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# Free minds Connect

No matter what...

keep your mind free

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# Free minds Connect

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Want to be on this list? Write up something and send it to us!

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## PARENTHOOD

By Juliana — Editor in Chief

What's good, Free Minds??? No travel photos this month- I've been staying pretty close to home. I've been reading a LOT, however, which you know is another way of traveling. I have a new 600 page book on my shelf called *Malcolm X- A Life of Reinvention*. It just came out last week, and it's been getting a lot of press- the author, Manning Marable, spent **two decades** researching this book, and died three days before it was finally published.

In the book, he writes about by seeing how his name changed- from Malcolm Little to Detroit Red to X to El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, we can see how this leader reinvented himself, over and over. Many people think that this is a distinctly American trait- do you? Do you see ways that we all reinvent ourselves, even if we keep the same name?

One of the famous things that Malcolm X once said was: "I don't think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did." I'm still on his early life (like I said, it's a big book!) but I'm interested to read what his biographer writes about it. And.... it's funny, the way the world brings things together. Last week on the way to do book club at the Jail I had to stop in Eastern Market to pick something up. There was a guy selling t-shirts and one of the shirts had a copy of a photograph of young Malcolm with his daughters, and above them said: "PARENTHOOD: BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY." I think it is time to get creative about the ways we parent and are parented.

In this issue we have a lot of different writers sharing their

thoughts about this issue- and bringing them all together has made me think a lot about it too! We are all learning together.

Sitting down to write this piece I called up my expert (my own father), and asked him if he had anything he wanted to say. "I think what's really important is that people *learn* to be good parents," he told me. "We're not born that way." That goes along with what I was saying about Malcolm X above- that we are all reinventing ourselves and changing, and that you can learn how to be the person you want to be.

The other piece that's important to me to talk about is that there are so many kinds of family besides the one you've been born into. I know this to be true because in my own life, I've been blessed with amazing parents but also with a network of mentors, "storm families," and other characters who serve as north star to my journeys and summer sun to whatever needs to bloom. Even if you're grown, it's not too late- you can still find people to mentor you and support you.

And also, maybe, you'll have the chance to step up to the plate to be a parent figure in someone else's life. I was so touched to recently meet a young man at book club who writes poems all the time about his beautiful "stepson"- it's not his child by birth, but when you read those poems you know that it's his son for sure.

Until next time, keep reading, keep writing, and keep your mind free. And for those of you who are parents, by blood or by other bonds, keep parenting, by any means necessary.

Juliana



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

# I GREW UP AS MY BABY GREW UP

By Michelle — Free Minds Mom

I was 17 years old when I had my son. Since I was still a teenager I had a lot of growing up to do myself and so you could say my baby and I both grew up at same time but in different ways. It was hard at first because I couldn't do the things that teenagers like to do like hang out with my girlfriends and party. It was a challenge letting go of all that freedom to be there for my son. From the beginning it was just me raising him alone since his dad wasn't in the picture.

I was lucky because I had done a lot of babysitting and had experience taking care of my nieces and nephews but it was different with my son because I had to be totally responsible for him all the time. It was also a challenge being a mother raising a male child. As a female I had to learn and adapt to male ways and I also had to call my male relatives, my uncles and male cousins to get help understanding why my son would do the things he would do. When he became a teenager I would ask them what is normal for a boy to react in certain ways. It was confusing to me, and I know I made a lot of mistakes, but I tried to learn from them. I could teach my son a lot of things but I couldn't teach him how to be a man. It's very different raising a boy than a daughter.

My advice to all the Free Minds young men who are fathers and are thinking of becoming a father in the future is that being a parent doesn't

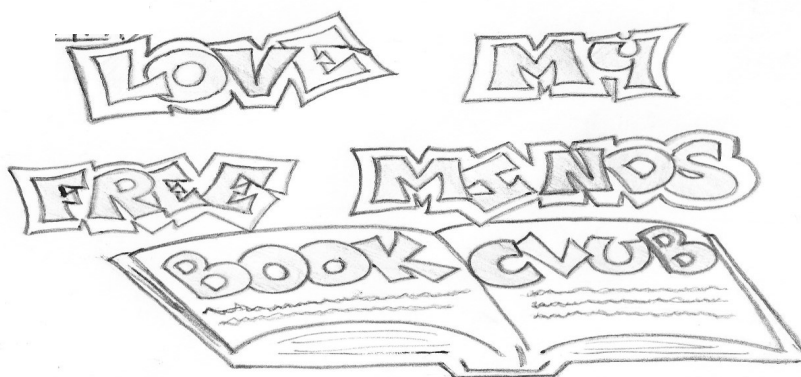
come with an instruction booklet so read and learn as much as you can about how children develop and look for the people you admire who do a good job raising their kids and ask them for advice. It's so much better to get good advice than for it to be too late. No one expects you to know how to do it automatically. Also don't think just providing material things and money for your child is most important. It's the love and attention and being there for them emotionally that is the most important.

Teach your child through having them see the positive things you are doing. Teach them to be responsible by you being responsible. Don't just tell them, *show* them how to be a good person by being one yourself.

There is so much joy in being a parent. One of the favorite parts for me was when he would bring home the little cards he made me in class after he started school and all the ways he would say he loved me like in Mother's Day cards. I was so proud when he made good reports in school. One of the hardest things for me as a parent is when I couldn't protect my child from the bad things. I have a lot of guilt over that. I've learned to express it and try to forgive myself but it's hard.

My son and I have a very open relationship and now that he is incarcerated we are able to share things and stay close. That's been the easiest part of being a parent for me, listening to my son. I hope I've shared some of the joys and challenges of parenting. I love my son and he's made me a better person and I'm so thankful for him for that.

Love always to my Free Minds Friends!



## NEVER A CHILD

S.H. — Free minds Member

I feel parenthood is a big part of a child's life growing up, from the time they learn to walk to the time they walk across that high school stage to become an adult themselves. Most of the guys in the neighborhood had nobody to look up to but Bud the Dope Man, as they might say. I never knew my dad growing up. When I met him, I was 16 years old and on my way to the juvenile unit over at the DC jail. At this time, he tried to teach me how to be a man. How could someone that abandoned me teach me how to be a man? My mom couldn't teach me so I learned on my own — or so I thought.

Now at the age of 24 and sitting behind these penitentiary gates I still haven't really found out how to truly be a man because I was never really a child. Meaning, how can someone at the age of 14, 15, 16 be a teenager or a child when they have to do for themselves what people were supposed to do for them?

The one thing I wish my parents had done was love each other for the sake of a child, not just a child, but for someone that would one day become a man. I've learned more things in prison in the last 7 years than I did in my whole 24 years of living. Parenthood is more than just having a baby — it's being supportive, honest, being able to listen, being patient, and most importantly being role models for the next generation.

Thank you guys for giving me this time to express my thoughts and feelings.

Happy Spring Free Minds!!!

It's really starting to come to life again here in DC. All the cherry blossom trees, daffodils and tulips are busting out. I love being reminded that renewal always comes after darkness and cold. It gives me hope. But I have to say those darn tulips get me upset every spring.

They are one of my favorite flowers and they last such a short time! They are in brilliant colored bloom for only about two weeks and then poof! They're gone. There's a big field of them right by the Jefferson Memorial near the paddleboats. I'm always panicked that I'll lose them before I get to enjoy them. So of course I waste more time worrying that the time is ticking away than actually enjoying them, in the moment. A gardener friend of mine told me, in her wise way of always comparing life to gardening (which is what I've found most gardeners do- I guess they can't help themselves) that tulips teach us to appreciate what we have and not focus on trying to hold onto things forever. Enjoy the fleeting beauty while you can. I don't like hearing that but I know she's right. Instead of spending all my time worrying that the good stuff that I have will one day go away- loved ones will die, friends will move on, and it's better to spend my emotional energy enjoying them while I can. It's tempting for me to wish life was like a DVD and I could fast forward, but I know the good parts in there would be missed too. I know you probably wish you could fast forward through your time locked up! At Free Minds, we believe that reading and writing can help you learn from the bad times and savor the good. In that spirit, included here is a letter from Kelli telling you about our exciting new project: a literary journal of your writing. And this beauty will not be fleeting like the tulips! That's the power of the written

## TALK-BACK W/ TARA

Tara — Executive Director



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# I FEEL Y'ALL PAIN

W.A. — Free Minds Member

Parenthood..... Sheeesh!

Well, being a parent locked up ain't easy, I'm hip. And naw, I'm not a parent but all my men is- some are locked up, some not. And me just being around them, I could tell it's hard. It's hard on me and I'm not even a parent cause I got to fly my mans in and look out for the family, cause that's what I'm supposed to do.

So I know parenthood is hard from in there, telling your kids that's Daddy's at school, trying to hide the truth from them because you don't want to be a bad influence. Well, thats what my brother tells my nephew because he thinks kids don't want to know that their father's locked up. So even though I'm not a parent, I feel y'all pain moe. So keep y'all heads up and let your kids and family know that u love them.

# UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

A. — A Free Minds Member

The number-one quality I like in my mom is

the love. My mother has unconditional love for me- it doesn't matter if I'm locked-up, crippled, blind, or dumb, she's gonna love me no matter what. She's gonna love me when I'm wrong. My mom pushes me to achieve the best in life, she says education is the key to success. That's why I'm gonna try my best to make her proud and don't take her through this emotional roller-coaster again. When I have kids I'm gonna try my best to be just like her and have some of the morals she has...

# POEM

D. — Free Minds Member

## To My Friends and Family

A deep disappointment I know I have been  
I have failed them once again  
My family and friends do right  
and righteousness is all they ever asked  
But I never seen the righteous path  
I was always moving too fast

To my mother don't feel bad  
I know you did your best  
You have shown nothing but love  
and all I caused you was stress

"Praise God and He will guide you"  
is what you always taught  
But I chose the wrong path  
so my downfall is my fault

I wish I would have just listened  
But now I'm paying the price  
Success seems so far away  
My future doesn't look bright

I was so blind to the fact that people  
really cared about me and my well being  
The love was always there  
But I don't deserve the love

It just doesn't seem fair  
That after all the pain I caused them  
they are still here  
So atrocious, audacious  
my actions seem so helpless  
inconsiderate of others  
I have always been selfish

But my loved ones never left  
It just made them love me more  
All I did was hurt them  
What do they love me for?

Why do they still care for me as much as they do  
I don't know  
but to them I have a lot to prove

I must prove that I can do it  
And they didn't waste their time  
They have nurtured my life goals  
Now it's up to me to shine

I must focus on my dreams  
Because there is nothing I can't do  
For all the love and support that was shown  
I really would like to thank You

I love you Mom



*Below is a very special submission- a poem from the grandmother of a Free Minds member. She is an inspiration to all of us now, as a grandmother, she is going back to school to get her GED- you're never too old to learn!!! She wrote this poem to encourage everyone to follow their own positive path, and she was so excited to share it with Free Minds.*

### Dare to be Different

**POEM**

The same old walk, the same old  
talk,

That is what you see.  
Cursing, swearing and getting  
high,  
What a way to be.

Every person for themselves,  
Make it on your own;  
Where's the LOVE given to you,  
How come it can't be shown?

Must you be like your fellow  
man,  
Acting just like him?  
When the Holy Spirit is available  
And with Him you always win.

I DARE YOU, just to make a  
change,  
BE DIFFERENT from the rest,  
BE YOURSELF and no one else  
And you'll come up with the  
BEST!

When I was growing up I did not have a mother around but I did have a dad with a drinking problem. I did not understand why he drank so much till later on in life. I knew he cared about us, but he basically let us do whatever because most of the time he was working or drinking. So I did have parents, but that's about it: people who just made a baby and let life take its course. I did have two mentors throughout my life, an older brother and a cousin. I was very close to my older brother and wanted to be just like him. My older cousin was the one with knowledge and kept me ok. Their message to me? Never end up like them. My brother was like a parent and he did not want me to live his life. He was in and out of jail for the most part. My older cousin went to jail and is serving a life sentence. Even though they were in the system they would still show me that they cared about me and that even though they are in, they try to better themselves.

That wisdom that they showed me was in fact like a parent for me. Why were they parents to me if they were always incarcerated or in the fast life? My answer is simply that their message to never be like them was in fact a deep message. I changed my ways and I did not end up like them, but I still respect them. They showed me to live life without hate.

They showed me that even in the situation that they lived in, there was always room for change.

**NOT JUST A  
SPERM DONOR**

M.B. — Free Minds Member

It's hard out here right now, so if you don't have any kids, its best to keep it that way. Anybody can be a sperm donor but it takes a man to be a father to his kids and be there for his kids. So my advice is, if you ain't ready to settle down and be a father than yeah strap up, because it is unmanly to have a kid and not take care of your responsibility. How could you live with yourself knowing that you have a little one out here walking around and you are liable to walk past him at any moment and you would not know his face from a stranger? That's my advice to the brothers without kids, but for the brothers with kids: I understand that you got to put food on the table just try it differently next time around maybe positively. I just hope for goodness sake that we as men get our stuff together for these young'uns coming up today. Just because you are locked up doesn't mean that you have to neglect your child either. You can't use that as an escape route because man you can call and just stay in his/her ear, let them know you care and you don't want them to go down the same path. Sometimes the baby moms can be a trouble, but just for the kids sake, try your hardest to **keep the communication on-point so you can break this cycle.** That's all I have to say, keep your head up and stay focused.



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word. It will be around a long time after we are all gone, and we can leave a mark on the world through our writing. Another way we can leave a mark on the world is in the way we choose to live, which brings me to our theme of Parenthood. In this issue you will read lots of insights about the experience of being a parent, being a child, having others parent

## Healing

*A poem for my dad*

**POEM**  
By T.B.

This poem is not a poem for fun  
This is a poem that will tell how much I  
care for someone (my father)  
I care and love him so much  
That right now I hate that we're not in  
touch  
I miss tellin' him about my day on the  
phone  
Or even laid back watching a movie and  
home  
My father means so much to me 'cause he  
taught me a lot  
He's the reason I know I will survive in  
life  
Ever since I was small he always told me  
to do right  
But now that he's getting older it's my  
turn to take care of him  
Hey, Pops, I'mma keep bangin' with you  
'til all the nails in.

—Written by a Free Minds member after his father suffered a stroke—

us if our own are not able, and more, but **I want to focus on parenting ourselves.**

What I mean by that is that no matter how loving, caring, and dedicated our parents or caretakers were, we all emerge from childhood with wounds to our emotional selves. No one emerges from childhood having had all their needs met. We aren't at that point in evolution where everyone is perfectly kind and loving to each other all the time. But the good news is that as adults, we have the power to change that. It's called "**re-parenting**" ourselves. It's the belief that our parents did the best they were able to at the time (and if they were absent, that was all they were able to give at that time) but we can now as adults give ourselves the love and attention that we might have missed, and heal our old hurts. This is a powerful thing, and if we engage it in, we are in charge of the quality of our life and control our own destiny. We have to acknowledge the pain and loss we suffered as a child, but we know we can make up for it by giving ourselves the love and attention we lacked. In the latest book we read in Book Club, The Naked Truth –Young Beautiful and (HIV)Positive, a young girl stays looking for the love she felt she never received from her mother, and goes from man to man, hoping they would give her the feeling of being loved and accepted for who she was. She finally realized that she was the only one who could do it, but only after contracting HIV from the man she believed was her "Prince Charming." Her name is Marvelyn Brown and she is an amazing young woman who travels the country educating others about HIV and about her journey of self love.

Think about how you- in the harsh environment of prison- can hold on to your humanity and "parent" yourself. Write to us and let us know some ways so we can share with others (it will always be anonymous).

I want to conclude with news from the Free Minds home front. Our latest Reentry event was a joint workshop with probation officers (CSO's) and Free Minds members who are home. Ok, now I have to tell you the Free Minds guys were not that excited about it :) but they showed support and came and it turned out really well! Wil, our reentry coach, had the FM guys pretend they were PO's and the PO's pretended they were just home on probation and couldn't find a job and were getting dirty urines. There was a lot of laughter and surprising

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## I Used To Work At the Jail

results. It was eye-opening to the say the least, and a great example of “walking a mile in someone else’s shoes.” We finished by all writing poetry together, which we published on our blog, and one of the poems from a CSO is published here.

I want to leave you with a new song that’s helping me- I’ve discovered a new type of yoga class called kundalini, and it’s hard, but really meditative- and so stress relieving because you’re too exhausted to worry! I think most of you know that feeling from working out. We sing this at the end of every class:

*May the longtime sun shine upon you  
All love surround you  
And the pure light  
within you  
Guide your way on  
Until next time  
Peace!*  
Tara



### **Quote- I-vator**

*The mind, once stretched by a new idea,  
never  
returns to its original dimensions. –  
Oliver Wendell Holmes*

*If everyone is thinking alike, then some-  
body isn’t thinking. – George Patton*

*Whether you think that you can or that  
you can’t, you’re usually right. – Henry  
Ford*

When you say I want to see you locked up,  
what I want to say is that I used to work there and I  
would never want to see you go back there.

When you say I want to see you locked up,  
what I want to say is that your family deserves for you  
to be in the community, but I can’t make those deci-  
sions for you.

When you say I want to see you locked up,  
what I want to say is that your past does not have to  
dictate your future, but you have to learn the lesson  
for yourself.

When you say I want to see you locked up,  
what I want to say is that I used to work at the jail  
and that experience is why I’m your Community Su-  
pervision Officer today, to see the change beyond the

## **NEXT ISSUE’S THEME:**

# *Knowledge*

The theme of our next issue is KNOWLEDGE. As always, there’s a lot of ways you can interpret this word, and we want to hear what you think. People say knowledge is power- is this true

or not? Where and how do you gain knowledge? In school? On the streets? In prison? So drop some knowledge on us- we’ll be waiting for your submissions!

