

January/February 2016  
Vol. 4, Issue V

# Free minds Connect

## THIS MONTH'S THEME: RESOLUTIONS

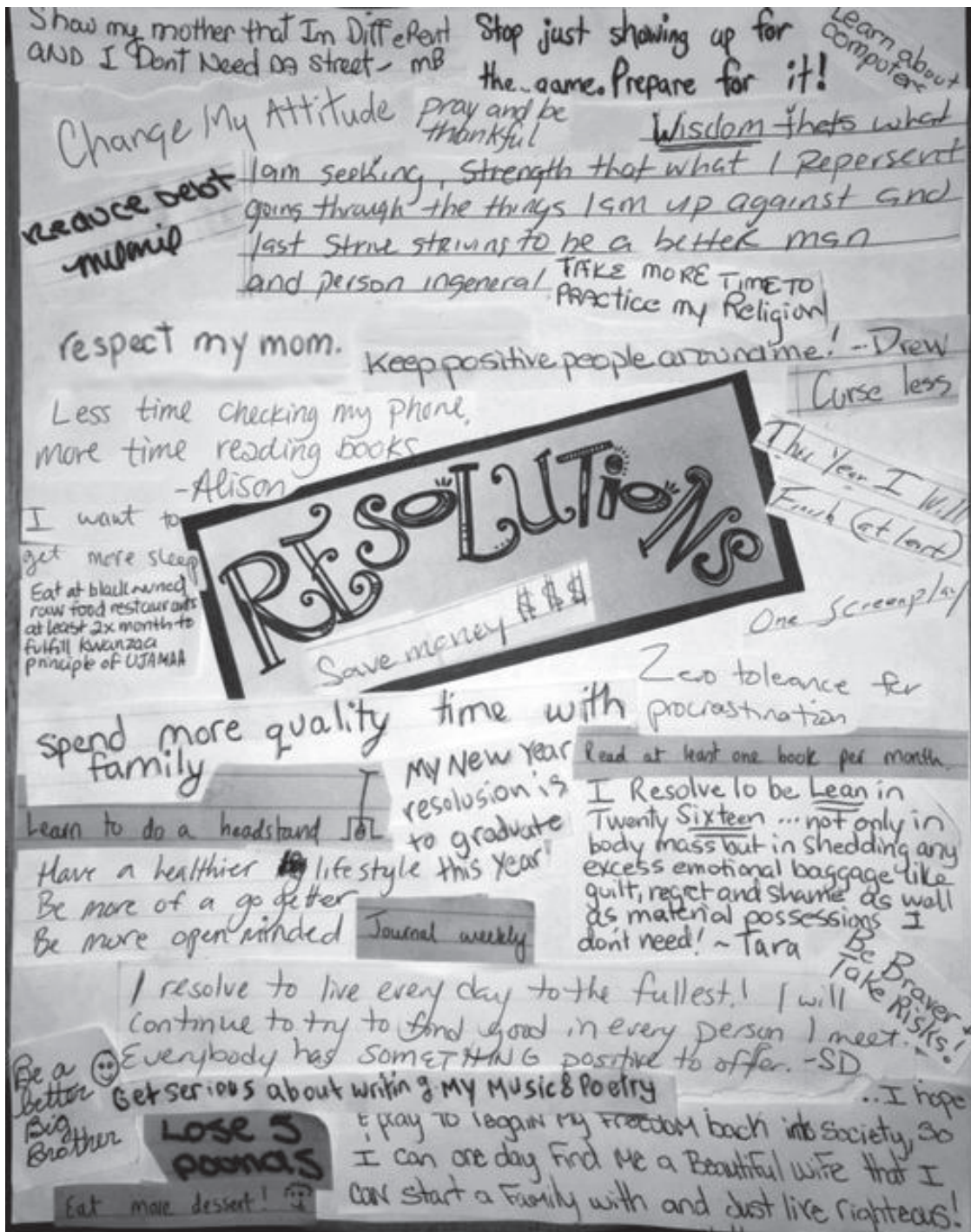
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We are ALWAYS looking  
for new contributors.  
Write or draw something  
for our next issue and  
send it to us! (Pieces not  
published in the Connect  
will appear on our  
writing Blog, and at a  
Write Night event!)

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**Next Issue's  
Theme:**  
**We Can Be the Change/  
Ending Violence in the  
Streets of DC**

Happy New Year Free Minds Family!

Greetings from Free Minds Headquarters. All of us here send you our best wishes to each one of you for 2016! I have two mottos I'm using for this new year. One is "It's going to be a Sweet Sixteen," as in I wish for you the same anticipation, excitement and hope of the NCAA basketball tournament final 16 teams and girls at their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday party.

I borrowed the second saying from my sister: "Lean in 2016." I don't mean only losing body mass, I mean paring down my "stuff," collections I've saved over the years -from my grade school notebooks to every drawing my nieces and nephews have ever done (they are in college now!) And most importantly, shedding excess emotional baggage. No more carrying around negative beliefs about myself or others! Sounds pretty good, eh?

Well I'm going to need all of your help to achieve it. Experts who study goal setting and achievement have proven that doing it alone just doesn't work too well. The power of the collective is a fact! I was walking Diego (the Free Minds dog) last weekend and looked up to see a flock of geese heading south for the winter. They were flying in a V. I had a faint memory of why that was from grade school science day but needed a refresher. It all boils down to "we get by with a little help from our friends." By flying in a group formation, geese are able to gain a 71% greater flying range than if they flew alone. As each bird flaps its wings it creates uplift for the bird immediately behind it. By flying in a flock the whole group gets to hit the beach in Florida much quicker. When a bird goes out of the pack it immediately feels drag and resistance and falls to the ground. You see what I'm getting at. People on a team working towards a common goal achieve it much faster because they are lifting each other up!

So when you read this inspiring *Resolutions* issue and follow the journey of our contributors as they braved college, mastered barbering, and became a better big brother while incarcerated, know that they were flying high from the "uplift" of others.

Enjoy this issue. I know I did. I loved your poetry, your BAM book feedback and your resolutions. Thank you for keeping me "flying high" my Free Minds brothers and sisters.

Yours in formation....Tara

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



### FREE MINDS MAILBAG

I love our book! (*The Untold Story of the Real Me*) I'm so proud of everyone in Free Minds. This movement is really life changing and I'm living testimony to that. -MH, FM Member

I loved the Family Connect issue! The column about Robert and his daughter really touched me and led me to call my daughter. We don't talk or write each other much, but every once in a while, we'll see hear or read something that makes one of us call or write the other. That's what Robert's story did for us! -JL, FM Friend

Family means so much to me. To read in the Connect how the other FM members feel about their mothers, fathers, sisters, and their brothers, that just showed how much we are alike made me realize that we are all just part of one big family. -DJ, FM Member

## FREE MINDS HQ



### George Pelecanos and Stephen Kinigopoulos Visit the Book Club *By Jess*

Last month, well-known author George Pelecanos and up-and-coming film director Stephen Kinigopoulos joined Free Minds on the juvenile block at the DC Jail. Although Pelecanos is best known for his novels and screen-writing, recently he's written a collection of stories based in DC. Last winter he brought in Kinigopoulos as director to bring one of those stories to life. Our members read the short story before screening the movie which was shot entirely in DC. They asked our guests questions about the film industry, how to write for movies and how to make a living as a writer or filmmaker. The screening was also attended by two members of Mayor Muriel Bowser's staff.

### Write Lunch with Senator Booker's Office

At the end of December, a small team of Free Minds staff and Poet Ambassadors arrived at the Dirksen Senate Office Building, where New Jersey Senator Cory Booker's staff members gathered to read and comment on several Free Minds poems. Poet Ambassadors Charlie and Aaron shared their own personal stories, and read poems from *The Untold Story of the Real Me* for the group. The senator's staff appreciated the chance to read the poetry, and we were grateful for the opportunity to continue to spread the message of hope and change to the Capitol and beyond. We can't wait to go back!



*Our Poet Ambassadors join members of Senator Cory Booker's staff in reading and commenting upon your poems.*

(Continued on page 3)



# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Happy New Year, Free Minds!

Okay, like some of you, I worry about making resolutions because I'm afraid that I'll just break them. This week there were so many new people at my gym. I call them "resolutionaries." Half of them will be gone by February! I don't want to be that person. Still, there's something about a new year that I just love. It's like a blank page. A chance to start fresh. This year, I decided that instead of making any crazy promise to eat only raw foods, or cut out my Starbucks habit (over my dead body!), I decided to choose three words that embody who I want to be. I hope that by focusing on these words, I will continue to grow in the right direction. My words are: **courage**, **kindness** and **creativity**. So if you hear me sounding cowardly, mean or dull, please give me a kick and remind me of what I said in January!

Here's what I wish for each of you this year: light. The light of peace, wisdom, growth and love. I hope you will embrace it and reflect it back out into the world. And in the words of QS (see page 8), let's all "resolve to evolve."

Until the next time, keep your eyes reading, your hands writing, and your minds free!

Your friend,  
Kelli

## WORDS OF WISDOM

By JG, FM Member



### *Resolving to be Grateful, Graceful and Content While Striving Toward My Goals*

In 2016, I resolve to do my best to be content, and to continue striving toward all my goals in a cool, calm and calculated manner. I resolve to be more grateful in the new year.

Expressing gratitude is a very effective way of claiming your happiness. Yes, it's a lot easier said than done, especially in prison because prison is such a negative, miserable place, and we all know how fast negative energy spreads. But that's all the more reason to express gratitude. We keep our minds and hearts open to all possibilities, allowing our desires to flow smoothly into our lives unhindered. When we are negative we block this flow and

stagnate ourselves. In the book *The Law of Attraction* this is called the "art of allowing." Practice makes perfect, and in this coming year I will practice keeping my express ways open to receive all the good things I'm sure are coming my way this year.

I've also been hearing the term "live in the moment" a lot lately and think this is important to remember as well. The reality is that all we have is the here and now. The past is done, and the future is not promised, so why not cherish the present? Paying attention to all the little things that count. Those are the things that matter the most to us anyway when we look back. In my humble opinion, by doing this we can accept our current situation for whatever it may be at the moment, while still moving forward. We'll just be moving much more gracefully. So acceptance, gratitude, contentment, progress and grace are keywords for me in the coming new year. Happy New Year, All!

(FREE MINDS HQ Continued from page 2)

### **Resolving to Recognize the Power of the Arts in Prison: Free Minds Goes to the White House, Again! By Alison**

What do US Attorney General Loretta Lynch, actor Tim Robbins (*Shawshank Redemption*), TV Host Terrence J, author Piper Kerman (creator of *Orange is the New Black*) and Free Minds Member Juan all have in common? They were all invited to speak at the White House in support of arts programs in prisons. That's right, on December 17<sup>th</sup>, Free Minds staff members Kelli, Suzie and Alison joined Juan at the White House event, *Innovation & the Arts; Prison Reform & Reentry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. We were treated to performances by a string quartet playing songs composed by inmates at the penitentiary known as Sing Sing in New York State, and a group of formerly incarcerated spoken word artists from California. Actors Tim Robbins and Sabra Williams (*Mission Impossible III*) described the impact of acting classes they run in California prisons. And best of all, your very own Free Minds brother Juan spoke about the power of reading and writing in jail on a panel with Piper Kerman!

Juan spoke to the audience of White House leaders, arts program administrators, and members of Congress, telling them how arts programming during his incarceration helped him get on a successful path, saying, "I was 16 years old when I was incarcerated and I was facing a lot of time. In that moment, you just give up on everything. You give up on yourself, give up on life, you give up on the outside, and you feel like you have nothing to lose and nothing to look forward to. So when the arts were introduced to me through the book club, it brought a sense of passion, it brought a sense of belonging, it brought something I was yearning for, all that time, like a family... It helped me to see a future for myself. It helped me to find who I am and who I want to be." Senator Deborah Stabenow from Michigan was so impressed, she asked Juan to autograph her new copy of *The Untold Story of the Real Me*. That's right, *our book is in the United States Senate!*

The evening was a powerful reminder that you and your Free Minds brothers may be behind bars but you are not forgotten. There are people out here, from volunteers at Write Nights to President Obama and his staff at the White House who recognize your talent and want to hear your voices. It was heart-warming to see so many people from different backgrounds--politicians, wardens, authors and social activists--all coming together to push for more arts programming in prisons. We are certainly looking forward to spreading your voices and showing the world your talent in 2016 and beyond.





# THE WRITE WAY

## Where Do We Begin

By Julia

*"Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice."* That's the first sentence of the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez. It's one of the most famous opening lines in literature.

I've taken a lot of writing classes, but perhaps the truest advice I've ever gotten was from one of my professors in college who said, "The goal of every page is to make the reader want to read the next one." This is especially true of beginnings. You guys know this—how many times have you read the first line of a book and decided whether or not you were going to read the rest of the book based on that beginning? We all do it. So here's the rule for beginnings: Make people want to read more.

For me, the Marquez quote works so well as an opening sentence because it immediately makes me curious. The rest of that section is about Aureliano Buendía's childhood (the afternoon when his father took him to discover ice—fun fact: before people had refrigerators, ice was a rare and exciting sight!). But the reader wants to keep going because they want to find out how he's going to end up in front of a firing squad, and how he'll survive (if he survives).

The beginning doesn't have to be the beginning—as in, you don't have to start with the day you or your character were born. There's no rule about where to begin, just different possibilities. I'm working on a story right now about an addict, but the story doesn't start with the first time he used. Instead, it starts when he's already been clean for years, but he finds out that his child might die. He doesn't know what to do, and in that moment, he's tempted.

So here's my advice: Start with a moment when something changes for your character, when he or she has to make a choice; start with a moment that tells the reader "this is who this person is, this is what this story's about." Most important of all: make people want to read more. Sounds easy, right?

### Writing Prompt

*When does the story of your life begin? If you were making a movie about your life, what would be the first thing the audience saw?*

**LAST ISSUE'S PROMPT:** You'll recall in the Family issue, Julia asked you to write about yourself from the perspective of someone close to you. Check out these two submissions:

### From a Loved One's Perspective

By BH, FM Member

Damn, this boy keep asking for letters. I wish I had the time to sit down and think about something to write him. Writing letters just ain't my style. If he didn't break the law, I wouldn't have to write no damn letter. He thinks the world is supposed to stop for him. He got me f\*\*\*\*\* up. I'll write him one when I feel like it. Til then, he'll just have to understand I'm busy.

### Seeing Things from My Grandma's Eyes

By CM, FM Friend

It was October of 2007 and I had just got locked up. It was tough for me coming from doing juvenile time to going straight to the adult jail for the first time so I was scared and didn't know what to expect. I called home and told my Grandma, "It's crazy over here." I told her how bad I wanted to come home and that I was stressed out. I told her I needed a lawyer but when she contacted them they wanted \$25,000. My Grandma didn't have that type of money. She told me she wouldn't be able to get me the lawyer.

I was very upset and acted very much out of line. I said, "I can't take being locked up no more!" Then she said some words that I didn't understand at the time. She told me that as long as I was locked up, she was locked up too. Her words didn't register with me until five years later, when I realized if I was home and my child was locked up I would be hurt, lonely and very stressed out, especially if I couldn't help when they needed it. When I finally put myself in her shoes I saw she felt locked up because I was locked up. She wanted to help me but just couldn't. Before she passed, I told her I loved her and that we will always be together no matter how far the distance between us. She said she would never give up on me. So no matter what, I know she is still around me spiritually.



## FAMILY TIES

The column where FM family and loved ones weigh in.

### Brotherhood, Incarceration and College

For this issue, Alison sat down with FM member Phil and his younger brother Delonte. As an older brother, Phil grew up trying to be a role model to his brother. When Phil got incarcerated at 16, their relationship got complicated, as Phil tried to navigate being a positive influence from behind bars. At 24, Delonte is now a college student, studying psychology to become a school counselor. Phil, now 27, came home in 2014 and works full time for the DC Government. He also does community outreach for Free Minds.

**Alison: Tell me about your relationship growing up.**

**Phil:** We were close. We grew up in the same house, just me, Delonte, and our mom.

**Delonte:** Phil was sort of like a father figure for me growing up, because our dad wasn't really involved. When stuff got crazy, it was always just the three of us.

**Alison: Phil, when did you start getting into trouble?**

**Phil:** I think I was 12. I was young.

**Alison: Delonte, how did you manage to stay out of trouble when Phil was getting into stuff?**

**Delonte:** (laughs) He and my cousins used to run away from me. If I would try to go with them, they would run. I have short legs, so I couldn't keep up.

**Alison: How did your relationship change when Phil got locked up?**

**Delonte:** It was hard, because it was always just us three. Our mom definitely took it hard. I was 13 at the time. I would just try to keep myself busy by working and playing football.

**Phil:** I felt like I let him down, but I was mainly focused on doing my time.

**Delonte:** I didn't want to put pressure on him, because I knew guilt wouldn't help his situation. In our family, we never really talked about our feelings a lot, so I didn't really bring up to him the way it was affecting me and our mom to not have him home.

**Alison: Anything you would have done different? Or advice for our members with brothers at home?**

**Phil:** Just stick with it. You can still be there for your family as much as possible even though you're incarcerated. You've got to make the best of a bad situation.

**Delonte:** Communication is the biggest thing. I don't think I ever really told Phil, but after a couple years, I started to get pissed. I started to think, like, he's supposed to be the one keeping me out of trouble and he's supposed to be here for me and our mom. At that point, my communication fell off a little. If I could go back, I would change that because anger didn't solve anything.

(Continued on page 14)

## ASK HF: ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Dear H.F.,

*I just got off the phone with my family. I ended up arguing with them because they are telling me they don't have any money to send me right now. It feels like they always have some excuse. Or else they say they sent it, but it doesn't show up and I have to keep asking about it. I hate to make it all about money, but I see other guys getting money put on their accounts and I can't get the hygiene products I need. I just feel like nobody cares about me anymore. It's affecting my relationships with my family and friends. What should I do?*

Sincerely,  
DC

Dear DC,

What should you do? First, look at all the things that you already have. Second, be grateful for whatever it is that you have in your possession. Third, recognize that everything that you think that you need is not really a need and more of what you want. If you have soap, toothpaste, deodorant, even if it is not the kind that you may want or not as much of it as you would like to have, be thankful for what you have because there are those that have less than you. Some, who have never had anything at all.

Stop comparing yourself to others. Stop paying attention to what others' families are sending them and how much they have. If you know your family really loves you, then trust that they will send what they can. They lie because they feel too sad to tell you they can't send what you've asked for. Give your family the benefit of the doubt. Appreciate what you have and know that everything that we "want" is not what we "need."

Sometimes people will let you down. My entire family has lost interest in me, except for my mother. After 19 years I guess they just think that I will always make it through. A lot of people we identify as family and loved ones aren't interested in helping us when we are not in a position to help them back. When others give up, we can't give up on ourselves. Because at that moment we are all that we've got. When you hit the bottom, there is nowhere to go but up. And on the way up, you'll meet new friends and family and you'll learn to love the new ones that love you.

I resolve to be here. There is nowhere in reality other than here, the present moment. I'm here, fully present, in the moment, with appreciation, loving from within and allowing this love to radiate. Stay present. Happy New Year.

Your FM Brother,  
HF

## Changing Ways

By DG, FM Friend

No New Year's resolution  
for me

No crying decree

No promises, just average  
changes

Less time complaining

More time getting money

Less time hatin'

More time appreciating

Not so many mugs

A few more smiles

Not so many followers

A few more leaders

Less spending

More saving

Less talking

More action

Change after all...is good

Change after all

Is all I know



# PAYING IT FORWARD

## PACKing in a Whole Lot of Love

By Jess

Eight years ago, a pit bull named Spike arrived at the Washington Humane Society. Like many of the other dogs there, Spike was stressed out, lacking attention, and super jumpy from too much time locked in a kennel. Two of Spike's caretakers decided to take him for a run. Spike had rarely been out in the beautiful, diverse neighborhoods in the district, but he fell into his stride within minutes. It became the first of many more runs.

This was the beginning of the PACK program, aka "The People and Animal Cardio Klub." PACK is a group of volunteers who meet at local parks in DC to run with adoptable dogs from the Washington Humane Society (WHS). Since then, hundreds of dogs have been able to experience the joy of weekly runs in the neighborhood with loving volunteers through PACK.

At the WHS, dogs arrive as strays or as pets whose owners can no longer care for them. After five days of basic care and adjustment, Melissa, a behavior and training counselor at WHS, performs a series of assessments to ensure the dogs are safe to be adopted.

Currently, about 60% of the dogs at the shelter participate in PACK (the others either have medical issues or were adopted too soon). Melissa's role includes matching volunteers with the right canine running partner. "It's based on the individual volunteer and their experience. For instance, I won't give a rowdy dog to a person who wants to go on a walk versus a run." Over 400 volunteers are enrolled in the program, and there are about 20 people who run several times a month.

Melissa says the volunteers keep coming back because of the dogs. Winter, spring, summer, and fall, the volunteers show up each month because they find it extremely rewarding to give these dogs the exercise and attention they need and deserve. As Melissa reminds me, not all dogs have happy endings. But a lot of the dogs are able to handle the stressful shelter environment because of the volunteers and their weekend runs.

"It gets the dogs out of the shelter," Melissa says, and it's something not many shelter programs offer. At the end of the day, it also gives WHS staff a chance to see how the dog acts in the real world, allowing for more accurate information to be given to potential adopters.

Melissa describes a dog named Pumpkin Spice. Pumpkin Spice was bored, frustrated, and upset about being locked up. He was a large, active dog and initially seemed like a lost cause. Yet PACK volunteers rallied around him and spent extra time with him every single week. The outpouring of love for Pumpkin Spice was so powerful that people would sometimes come in during the week to take him out. As Melissa remembers, "they helped him to keep sane so he didn't lose his mind in the shelter." After a season passed, a healthier, happier, and calmer Pumpkin Spice was adopted by a loving family in the DMV.

"It's really rewarding to work with these dogs who have nothing and they're scared and to see them blossom and find a happy home... to see the process from being scared to being loved," Melissa says.



## QUOTE-I-VATOR

One of the lessons that I grew up with was to always stay true to yourself and never let what somebody else says distract you from your goals. And so when I hear about negative and false attacks, I really don't invest any energy in them, because I know who I am. – *Michelle Obama*



If you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or objects.  
– *Albert Einstein*

Where there is life, there is hope.  
Think positive. – *GM, FM Friend*

I hope in the next year ...you surprise yourself. – *Neil Gaiman*

As long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there to hold the person down, so it means you cannot soar as you otherwise might. – *Marian Anderson*

## DC Fliks of the Month:

Do you know where these photos were taken?



# BY FM MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

## Untitled

*By ST, FM Friend*

My mind drifts every time I write  
I get the right to passage  
And through each paragraph  
I express my inner passions  
But sometimes the math don't add up  
'Cause to live righteous  
And earn a right to the tree of life  
You gotta get out of the flesh  
So every day I live  
A day is subtracted from the time I've got left  
What's fair?  
No disrespect  
But is death really worse than life  
If your loved ones didn't have to suffer the pain?  
It all ends when you no longer have the nerve to feel  
You fear what you've already been through  
Or cannot see  
The eye is the most instrumental tool you possess  
The mind possesses itself, not the devil  
You gotta take the blame yourself  
He only plants the seed  
People live for the moment  
Having fun makes you feel free  
But it could cost you in the long run  
Never let your ship sail without a compass  
Anchor yourself until you know what route you're taking  
To help this generation emerge from this plague of  
violence  
Use the vaccine that makes it treatable by obtaining  
knowledge  
So as a people, not a single one of us dies in vain

## Just Another Bad Dream

*By DT, FM Member*

As my days shine  
And my nights sail with the sea  
The loneliness I feel, just call it incomplete  
They knock me down, thinking I can't get back up  
Without your love, baby  
I feel so messed up  
The loneliness, stress and pain  
Wait a second, just hold up!  
It seems that just a moment ago, I could feel your touch  
It's just a bad dream  
But I can't wake up  
This isn't real, it's dark and I'm laying on steel  
Kick, punch, scream, hold up!  
Damn, I think I forgot  
I'm still locked up

## SOLITARY

*By WM, FM Member*

Sentenced to 17 years  
Now I'm doing cell time  
Trapped in  
With no where to go  
Life becomes the same every day  
With no hope  
Trying to free my mind  
How can I with so much time?  
Blind to the fact  
That freedom was mine  
Right in the palms of my hands  
Slipped away before I could take a second glance  
At my mother crying in court  
The jury never gave me a second glance  
Was only a juvenile  
But was sentenced as a man  
Have no pity on me  
But I hope you can understand  
Now I stand as a man  
Speaking words of truth  
Challenging my mind to duels  
Now that 17-year sentence  
Was fire to my fuel  
I reach heights unimaginable  
My talents become my leadership  
My leadership becomes achievement  
Now that you hear this poem  
You received it  
The special one  
The Book Club told me to believe it  
My mind is free for all to see  
The dream is manifesting itself  
I can see it vividly  
Sentenced to 17 years  
They thought they would get rid of me  
Provoke my mind to become one with time  
My mind is so free  
My thoughts should be a fee  
No matter how hard it seems  
Or how hard it may be  
Free your mind  
And you will see  
God is the best of planners  
Your life was destiny  
My mind is free  
To be the best of me  
Shout out to Free Minds  
For seeing the best in me



# BY FM MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

## Reflection in the Mirror

*By EW, FM Member*

It was from birth  
How I was raised on Earth  
My childhood was a sport  
Where gangstas killed over turf  
During the course of my teen years  
Too many friends and peers killed  
Schools and playgrounds became a war zone  
Lost in the world  
Not knowing which way was home  
Before I found out what life was all about  
Watching my so-called friends and the things  
that came up  
My intelligence and education was the best  
Knowing that trials and tribulations  
Were just a test

## I Resolve

*By BG, FM Friend*

I resolve to do the right thing  
At all times, no matter what it may bring  
I resolve to become a better man  
Even at my worst  
Among whomever  
Regardless of what was planned for me  
I resolve to continue  
Beyond my best  
Pushing myself to do better  
Out with the old, in with the new  
I resolve to father my child  
No matter how old she turns  
Knowing forever in my heart  
To raise my seed  
I resolve to enjoy life  
With the wife of my youth  
Although not yet married  
But remaining faithful and true  
I resolve to raise the bar  
Above expectations  
Participating and not just spectating  
Not just tolerating  
But also celebrating  
Finally...  
I resolve to be me at all times  
Allowing you to be you  
Not doing what should not be done  
But what needs to be done  
That I do

## One Track Mind

*By DJ, FM Member*

Non-stop same old song  
A million times  
Writing to feel the wrong  
Voices, cords, raps, harmonies and poems  
Sometimes the feeling  
Is a never ending song  
One track frame  
Thoughts in my head have felt worse  
With a one-sided brain  
The pain that I've cried  
Has made my song  
A one track mind

## I Resolve to Evolve

*By QS, FM Friend*

As I look through the window at the falling rain of a gray December morning, my mind begins to reflect back on the year that is coming to a close. The memories that flood my thoughts are like double edged swords. There are the happy ones and then there are the ones I no longer want to remember. The ones that awaken excruciating longings and regrets. It's at this moment when I look towards the promise of the coming year with extreme hopes and great expectations. I know it's now at this pivotal point in my life that my thoughts and actions will determine whether I shall miserably fail or gloriously triumph in achieving my future endeavors. Life has taught me that character cannot be made except by a steady, long, continued process. If I cannot change the very fabric of my thoughts, I will never be able to change my reality and therefore I will remain a prisoner of my circumstances. In order to meet the challenges of an unforgiving world as I strive to evolve into the man God meant for me to be, I must unflinchingly resolve to be a man of integrity by making and keeping commitments to myself and others. To "walk my talk." I resolve to have a purpose, a mission, a sense of direction and value in my life. To not just function on an impulse or desire at any given moment. I resolve not to hold any anger or resentment in my heart because hatred is a curved blade that will do more harm to the possessor than to the individual at which it is aimed. I resolve to teach and give more because it's not enough just to seek greatness in myself, but to help others find the greatness within them. Most importantly, I resolve to love, honor and follow God's divine direction as I ask him to mend and fortify the weak places of my heart, soul and mind. In the end, yesterday is history and there is no guarantee that tomorrow will come. All I have in this life is now. Right now is the only time I own, the only thing I can hope to control. So, with resolve I will continue to evolve.





# IN THE NEWS

By Kelli

## INTERNATIONAL

The international refugee crisis continues as a result of the civil war in Syria, which we wrote about in our last issue. Since the war began in 2011, more than 11 million people (that's half of the country's pre-war population) have either been killed or forced to flee their homes. Experts expect that by the end of this year there will be more than 4 million Syrian refugees. The majority of them flee to nearby Jordan and Lebanon, but these small countries are struggling to handle the huge numbers of new people. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are making desperate trips across the Mediterranean Sea in hopes of finding safety in Europe—mainly Greece and Turkey. Many have drowned on the journey. The European Union is still trying to decide upon a strategy to resettle so many people in need.

North Korea exploded what they claimed was a Hydrogen bomb in an underground nuclear test on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Other world powers and experts doubt very much that it was a H bomb. Still, it was their most powerful out of four recent nuclear tests and experts agree it was meant to intimidate the rest of the world and convince their own people (who live in a very closed society without access to the internet) of North Korea's power and dominance. The leader of North Korea, Kim Jong Un is only 33 years old and widely considered unpredictable, and by many, dangerous.

## U.S. NEWS

On January 12, President Obama delivered his 8<sup>th</sup> and final State of the Union address to Congress. It was nontraditional in that it didn't focus much upon specific policies or plans, but instead pled with political leaders from both parties to learn to work together. He also tried to soften the fear of terrorism in America in the aftermath of the attacks in Paris and San Bernardino. Obama took aim at Donald Trump (without calling him by name) saying "When politicians insult Muslims, that doesn't make us safer...it is just wrong. It diminishes us in the eyes of the world." This was clearly a response to Donald Trump's call in December for American to ban all Muslims from coming into the country.

Speaking of Trump, he has shocked many by being the Republican front-runner in the lead up to the February 1<sup>st</sup> Iowa Caucuses. Iowa and New Hampshire are historically viewed as important tests that help predict who may emerge as the party's candidate. On the Democrat side, Hillary Clinton currently has only a two-point lead over rival Senator Bernie Sanders from Vermont. This presidential race so far, has been anything but boring!

## DC NEWS

It's been thankfully quiet in DC in the new year so far. Some good news...Bei Bei, the 5 month-old panda bear cub at the National Zoo made his first public appearance on January 15<sup>th</sup>.



He is only 25 lbs and cuddly now (see photo). When full grown, though, giant panda bears have powerful jaws, large sharp teeth and huge claws. Bei Bei will eventually grow to be approximately 275 lbs. Pretty soon it will no longer be safe for zoo-keepers to enter his area at the zoo!

## SPORTS

Once again, the **Redskins** (aka "Washington's Football Team") disappointed DC. Hopes were high after they won the NFC East and were given the chance to host the first playoff game on January 10, but...they lost. Still, Kirk Cousins didn't disappoint, breaking several passing records. Fans will have to wait and see about next year though, since Cousins is a free agent.

The injury-plagued Washington **Wizards** can be best described as "consistently inconsistent." They are racking up close to an even number of wins as losses so far at 18-19 and are still in playoff contention.

Local hoops are much more exciting for University of Maryland fans. The **Terps** are currently ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the country (behind Oklahoma and Kansas) and can boast a candidate for Player of the Year in their starting line up in Melo Trimble.

The DC team that we can get behind is the Washington **Capitals**. They have the best record in the NHL! Last week, superstar Alex Ovechkin became the 43<sup>rd</sup> NHL player in history to get 500 career goals. He's the first Russian player to ever achieve this!

## JANUARY 2016 TOP 5 LISTS

### Billboard top five R&B/Hip Hop Albums (January 23)



*Royalty* • Chris Brown  
*Beauty Behind The Madness* • The Weeknd  
*TRAPSOUL* • Bryson Tiller  
*When It's Dark Out* • G-Eazy  
*If You're Reading This It's Too Late* • Drake

### Billboard Top 5 Singles (January 23)



*Sorry* • Justin Bieber  
*Hello* • Adele  
*Love Yourself* • Justin Bieber  
*Hotline Bling* • Drake  
*Stressed Out* • twenty one pilots

### New York Times Best Sellers (January 24)



*Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, by Alan Dean Foster  
*The Girl on the Train*, by Paula Hawkins  
*All the Light We Cannot See*, by Anthony Doerr  
*The Rogue Lawyer*, by John Grisham  
*The Nightingale*, by Kristin Hannah



# REENTRY PROFILE

Where we bring you the success stories of returning citizens who have overcome the tremendous obstacles of reentry and inspire us with their courage and tenacity.

## Resolving to Obtain My Education

By Stephen, FM Member

I grew up in Washington, DC in the Trinidad neighborhood. I met Free Minds when I was a juvenile charged as an adult and sent to the DC Jail. I came home in 2012 after serving six and a half years in prison. I'll be honest, when I first came home, I hung around with the same people as before. For a while I drove a nice car and had nice things but one day I realized I was only showing off for the same old people, who are in the same predicament they have always been in. Those people are stuck and they ain't doing anything with their lives.

I worked as an electrician for a while but ended up getting laid off and that's when I made the decision to start over and go to college. I wanted to get my education and a career that will pay well and provide me with steady work. I am now a full time student at UDC and just made the Dean's list for the second time. I'm a sophomore, with another two years to go until I graduate. I am studying to become a Civil Engineer, which means that I will design and build bridges and buildings one day. My dream is to build one of those buildings that stretches over top of a road or tunnel, like the one in downtown DC near the entrance to 395. The program involves a lot of math and hard work, but I love it.

The best part about going to college is meeting new people, making a new group of friends who are trying to do something with their lives and having new experiences. It's important to realize that there is more to life than just your neighborhood.

I now understand the value of time. Life will pass you by if you aren't doing anything with your time. The hardest part about being a full time student is staying committed to it and actually doing the work. It's easy to sign up for school and tell people you're in college but it's another thing to actually go, be serious about it and do the work that you need to do in order to graduate. It's not easy but it will be worth it.

If I could say one thing to the guys who are about to come home it would be that the city has changed and that you need to change with it. H Street looks like Adams Morgan now! A friend of mine just came home and thought he was in Georgetown but was really on Rhode Island Ave!

If you want to be successful in DC you have to work hard and do things legit. If you are out on the streets you're just going to end up back in jail or dead. You can't sit outside all day and have it end well. That's what I realized a long time ago and I am glad I did.

# THE REAL WORLD OF WORK

## HOW TO BE A MASTER BARBER

With Jim

Jim has been working at the barbershop since he was 7 years old. He made a dollar a day for sweeping the floor at the Arlington, Virginia shop his father, Jim Sr. opened in 1960. Back then, his father was the only barber in the county who cut hair for both black and white customers. Jim learned important life lessons from his father, such as: never charge an unemployed person for a haircut; and go to the home of someone who is sick and cut their hair for free. This month, Kelli sat down with Jim to talk about what it takes to be a successful barber.



### KELLI: Why did you become a barber?

JIM: It came pretty naturally to me since I grew up in my dad's shop. My other job is as a firefighter. It can be pretty devastating because people lose so much in a bad fire, and you're just there to clean it all up. You never really find out what happens to the people afterwards. At the barbershop, I'll get a customer coming in "devastated" by a bad haircut and in 20 minutes I can fix or "cure" the problem! I get a lot of satisfaction from that. Plus, I'm an artist. I love to draw, and creating a good haircut takes artistry. I get to visualize something and then make it happen. I feel like I've got the best of two worlds being a firefighter and a barber.

### KELLI: Was it difficult to learn the trade?

JIM: No, you just have to work hard and concentrate to learn the basics, and never stop learning.

### KELLI: What is the most challenging thing about your job?

JIM: It can be physically demanding standing on your feet all day. For example, yesterday, I opened at 6:30AM and cut hair until 8:30PM without a single break. I didn't even eat! When we closed, I didn't even want to go get in my car. I just wanted to sit down in my chair and relax.

### KELLI: What is your favorite thing about being a barber?

JIM: Talking to people. Without a doubt. I have guys who've been coming in for years. We see each other for maybe 30 minutes each month, but I know so much about them, it's like we're family. I know their wives' names, how they met, what sports their kids

(Continued on page 11)



## REAL WORLD OF WORK

(Continued from page 10)

are playing, if they lost their jobs, how they feel about politics. One guy, I cut for 15 years and when he moved, he gave my information to his mother. He told her, *This guy knows more about me than anybody I know. If anything happens to me, get in touch with him!* That's amazing to me.

### **KELLI: What role does the barbershop play in the community?**

JIM: It's a place where all kinds of people come together. We have 15% of our customers who are women. People from all races and walks of life. Famous people (a Washington Post columnist, a Redskin player, and former Georgetown basketball coach John Thompson are all long-time customers), and regular folk. We talk about everything: politics, sports, religion (but that one can get tricky!) Conversation is such a rich part of life. I love a good debate! But we all listen to each other even if we disagree. Being disrespectful of other people will get you banned from my shop.

### **KELLI: What qualities make a good barber?**

JIM: You have to like people. You have to be artistic. And you have to be a good listener. You need to hear what a customer says he wants and translate that into a creation. There is a difference between a "cutter" and a "master barber." Anyone can learn the basic skills and be a cutter. But to be a master barber you need to have an eye for it.

### **KELLI: Have you ever tried to talk someone out of a haircut they asked for?**

JIM: Oh yeah! (laughs) All the time.

### **KELLI: What's the craziest request you ever got?**

JIM: One day the woman who ran the fish department at Giant came in. She told me she was going to send one of her employees in who needed a haircut. He wore a hat every day and wouldn't take it off. She didn't know what was going on, but he couldn't keep wearing that hat. So the guy comes in, sits in the chair, takes off his hat and he had so much hair and there was so much stuff in it! I mean fish bones and garbage...For real! I had to cut all of his hair off down to his skull. The guy didn't even care. He just didn't want to comb his hair. His boss came in and gave me a big tip later that day!

### **KELLI: What advice would you give to Free Minds members who might be interested in pursuing a career as a barber?**

JIM: The licensing requirements are different in MD, DC and VA. Find out what they are where you live. Don't take out expensive loans for commercial barber school if you can avoid it. Instead, look for an adult education barbering program through the county or at your local community college. Then find a barber to take you on as an apprentice. Most barbers love to train young guys who are enthusiastic and committed. Good luck!

(EDITOR'S NOTE: According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, experienced barbers in DC make an average of more than \$50,000/year. This is significantly higher than in other parts of the country!)

## REENTRY SPOTLIGHT

By Keela

What's up Guys?!!

New Year, New You!

Embrace this mantra guys because you can make the decision to be a new you anytime of the year you want, not just in January. But for the sake of tradition, just go with it! I've been on the lookout for quality programming in the city and I am pleased to let you know that I have found some that fit the criteria so check them out!

### **Goodwill Hospitality Job Training Program**

**2200 South Dakota Avenue NE**

**Washington DC, 20018**

**202-715-2618**

- 5-week hospitality jobs training program. Prepare for entry-level jobs in area hotels such as housekeeping, front desk, cashiers, hosts, stewards, servers, and security.
- No cost to participants
- Transportation stipend provided
- Personalized job placement support
- Must pass multiple drug screenings

### **The H.O.P.E. Project Training Center**

**3230 Pennsylvania Ave, SE**

**Washington DC, 20020**

**202-449-8663**

- FREE 7-month IT/Help-desk training program
- Earn certifications in COMP TIA, Microsoft SharePoint, Professional Development and Career & Social Coaching
- For DC residents from 18-35 years old
- Must have GED/HS diploma
- Returning citizens encouraged to apply\*\*
- Proven track record of graduate success/employment

### **Green Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Program**

**1618 Monroe Street NW**

**Washington DC, 20018**

**202-939-2400 ext.932 or 933**

- 12-week Construction Specialized Green Building Training
- For DC residents 18 and over
- Earn certifications in solar panel installation, weatherization and sustainable building
- Partnerships with WMATA and Clark Construction
- Hands on work training
- Job placement assistance

Guys, please don't hesitate to reach out to some of these awesome programs, and if you need any help, you know who to call!

**REMINDER: If you will be coming home soon, let us know your release date so we can reserve a spot for you in our one-month paid apprenticeship program!**





# AROUND THE WORLD...

By Kelli

**Q:** Where did more than 1 million people go on December 31<sup>st</sup> to make New Year's resolutions?



**A: NEW YORK CITY!** Well, Times Square specifically. And okay, half were probably more focused on getting turned and partying into 2016. But c'mon, at least *some* of those people watching the ball drop at midnight were thinking about their resolutions! For that reason, this issue, we take you to *The Big Apple*, aka *The City that Never Sleeps*.

If you've never been, put it on your bucket list! I hope my description will allow you to imagine a little mini trip there right now! I was 22 when I saw it for the first time, and remember hanging my head out the car window looking like a hillbilly (country, bamma), but I couldn't help it. It's that amazing. As you know, New York is crazy expensive, but there *are* ways to see the city without breaking the bank.

**GETTING THERE:** Hands down, the best way is by bus. Bolt Bus and Mega Bus run several times a day from Union Station for \$25. They're clean, safe and dependable! Even if you have access to a car, parking is expensive!

**WHERE TO STAY:** Split a hotel room with friends. Try hostels (barebones option where rooms have a simple bed and a shared bathroom) available in NYC for \$75-100—check out Chelsea Hostel. Or consider leaving DC before the sun comes up and spending one fun-filled day in NY before collapsing in your seat on the midnight bus home.

**GETTING AROUND IN THE CITY:** The subway is excellent. Pay as you go, or buy a metro card and ride the trains as much as you want all week for \$31. The subway is awesome for people-watching and you can hear amazing live music at the stations too.

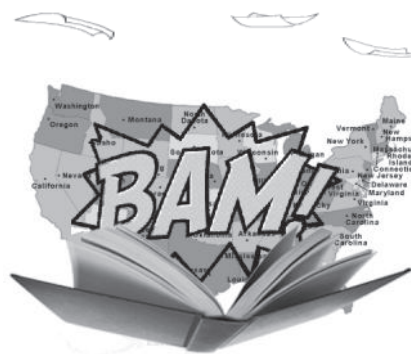
Now, what should you see? Every trip is a different adventure. You could go every weekend for the rest of your life and never run out of cool things to see and do.

- **TIMES SQUARE** – The busiest pedestrian intersection in the world! Your senses will be overwhelmed by the giant video screens, street performers, and smells (good *and* bad). You might see the Naked Cowboy (a buff dude in underwear, long hair, cowboy hat and boots carrying his guitar, who's been hanging out there for the last 20 years). Times Square is definitely a major tourist attraction, so watch out for people wearing Elmo and superhero costumes charging \$5-10 just to take a selfie with them. Don't do it...some of them are a little creepy! Do check out the giant M&M store located just across from Hershey's Chocolate World (free samples!) And if you want to see a Broadway show (the one everyone's talking about now is *Hamilton*, the story of American "founding father," Alexander Hamilton told as a hip hop musical), they do half-price tickets lotteries every day in Times Square.
- **STAR-GAZING** – Most people have seen someone famous in NYC. I once saw Tracy Morgan. Go to the Today Show set at Rockefeller Plaza and wait for the morning news team to come out with the cameras! You can also email ahead for tickets to shows like Jimmy Fallon, Saturday Night Live and The Daily Show. I went to SNL in 2003 and the musical guests were Beyoncé and Jay-Z (Seriously. Nobody knew how famous they were about to become!)
- **STATEN ISLAND FERRY** – Don't miss this! The FREE ferry runs every 15-20 minutes from NYC to Staten Island and will take you right by the Statue of Liberty. We've all seen it on TV and in photos, but it's so majestic in person. You can ride back and forth all day long if you like.
- **CENTRAL PARK** – It's huge—843 acres and smack dab in the middle of the city—and full of people roller-blading, running, playing chess, picnicking, and walking by the big duck pond. My favorite is ice-skating! Check out this photo of the famous rink. This park is so big that you can still find beautiful stretches where you won't see another soul.
- **9/11 MEMORIAL** – Walk around the memorial including the two large pools that stand in the spots where the World Trade Towers stood. This place will really make you think about what it was like that day, and all those we lost.
- **MUSEUMS** – We're spoiled in DC by the Smithsonian, but NYC is also home to amazing museums. The Metropolitan Museum of Art ("*The Met*") has more than 2 million pieces of art and is visited by people from all over the world. The suggested admission price is \$25. Did you catch that?



(Continued on page 14)





## BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

By Julia

By now you all should have received your copy of *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson (if you didn't, let us know) about Stevenson's work as a lawyer for people on death row in Alabama, and his experiences with the criminal justice system. He writes in detail about a man named Walter McMillan who spent decades on death row for a murder that he didn't commit. Here's what you guys had to say about *Just Mercy*:

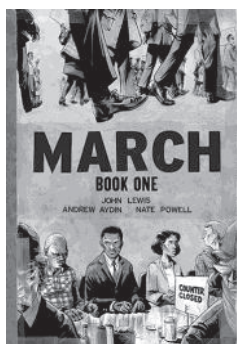
*Hands down, this is a very moving book. I found myself moved to frustration. There were too many parts where I fully understood the pain expressed, especially the part where he was having such a peaceful moment only to be interrupted by the police pointing guns at him. This book was a sorrowful reminder of America's problem with the minorities and poor. It painted a vivid picture for all to see America's corrupt legal system. Mr. Stevenson should be congratulated. I admire his courage. This book is a must read and belongs in every library. –MH*

*That book was so uplifting in many ways. –DW*

*It's a really intense book but I love how it keeps me wondering about a lot of things. –LB*

*I thought it was insightful and taught me about the inequality of justice in America throughout history. I identified with the section about the children being sentenced to life in prison being as though I came in as a juvenile. Even though I wasn't given a life sentence, I feel as though 24 years is more than a lifetime especially for a juvenile. A quote out the book that I believe is true is: "The power of mercy is that it belongs to the undeserving. It's when mercy is least expected that it's most potent, strong enough to break the cycle of victimization and victimhood, retribution and suffering. It has the power to heal the psychic harm and injuries that lead to aggression and violence, abuse of power, mass incarceration." Everybody is deserving of mercy, even those who don't think they deserve it. –DJ*

The next BAM! book will be the graphic novel *March: Book One* by John Lewis. Expect this book in February or March. Let us know your recommendations for what we should read next.



John Lewis was part of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. He worked with Martin Luther King, Jr. and was an important player in the struggle to de-segregate the south and win the right to vote for African Americans. Now he serves in Congress, where he has been a Representative for Georgia since 1987. *March* is a graphic novel about the events in his life that led him to joining the Civil Rights Movement.

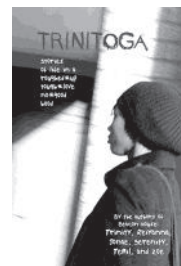
### Discussion Questions:

- The book starts with John Lewis preparing for Barack Obama's inauguration. What did Obama's inauguration mean to you? What does it mean to Lewis and others of his generation?
- Is the struggle for civil rights over? Do you see any connections between the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and the Black Lives Matter movement of today?
- This book is the first part of a series. Would you be interested in reading more?
- Do you like reading graphic novels? Why or why not?

Send your book reviews to Free Minds at 2201 P Street NW, Washington, DC 20037.

### WHAT THE YOUNG'UNS ARE READING

Your young FM brothers on the juvenile unit just finished reading *Trinitoga: Stories of Life in a Roughed-Up, Tough-Love, No-Good Hood*, written by five DC teens in which they create a fictional neighborhood that looks like their own filled with characters based upon people they've actually known. The book has inspired the guys in the Book Club to start writing their own story together. Their working title is: *Life in the Field* and will tell the story of six young men who meet as kids attending a summer basketball camp. After going their separate ways for high school, they find themselves brought together again—this time in jail.



***Has anything you've read inspired you to write?***



# FAMILY TIES

(Continued from page 5)

**Alison:** Delonte what are you doing now? Are you closer now that Phil is home?

**Delonte:** I'm in school in North Carolina studying psychology. I want to go to graduate school to be a school counselor so I can help kids who are going through what we went through. Since Phil came home in 2014, we call each other as much as we can. I've been following the work he is doing through his job and Free Minds, and I've read the articles about him. I'm proud of him for all the positive things he's doing now, and he tells me he's proud of me too.

**Alison:** Any resolutions for 2016?

**Phil:** I just want to continue on a positive path and to get off papers.

**Delonte:** I want to have a better relationship with my family. It gets hard to stay in touch because I'm 6.5 hours away in school and working, but I want to visit and call more.

**Would anyone in your family like to write a piece for The Connect?** Tell them to send it to Kelli at Free Minds, 2201 P Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037.

**THE LEGAL PAD**, by Janet, FM Friend and DC Attorney will be back next issue with a column about the ins and outs of parole and probation, including how the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act pending in Congress could apply to prisoners sentenced to life under DC Code Title 16 as adults while juveniles.

# AROUND THE WORLD...

(Continued from page 12)

"Suggested." You can pay \$1 if that's all you have! Across town at the Museum of Modern Art ("MoMA") you can go for FREE on Fridays from 4-8PM.

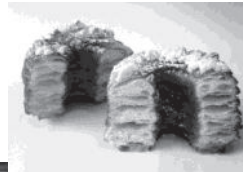
- **SHOPPING** – Okay, it's not FREE, but NYC is a shopper's paradise. For example, are you a sneaker-head? Check out *Flight Club*, where they sell every type of kicks imaginable. One whole wall features 10,000 pairs of never-worn, plastic-wrapped shoes stacked in 15 rows! Or go to *Nike Lab* which sells super-limited releases or *Extra Butter* which actually holds "release" parties for the latest sneaker. If you really love MJ, you'll want to go across the bridge to shop at *Jordan Heads Brooklyn*, a store dedicated entirely to His Airness – memorabilia, clothing and of course, shoes! It doesn't matter what you're shopping for, you can do it in NYC.



- **WALK OVER THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE** – Join hundreds of New Yorkers and other tourists to walk across the 1.1 mile pedestrian bridge from Manhattan to Brooklyn (and back). The views are spectacular!

My fellow travelers, we've barely scratched the surface and haven't even talked about food! Forget shopping, NYC is a place for people who like to EAT. Have you ever heard of a *cronut*? It's a cross between a croissant and a donut invented by NY baker Dominique Ansel in 2013. Three years later, hundreds of people still line up outside Ansel's bakery every single day to get one. At one point, people were scalping \$5 cronuts

for up to \$100! That's just dumb. You're gonna want a slice of Famous Original Ray's pizza though. That's just a given. But I'm out of space, so we're going to have to save the culinary tour for a future issue!



**(EDITOR'S NOTE: Is there some place you'd like us to take you in the next Around the World column? Let us know.)**

## NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: We Can Be the Change/Ending Violence in the Streets of DC

In 2015, there were 162 homicides in Washington, DC. Sadly, three of the dead were Free Minds brothers. As a family and a community, we **MUST** figure out what we can do to stop the violence. It is our goal and our mission that **NO MORE** bright lives be wasted. Please submit your poems, your thoughts, your original lyrics and your ideas. What impact has violence in DC had upon you? What do you believe we can do together to turn the tide? What are you willing to do individually?

Until the next time, stay strong and keep your mind FREE!

