

December 2018/January 2019

Vol. 8, Issue 1

Free minds Connect

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JOURNEYS

**INWARD AND OUTWARD JOURNEYS:
WHERE WE'VE BEEN AND WHERE WE'RE GOING**



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!

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Next Issue's Theme:
Healing

The *Connect* is a bimonthly creative writing newsletter published by the members, staff, and friends of the Free Minds Book Club. Each issue focuses on a specific theme as well as highlights the discussions of the Free Minds long distance BAM! (Books Across the Miles) book club. We publish five issues per year.

TALK BACK WITH TARA *Letter from the Editor*

Happy New Year, Free Minds Journeyers!

I hope this first issue of 2019 finds you with hope and optimism for a new year filled with learning and personal growth. I always try to kick start a new year with a personal motto. A friend suggested "*SERENE in Twenty Nine-TEEN*," and it spoke to me!

The wiser I get (I always replace the word "older" with "wiser" now ☺), the more I realize change and action works best if I come to it first from a place of peace and clarity. I welcome you to take my motto for yourself, and we can be calm together. My **equanimity** (mental calmness, composure, and evenness of temper, especially in a difficult situation) was tested right away as I was driving back to DC after the holidays and got stuck in a massive traffic jam, at a complete standstill for hours. You can all probably guess where I traveled to then – an inner journey through reading! I was lucky because Jessica had just sent over all of your incredible poems and writings for this *Connect*, and I was able to embark on an amazing trip on I-95 without my car moving an inch!

Extra big kudos to you all on this issues' submissions. They are exceptional. You will read about Bereket and EU, who embarked on perilous treks, leaving their families in Ethiopia and El Salvador to escape danger and find a better life in the US. RTC shares how his brave journey inside himself enabled him to pull free from heroin and insecurities he has been battling his whole life.

Our intern Nick (attending Howard University) interviewed FM member Brandon, who shared this about getting his commercial driver's license and driving all through the city: "*In the street life, I stayed confined to one area, and now that I'm legit, I have my license, I can go anywhere... I'm downtown, I'm all the way uptown, I'm in places where I'm like, "Wow this is beautiful!"*"

We love FM member JG's description of traveling far, "*All of my mental journeys by way of books have nourished me, uplifted me, and left me with a sense of mental freedom I've never known*."

We've reprinted a heartwrenching article about one man's

journey to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, to see if his ancestor was a victim of lynching. The memorial was created by Bryan Stevenson, who you may remember from the book *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. I was able to attend the opening of the National Memorial and the Legacy Museum that links our current mass incarceration epidemic directly to the institution of slavery. It was one of the most profound and life-changing outward and inward journeys I have ever taken.

It was one of the most profound and life-changing outward and inward journeys I have ever taken. Let us know if you want more information about the Legacy Museum and Memorial and we will send it to you.

I believe the only way to bring about racial equity and healing is to confront and learn from the atrocities that this country has committed. And as you know, we love the healing way of travelling through grief and trauma by writing about it. MS eloquently articulates both the mental and emotional freedom writing gave him to face the pain of his childhood abuse and eventually travel to places of love and certainty. He found the courage to share his writing and we are beyond thrilled to be part of MS's journey as he writes, "*I've finally shared my voice with others beyond the walls of self. I have found people who want to hear what I have to offer, and in and of itself, this is a new experience for me: Acceptance.*"

Thank you MS and all of you Free Minds members. Your ability to withstand powerful outside forces of negativity and still maintain a positive mindset open to inner growth is a much-needed refueling station for us on this journey of life we travel together.

Until next time,
Tara

*May the long time sun shine upon you
All love surround you
And the pure light within you guide your way on
(check out meditation on page 21)*

FREE MINDS HQ

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

By Melissa

Two Authors Visit DC Jail

Elizabeth Acevedo, author of *The Poet X*, and Jason Reynolds, author of *Long Way Down*, visited the DC Jail Book Club this past fall and were big hits! Elizabeth shared a piece about the power of being a woman even though society doesn't often see their strength. She won the National Book Award for *The Poet X*! Jason shared about his childhood in DC during the '80s and '90s, and how he became a reader relatively late in his life (at the age of 18). He is now a *New York Times* bestselling author. It's never too late to start reading and writing!



Featured on PBS

You can now say you're famous TV stars! We were selected to be on PBS's (Public Broadcasting System) *The Great American Read*, an eight-part documentary series featuring America's 100 best-loved novels. The national network with over 90 million viewers came to the DC Jail to film our book club members reading one of the chosen novels: *The Giver*. We're so proud and grateful to our members who agreed to be shown on TV in an effort to change the narrative around incarceration and education.

Volunteer Letter Writing Circle

We have so many volunteers who are always asking how they can help out and we get so many letters every month filled with great writing and poetry that we decided to form a volunteer letter writing circle one night a week to widen your circle of support. Community members can share their love for reading and writing through correspondence with all of you Books Across the Miles prison book club members. We're so thrilled and grateful to have them! If you write to the office, you may hear back from one of them ☺



FREE MINDS MAILBAG

We love getting mail from our Free Minds family. Here are some of your thoughts on the September/October 2018 Connect on Parenthood.

EJ: The September/October issue had me in tears. Me and my kids have a bond of gold. I have been writing and calling my kids from behind these walls for the past 25 years. We love each other so very much. Their mom has been an angel and soldier through it all, even though me and my kids' mom are not together. We still are very cool and wish each other the best. We are proud grandparents of 4 grandbabies.

Thank you so very much for sharing the pictures of the Smithsonian Museum, as well as the National Zoo and the pandas... I can remember the first time I took my kids to the zoo. They were so happy. I can even picture the smile on their little faces. I love and miss my kids so very much it hurts.

SC: The questions asked in this issue's Ask HF are questions that are not asked enough by young men entering the system. HF gave the most important advice that he could have given and that was: you cannot be afraid to be yourself.

I have seen it too many times to count, how a young man comes into these environments and immediately attempts to adopt the characteristics of the individuals that he wants to gain acceptance from, all in the name of being cool. The sad part is that these young guys spend so much time covering up and hiding who they really are, that they never get a chance to know their true self; they never get a chance to grow and mature properly into the man that they could be.

If I could give some advice to all the young brothers who are headed to the feds, it would be: Before you seek out the acceptance of those around you, learn to accept yourself. Figure out who you are and love what you find. Because one thing is for certain: if you do not like yourself, how do you expect others to like you?

TG: Donte's story about meeting his father in prison and Tia's article about keeping the communication between her children and their father alive floored me. I have not stopped crying.

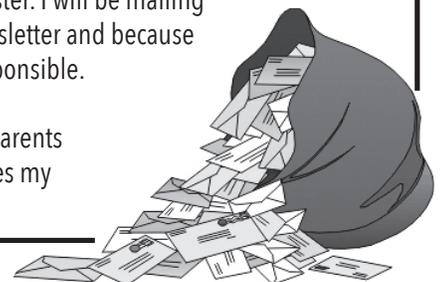
I left the world in '99, leaving a one-year-old son behind. I was too embarrassed about being locked up then to reach out and try to forge a relationship with my son. While here, I met a man who claimed to be my father. My mother claimed she would explain everything to me when I go home, but I never made it home and cancer allowed her to take her secrets to her grave.

Then, after being here for 16 years, I got a DNA request from a woman with an 18-year-old son. Yes, you guessed it, I'm the papa! Since then, I've withdrawn deeper into myself. I sought refuge from the pain of not being there by not thinking of them. I've tried to protect myself from the shame by making myself believe they are better off not knowing me. But this Connect and all of the poems and essays have made me wash away all that nonsense with the tears I've never cried. Thank you Free Minds Family for waking me up.

CM: I loved how the last *Connect* on parenthood came out. It was over the top! I love how Keela opened up about her family struggles through incarceration and how to keep the line of communication open. You guys are the best! Every story was great but my favorite was Donte meeting his real dad right here in prison. Wow. Keep up the good work.

BKC: I was so impressed with the parenthood information about rewarding your kid/kids. I shared this newsletter with someone who knows I am getting my stepson a present for Christmas because he always make good grades in school and he started back playing football like I ask him to do for me. Yah man, I gave him my word at the beginning of the year I would get him a present as long as he stay out of trouble, do good in school, and keep a clean & organized room while living with my sister. I will be mailing him this whole newsletter about Parenthood because my poem to him was published in this newsletter and because this is a big lesson he can learn about parenting. Also this will get him started on being more responsible.

MC: When I sat down and read how everybody had so much to say about their parents and how parents had so much to say about their kids, it brought tears to my eyes, because I really wanna know, does my mother love me because I am her child (meaning she has to) or is it because she wants to?





FAMILY TIES

My Family's Journey from El Salvador to the US

By EU, Free Minds Member

Free Minds member EU shares the impact that the 3,000-plus mile journey from El Salvador to the United States has had on him and his family.

I was born in a town called La Union in El Salvador. I only have a few memories of my country. I remember going hunting with my father. And I remember the mango tree that was right outside of my window. I'd go climb the tree and eat mangoes until I was sick!

I was very small when my father made the trip to the United States. He told me later how hard it was. How he went days without food or water. After he left, it was just me and my mother. When I was four, my father came back to get my mother. There were no opportunities for them in El Salvador. They left me with my grandparents until my uncle could pay someone to bring me to the United States. The trip took more than a month. When we crossed the border, I was climbing high up on something and a man told me to grab his hand. I wouldn't do it, and I almost fell. Later they told me those rocks were so high up, that if I would have fallen, I would've died. I remember walking with a girl across the desert for five days and four nights. Just walking and walking. My shoes were all broken up and full of sand. After the desert, we alternated walking and riding in cars. They called them "special trips" when they involved a pregnant woman or children that couldn't ride on top of the trains. "Special trips" cost even more than the regular ones, and those were \$10,000-\$15,000 a person. My father had to give them his house to pay for the trip.

I wasn't scared. I know I should have been, but I wasn't. I just wanted to be with my parents. That's what kept me going, was thinking of being with them again. When I arrived in DC, I was so happy to see them. My mom gave me chicken and fried rice and I remember getting it all over the floor. I was just a messy little kid!

Being an immigrant in this country hasn't always been easy. Neither of my parents really knows how to read or write. They both work long hours in restaurants. I've been called names like "Spic," "Mexican," and "grape-picker." Kids used to laugh at me for the way I dressed. But I'm proud of my parents for making the journey and bringing me here. We came here illegally, but we have made something of ourselves. They came here to give me a better life. They were thinking about me and nobody else. Then my siblings came along, and just like they gave me a good life, they gave them a good life. We all work and we send money back to our grandparents in El Salvador.

continued on page 11

ASK HF ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Dear HF,

I've spent more than a decade in prison. I just went to court for the first time since I was sentenced. If I am lucky, the judge will grant me a new sentencing. If she does, I could end up doing a lot less time than what I was sentenced with. On the other hand, the judge could deny me and I discover I still have to do my original sentence. Don't get me wrong, I am grateful to even be in this position. I spent days, weeks, probably more like *months* in the law library educating myself on the law to get to where I am today. I'm back at the DC Jail and all I can do is wait. But what if the judge's decision is not in my favor? For real, I don't know if I could live with that! It would be like all of that hard work, and all of my prayers and my hopes and dreams were for nothing. How do I prepare for both possible paths in my future?

Sincerely,
DR

Dear DR,

First of all, life is a war, comrade. In the war of life and living, we have a duty to fight battles on so many fronts. Sometimes we may be in a concrete jungle, and other times our battles play out in a courtroom. Nonetheless, even if it is an uphill battle, we must show up and show out.

In war, there will be many battles. The key to the war of living is to know that each battle does not constitute the entire war. Therefore, in your situation, a war in which I have been fighting for 22 years behind these walls (I am currently at the DC Jail awaiting another battle in court as well), if you are already considering quitting upon an undesired outcome, then you have already lost the war.

You have to maintain the spirit to fight no matter how each battle plays out. Your character will be judged more by how you handle defeats than by how you handle victories. Just because you win or lose a battle doesn't mean that you have won or lost the war. The ideal is to keep the will to win no matter the outcome. By not maintaining the will to win, winning a few battles makes you comfortable and complacent.

Stay in an inspired zone. Maintain the will to win no matter what the battle dictates. And remember, it is a war and not a battle that settles the score.

Your FM Brother,
HF

CONVERSATION WITH JULIA AND BEREKET

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

By Julia and FM Friend Bereket

Hello Free Minds travelers! While I was walking home from work, I was thinking about journeys big and small (traveling across the country, or through the city, or through our imaginations...). I passed under a pine tree at the edge of Meridian Hill/Malcolm X Park. Its massive branches were stretching over the wall at the edge of the park, and it had blanketed the wide sidewalk in pine needles. One moment I'm walking on pavement and the next I'm stepping onto a bed of fragrant pine needles. It was a soothing and unexpected moment in a journey that I take every day.

But enough about me. I want to introduce you to a young woman I had the pleasure of meeting earlier this year, who has been on a truly incredible journey. Her name is Bereket. She's a teenager from Ethiopia who came to the United States last year seeking asylum (**asylum**: protection granted by a nation to someone who has left their native country as a political refugee).

I met Bereket through my mom, Anne, who was her teacher. When my mom found out about Bereket's situation, she tried to help her, and Bereket ended up living with my parents for a few weeks until she relocated to Minnesota. I asked her if she would share her story with you all, so my mom talked to her on the phone one day after work.



Bereket's Journey

I grew up in Adama, Ethiopia. It's a town with a lot of things to do; I loved to go to movies and hang out with my friends. But when I was young, both of my parents were arrested and incarcerated. My father was arrested because he didn't accept what the Ethiopian government did. Our prime minister at the time was very discriminatory towards different ethnic groups in Ethiopia. He didn't accept Oromo or Amharic people. My father couldn't accept that discrimination. We insisted that we had rights too. That's why he was arrested.

My father was tortured in prison. The prison was far from our home, but my mother went every day to try to see him and bring him food. My siblings and I went on weekends, but they wouldn't let us see him or give him food. The first time we saw him was three months after he'd been arrested. He tried to hide his injuries from us. He hid it, but he was in so much pain. He cried for hours when we visited him that time.

It was very hard for my mom when he was in prison because my mom had to work and take care of us five kids. Then one day police came to our house with guns demanding to see our mother. They broke down our door and screamed at us that we had to tell where our mother was. We said we didn't know where she was and they left. She later went to the police station to complain about them going to our house and scaring her children. That's when they took my mom to prison. All of this happened when I was 10 or 11 years old. My mother was released after a few months, but my father was in prison for many years, until he died.

When I was 17, I had an opportunity to come to the United States for a high school robotics competition. The government in Ethiopia had done so many terrible things to my family, so I thought this was my chance to escape and I hoped I could bring my family here to be safe. Even if I wasn't able to go to school, I would get a job here in the US. When I arrived in the United States for the competition, I applied for asylum.

I don't have any family here in the US, so I was scared. I knew I would have to take care of myself. That's very hard. The most frightening day in my life was starting here because everything was totally new and I was all alone.

I miss my mother and my siblings back in Ethiopia. I talk to them through texting apps, and sometimes I can buy a phone card so I can call my mom and brothers and sisters.

I love my country, but I'm afraid of the government. I worry about my family there. My mom is working and taking care of my two brothers and two sisters on her own. She sacrificed a lot for us. I miss my family so much, but how can I go back with the things the government did to my mom and dad? I miss other things too, like our traditional foods. The Ethiopian food here is not the same. I miss our holidays, celebrating them with my family and our neighbors. I even miss the weather back home.

I want to get my education and work so that I can send money home to help my mom and my siblings. I want to go into the fashion industry and maybe own my own business.

Bereket's asylum case is pending. She is waiting for an interview, in which she'll be able to make her case for why she should be allowed to stay in this country. She could be waiting for months or even a year or longer. No matter what happens with her case, please join me in wishing her and her family a bright future.





MEMBERS *CONNECT*: JOURNEYS

Getting to Know Me

By RTC

My "Journeys" for the most part are about my traveling on a BOP bus. I travelled to Ashland, KY; Otisville, NY; Lewisburg, McKean, Allenwood, Canaan, and FDC Philly, PA; MDC, NY; Petersburg, VA; Atlanta, GA; and of course, Lorton, VA. Still, as you know, traveling on my own accord can be more favorable and rewarding. Still, I admit, the sightseeing does have its place.

My inward travels, for the most part, do concern me getting-to-know-me in every which way. No half stepping. No shortcuts. All reality, period. And for my own good. With this, I was able to quit smoking cigarettes, shooting heroin, cursing, lying, and drinking alcoholic drinks. Battling insecurity as well.

Just the other day, I spoke with my mother in the way of me being taught good manners, being respectful, being respected, and how to get along well with others. Of course, this is still beneficial to this day. Thank our Creator.

Still, I witnessed things that I was too young to comprehend. These things had their effects and still do in some cases. So I am mindful. And try to see it (all) for what it really is.

By the time my stepfather got on the scene, I was out to get attention, so I acted up in school. Fortunately, I passed each grade just the same. And my stepfather did his

best to aid and assist me as best he knew how. Still, I was a handful in my own way. So I had to adjust, like-it-or-not. His presence did help.



Psychologically, I had work to do. And before I knew it, I had begun to use heroin, which, of course, only made matters worse. Before long I was getting into trouble and getting caught up in truly unbeneficial conduct and affairs. My mind was adjusting more and more to what was best left alone. As one thing led to another, before I knew it, I was incarcerated. Not even conscious of the whole picture.

I got out and stayed drug-free for a while. Still, I fell back into it. Got locked up again. In the long run, I left it alone due to the losses and negatives thereof. I started by our Creator's Grace and Mercy to see life differently. My thinking process shifted. I was blessed to see the truth and face the facts to the point of change. And for the better. Praise the Creator.

Take care, and keep your mind Free.

The Journey of Writing

By MS

My journey began with a heavy blow, then late night maternal visitations, then lying to teachers about bruises and the like. This journey took me to the borders of fear and back, introduced me to isolation and regret. I traveled from foster home to foster home to group home, never really finding any real place to call my own (to call a home). I always felt like I was in a state of perpetual displacement, as if I was lingering at the edge of sight like a ghost or that squiggly thing that sometimes shows up in the corner of your eye (wait – there it is now!).

My journey also skewed my view of love, what it meant, how it was shown, when it was given, and why I was treated as if I wasn't worthy of it. My journey taught me that silence was paramount to avoiding bodily harm, silence was a haven of sorts – until I felt things bubbling up inside of me. I had questions that I needed answers to. That's when a teacher's aide named Mrs. Grace introduced me to writing.

OH man!!! The places I have been since I started writing. During this time, it was explained to me that the things that happened to me weren't my fault. Even so, I was still hurt, confused, and really, really pissed off, but writing helped me channel my hurt, my disappointment, my confusion, my dreams (of who I would be without

this pain), and my hopes onto every unsuspecting page I touched. Writing has helped me articulate my dreams of what love is, could and should be, my muse, imagination, trying to will this person into being. Writing has allowed me to face some dark sh*t hiding in my heart and mind. My journeys in writing have been one of years treading along the paths, byways, switchbacks of the majestic wilderness called life. After all this time, I've finally found stable footing; I've finally shared my voice with others beyond the walls of self. I have found people who want to hear what I have to offer, and in and of itself, this is a new experience for me: Acceptance. (Free Minds, thank you for noticing me.)

This journey has been long, painful, awe-inspiring, regret-laced, and lonely most of the time. But I wouldn't trade my life – the Good, the Bad, and the in-between – for all the rice in China.

Travel well, dear reader, strengthen your resolve and take the boldest steps you have been born to take. Allah guides your steps, so you can never truly step astray. Believe in you, weary traveler; it's all worth it in the end.

A Gift and a Curse

By AL

My journey has truly been one of great personal growth and much sacrifice. Incarceration is never easy on the individual nor those who stand by those incarcerated. So I view my incarceration in twofold: a gift and a curse.

The Gift

My past is one I am not too proud of, yet one I take full responsibility for. My attitude before my incarceration was draconian and my perception of reality was irrational. I had little respect for human life and little respect for myself.

Yet universal law has a way of slowing you down and opening your eyes. My incarceration has been an intricate journey in some stages; however, through my journey of self-development, I have found myself – the light amongst the darkness. Learning true knowledge of self has changed my perception on irrational thoughts to ones of rational consequences. In essence, I've grown from an immature man-child to a responsible, reliable and mature MAN with the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to be a productive member of society.

The Curse

Incarceration tends to desecrate relationships while tearing out the very fabric of family structure. Being away from those you love and care about is never easy, because you realize you are not doing time by yourself. Those who are doing time with you are, in a sense, incarcerated themselves.

I had to watch my children grow into pre-adults through pictures, while trying to get to know them through letters, phone calls and emails. I cannot get a day, week, minute or hour back of the time I've missed out on my children's lives.

However, this journey has actually helped broaden my horizon as a son, father, brother, and overall as a human being. And through it all, I've learned that we all go on journeys in life, and it's not about what path you take, but more so, what you learn on your journey and how you apply it to your life.



MEMBERS *CONNECT*: JOURNEYS

El Salvador

By AC

I am from El Salvador – let's call it ES. It may sound like a curse, but I'm proud to be a Salvadoran, born and raised (and when the time comes, also deported to). I am not proud of how violent it has become lately, nor am I proud of the number of people who leave the country to come to the US instead of actively trying to change over a country in a positive way. There is a lot that has to be done to make ES better, but I'd say we are on a good track because it has never been all that bad.

The people from ES are generally kind, humble, noble, loyal, and fierce warriors when their hearts belong to a cause (which may explain the violence, because of how many people who are simply misguided). They are good people in horrible circumstances, which brings out the bad in them.

The country itself is like a paradise. There are breathtaking beaches, colorful landscapes, exotic animals, fruits that kings and queens could only dream of tasting (look up "cocoa tree" or "how was chocolate invented" to see what I mean).

ES also has something of a spell on time. The days seem to go slower than they do here in the US, and that's a great thing when you are spending time with your loved ones on some random lazy Thursday afternoon drinking coffee on your porch. There is something almost magical when you swing back and forth in a hammock in the shade of a mango tree on a hot, sunny, summer day as a multitude of birds take turns singing and dancing in the skies for you.

The stars look so big and bright and so does the moon. It's as if you were closer to the heavens (which you kind of are, since you are close to the equator). Kites adorn the blue skies on the windy days, mostly during September and October, until the purple, red, and gold clouds announce it is time for the sun to set on the coast and become two as it touches and goes into the water becoming a million shining stars floating around.

Around April, during the Holy Week, roads are covered in flower petals of all colors, which are made into intricate drawings of pretty much everything, like portraits

that the wind will erase in a short time. Around September 13-16, ALL the schools in the country take to the streets with their proud marching bands and school banners to celebrate our Independence Day, September 15.

I'm not trying to sound like a tourist guide; the "high murder rates, extreme gang violence, slim-to-none community safety" would mess up my tourism pitch. Still, there is a certain "magnificent work of art" about ES. I'm getting deported back to ES after my sentence, and while I'm excited, I'm also very concerned, not scared, just concerned. When I go back, I will have spent more time on US soil than in ES. I have already started using American mannerisms; I got used to the upbeat tempo, oftentimes materialistic, way of going about. I even speak English now. I tried to adopt the American way of life as much as I could and I tried to fit in within society's matrix as much as possible—I guess I failed to fit in completely because I broke the law and for that I'm very sorry. Now, my life here in the US, life as I know it, is completely over and I find myself wondering, "Now what?" I guess I'll start all over again in my country.

But I'm not complaining. I'm more a "lemonade" type of guy, so I don't mind when life hands me lemons. Besides, everything that happens in my life is a direct result of my decisions and actions. There is no one else to be blamed. Now I can take everything I have learned and use them to become a better person. I can't change the mistakes I made in the past, but I can become a better person for the future. I am hoping to bring "good" to my country, which I miss so much, a country that needs as much "good" as it can possibly get.



Impatience

by Jordan

A journey is a pathway to something in your life that you can learn from. Whether negative or positive, a journey is something that could define who you are for the entirety of your life, so cherish them all as you cherish yourself.

Unfortunately, I went through the best and worst of journeys, but it made me a stronger young man. I was an impatient boy, wanting to provide for myself. I was very intelligent in school, but it didn't seem like enough to get a job. I chose to commit crimes in order to have money of my own in my pocket. This choice led me down a difficult journey, which turned out to be incarceration at the age of 17. I was in an adult facility with "Title 16" on my new resume.

It was a long journey, but I was able to turn it into a positive one by grasping the support of my family and Free Minds, my second family. I focused on finishing high school and did just that as soon as I get home. Then, I started working in the Free Minds office and got to actually read some of the poems that many of you write! By the time you read this, I'll be starting my first semester of college for Business Management.

Long story short, your journey doesn't always have to put you down. It can be a lesson, a blessing, or mistake that you may have outgrew to become the better person you are today.

Untitled

By ABC (FM Sister)

How to understand what has happened is the biggest question I ask myself every day. Sometimes, I wake up and think, *Is this just an illusion? This is not real.* I try to put a smile on my face and live day after day, trying to deal with all the different attitudes. Adapting to my new life is not easy, but my old one wasn't good either. Still flying in my mind lost and trying every day to not remember the past because it hurts. My heart bleeds every day for the ones I have hurt.

All these faces and none of them are familiar to me. They smile at me, but talk of me. I wish to have a real friend to do this time with. I'm lonely between these walls with fourteen-hundred who are going through the same thing I'm going through.

Trying to find my way out of this prison, my body is chained, but not my mind. It wanders off in thoughts. I overwhelm myself with feelings for the wrong things, feeling lonely, in need of love and companionship. Trying to find it in friends and the wrong gender.

It's crazy how frustrated we get, mentally and emotional. We mentally struggle. This incarceration messes with our minds. They expect us to come out better, but what they don't realize is that mentally and emotionally, we get messed up. If we are not strong enough on our minds, we are doomed. We break down: anger, jealousy, envy, sadness, love, and shame rule us in this place.

continued on page 16



THE WRITE WAY

How to Finesse Clichés, An Exercise

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

By James, FM Poet Ambassador

My name is James and I am a creative writer. My writing style is very creative and not your average way of writing. Yes, I write rhymes and yes, it's over an instrumental, but my wordplay is not basic. I like to have a thought and figure out how to make it more appealing to the eyes and ears.

I do this, not to impress people, but because I love the feeling I get knowing I can amaze myself with the things I say. I like the faces people make when they listen to me – you know, that “something stinks” face.” I like when people rewind my music while laughing at how clever my last punchline was. When I was amongst the good men in Allenwood from 2013-2016, I participated in many rap ciphers and gained a name as one of the top lyricists there. They called me Lil Jay.

I now have an album out on all musical platforms and still take the time to write poetry. The power of poetry has been the reason some people begin a healing process. I've watched people read poems and get influenced and when I see them again, they are excited to tell me that they took a shot at it and enjoyed the therapeutic feeling they got. For those who like to write, are interested in writing, or just trying to improve on writing, I am here to give you some of my techniques that I either learned or that just came naturally to me.

Rap, R&B, and poetry, along with some other genres, are all very creative forms of writing that people use to express themselves. Using personification, hyperboles, metaphors, similes, and analogies are many ways one can exercise their creativeness. With a firm understanding on how to use them, along with knowing synonyms and antonyms, a person can take their creative abilities to new heights. For example, rapper and songwriter Lil Wayne has mastered the art of each of these tools. His ability to flip and turn words has amazed people for years.

For example, “They started French kissing, so he didn't see *moi*.” – Lil Wayne.

In this example, *moi* is French for “me.” *Moi* also is also the sound commonly made to describe a kiss. So in this line he made a play on the words “French” and *moi*. It's very clever, but so simple.

Me, personally, I like to take clichés and finesse them. By finesse, I mean: to say a cliché and add a twist to come up with something witty to say about them.

For example, here's something I came up with while writing this Write Way:

Love is never lasting, the time is passing
They say the Devil wears Prada, the new fashion
They say that life's a b***h, hope I don't lose passion
I'm on the road to riches, my seat belt fastened
They say that love is war, the Titans start to clashing
They say that time is money, so money I'll be stashing
Hope I can live forever, forever never happens

I'm tired of this s***, but they say s*** happens
Herbal tea and good smoke is my scapegoat
They say you find misery and lose hope
They say what goes around will meet you 'round the block
What has hands but can't touch... clocks
Love is never painless, the weather's never rainless
They say that Angels wear white but white is never stainless

Another approach I take is something I learned in elementary. Things don't have to rhyme in poetry, but rhyming can also be powerful when it adds value to your piece. First step is to come up with a line, “*I get tired of feeling the pain.*” Now that I have my first line established, I look at the last word and in my head (you can write it down if that's easier or more comfortable) come up with words that rhyme with that word. *Rain, gain, brain, sane, etc.* I'll go with “brain” in this example and figure out a way to incorporate a slick way to use that word. “*I need healing, like homework need a brain.*”

There are many ways to approach the paper once the pen/pencil is in your hand. If you don't know what to write or are intimidated by writing, you can just freestyle and jot down thoughts. Look at a wall and let your mind drift off into a fantasy land, or just start off with the first thought that comes to your mind. Remember, when writing your thoughts, there is no right or wrong way. This is now your world and your story, so you can go wherever you please on the paper.

With that being said, I challenge you to pick a style listed above and write, write, and write!



PAYING IT FORWARD: BREAKING FREE

By Kelli

Free Minds friend Mike began using drugs when he was a 14 year-old growing up in Richmond, VA. He was an only child who struggled to get along with his father. Mike began selling marijuana to support his drug addiction and was soon kicked out of high school. In his own words, he is a "repeat offender." At 40 years old, Mike has been in and out of jail and prison since he was 23 years old, experiencing only four years of freedom during that time.

Mike will be released in late 2019. He believes this time will be different because he has learned how to better manage his time, decisions, relationships and money. Most importantly, he says instead of focusing upon himself, he has become "others-focused."

I caught up with Mike recently over the phone. He says his internal change has been a gradual process that kicked off when his girlfriend broke up with him.

KELLI: So how did that motivate you?

MIKE: I had put all my emotional capital into that relationship, and when it ended abruptly, I realized how emotionally and spiritually bankrupt I was. I needed to do something radical to gain self-reliance. I began reading and acquiring knowledge, initially about addiction and psychology because I wanted to figure out how to repair my broken brain, but I soon branched out to learn about all types of topics. I developed a strict daily reading and writing schedule.

KELLI: What became your focus?

MIKE: I really looked outside of myself. I'd been exposed to some positive ideas and people at a college program called Open Minds at the Richmond City Jail. I took a course called "Writing for Social Change" that opened up my eyes to what is going on in the criminal justice system. I was reading books like *The New Jim Crow* that really had a huge impact on me. When I got to prison, I thought, *why don't I start writing again?* Maybe I can get people to write with me and see what kind of change we can create here. I saw so much need in prison and I just wanted to be part of the solution.

KELLI: You are now running three different projects inside the prison. Can you tell us about them?

MIKE: It all started when I met my friend Rodney. He grew up in the foster care system and had fallen into a familiar pattern of criminal behavior. In prison, he had dedicated himself to personal development and serving his community in ways that encourage self-reliance but collapse the cultural and social barriers that preserve inequality. We began sharing ideas about how to do this work inside the prison community on a regular basis.

A group of us started something called Breaking Free Poets. I find such a cool energy comes with slam poetry. It's theatrical, passionate and energetic. We wanted to bring that here. A group of us started meeting

regularly to write and perform and it just evolved. We have become like a family. We'll have shows with 200 guys in the prison chapel and they're giving each other standing ovations the response is crazy! We always have new guys wanting to join!

KELLI: What about the other two projects?

MIKE: Rodney invited me to co-facilitate the Victim's Impact group. It's an empathy-building workshop where we challenge ourselves to really think about the harm and wreckage we have left behind with our criminal behavior. We've all hurt people and coming to that realization is vital in order to heal. It's powerful. This is a group of men in prison emoting and working through really tough stuff and I've gotta say, this doesn't happen very often. Especially not in programs run by staff members who only understand what we're going through in a generic kind of way.

KELLI: So it makes a difference that these workshops are led by fellow inmates?

MIKE: Absolutely! We are uniquely equipped to lead this movement of change. Rodney and I also restarted a Young Men's Empowerment workshop; really it's personal development that had originally been run by a Free Minds member named Norman. We've already led four ten-week sessions, helping these guys realize their potential, by talking about personal and social responsibility, parenthood, interpersonal relationships and basic education skills all of which are really needed here. There are so many negative influences in prison that people can latch on to. The drugs, the gambling, the sedentary lifestyle. We want to get people motivated to do something positive for themselves and think forward about their future. Even if they have a lot of time to serve. It's never too early to start!

KELLI: A lot of people commit to changing themselves while in prison, but you have extended this to lifting up others and bringing them along with you. Why is this important to you?

MIKE: Honestly? I don't know what else I would do! I feel like I have a duty to my fellow human beings. I'm influenced and motivated by all that I've read to lift others up and bring them with me. It makes the journey that much sweeter!

KELLI: What do you see in your future?

MIKE: I want to work with some of the other guys in here when we get released to create Breaking Free Media. We'll do podcasts and a series of documentaries about reentry, prison, poverty, crime, and mass incarceration. I'd love to be creating live performances at festivals and seminars. In whatever form, I am dedicated to criminal justice reform activism, and eventually, creating my own nonprofit. That is the dream.

And as for why I practice "paying it forward," I believe that some things you can only keep by giving them away.



DC REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

Hey guys,

What's up? So glad to take this journey with you today. We've all heard the phrase "Life's a Journey," and I think that we can ALL agree that that phrase is soooo real.

They say that the only guarantees in life are taxes and death. Now that's a little daunting, but we know that that is not all that this life journey has to offer. Even in our difficult times, we can find things to be thankful for. This journey that we're all on will consist of happiness, pain, joy, peace, disappointment, and a whole host of feelings and emotions, and to be honest, we need them all. Today, I want to focus on one quality that would make each of our journeys just a little bit sweeter, and that quality is **gratitude**.

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful and appreciative even for the little things in this journey, and also accepting and returning kindness when due. Sometimes, our particular journey has been really difficult and because of that, showing and even receiving gratitude can be challenging. That's understandable, but the good news is that you can start right now, and if it proves difficult, you can take baby steps and practice showing and receiving gratitude daily. I'm also happy to announce that recent scientific studies point out that after 10 weeks, people in a research group who had focused on practicing gratitude in their own lives showed significantly more optimism in many areas of their lives, including health and exercise. In another study where people were asked to write and deliver a letter to someone for whom they were grateful, their happiness levels and life satisfaction were dramatically impacted even weeks later.

This journey will be many things, and when we come to the bumps in the roads, the disappointments, the hurt and pain, taking time out to focus on the things that we have to be grateful for can be a strong antidote to hopelessness, so come on, let's dive into some gratitude! And because I am so grateful that we are on this Free Minds journey together, I want to deliver some information that will make your journey back home more productive!

First Class Workforce Solutions
1713 7th Street NW, Washington, DC 2001
(202) 464-3035

First Class Workforce Solutions is a job placement assistance organization that is returning citizen-friendly and is always looking to place individuals into hospitality-related industries.

Georgetown Pivot Program is a wonderful new program at Georgetown University specifically for returning citizens! Pivot Program Fellows are on campus full time, Monday to Friday. In the mornings, they are employed as interns at job sites across the university and in the afternoons, they attend classes taught by Georgetown faculty. At the end of the academic year, fellows choose between one of two transition phase tracks: incubation or employment. Those opting to create their own business are provided with workspace, business coaching, legal support, and access to resources; those seeking permanent employment are placed in off-campus internships with local employers. For the duration of the program, Pivot Program Fellows receive a weekly internship stipend from the DC Department of Employment Services, providing a strong incentive to complete the program. The awesome news is that Free Minds is working very closely with Georgetown to help our members apply and are proud to announce that some of your Free Minds brothers will be starting classes in January. If you are interested once home, we would be more than honored to assist you with the application process!

No one can make this Journey alone, and we are so happy that you chose to partner with us during yours!

Until we **Connect** again
- Ms. Keela

FIRST CLASS

Workforce Solutions 



FAMILY TIES (CONTINUED)

continued from page 4

We always worry that we'll get sent back. My little sisters are American citizens, but my parents and I weren't born here. This isn't our country. That's why they have worked so hard to walk a straight line. And then I came into the picture as a teenager and messed up. When I was 16, I got charged as an adult and did time at the DC Jail, risking everything they've worked so hard for. It's been painful, but we're going through it together. And that makes us stronger as a family. Our family has always been united. We're close no matter what happens.

I am working two jobs now and working toward my GED. I'm a grill cook at one restaurant and a food runner at the other. I work between 50-60 hours a week and study on the side. I want to help my family so my parents don't have to work so hard. My goal is to open my own restaurant. It will be called "La Familia" (The Family). It's going to be the greatest place! We'll serve every kind of food I can learn how to make. Right now I'm just trying to learn absolutely everything I can about running a business. If I keep the right path, give me 5-10 years and I'll have my restaurant!

I have never forgotten my roots. I love living in DC, and I love America, but I'm still full-blown Salvadoran. I get angry when people talk trash about the people who are trying to come across the border and want to keep them out. No, man! Everybody deserves a better future. We all should have the right to choose what we want in life.

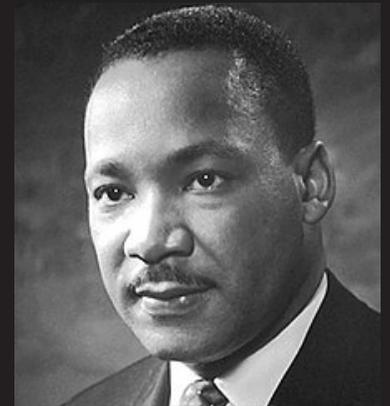
Whenever I complain, my dad always reminds me what we've been through. Anything we're dealing with is nothing compared to the difficult journey it took to get here. He's right. And it's worth all of the sacrifices that we've made. There's nothing more beautiful in the world than to share every single moment you have with your family.

QUOTE-I-VATOR

"If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. But by any means, keep moving." – Martin Luther King Jr., American Baptist minister and civil rights leader, (1929-1968)

"The journey between who you once were and who you are now becoming is where the dance of life really takes place." – Barbara De Angelis, American relationship consultant, TV personality, and spiritual teacher (1951-)

"You can't get there by bus, only by hard work, risking, and by not quite knowing what you're doing. What you'll discover will be wonderful: yourself."
– Alan Alda, American actor (1936–)



Martin Luther King, Jr.

"No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path." – Buddha

"Over every mountain there is a path although it may not be seen from the valley."
– Theodore Roethke, American poet (1908-1963)

"All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware."
– Martin Buber, Israeli Jewish philosopher (1878-1965)

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."
– Marcel Proust, French novelist, critic, and essayist known for the novel *In Search of Lost Time* (1871-1922)



POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Destiny

By JP

I wouldn't have changed
 If I was never confined to a prison
 I wouldn't have ever changed and understood
 The true meaning of transition –
 The true meaning of decisions (or)
 The true meaning of being in compliance
 Against my defiance and following the Laws
 that were given
 I would've never understood the environment
 That I lived in –
 Or the requirements for success that begins
 with your vision
 A product of my environment
 See, my environment was a prison
 So my mentality was reduced to a conflicted
 way of living –
 Surviving –
 Existing –
 And since my future wasn't vivid
 My execution for the future was to embrace
 the present with resistance
 Never saw bars and chains from such persistence
 Never thought that people would change
 and act different
 My world was crashing
 At least the world that I lived in –
 And I wondered if I could ever
 Recover from such a critical condition
 In society they define prison as a pitiful position
 A foundational structure of a judicial pavilion
 But my definition is contrary to those feelings
 Because in my mind I'm free
 Free beyond brick ceilings –
 Free beyond my reality
 Because my words transcend distance

Immortal Me

By JK

Immortal me, for centuries I've endured unjust liberties on this journey across the sea.

Misery through the eyes of the damned chained to sail on the ebb and flow of time, thirteen settled as conquest slowly burned in their mind.

Immortal me with a defiant yell to tyranny, I take up musket in hand firing the first shot of freedom to consecrate this land.

Immortal me in my pain, walking the wide streets of slavery subjected to countless acts of savagery, hung and set a fire in many southern trees on my knees asking how can this be.

Immortal me constitutionally labeled 3/5ths, marooned on this land where my fathers died, nascent of white pride for thee I sing.

Untitled (How to Become Great)

By VC

I have always been a great man
 But now, I strive becoming great
 I live my life to offer love
 Now my heart no longer full of hate
 I've encountered many crossroads
 I've taken many wrongful turns
 The destination always painful
 But every time a lesson learned
 So much weight upon my shoulders
 Some days I thought my soul would break
 I felt the universe against me
 Most of my choices were mistakes
 Yet, I'm a warrior
 Never quitting
 I'll never speak the word defeat
 I've got the strength of God inside me
 There's not a demon I can't beat
 No longer crumbling to desires
 Embracing struggles face to face
 I live my life to be the greatest
 My life no longer lived to waste
 There will be obstacles to hurdle
 Some days might seem real dark and rough
 But I'm not new to true adversity
 One thing for sure, it's made me tough
 For once the ones I love are smiling
 My actions ceased creating hate
 The world believed I'd never make it
 Look at me now
 I turned out great...

Just Past the Horizon

By BKC

*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 feel is a beautiful land with lots of people waiting to greet me

Just past the horizon, I hope I never get back on this path that I am saying good-bye to

Just past the horizon, I know I will be successful

Just past the horizon, I see there is a better life waiting for me

Just past the horizon, I see a pleasant outcome

Just past the horizon, I'm waiting for my spirit to be overwhelmed by joy

Just past the horizon, I will never look back

Just past the horizon, I can say, "I have made it home"

Grand Tour

By KW

From Darkness to Light... I set forth,
 But when did my Trek begin?
 Well-timed we will agree – yet – my quest isn't over,
 Roaming... wandering with purpose,
 Know where I'm headed somewhere...
 just look BACK!
 At what I and where I came from,
 Non-stop flight, my navigation be damned.
 Forward motion this campaign,
 This man... shame it took **THIS** long,
 To set a **Recourse** from Wrong.
 The depths of darkness I've voyaged through,
 But when did my trek begin?
 A decisive moment?
 A turning point?
 Or was it... travelling across the **Fields of Lies**
 That, that suggest...
 I'm ya **Slave, N****r, Boy, Negro, Colored,**
 or **N****a**?
 In the course of truth, I distinguish.
 Roaming... wandering in light,
 But when did my Trek begin?

I dedicate this to Recy Taylor, Betty Jean Owens, Rosa Lee Coates, and Joan Little... their Journey through Darkness must be REASON enough for us to CLING to the Light of the Truth. Go Vote - KW

What Made Me

By James

Multiple long nights and "it's gonna be alrights"
 It was the year 2003 when I left Mama's sight
 The distance between us put distance
 between our bond
 But love is love and I still love my Mom
 I cried before, with thoughts that I'd never share
 Because where I come from, weakness is rare
 Told myself, "You are bless by the best"
 'Til that theory got put to the test...
 Pops got popped for the second time in his life,
 Difference is this time I was alone at night
 My mind went to "forty," the one with a clip
 With plans to hunt a person, with it on my hip
 Vision blinded, couldn't find it
 Pops moved it perfect timin'
 A beast was born, or was it in me
 Evil thoughts, I processed many
 Soon after, no more laughter just pain to inflict
 Robbing people with death in my clip
 Short-lived life of crime that ended with time
 But the death of my cousin put death on my
 mind, I had to think
 Change of heart, though still the heart of a lion.
 I became a Wise Owl
 And realized I'm worth more alive than dead
 or in trial
 With that recipe, it made me who I am today
 James. But my friends call me Jay...



POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Worlds Between the Lines

By AC

To say that listening to others and their stories helps us be understanding, is a serious understatement.

I would say it opens doors to travel out to worlds, that due to given circumstances, we have not already had the chance to explore.

Yet with the spell of spoken or written words, we are taken to epochs and locations way beyond the limits of my confinements, or yours.

With every sentence that we hear or that we read, we are met with thoughts that give our minds the nourishment they need.

We feed them sights, like a sun, rising ever so bright through clouds that adorn our beautiful blue sky, shining on millions of flowers full of color, full of life for a second, replacing the intermittent red, blue lights flashing up and down the street every single night.

We imagine the sounds that we desire, which almost take away some of the stress from our ears, after hearing faint gunfire.

Or how about the places and the eras, that we often find between the lines. It's almost like a way of traveling in time.

We put ourselves right in the midst of whatever the events, regardless of how far away or how remote in time they might have been.

So even after the book is closed and the conversation is over, our hearts and souls still retain the power to wander, to be free, to discover who we've been, who we are and who we'll be.

But of course, go find out for yourself and you will see.

Don't believe it just because you heard it here from me.

I Forgot Who I Was

By HW

I woke up one day feeling powerless & caged. I felt lost and afraid, it was freedom I craved!

I felt like no one loved me & I was all alone. I felt young & lost, but I'm fully grown.

Beat down by life & my own mind. I let myself down and I started to drown.

I could not see tomorrow & felt like I could barely get through the day.

I don't know who I am anymore, like my memory started to fade.

Deep down inside I know I used to be strong, then I remember that I have been strong all along.

I might have slipped, I might have fell.

I have to stand up, I have to prevail.

I must be fearless, I must be strong.

It's a mental battle, and I'll make it home!

DC PHOTOS: THE MENU AT THE ICE CREAM TRUCK



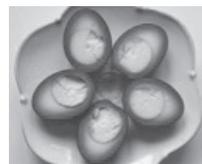
Do you remember any of these snacks you could only get at an ice cream truck in DC? Just like Go-Go and Mambo (or Mumbo) Sauce, these items are a part of DC's culture. Around the way, these are some of the most common items purchased from the ice cream truck.



At the ice cream truck in DC it is an unspoken rule to purchase this candy with the change you receive back. "Let me get 50 cent worth of Frooties."



This is the master blend of the city. Pickled eggs and sunflower seeds mashed up in a plastic bag! It's not too appealing to the eye, but once you cross that line and taste it, you might really love it.



You may not have had Frunass in a minute! These are like Frooties but more extreme – how would you describe Frunass?

What other foods or beverages do you remember that you loved to enjoy when you were a child? Write about the times and how life was around that time. Try to make a connection between the food/beverage and where you are from. Also, do you have a different taste than someone you are friends with and always debate on what's better and why? For instance, Pepsi vs. Coke, or grits with sugar or without sugar! It's a never-ending debate right?

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!



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."

Nostalgia: El Salvador

By AC

Editor's Note: AC wrote both the Spanish and English versions. These are not exact translations. Instead, each one is a unique essay.

Ay Dios, me da mucha emoción acordarme de por allá. Yo nací en Ahuachapán y bueno me crié en Soyapango por eso digo que soy de ahí. Me vine a Fairfax County, VA, a los 15 años y tengo 32 cumplidos. Prácticamente he vivido la mitad de mi vida aquí y la mitad allá. Y aunque a mi pulgarcito lo consideren un infierno, yo lo extraño muchísimo. Esos mangos, almendras, jocótes, jicamas, zapotes, guayabas, marañones. Una sebada, ó tamarindo, ó tal vez una horchata con unas cinco pupusas: 2 revueltas y tres de frijol con queso, con curtido picante y salsita caliente.

¿Te imaginas un vasito de café con un pedazo de semita? ¿Que tal una leche poleada? ¿Yuca frita con chicharrón con chimbolitos?

Extraño esas hamacas pintadas de arcoiris. Extraño como se mecen en la sombra de un palo de mango en un día caliente en plena temporada seca. Todavía puedo oír esos pájaros exóticos haciendo ruido y hasta esos loros leperos diciendo malas palabras. ¿Te acordas como silban esos sin vergüenzas? Que belleza.

Allá en la capital, me acuerdo de los cobradores de buses, como anuncian las rutas de los buses y las paradas. "¡Subase, subase! ¡Subase que no va llena!" Los niños jugando con trompos o con chibolas cuando no andan retozando con la pelota en ese sol que puede cocer un huveo en el pavimento.

¿Te acordas de las piscuchas navegando los cielos, flotando en esos vientos de Octubre y Noviembre?

¿Te acordas del "¡Ay niña!" o el "¡Ay Doña!"

No sé si es la nostalgia o simplemente una ilusión, pero sí extraño a mi gente, a mi patria, mi cultura, mi comida, todo.

Oh God, remembering what it was like in El Salvador gives me so many emotions. I was born in Ahuachapán and I grew up in Soyapango, San Salvador, hence the reason I say I'm from "Soya." I came to Fairfax County, VA, when I was 15 years old and now I'm 32. I have live basically half my life here and half there. And, though some people consider my Pulgarcito (slang for El Salvador) "hell," I still miss it so much.

I miss the exotic fruits: mangos, almonds, jocótes, jicamas, zapotes, guavas, and cashew fruits (yes, those cashew seeds you eat come from an actual fruit, and it's so good).

I miss the typical dishes, a little taste of home: 5 pupusas, 2 revueltas, 3 with beans and cheese, with a little curtido (pickled vegetable mix) and hot tomato sauce. Of course, a drink to accompany it: a glass of cebada (barley, the pink drink at your local Spanish restaurant), or maybe tamarind juice, or even Horchata. Yes, I miss that, and most importantly, I miss the pride and love put into those meals I call my people's.

Just about now, I'd love to have a small cup of coffee: that same coffee that not long ago adorned the mountains and hills of our country. I'd drink it with a slice of semita, which is one of the best pastries out there. How about a leche poleada (a hot drink with milk and flour)?

I would love some fried yucca with chicharron and anchovies with some hot tomato sauce, all served on a banana leaf. From humble hands, to your curious stomach, with much love.

I miss the culture. I miss those rainbow-colored hammocks. I miss how it feels when they sway in the shade under a mango tree on a hot sunny day in the dry season. When I close my eyes, I can still hear those exotic birds making noises that in hindsight sound like music to my ears. Yes, even those vulgar parrots cussing everybody out using every bad word under the sun and whistling without any shame at every pretty girl that walked by. How beautiful.

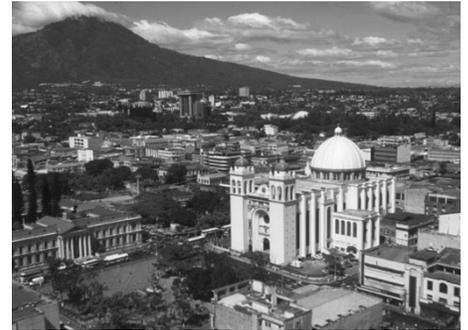
Back in the capital, buses have a driver and a guy who goes seat by seat asking for the money for the trip, the "cobrador." I remember all the cobradores shouting, trying to convince you to get on their bus instead of any other, announcing routes and stops: "Get on! Get on! It's not full yet! We can still fit more in!" even when everyone was already bottled in there holding by the handrails attached to the roof.

I remember the children playing with trompos (wooden spinners, marbles, yoyos) whenever they weren't running around with the ball in that sun that could cook an egg on the pavement. Many times barefoot.

I remember the kites sailing the skies, floating in the October and November winds.

I remember the "Ay Niña!" or the "Ay Doña!" as the highest level, top secret conversations about our neighborhood's latest news and events (and rumors) were being conducted by the beloved (and silly) mothers of our street.

I do not know if it's nostalgia or just an illusion, but I do miss my people, my country, my culture, my food, everything.



Soyapango, El Salvador



Exotic fruit clockwise from top left: guavas, jocótes, jicamas, cashew fruits, mangos, and zapotes

POEM ABOUT EL SALVADOR

By AC

Please let the light shine
onto the country in which its people walk
with their gaze fixed down onto the ground.
Let them know there is something great for them
out there,
not just worries, broken dreams, bad news
for tomorrow
and days painted dark and gray
with strokes full of soul-crushing sorrow.
Let them look up and around
to take in the bright colors, sweet smells,
glorious sounds.
Let them see the true value of this precious life.
Let them experience the waves breaking up at the beach.
The nature-colored rainbow of wonders portrayed
in the landscape
as far as the sight can reach.
The harmonies echoing in the background behind
the noise
creating a melody straight from the birds' consortium
composed exclusively for our unexpecting ears
to enjoy.
The gold, red, purple clouds lighting the firmament on fire,
a vision that left me thinking I was seeing
the end of the world every afternoon as a child,
as the setting sun became two when it dipped into
our Pacific waters:
A breathtaking image of sight that really matters.
Let them see that life is something precious,
the greatest gift we could have ever received,
the most valuable treasure.
Let them see that conflict doesn't fix violence,
crime doesn't solve poverty,
hatred and fear don't equate respect,
and that love is one of the best things
that you can give and receive and it's absolutely free.
Let them know that life is great,
that here is something called hope,
and, just like a brick, we can use that to build and
to create
something good for the future.
If not for us, then at least, perhaps, for those of
The New Generation,
who, after we're gone, will attempt to undo the
wrongs we've done.
They will care for our mislabeled Paradise.
Till then, I only have one wish to materialize:
For the people left in my land, weathering the storm
to be able to see better days
when kindness, humility and love finally become
the national norm
of our beloved, beautiful home.

JG'S WORDS OF WISDOM

Journeys of the Mind

By JG

*Note to readers: Can you guess which books JG has journeyed through?
Answers at the bottom.*

I've stood at the scratch line with King Tremain.¹ And heard the echoes of a distant summer.² Traveled through the swamps and bayous of Louisiana. And felt the deep connection and loyalty that existed between these clannish, mob-like families of the early 1900s, strengthening my faith in the full resurrection of the Black family of today. I've traveled the rainy, fog-ridden wetlands of Forks, Washington, with Bella.³ Felt a love so passionate, so strong. More addictive than heroin. Met vampires and werewolves alike. Learned about their eternal conflict. And stood in awe of the supernatural speed and strength of these nocturnal creatures and the depth of imagination of their creator. I was truly inspired. Twilights just haven't been the same since.

I've lived in eighth-century Spain and Morocco.⁴ Traveled across the Strait of Gibraltar with the dark-skinned, full-lipped, kinky-haired men of original rulership (Moors). I've basked in the glory of conquest with my Moorish forefathers as General Tarik ibn Ziyad subdued, then civilized the Europeans. Introducing them to irrigation systems, to the knowledge of preserving and preparing their foods properly, and to the importance of bathing daily with soap and water. I watched as the Moors placed bat houses and libraries on practically every corner of the cities of Spain, marking the beginning of enlightenment for much of Europe. I rolled my shoulders back and held my head high in the knowledge that these Moorish Nobles and warriors were flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood. That I am today what my forbearers were yesterday without doubt or contradiction. Greatness is in my blood.

I've roamed the gritty streets of 1940s Boston and Harlem with "Detroit Red," hustling, stealing, pimping, and robbing, so lost in the struggle of racism and poverty that we found ourselves numbing the pain with drugs and alcohol.⁵ I suffered with "Detroit Red" in the dark, cold, redemptive isolation cells of prison, literally and figuratively. Locked down 23 hours a day, studying, reflecting, empathizing with those I've hurt, practicing introspection, growing. And at the end, I was honored to have witnessed the birth of Malcolm X, who helped cause a major paradigm shift in the way I thought about myself and the world I live in.

I've lived vicariously through numerous people and the benefits have been many and more. All of my mental journeys by way of books have nourished me, uplifted me, and left me with a sense of mental freedom I've never known. And where the mind goes, the body must surely follow.

¹ *Standing at the Scratch Line* by Guy Johnson

² *Echoes of a Distant Summer* by Guy Johnson

³ *The Twilight Series* by Stephenie Meyer

⁴ *History of the Moorish Empire In Europe* by S.P. Scott

⁵ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Alex Haley and Malcolm X



MEMBERS *CONNECT*: JOURNEYS

continued from page 7

what the tide brings in

By GM

ADX is a secluded and desolate island.

Most days, "mail call" is like walking from the far end of the island in the blistering sun coupled with stifling humidity only to reach the shore of the island, and have your hopes dashed by the inarrival of the message in a bottle.

Devastated!

All one can do is look deep off into the horizon, and ask one's self,

Is family, love, loyalty... all the essentials of life... stronger than time and distance?

As you turn slowly to make the trek back to the end of the island from which you came, you start considering,

Is this cosmic justice for things you've done in the past?

Or is God a sadomasochist?

Whether or not you find the answers to those questions remains to be a mystery, but the one certainty you do have is that come tomorrow, **you'll do it all over again!**

...Then one day, as the shore comes to view, you notice the sun's reflection off of a bottle.

A smile wider than the Pacific Ocean spreads across your face.

Your heart rate increases like it's about to be reunited with its long, lost love. You cover the distance between you and the bottle like you're riding Pegasus.

At last, the bottle is in your hand, and in that moment, it seems like the earth has stopped rotating on its axis!

You're thinking about the lovers you've lost, and the one undying love you hope to gain. Therefore, before you ever so gently pull the cork out of the bottle, you pause to **savor** the moment!

You **inhale**, then your lungs and chest swell as her words give you a natural high
You **exhale** while smiling to yourself because you thought you saw the clouds making a smiley face in the sky!

By the end of the letter, her words have reminded you of what makes life so great.

Off you run in search of paper and pen because life has taught you, it isn't every day you can make a friend, and you should be appreciative of **what the tide brings in.**

SUDOKU

RULES: Each of the nine blocks has to contain all the numbers 1-9 within its squares. Each number can only appear once in a row, column or box.

The difficulty lies in that each vertical nine-square column, or horizontal nine-square line across, within the larger square, must also contain the numbers 1-9, without repetition or omission.

Every puzzle has just one correct solution.

Solutions can be found on page 24.

EASY

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 3 | | 2 | | | 4 | 7 |
| | | | | 3 | 9 | 2 | | 6 |
| | 9 | | | | 8 | 3 | | |
| | | 9 | | | 4 | | 7 | 1 |
| 8 | 6 | | 2 | | 7 | | 9 | 3 |
| 5 | 7 | | 9 | | | 4 | | |
| | | 8 | 4 | | | | | 5 |
| 9 | | 6 | 5 | 7 | | | | |
| 4 | 5 | | | 8 | | 7 | | |

HERCULEAN (VERY HARD)

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 8 | | 4 | | | | 6 | |
| | | | 3 | 8 | 2 | | | | |
| | | | 6 | | | | 1 | 7 | |
| 4 | 8 | 1 | | | 7 | | 3 | 6 | |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | 3 | | 9 | | | | 1 | 2 | 8 |
| 7 | 9 | | | | 5 | | | | |
| | | 3 | 4 | | 6 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | 1 | | 6 | | | |



THE REAL WORLD OF WORK

On the Road to Prosperity: Interview with FM Member Brandon

By Nick, FM Intern

Hi! My name is Nick and I am an intern at Free Minds Book Club for the Fall of 2018. I wanted to work with Free Minds because I wanted to help make a positive impact on the lives of incarcerated people in any way that I could.

In late November, I got a chance to speak with Brandon, a long-time Free Minds member. He told me of his on-the-job journeys, along with some of the journeys he is embarking on in his personal life. Brandon also told me about of the struggles that he encounters on the way to better things, but also emphasized that positivity, forward thinking, and perseverance will bring him where he wants to be. He currently lives with his father and is raising his ten-year-old daughter.

Nick: Alright, so let's start at the beginning. Tell me about yourself!

Brandon: My name is Brandon and I have been a Free Minds member since 2012. I have been home for a year and five months. Right now, I'm living with my dad. I have a job. I'm actually a CDL (commercial driver's license) driver. I drive dump trucks. Coming home from prison, it was a challenge. While in prison, I was getting all my goals and ideas together of how I wanted to come home and hit the ground running, but there were so many barriers against what I wanted to do that I had to follow the flow of my help and my advisors. I got back in line with Free Minds and they helped me with interview skills and job help. I did a lot of speaking engagements at schools and colleges to inspire youth and keep up their motivation. Later on, I went on and took a training course with Tony on empowerment, and I got my CDL through them and then I got my job driving dump trucks.

Nick: So, is this your first job?

Brandon: This actually isn't my first job. I was a janitor and doing maintenance at Barry Farms for a while, and while I was doing that I was actually going to school to get my CDL, after which I moved on to driving dump trucks.

Nick: Okay! What is driving around DC like? Do you get to see anything cool?

Brandon: It's amazing because it just showed me so many places I haven't been. In the street life, I stayed confined to one area, and now that I'm legit, I have my license, I can go anywhere without having to look behind me or run from the police. I'm downtown, I'm all the way uptown, I'm in places where I'm like, "Wow this is beautiful!"

Nick: So, you get to explore on your own terms?

Brandon: Yes, yes.

Nick: That is so awesome! What do like about your job most, outside of you getting to see more of the city?

Brandon: What I like about my job is that I'm not confined to one place. I get job locations every day to go different places, so I get to sightsee. Also, I'm kind of independent with it. I don't have no one driving with me. It's good for me because it's on my own time, you know?

Nick: You mentioned that you had some goals while you were in prison, like what you wanted to do when you got out. What were some of those goals?

Brandon: Well, I had a lot of business goals. I wanted to be my own



entrepreneur. I guess that's what everyone does, like a cliché, but they don't realize how hard it can be. I wanted to start a couple of apps at first, but then I thought about writing my own book, and then I started thinking about opening my own breakfast restaurant. So, a lot of these ideas flow through, but I'm so stuck on, "How am I going to get this done?" or "where's the help, where's the money at to support this?" So I had to take a step back and realize that I had to get me a job first to support my everyday needs. I still have these goals in mind but right now, I have to build up my stabilization first.

Nick: You told me your story about where you came from and where you seek to go. How do you feel about where you are right now?

Brandon: Sometimes it gets real blurry because your mindset is thinking ten times ahead of where you're at right now and that can get discouraging. When I take a seat and I look at where I started and where I am right now, just having my freedom, that's a big accomplishment. Moving forward, I need to focus on the community support I have and understand that not everything I want to do is going to line up how I want them to, but if I keep these goals in mind, I will eventually end up finding ways of utilizing these strategies.

Nick: Do you have any advice that you'd like to give to other Free Minds members who are about to begin their journeys outside of prison or members who are still in prison and going through their journeys right now?

Brandon: I would just let them know that coming home from prison is not going to be easy. Trust and believe that if you really want the change, you must change your environment. You have to change your friends, the old contacts. You can't call them and expect them to be on the same terms you are. If you're really looking for change and motivation, you have to get into these programs that DC are offering. You have to be patient. You have to really put your mind forth on setting a budget as far as your money, accepting jobs that you do not want or that you don't like. You accept that just to get onto the next level. It's not going to be given to you out here. You've got to make sure you just do for you and make sure you stick a line with your family and your community, especially Free Minds.



IN THE NEWS

US NEWS *By Abhi, Free Minds Friend*

October 9: Hurricane Michael passed through the Florida panhandle, causing widespread damage in the Tallahassee area. The storm cut power to over 550,000 people and killed 60.

October 24: Mail bombs were discovered addressed to several national political figures, including former President Obama, former Attorney General Eric Holder, and Hillary Clinton. The suspect was arrested in Florida later in the week.

November 6: Elections took place for the House of Representatives, Senate, and in several state races. Democrats recaptured the House while Republicans held the Senate. Democrats flipped several state legislature seats. Many of the races came down to just a few votes, leading to recounts long into November. (See deep dive on the next page)

November 7: Attorney General Jeff Sessions was asked to resign by President Trump following the elections. Trump was frustrated with Sessions's recusal from the investigation into potential wrongdoing during the 2016 election season.

November 11: The Camp Fire in Paradise, California, and surrounding region consumed areas larger than Washington, DC. Several thousand people are still missing after the fires.

November 25: Several thousand people arrived at a border crossing near Tijuana to claim asylum in the United States. Border agents closed the crossing and fired tear gas at the claimants. The presidential administration had drawn attention to the group of asylum seekers, claiming the "caravan" was a security threat.

WORLD NEWS *By Abhi, Free Minds Friend*

October 2: Saudi journalist and American resident Jamal Kashoggi disappeared during a visit to the Saudi embassy in Istanbul, Turkey. Turkish authorities later released audio revealing that Kashoggi was murdered by a team of Saudi operatives, allegedly for his criticism of the current King of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman.

October 6: A painting by secretive British artist Banksy sold at auction for \$1.4 million – and immediately self destructed on the auction stage by going through a shredder hidden in the picture frame.

November 1: Scientists identified an interstellar object – traveling

between solar systems – for the first time ever, noting that its strange shape made it "tumble" faster than most comets. Astronomers at the University of Hawaii named it "Oumuamua," or Hawaiian for "scout."

November 4: Ross Edgley became the first person to swim around all of Great Britain. The 1,780 mile swim took him 156 days to complete.

November 16: British Prime Minister Theresa May appointed new cabinet ministers to handle workforce and Brexit issues after several members of her team resigned. The United Kingdom is drawing closer to its deadline to leave the European Union after its public voted to do so, but polling shows British voters now do not favorably view any of May's proposed plans for Brexit.

November 17: Protesters in France took to the streets in a mass strike that lasted more than two weeks, after unpopular President Macron suggested a fuel tax hike. The protesters are called the "yellow vests," after the safety vests they took from their cars to march.

November 25: Russian ships in the Black Sea intercepted Ukrainian vessels over competing territorial claims in waters near Crimea. Crimea has been controlled by Russia since an invasion in 2014 – Ukraine and Russia have been in indirect conflict since then but the tension has not previously spread to the Black Sea.

November 29: Reggae music was added to the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The UN agency catalogues items such as musical genres, cooking styles, and literary traditions to showcase the importance and variety of culture.



former President, Barack Obama



Attorney General, Jeff Sessions



Saudi journalist and American resident Jamal Kashoggi

SPORTS *By Gavin, Free Minds Friend*

After a dominant regular season in which they won two thirds of their games, the Boston Red Sox won the World Series in 5 games over the Los Angeles Dodgers to capture their fourth title in the last fifteen years.



The 2018 Boston Red Sox

Undefeated UFC Lightweight champion Khabib Nurmagomedov defended his title against former featherweight and lightweight champion Conor McGregor in an MMA fight marred by post-match controversy. After a technically excellent fight in which Nurmagomedov defeated McGregor by submission in the fourth round, the victor climbed out of the octagon and attempted to fight a member of McGregor's team. A brawl ensued in which both men participated. Nurmagomedov stated later that he was provoked by trash talk



IN THE NEWS

against his family and religion, but his winnings were temporarily withheld. The situation is still being resolved.



Khabib Nurmagomedov



Conor McGregor

The four participants in the College Football Playoff National Championship have been set, with SEC Champion Alabama, ACC Champion Clemson, Big 12 Champion Oklahoma, and Notre Dame to play in the semifinals at the end of December. All but Oklahoma are undefeated.

After a slow start, LeBron James has led the Lakers to the thick of the Western Conference playoff race. Stephen Curry's injuries have kept the Warriors from their usual dominance, though they remain the favorites to capture their fourth title in five years. In the West, virtually every team except the hapless Phoenix Suns has a chance to make the playoffs; in the East, LeBron's departure has left a vacuum multiple teams are struggling to fill; the Toronto Raptors and new free agent acquisition Kawhi Leonard lead the conference for the moment, but MVP candidates Giannis Antetokounmpo (Milwaukee Bucks) and Joel Embiid (Philadelphia 76ers) have their teams in the hunt as well... and the talented but thus far disappointing Boston Celtics are not that far behind.



LeBron James



Joel Embiid

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE US ELECTIONS *By Jamie, Free Minds Friend*

Democrats control the US House of Representatives for the first time since 2010 after picking up 40 seats in the November 6 midterm elections, for a 235-200 majority in the 116th Congress. The 40-seat gain was the largest for Democrats since the 1974 midterms. Despite the Democratic wave in the House, Republicans retained control of the US Senate, picking up two seats to increase their majority in that chamber to 53.

On the state level, Democrats flipped seven governorships and six state legislative chambers. The voter turnout percentage of 49.3 percent was historic, the highest for a midterm election since 1914, and a huge jump from the 36.7 percent turnout in 2014.

Signs of a potential wave appeared early. The Republicans' signature policy efforts – a massive tax cut for corporations and the wealthy, and a failed attempt to repeal the Affordable Care Act, a.k.a. Obamacare – were deeply unpopular. Democrats performed strongly in 2017 and 2018 special elections, even winning a Senate race in Alabama for the first time since 1992. Several Republicans chose to retire before the

midterms, most prominently outgoing Speaker of the House Paul Ryan. Ultimately, the Democrats won the House by their largest margin of victory since the Watergate scandal.



Current President, Donald Trump

In gubernatorial elections, Democrats flipped Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, and Wisconsin from red to blue. Republicans won the formerly independent governorship in Alaska. Democrats retained nine other governorships, while Republicans retained 19. Republicans will now hold 27 gubernatorial seats to the Democrats' 23. Including state legislative results, Democrats gained complete control of the Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Nevada, New Mexico and New York state governments. Republicans gained complete control of Alaska, while governments will be divided in Kansas, Michigan, New Hampshire and Wisconsin.

Notable ballot initiatives approved in the midterms include Florida's Amendment 4, which restores voting rights to most formerly incarcerated people after they complete their sentences. Approximately 1.5 million Floridians will regain the right to vote as a result. Elsewhere, Colorado and Michigan passed amendments to reform gerrymandering. Idaho, Nebraska, and Utah voted for Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act. Alabama and West Virginia approved restrictions on abortion. Maryland, Nevada and Michigan expanded voter registration, though Arkansas and North Carolina passed restrictive photo ID requirements. Michigan, Utah and Missouri voted for marijuana legalization.

The new Congress has 104 new members, for the third-highest turnover rate since 1974. 2018 was also a banner year for women – 116 female candidates won their House or Senate races out of 256 who ran. In total, 126 women are serving in the 116th Congress, breaking the previous record of 107 held by the 115th. The freshman class includes the youngest women ever elected to Congress, the first Native American women elected to Congress and the first Muslim women elected to Congress.

Representative Nancy Pelosi was elected Speaker of the House, while Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell retained his position. Democrats have promised that they will use their new majority to work on ethics reform, voting rights, healthcare and increased investigations into Trump administration scandals. However, their first priority has become seeking a resolution to the government shutdown that began in December over the Trump administration's demand for border wall funding. With the end of a unified federal government, significant legislative accomplishments are unlikely to happen in Washington until after the 2020 elections.



House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi



BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club
by Julia

Hey FM Fam! We got some fantastic, thoughtful responses to the poetry book *Bastards of the Reagan Era* by R. Dwayne Betts. If you didn't get the book, please let us know – and we always want to hear your feedback!

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?

EH: The era of the Reagans was just say no to drugs and let's lock people up for a very long time. For possession of crack, people got life, but you have people like John Delorean who got busted with 30 kilos and didn't do a day in jail—but he is white with money. I think the era was to lock up all the poor minorities.

SC: As a man who grew up in the "crack era," I can actually say that these poems not only spoke to me, they spoke for me. The pictures that are painted; the images that his words project; the feelings that are conveyed. All seem identical to the story that I want to share. The likeness has prompted me to start writing some poetry of my own. (Be on the lookout. Free Minds will read my poems first). Thank you for the books.

JKG: I think in the author's generation, the "crack era" was a new addictive experience inspiring a drug dealer's addiction, drug addict's addiction, and an addition to a new criminal lifestyle. Yes, I feel like things have changed from his era to now. But the dynamics of those three aforementioned addictions still remain the same...The way my experiences differs from the authors can be found in the criminal trends. In my generation instead of just "crack", it became pills, swipe life white collar crimes, k2, etc. A person also has the option to sell crack. My generation has more diverse criminal options that are just as glorified by the underworld as selling drugs. The ways in which the author's generation and my generation are the same basically comes from our faulty boiler system, misplaced loyalties and the urge to prove masculinity through violence. When all else changes, these mentalities stay the same.

AL: I do not feel that things have changed because Reagan's era was the "war on drugs" era, that still remains a war within black communities. My experience was not much different growing up because I came up at the end of Bush Sr. and the beginning of Clinton (Mass Incarceration) era. It remained the same because minorities (especially African Americans) still paid the price.

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?

EH: DC is brought to life in this book by seeing the war on many different fronts and he does a great job showing it how it's taken people down time and time again by either them getting put in a prison or a casket.

JKG: Washington is brought to life through the authors gripping experiences inside DC. He intimately knows at that particular mental period and era in his life. I think he does a good job of characterizing the city but I'm interested in knowing how his kaleidoscope view of Washington DC has evolved over the years.

AL: The author brought DC to life by giving you familiar street names and thoughts of being at the Ibex (local club) as Wink made you sway to the rhythm of the congos inside that packed club. Or the feeling you get from some band putting your neighborhood on or simply shouting you out. I see the side of the streets I grew to know coming up in the city. I saw the violence, the rage, and



at times the unprovoked anger of just growing up poor. I still see the addicts in the hallway or on the street corner, lost in their own high of choice. Yes, I believe he has done an excellent job of characterizing the city in his day and time. Washington, DC, was dubbed the "Murder Capital" because of the rash of violence that the author express within his story.

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?

EH: The city that nearly broke me I feel is about experiences in his own life. He watched people die and go to prison and lives that were changed forever. The book I feel is about real life in DC and now the sentence reform and prison reform if it passes can help to alter the future of many but that remains to be seen.

[Editor's Note: EH is referring to a federal bill called the "First Step Act." This bill just passed Congress. Write to us if you would like more information about the First Step Act!]

JKG: I think that the theme "for the city that nearly broke me" is his personal scale. Weighing the pain of undesired consequences against the pleasure of desired consequences. While traveling down the right of passage trail leading towards capturing mainlines. I think the theme I would often return to would be "ripples of frozen water"!

BKC: This is his way of saying he took on his big step down hill, and didn't think he would overcome this step to making it out of the badness that lives around him day to day.

AL: I can only come to the conclusion that the author (like myself) was almost a victim of the pitfalls of the streets and had it not been for his will to survive and want something better for himself, then he would have been broken. I think my book would be similar in the sense that sometimes you only reflect back on that which you know, so death would have been what I 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?

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

JKG: I think all the journeys he is speaking of in this poem are the emotional, mental, physical and financial journeys that all leads to his maturation. To answer the second question, I think we are slaves to our consciousness in regards to our past decisions and or deeds. Our consciousness hunts us visibly in the most inopportune moments.

BKC: The same drugs and crimes are still going on that started in that time.

AL: The author finds himself on a journey to a Virginia prison, a journey through life in the streets. These journeys represent significant moments in the author's life because some are reoccurring that this may very well be what almost broke him. History haunts us all because we are all products of the drug epidemic. It has affected us all in some way, shape or form. From the ones who sell the product, to the individuals who purchase the product. To the children at home starving, or living in a single parent home. We all are affected.

Julia's Note: *I don't usually interject, but I really want to share one thought about this poem. When I read it, I thought a lot about the Middle Passage, the devastating journey that enslaved Africans were forced to take in the belly of slave ships across the Atlantic Ocean. I felt that this journey was really echoing through the centuries in this poem. Let us know if anyone would like to read a book about the Middle Passage.*

5. Do you have a favorite poem in this book? Could you relate to it? Why or why not?

JL: Mr. Betts book of poetry is deep and very realistic. This literature should be read and studied by those who wish to understand what the street mentality consists of before taking actions to improve street (and prison) conditions. I really can relate to the poems on pages 56-60 and pages 61-67 because I've spent a lot of time in the prison system and take Mr. Betts' words and insight to heart.

JKG: My favorite poem is titled "To the Edge of Panic" on pages 22-25. This poem bluntly describes what happens in prison.

AL: My favorite poem in this book is "What We Know of Horses." I can relate because in a sense I am his brother. I deal with the reality of this living casket (prison) every day, yet I find peace amongst the many memories of my neighborhood.

MEDITATION

START WHERE YOU ARE! Meditation Practice

By Kelli

(VOCABULARY WORD FOR TODAY: **Equanimity**. This is a beautiful word. It means mental calmness, composure, and evenness of temper, especially in a difficult situation.)

If you've been around Free Minds for any length of time, you know that we are big believers in the benefits of meditation. We meditate before every book club, so we thought it's only right to bring meditation to you all through the *Connect*. Some of you may have been meditating for years, and others are reading this and thinking, "Medi-wha? Nooooooo!"

As a Free Minds member though, you have already dedicated yourself to keeping an open mind, so let's give it a try.

Since it's winter, we can think of this as a brief opportunity to hibernate. Hibernating is the bear's way (and my way!) of rejuvenating and recharging. So while meditating is not the same as falling asleep for the winter, it IS similar in that we are becoming singularly focused upon just "being."

The best part about this is that you can start where you are.

Right now as you're reading this, no matter where you are, become aware of your breath, the flow of air. And gradually, extend that awareness to what is **ACTUALLY** happening in and around you. Slowly, move your awareness around, perhaps to your heart beating or a sensation in your body. But whatever you bring your awareness to, simply observe, don't try to change or control it.

Guess what? With this simple act of observing, you are beginning to meditate, you are becoming more mindful and more conscious of what is actually taking place rather than your thoughts ABOUT it. When you apply this same act of observing to your thoughts, you allow them to pass through, rising and falling, just like the sensations in the body, while you maintain an attitude of **equanimity**.

There is a reason why meditation is called a "practice"! Don't be discouraged if at first, the mind makes a noisy racket and seems to create constant distractions for you. Just keep practicing. Over the next month or so, let's all take time to practice withdrawing and hibernating in our imaginary warm little caves of meditation. Even if just for a few moments each day. The rewards of cultivating a meditation practice are worth it, and remember, it can be done anytime, anywhere. Start where you are!

Please let us know your thoughts on this meditation section and if you would like us to include another one in future issues.





EUGENE RICE WAS LYNCHED IN 1918. THIS APRIL, I DROVE TO SOUTHERN GEORGIA TO LEARN IF HE WAS FAMILY.

an excerpt
By Zak Cheney-Rice | April 30, 2018

In April 2018, the nonprofit Equal Justice Initiative opened the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama, a national memorial to commemorate the victims of lynching in the United States. On the same day, they also opened the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration. This essay, originally published on Mic.com by Free Minds friend and writer Zak Cheney-Rice shares some of his feelings when he visited the memorial and museum.

EUGENE RICE is listed with 19 other Brooks County lynching victims on a rust-worn marker in Montgomery, Alabama. The iron slab is part of a project at least eight years in the making: the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, billed as America's first memorial to people terrorized by lynching.

Housed in an open-air structure uphill from the city's main drag, the monument unfolds like a graveyard winding underground. But instead of traditional headstones, the markers bearing the names of the lynched – more than 4,400 names arranged by county and state – are suspended from the ceiling by metal bars. It's a haunting approximation of the hanging ropes that killed so many being honored.

The wooden floors sloped downward as I made my way below ground level, and the ceiling rose, pulling the markers up with it until they hung above me. Row after row passed overhead as dozens of visitors filed past, some in tears. The memorial is a stunning feat of research and design that would not exist had American tradition held its course.

Lynchings, among other objectives, were part of a massive gaslighting campaign against black America. They were designed to terrorize, to serve as a threat and a warning, but were shrouded in postmortem denial. White perpetrators rarely talked about them after the fact. Seared images lived on mostly in black people's recollections, passed down through generations in hushed tones, if at all.

But what these people saw was undeniable. Blacks were tortured, killed and often mutilated before white crowds that sometimes numbered in the thousands. Onlookers cheered, gasped, covered their eyes, snapped photographs, ate picnics. Postcards depicting mangled black corpses were sent to white friends and relatives who could not attend. Victims' bodies were left on display, sometimes for several days.

Afterward, black people talked publicly about lynchings only under threat of death. Whites did the same knowing legal repercussions were possible, though almost nonexistent. The result was near-complete silence. Walking through these towns, you'd think nothing had happened. It was typical for a community to say nothing about a lynching that had just taken place – even when burns were still visible on tree trunks and skid marks from a dragging still riddled the town square.

This is what makes the National Memorial so remarkable: its insistence on naming what was intended to go unnamed. "I've been trying to get to higher ground for a long time," said Bryan Stevenson, the renowned



Alabama-based black public interest lawyer, at an opening week event Wednesday. "Today, I believe that Montgomery is higher ground."

He was referring to a spiritual elevation he felt the memorial represented, a commitment people in Montgomery had made toward atoning for past wrongs. Stevenson's legal organization, the Equal Justice Initiative, is behind both the memorial and the Legacy Museum a few blocks away, which charts several hundred years of black hardship in the United States from slavery to mass incarceration.

Both opened last week, and I came to Montgomery to tour them and see Stevenson speak. His ability to synthesize black history in stark moral terms – and to do so while running a revered defense practice and marshaling hundreds of civil rights luminaries, celebrities and others to see it come together – infused the week with an infectious energy, fueled by the possibility that America might at last face its most horrific crimes and start to heal.

But as Stevenson and others made clear, you can't have reconciliation without telling the truth first. And though many have tried hiding it, truth survives in the spirits of lynching victims, and the memories of their families, their communities.

One of these women took the stage at the Montgomery Performing Arts Center on Wednesday night. Mamie Kirkland is 109 years old. When she was 7, in 1915, her family fled Ellisville, Mississippi. Local whites had planned to lynch her father and a man named John Hartfield. Kirkland's father rushed home and began stuffing family belongings into suitcases, loading the car, telling everyone they had to leave. Both men skipped town.

Kirkland's family settled in East St. Louis, Illinois. They didn't stay long. Rampaging whites – enraged by job competition from incoming black workers – drove them out in 1917. They then moved to Alliance, Ohio. The local Ku Klux Klan came knocking on their door one night bearing torches. They threatened to incinerate Kirkland's family. The family moved again.

This time, they went to Western New York, where they planted roots for the long term. As exhausting as it was to keep running, their decision to



flee saved them from a more gruesome fate. John Hartfield returned to Ellisville some time after he left. On June 26, 1919, he was lynched there. Mamie Kirkland spoke four words onstage in Montgomery about these events: "I will never forget."

It had been 102 years since Kirkland was driven from Mississippi, since her father came home ordering his family to pack. Bearing witness to what made them run was never Kirkland's choice. It is her burden.

But nobody is alive to tell Eugene Rice's story the way Kirkland is to tell hers. My grandfather – the man from whom the "Rice" in my name comes – died in 2011. Almost all his people left south Georgia decades ago, with most settling in Philadelphia. His only living sibling is 103 years old and has dementia. The cousins I spoke with have no knowledge of the lynching victim who could be their relative.

Across the South, white people have lynched black people for a variety of absurd reasons. Many are listed on the walls of the National Memorial. There was William Powell, lynched in East Point, Georgia, at age 14 for "frightening" a white girl. Elizabeth Lawrence, lynched in Birmingham, Alabama, for reprimanding white children who threw rocks at her. Grant Cole refused to run an errand for a white woman in Montgomery. Anthony Crawford in Abbeville, South Carolina, rejected a white merchant's bid for cottonseed.

The common thread is innocence. None had committed an objective social transgression. Throughout the memorial, a premium was placed on highlighting black victims who had done nothing wrong, who had behaved within society's normal bounds but were killed for being on the wrong side of the day's color line.

Eugene Rice was an accessory to murder, if reports are true. He helped plan the killing of a white man at a time when lynching was an obvious consequence. His killers didn't just want him to die, memorialized far more as a warning than a person – they wanted him obliterated. They wanted his life erased. It's a miracle his name survived at all.

AS HAMPTON SMITH lie dead in a pool of his own blood, Sidney Johnson fled into the woods. By most accounts, it was Johnson who pulled the trigger that May night in 1918. But he had several accomplices in what was later revealed to be a long-gestating murder plot.

On May 13, a man named Hayes Turner and his 20-year-old pregnant wife, Mary, had hosted Johnson, Will Head and Will Thompson at their home to discuss killing Smith. Two more men, Julius Jones and Eugene Rice, may also have been present. All seven could detail violent encounters with the white landowner. All were worn down by Smith's brutality. All had grudges.

...

Eugene Rice was caught and hanged on May 18. Six more men – Chime Riley, Simon Schuman and four others whose names remain undocumented – were killed soon after. Riley's body was weighed down with clay cups and tossed into the Little River. The same waters later produced three more black corpses that had been dumped there (it remains unclear how or if they were connected to Hampton Smith's murder). None of their names have been verified.

...

Many locals denied the lynchings outright. Professor Julie Buckner Armstrong, who wrote the 2011 book *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching*, details the response she got from local historians in the late

1990s when she tried asking them about May 1918.

"[The white volunteer at the Brooks County Historical Museum] told me that no lynchings had ever happened in Brooks County," she wrote. She added that the director of the facility's Lowndes counterpart claimed he was not aware of any local lynchings, either. "One of [the Brooks volunteer's] ancestors had been a sheriff in 1918, she said, and he was a kind man who always treated blacks fairly."

Today – by no small effort – the historical record is more accurate. A metal placard marks the spot where Mary Turner was lynched in Lowndes County. Stuck in a dirt path by the Folsom Bridge off Highway 122 in Hahira, Georgia, it tells in raised silver font an abridged account of the rampage.

Vehicles were scarce the day I visited in April. Quiet punctuated by humming dragonflies was more frequent than the rumbling of engines. Nearly every driver who passed looked white, wore wrap-around sunglasses and drove an immaculately waxed pickup truck. Ants swarmed the placard's base. The sun was out, the sky clear.

For three years, local activists, educators and Turner's descendants – collectively called the Mary Turner Project – had lobbied the Georgia Historical Society to get the placard placed in this spot. They were successful in the end. It has stood since 2010. Though it is out of the way, not a marker you'd stumble across by chance, its significance cannot be overstated in a city that is an estimated 73% white and borders a county – Brooks – that led the state in lynchings between 1880 and 1930. Its incongruity is hard to escape. Drive a bit further, into Morven, and you'll find another sign enticing passersby to "join the Sons of Confederate Veterans."

The local response to the memorial has not been entirely friendly. Visual reminders of racial violence have earned white support mostly when celebrating those lionized as heroes – George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee. But where the monument is an indictment of their brutality, a different response takes shape. The bullet holes that have riddled Mary Turner's memorial since 2013 stand as a testament to this reality.

"The fact that someone was so insensitive to damage [the memorial] that way says something about the mentality of some of the people who live here," Mark George, coordinator of the Mary Turner Project, told local television station WTXL at the time of the vandalism.

Shafts of sunlight pierce the sign where the bullets struck five years ago. If you look closely, there's a detail that's hard to shake: One gunshot has left a hole almost directly over the "o" in "mob."

...

Decades of record demonstrate in no unclear terms that the world's oldest democracy is a nation where a black man could be murdered in public by his own neighbors and leave no substantive evidence he ever existed. It's as sobering to note that more black lives than we'll ever know have been purged from memory the same way. Telling truths and mining our grimmest national horrors are preconditions for reckoning. But whatever reckoning comes must first be salvaged from what we've already forgotten.

Such was the negative value of a black American life for so long – not eons back, but within the lifetime of people who are alive today. For many of us, these memories are still fresh. For many, it feels like not much changed.

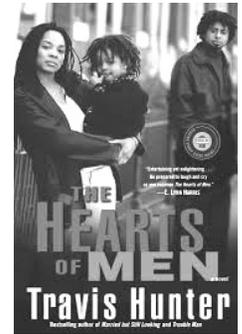
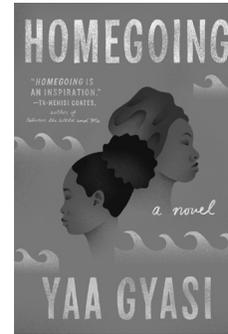


WHAT WE'RE READING

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."

• **LC: *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi**

It is an amazing story of a mother who has two daughters in Ghana and leads down into generation after generation across the middle passage to America and back. This book is like the new generation *Roots*.

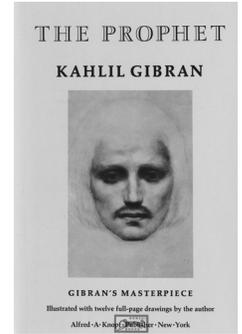
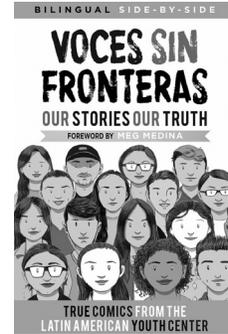


• **SC: *The Hearts of Men* by Travis Hunter**

This is a book about the growth, responsibility, sacrifice, and forgiveness of four Black men dealing with the all too familiar challenges that we are all faced with. I think that this is a good book to read for members of my Free Minds Book Club family.

• **EH: *Voces Sin Fronteras* by the Latin American Youth Center**

Voces Sin Fronteras makes me think how we here in America take for granted the little things in life like going to school and being able to be a child and not have to worry about working to help the family and how we are safer here than anywhere in the world and then we have our president here sending troops to the Mexico border to stop people that are not trying to come in illegally but walk into the border crossing and asking for asylum the legal way. It hits home for me because my daughter lives in Mexico with her mom because I'm locked up. She is a United States citizen but has to stay there 'till I'm out. The book is over the top, and I commend the kids that wrote it.



• **JL: *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran**

I've read *The Prophet* twice so far. It's almost religious and gives good sound instructions that one can use to improve his/her spirituality on a daily basis. The character, *Almustafa*, reminds me of a Buddha or Confucius who went around giving insight to their people to assist them in daily living and helping to improve their circumstances.

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: HEALING

For the next issue, we're going to be reflecting on what it means to *heal* – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually... all forms of healing. I recently learned about an idea called *moral injury* that refers to the way a person's conscience (their sense of right and wrong) can be injured after a traumatic experience. I read about this in an article about military veterans experiencing moral injury after serving in war. When we've experienced a physical injury, we go to a doctor. But what about other kinds of injuries? Injuries to our mind, heart, or spirit? In what ways do you heal yourself from emotional wounds (incarceration, loss of a loved one, breakup of a relationship, experiencing traumatic events)? Some people meditate, some people exercise, some people talk it through with other people, some people read, write, or create art...have you been part of helping someone to heal their emotional wounds? If so can you describe the experience? Do you have any suggestions for how we as a society can heal ourselves and each other?

The issue after healing will be on growing up and adulthood – what does it mean to be grown?)

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!

SOLUTION - EASY

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SOLUTION - HERCULEAN (VERY HARD)

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