

Free Minds Connect



THIS MONTH'S THEME: PRIDE

You've probably heard the phrase, "proud as a peacock," right? Well, did you ever wonder where that saying comes from? When a male peacock wants to find a mate, he spreads his colorful tail feathers and struts around in hopes that the female of his choice will see how beautiful he looks and want to be his "lady friend!" Because they do that, peacocks have become a symbol of vanity and excessive pride. This issue of The Connect looks at both sides of pride--the good and the bad. That's why this peacock isn't just looking in the mirror or strutting around relying on his good looks. The Free Minds peacock is writing a poem (and after that, he's going to read a book and soak up some knowledge!) This issue is full of submissions on pride by you, your Free Minds brothers, and the whole FM family. So sit back, relax and enjoy. Then pick up a pen and paper and send us your feedback!

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Free Minds Editor, Kelli*

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Emmy and authors
9 books...all from
behind bars! (page 5)**

Is brought to you by...

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*We are ALWAYS
looking for new
contributors. Write
or draw something
for our next issue
and send it to us!*

Free Minds

Book Club

2201 P Street NW
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**Next Issue's
Theme:
Learning**

Bonjour Esprit Libre famille!

That's "Greetings Free Minds family" in French. Why French, you ask? Well, because I am writing to you from Geneva, Switzerland where French is the official language. Right now I am looking out a window at the famous snow-covered Swiss Alps mountains. Ils sont superbes (they are beautiful!) I am attending the first ever "World Congress of Juvenile Justice", a meeting of over 800 people from almost every country in the world gathered for a common purpose; to find ways to make the juvenile justice system better. I've heard about innovative restorative justice programs that really work in places with severe violence like Brazil's favelas (slums) as well as places like New Zealand with few guns and a low crime rate. I've heard about a Bangladeshi judge who changed laws so that youth go to community programs instead of detention. And a specially trained youth police force in London that offer services for the whole family instead of arresting a youth when he/she is involved in an incident. While conditions in each country may be very different (level of poverty, gang influences, easy access to drugs) I am struck with how similar we all are. The young people, government leaders, judges, defense lawyers and community groups all talk about the exact same issues and challenges. It shows me that if we share ideas that really work we can provide safety and opportunity for youth all over the world. There is power in the collective!

Which brings me to this issue's theme of PRIDE. Imagine me sharing with everyone I meet all about each one of you (just shared a cup of tea with a judge from South Africa!) and hear my voice bursting with pride describing how you free your minds with books, writing and dreams of a better future. When people hear about you they want to learn how they can start a book club in their country. Free Minds might really go global one day.

Another common theme here is the other meaning of pride—and that is not asking for help and believing that one must handle things on your own. For example youth having "too much pride" to tell adults they are being abused at home or are suffering from depression or being forced to join a gang. Instead, they cope with it on their own which leads to poor choices, and ultimately entering the juvenile justice system. I've seen this firsthand with Free Minds members who've been incarcerated since they are 16 and come home at 24 years old. They think because of their age they should have their own place, car and nice things. One member felt ashamed to still live with his mother when he was, as he said "a grown man" and should be able to provide for himself. When he didn't find a job quickly he turned back to selling drugs instead of taking the help his mom offered. Now he's back in prison. If only he had been able to see that it didn't make him weak, but if he took her help until he could get a job, then he would really be able to provide for her and his family. Sometimes what seems like the "weak" way is really the strongest way. So I urge you all to embrace POSITIVE PRIDE—and focus on all the many accomplishments you have made like getting your GED, reading books, writing, encouraging your brothers and sisters to keep out of the streets and the proudest of all—changing your life and believing in yourself.

I have to run now as they are having a workshop on ways we can persuade prosecutors and judges to try these alternative community programs. It's the most important one and I don't want to miss it! Until next time know that you are always on my mind and in my heart.

Esprit Libre à jamais (Free Minds Forever!)

Tara

May the long time sun shine upon you

All love surround you

And the pure light within guide you on

FREE MINDS HQ



The end of one year and beginning of the next is always a chaotic and happy time around 2201 P Street. We love to celebrate successes in the Free Minds family over the past 12 months, and ring in the new year with high hopes for continued growth for all of us. Here are some highlights from the past two months:

FM Holiday Bash - On Saturday, December 20, about 45 people gathered at Red Rocks on H Street NE for the Free Minds Holiday Bash. Everyone enjoyed pizza and wings. The kids (along with Seana's firefighter husband Marcus—a big kid himself) crowded around a table to frost, decorate, and eat cookies. And you know it's not a Free Minds party without games, right? This year we had a Free Minds trivia contest, including one question that stumped everyone: "What was the first book that Free Minds Book Club ever read?" (The answer: Dark, by Kenji Jasper!) As FM Member Phil said: "The party was very welcoming and a nice venue to get the holidays started!"

Happy New Year Free Minds! - Remember how teacher Erin Gruwell and her students held a Toast For Change in the book and movie Freedom Writers Diary? Well, we held our own Free Minds Toast For Change 2015 in mid-January. Everyone held glasses with sparkling cider up in the air and shouted promises to ourselves and each other to change our lives for the better this year. Some of the toasts included: Be a better role model for the kids in the neighborhood/Finish high school/Find more joy in life/Get the tattoo on my face removed/Pass the GED test/Get a better-paying job/Be a better listener! So what change are you toasting to this year?



First Ever Interactive FM Bulletin Board - You've all heard about Free Minds' monthly "Write Night" events, where members from the community gather to read and respond to Free Minds poetry?

In January, several FM mem-

bers who are home read your work aloud to more than 30 staff members of the US Department of Education! Not only that, we were invited to display an interactive bulletin board in the building's lobby where people can read and respond to your poems! Check out the crowd that gathered to read them on the first day...Even Obama's man, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan came down to see it!

Be A Free Minds Apprentice When You Come Home! Thanks to generous individuals who donated their own money. Because they believe in you, we are able to expand our Apprenticeship program from one week to one month. This is a chance to receive invaluable job readiness and life skills. Apprentices work with staff as well as fellow Free Minds members, connecting them to a network of positive support. As an apprentice, you will work in the office assisting with Book Club lesson plans, writing for the Free Minds Connect and providing other program support. It also provides you with a great experience and references to put on your resume. If you are interested, write to let us know when you are coming home to reserve your spot!

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

By Kelli

To be honest, when "pride" was first suggested as the next Connect theme, I thought only of the word's positive meaning -- all of things we do that are in line with the kind of people we want to be--the things that make us proud! Recently though, I had an experience with one of your Free Minds brothers that reminded me there are two sides to pride.

TJ* spent 9 years behind bars. As soon as he was released, he did nearly everything right. He hit the ground running, filling out applications and going to job interviews all over DC. Even when he was turned down for checking the "felony" box, TJ didn't give up. It paid off. He got a full-time labor job working long hard hours to support his child and his family. I remember meeting up with TJ one August afternoon as he got off work. He was dog-tired, sweaty and exhausted. But do you know this guy had the biggest smile on his face? He was so proud to be working (the good pride!)

Fast forward about a year or so. In addition to working, TJ was now doing advocacy with Free Minds, going into the community to share his story so that younger kids might learn from his mistakes. Wait, did I tell you that TJ is also a crazy talented writer? When he reads his poems, he nearly always brings the public to their feet! Unbeknownst to us, TJ was struggling with drugs. He had started smoking K2 daily as a way to deal with the stress caused by his family. At one point, he quit cold turkey just to prove to himself that he wasn't an addict. Both of TJ's parents had abused drugs throughout his childhood and he didn't want to be like them. His girlfriend helped him through the withdrawal, hiding him in her basement for 24 hours (turns out, withdrawal from K2 can be really ugly!). His sobriety didn't last long though. He started using again. This time, it didn't take long before he lost his job. His girlfriend's family no longer allowed him to come around. But TJ didn't tell anyone at Free Minds. His pride (the bad kind) wouldn't let him ask for help.

A month ago, I became worried when TJ stopped returning my calls. He always loved to talk and tell me the latest about his job, or the kids he had met in the high schools who looked up to him. Now he was ducking me. Then one day, he came to the office, high and not making much sense. TJ always looks fresh in clean pressed clothes and a new haircut. On this day, his clothes were dirty and torn. We certainly couldn't take him into the schools like this. We told TJ to go home.

Have you ever heard of a drug intervention? Free Minds kicked into high gear and along with a few of his close friends, organized an intervention for TJ. He is just way too special and gifted for any of us to allow K2, or anything else destructive, to claim him.

Eight of us met at TJ's friend's house. None of us had ever participated in an intervention before. I was as nervous as everyone else! His girlfriend figured out a way to get TJ there. When he walked into the house and looked at all of us, he was shocked.

"I feel like I've been set up!" he said, backing toward the door. He was clearly angry. Luckily, one of his quick thinking friends wrapped him up in a big bear hug, calming TJ down. He agreed to let us talk with him. We took turns sharing with him how much we love him, all that we'd seen him accomplish, and how we'd seen him change because of K2. When the subject of rehab came up, TJ was emphatic that he did NOT want to go. He said he could stop anytime he wanted, pointing to the first time he'd quit (bad pride again!) But his girlfriend was there to remind him of his relapse. None of us was about to let up. There were a lot of tears along with even more brutal honesty. Over the course of the next few hours, TJ's (bad) pride slowly melted away. He shared with us that he was actually scared about what K2 was doing to his body. And he agreed to go into treatment.

TJ is in a residential treatment facility now and they say he's doing a great job following the program. The rest of the FM staff and his good friends all believe that TJ can do this and come back better than ever. Please root for TJ with us.

Now I have taken you on a journey from good pride, to bad pride, and now, back to good pride. Because you see, I am SO proud of TJ for humbling himself and accepting help. To me, he has become the ultimate role model. This life is a tricky business. We all can use a little help from our friends. ***TJ is not his real name. It's been changed to protect his privacy.**

JG'S WORDS OF WISDOM

By JG, Free Minds Member in Federal Prison

Taking pride in your accomplishments is a good thing. It's something we all should do. I believe that we must also balance our pride with a strong sense of humility in order to keep us within the bounds of righteousness.

Too much pride causes us to become arrogant, full of ourselves, and foolish. Too much pride is unhealthy for us because it distorts our perception so much that we begin to somehow feel as though we're better or more important than the next individual. Too much pride is the entrance door to a deep, dark hole of jealousy, envy,

slander, theft and everything else that harms. Essentially, too much pride drowns out that little voice that's constantly speaking to us, guiding us along our path to light.

But the right amount of pride works with that little voice, the God within, and allows us to move along with the confidence and will to know exactly what we want out of life, and go for it unflinchingly and unapologetically. Pride balanced with humility produces strength and clarity. The balancing act, now that's the trick!

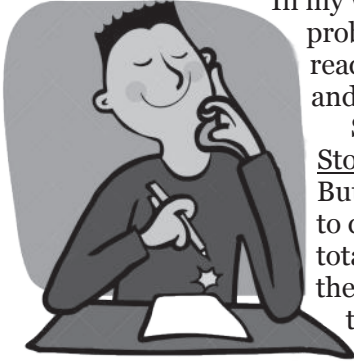




THE WRITE WAY

PUTTING THE AUTHOR IN AUTHORITY

By FM Writing Guru Julia



In my writing classes, we talk a lot about **authority**—now when you think “authority” you’re probably thinking about people in charge—so in writing, authority is about convincing the reader that you are in charge of the story or poem. You are the author of your own story, and you know what you’re doing.

So how do you do that? One big way is the use of detail. I’m reading a book right now ([A Story Like the Wind](#)) that is set in colonial Africa, something I know almost nothing about. But I trust that the author knows what he’s talking about because he uses so many details to describe the land, the people, and the way of life. For all I know, these details could be totally made up—I hope they’re true, but I wouldn’t know! The author has convinced me, the reader, that I can trust him. He has a lot of **authority** because he uses so many details that it sounds like he knows a lot about the subject, or he has done a lot of research.

For example: “His name was ‘Bamuthi, which meant ‘He of the Tree.’ He was said to have been born unexpectedly under a sacred tree while his mother was hiding from their hereditary Mashona enemies” ([A Story Like the Wind](#) by Laurens van der Post). The author could have said “His name was ‘Bamuthi” and left it there, but the added details of the significance of the name in the African language Sindabele, the sacred tree, and the enemy tribe all combine to make me believe the author knows a lot about this world that he’s writing about.

So what can you do to establish your authority? Well, I’m still working on that one myself, but I think getting the details right is a good place to start. Imagine you’re writing about something you know well like the neighborhood where you grew up. You have a lot of details you could use—what the buildings look like, the bodega on the corner, the view from your window—and lots more!

But what about when you’re writing about something you don’t know well? I’m often in this situation, and the easy answer is research—but maybe you don’t have the right books in the library for what you want to know. Your biggest resource is the people around you and your own eyes and ears. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve complained that I don’t know enough about a subject, only to have a friend or acquaintance say, “Oh, I can tell you about that!” So if you want to learn about something, just ask! You might be surprised what people can tell you.

Writing Prompt: Write about a place you’ve never been, or a situation you’ve never experienced. Imagine that you are an expert on this subject and use a lot of details—real or made up—to practice writing with confidence and authority.

Free Minds Poets Touch Lives Nationally!

As you know, we are hard at work on the second Free Minds literary journal scheduled to come out in May 2015 (knock on wood!) The first book, [They Call Me 299-359](#) continues to make an impact, not just here in DC, but all over the country. If you don’t believe me, take a look at this letter we just received from a public school girl in the Bronx who found the book on her teachers desk.

Hi, my name is TS and I am 13 years old in the 8th grade. I want to say thank you for giving me a opportunity to read your book [They Call Me 299-359](#). This book really inspired me to become a writer and it also opened my eyes to the world

and challenges people face in everyday life. I love the stories and emotion the inmates show and write in this book! I recently started to write my own poems to help myself and others just like the inmates’ poems did to me. I would love to say thanks to every single inmate for sharing their stories with the world. Also sorry for all the inmates that have fallen. I look forward to reading more of your books. Once again thank you for inspiring me.

I hope this makes you feel proud, Free Minds poets. Keep writing, you special people. Words have the incredible power to teach, build community, inspire individuals and change lives.



ASK HF: ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

HF is a Free Minds Friend doing a long bid in the Feds. Send him your questions about doing time, family, loved ones, or anything else and he will answer you in his column!

“I’m facing some time. Do you ever feel like your life is over due to being incarcerated for so long? How do you handle it?”

Today, I was watching the movie about the life of the late great James Brown titled “Get On Up.” In the film, James Brown looks at the camera after experiencing a setback due to racism and said, “When things get bad, I get tougher. I don’t quit, I keep moving forward and not backwards. Because if you move backwards then you are dying.”

I was arrested when I was 16, and the homicide detectives told me, “You’re going to be in jail for the rest of your life!” Imagine being in high school listening to a lecture about going to college and then being arrested by officers who tell you that you are never going home again before you have even been indicted, tried, convicted, or sentenced. Whether it is a judge, a prosecutor, a policeman, or a correctional officer, even your lawyer or loved ones, people will always tell you things about how your life is and how it will be, but only you have the power to choose how you respond. I never believed anything anyone had to say about my life more than me because most people are not even certain what direction their lives will take. Nobody ever told me that after 18 years in prison: that I would win an Emmy award for a film recording from my cell at D.C. Jail; that I would go to college in prison; that I would become a publisher and author nine books utilized to save lives in this country and Europe; that I would be a dynamic poet, and national blogger for a firm in California. No one told me these things because young black boys that get Title 16’d in D.C. are not “expected” to do anything great. However, I had a different vision for myself and I chose to look at my life and situation differently than anybody else.

Therefore, just because you are facing a long time in prison, follow the recent legal news dealing with juveniles receiving life sentences. Laws change every decade. If you were a fighter in the streets and not a coward, then why choose to give up on life now just because of what a judge or jury says about you? If you choose to give up on life, then give up. But if you choose to live? Well, LIVE without fear of failing and reach for what others deem to be impossible while knowing in the midst of your pursuit that you deserve everything that you are reaching for!!! Your friend, HF

CONNECTING WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

One of the youngest and newest Friend of Free Minds is 8 year-old Zawadi, who recently attended the Free Minds Holiday Bash . Zawadi jumped right in, playing Twister and decorating cookies alongside Free Minds members. This month, she wants to share her thoughts about pride with all of you!

I Am Proud

By Zawadi, age 8

I am proud of moving up a level in my reading class.

Now I can read Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul.

I am proud that I can now read chapter books.

I have worked hard at reading.

The summer came and went. And I read and read.

I am proud of reading at the same level of my friends.

I am proud to be a Kankouran dancer.

The drum moves me and I feel alive and free.

The drumbeat reminds me of Kenya, the country

I was born in.

Kankouran is special to me.

When I dance on the stage I think I am in Kenya.

I can see the Kijiji, the open market where goats roam free.

I move to the rhythm of the drum. I see Masaai warriors and I am happy.

I am proud of my new school. I am happy to be there.

The school has elevators, tablets and a big gym. It is a few blocks from my house.

For 18 months I saw construction workers in my school lot.

They worked hard to make us safe and comfortable.

I know I am lucky to have such a fancy school.

I am proud to be me. I am Zawadi.

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.



PAY IT FORWARD

AN ESSAY BY FM FRIEND, TOM

We met Tom last year after he lost his son. Tom has become an invaluable supporter of and volunteer for Free Minds.

A Proud Father

By Tom

The theme of this issue of Free Minds Connect is pride, and a person can proud of many things – themselves, their accomplishments, their heritage, or their family. Being proud of something good is a wonderful feeling. I am proud of Mike and Mary, my two children. When they were born, I thought they were perfect. I dreamed about all they would do and become, and the happy and productive lives they would have. As they grew, I realized that they were human like everyone else, with their strengths and good attributes, and with their weaknesses. I loved them for who they were, supported them, celebrated their successes, and did my best to prepare them for their future lives.

I told Mary and Mike that I believed it was more important for them to feel proud about themselves than for me feeling proud of them. I tried not to define success for them - they needed to do that on their own. For me, success comes from having healthy relationships, having positive self-esteem, being honest, and having integrity.

I was so happy and proud sending out a Christmas card each year with a picture of my two kids. This year, however, there was no card. My world changed with a terrible loss - the death of Mike at age 23 year old this past April. Grief has taken hold of me, and I have yet to find solid ground. Metaphors abound, and I feel like a rudderless ship.

Mike was a good kid (actually, a young man), and I loved him dearly. He was generous, outgoing, made friends easily, and had a wonderful sense of humor – he could always put a smile on my face. Mike was going to college and majoring in economics when he died. His passion was ice hockey, beginning when he was seven, and continuing thru high school, intramural and adult pick-up leagues, and college. I was never a big sports fan, but his enthusiasm was infectious, and our entire family became fans of the Washington Capitals, attending games wearing our CAPS jerseys, and watching them at home (and even listening to games on the radio). Mike exercised religiously (hockey, cross-fit, heavy duty gym workouts – ‘pain is fear leaving the body’) and taught me about health and nutrition. Some of his favorite things were Whole Foods market, Chipotle, Lil Wayne, Dash Berlin, Under Armour, BMW M series, entrepreneurship, the United States, his friends and his family.

But Mike was often reckless and had a sense of invincibility. He had his ups and downs over the past many years, and struggled with substance abuse. My wife and I thought that, in the months before his death, he was generally in a good space, but I guess not. He died of an overdose on Easter Sunday. He was a good friend and companion. How I relish the many memories of the times we had – both good and bad. He could be trouble, but he was our trouble, and now he is gone.

It is difficult for me to come to terms with my loss, both intellectually but especially emotionally. Out of so many kids in the world, why did this happen to him? to me? to us? What

could I have done different? As a father, how could I have better protected my child? What comes next for me? How do I want to live the rest of my life? I feel that capacity for joy has been taken from me, as well as a sense of meaning in my life.

I was struck by an earlier Free Minds newsletter, with members responding to the question “How many people do you know who have been shot?”. There is so much loss and pain in our world. Everyone grieves differently, and a loss of a parent, a child, a close friend, or a family member can trigger grief. Besides losing my son, I lost so much more – my peace of mind, my dreams and hopes for tomorrow, my identity as a father. My grief takes many forms. At times I feel guilty, angry, sad, or helpless. Sometimes separately, sometimes all together.

So, what to do if you experienced a loss and are grieving? I wish that I knew, but I do not believe there are any answers. All I can do is share what I have experienced so far. For me, I need to take my grief in doses – I do not have the emotional strength to tackle the enormity of the loss at one time. Let me think about some happy times today, some of my regrets at a later date. So many things trigger thoughts of Mike: a favorite food, an article of clothing, a photo, a TV program, a snippet of a song, a man walking down the street with his son. I keep busy with work or on mindless tasks. I use quiet times to think about Mike and feel close to him and his spirit.

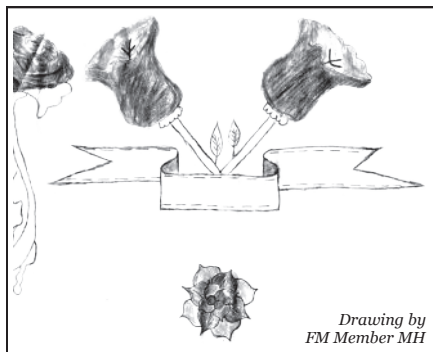
I know I need to focus on me, on my physical, mentally and spiritual health. Physical health is easy for me – I use walking and exercise as a coping mechanisms. I wish that mental and spiritual health were as easy – doing the mental or spiritual equivalent of a P90X workout each day. I realize intellectually that I need to accept my loss, but it is not easy (God grant me the serenity of accept

the things I cannot change...). I know I should be grateful for my life, for so many good things. But feeling grateful is tough right now. It is one day at a time, one foot in front of the other. That is how I get by. Keeping a journal helps: expressing my thoughts and emotions, writing about how I feel, and documenting parts of Mike’s life. I have been attending some grief groups for parents who have lost children. These can be overwhelming, seeing the pain others are going through. But in a sense, they are comforting because I know there are others who are going through what I am experiencing.

I am trying to reach out and help others. I want to prevent others from experiencing the loss I have and to do the little I can so that other young men can reach their potential, the way my son never did. I admire the Free Minds members. The ones I have met are working diligently to overcome obstacles and recover from past mistakes. No easy tasks. I am inspired by their optimism, courage and hope.

Here I am, a relatively short time after Mike’s death. I miss him dearly, and I know that I am forever changed. But I am proud of my son Mike. I celebrate his life, and know that this spirit lives on.

*“What is precious is never to forget...
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit.”
--Stephen Spender*



*Drawing by
FM Member MH*



QUOTE-I-VATOR

I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him. --Abraham Lincoln

If you are humble, nothing will touch you, neither praise nor disgrace, because you know who you are. --Mother Theresa

Pride

By AG, FM Member

Yeah, I know all about pride
I ride with pride
I'm sitting in prison 4 committing a crime
Because of my pride
Didn't wanna walk away after being called a b****
Because of my pride
Have you ever been in love b4?
Well, guess what?
I lost her 'cause I was being stupid
And thinking with my pride
Pride is why most men are sitting in prison
Pride is why I continue having thoughts of suicide
I'll die 4 pride
Ride 4 pride
Cry 4 pride
Now I'm sitting here wondering why
All 'cause of my pride
Pride means my body's locked up
But pride that my mind is free
Pride all because of Kelli, Tara and the whole Free
Minds Family
Pride!

Untitled

By MH

Moms pushed out a fighter in '91 who came out
swinging
Young city boi that talks fast while his feet
are moving
In this environment, I wake up to Unc's in front of the
2-4 bumming
Strolling past the Carry Out right next to the Check
Cashing
Right next to Big Ben's Liquor Store
I peep my older peers sporting Foamposites and
Solbiato
Finally making it to the court, I pass on throwback
And give 33 a go
I enjoy myself as Slim Jones and Moe swears

He's Hot Sauce off and one
Just a short-lived moment of innocent fun
As an Old Head drives by bumping Chuck Brown's
"Run Joe"
Me, Slim and Moe not I step off towards the 2-4
Heading to different aisles to quench our needs
Slim gets a Big Mama sausage to go with his BBQ
sunflower seeds
Moe likes flavor with his Blue Big Burst and
ranch Doritos
I'm more of a chocolate dude, with my Arizona and
pocket full of peanut chews
Before the next idea could pop, we found ourselves
amongst the hustlers of our block
At such a young age, temptation was something we
could not tame
Fate was decided once Slim cleaned up his first
crap game
Moe was always ready for whatever and was down
to ride
For me, all I saw was my homies, my block, our world
So naturally I experienced Pride
In no time with this Game we became players instead
of fans
Simple mathematics were re-up, stretch it and flip it
That equals a lot of hand to hands
Slim gambles, I hustle and Moe stays with a gun
Innocent took a turn towards reckless fun
Our gear even changed from Coogi to Hugo Boss
But Ms. Kim knows all our orders, I need extra Mumbo
Sauce
With a knot in our pockets and some heat for
our waists
It's only right that we poke out our chests
Playing spots like the Black Hole, Tunnel, and Mad
Chief but ducking the infamous Unifest
However there is two sides to the Game
Like how Slim can never gamble again
Because a cold blooded hater killed him at a crap game
Or how Moe hooked up with crash dummies up a hill
called Oak
Came home, went on the wrong move, and got smoked
I'm on memory lane out at the BOP on Thursday
Eating some fried to the side
Yeah we made some bad choices but through
everything negative
I will always have my pride



Does this look familiar? It looks like "The Chair" in Anacostia, right? Well, they have a giant chair sculpture in Geneva, Switzerland outside the United Nations. If you look closely, you will see that one of the legs is missing. It's called "Broken Chair" and it pays tribute to victims of war violence, especially those who have lost their legs because of land mines.



IN THE NEWS

By FM Friend John

World

Sadly the world headlines continue to be dominated by news of radical Islamic terrorism. Among the tragedies:

- Hundreds or even thousands dead in attacks by a Nigerian group called Boko Haram on several villages and towns.
- The slaughter of three dozen Kenyans working at a quarry by a group called Al-Shabaab
- The murder of 11 people at the headquarters of French magazine Charlie Hebdo by militants loyal to Al-Qaeda.
- Continuing public executions by the Islamic State, a group that continues to hold territory in Syria and Iraq.

Nation

The Ebola panic, at least in America, is over. Next health scare: Measles! Now Ebola is a deadly virus with only experimental treatments. Measles was eliminated from the United States in 2000, but in recent weeks there have been just over 100 known cases. Most stem from an outbreak at Disneyland in December. The outbreak is frustrating health officials because measles, while dangerous, is pretty easy to prevent by administering vaccines to children.

This outbreak has prompted somewhat of a national discussion about the responsibility of parents to get their kids vaccinated against the virus. While the safety of the vaccine is not in question amongst medical professionals, some believe that it should always be a parent's choice to administer medicine to their children.

We are less than two years from a presidential election, and the field of candidates is slowly beginning to take shape.

On the Democratic side, there is one massive frontrunner: Hillary Clinton, former first lady, Senator and Secretary of State.

On the Republican side, the field is wide open and includes at the very least: New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky and Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush.

It is worth noting that Senator Paul and another influential Republican, Congressman Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, have vocally supported the idea of reducing America's reliance on incarceration when it comes to nonviolent offenders.

DC News

The D.C. Council, with support from new Mayor Muriel Bowser, has approved the use of approximately \$150 million to help D.C. United build a soccer stadium. The stadium will be located in the Buzzard Point neighborhood in Southwest D.C.

Sadly, that stadium will not be used for Olympic competition in the year 2024. While Washington was believed to have been a strong competitor to host the Summer Games in 10 years, Boston was chosen to compete for the Olympics on behalf of the USA.

In 2012, the number of homicides in D.C. was 88, the first year since 1963 that under 100 people were killed by someone else in the city. In 2013, the number went up to 92, with an additional 12 people killed in one single incident at the Navy Yard. Last year's total was 105. When you factor in the Navy Yard tragedy as an outlier of sorts, the data now suggests a consistent and troubling trend upward in homicides.

Sports

Let's get the Redskins out of the way quickly, since they don't deserve much ink. The team finished 4-12, Robert Griffin III was again benched to end the season. Here are some silver linings: 1) Owner Daniel Snyder FINALLY has hired a general manager, Scot McCloughan, whose sole job will be to figure out what people should be on this team. Why is this important: The Redskins have drafted only a handful of guys that anyone would view as "building blocks." McCloughan has drafted 24 Pro Bowl players in nine years with the Seattle Seahawks. 2) Wide Receiver DeSean Jackson, the Redskins' big free agent signing, was by far the best player on the offense this year, hustling even in hopeless losing efforts.

Now onto the good news: D.C. is starting become a real presence in the winter sports season. The Wizards are 31-18, sit third in the Eastern Conference, and John Wall is averaging an eye-popping 17 points, 10 assists and 2 steals per game*.

The Washington Capitals are 26-15, are seventh in a tight Eastern Conference race, and Alex Ovechkin is leading the NHL with 31 goals*.

Also back on the scene: the Maryland Terrapins, who joined the Big Ten this season and have emerged as a frontrunner in their new conference. The team is led by three big scorers: Melo Trimble, Jake Layman, and Dez Wells. All three are averaging more than 10 points per game*.

**as of press time*



POEMS FROM LAST ISSUE

We didn't want you to miss these poems submitted for last month's HOPE issue!

The "H" in Hope

By CT, FM Friend

The "H" in hope was always
An "N"
It was a lost cause, striving for
Nothing, just wishing to hope
For something
But the "H" in hope was always
An "N"
Can I – Nope, I wish I could – Nope
When I grow up – You won't!
It was just too far-fetched and a
N**** refused to be a dog too...
Hell No



Self-portrait, by FM Friend SU

Hope Part 2

By MT

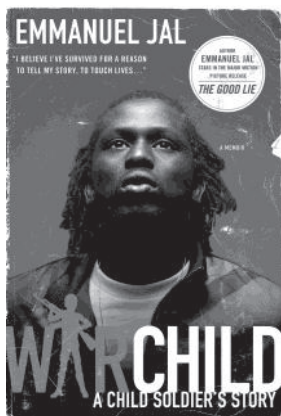
Hope is an eternal idea proselytized
By the son of a Kenyan foreign
And the daughter of the Kansas heartland
That inspired our nation to believe that "We the
People" can overcome
The greatest financial crisis since the Great
Depression
His successes and failures are the embodiment of
our advocacy
Of the true spirit of hope
It is an understanding that hope is only attained
Through factional compromise and not the
annihilation of contrary ideas
That we do not subscribe to believe in
It is advocating our political will with leaders
In the mold of Henry Clay, the Great Compromiser
Who have the ability and fortitude to solve
today's challenges

Immigration and prison reform are no more
challenging
Than the transcontinental railroad and the
National Highway System
A nation that gave birth to Robert Oppenheimer's
engine of destruction
Can bend that technology to a truly clean energy
source
The greatest republic in the history of mankind
Can develop new and free ideas that serve as a
bulwark
Against radicalization from the east and west
Technological innovations could not only be the
construct of Silicon Valley
But could also thrive in the steppes of Mongolia
And in the once formidable center of cultural
enlightenment
That was once the heart of the Mali Empire, but
is now just Timbuktu
Hope is future possibilities realized

REENTRY PROFILE: MAURICE

As a young teen, Maurice loved school and learning. His teachers noticed his intelligence and urged him to attend a highly rated public high school across town. Maurice wondered where he would get money for the things he needed, including clothes and the more than \$6 round trip metro fare to get to school. When he had money, a drug-addicted family member would often steal it. Maurice applied for jobs every place he could think of, only to be told over and over that he was too young. His attendance at school became spotty because he simply couldn't afford to get there. Maurice turned to crime to support himself.

"I knew that it was wrong, but I just kept telling myself I would only do what I needed to do to get by until I turned 18 and could find a better way out — get a real job and maybe eventually become a firefighter or police officer," he says. A few months later, Maurice was arrested on robbery charges and charged as an adult. He was sentenced to more than four years in prison.



Maurice had always loved reading and so when he learned about the Free Minds Book Club at the DC Jail, he wanted to join immediately. Among the books he read at the jail was War Child, the memoir of child-soldier Emmanuel Jal, who was forced to fight in Sudan's civil war. Reading it gave Maurice a new perspective and optimism that he could overcome his own circumstances. That book seemed surreal and

made all the struggles that we the people of America go through seem as little as a pond is to an ocean!"

Maurice began to focus upon his education, earning his GED in prison. He continued reading books and writing poems. It has been almost two years since Maurice was released. Right away, he joined Free Minds, speaking in the community about his experience and sharing poetry as a powerful tool for the prevention of future violence. "I am passionate about this mission," Maurice says. "I now have the opportunity to give back to society by telling kids who are now where I once was that even though they may be going through trials, there is a way out, as long as they don't lose hope."

This month, Maurice shares his thoughts with you on PRIDE:

PRIDE

By Maurice, FM Member

I've seen people's pride be their destruction and I've seen people's pride be their motivation. I want to tell you a little about my experience. Right now, I work at a dog daycare in DC (not the best of jobs). It isn't fun having to wake up at 5:30 AM every day to make it to work on time and pick up dog manure. But at the same time, I have a vision. I want to paint you a picture so you can have a proper understanding of how pride can benefit you or be used against you.

I know a lot of guys I talk to about my job sit back and laugh and sometimes it can be tough, in a way. But mind you, those guys laughing at me are the same ones with no job, and no responsibility. They are the same ones who be dressed up fly and walk right past their kids like they didn't make them. So I understand when guys say they won't work at a McDonalds and/or other places that's somewhat degrading. But in reality, it's only truly degrading when you don't have a job at all in society. Some people use their pride to make you feel belittled. But in reality, you doing something they wish they had the courage to do.

Some people say they won't work somewhere because they "don't wanna be caught slipping." Okay, so instead, you going to be in your neighborhood all day, doing everything negative under the sun, where everyone knows where you are at? So basically you just a moving target? You're just hurting yourself by saying, "I'm too good to work at _____," or "I would never work at ____." But you would commit crime or stay outside not applying yourself just being in the way? Where is the logic in that?

Me, I see my situation as a small stepping stone. Basically, I am using my job to establish myself in the career world. Nobody wants to hire someone with no experience other than criminal activity. But there are also some people who will. I am living proof. But you have to want it for yourself and go get it, just like you would in the streets. It's the same thing, just a better outcome. So bust your pride and say, "I'ma do whatever it takes to be successful and stay free, and be a better me." Every morning that I wake up mad or in a bad mood I remember I'm out here moving towards something. My pride won't let me be a statistic.

I'ma close this out. Remember, "PRIDE IS NOT POWER" and "IT'S OKAY TO SWALLOW YOUR PRIDE YOU WON'T GAIN A POUND"



CAREER CORNER

By Keela

Hey guys what's up. I wanted to let you know about a couple of resources to take advantage of once you're back home.

Reentry Programs to Consider

UPO Weatherization Training Program

Weatherization is the process of protecting a building and it's interior from the elements, especially sunlight, precipitation, and wind. This plays an important role in optimizing energy efficiency. The UPO Environmental and Construction Trades Training Academy located on Girard Street, NE, offers training courses, designed for individuals interested in developing the technical skills necessary to secure employment in the growing fields of weatherization and "green" construction. Students are trained using cutting-edge technology. Qualified, low-income DC Residents are eligible to enroll in free courses.

Call 202-526-2644 for more information.

Bennett Career Institute

Are you interested in becoming a barber/hair stylist? You might consider the Bennett Career Institute located on Monroe Street, NE with courses in barber/styling, cosmetology, and makeup artistry. BCI has rolling admissions which means you can start anytime. You must have your high school diploma or GED. The course for your barbering license entails 1500 hours of instruction/ or 12 months of attending full-time. The tuition is not inexpensive, but BCI does assist students to apply for and receive federal financial aid. To schedule an interview and find out more about financial aid, call BCI at 202-562-1400.

Coming home in the next 6 months? Write us a letter or give us a call at 202-758-0829 so we can help you plan for reentry!

ON THE JOB: WHAT IT'S REALLY LIKE

Free Minds interviews Jim, a Field Superintendent working for a commercial construction firm in Pennsylvania, and a good friend of Tara's. Jim oversees all aspects of each project. He's worked in construction for 35 years so he knows what he's talking about! We're so grateful he took the time to share his experience and advice for anyone considering a career in construction.

FM: So Jim, why did you enter the construction field?

JIM: I was 22 years old and I saw a sign saying they were paying carpenters \$13 an hour/\$400 a week which was a lot of money back in 1980. I was about to get married and wanted to buy a house, so I went for it. I had experience watching my dad fix things around our house. I was always curious and learned quickly. The best thing about construction is that it's a field you can enter with decent pay and no previous knowledge. I must have talked myself up in the interview because they gave me a senior position and assigned me a carpenter's assistant who had just come out of carpenter trade school and wanted to show what he could do. He begged me to let him put in the metal studs and I said okay. Truth was, I didn't know how myself, so I watched him do it and that's how I learned!

Since you didn't have experience in carpentry what did you do to be so successful so quickly?

I kept my mouth shut and my eyes open! I watched and learned. I really felt like I was in over my head but I took it all in quickly. It was a big commercial building and after 3 months on the job they had layoffs. I survived the layoffs. I will always remember that first Christmas, the owner of the company who had to be almost 90 years old walking around with the foreman on the job site and handing me a \$25 bonus check. He said I was doing a good job. That meant a lot to me and that's how I manage my team today. I see who's working hard and I tell them and reward them.

What are the qualities you look for in an employee and what is the job of a laborer just starting out?

The best employee is confident, positive and upbeat about working in construction. I look for someone who is willing to do what's necessary as a laborer but wants to learn all the time. Laborers can make \$27/hour. I want someone who's excited and comes on time ready to work. I tell guys they need to leave whatever happened at home, at home and get the job done. I can't have someone on his cellphone all day fighting with his girlfriend. We drug test so you need to be clean too. A laborer is critical to the whole project. They are responsible for keeping the job site clean and safe. They keep the materials accounted for and distributed. The task could be moving a pile of bricks from point A to point B but for each task it's really important to plan out your work.

(Continued on page 12)



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



FREE MINDS MEMBERS RISE TO THE CHALLENGE!

In our last issue, FM Member DS challenged you all to write what kind of nonprofit organization you would like to start to help others. Check out a few of the responses...Sounds like together we are going to change the world!

My program would be called "MY-C.R.E.E.D" (My Creation Reflects Every Essential Dream) and my intention would be to encourage kids, teenagers and adults to manifest their dreams into reality no matter what circumstance they are in. Life is short and the only person who can make something big out of it is you. C.R.E.E.D. would help people take their passions and perfect them. —NH

My program would offer job training to the Free Minds members coming home from the feds. I would try to provide housing for them and pay them while they are being trained. I want to name it: R.E.A.C.H. - RReturning And CHanging. —DH

My organization would be called "Youthful Decisions," and would serve youth struggling to decide if their God-given talents are good enough for the world, or if they're better off hustling through life and dealing with the consequences. It's our job as adults to teach kids their decisions don't just affect them, but also the ones who care about them. —DB

The name would be "(Men) R.E.A.L." (Realizing Everything About Life) and it would be based on the characteristics that make up a man: self respect, honor, morals, principles, and honesty. We would teach young men how to build themselves up to be the best men they can be spiritually, mentally, and physically. We will show them the importance of education, how to get it and enjoy it. —XE

It would be named The Making of Kings and Queens Foundation and would help youth find their talent and use it to their benefit. A talent does not have to be artistic--someone could be a great speaker or just a great mind, period. I want to inspire them to reach their full potential, and never settle for what others say they are. —WW

("On the Job", continued from page 11)

Break down how you are going to do each task. Once you're given an assignment, think of how you can do it the smartest way. We give someone 90 days to learn on the job. Stick it out, then you can move up from there. Measure everything out so you are a real help to the carpenter. You'll be appreciated and rewarded. Grab the drywall for the carpenter etc. Look around and learn about the other jobs. You can become a carpenter and move on to be a mechanic (electricians, HVAC, plumbing), do demolition or work in concrete. Get to know everyone's trade and you will be valuable. Take the drawings home. Go to the library and learn how to read drawings or blueprints. You earn respect when you are supporting someone and making their job easier and faster. The foreman is the supervisor for each area. Most of the times if a foreman sees how hard you are working you will be approached to take on more training.

Why don't some guys make it in the field?

There are a lot of egos in this industry. 99.9% are men and that means there is a lot of muscle flexing. Don't get into it if something says something that offends you. Deal with it in a mature, rational way. I use humor and make a joke out of it. People will call you names but you have to avoid the nonsense, do your job and keep your eyes on the prize (the promotion). As far as advancing don't take no for an answer. If you really want to do something, keep trying. Don't wait to do something, take the lead. You need to be able to not let things get to you at work. I see guys engage in healthy competition by challenging each other. "I can do 5 drywalls- how many can you do?" This is the best way to earn respect in a positive way instead of getting caught up in responding to nonsense.

What are some of your proudest accomplishments?

What's great about construction for me is that you can see what you are doing. In just a few days you see it. "Wow, this went from a hole in the ground to the shape of a building then the walls, doors, finishes!" You created something and it makes you feel good and want to go back to work every day. One of my favorite projects was renovating an entire city block in Wilmington, Delaware. It was a depressed area and we brought it back to life. I love driving people by to see it. I'm really proud of that. You will enjoy doing that too once you build a building. It's a great thing.



AROUND THE WORLD...

A Journey to Southeast Asia

By Seana

Last December, my husband and I flew to Southeast Asia and spent three weeks traveling between Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. I had no idea what to expect because I had never traveled so far from home, but we immediately fell in love with the people and cultures. While the countries were different in a lot of ways, they had one very important thing in common: pride. Everyone we met was extremely proud of who they were and where they came from.

In Singapore, we met a firefighter outside of a local fire station who proudly showed off his equipment and vehicles, giving us a short history of his life and what it meant to him to do such an important job. This was particularly interesting to my husband, who is a firefighter here in DC. In Malaysia, we went on a day tour with a local man who lived outside of Kuala Lumpur, the capital city, in a very poor section. He grew up in a small village and still lives there with his wife and children. He even invited us to his home for dinner, which we would have taken him up on if we had been staying longer! He took us to the palace and temples. Everything we saw was so beautiful and the people were incredibly kind. At the end of the day we stopped on a hillside where some of his friends ran a tourist attraction-feeding wild monkeys! The men working there are very protective of the animals but are also excited to share them with those new to the area. You could buy green beans or bananas and hand feed them because they are completely tame. In fact, they are so used to tourists that if you are holding a handful of food they will climb all over you-

terrifying at first, but funny and neat once you get used to it.

We finished the trip in Thailand where we saw a number of beautiful temples and statues.

This 12 meter gold statue of the Lord Buddha in a seated position was breathtaking to see in person. No matter how busy the surrounding areas are, these places are always extremely quiet and peaceful, as people worship and show respect. Everyone we spoke with was so proud of their country, culture and religion. The whole trip was very inspiring and I hope to return one day.



MIRROR

By DJ

I take a look in the mirror
And sometimes I don't even recognize the reflection
What I do see is so many regrets, wasted talent
Sometimes, I think that they won officially, broke my spirit
I look around and see so many gifted males in cells
You have rappers, singers, artists and poets, all in one place.
A million dollar industry
Then I think of my son and I wonder
Is he proud of his father?
Will he understand that I took those risks
So we could be the "haves" and not the "have nots?"
Now I wonder, would he even care?
If his shoes had Spiderman or a Nike swoosh?
Or would he be just as happy if I was there?
I take a look in the mirror
And sometimes I don't even recognize the reflection
It ain't my fault that my Grandmom raised me
And she did her best
I could use so many excuses
But in the end, I had everything I needed and more
To tell myself to stay strong and never give up
But these years pass me by
I am still here trying to downplay the fear
Of getting old in here
And being forgotten by the ones I took for granted
So, to all my friends, Kelli, Tara, Free Minds, Wilbert
You always held a brother down

Thank you and congrats

To my son, Dalen

I know how you feel

I love you and I know one day, you will understand

That I am only human and all humans make mistakes

And to Moneick, you have always been there for me

I know I let you down the most of all

I am so thankful that you are a strong Black woman

I apologize to you all

I take a look in the mirror

And the reflection I see gives me a sense of pride

I see a man who takes responsibility for his actions

And deserves a chance to right his wrongs

Change and Pride

By KA

Change is known to be the hardest thing to do
Sometimes pride plays a major role in not changing
Not because we don't want to
Because I know we all want change
But because we fear what others think about us
We don't want to be known as "getting soft"
I think a real man or woman accepts change
When we know it's for the better
I feel like a sucker is the one who tries to do for others and not
himself
And will put themselves in harm's way for the entertainment or
gossip of others
Sometimes we do what we don't want to



BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

WHAT ARE THE YOUNG'UNS READING?

Your 16 and 17-year old Free Minds brothers on the juvenile unit are reading a new novel called When I Was The Greatest, by Jason Reynolds (a recent grad of U-MD and hot new name in young adult fiction) about a 16 year old named Ali (after the boxer) growing up in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn and struggling to beat the odds and succeed.



Write us and tell us what book you are reading!

Pride

By QS, FM Friend

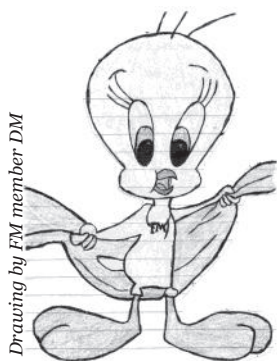
I've come to realize through life's experiences that at times, I've tended to let my ego get in the way of my self-expression of pride. And because of this, I began to forget about the people around me and how God has blessed me with their aid and assistance in accomplishing personal goals and overcoming obstacles in my life. You see, pride unchecked can cause us to distance ourselves. It will make us want to constantly compare ourselves and to show off our little (or large) accomplishments in a grandiose manner, when in actuality, they are irrelevant to the greater picture.

Pride unchecked can manifest itself as self-righteous indignation (how could you) or (I would never do that). You see pride's favorite word is "me."

I say all this because pride without humility, pride without the remembrance of God as the source of all your strength and abilities will cause you to distance yourself from God, which in the end, will lead to a life of pain and inner loneliness. There's nothing wrong with having pride in self, but just remember, that with pride comes humility and gratitude to the source that uses you as a pen to write upon the hearts of those you come in contact with. When you recognize and honor your God-given gifts and use them to better the world around you, then you are exhibiting selfless untainted pride. So the next time you feel a sense of pride, ask yourself, did I give or was it all about me.

What Kind of Pride Do you Represent?

by BH, FM Member



Drawing by FM member DM

Too much pride can be dangerous. Too much pride means an unduly high opinion of oneself, haughtiness or arrogance. The Hebrew word for pride means "to boil up" and refers to a raging arrogance or insolence. Such behavior always leads to shame! This type of pride has affected me internally. I have become cold hearted, selfish, unloving, disrespectful, rebellious and antisocial through this bad kind of pride.

I would rather represent the good kind of pride. I am proud of the maturity I gained at such a young age. I jumped in the streets at the age of 15. I faced a lot of life and death situations, and I am proud to be alive to talk about my experience. What also makes me proud is that I spent most of my youth in the streets and was still able to finish high school. Hanging around old heads made me more mature faster than others in my age group. Dudes my age looked up to me and would do anything I told them to do. What makes me proud is my experience in the street life and the fact that I got out of the streets before I was killed in them.

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: Learning

How do you feel about learning? Is learning different than education? Did you have good or bad experiences with learning growing up? How do you learn best? What do you want to learn? What are you learning about right now?

Until next time, stay strong and keep your minds free! And remember, we are proud of you! —Your Free Minds Family