 days later. I was that obsessed with things of value beneath the ground that we walk on carelessly every day. I was like yeah, that's what I want to do!

KELLI: Wow. That's pretty interesting, considering your job now is dealing with plants and herbs and roots that grow in the ground!

DAVID: Right?

KELLI: How did you go about your job search when you were released from federal prison?

DAVID: The first thing I did was go to MORCA (The Mayor's Office on Returning Citizens Affairs). They help you get your ID, your social security card. One of the women there helped me put together my resume. They even got me a few interviews. Through them, I also took a class to become a registered flagger. All of these flagger opportunities came up, but then I discovered you needed to have a driver's license to take the jobs. (Lesson learned: Do your research and ask a lot of questions!)

KELLI: So, tell me about the first job that you got.

DAVID: Once I got my phone, I could submit applications on a website called Indeed and got an interview with a big construction company. I passed all the steps and they hired me as a general laborer.

KELLI: That's awesome!

DAVID: Yeah, that's what I thought, but there's more to the story. I was so excited to get that job! I went to Home Depot to get a 22-ounce hammer, got myself steel-toed boots, all of that. The first day, I got to the construction site, and the work was really tough. But I was hanging in there, because that job paid \$16/hour. Then, near the end of my shift, I tripped and fell on a nail that went through my pants leg straight into my knee. As easily as that nail went in my leg, it could have gone into my eye. When I reported it to my foreman, he didn't send me to the doctor, the hospital or anything. He just told me to go home. I was in good physical shape, but when I got hurt and nobody cared, I thought, this isn't for me. It was too dangerous. They had no safety training at all and no safety equipment. I was disappointed in myself for quitting after one day, but at the same time I knew I needed to be at a job that I could maintain for the long haul. That's when I checked in at the Free Minds office. Tia, the FM Job Coach got me an interview at the tea shop. The rest is history!

KELLI: What exactly is your job?

DAVID: My title is bartender, but we all share responsibilities – whether it be washing dishes at night, sweeping, mopping after closing. During the day I'm a bartender, but at night I've got to clean up, I've got to restock the bar, I've got to make sure all the shelves are full of teas ready to be for the morning.

KELLI: That sounds like hard work.

DAVID: It is. But when I applied, I told the owner I was going to work diligently. I told her I would learn fast. Sometimes people say those things just to get a job, but then they're half-stepping. Throughout my whole 7-hour shift, you're never going to catch me standing around doing nothing. I'm doing a walkthrough to make sure all the customers are good. I'm coming through, "Y'all how is it going? Everything all right? You guys need

anything?" I'm wiping off tables, picking up trash. I don't stop moving. The owner told me she loves how hard I work. The \$10.50/hour might suck now, but she's already told me that if I keep this up, I'll be promoted to assistant manager and make a salary.

KELLI: So, what exactly is this tea shop? What can I get there?

DAVID: It's an amazing place. The owner is an herbalist and a naturopathic healer. We sell tonics, teas, and drinks meant to heal people – no matter what it is they might be dealing with.

When I first started working there, the manager had emailed me a whole list of all these different plants and herbs: St. John's wort, chamomile, ginger, turmeric, and on and on. My job is to study these things until I know all of them. We make 76 different drinks – each one of them completely organic and natural – and I already know how to make 38 of them. I am dedicated to mastering my craft so I can not only make every drink, but explain to the customer how, and why it will benefit them. I'm a junior herbalist in training. Before this job, I had zero interest in homeopathic medicine. Now I'm obsessed. And this stuff works!

KELLI: So, it's like a health food restaurant?

DAVID: You know that TV show *Friends*, where the guys all come into this coffee shop every single day, and even go on dates at that shop? This is a Jamaican version of *Friends*. The owner is Jamaican, and the shop has this really Caribbean vibe to it. We have so many regulars coming in. They'll come in on a date. Or they'll come in feeling sick or with aches and pains. The place is decorated beautifully and intentionally with handmade furniture and all kinds of art. Everything has a meaning. It's a place of comfort. People can come and know the staff are going to be nice to you and heal you and make sure you're okay. It's just a big ball of positive energy.

KELLI: Your job sounds amazing. Are there any downsides?

DAVID: There's always going to be challenges. For example, I work with one young man who doesn't give his job 110% like I do. When I work with him, I'm doing double the amount of work that I do when I'm working with other people. It's really annoying to have a lazy coworker and I have to make up for his slacking. They want us to work at the speed of light. Now I'm working at the speed of light, and he's working at the speed of a snail! But I'm not going to let anything or anyone get in the way of my goal. I need to save \$1,500 to get an apartment when I leave the halfway house. I'm close. Am I going to let my frustration with a coworker make me quit or go complain in a manner that's not professional and then get fired? And then what? Now I don't make the money and I have to go to a shelter? All because I couldn't keep myself emotionally together to deal with a difficult individual? No! Don't ever let anyone else get in the way of what you're trying to accomplish. I love this job, I love the people, and I want to stay here.

KELLI: What advice would you give to other Free Minds members looking for fulfilling employment when they come home?

DAVID: Of course, the first thing is reach out to Free Minds for help! That's obvious. The second thing is don't go back to your past life or your past friends. If you know that hanging with Tom, Dick, and Harry is the reason why you went to prison, then don't go back hanging with them. I don't even care if it's your family! I realize I'm successful now and more doors are opening because I'm doing the exact opposite from what I did before. I'm working at a place that's only paying \$10.50/hour, but it's not about the money, it's about the people. I'm meeting people who want to open doors for me! I changed my environment. Do you know how amazing it is to have a job with people you actually like? That are your friends? Change your surroundings, don't do the same things that you were doing the first time. Obviously, that didn't work out for you. Believe me. You're going to be so much happier.



AROUND THE WORLD

The column where we explore places near and far on our wondrous planet. The writer is the guide and the readers are on "vacation via imagination."

Montego Bay, Jamaica

By Mbachur, Outreach Coordinator

In August, I visited Montego Bay, Jamaica. This trip was honestly a life changing experience. Montego Bay is the capital of Saint James Parish on Jamaica's North coast and is a major cruise ship port with many beach resorts and Jamaica's number one vacation spot for tourists.

When people hear of Jamaica, they think of a few things—Bob Marley, ganja, jerk chicken, and beautiful beaches – but the country is much more than just those things.

During our trip, we visited the National Museum West in downtown Montego Bay, where we learned about one of Jamaica's biggest slave rebellions, Rastafarian culture, and prominent Black figures who helped shape the country to be what is today. We also visited some of the towns deeper into the city of Montego Bay and spoke to locals about things like poverty and why the "N" word is rarely used in Jamaica like it is here in the United States.

During slavery, Jamaica functioned primarily as a sugarcane port. The island's last major slave revolt, called the Christmas Rebellion (Baptist War) took place in St. James (Montego Bay) in 1831 and was led by a man named Samuel Sharpe. Although born a slave, Samuel Sharpe educated himself by learning to read newspapers and books. Sharpe was named as the key figure behind the resistance and was captured and hanged in Montego Bay. In 1975, Sharpe was proclaimed a national hero of Jamaica, and the main square of the town was renamed in his honor.

The next exhibit in the museum was about the Rastafari movement. Influenced by both **Ethiopianism** and the Back-to-Africa movement promoted by **Pan-Africanist** figures like Marcus Garvey, the Rastafari exhibition was one of the most interesting to me. The Rastafari movement was not founded by legend Bob Marley, but it originated among impoverished and socially disenfranchised Afro-Jamaican communities in 1930s Jamaica. Rastafarianism is to be considered a social and religious lifestyle, with an estimated 700,000 to 1 million Rastas worldwide!

Marcus Garvey was considered to be Jamaica's first national hero. His Pan-Africanist vision is what spearheaded many projects to establish independent Black states around the world. In the United States, he was a noted Civil Rights activist who founded the **Negro World newspaper** and a company called Black Star Line that would provide transportation to Africa for all descendants through the diaspora. In 1922, Garvey and some of his comrades were indicted for mail fraud and served two years of a five-year prison term and was then deported. Unfortunately, he was never able to revive the movement abroad, but his legacy lives on. It is rumored that Garvey is credited with coining the phrase "Black is beautiful."

During our visit to the towns of Montego Bay, we visited a few shops and markets where the real "hustlers" were. When I say "hustlers," I mean the people that work day-to-day to make a living by selling anything they can to make ends meet. They sell fruits, beef patties, handmade jewelry, clothes, stolen jewelry, electronics, candy, and all kind of trinkets and gadgets that you can think of.

Montego Bay is pivotal to Jamaica's economy because it holds most of the weight of the country's tourism sector. So, when Americans spend their US dollars in these small markets or by buying the wares of the street hustlers, it can really make a difference to locals who don't work in hotels or restaurants or clubs. When we were in Jamaica, the currency exchange rate was about \$129 JA to \$1 USD. During our first night, we went to a restaurant to eat, and the bill was \$3,425.10 in Jamaican dollars. The US dollar conversion was \$29.78. There are tons of international companies that have hotels and resorts like Hilton, and international chains like Starbucks, Burger King, and Dairy Queen, but we made it our effort to support the local markets and street vendors who sold bottles of water and food, and souvenirs.

Towards the end of the trip, my friend and I were playing music, and one of the rappers used the "N" word in his song, and then it hit me. During our entire trip, we must have spoken to at least fifteen different people a day. I noticed that we never once heard any of the Jamaicans say the "N" word. At all. When we asked people about this, a lot of them said that Jamaicans (and many other Black people in the Caribbean) just don't use that word because it's not progressive to them/us as a group of people. Even though their culture is influenced by Black American culture, the word just isn't used like it is in the US. One elder said, "Jamaicans are cool people, we love good vibes and that word is all bad vibes. We don't like bad vibes in Jamaica." In the United States, it's different. I hear that word a couple times a day. In Jamaica, they say things like "brother."

My trip to Jamaica was definitely an eye-opener!

Key:

Ethiopianism - The Ethiopian movement is a religious movement that began in Southern Africa towards the end of the 19th century, when two groups broke away from the Anglican and Methodist churches.

Pan-Africanism - A movement created to unify and connect people of African descent worldwide.

Negro World newspaper - A weekly newspaper, established in 1918 in New York City, that served as the voice of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League, an organization founded by Marcus Garvey.



My friend and I did a parasail activity and were 8,000 feet up in the air. This is a picture of what parasailing looks like.



These are houses where people who do agricultural work (fishing and some farming) live.



IN THE NEWS: DEEP DIVE

By John, Free Minds Friend

DEEP DIVE: UNDERSTANDING FAMILY SEPARATION AT THE BORDER

Every year, thousands and thousands of people from Central America travel on a dangerous journey through Mexico to America's southern border, in search of what's known as political asylum. They are asking for protection from the endemic violence in those countries – especially Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador – where gangs control the streets and the drug trafficking.

Sometimes, families show up together to seek asylum. Sometimes, unaccompanied children and teenagers will arrive by themselves, often with information about a relative living in the United States.

Starting with the George W. Bush administration, America had a basic plan for how to handle the situation.

The families are sometimes detained for a brief period while the Department of Homeland Security determines the credibility of their claim. Many of those families are then released into the United States, often with GPS tracking, while their case moves through our immigration courts.

For the unaccompanied children, the policy has long been that Homeland Security hands those children over to another federal agency: The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). And HHS would put the children into what's known as the Unaccompanied Alien Children program (UAC).

Then, HHS provides shelter and care for the kids until they can find them a "sponsor" in the United States. In the vast majority of cases, that sponsor is either a parent or a relative who is already here. Once the child is placed with a sponsor, his or her court date for an asylum hearing is set.

The Trump administration has taken a harder stance on immigration than Bush or President Barack Obama, including those arriving to seek asylum. They do not want to permit asylum-seekers to live in the United States while awaiting their day in court, primarily out of concern that they will disappear into the country and simply become undocumented immigrants.

In the case of children in the UAC program, this is not unfounded: a high rate of those children never show up for their asylum hearing. The ones that do are not guaranteed a lawyer for the complicated job of proving a credible argument for political asylum in America.

In an effort to deter Central Americans from attempting to cross in search of protection, the administration took several steps. The

first was limiting the conditions that would permit asylum. Second, the administration issued "zero-tolerance" policies under which they would prosecute and move to immediately deport anyone trying to cross the border, even to seek asylum.

And finally, in instances where families sought asylum together, they began to separate children from their parents. The parents would go to detention centers run by Homeland Security.

The children would end up in the UAC program that we described above, even though they did not arrive to the border unaccompanied.

This practice did not last long, because leaders from both political parties, along with many public interest groups, religious organizations and corporations, loudly objected to the practice of ripping children from their parents' arms. So the administration relented after several weeks, and ended the practice of family separation.

But damage had already been done: 2,654 children had already been torn from their families by the practice. So a federal judge ordered the Trump administration to immediately begin returning those children in the UAC program to the custody of their parents.

This has proved more difficult than one might imagine. Some of the parents had already been deported; others were living in immigration detention centers, and it is against the law for a child to live in those for more than 20 days.

And in some cases, the administration has said they will not reunite children with the person they arrived with because there is concern that the person either is not their parent or has a violent criminal history. In those cases, it would still be possible to place the child in the custody of a family member living in the United States.

As of late August, more than 500 children remained separated from their parents.



43rd President George W. Bush



44th President George W. Bush



US zero tolerance on border crossings causing turmoil

IN THE NEWS: BRIEFS

WORLD

by Abhi, FM Friend

Germany: Kenyan athlete Eliud Kipchoge ran the fastest marathon ever, at 2:01.39 in Berlin, Germany, and scientists now think the first human to break the two-hour mark – once thought an impossible feat – could do so in our lifetimes.



Kenyan athlete Eliud Kipchoge

Germany: Anti-migrant violence broke out following a series of neo-Nazi rallies with over 8,000 attendees, followed immediately by counter-protests and a concert against violence that drew 65,000. The head of Germany's BfV (the equivalent of the FBI) was fired by Chancellor Angela Merkel after he downplayed the initial violence.

Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right Presidential candidate in Brazil, was stabbed in the gut, but survived the assassination attempt. He is currently leading opinion polls, though unexpectedly he is performing worse after the stabbing. Incumbent President Lula has been barred from running due to Brazilian anti-corruption laws.



Brazilian Presidential candidate, Jair Bolsonaro

Syria: A Russian patrol aircraft veered into Syria to avoid Israeli airspace, and was then mistakenly shot down by Syrian government forces. The entire battalion responsible for the shutdown is facing criminal charges from the Syrian military, suggesting that the Russian government may have demanded that someone be held responsible.

United States: The US announced it would cut support to a United Nations agency which provides aid to about 5 million Palestinian refugees – following the announcement, Germany and Jordan called on the European Union and Arab League, respectively, to provide emergency funds to cover the \$12 million gap this would leave. Earlier in the month, President Trump ordered that the DC Office of the Palestinian Liberation Organization be closed.

United States: The Trump administration continues waging the trade war with China by announcing \$200 billion worth of new tariffs on goods from China. China retaliated with tariffs on goods from the US.

NATIONAL

by Jessica, FM Prison Book Club Coordinator

In late June, Supreme Court Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy announced his retirement from the court at the end of July, giving President Trump an opportunity to fill a second Supreme Court seat. In 2017, Trump nominated Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court to fill the open seat left by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in 2016. Trump's current nomination is Brett Kavanaugh, who is undergoing public hearings in the Senate Judiciary Committee as they evaluate



Supreme Court Associate Justice Anthony Kennedy

his candidacy. On September 16, 2018, Christine Blasey Ford, came forward with an allegation that Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her when he was a 17-year old high school student.

In August, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ordered the release of a 900-page Grand Jury report detailing sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in Pennsylvania. The report named over 300 priests accused of sexually abusing more than 1,000 children in six dioceses.



Hurricane Florence caused destruction and death in North and South Carolina

In early September, Hurricane Florence cause heavy rains and flooding throughout the Carolinas. Please let us know if you were affected.

SPORTS

by Jessica, FM Prison Book Club Coordinator

The US Open took place in August, with Novak Djokovic beating Juan Martin del Potro in the men's final to win his third US Open title and 14th Grand Slam title. More notably, in the women's final, 20-year old Naomi Osaka defeated Serena Williams, her tennis idol, to become the first Japanese-Haitian-American player to win a Grand Slam tournament. The match drew international controversy after the referee penalized Williams for several emotional outbursts during the game. Fans and professional tennis players alike debated whether these penalties were sexist responses that would never be levied on a male counterpart or justified by her actions.



Serena Williams

Football season has just begun. The Redskins are off to a lackluster start, losing the first game of the season 9-21 to the Indianapolis Colts.

The Washington Mystics, expected to finish eighth in a preseason prediction, made it to the WNBA finals for the first time in the team's history, thanks in part to their addition of WNBA All-Star Elena Delle Donne. Despite ultimately losing (0 games to 3) to the Seattle Storm, this season is viewed as a significant accomplishment and attestation to the team's championship potential going forward.

Their NBA counterpart, the Wizards, just signed Dwight Howard from the Charlotte Hornets, which will likely affect the team's performance this season in yet to be determined ways.

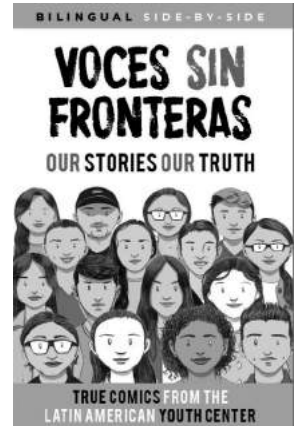


Dwight Howard of the Washington Wizards



TATO'S STORY, AN EXCERPT FROM *VOCES SIN FRONTERAS*

The next issue of the *Connect* is about journeys, and we wanted to share with you one of the journeys of young people from the Latin American Youth Center in Washington, DC, featured in Shout Mouse Press's recently published *Voces sin Fronteras*, a book of the stories of these young people in comics and words. Reprinted with their permission is Tato's Story, the text in English and Spanish on below and the comics pictured on the right.



To Die Dreaming *by Tato*

When I was 15 and living in Honduras, I had many responsibilities. My mom couldn't work. I was the only one who could help. There was also a lot of violence in my neighborhood, many people got hurt. Some got killed. After a while, I decided to leave the country to escape the violence. My father lived on the other side of Honduras. But still there was violence there. I was able to make it to Mexico City. But I didn't have money or food. I had to sleep in the streets. Even through the rain, the cold nights, the heat, I had no choice but to catch a train called The Beast, where many have lost their lives. I had to cross one last obstacle to reach my dreams. At last, I made it.

Thank you, God, for everything.

I found a way to help my family get far away from the violence...
... and I fulfilled my dream of starting a new life.

Morir Sõnando *por Tato*

Cuando tenía 15 años y vivía en Honduras, tenía muchas responsabilidades. Mi madre no podía trabajar. Yo era la única persona quien la podía ayudar. También había mucha violencia en mi vecindario. Muchas personas fueron lastimadas. A algunas las mataron. Después de poco tiempo, decidí salir del país para escapar la violencia. Mi padre vivía en el otro lado de Honduras. Pero también había violencia ahí. Logré llegar hasta la ciudad de México. Pero no tenía dinero ni comida. Tenía que dormir en las calles. A pesar de la lluvia, las noches frías, el calor. No tuve otra opción más que tomar un tren llamado La Bestia donde muchos han perdido la vida. Tenía que cruzar un último obstáculo para alcanzar mis sueños. Al fin, lo logré.

Gracias dios por todo.

Encontré la manera de ayudar a mi familia a alejarse de la violencia...
... y cumplí mi sueño de comenzar una nueva vida.

CUANDO TENÍA 15 AÑOS Y VIVÍA EN HONDURAS, TENÍA MUCHAS RESPONSABILIDADES.



MI MADRE NO PODÍA TRABAJAR. YO ERA LA ÚNICA PERSONA QUIEN LA PODÍA AYUDAR.

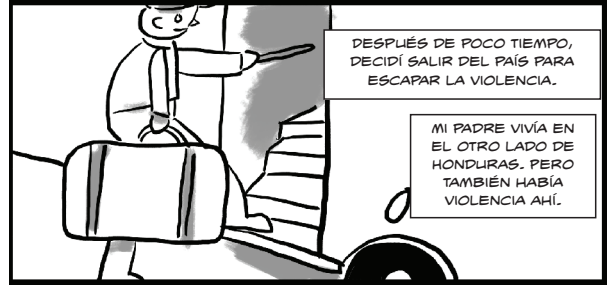


TAMBIÉN HABÍA MUCHA VIOLENCIA EN MI VECINDARIO. MUCHAS PERSONAS FUERON LASTIMADAS.



A ALGUNAS LAS MATARON.

DESPUÉS DE POCO TIEMPO, DECIDÍ SALIR DEL PAÍS PARA ESCAPAR LA VIOLENCIA.



MI PADRE VIVÍA EN EL OTRO LADO DE HONDURAS. PERO TAMBIÉN HABÍA VIOLENCIA AHÍ.

LOGRÉ LLEGAR HASTA LA CIUDAD DE MÉXICO. PERO NO TENÍA DINERO NI COMIDA. TENÍA QUE DORMIR EN LAS CALLES.

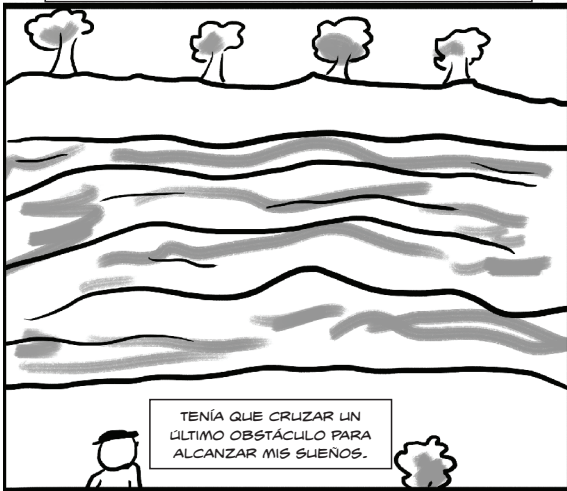


A PESAR DE LA LLUVIA.



LAS NOCHES FRÍAS. EL CALOR.

NO TUVE OTRA OPCIÓN MÁS QUE TOMAR UN TREN LLAMADO LA BESTIA DONDE MUCHOS HAN PERDIDO LA VIDA.



TENÍA QUE CRUZAR UN ÚLTIMO OBSTÁCULO PARA ALCANZAR MIS SUEÑOS.

AL FIN, LO LOGRÉ.

GRACIAS DIOS POR TODO.



ENCONTRÉ LA MANERA DE AYUDAR A MI FAMILIA A ALEJARSE DE LA VIOLENCIA...

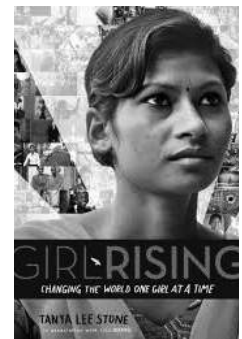
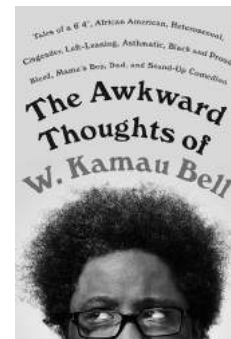
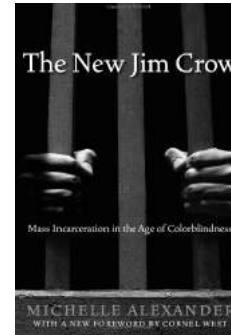
... Y CUMPLÍ MI SUEÑO DE COMENZAR UNA NUEVA VIDA.



WHAT WE'RE READING

Are you reading something you have really strong feelings about and want to share your thoughts with other Free Minds members? Send us your impressions (approximately 100 words) and we may feature your book in the next "What We're Reading."

- **PJ:** *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander. This book explained the relationship between slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration; their similarities, in an age where people claim not to see skin color anymore.
- **Julia:** *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo. This is a novel written in verse (meaning it's all in poetry form) about a young woman named Xiomara Bautista growing up in Harlem. She's going through a lot of adolescent issues, rebelling against her mother and always putting on a tough face. But she begins writing poetry and discovers the power of her voice. The author is an accomplished spoken word poet, and I loved the energy and power in *The Poet X*.
- **Tara:** *The Awkward Thoughts of W. Kamau Bell* by W. Kamau Bell. One of my favorite things is comedic writing. This book is awesome. Comedian Kamau Bell weaves current issues, historic events, and social commentary in a truly engaging and entertaining way.
- **Jessica:** *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown. I just finished reading this book recently and I can't help but think all of our members should read it because it's about combatting those feelings of not being "enough," which I think we can all relate to. Although at first, I wasn't sure if members would be receptive to because it talks a lot about vulnerability, the more I think about it, the more I know I'm wrong. Free Minds members are some of the most FREE and OPEN people I know - and know that vulnerability is strength in itself too!
- **DJ:** *Girl Rising* by Tanya Lee Stone. *Girl Rising* was filled with heartwarming stories about young girls around the world who are smart and deserving of educational opportunities, but have been excluded from the chance for one reason or another. When these girls were granted the chance to participate in educational programs, it was apparent how the effect of education tamped down the presence of poverty and unfair disadvantages. Their stories gave me pause to reflect on my own life and how education has changed it positively. My confidence is bolstered now. I am eager to join in discussions, express my wit, and even offer guidance to others who have yet to see education as a beacon of hope and security. The book *Girl Rising* offered a powerful message of how fortunate we are in America to have so many educational opportunities available to us. I will never disregard these opportunities."



BOOK BALLOT!

Remember to vote in the BOOK BALLOT from the previous issue! We want YOU to help us pick the next BAM books. Send in your top two choices from the books below. If you have other recommendations, feel free to send those along too! The top two vote-getters will be our book club selections for the rest of the year.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Voces Sin Fronteras by DC's Latin American Youth Center	The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas	Men We Reaped by Jesmyn Ward	Right as Rain by George Pelecanos	The Day Tajon Got Shot by DC's Beacon House Writers	Man's Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club

Bastards of the Reagan Era

Hey Free Minds Readers! The next BAM book will be the poetry collection *Bastards of the Reagan Era* by Reginald Dwayne Betts. Expect this book in September/October. If you don't receive it and want to make sure you're on the list, just send us a letter!

Some of you may have read other books by this author, like *A Question of Freedom* or *Shahid Reads His Own Palm*. He grew up in Washington, DC, and was incarcerated as an adult in a Virginia prison when he was 16. Now he is a published author, a graduate of Yale Law School, and a friend of Free Minds.

When you read, here are a few ideas to think about:

1. The title refers to the author's generation, growing up in the Reagan era, a period of time beginning when Ronald Reagan became president in the 1980s. Do you feel like things have changed? In what ways was your experience different? In what ways was it the same?
2. How is Washington, DC, brought to life in this book? Do you see multiple sides to the city? Do you think he does a good job characterizing the city? Why or why not?
3. There are 11 poems in this book with the title "For the City That Nearly Broke Me." Why do you think he keeps returning to this theme? If you were writing a book of poetry about your life, what idea would you return to again and again?
4. In the poem "Bastards of the Reagan Era" (page 15), he writes about the journey through Virginia in the prison van, but there's another journey in the poem too. What are all the journeys in this poem? On page 26, he writes, "I could tell you I changed/ But history will haunt us all." In what ways is history haunting the poet and us, the readers?
5. Do you have a favorite poem in this book? Could you relate to it? Why or why not?





NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: JOURNEYS (COMING JANUARY 2019)

There's a famous saying that goes, "It's not the destination, it's the journey."

For the next issue, we're going to be reading and writing about *journeys* – both physical journeys and mental journeys. Where have you journeyed in life, and how did these journeys change you? This could mean traveling physically to the United States from another country, riding in the prison van or airplane, visiting another neighborhood, city, or state...any journey, no matter the distance. OR this could mean the journeys you take in your mind, your internal journeys. Who were you when you were younger, and how have you changed since then? How are you still changing?

Think about where you've been, and where you're going... that's got to be an incredible journey!

Just Past the Horizon

a poem by _____

I'm on a ship setting sail, with so much possibility
Where the sky meets the water is as far as I can see
Although the journey is long, I know what's in store for me

Just past the horizon, I _____

Just past the horizon, I hope _____

Just past the horizon, I know _____

Just past the horizon, I see _____ is waiting for me

Just past the horizon, I see _____

Just past the horizon, I'm waiting for _____

Just past the horizon, I will _____

Just past the horizon, I _____

Dear Younger Me

a poem by _____

You had a dream last night. In this dream, the person you are today goes back to a younger version of yourself.

This was a time where things seem hard to handle and you were most vulnerable, or maybe at a time you were most happy (your choice). What would you say to each other?

What advice, life tools etc. would you give to the younger you and what would the younger you say in response? Is there anything in life you may have lost touch with that the younger you would like to tell you to not give upon?

A prompt by FM member QP

And in case you're thinking ahead,

the March/April 2019 issue of the *Connect* will be all about healing! Healing ourselves, healing others, healing the world, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Send us a poem or essay of your own, or use our prompts for inspiration.

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!

