

May/June 2017  
Vol. 6, Issue 3

# Free minds Connect

**THIS MONTH'S THEME: INSIDE/OUT**



OUTER ME

INNER ME

**FROM ROBBERY  
TO REBUILDING  
THE COMMUNITY**

**PAGE 10**

**FATHER-SON BOND  
STRONG THROUGH  
24-YEAR BID**

**PAGE 5**

**"MY BLINDNESS  
DOESN'T DEFINE  
ME"**

**PAGE 12**



# Free Minds Connect

## TALKBACK WITH TARA

Is brought to you by...

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SJ, JTM, TJ, DR**

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**JEFFREY, ALFRED SR.,  
JOHN**

FM Friends

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 will appear on our writing Blog, and at a Write Night Event!)

Free Minds Book Club  
2201 P Street NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
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**Next Issue's Theme:  
Nature**

A warm hello, Free Minds Family!

This Connect's theme of "Inside/Out: Inner Me and Outer Me" holds special meaning for me and Free Minds. As you know, our core mission is to awaken, nurture and elevate the voices of Free Minds members. The name of our book, *The Untold Story of the Real Me*, shows the world another side of our members. But it's often not easy to first, find who we really are inside, and second, to share that self with the outside world—a world, especially in prison, that is often not a welcoming place for our true feelings. But in this issue you take on that difficult journey with bravery and compassion, and as always I am so humbled and proud of you all.

I just returned from an incredible trip to Iraq, where I was interviewing refugees who fled ISIS and are now living in Kurdistan. Hearing stories from survivors of the Yazidi genocide (which is still going on—3,000 people are still held captive) was both horrifying and deeply touching. I will share my experiences in the next issue, but just to say their inner selves were not accepted by a cruel, outside world, yet they never wavered in their beliefs and who they are.

As DD shares in this issue, *"It's so hard for me now to show who I am inside on the outside because that can be taken for a weakness."* DD shares a reality we know in the prison world. That's why I am so grateful we have the Connect—a safe space where we can fully express ourselves in anonymity. Thank you for taking the risk to share your real selves on paper.

There were so many lines that stood out in this issue. I've picked some to give you a sneak peek of the wisdom and insight you're about to read.

I checked in with my nephew who has been blind from a young age on finding true friends. *"If they are having trouble being true to themselves, odds are they won't be true to me as a friend."* That's some wise words right there. Free Minds member Carlos had some deep thoughts about his homecoming. *"I realized that all I'd ever contributed to was destruction in my community."* He's been busy repairing that harm as an advocate for returning citizens.

As CM says, *"there is a good guy that lives deep within every guy acting bad."*

Finally we get to benefit from our perceptive advice columnist, HF, who never fails to provide us with words to live by: *"Walk with compassion in your life and always remain willing to rise above those that offend you so that you will receive the same in response."*

You all "rise above" every time you take pen to paper. Keep rising.

Until next time, you are always in our thoughts.

Tara

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

## FREE MINDS HQ



By Melissa

### New in Reentry

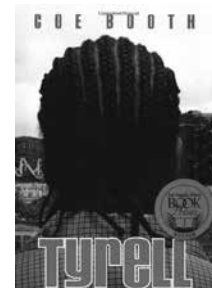
We've revamped our month-long Reentry Apprenticeship—now it goes all year! It's now a continuous program with five components: job readiness training, a book club and writing workshop, paid work shifts at local companies, personalized job and program placements, and community outreach.

### The Atlantic and Allstate honors Free Minds

In April, *The Atlantic* magazine and Allstate Insurance Company honored five nonprofits with the Renewal Awards for their innovative mission to support underserved communities. Free Minds was one of five winners selected from approximately 500 organizations across the country!

### Author Coe Booth visits DC Jail

Perennial Free Minds favorite Coe Booth, the award-winning author of *Tyrell*, *Kendra*, and *Bronxwood*, shared her expertise about how to write powerful novels about the place where you grew up. Any suggestions for who we should invite next?



Give us a call when you get out: (202) 758-0829



# THE INNER ME VERSUS THE OUTER ME...

*By Free Minds Members*

*People are too quick to judge by what they think, but never take the time to actually get to know the real you! Just because I've been to jail or 'cause I'm from D.C., does that make me a thug? No, it doesn't. It really don't tell you nothing about the person I am, just the person I was. My heart has softened and I'm a better man through life altering changes. Guys often want to be something they're really not, when all along there is a good guy that lives deep within every guy acting bad. That's all it is. It's an act. I know this because I live it and today I live my life as a leader with dignity and respect for all walks of life. So, the inside of me shines brighter than what's shown on the outside. - CM*

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*It's hard for me now to show who I am inside on the outside because, I am in a place where that can be a bad thing or be taken for a weakness to some. Sometimes the way we are perceived, help us and hurt us. I just have to figure out a better way to go about learning how to do that...The tattoos on my body, tattoos on my face or whatever, it's hard for people to see me as I have changed. When they look at my appearance, they always say "don't judge a book by its cover," but in the world that's what is going on. Everybody is judging people for whatever reason it is. The hairstyles, tattoos or whatever, you are always gonna be looking at different people. Perception is everything. So, I don't know how I am gonna do it. I am going to keep working on myself and striving to be better. - DD*

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*While looking at my face you would think, "Oh, she's pretty." You would never think she would get locked up, that she knows how it feels to be hurt. Though, inside you would notice my heart is my window to my past. The pain I dealt with, the beatings I took, when I was younger. You would notice my heart has a hole in it where all the good times fall into and you notice everything is around it. Outside you would see a face that smiles, but on the inside, I'm crying. I cry for the little girl trapped inside who couldn't cry when she was younger. Inside I cry so much that No One really knows the true me. Outside I act strong and as if nothing could hurt me. I'm tired of crying on the inside! Crying on the outside, people notice not everything is peaches 'n' cream. - LB, Free Minds Sister*

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## WORDS OF WISDOM

*By JG, FM Member*

This month's theme presents the perfect opportunity for me to share my Inside-Out experience with you all. The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is a reentry program where "education in which we are able to encounter each other, especially across profound social barriers, is transformative and allows problems to be approached in new and different ways. Inside-Out's mission is to create opportunities for people inside and outside of prison to have transformative learning experience that emphasize collaboration and dialogue and that invites them to take leadership in addressing crime, justice, and other issues of social concern." I graduated in 2015 and it was, without a doubt, the best program I've taken while on this journey. It allowed for a degree of normalcy that most of us in prison don't get to enjoy on a regular basis. Every week we came together, 15 "inside" students from the prison and 15 "outside" students from the university, and studied and dialogued together and the experience was no less than transformative.

At first I was a little concerned as to whether or not I'd be able to hold my own amongst a group of college seniors, but I rose to the occasion and excelled. Within those 16 weeks we not only expressed and challenged points of view and expanded our collective conscience, we bonded. Maybe some of the inside students viewed the outside students as snobby college kids, and perhaps some of the outside students viewed the inside students as untrustworthy convicts, but by the end of the course nothing could've been further from the truth. This is the power of Inside-Out, you come into it one way and you come out better. In 2016, I had the opportunity to be a teacher's aide and that experience was just as fulfilling as when I took it. Inside-Out gets you to thinking by challenging the status quo, questioning social norms and really examining what true justice is and what that looks like. It's an amazing program and I strongly encourage anyone, if the opportunity presents itself, to enroll. I promise you won't regret it. Peace!



# THE WRITE WAY

By Gabe

Hey guys, Julia here. Today I'm passing the mic to Gabe, who has been working with us as a writing coach in our reentry work. He has a lot of experience as a writer and a teacher. Over to you, Gabe.

Dear Poets, today we're going to look at a short poem by E. Ethelbert Miller, a writer from the Bronx who moved to DC many decades ago to attend Howard University, and never left. Ethelbert has deep roots in the city. In 1979, Mayor Marion Barry declared September 28th would be "E. Ethelbert Miller Day." Let's look at the poem.

### **Freedom**

after word spread  
about emancipation  
some of us went to  
the end of the  
plantation and looked  
for our children to  
return. freedom don't  
mean much if you can't  
put your arms around it.

By E. Ethelbert Miller

Two important words offer us a clue about when and where this poem is set: "emancipation," and "plantation." It probably takes place at the end of the Civil War, and the use of "us" lets us know it's written from the perspective of the slaves. I had the chance to speak with Ethelbert, and he described how writing work set in another time period could be a great opportunity "to look at other books and study history, to move beyond the self and a poem of self-reflection and say 'I'm going to have to do some heavy lifting in my work.'" Slavery was brutal and destructive in too many ways to count, but one horrific aspect of it was the callous way that slave-owners broke up families, selling away sons, daughters, mothers and fathers.

No matter where a poem or a story is set, it can resonate with us on a human level. You know better than most what it means to be separated from loved ones. Can you imagine being told you're free, but knowing very little of the world outside of where you've been confined? To go only to the edge of the plantation, when the person you love most could be on the edge of a plantation hundreds of miles away, in a different state entirely? Nothing like a telephone, no social media, probably no way to write a letter even if you did know where to send it, because most masters didn't let their slaves learn to read or write? How bittersweet would the word freedom taste? Through his poem Miller forces us to confront that question, to begin to imagine how that might feel, even if we'll never fully understand.



E. Ethelbert Miller sits on a bench where a poem of his is carved into the ground near the Dupont Circle Metro station. (Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

When I spoke with Ethelbert, he gave me some background on what inspired him to write the piece. Lorton Prison in Virginia was closing, and they'd started sending inmates from DC to a prison out in Ohio. Ethelbert visited these men from DC, who were suddenly very far away

*continued on page 18*

# FREE MINDS MAILBAG

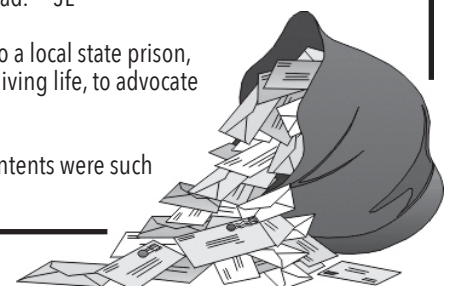
*We love getting mail from our Free Minds Family. Write us, and let us know what you thought of this issue!*

"I read all the brothers thoughts and feelings about "LEGACY" and they went deep and I respect them for sharing that with the world. It takes a real man to accept the fact that they are afraid to die alone. I really like KJ joint bcuz he speaks about all the hate that the ones close to us really have when it's really supposed to be the opposite. I also loved Janet's story about her son Sean. We really take our moms and loved ones through hell and back while we running these wicked streets. SMH. It's sad but true and it took me a real long time to understand the things I do affect those close to me." - CM

"The art on the cover is definitely "awesome," symbolizing how one can leave his or her mark on the world. From a mental aspect it shows that one can draw their own world (in a positive sense), making it what they want it to be. KB's writing on top of page 3 is deeply felt, inspirational, and poetic. It truly fits the theme of this issue. KB eloquently shares our purpose here on Earth and tells how legacies of the past are an important ingredient to inspire future legacies. The poems written by FM members are also awesome. SAT's "Unspoken Legacy" is so real, lines 5 through 13 I've experienced personally. It's more than SAT's opinion - it's the truth. I really enjoy reading the poem. KJ's poem is very deep and detailed and I like the poem's twist: from a perspective of "death" (at the beginning of the reading) to becoming a "living" example towards the end. A really good read. LG's poem "Remember Me" is a good, inspiring message of transformation for the better. All the poems are a great read." - JL

"I know the struggles of society because, like Nick, I lived it. My legacy is to fight for DC inmates to return to a local state prison, to fight for human rights behind bars and detention centers, to find a proper guidance from foster care to living life, to advocate better school programs, and work programs." - JC

"My favorite article was REBOUND. It was so very well written. I had to read it over and over because the contents were such a reality. Terrific work!" - DJ





# FAMILY TIES

The column where FM family and loved ones weigh in.

By Kelli

**A father waits with patience, hope, and faith for his son who has served 20 years of a 24-year sentence.**

Pastor Alfred "Mustard," Sr., grew up in Washington, DC. While he was never incarcerated himself, Pastor Alfred knew many friends who got caught up and served time. He also knew many who died in the city's violence. In 1979, he moved to Virginia, in part to provide a safer environment for his son Alfred Jr. (then 3 years old). When he was 13, Alfred Jr. moved to Maryland to live with his mother. He began getting into trouble during his late teens, spending two years in a boys' home. Pastor Alfred was heartbroken when Alfred Jr. was charged and convicted for armed robbery in 1997 at the age of 21.

**KELLI:** What was Alfred Jr. like growing up?

**PASTOR ALFRED, SR:** We had a close connection with one another. A bond that was inseparable. He was nurtured through school and he did well. He received a lot of awards for academics. He also excelled at football and basketball. Later on, he became very good at boxing. When he was arrested, he was on his way to the Golden Gloves in Australia and was being considered for the US Olympic team. He was also working with UPS in the stock room. That was the thing about him. Whatever he was doing, he was going to do it the best that he could.

**KELLI:** How did his arrest impact you?

**PASTOR ALFRED, SR.:** I was terrified. I'll never forget the look on his face when he was found guilty. He turned around in the courtroom and looked at me as if to say, "Help!" That was one of the most hurting moments in my life when I could not help my own son. When he was sentenced, I looked at him and then I looked over at the police and they were laughing. I felt so bad.

**KELLI:** How have you maintained your relationship throughout his incarceration?

**PASTOR ALFRED, SR.:** Our relationship is unreal as father and son. Whenever I visited, he was always so proud because I would always go dressed, representing him as his father in the ministry. He was always proud of my presentation and my accomplishments. I came from the projects and came through the ranks. And that pride goes both ways. I am so proud of him too. He is self-taught and self-motivated. When he was in every other institution, I was always visiting. Where he is now though is one of the most horrific places. Alfred Jr. doesn't want him to come see him there, so we talk on the phone. I send him money whenever I can as often as I can. I send him stamps. When

# ASK HF ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Dear HF,

I go home in 3 months. I've been incarcerated for a crime against my best friend's baby mother. During my bid I never reached out to him or vice versa. How should I approach him and his family? Before this happened, we were like family. Recently, my mom ran into his sister in passing. They exchanged hellos and went about their day. Does that mean they would allow me the chance to explain myself? Or do you think she was just trying to be courteous to my Mom? Please tell me how to handle this situation!

Sincerely,  
AN

Dear AN,

Assuming you already understand the serious nature of your offense, the next step is to learn to forgive yourself. After that, it is your duty to attempt to make amends with your victim in hopes of reconciliation. Under the principles of Restorative Justice, offenders make reconciliation with their victims when possible. (With the passing of the new Comprehensive Youth Justice Amendment Act this year, D.C. juvenile offenders will begin to take part in victim-offender reconciliation programs.)

Since it was your best friend's girlfriend, try to make reconciliation with him as well in the process of healing the wounds that your actions left open. I am sure that you know your best friend very well, his likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. After sending a letter to both your victim and your best friend acknowledging the harm that your actions caused and seeking to atone, you must understand that you do not have any control over how they feel about you or if they will ever forgive you. In some cases, victims and the loved ones of victims are not seeking reconciliation and there is nothing you can do about that.

If you send your letter and you do not hear any response, then it may be best that you do not attempt to reach out to them after you are home. If you think that contact could lead to more harm, you should avoid the potential conflict. After accepting responsibility for your crimes and doing your best to be reconciliatory with your victims, you must move on to begin your journey to repair your own life. We've all done bad things before, even to those that we love the most. I admire your willingness to seek reconciliation for your mistakes. One way to make sure that others forgive us is to make sure that we forgive those that have offended us in the past. Walk with compassion in your life and always remain willing to rise above those that offend you so that you will receive the same in response.

Sincerely,  
HF

we talk, we always talk positive. He keeps me even more positive than I am already. He is a beautiful writer, and with his writing, he is very positive. He writes under the pen name "Spoken Truth." His incarceration hurts him, it hurts me, and it hurts his mother, step-mother and his brothers. But he and I, we keep each other spiritually motivated.

**KELLI:** Have you seen Alfred Jr. change and grow during this time?

**PASTOR ALFRED, SR.:** Yes Lord. When I talk with him, I listen to  
*continued on page 17*



# THE INNER ME VERSUS THE OUTER ME...

*continued from page 3*

*How you feel about yourself will be reflected on the outside no matter how hard you try to hide it. I walk around these prison walls with my head held high with my chest up and shoulders spread wide. Some of my fellow inmates kid me that I walk around like I'm royalty. Well, I, in turn, tell them that I carry myself the way I do because I am "Royalty" within myself, regardless of my environment or circumstances. I also tell them if you act like you want to be, eventually you'll become how you act. My secret is that I've come to recognize where my power truly comes from and that I'm blessed and highly favored. I've come to realize that my life is a reflection of my feelings toward myself. If I smile, people will smile back at me, and if I frown, they will also frown back. So, that lets me know that life is a mirror of what we project outward from within. The day you begin to value your own self, know it and remain aware of it, and then you will be your own best friend. Face your inner fears and know with change comes responsibility. Learn to love yourself from the inside out because ready or not, the future is coming, and your destiny is created by your thoughts, feelings, and most importantly, the actions you take now in the present. - QS*

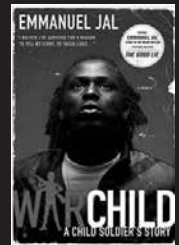
## QUOTE-I-VATOR

*"I survived because the fire inside me burned brighter than the fire around me." - Joshua Graham (author)*

*"Your outer world is a reflection of your inner world." - T. Harv Eker (author)*

*"The ultimate mystery is one's own self." - Sammy Davis Jr. (entertainer)*

*"What music does to me, it helps me balance my inner pressure so that I can deal with the forces outside that are trying to pressure me." - Emmanuel Jal (author of War Child, activist, rapper)*



*War Child by Emmanuel Jal*

## DC PHOTOS OF THE MONTH



The famous Big Chair in the Anacostia neighborhood in Southeast DC!

The Big Chair was created in 1959 as an advertisement for a furniture store. The furniture store is now located in Virginia, but the Chair still stands.



You asked and we have delivered! Check out Horace and Dickie's Carryout on 12th and H St. This carry out is known to have a long line stretched out into the neighborhood on Fridays.

Have a request for next issue's DC Photo of the Month? Write us at 2201 P St NW, Washington, DC 20037 and let us know what you'd like to see!



# CONVERSATION WITH KELLI



Hey Free Minds Little Brothers,

I'm writing from a plane headed home from visiting family and friends on the west coast. Over the last week I had lots of conversations and I drank *lots* of coffee.

My favorite spot was Dana Street Roasters in Mountain View, California – a little neighborhood café with a kind of hippy vibe. It was full of all types, sizes, and colors. A gathering of men in their seventies looked like they may have been meeting at the same table for Monday morning coffee for decades. A young Vietnamese couple looked like they might be on their first date. 😊

Throughout the week I've been thinking about you all, and about the idea of our inside and outside selves. Generally, I don't love crowds or crowded places. Between going through four different major airports and spending time in downtown Portland and San Francisco though, I've been around plenty of people lately. So I took the opportunity to really watch and listen to them.

In contrast to the first coffeehouse, we also hung out in a spot in Palo Alto (in the heart of what's called "Silicon Valley" because of all of the tech companies there). There were lots of up-and-comers in expensive clothes and new haircuts trying to influence others over lattes. They all looked polished and slick. But the people there seemed to be acting fake and full of themselves. One guy was wearing these Italian dress shoes that were clearly really expensive but they curled up at the toes and he looked like an elf!



On Saturday, I went with my son Elijah (he's at college in California) to a place called Dolores Park in the Mission District of San Francisco. The park is this enormous green space on a hillside overlooking the city. When we got there, it was so packed, I swear, I thought there was a major concert going on. It was just the beautiful weather that had brought everybody and their brother's dog out! We stayed for probably two hours. It was the best people-watching ever!

There were competing speakers playing all kinds of music. Some people were dancing salsa next to other people singing along with Kendrick Lamar. A group of about 10 preteens were riding through in a line of BMX bikes, all doing sustained wheelies on the back tires – one kid standing on his handlebars. Everyone was cheering for them and the boys were so happy. There were awesome dogs. Great Danes, Boxers, and beautiful mutts. A birthday party was happening and the partiers were sharing cake with strangers. Others were diving into the grass as they played Spike Ball. A group of four women were throwing a football to each other and no joke, their arms were better than most men. Everywhere, people were laughing and smiling. Now I don't know if it was because the sun was shining, because it was the weekend, or because everyone was literally "playing." Maybe I was just happy, but I had the deep sense that a lot of those people were being their authentic selves that day. Have you ever had this feeling? I wish every day and every place was like this. Okay, you're right, maybe the little dude standing on his handlebars was trying a little to impress, but I don't blame him... he had skills! For the most part it was just people being people. I feel like we spend too much of our time trying to be who we think others want us to be, and not enough time exploring, sharing, and being who we really are. It's those times that life feels the most amazing.



Dolores Park – Mission District of San Francisco

I'm going to keep striving to be the best truest version of myself. Want to join me? Until the next time, stay strong, keep reading and writing, and keep your mind free!

Your friend, Kelli



# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## WHAT IF?? By DC

What if my inside was out, and my outside was in,  
And you could see what was on my mind,  
And the things I thought,  
Would you still think of me as a friend?

What if my heart beat so loud on my sleeve, with passion and love,  
Would you try to ignore it, instead of listening with open ears?  
Or if my feelings glowed so bright like a blush on my face,  
Cause I'm still ashamed and embarrassed over the things I did  
in my years.

What if my intestines only told you the truth,  
About all my likes, dislikes, certain things in the past,  
Would you tell me you hate my guts?  
If my lungs can finally exhale all the negativity it was given  
to inhale,  
So it can blend with the same pollution that spread across  
the world,  
From factories, old tractors, and trucks.

What if everywhere you looked every inside was out,  
And every outside was in,  
Would you say the world would be better or worse?  
Because some things that are inside need to be out,  
And some things out need to be in.

If things were made any different,  
Would it be a gift or a curse??

## Who Am I By JH

I'm a striving believer of the religion of Islam  
I'm a striving father who's trying to be as active as possible in  
my children's life  
to the best of my ability  
I'm a product of a drug infested violent economy who's  
seeking change  
I'm the child who threw pebbles at the prison glass until it broke  
and forced me into realization of manhood  
I'm a person who learned what forgiveness really is  
Along with being held and holding others accountable  
for their actions  
I'm a true believer of not cutting family ties  
And understand that relatives make blood by all means  
But I grasp hold of the understanding that loyalty makes family  
I'm a person who loves hard when the opportunity  
presents itself  
I'm also a person who feels like I lost more than I gained  
due to certain circumstances and obstacles in life  
Who am I?  
I'm a person who learned and accepted my previous mistakes  
which help me realize who I am

## Inside/Out By DR

My inner self is pure and a reflection of our creator  
It always starts with a thought  
And allows you to be true to YOURSELF!  
Whereas though my outer self is an illusion and will pass away  
I can change the look up many times  
But never get the true me!  
One is higher and one is lower  
When I praise the lower, the outer, I always look fly and sweet  
But never in the right state of mind!  
When I praise the inner, I'm able to make the right choices,  
For myself and those around me  
But understanding I'm mixed with both,  
Gives me a chance every day to better my condition  
and get things right  
Remember salvation is personal!

## And the Oscar Goes To By QS

They only see my shell, they can never tell  
how I really feel inside.

The strong man they see, they expect me to always be,  
but from them, the truth I hide.

My smile is just a stain sitting on top of my pain,  
crying tears of heartache, while walking in the pouring rain.

I'm torn by misdirection,  
my mind struggling, overcome by anxiety, crying, screaming.

Sitting around day dreaming, lost in thought,  
while questioning my mental state of being.

I'm afraid of giving, into the frustration and anger –  
fighting the good fight – giving it my all.

Knowing if I give up, I'll self-destruct,  
becoming another statistic of a lost soul within these prisons walls.

Waking up to a brand new day, thank God for his grace and mercy,  
mind focused with infallible determination,

Opening up my photo album to look at my family  
to give me a sense of strength, purpose and inspiration.

If it's true that the world's a stage and we're all actors,  
Then my appearing to have it all together without  
heartache and pain  
should definitely win me an Oscar.



# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Haiku By JM

Brown enough to hate  
Love me I am a person  
I will love you back

## The Cover of My Book By LG

Feared and highly respected  
Goals I set to achieve  
For me to survive in prison  
I did that which I believe

My reputation spoke for itself  
I gained respect with a price  
It almost cost me my life  
That's the gamble of rolling the dice

Violence became second nature  
With a permanent mug on my face  
Living a played out lifestyle  
That I struggle hard to erase

Inflicting pain to send a message  
Low tolerance for disrespect  
Please don't break his peace  
This vengeance will resurrect

Maturity is a blessing  
It teaches you tranquility  
When pride is not a factor  
You'll find your true humility

I've always had a heart  
Misunderstood and  
misdirected  
The inside is finally showing  
And will never be neglected

I've pleaded for a second  
chance  
After proving myself for a  
year  
I was given a better  
environment  
My path is very clear

Those who know me well  
The image they hold is a lie  
With no desire to harm a soul  
I can finally let out a sigh

Today I'm a better man  
Just take a very good look  
The inside is much sweeter  
Than the cover of my book

## Inside, Outside By JTM

Inside, the volcano boils the lava  
Biding its time, stoically  
Outside, the sun shines radiantly  
Ensnared, are the clouds

Inside, there is a waterfall  
Outside, there is a dam

Inside, the heart of the home  
The tomato has been cut  
Outside, the home has been repainted  
To mask the damage

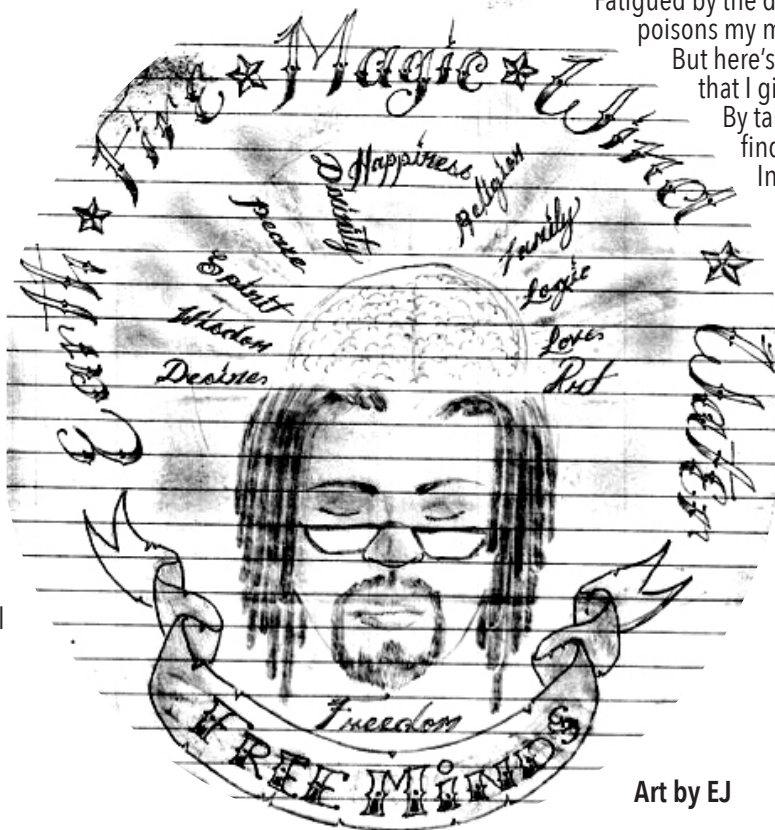
Inside, the coal mine is enigmatic  
Outside, Mount Everest is portrayed

## Reflection By TJ

Looking in the mirror and what do I see...  
A reflection of myself staring at me  
Unearthing imperfections that change with time  
Was enraged in a cage now I'm free sunshine  
Redemption for today seeking forgiveness on tomorrow  
Wondering what I'm to do with the time that I've borrowed  
Inadequate or presumptuous is what I see at times  
Fatigued by the disease around me  
poisons my mind  
But here's some sincere advice  
that I give to you  
By taking time to reflect you'll  
find the truth  
In YOU!!!

## Inside Out By JW

I am smiling now  
Inner peace is within me  
Warm words heat my soul



Art by EJ



# REENTRY PROFILE / THE WORLD OF WORK

## Carlos's Story: From Robbery to Rebuilding His Community

By Kelli

Carlos grew up in a crime-infested, poverty-stricken neighborhood where he was exposed to drugs and violence on a daily basis. Now 25, Carlos says the house where he was raised along with four siblings was just like all the others in the neighborhood. Drug dealers and drug users came through the house all day long. When he was six years old, he watched as someone shot and killed a man in his own living room.

He started getting into trouble at 12, by emulating the only behavior he'd ever seen. "I never had the opportunity to see my mother or father get up every day and go to work. I had only seen things done the illegal way," he says. By 17, he says he already had the record of a career criminal. "I believe that my peers and I had all become mentally imprisoned. We didn't believe that we were capable of doing things any other way," he says.

At 18, Carlos was arrested for armed robbery and spent the next six years in prison – two of them in solitary confinement. It was during that time – alone – that he says he came to understand that he wanted more out of life. "I had enormous regret, and still do," he says. "I realized that all I'd ever contributed to was destruction in my community. I beat myself up about it for a long time, and I still do. But I began to train myself to think differently so that I could achieve something better and pour myself into making my community a better place."

After his release from solitary confinement, Carlos obtained his GED and then enrolled in correspondence courses through Ohio University. He was released in February 2016 and continues to work towards his bachelor's degree in Social Sciences, boasting a 3.67 GPA. Recently, I caught up with Carlos to talk with him about his job as a Navigator at a local nonprofit organization called Changing Perceptions that helps returning citizens to reach their full potential both personally and professionally.



**KELLI:** As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

**CARLOS:** Growing up in that environment, I never thought about the future. Eventually it came to me though that when most of us were growing up, we had all of these social workers through DYRS and group homes, and they would tell us to do XYZ, but none of them were ever able to relate to us. It's hard to take advice from someone you don't trust! I realized my own experience gives me a unique ability to relate to people going through something similar – to be a credible messenger. That's when I decided I wanted to do social work and help young people.

**KELLI:** What were the biggest challenges for you when you got home?

**CARLOS:** Everything! I'm not gonna lie. It was hard for me to even cross the street! I'd see people jay-walking and just feel paralyzed, afraid to follow. I thought *I am NOT going back to jail for jay-walking!* It was hard to adjust to the sounds of my new environment. My first night at Hope Village there was a helicopter in the sky and I was SO spooked. The next morning, I woke up to the banging sound of the trash can against the truck. It was really scary. Then there's getting your ID, your Social Security Card and the hardest of all, a job. I realized I'd been thinking as soon as I had my freedom, everything would be okay. But there were a lot of things I had to learn how to do. I had been living one lifestyle my whole life and for me to come back to my community with a brand new mindset was really hard. I had to blaze a new trail for myself. But I put in the work and eventually, things began to run more smoothly.

**KELLI:** In what ways has your felony record affected your life?

**CARLOS:** Oh my gosh. Finding employment. I still have my composition book where I documented every single job – more than 200 – that I applied for! Because of the "ban the box" law, I would usually make it to an interview, but then they'd make a job offer. After that, they would inquire about my record. I chose to be honest and acknowledge it. My philosophy was to tell the truth, and then do my best to take their mind off the conviction by talking about everything I can do. The hustle and grind, it takes time. But I got a job. Another obstacle was housing. It's ridiculous the discrimination against felons for housing – a basic foundational need. I've applied for a lot of apartments and they'll basically take your application fee and then deny you. It's how they usurp money from people they know they won't ever accept. I did finally find an apartment too.

**KELLI:** Okay, so tell me about your job?

**CARLOS:** I am what's called a *Navigator* at Changing Perceptions. I work with individuals coming home from prison to navigate the reentry process. My goal is to enhance their abilities and foster them to turn their skills into a profit, whether it be through business ownership or meaningful employment. I probably talk to at least 25 returning citizens every single day. Recently, I've also begun to do more outreach and advocacy to the community both to help open people's minds and also to boost our visibility so that we can raise more funding for our work. I speak on panels all over the city.

**KELLI:** How did you get the job?

**CARLOS:** The founder is a Free Minds member! When I first got home, I was in the Free Minds apprenticeship. As part of that, I did onsite work experience at RFK Stadium where I was cleaning up with some other Free Minds members. I didn't know it, but the staff at Changing Perceptions were there too, and they admired my work ethic. They invited me to do more jobs. One day, I was working with another guy who I assumed was

*continued on page 16*

# REENTRY CORNER

By Keela

Happy Spring Guys!

New season, new opportunities! Today I want to take some time to tell you what your Free Minds brothers have been up to and more importantly, how you can get in on this mannn! LOL (I know y'all remember that line from "Friday", do not leave me hanging). These are real life examples of what could possibly await you upon your return to the DMV.

**MJ Valet** - MJ Valet is a special event valet parking and transportation organization in DC that hires returning citizens! Several of your Free Minds brothers are currently employed there, with the latest one being hired two weeks ago. Of course the number one requirement for working at MJ Valet is obtaining your driver's license. Please do not be deterred by the fact that you need your driver's license. Your Free Minds brother DH just got his license two weeks before he was hired. I also would like to take this time to let you guys know that getting your learners and your driver's license should be at the TOP of your goal list when you get home. There are TONS of driver jobs in DC. I had one of our partner organizations a couple of weeks ago looking to hire guys who had their driver's license. Please make this a priority.

**First Team Staffing** - First Team Staffing is a temp to permanent firm that specializes in providing staff for employers in the hospitality, labor and food service industries. They had a hiring event last month and one of your Free Minds brothers was hired for the construction and food service industry. Today, I decided to call First Team Staffing myself to verify that they do indeed hire returning citizens and was told by a gentleman that has been there for 17 years that YES they do! First Team Staffing is located at 1713 7th Street NW, and be reached at 202-464-3035.

**Amazon** - Amazon has come to the DMV! Yes Amazon officially opened their doors for business here in the DMV and they are hiring like mad and we know from first-hand experience because they hired one of our family members, that's right, Free Minds brother TF was hired back in February as an Amazon Fresh Associate. Amazon has expanded and now have positions where you can make your own hours delivering packages for Amazon Flex so again, get your driver's license! You can apply for Amazon Fresh/Flex by going to their website [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

I want to let you know what's all the rage in the world of technology, something that every one of you can take advantage of and earn a substantial income, it's called CODING!! Coding schools are springing up everywhere and are coming straight to urban neighborhoods to find students. DC has a vast majority of schools and one in particular that is looking for returning citizens. It's called Mission Launch and get this, the founder is a returning citizen! That's right; Teresa Hodge started Mission Launch after returning home from her sentence because she wanted to empower returning citizens. Free Minds has had the awesome opportunity to meet Teresa and she even gave a presentation about Mission Launch at one of our apprenticeships. She was featured in the "My Sisters and Me" issue of the Connect last year.



I know that IT can be intimidating but anyone can learn coding, heck, they are now teaching coding to elementary and middle schools kids because it's the wave of the future. A few years ago, one of your Free Minds brothers, JP, was at the halfway house, and he and a few of the other residents all went to sign up for a construction course. There was one young man who decided to go

*continued on page 12*



# INNER ME/OUTER ME

*By Jeffrey, Free Minds Friend*

*We asked Tara's nephew Jeffrey to share his thoughts about our theme of the inner self and the outer self. He became blind as an infant due to an inoperable tumor on his optic nerve. Jeff is now 22 and attending college in an advanced degree program to become a youth counselor.*

It's easy for people to make assumptions about what's going on inside of me because of what they see on the outside. I've learned to share even more of my true inside self because my blindness doesn't define me. That's a part of me but it's not who I am.

Since I'm blind, I use a cane. When people see a guy with a cane they will often feel sorry for me and talk to me in that baby high pitched voice. I think they pity me. This is so annoying. When I was younger, I used to get really angry but now I usually ignore it and hope they will get the message. Some people get it and others are just clueless. I distance myself from the clueless people. It's a waste of my time to get upset.

I think some people don't know how to interact with someone who is blind. Our society doesn't really deal with people who are different very well. I want to do more traveling to see if this is different in other countries. I've heard that Germany is better with people who are disabled, probably because of their painful history of the Nazis killing people with disabilities.

Some people don't see my inner self because they make assumptions about me based on my disability. On the other hand, sometimes it's easy to make friends because some people are naturally curious and they ask about my blindness so that starts a connection. I don't mind talking about my blindness but I don't want it to be the only thing I'm known for.

I'm an open person naturally so it's easy for me to be myself around others. I think like attracts like so other genuine and open people show up in my circle. When I meet people who I know are faking it I just let them play their own game because eventually they will get caught up in it. It's inevitable. If they want to pretend to be something they're not that's their thing. I also try to have compassion because it could be a defense.

I steer clear of fake people because if they are having trouble being true to themselves, odds are they won't be true to me as a friend or in their commitments in life.

My advice is to figure out what kind of people make you feel good about yourself—your real self. If you are trying really hard to get people to like you by being a certain way you think they want you to be it never ends up well. If I'm comfortable with myself then other people around me will take that cue and show their true selves. And that's something everyone wants to "see." ☺

# REENTRY CORNER

*continued from page 11*

against the grain and sign up for an IT help desk course. After JP finished the construction course, he was eventually hired and went about his life. Five years later, he ran into that young man driving a really nice car. JP asked, "Man, where do you work?"

The young man replied, "Do you remember when all of y'all took the construction course and I went to the IT class? That nine month course landed me a job where I now make \$70,000 a year doing IT help desk work, and work ain't hard at all. It's all in your mind if you think it's too hard."

That same school that that young man went to has been featured in this column; it's called HOPE Project, right on Pennsylvania Avenue. It's free for DC residents and I have been trying to get guys to go there for years, so please, take the challenge like that young man. Who knows, you may end up with a \$70,000 a year gig!

HOPE Project  
3230 Pennsylvania Avenue SE  
Washington, DC 20020  
202-449-8663

Okay Guys, until next time keep FREEING your MIND!







# CODE SWITCHING

*By Mbachur*

Code switching is defined as the practice of moving back and forth between two languages, or between two dialects of the same language. Sometimes, it's even called style shifting. When I am with my friends, we may use slang or African American Vernacular English (AAVE)\* instead of constant Standard American English (SAE). When I am with my family members, we switch back and forth between English and our native language called Wolof. When I am at work, or in a professional setting, I always use Standard American English. Code switching is very important because you have to know what kind of dialect is considered formal in professional settings, and what kind of dialect is considered informal in more relaxing settings.

For example, in DC, a typical conversation with a friend in an informal setting would go something like this:

**Person A:** Aye wassup fool?

**Person B:** Wassup slim, I'm coolin.

In a professional setting, let's say at the White House, a formal conversation would go something like this:

**Person A:** Good morning, how are you today?

**Person B:** Hello there! I'm doing well. Thank you for asking.

The best thing about code switching is that public figures do it too. Our former president Barack Obama was in a chili-dog restaurant in Chicago, and when asked if he needed any change for the chili dog he bought, he responded with, "naw, we straight!" Obama is probably one of the most well-spoken people to ever address this nation, but even he knows when to use relaxed dialect in an informal setting.

One of the best things about being from DC is that we have a very unique dialect. We say things differently from people that are from New York, Atlanta, and Chicago. We also have some of the best slang terms around.

Here are some of my favorites:

**Moe, Slim, Bob:** A person, comrade, or close friend

**Guh:** Flabbergasted

**Kill:** Agreeing or expressing seriousness

**Rappin:** Excessively talking about relevant or irrelevant things

**Jhi like:** Kind of like

**Wellin:** Fabricating or stretching the truth

Do you code switch? I'd like to hear some ways you guys like to switch it up!

**\*AAVE (Ebonics):** American Black English regarded as a language in its own right rather than as a dialect of Standard English. [To read more about this, check out James Baldwin's essay, "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?"]



# IN THE NEWS

By John, Free Minds Friend

## TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS

We are four months into the four-year term of President Donald Trump. Here is a rundown of American politics and foreign policy since Trump was sworn in.

**Middle East:** The president issued an executive order early on that halts the U.S. refugee program and forbids travel here from several Muslim-majority countries. The initial version of that order was struck down by the courts; a new version is still pending a legal challenge.

President Trump made his first overseas trip in May, and made his first stop in Saudi Arabia. Speaking before the leaders of many Arab nations (conspicuously absent was Iran), Trump said that America offered an "outstretched hand" to the region for future development. He also admonished the leaders to "drive out" the extreme terrorist groups that commit atrocities in the name of Islam.



President Donald Trump is escorted by King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia during arrival ceremonies, May 20, 2017, at the Royal Court Palace in Riyadh. (Official White House Photo/Shealah Craighead)

**Health Care:** Trump has backed two efforts by Republicans at repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, the overhaul of federal health care policy signed into law by former President Obama. Both of those efforts began in the House of Representatives, and involve a law called the American Health Care Act.

The first one failed because House leadership could not convince enough Republicans to support it. A second version of that bill did pass the House, so now the action has moved to the Senate. That chamber of Congress (also

led by Republicans) could pass a similar bill, which might lead to a massive change in health care soon. It could craft a different version, or the Senate could choose not to act, which essentially kills the bill.

**Russia:** Trump's early tenure has been most prominently marked by the ongoing investigation into whether Russia colluded with his campaign in its efforts to disrupt the 2016 American election. There are ongoing investigations overseen by the FBI, the House of Representatives, and the Senate.

In May, the president fired FBI Director James Comey (pictured at right), who had acknowledged the investigation into the Russia-Trump Campaign connection at a hearing months ago. News outlets have reported that Comey kept memos of his meetings with Trump that suggest the president asked him to back off an investigation into one of Trump's key advisers. Comey is set to publicly testify in the near future.



## WORLD

In the wake of President Trump's victory, many wondered whether European countries would also elect leaders who vowed to halt the flow of immigrants and refugees from war-torn countries like Syria. Thus far, it has not happened: in Austria, the Netherlands, and France, voters have favored other parties over the nationalist candidates.



In Iran, more than 70 percent of eligible voters turned out for this year's presidential election, which was held in May. Those voters re-elected Hassan Rouhani (pictured at left), who was challenged by candidates that were widely seen as more hardline figures.

# IN THE NEWS

In terms of world peace, there are two variables that could dictate whether or not the U.S. can stay out of major armed conflicts. First is the tense relationship between Iran and the coalition of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The other is, of course, North Korea. The North Korean government has tested several long-range ballistic missiles in recent months, and experts believe the nation continues to make progress toward possessing a nuclear weapon that could reach the United States.

The most alarming situation in the world, however, is the continuing famine affecting several countries including Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. The lack of water has killed off animals and plants, and has already killed thousands of people. These conditions threaten to kill millions if the situation continues to worsen.



Image Credit: United Nations

## SPORTS

It is getting hard to keep count of how many times D.C.'s winter teams, the Wizards and Capitals, make it to the second round of the playoffs and flame out. Whatever the total is, you can add two more for 2017.



Capitals goalie Braden Holtby  
(Comcast SportsNet Mid-Atlantic)

The **Capitals**, for a second straight season, finished the regular season with the best record in the NHL. And for the second straight season, the Caps were knocked out by rival Pittsburgh Penguins in the second round.

With a slew of free agents to either sign or part ways with, the Capitals are at a crossroads. Do they bring most of the players back and continue to pursue a championship with the current nucleus of forwards Alex Ovechkin and Nicky Backstrom, and goalie Braden Holtby? Or do they blow it up, possibly trading Ovechkin, and start again?

On the hardwood, the **Wizards** started this season shaky but quickly became one of the best home teams in the NBA. But that was not enough to best the Boston Celtics in round two: The Wizards lost the series 4-3, winning every home game and losing every game in Boston. The Wizards are seen as an ascending team, built around the prolific scoring of its guards, John Wall (2, below) and Bradley Beal (3, below). But most believe they will need to add a significant star to that nucleus if they are going to seriously contend for a spot in the NBA Finals any time soon.



(Geoff Burke/USA TODAY Sports)

The Washington **Redskins** used the 2017 draft to improve its dismal defense, taking two University of Alabama standouts with its first two picks. What will the offense look like next season? That's the multi-million dollar question. There hasn't really been any closure on the question of what to do with Kirk Cousins, who is clearly frustrated by the team's lack of a long-term contract for him. The team has also parted ways with its high-priced receivers, DeSean Jackson and Pierre Garcon, in favor of a young corps including Josh Doctson, Jamison Crowder and Terrelle Pryor. If Cousins stays and helps those guys emerge, and tight end Jordan Reed can stay on the field, the Redskins might have a potent offense on their hands. But those are some big ifs.



Redskins QB Kirk Cousins  
(Brad Mills/USA TODAY Sports)



# UPDATE ON THE COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH JUSTICE AMENDMENT ACT

As of April 2017, this bill is now law in D.C. What does this mean? The Act creates a sentencing review opportunity for some (but not all) individuals sentenced in D.C. who were convicted of an offense that occurred before they reached the age of 18. The Act permits a person to petition the court for a sentencing review IF:

- 1) you were convicted of a violation of the D.C. Code in the District of Columbia Superior Court (not federal court), and
- 2) you were convicted in adult court for an offense that occurred before your 18th birthday, and
- 3) you have served at least 20 years in prison, and
- 4) either
  - a. you have a parole-eligible sentence but are not yet eligible for a parole hearing, or
  - b. you have a non-parole-eligible sentence (meaning you have an out-date at some point in the future).

**IF YOU THINK YOU ARE ELIGIBLE FOR REVIEW**, please contact the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, or have your attorney contact them.

Greg Hamilton  
The Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth  
1319 F Street NW Suite 303  
Washington, DC 20004  
202-289-4677

## REENTRY PROFILE / THE WORLD OF WORK

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also just home from prison. He was picking up trash right beside me and asking me all kinds of questions about what I wanted to do with my life. I remember thinking, *Who is this dude?* But I engaged and started asking him questions too, realizing he has a lot of life experience. It turned out he was a board member for Changing Perceptions. He ended up emailing me later that day with a job offer!

**KELLI:** What do you like the most about your job?

**CARLOS:** What I love is that I work with individuals just like me. It's just that I'm further along on the journey of reentry than they are. I have built solid friendships with these guys. We have the same model as Free Minds: it's a lifetime membership...once you are in, you are in! I get to see these ideas from people like me who I know are capable of doing anything they want. Then I get to see these ideas manifest into real things. So many different personalities come through, which is great for my own professional development. I'm learning how to deal with all types of situations, because everyone is different. That's challenging, but I love the challenge.

**KELLI:** What advice would you give someone who wants to do social work?

**CARLOS:** Volunteer. Often we go into things with automatic expectation of being at the top right away, even though it's a matter of giving back. We need to keep in mind that at the heart of social work is giving back. It's not hard to find ways to volunteer. Things usually start there. And believe me, there is no currency or recompense equal to changing a life. You may just be checking in with someone asking how they're doing, and that's the moment that flips everything for that person. So get out and render your services as a volunteer. In the long run, this will pay

off. You will eventually see money for your services. I understand that compensation is a big need, but start giving back and the money will come.

**KELLI:** What advice would you give to someone who isn't coming home, but feels the same desire to help?

**CARLOS:** Write. You all know the guy who writes for the Connect named HF? Well, I don't know for sure, but I have the sense that he's been incarcerated for a while because of all of his wisdom. He doesn't even know the influence that he has had on me and my life. I remember so many times reading his words in my cell and gaining new understanding that helped me to change my life. Whether you share your writing in The Connect, or your poems at Write Nights or even through letters to younger siblings or friends, you can change lives through writing.

**KELLI:** Your thoughts on the theme of this issue?

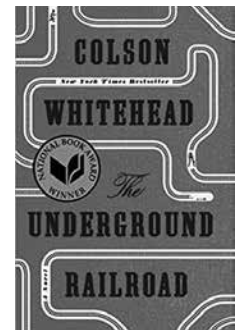
**CARLOS:** When I was growing up, I was definitely hiding behind a façade. I felt one way about things, but I knew I had to do things otherwise in order to have the image I needed. Now as an adult, I try to be as transparent as possible. Exactly what I feel inside is what I present to the world. It allows for truthfulness. I don't care what people think, this is me. Take it or leave it.

*Carlos's dream is to continue growing as an advocate for the creation of entrepreneurship opportunities for returning citizens. Eventually, he will start his own nonprofit organization. Carlos welcomes calls from any Free Minds brothers or sisters arriving back home in the community. Changing Perceptions's phone number is 202-304-6235.*



# WHAT WE'RE READING

- Julia: Beloved by Toni Morrison. This novel is historical fiction (set in the 1800s after the Civil War) about a woman who fled slavery with her children, but is now being haunted by the spirit of her daughter who died. This book was very moving, and I would recommend it to anyone.
- Mbachur: Assata: An Autobiography. This book is about former Black Panther and Black Liberation Army activist Assata Shakur. She discusses her personal experiences that led her to a life of activism, and her encounters with both Black and White revolutionary groups and the FBI.
- Kelli: The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas. The story of a teenaged girl who witnesses the shooting of her friend, an African American male, by a police officer. In addition to her enormous grief, she must deal with the different expectations of everyone around her to do the "right thing." This book is still in hardback, but it was extremely relevant and thought-provoking.
- Gabe: The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead. Set during slavery, this is a moving, suspenseful novel about a woman's attempt to escape. The author clearly did a lot of research, but he uses his rich imagination to tell a story that breaks from the historical record, creating a new, mythical sort of tale.



# FAMILY TIES

*continued from page 5*

him more than I talk, I am so amazed with the words that come out of his mouth, where he wants to go. Alfred Jr. is a leader. When I visit him, I watch and I see the friends that come by to speak to him while I'm there and I watch the way men approach him and I see strength in my son's eyes and the respect he gets from other inmates.

**KELLI:** What do you think will be his biggest challenges when he comes home in a couple of years?

**PASTOR ALFRED, SR.:** He will have to deal with not being accepted by society because of being an ex-felon. Society hasn't grown enough to see that a person can be rehabilitated and become a different person. But he is strong. I know he will achieve whatever goals he pursues.

**KELLI:** What advice do you have for other young men who are locked up about maintaining or regaining close ties with their family?

**PASTOR ALFRED, SR.:** Find your God. I know everyone in Free Minds may not be Christian like I am, they may be Muslim or any other faith. But discover who or what you believe in and then you will be able to understand love...You have to love first in order to be loved. Once you find that love, it will automatically come with your family. Yes, you will find those who won't understand, but if you humble yourself they will be able to understand eventually what you are offering.

**Pastor Alfred, Sr.** is the Pastor of a church in Virginia and the host of a weekly inspirational radio program. If you would like to be in contact with him, you may write to him through the Free Minds office and we will forward your letter to him.



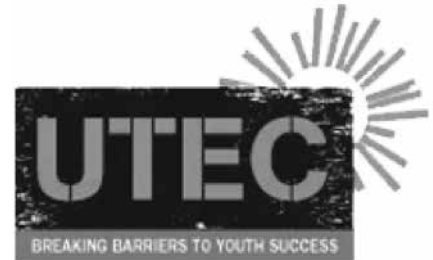
# PAYING IT FORWARD: A TEEN CENTER BY TEENS, FOR TEENS

*By Hosea, Free Minds member*

This month we open your eyes to The United Teen Equality Center (UTEC) in Lowell, Massachusetts, where we had the chance to visit on our trip to Boston in March. UTEC was founded in 1999, by young people who organized to develop their own teen center in response to the increase in gang violence. They wanted a "safe space" to hang out after school. Today, nationally recognized as a model agency, UTEC's mission and promise is to ignite and nurture the ambition of proven-risk youth to trade violence and poverty for social and economic success. UTEC defines "proven-risk youth" differently from "at-risk" youth. "Proven-risk" are young people who already have a history of serious criminal and gang involvement, ages 16-24, and who likely represent the largest return on investment within our communities (from a public safety, public health, and economic perspective).

UTEC gives inner-city youth a gathering place where they can come away from the streets and feel comfortable being themselves. UTEC also offers employment opportunities. The unique thing about UTEC is they not only work to prevent kids from further involvement with the criminal justice system, but they show them a permanent way out. UTEC's job training program offers youth not just skills, but practical work experience in one of three work environments. UTEC runs its own café, a woodworking shop, and a catering service.

I spoke with a young man named Jamel who was recently incarcerated in Massachusetts, and he told me about how UTEC helped him. He was incarcerated for 18 months for a felony gun charge. That's when UTEC's street workers met him behind the wall, and invited him to join UTEC so they could give him some reentry support. He recently graduated from the program and now has an internship with Whole Foods. He has also been active in organizing at the Massachusetts State House, trying to change laws for young people returning from prison.



UTEC helps reduce recidivism by giving young people the necessary skills to succeed and become independent. UTEC plants seeds of peace and cultivates trust in the young people they serve. They see beyond the mask, knowing there's always more beneath the surface. As Jamel said, they "ignite social justice."

UTEC is helping out the young people in their community and giving them a chance at a productive life.

## THE WRITE WAY

*continued from page 4*

from their families, in an economically depressed part of Ohio with a totally different culture. (Again, Free Minds members know about this all too well.) There were all sorts of clashes. Guys were trying to escape, and the prison put up razor wire, everywhere. Even today Ethelbert sounds shocked as he remembers the barbed wire: "I walked into the yard, and there was a basketball hoop, and I wondered how many basketballs they went through a year, when someone shoots an airball."

What Miller heard and saw on his visit to the prison moved him to revisit history. He imagined a moment, over a century before, in the lives of newly freed slaves. He also tackled a topic as sprawling as "freedom," and made it real. Freedom is being able to put your arms around your loved ones.

Sometimes as writers, we fall back on broad, general terms to write about life: love, hate, joy, pain, struggle. But the most successful writing communicates these emotions in specific, concrete ways. You have experienced a whole range of things in your life, but the only way you'll be able to make your readers experience those things right alongside you is if you dig in with details, to make it real.

Here's a long-term challenge: Revisit some history books, pick a time period, and write a poem set in that time period. Remember that even though it's set in a different era, it can still teach us a lot about ourselves, and our world today.

But here's your assignment for the moment: Write a poem where you include as many specific details as you can about what represents freedom in your life. If it's too hard to envision that right now, start with a poem that describes all the reminders that you are not free. Nobody is going to tell your story better than you can tell it yourself.

# AROUND THE WORLD: THE GREECE OF MY YOUTH

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

*By JMA, Free Minds Member*

In June, 1991 when I arrived in Athens, Greece, I was 20 years old. It was a time of great upheaval in the world. Europe had not yet become the economic powerhouse of the European Union with its own common currency and open borders and I arrived in a Greece that was still very Greek in its flavor. In Athens (the capital city), shopkeepers routinely closed their shops in the afternoon to watch a football (soccer) match or to run off to the Kafeniou for a quick Turkish coffee and a game of "tavlet" (backgammon). In this Athens, strangers would routinely invite me into their homes to chat and offer me coffee and baklava while they interrogated me innocently as to where I was from. Old men would pull me into Kafeniou to share a plate of olives with them along with a glass of Ouzo, a Greek liquor which tastes like licorice, and water. This was my Greece, when in my first semester at the University of Athens my Greek language professor invited me to spend Easter with his extended family at his ancestral village in Corinth, where I indulged in feasting on whole roasted, stuffed, spiced and seasoned lamb while downing glass after glass of Retsina (Greek wine), Ouzo, and Metava (Greek brandy) before rushing to the vomitorium (yes, vomitorium) to empty my stomach and continue feasting, as was the tradition for the three days of Easter celebrations. It was a Greece which welcomed me and reminded me of Africa because of its many quaint almost third world behaviors; the first time I went into a public rest room I learned never to do it again when I saw the mountains of toilet tissue in trash baskets next to the commodes in the stalls which had been used to clean people's backsides but could not be flushed because Athens still did not have a modern sewage system. Who would have thought that with all their contradictions, my time in Greece would be a pivotal point in my life, the turning point where I left behind all childish things and learned what it meant to be an adult?

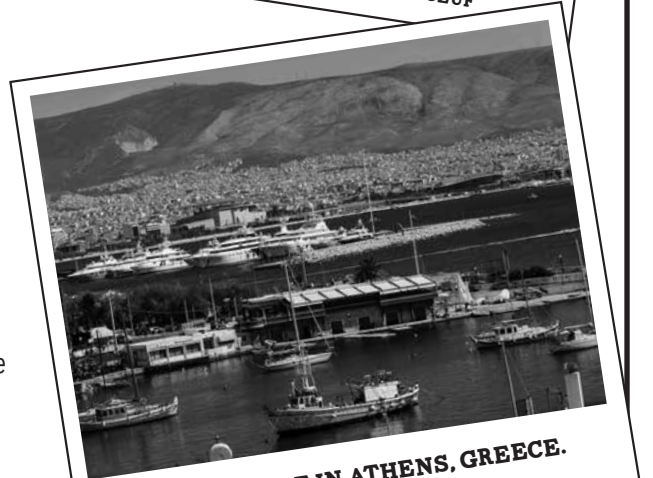
But Athens is an old city, situated within an even older city overlooked by a yet even older city, the Acropolis which bleeds its ancient blood onto the sun-drenched stones of Monastivaki and Plaka, the oldest parts of modern Athens which lie not far below it. I would wander these maze-like streets bombarded by the "bouzouki" music, traditional Greek music played on a lute, which wailed in the background from loudspeakers everywhere while my nose was treated to the thousand scents of the spices which saturated the air from the Old Market a few blocks away. I would often watch the sunset at the port of Piraeus in Athens while snacking on sun ripened and deliciously tasty tomatoes, black olives cured in olive oil, fresh bread and blocks of feta cheese drenched in extra virgin olive oil sprinkled with paprika. And it was from this port that I left Athens to explore the many Greek islands that lay out in the blue/green waters of the Mediterranean.

The islands themselves were each as unique as a finger print, each with its own geography and its own culture. I saw first-hand the remains of the mighty Minoan Civilization on the island of Rhodes, once both powerful city-states that had by now, devolved into tourist traps designed to filter out the mighty dollar, the potent English pound sterling and the Japanese yen. The Greece of my youth was a land juxtaposed between modernity and antiquity, and not quite belonging to either, which lent it an air of perpetual mystery and sadness as Greeks struggled to redefine their place in the New World Order.

When I finally left Greece in July 1993 after 2 exquisite years of exploration and revelation, I left behind not only my childish self, but I also left behind a piece of my very soul in a country that was as chaotic as myself. And even to this day that Greece, the Greece of my youth, will forever remain in my heart and mind, a screen shot of those wonderful 2 years that I spent there that will never ever be forgotten.



**THE ACROPOLIS, AN ANCIENT CITY BUILT AROUND THE YEAR 400 BC. THE ACROPOLIS OVERLOOKS THE MODERN CITY OF ATHENS, GREECE.**  
PHOTO CREDIT: CHRISTOPHE MENEBOEUF



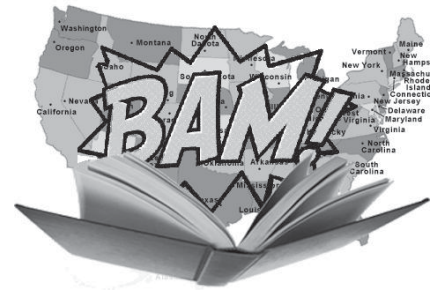
**PIRAEUS PORT IN ATHENS, GREECE.**  
PHOTO CREDIT: FLICKR. FOTOGAKE



# BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

## Free Minds long-distance book club

By Julia



Hey FM readers, what did you think of March??? If you haven't already told us, we'd love to hear your thoughts on the book. If you did not receive a copy and you want one, send us a letter and we'll send you one, as long as you're in a facility that accepts books. But enough from me – here's what you all had to say about this month's book!

**Bob Moses was a smart man, and he was well known in the movement. He started wearing a different style of clothes (page 43) - why? Have you ever tried to change the way people see you?**

"He chose to wear the overalls to represent for the farmers and the rural workers. Honestly I always have been blessed for the most part for people to see the good in me. Now I've had a few instances where people chose to see me as a bad person and it seriously bothered me." – SL

**After President Kennedy's assassination, the protesters saw that his death was a way to bring people together. Have you ever been faced with a tragic situation that brought people together?**

"I would have to say when my brother John took his life in 1991. Our family has always been very divided...John was the peacekeeper of the family (even got stabbed by an Aunt doing it). By '91 John had just had enough of the family fighting that seemed was never going to quit (the note he left reflected that). John without any warning walked to the highway that ran through our town and stepped out in front of an 18 wheeler on I-5. After that, the fighting just stopped. Though it would flare up every so often. Even then it was like John was keeping the peace from afar. A fight would flare up and one of John's favorite songs would come on...We know in our hearts it was him." - JT

**In 1963, black people couldn't vote, and if they tried they would be put in jail or worse. How do you think they felt about voting? How did you feel today about the importance of voting?**

"Black people felt it was their right because they helped build this country. I feel it is important because it's your 'voice!'" – MT

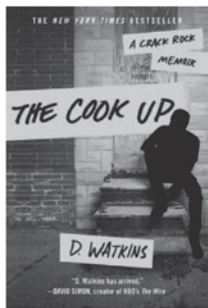
**More thoughts on March: Book Three:**

"I truly believe it should be taught in every school in America. Especially those with African-American kids. This book has enlightened me on some very touching things and it brought me so much strength, hope, and faith to never give up! No matter the circumstances." – VM

"When I read something like March, it is a reminder of not to take things for granted, it gives clarity to the journey and a deeper appreciation for what we have, but it is also a reminder that we must all take our places in the struggle, contributing to what is right and making life better." – KM

"It made me look at not just black history but America and the history of this country we have overcome a lot. Knowledge is key. I'm learning with every book I read." – DP

"It was very captivating, a remarkable story of history, a very positive revolutionary novel of how African Americans had to really fight for equal rights within this American imperialist's system. Those African Americans during the 60s era knew one thought process, which was, 'Through slothfulness and...unawareness we surely die. But through strength, honor, courage, and vigilance we surely survive'..The SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) is a very positive and powerful movement. It's something similar to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement across America." – SJ



**Up Next: The Cook Up: A Crack Rock Memoir by D. Watkins**

A true story about a young man growing up in East Baltimore. D. thought he had it all figured out. He was getting ready to go to college when his older brother was shot and killed. Now D. has a choice: go to Georgetown University, or take up the mantle of his brother's crack empire. Will D. get out of the drug world, or will he follow in his brother's footsteps? You'll have to read and find out...

**Discussion Questions:**

1. In the chapter called "The Beast," what is Dee referring to as the Beast and when did he start to notice that the Beast was changing him? Dee says of the Beast, "your mother can't protect you from it." Is he right? Why or why not?
2. D. says one of his biggest fears is "not dying, but dying with the same story as everyone else." Do you understand how he feels? What can people do to make sure their stories aren't the same as everyone else's?
3. D. wrestles with the idea of leaving home and the drug game. Why is it so scary for him? Why do so many people talk about going straight, but so few do it? If you had the opportunity to leave your hometown, would you do it?

# NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: NATURE

As I write this, I'm holding a letter from JW describing the wildflowers blooming outside his cell, and I'm reminded of the famous Tupac line, "Long live the rose that grew from concrete." For the next issue, let's think about our planet Earth, and the natural world around us – the birds in the trees, the sky above us, the earth beneath our feet. What does nature mean to you? In what ways do you feel connected (or not) to nature? How can we bring nature into our lives even when we are physically isolated?

Until then, stay strong and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!