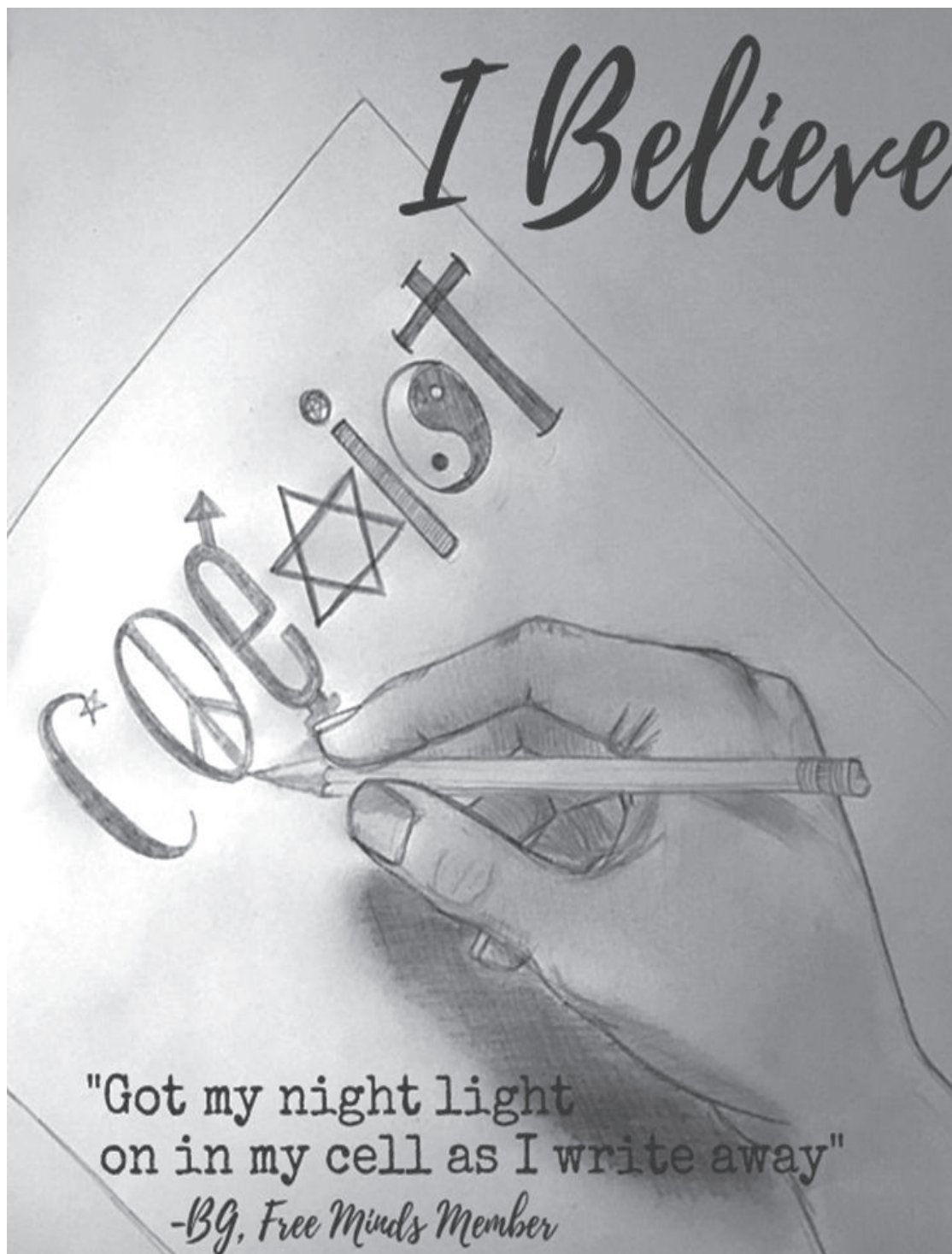


May/June 2016
Vol. 5, Issue I

Free Minds Connect

THIS MONTH'S THEME:



IN THIS ISSUE:

**Ask a
Muslim
(page 12)**

**FM Member...
Working
My Way Up
at Amtrak!
(page 10)**

**A Father's
Advice
to His
Incarcerated
Son (page 5)**

**My Buddhist
Faith from
Vietnam to
the U.S.
(page 7)**

Is brought to you by...

Tara
Executive Director

Alison
Editor-in-Chief

Julia
Managing Editor

**Seana, Jess,
Kelli, Melissa**
Project Editors

JG, HF
Columnists

Keela
Book Club &
Reentry Manager

Marcus
Reentry
Apprenticeship Trainer

Grace
Intern

**JG, HF, James, DH,
CM, DK, QS, KB,
DJ, BH, BG, DF**
FM Members

**ET, Chris,
John, Huang**
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
202-758-0829*

Next Issue's Theme:

*Me and
My Sisters*

Namaste Free Minders!

A warm hello from Free Minds headquarters. I hope this Connect issue finds you in good health, in body, mind and spirit. Can you tell I've just come from a yoga class? ☺ Namaste is a greeting commonly used in India and often in a yoga class in the US. It's a Sanskrit word that means the light in me honors the light in you. For me, light is what this issue's theme "I Believe" is all about. It is bringing to light our personal belief systems so we can all bask in the glow of our interconnectedness and have a greater understanding of each other.



I want to give a big shout out to Jess who suggested this issue's theme and whose artistic talent brought forth the beautiful hand drawn cover. Also a big thanks to Free Minds member BG whose words "Keeping the night light on in my cell as I write away" inspired me so much. I see faith and belief like a night light that pierces the darkness of fear and loneliness with the brightness of hope and unity.

In these pages you will find real life examples of people who are "night lights" for all of us. From Free Minds member DH's father guiding his son away from the negative forces of the streets to Mona and Sebastian who set up their "Ask a Muslim" booth after terror attacks. Just today we received a request from a minister whose congregant was violently carjacked by a young man in Maryland asking if we knew of any program like ours that could help him in prison there. The victim could only imagine what the young man has gone through for him to do something like that. This kind of compassion shines a powerful light over all of us. Kelli, in her column writes about the one belief all the world's major religions share and I want to add another commonality; the sense of community that provides a group cohesion and identity as a way for traditions to be passed down. I took an elective class in college called World Religions. It was fascinating to me. I loved learning about all the different belief systems. I remember thinking how cool it would be if every child could be part of a different faith tradition for each year of their life and then when they became an adult they could choose the one that felt most right for them. I felt like a lot of intolerance would evaporate.

It is with great pride that I see how our Free Minds community is already passing down our tradition of tolerance and inclusiveness as we continue to grow. Thank you all.

Until next time, keep those brilliant minds of yours free,

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 Jess

WE CAN BE THE CHANGE: WRITING SOLUTIONS TO VIOLENCE

On April 27th, as part of National Reentry Week, we hosted a poetry reading and discussion with more than 100 people in attendance! Speakers included several of your Free Minds brothers, two Ballou High School students, and an English teacher from Eastern High School, who discussed the importance of telling your own story through writing, saying, "we all have something within us that is worth listening to."



Table displaying your success stories!

VISIT TO HARVARD

Ms. Keela and Poet Ambassador Phil faced their fears of flying and headed up to Boston to visit Harvard Law School. Phil spoke to a group of 80 law students in the morning about his past, present, and future, before the two Free Minds family members sat in on an actual Harvard law class and hosted a Write Night event with Harvard students and faculty.

INTERVIEWS WITH STORYCORPS

StoryCorps travels the country recording peoples' stories in their mobile recording studio. Kelli and Free Minds Member Will had a conversation about life, connection, transformation, and family. Free Minds members Calvin and Phil interviewed each other about their strong friendship that helped them survive prison, and how they're supporting each other now in reentry. The conversations will be archived in the Library of Congress!

LETTER FROM KELLI

Hey Free Minds Little Brothers & Sisters,

As you can see, I've put down my Editor's pen for now. The Free Minds Connect is now in Alison's capable and creative hands, but you'll still get my two cents in this space each issue ☺. Have you ever noticed people have a hard time talking about faith and belief? Maybe it's because we get anxious that other people are trying to convert us (when you open the front door and see someone all dressed up with a handful of pamphlets). Maybe we feel defensive when another person doesn't agree with what we believe. Sharing our beliefs is fraught with all kinds of stuff. Devastating war and bloodshed throughout history can often be traced to peoples of different faiths being at odds with each other. Even so, I think it's vital to share our faith with others because it's really at the core of who we are.

I try to focus on what we have in common. For example, if you look at every major religion in the world, from Islam to Christianity to Confucianism to Hinduism to the Baha'i faith, etc., you will find some version of the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," (this version is from the Bible's book of Matthew). Think about it. Followers of almost all major faith systems agree we should be nice to each other. They are also pretty much on the same page about how we should treat the planet. If we focus on the big stuff that really matters, we can learn a lot from each other and from each other's beliefs and faiths.

I believe in redemption. I believe all of us have done things that were wrong and that we are ashamed of. But I believe that God (Allah, the universe, insert your word here, etc.) offers forgiveness. We are never beyond redemption. I believe our job is to work every day, every hour, every moment to get it right. And to support our friends, loved ones and neighbors as each of them tries to get it right. That's my two cents. I'd love to know what you think. Until then, keep striving and keep your mind free!

Your friend,
Kelli

WORDS OF WISDOM

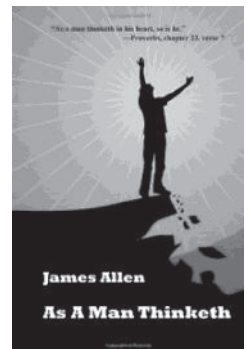
By JG, FM Member

Faith is what man knows is truth, regardless of physical evidence. At first this idea sounded a little crazy to me. I was always the kind of guy that thought "believe none of what you hear and only half of what you see." I still do sometimes! However, when it comes to faith, things are much more simple. I read the classic book called As a Man Thinketh by James Allen. It explains that man is the sum total of his thoughts. Everything about a person's conditions is a reflection of his predominant thought patterns. We emit and receive exactly what it is we think about the most. Faith is a power that everyone has, and it's working at all times. It's important to be optimistic because when we have enough faith in something that something becomes our truth, and our life experience will reflect this.

For example, the entire time I've been locked up—13 years now—I never truly felt like I was going to do the entire sentence. I've believed from the start that I can be a better man and that I deserve a second chance. Most of my thoughts and actions have reflected these beliefs over the years. About a month ago, the court granted me an attorney to proceed on my ineffective assistance of counsel claim. My faith has carried me this far and I have no logical reason to think it won't carry me the rest of the way.

Have faith that all your dreams and goals will come to pass. Have faith in humanity and a better world. If we can all do this, the collective conscious will shift and major changes will take place for the better. Peace and Love.

Your Free Minds Brother,
JG



FREE MINDS MAILBAG

"To my friends at Free Minds. I am very inspired by the newsletter. I love it. I believe God is doing something great in and through Free Minds. I believe in you all and your mission I want to and am happy to be a part of it. I will pass my newsletter around, encourage people to write, and take the time to do so myself." – DF, FM member



"I received my feedback from the write night on the poem below. It brought tears to my eyes to read such positive things about my poem. I write a lot, but never really shared anything, in fear of being judged that it wasn't good enough. Those comments gave me a lot of confidence, and I really appreciate it. Thank you so much. It made my day yesterday." – DK, FM member

"I would like to really thank Free Minds for always keeping me up to date also sending me amazing books to read. So thank you!" – QL, FM Member





THE WRITE WAY

Using Metaphors and Similes

By Julia

Every day is a new chapter. Of course, days are not literally chapters—this is an example of a **metaphor**. Metaphors are when a word or phrase (“chapter”) is used to describe something that it isn’t (“every day”). You may have also heard of a **simile**, which is a kind of metaphor that uses the words “like” or “as” to make a comparison (“Every day is *like* a new chapter”).

Metaphors and similes can be useful when you’re writing to describe something that’s difficult to put into words, like love, or faith, and to express big ideas with specific, relatable things that people can understand. Metaphors are also a lot of fun because they’re a way to take something normal and express it in a new and creative way.

In *The Untold Story of the Real Me*, Deante uses similes in “Without You” on page 58:

Without you I am like.../A lamp with no light, a heart with no blood/A body with no soul, a baby with no love...

Mike uses a metaphor on page 94 in “Wildfire” as he writes about Freedom like a person. On page 45, Curtis writes about his “Poison.” Curtis and Mike are both using metaphors to describe big ideas as people.

See, I met this tall beautiful glass/Filled real nice, and when she comes around/She’s cool as ice...

Writing Prompt

Take one of these big ideas from the list below and use a metaphor or simile to describe it. For example: My soul is like _____.

MY SOUL

MY HANDS

FAMILY

FREEDOM

MY HEART

MY MIND

FAITH

POETRY

MY FACE

LOVE

LIFE

HOPE

Change

By CM, FM Member

When I first came to the jail in 2007 I was 18 and I still had the street mentality. I felt as though I still had to go hard and impress people around me so they wouldn’t think I was soft or weak. I justified my actions by saying I was adapting to my environment because coming up in DC I was taught go hard or go home because only the strong survive.

At the DC Jail I was sent to South 1 (the hole) and it made me see things through a different perspective. It not only affected me but my family too because I had no visits, phone or commissary for 60 days.

So now, 8.5 years later, I’m no longer the same person. I’m not worried about what my peers think and I’ve also learned a great deal of respect. Now I’ve grown from a young adolescent, with no real guidance and a vicious point to prove, to a better man and father who values his life and the ones close to him. Loyalty means the most, so change is a good thing in my book.

If I can do it, so can you! ☺

FAMILY TIES

The column where FM family and loved ones weigh in.

Keeping the Faith: A Father's Advice to His Son

DH has been a Free Minds member since 2007. His father, ET, spoke with Alison about faith, incarceration, and his relationship with his son over the years.

Alison: Tell me about the role that faith played in your family life, and in DH's upbringing.

ET: My parents converted to Islam in the 1950s and they raised me and my siblings Muslim. My faith has been important to me from a young age, and I also raised my children Muslim. I didn't force religion on my children, so DH had the opportunity to make that choice on his own. But when I got DH, the teachings of Islam were a part of our lives, whether we were studying at home or going to make prayer.

Alison: What do you talk about with DH? What advice do you try to give him?

ET: We can talk about anything, sports, religion, his future. I tell him you have to think another way. When it comes to that fast life, everybody's not going to be your friend. The older and wiser you get, your circle is going to get smaller and smaller. If you're doing right and they're not doing right, you gotta leave them alone. I got friends that still want to run the streets, but that's not me. I work two jobs. Some of them be like, how you get this, how you get that? The same way you could have gotten it. Go to school. I encourage DH to make plans and goals for when he comes home. He has time to do, but he can still make the best of it. Take advantage of the programs they offer the inmates. I tell him the ball is in his hands because he's a grown man now.

Alison: What are you most proud of DH for? What are your hopes for his future?

ET: DH is very intelligent and I'll always be in his corner. He got his GED in there, and he plays a little basketball. I played sports myself; football, basketball and boxing, so I like to think he takes after me with the sports thing. He'll still be young when he comes home, and even though he missed out on a lot, I hope he can learn and do well while he's doing his time, so it's not time wasted. If he does that, I know he can use the skills he gains while incarcerated to make a life for himself when he comes home, whether it's fixing things or computers or driving or counseling youth.

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

ASK HF: ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Dear HF,

When I was coming up, I had a negative mindset. I was doing bad things and that's what everyone expected of me. Now that I'm older, I can see the positive in myself. I'm realizing I don't have to puff out my chest and look hard. I can just be myself. Some days though, I can feel that old negativity coming back in me again. I don't want to go back to the way I used to be. How can I build upon the progress I've made getting to know myself and deal with the old impulses when I feel them?

Sincerely,
MA

Dear MA,

Most of us were prisoners before we came to jail. We were incarcerated by the chains of what others expected of us while we imprisoned our real selves. As we grow older, we realize that it's easier to be our real selves instead of being what everyone expects us to be. In order to build upon the progress that you've made in being your real self, you have to constantly remind yourself of who you really are and what you want to become. You have to begin to dictate to others who you are and refuse to revert back to the acting that you were doing to please others. Surround yourself with people that are comfortable with the real you, and avoid those that are not on the same path as you. It takes courage and strength, but your commitment to being the real you overrides everything. Be Free To Be You!

Sincerely,
HF

THE LEGAL PAD

by Chris, FM Friend and DC Attorney



Did you receive your sentence under the Youth Rehabilitation Act? Do you fully understand what that means and how it works? If not, have no fear! Free Minds friend Chris, an attorney in DC, breaks it down for us.

What is the Youth Act? The Youth Rehabilitation Act—the Youth Act—is a sentencing law that allows D.C. Superior Court judges to give certain benefits to young people who have been convicted of crimes.

What are the benefits of the Youth Act? The Youth Act has two main benefits. First, the Youth Act allows judges to “suspend the imposition or execution of sentence and place the youth offender on probation.” If you get a Youth Act sentence, the judge can almost always sentence you to probation, even if you've been convicted of a crime that carries a mandatory minimum sentence (this is not true for

(Continued on page 8)



BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Thank God

By DJ

Assalamu Alaikum
Inshallah we live to see many more years
Sometimes we live life so fast
That we forget to take time out to worship our lord or
acknowledge him
That we fall off our deen and find ourselves locked back up
Why? Because Allah brings us back to the place where we
remember him the most
So if you were deening in prison and forgot about him
in the streets,
You'll eventually find yourself back in
Because he wants you to thank him and repent to him
Because we won't do it in the streets.
Continue to keep Allah first and always remember your lord
And he'll never forget you



Gotta Stop

By QS

My life has been laced with disappointment
Adversity, I know oh so well
And because of my lack of belief, trust, and faith
In you, dear Lord, in my past
Behind a thirty foot "wall"
Is where I now dwell
With myself I've become annoyed, for what I bear
I'm to blame
And as I acknowledge this fact
I'm utterly consumed with shame
On me many have lost hope
And I suppose this they have a right to do
They're tired of giving me the benefit of the doubt
To accept my excuses, they're finally through
Yet dear Lord you continue to be patient with me
Your mercy I can't explain
And it's time I stop taking your blessings for granted
Or to my dismay, it will have all been in vain
I realize now how blind I've been, making the
same mistakes
In the back of my mind thinking it was cool
I vow with a humble heart to stop insulting your grace
Dear Lord
And acting like a damn fool

A True Friend

By KB

Friends, how can we trust, share and care for one another
If we don't have love or even faith in each other?
If we don't trust one another
How can we call each other right hand mans and brothers?
If we don't love one another
How can we help a loved one or friend
When we don't care about them?
How can we give to each other
When we don't like to share?
But yet we say we still trust, love and care
We are on this earth to trust in, care for and give God
our praise
But instead we give our time to TV, sports, music or the
latest social craze
Nothing on earth can replace God's love
Try if you want
In the end, I'm sure you'll come to the same conclusion as
Solomon and say,
"Only in God, do I put my trust in"

Until I Came to Prison

By DK

Until I came to Prison
I grew up in Churches
But the Word of God never set in
Until I came to prison
I got caught up, made the wrong choices
Lied and stole
I didn't know the real me
Until I hit these bars and concrete
I thought I could do it without God
I thought I could it with my so-called friends
I didn't realize all the lies and stories people would tell
Until I came to prison
I've struggled and hustled for what I needed
All the people who said they would
Be they isn't nowhere to be found
A good friend one day told me to sit down
And read the Bible.
I rolled my eyes, but I did it
I started to read about forgiveness
Everybody who I hadn't forgiven, I did
At that very moment
Now I realize God is with me all the time
Until I came to prison
I didn't know God, but now I do
I don't want to live my life without him



PAYING IT FORWARD

BUILDING WITH BEANS

By Kelli

You know H Street NE and Benning Road, right? This area was nearly destroyed by riots in 1968 after Martin Luther King's assassination. In an area already suffering from high poverty and unemployment, fires and looting left businesses closed and the economy devastated for decades. In the last several years though, the area has undergone an enormous transformation. Gentrification has led to higher end restaurants and clubs popping up along with rentals and condos with prices beginning in the \$300,000's. While it looks and feels shiny and new, the problem for many long-time residents is that they can no longer afford their own neighborhood!

Zach Linsey, a 26 year-old lawyer who moved to the DC neighborhood two years ago from Florida, has an idea to address this problem. Shiny and new is only good if everyone can enjoy it. What if every new business in the neighborhood was not only motivated to make a huge profit, but also provided jobs to lift up the area's most marginalized residents? This is exactly what Linsey intends to do with his new nonprofit organization, Building with Beans, a coffee roastery and tasting bar that will be dedicated to producing high quality coffee while providing job training and employment for the people in the neighborhood. The coffee will be priced low enough that everyone in the neighborhood can afford to enjoy it.

Building with Beans is already producing coffee. They are currently looking for investors and a location in the area. Once the facility is ready, they will train as many people as possible, focusing on returning citizens, "at-risk youth," homeless individuals, and people with disabilities. These Building with Beans "fellows" will earn a wage as they learn the inner-workings of a coffee company, from roasting to distribution to the art of making a latte. Then Linsey and his team will help them find full-time employment.

Building with Beans is what's called a *social enterprise*—a company based on the idea of multiple bottom lines. So while most traditional businesses focus only on the financial bottom line, or the money and profits they bring in, a social enterprise business measures its success by the positive impact it has on the planet and on people in the community.

Now, that's what we call *Paying it Forward*!



Buddhism

By Huong, FM Friend

I am from Vietnam. My family practices Buddhism, a religion that follows the teachings of Buddha. Buddha was an enlightened thinker sometime between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C. He shared his wisdom to help people end their suffering by understanding the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are that we crave impermanent states and things, which causes suffering. Buddhists believe in samsara, the endless cycle of rebirth, suffering, and redeath. We can escape this cycle by restraining oneself, cultivating discipline, and practicing mindfulness and meditation to achieve nirvana and stop the cycle of samsara.

The country of Vietnam is half Catholic and half Buddhist. Our two big holidays are Phat Dang, in which we honor the Buddha's birthday, and Nhu Lan, in which we celebrate our parents. Because Buddhists believe in rejecting unnecessary cravings, part of our practice is fasting. We eat a vegetarian or vegan diet, either for one day at the beginning and end of the month, or for two weeks in the middle (people can choose). My parents practice a form of Buddhism where they built shrines to our ancestors in our home. Some people worship privately at these shrines, but my family also goes to the temple. After going to the temple, we always eat together to celebrate and bond as a community.



Huong's shrine to her family in her home

I was born in Saigon, the capital of Vietnam, and moved to the jungle where my family became farmers. We raised chickens and ducks and grew vegetables. I met my husband online. He had immigrated to the United States in 1975 when South Vietnam lost the war to North Vietnam. We got married in Vietnam and moved to the US in 2013 with our son. I still practice Buddhism the way my parents raised me even though I live in a different country now. The meditative practice gives me great comfort and calm when times in life are difficult.



THE LEGAL PAD

(Continued from page 5)

carjacking or armed carjacking). Second, if you are sentenced under the Youth Act, you are potentially eligible for a Youth Act “set aside” at the end of your term of probation or supervised release (more on this in a second).

Who is eligible for the Youth Act? The Youth Act only applies to people who are younger than 22. Also, the Youth Act does not apply to all crimes. If you are convicted of first-degree murder or if you’re convicted of second-degree murder that “constitutes an act of terrorism”—which you’re probably not because it is really rare!—then the Youth Act does not apply. It also does not apply to people convicted more than once of crimes that count as “violent” or “dangerous.” Finally, even if you’re under 22 and were convicted of an offense that makes you eligible for a Youth Act sentence, whether you get sentenced under the Youth Act is up to the judge. Judges only use the Youth Act when they think the person will “derive benefit” from it.

What is a Youth Act “set aside?” It means that a judge has set aside your conviction after you finish serving your full sentence, including any terms of probation or supervised release. For purposes of future employment, you no longer have a conviction and can tell employers that you do not have a conviction. Basically, it’s pretty similar to an expungement but not quite as good because law enforcement and officials still have access to the information and can use it for “legitimate purposes.” These purposes are limited to circumstances in which you’ve been charged with a new crime, are testifying in court, or need to register on a sex offender or gun offender registry.

Is my conviction set aside automatically? Maybe, maybe not. If you are “unconditionally discharged” from parole or probation before your sentence was set to expire, your conviction should be automatically set aside. In any case where your conviction is set aside, you should receive a certificate that says as much. If you do not receive a certificate, it is important to check with your lawyer to make sure that your conviction was actually set aside. Mistakes can happen! If you finish your full sentence without early termination, you need to file a motion with the court to get your conviction set aside.

If I get a Youth Act sentence, am I guaranteed to have my sentence set aside? No. It is important to successfully complete probation or parole to make sure that you receive your set aside. Judges will withhold set asides when they think you have not done a good enough job under supervision. That doesn’t mean that a judge will withhold the set aside for a small violation, or won’t be flexible, but they definitely monitor your performance on supervision and take it into account.

QUOTE-I-VATOR



“Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

“If I have the belief that I can do it I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.” – Mahatma Ghandi

“Don’t speak to me about your religion; first show it to me in how you treat other people. Don’t tell me how much you love your God; show me in how much you love all His children. Don’t preach to me your passion for your faith; teach me through your compassion for your neighbors. In the end, I’m not as interested in what you have to tell or sell or preach or teach, as I am in how you choose to live and give.” – Senator Cory Booker (His staff has commented on some of your poems at Write Night!)

DC Photo of the Month:



Are there any Ballou Knights out there? **Frank W. Ballou Senior High School**, located in Southeast DC’s Ward 8, reopened

in a shiny new 365,000 square foot facility in December 2014. The new Ballou facility, which enrolls 678 students, now includes an on-site auto repair shop, TV production and a music recording studios, a digital photography lab, a cosmetology lab and hair salon, a teaching kitchen, fitness center, swimming pool, community center, and a health care suite. Do you even recognize it?

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!



IN THE NEWS

By John, FM Friend

NATIONAL

Both political parties will soon hold their conventions where they announce their candidates for President of the United States.

The Democrats will very likely nominate Hillary Clinton, who if elected will become the first woman elected to the nation's highest office.

Clinton was the First Lady, she has served as a Senator for New York, and she was Obama's Secretary of State. If she is the candidate – Bernie Sanders has not yet left the race, and has the tiniest sliver of a chance – she will be among the most qualified people to seek the presidency. But she will also have some career baggage to address. Clinton has admitted to improper use of private email accounts to communicate classified information. She has also been questioned at length by a Congressional committee over what happened at the U.S. Embassy in Libya, where militants killed a U.S. ambassador in 2012. Neither of those incidents are likely to land her in any real trouble, but you can be sure both will come up often during the presidential campaign.

Meanwhile, the Republican Party will nominate Donald Trump, a billionaire who, until this year, had donated money as much to Democrats as he had to Republicans.

Trump's campaign was built on several plans. First, he proposes to renegotiate our trade deals to improve America's economic standing and to create more jobs in the country. Second, he promises to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, and said that he'd get Mexico to pay for it. Third, Trump called for banning all Muslims from entering the United States for an undetermined length of time as we continue to fight the fundamentalist regime known as the Islamic State. However, he has done very little to explain how he would do any of those things. His rivals for the Republican job never succeeded in forcing the media to question his plans; we'll see how he does now on the biggest stage of all. Despite his convincing win in Republican primaries, he'll start his campaign as one of the most unpopular candidates of all time.

Last news update, we mentioned that President Obama had called for an end to the use of solitary on juveniles, announcing that he had banned the practice in federal facilities. Now, a national campaign has been launched to build on that momentum. The Stop Solitary for Kids campaign will seek to work with local juvenile justice and adult systems to eliminate the practice of putting juveniles in solitary confinement. The long-term goal of Stop Solitary for Kids is to make the use of solitary confinement rare enough that lawyers can argue it should be unconstitutional.

PHILADELPHIA
2016
★ LET'S MAKE HISTORY AGAIN. ★
RNC★2016
CLEVELAND

MUSIC

Some sad news of late in the world of music, as America lost one of its greatest artists and one of its groundbreaking rappers.

Prince Rogers Nelson, better known to the world as Prince, died at his home in Minnesota in April at the age of 57. He was without question one of the greatest guitarists in the history of rock and R&B, and his legacy as a great American songwriter is unquestionable. Among his most famous songs: Purple Rain, Let's Go Crazy, 1999, When Doves Cry, and Little Red Corvette.



A month earlier, the world lost Phife Dawg, one half of the rhyming duo that made up A Tribe Called Quest. Tribe was one of the groundbreaking rap groups from the late 1980s and early 1990s that transformed the hip-hop genre with sophisticated beats and complex rhyme patterns.

On a brighter note, Q-Tip – Phife's partner in A Tribe Called Quest – has been named the first artistic director of hip-hop culture for the Kennedy Center.

SPORTS

Redskins: The Skins used their first round draft pick to grab what they hope is their future franchise wide receiver, Josh Doctson. It was a surprise to many that they used that pick on offense and not defense, but the team could lose both Pierre Garcon and DeSean Jackson next season to free agency.

The burgundy and gold have signed defensive back Josh Norman, a member of last year's NFL All-Pro team. Norman was a cornerstone of the defense that helped bring the Carolina Panthers to the Super Bowl.

Wizards: Rough year. Bradley Beal had another season full of injuries, and the roster around John Wall was not strong enough to earn them a spot in the playoffs. The bottom line for the Wizards is this: They have tried to pave the way for the team to sign Kevin Durant if he wants to come home and play where he grew up. But it's not looking good for that to happen at the moment, and the Wizards badly need to work out a Plan B if Durant picks any of the dozen other teams that want his help.

Capitals: The Caps needed to win two straight to advance into the Eastern Conference finals. They were down 3-2 in the series to their hated rival to the north, the Pittsburgh Penguins, and lost in OT in Game 6. Regardless of the outcome of the season, the future is bright for hockey in D.C., with TJ Oshie and Evgeny Kuznetsov stepping up to support Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom this season.

Nationals: Up and down in the early going. The bright spots have been great early play by pitcher Stephen Strasburg, new acquisition Daniel Murphy, and some monster games from Bryce Harper.

The Nats swept a series with the St. Louis Cardinals and followed up with a win in the series against last year's World Series champs, the Kansas City Royals. They then lost four straight to the Chicago Cubs, who look like one of the toughest teams in recent history. It's still early though!



REAL WORLD OF WORK

Free Minds Friend Michael grew up in Southeast Washington DC. In 1993, at the age of 20, he was charged and convicted of carjacking, and began serving a sentence in Maryland. Since that time, through hard work and perseverance, Michael has overcome the barriers involved with having a felony record, and now works full time at Amtrak, the high-speed train company. Alison talked to him to get the scoop on what his job is really like.

Alison: What do you do for Amtrak?

Michael: I do track maintenance. It is an entry level job, but I just got my 90 days in, so now I am part of the union and can bid on some of the opportunities that they have to obtain additional training and promotions.

Alison: What is a typical day at your job like?

Michael: I go in to work at 8PM and work 10 hour shifts, 4 days a week. It is hard work, but I like it. If there is a problem with the railroad tracks or ties, we replace and repair them in order to make sure the tracks are safe so the trains can run how they're supposed to.

Alison: What is the hardest part of your job?

Michael: Sometimes we use machines, but there are some parts of the job where it is really hard labor, like when we have to move the ballast in order to work on the railroad tracks and ties. The ballast is what we call the rocks you see under the railroad track. We need to move them in order to see what we need to fix with the tracks.

Alison: What is the best part?

Michael: I like working. It's hard, but it's a good job. We have a union, and they are always announcing opportunities to get a new certification or new skills to move up past the entry level. You have to bid on the opportunities. Sometimes you get it, sometimes you don't. I also like that I get to work at night and work 4 days out of the week, so I can keep doing my landscaping business during the day and on my days off.

Alison: What traits would someone have to have to be good at your job?

Michael: The biggest thing is just showing up. You have to always come in ready to work, and you have to be on time. They're looking for guys who are not afraid of hard work and who can be consistent and show up on time.

Alison: What certifications or training do you need for your job?

Michael: A high school diploma or GED for the entry level jobs like mine. When you have opportunities to move up, those require some certifications and training, but Amtrak provides those training opportunities.

Alison: Do you have any advice for people coming home that want to work but struggle to get a call back or an interview?

Michael: You have to keep trying, never give up. It won't be easy, but if you really want it and you are willing to put in the work, opportunities will come if you keep trying.



REENTRY PROFILE

The column 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.

By James, FM Member

Coming home from prison this time has been a lot different from others. Past times I was so eager to catch up that I would completely forget all my goals and my rational thinking would go right out the window. Although I grew up in West Virginia I made the choice to move to D.C. Desperate times call for desperate measures!

Since being home I've experienced the same setbacks and letdowns as times before. My new attitude kicked in and I tried to remind myself what was important. Now, though I wanted to jump right in to work, things were moving slow on the application side and callbacks were a thing of the past. When I was afforded the opportunity to meet with Seana at Free Minds I didn't think much of it. What could a book club and writing workshop possibly do for me?

After the first day of the Apprenticeship I knew I had been selected for something special! The way they let you know that helping you was truly what they were there for was amazing! They taught us valuable life skills and helped us to understand that even in your personal time you still represent your company. Our time focused on interview prep and how to conduct yourself while searching for a job and selling yourself in your resume was invaluable. Most of the things being taught were like a foreign language! But the way they explained and had us work at it helped to create confidence instead of uncertainty and worry.

After the apprenticeship I no longer dread an interview or fear speaking in front of others. I'm eager to do these things now! Bring on the next challenge because what Free Minds gave me was confidence in myself.

More information on our Apprenticeship Program is on the next page.



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

REENTRY SPOTLIGHT

By Keela

Hey, Hey Hey Guys!

I wanted to give you some exciting information about our Job Readiness & Personal Skill Building Apprenticeship! So far, we have graduated 56 apprentices since we started last February and guess what, WE WANT YOU!!

As you know, during the apprenticeship, we focus on job readiness and job sustainability through engaging hands-on sessions that include activities like team building exercises at KAAOS Gym and mock job interview scenarios at the beautiful state of the art offices of the Advisory Board Company, and that's not it.

It wouldn't be a Free Minds apprenticeship if we didn't include successful returning citizens who currently own their own businesses, come and facilitate some of the apprenticeship sessions, and show you how you can join the ranks of returning citizens everywhere that have decided to take the entrepreneurship path. You'll also get real on-the-job experience working at a local business run by returning citizens!

The apprenticeship is run every other month; we are sticklers for punctuality and attendance because we are preparing you for the real world of work, and these days, competition is fierce.

So if you're interested in this PAID opportunity, we need to hear from you! The next one is in August and seats are filling up fast. If you happen to be coming home before August, please reach out to us as soon as possible for your chance to be a part of the August class.

Following the August apprenticeship, we will hold one more apprenticeship class for this year in October so please write/call/email us for your spot! Hope to hear from you soon!

AROUND THE WORLD...

For this Belief issue we are sharing a little bit about faith systems around the world.

Faith and Belief Systems

Did you know that there are over 40 organized religions and faith groups of the world? Here are some fun facts about them!

TOP 5 LARGEST RELIGIONS IN THE WORLD

1. Christianity: 2200 million followers
2. Islam: 1600 million followers
3. Hinduism: 1100 million followers
4. Chinese folk religion: 754 million followers
5. Buddhism: 535 million followers

ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are Abrahamic Religions, which are named for the patriarch Abraham. These religions are unified by practice of monotheism (belief in one God.)

ISLAM

Muslims believe there is only One God, Allah. Jesus, Moses, and Abraham are respected as prophets of God, but the final Prophet was Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him.) The holy book is called the Qur'an, and the five basic Pillars of Islam are the declaration of faith, praying five times a day, giving money to charity, fasting, and a pilgrimage to Mecca.

WHAT'S THE MAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUNNI & SHI'ITE ISLAM?

Sunnis, around 70-75% of the entire Muslim world, believe Abu Bakr, the father of Muhammad's wife Aisha, was Muhammad's rightful successor. Shi'ite Muslims, who make up 25-30% of the Muslim world, believe Muhammad divinely ordained his cousin and son-in-law Ali Ibn Abi Talib.



Sultan Ahmed Mosque, Istanbul, Turkey

(Continued on page 13)



ASK A MUSLIM



On November 13, the city of Paris, France experienced a series of coordinated terrorist attacks, killing 130 civilians and wounding another 368 people. As a three-month state of emergency was declared over the country, a sense of fear and darkness spread across the world. For Mona and her husband, Sebastian, the fear was paralyzing. As Islamophobia continued to grow, this Muslim couple no longer felt safe going about life in their small town in Massachusetts – until they decided to counter hate, fear, and violence with love, kindness, and understanding.

A few weeks later, Sebastian and Mona picked up boxes of donuts and cartons of coffee from a Dunkin' Donuts and parked themselves outside of a Cambridge, Massachusetts library. They set up signs with words like "Ask a Muslim," "Free Conversation," "Take a Flower," and "Free Coffee and Donuts." Armed with warm smiles and open hearts, Mona and Sebastian invited strangers walking by to take a donut and have a conversation. As the day went on, conversations about the Red Sox, the weather, parenting techniques blossomed. For those who stuck around, the conversations grew to include

topics like what it feels like to be a Muslim in America today. As Mona writes, "We wanted to replace the trauma and terror with love by way of doughnuts, coffee, flowers and good conversations."

Here, Sebastian shares more about their story:

In the first five minutes, we had two interactions which made the whole effort worth it. First, a student walked up to us, having just gotten out of classes for the day at Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, adjacent to the library, the same school the Boston Marathon bombers had attended. He wore a backpack and held his phone nervously. He didn't want a donut or a cup of coffee. He stood there for a moment, approached us and said, "I just wanted to say I'm Muslim, and I think what you're doing is really cool."

Next, a woman walked up. She, too, stayed back, as if she was composing herself. She approached us tentatively and was choked up with emotion, stuttering between tears and jubilation. "I just want to say thank you," she said. "Thank you for doing this. I'm so sorry for what's happening right now. I don't know what to do. This is so great... Thank you." And in that moment, I realized a few things. First, we were going to stay out here until it got too dark or cold to stand it any longer. And second, I knew then we weren't doing this to convince anyone that Muslims are good people, that 'Islam' is really about 'Peace', that we unequivocally condemn acts of terror, that we're more terrified of ISIS than anyone else. We weren't trying to "convert" the intolerant. Instead, we were there to give a small morsel of hope to people who were also trying to come out of a dark place, who were also affected by world events, who, like us, were feeling depressed and hungry for some sense of sanity. We were doing it because sadness creates a need to mourn and connect, but our collective fear had kept us indoors and silent, heads down, surviving instead of grieving and sharing.

We went back the next day, and again two weeks later. Almost everyone who approached us was positive, sweet, curious. I thought the magic would be gone when we were filmed by Al Jazeera and "AJ+," figuring the cameras would scare people away, or bring out the real crazies. On that day, though, we started getting our first real questions about Islam, our faith, our marriage. People asked us earnestly what they could do to combat Islamophobia, what they should know about Muslims, and what were the most common misconceptions about Islam.

We pray for the day when no person or group needs to set up these kinds of booths, when "outing" yourself in this way is not newsworthy, when curiosity and conversation among strangers are commonplace. Until then, may we inspire and encourage each other to share in this adventure of being human. May we not be afraid to offer a stranger a free cup of coffee, and may we not be afraid to take one. And may we have the courage to look up, to shake off the wintery fears, and find light in every dark corner.

Since that first morning in December, the couple has set up their stand close to a dozen of times, and have met between 200 and 500 people. Some were quick hellos, while other conversations were much more in depth. Overall, Mona said that these encounters have been healing and healthy for her and her husband. "We always walk away feeling seen, heard by and connected to the people who stop to talk," she wrote.



AROUND THE WORLD...

(Continued from page 11)

TAOISM is an ancient tradition of philosophy that originated in China 2000 years ago. It is a religion of unity and opposites; Yin and Yang. Taoism includes many deities (gods) that are worshipped in Taoist temples.

HINDUISM

80% of Indians are Hindu. Hindus believe in a Supreme God, whose qualities and forms are represented by many deities (gods) that come from Him. They also believe that existence is a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, governed by Karma.

BUDDHISM

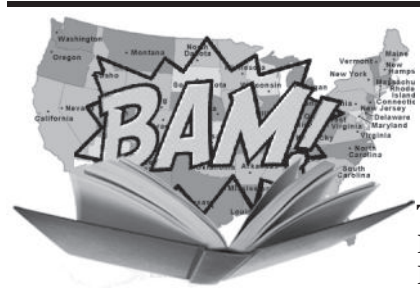
Buddhists do not believe in a personal God – instead, they focus on the path of Enlightenment, which is found in the practice and development of morality, meditation, and wisdom. The ultimate state of enlightenment is called Nirvana.

BAHA'I

Founded by Bahá'u'lláh in Iran in 1863, followers of the Baha'i faith accept all religions as having true and valid origins. The main tenets of this belief system are unity, and working together for the common good.

There are so many incredible religions, belief systems, and faiths around the world that it was impossible to include all of them here. Interested in learning more about another belief system not mentioned, or have more questions about the ones listed here? Write to us!

FUN FACT: Can you guess which belief systems represented by each of the symbols on the cover page? Answers on the last page!



BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

Free Minds long-distance book club
By Julia

The reviews are in for *March: Book One* by Congressman John Lewis, the graphic novel about his experiences during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. We got so many responses to this book that we can't print them all, so without further ado...

"With all the racial injustices taking place, *March* was a pleasant reminder of times better left in the past. The story line was very well written and emotionally charged. I could really feel the emotions of the characters during their "sit-ins." The artistry throughout the book was very well done. Each character displayed wonderful expressions in tune with the text. Excellent! I truly enjoyed the book and have shared it with several others who have enjoyed it as well. I can't wait to read the next book!" – KM

"You opened up my eyes to what African Americans went through back in the day. I don't study up on history, well I didn't use to, but now I think I will. See as a white man, I wasn't really interested in what happened to African Americans back in the day. I wasn't racist, in fact, I have more African American friends than white, but for some reason I was never really ever interested in what African Americans had to go through. This book opened up my eyes, I now want to learn more. I couldn't believe one book could have me to open up this way." – DK

"I believe that we need more leaders like John Lewis, so our youth can aspire to be more than what's expected of them. We need more teachers coming out of our communities. We need more doctors, politicians, engineers, lawyers, judges...and of course CONGRESSMEN!" – G.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you think John Lewis felt preparing for Obama's inauguration given all that he had seen and experienced?

"I think John Lewis felt "complete." John Lewis had no idea what the future held for him, if he were to survive his experience that is. Moving forward, John Lewis was able to see Obama's inauguration.

"Bringing himself to completeness in his mission to have equality." – BH

2. Why did nonviolence work for John Lewis and Martin Luther King, Jr. to bring about social change?

"Nonviolence worked for John Lewis and Dr. King, because two wrongs don't make a right. If their mission was to bring peace and love for one another, then their reaction was going to have to be nonviolence. I believe action was the

(Continued on page 14)





BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

(Continued from page 13)

best method. The sit ins and marching was the only way to social change...I feel that nonviolence is a silent force capable for putting the devil at peace with you. I hope that March reaches miles across this country and touches the coldest hearts out there.” – BH

3. *What do you think of the notion of “loving one’s attacker?”*

“I believe that this is the most powerful thing a human can do. It is very hard sometimes but just as rewarding.” – DF

“That notion to me means not to repay evil with evil. I could see good in those who bring harm to me. I sense that there is a need that I can help them with. A lot of people lack communication skills so the only way to act out in violence sometimes.” – BH

“When I stop to consider others and their well-being I find myself because in reality we are one. We all live life together. Let’s enjoy living life together. Not meaning just you and I. Yes, you and I but also humanity as a whole. This is what I’m thinking about and feeling right after reading March. Thank you. I enjoyed myself for the first time reading history. This is a truly amazing story about being committed to the betterment of a nation beyond one’s own self.” – BG

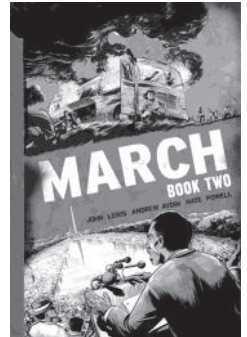
4. *Is there a modern day issue for which you would be willing to take a stand or march?*

“A modern day issue I would take a stand on or march for is gun violence. Reading *March* has shown me what unity can do, and also how far us African Americans lost touch with each other. John Lewis’ nonviolent techniques would be a great example to stop gun violence. If I came unarmed to resolve a conflict, the next person would be less tempted to bring a weapon.” – BH

NEXT “BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES” BOOK: *MARCH: BOOK TWO*

We will continue the discussion with the second book in the March series, *March: Book Two*! Remember that you can write in with answers to these discussion questions—we want to hear from you! If you haven’t been receiving books and you want to, please let us know so we can add you to the list!

1. How did music play a role in the Civil Rights Movement? Why did the Freedom Riders sing in Parchman Prison (see page 106)?
2. John Lewis had an important decision to make before he gave a speech at the March on Washington. What advice would you have given him? (pages 154-157, 162-165)
3. How is racism different or the same in different places? Has racism changed over time?
4. How is the Black Lives Matter movement today similar and different from the Civil Rights movement? What about the fight for immigration rights?



NEXT ISSUE’S THEME: *Me and My Sisters*

Mothers, grandmothers, aunts, daughters, sisters, friends, girlfriends, teachers — who are the women in your life that are important to you? What do you respect or admire about them? How do you think men and women are different, and how are they the same? Next issue, we’re breaking down the barriers between men and women.

Until then, stay strong and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!

Answer to Fun Fact on previous page:



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