

June-July 2013

Vol. 2, Issue IV

Free minds Connect

TEMPTATIONS

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Is brought to you by...

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Write or draw some-
thing and send it to us!

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**Next Issue's
Theme:**

PAY IT FORWARD

Who are the people in
your life who have most
helped you to mature
and grow? How did they
help you? What can you
do to give back to your
community and help
others?

TALK-BACK WITH TARA

Happy summer Free Minds members! Greetings from FM Headquarters! Summer-time and this issue's theme of temptation go hand in hand for me. The warm days and nights seem to bring out even more the urge to do things that aren't good for me. Maybe it's a leftover feeling from my youth, when summer meant fewer rules and no homework and a general feeling of risk-taking and letting go. As always, I'm so humbled by all of our contributors who shared their personal struggles with temptation for this issue and their amazing poetry and stories.

In this issue, our wonderful Free Minds member JG demonstrates his raw honesty and emotional openness by sharing his PCP use and its harrowing effects on his life. He never fails to inspire us, and we look forward to his regular column every issue. We also have contributions from Aunt Sue, who is always ready to help Free Minds youth at every turn, and from my good friend Eileen's son Pat, who marked his 30th day clean from painkiller addiction by sending us an invaluable message that we can't do it alone.

These stories fill me with hope and demonstrate the power of Free Minds; we are building a community of positive people who share their struggles so we can all get stronger. I want to share my greatest temptation—I am frequently tempted to fall into feelings of hopelessness and despair when I read about negative things in our city, such as another

homicide listed in the paper or the level of homelessness and unemployment in DC (see our new Reentry Specialist Ms. Shae's article on p. 9). I start thinking that the societal problems are too intractable (good word—look it up!) and spiral down. But then I read one of your letters or poems or go to one of our *On the Same Page* events, and I'm restored again.

We end each *On the Same Page* session with a "Toast for Change." We hand out plastic champagne glasses and sparkling cider to all the students and stand in a circle. Each person shares one thing he or she wants to change personally or in the community. (If anyone saw the movie *Freedom Writers*, we got the idea from there!) It usually brings tears to my eyes, and I get chills because the kids are so open and honest. They say things such as, "I want to believe in myself more," "I want to stop being so angry all the time," or "I want to stay in school and not go to jail like my brother did." We all stand there shoulder to shoulder and form an invincible force of hope to fight against the temptations of life. As one of my favorite lines says, "we get by with a little help from our friends." Thank you, Friends, for everything you give me and Free Minds.

Tara

*May the long time sun shine upon you
All love surround you*

And the pure light within guide your way on

Temptation

By TJ, FM Member in
Federal Prison

Temptation

A dangerous sin
What corrupted our world
And doomed our end
Temptation

A heartfelt desire
With the devilish rage
Of an un-kept fire
Temptation

The result of shame
For what you think is love
Is often pain
Temptation

As close as kin
What can make you betray
Your own best friend

FREE MINDS HQ

Hi Everyone! Sarah here with your monthly office update from the Free Minds Headquarters! As usual, we've been really busy getting the Free Minds message of hope and change out to the community. Here are some things we've been up to since we last updated you:

- We had a recording session in the office where Free Minds members who are home in the community recorded their poems on professional audio equipment!
- We held a lot of great *On the Same Page* events at different schools around DC, including programs at Johnson Middle School, Cesar Chavez High School, and REACH Incorporated, a tutoring program that helps students improve their reading
- Our poet ambassadors continue to give back to the next generation by co-leading writing workshops at New Beginnings! They are "paying it forward"—see our next theme on page 12 for more about this!

An Eye Opener for Someone

By DJ, FM Member in Federal Prison

Struggling to pay rent
Long nights but fast days
Stressing just thinking
I could get a couple grand
Off a couple grams
Temptation, damn
Stuck in my daydream
Of making a living off a life of crime
Forgetting about the consequences
And possible jail time
But that won't happen to me
That's what she told me
You're too slick
You move too quick
Is what temptation told me
But what she didn't tell me
Is prisons are filled with people
All race and backgrounds
Who listened to temptation
I was tempted not to write this
But I just hope my mistakes
Could be an eye opener for someone

I Was Consumed by Drugs and Money

By Sue, Free Minds Aunt



The temptation of the streets can be hard to resist. I believe old habits can be the worst temptations of all due to familiarity. It takes individual strength to move away from one's past. Old friends from the streets are a major source of temptation for someone who is struggling to move on from the streets. Although they embody familiarity, they also push for old, negative habits. If someone's individual perseverance and newly-obtained value system that dictates whether or not someone does or doesn't overcome negative allurements. About 12 years ago, I myself was still involved in the street life. I was consumed by drugs and money, and the novelty of disobeying society's rules. My baby brother passed away from AIDS on March 9, his 31st birthday. So because of that, my anger and sadness propelled me to give into the temptation of the streets. I kept asking myself why it had to be my brother, rather than me, who was sick. I indulged in drugs and money because I had little faith in everything else. However, as time passed, I learned to deal with my grief and to see the death of my brother in a different way. Seeing how brief my brother's life was, I decided I wanted to live—to *really* live. I wanted my children to know me –not from behind bars or from a hospital bed – but as a mother and caregiver. After witnessing my brother's death, I decided I didn't want to be plagued by sickness or to be tempted by things that could eventually destroy me. Although I've turned my life around, I recognize that temptations will always exist. I advise those who are struggling with temptation to change their environment because permanently changing and bettering yourself can only come from within.

JG'S WORDS OF WISDOM

Still a Work-In-Progress: My Past Smoking PCP and Quest for Self-Discipline

By JG, Free Minds Friend in Federal Prison

Temptation. Yeah, I know a lil something about that. I experience temptation every single day. Sometimes I'm tempted to curse a C.O. out when I feel I've been done wrong. Or I'm tempted to punch a dude in his mouth because I feel like I've been disrespected in some way. Or, in true escapist fashion, I'm tempted to find some drugs or alcohol to lose myself in. when I was a little younger and much more impulsive, I used to do all of this and then some. But as I got older and started practicing self-control, I began to get better at fighting temptation.

When I was home I used to smoke PCP. I started when I was very young—about 13 years old. There have been times where I've "lunched out," or overdosed if you will, on PCP. When I came to, I couldn't account for the last few hours of my life. And each time everybody would tell me all of the crazy things I had done while I was out of my mind for those few hours, because I never remembered it myself. We were so young and lost that we couldn't grasp the seriousness of the whole situation; we'd just laugh about it. Every now and then I'd get this vague feeling that maybe I should

stop smoking boat and weed, but I didn't know exactly why. I just had that feeling. It would quickly go away though because at the time, that instinct had no real foundation.

When I got locked up and started reading a lot and really reflecting on my past, I began to see and understand why I should be resisting certain temptations. Self-control and self-discipline became priorities for me. I began to realize that without them I'd continue to be a slave to the 5 senses. So I began to practice disciplining myself in certain areas of my life. Some areas are more difficult than others, but you have to start somewhere. Practice makes perfect, and at times I can be a big procrastinator, but the key is just to start. Make up your mind that you're going to stop allowing this or that to tempt you, and start the fight. It'll definitely be a fight, that's for certain. It's all a part of life's journey and our quest for knowledge of self. I'm still a work-in-progress, but I can honestly say that through learning about myself and the world around me, which gave me my foundation, and through persistent practice, I'm not even tempted by certain things anymore, and I'll continue to get better. Until next time, peace and love.



THE WRITE WAY

Hey Free Minds, this month we have an article by a friend of mine who is also a talented writer. We wanted to print this in the Tribute issue, but had so many great articles that we decided to save it for this one instead. I live in Boston, and as you may know, April 15th was a holiday here for the Boston Marathon. But at 2:50 pm, two bombs went off near the finish line, killing three people and injuring over 100 more. I was at a meeting with a professor and some classmates, and we ended up watching the news for hours. When we left, my professor gave us just one piece of advice: "Write." -Julia

WHEN BOMBS GO OFF IN YOUR CITY: THE PROCESS OF WRITING THROUGH TRAGEDY

Reprinted with permission from The Boston Book Blog, 4-24-2013

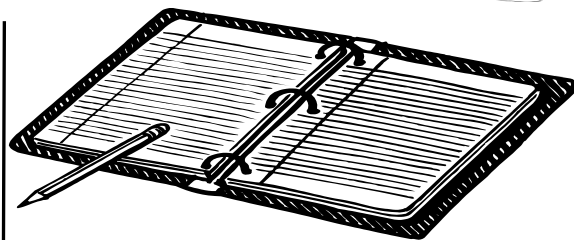
When bombs go off in your city, how does a writer respond?

This was the question Boston writers had to necessarily face last week as twin explosions rocked our city on Marathon Monday, and as the subsequent massive manhunt for the suspects put Boston on lockdown. As writers we all have the grand idea of how we should respond: We write our eloquent elegy to the victims of the tragedy, we pour ourselves out in our writing and use it as catharsis, we put meaning to these events through the words we write. That all may, and probably will, come eventually. But in the midst of a week of chaos, how should we respond is sometimes far away from how we actually do we respond.

I can only speak from personal experience, but when a tragedy hits a writer – something so great as a terrorist attack to something so close as the death of a loved one – we first respond as human beings. We are shocked. We are panicked. We are saddened. We are fraught. We cry. We call loved ones. We want to be around friends. We grieve.

But the reaction then branches from there. A writer continues on as a human and as a writer. As humans we continue to experience, but as writers we're taking notes on that experience. As humans we continue the emotional processing; as writers we observe ourselves emotionally processing, and take note of what we feel, what we're reacting to, what makes us sad or angry or depressed. As humans we continue to interact with a changed world; as writers we ask, "How does one interact with a changed world?" As humans we track the news because we want to be informed of updates or changes in the situation; as writers we thirst for news, for video, for pictures, for stories, for whatever we can read or see or hear that will help us put together a full narrative of the event, so that we can see some kind of meaning in the chaos. As humans, we live; as writers, we observe how we do that living so we can make our writing more real.

It's a strange duality that occurs in a writer, this double-branched existence. But we are also creatives who have the mantle – and burden – of attempting to recreate authentic human existence through words on a page. We are required to mimic and recreate life, and that necessarily draws us into a dual existence. If you found yourself looking at the news, or having a conversation with a friend, or weeping in your empty apartment, and then said to yourself, "I need to remember this so I can use it someday," then you are doing what you need to do as a writer.



WRITING EXERCISE

This can be a poem, story, song, journal entry, whatever. It can even be a picture! The important thing is just to create. Think about a time when something negative happened.

A) Where were you? What were you doing/thinking/feeling?

OR

B) Imagine you are someone else (either someone real or someone imaginary). Write about that event or a similar one from their perspective. What were they thinking/feeling/doing?

Writing Your Own Words

By Joe, Free Minds Program Assistant

Hi FM family! We hope you know how excited all of us in the office are whenever you send in new poetry. It inspires us every day to read your writing and to get to share your voice with the world. Your words have a huge impact.

Because the poems and stories you write make Free Minds what it is, we wanted to go over some quick guidelines for sending us your work. We always want you to feel free to write whatever is on your mind. You can write about anything you want, in whatever style you want. The only thing you *can't* do is copy someone else's writing or ideas. Taking someone's words without permission and passing them as your own is called "plagiarism."

Once someone has written words down, those words belong to the writer. It's perfectly ok (and important!) to be inspired by other people's writing and to learn new styles and strategies from the things you read. But copying a poem or a line that someone else has already used doesn't work.

If you really love a line and want to include it, you can quote it by putting it in "quotation marks" and make a note of where the line came from. And if there's a poem that someone else wrote that inspired you so much you want to send it to us, that's great too – but if you do, please let us know where you first saw it and who wrote it so we know who it was originally. We love to pass along your words to the community to show them the strong and inspiring people and poets you are, so we need to know it's your words that we're showing!



I WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN IN THE CAR

By LN, Free Minds Member Home in the Community

Temptation plays a big part in everyday life. Once you're tempted to do something, there's either a positive or negative impact from it. My experience with temptation led to nothing good. I was arrested for being in a stolen car as a youth, which led me to other negative things. Now that I look back on what happened in



the past, I think of ways I could've avoided the situation, like telling my "Good Men" that I'm not with them type of things and that I'm trying to stay on the right path. Even though it seemed fun in the moment, I wish I wouldn't have gotten in the car.

ASK HF: ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Hi Free Minds! We're starting a new advice column in the Connect to help with any issues you may be working through. HF is a Free Minds friend doing a long bid in the Feds, and he wants to give back to the Free Minds community by helping other young men like himself through their incarceration period. So please send us your questions and we may feature them (anonymously) in future issues! These can be about any problem you might want advice on...family, girlfriends, dealing with solitary confinement, coming home, you name it. Here is the first question in our series! —Sarah

Question: How do I break the cycle of incarceration in my family? My dad, uncles and cousins are still or have been incarcerated, and here I am, another young man already locked up.

Answer: In order to break anything, we must first learn the elements that the thing is made of. If you look at the lives of your father, uncles, male relatives, the elements that keep the cycle of incarceration going are drug and alcohol abuse, lack of formal education, and lack of financial resources. To break this cycle of imprisonment, you must discipline yourself to first get the drugs and intoxicants out of your diet because they cloud your decision-making skills. Then you have to commit yourself to education in all forms that are available to you. The more you know, the more you can do. We only sell drugs and rob people because our lack of educational and vocational skills limits us to these poor choices of obtaining wealth. The only way that we can come out of poverty legally and stay out of jail is to dedicate our time to learning about money and how to obtain, budget, save, and invest it in ways that will not land us inside of a cell. Lastly, you must be determined not to pass down the criminal mentality and actions to the next generation in your family. Do not glorify nor praise this tragedy. We wear a badge of doing time in prison on our shoulders as if it is something to brag or feel proud about. Speak down to this to your children, nephews, and younger male relatives so that they will have no desire to embrace the elements that lead to prison.



TEMPTED TO GO AFTER ENEMIES

By LV, Free Minds Member in Federal Prison

I want to talk about some temptations I had in the past. I used to feel tempted to go after people that I thought were my enemies. It's a crazy feeling that I used to get every time I would see those people. Words don't harm but in my life-style it only takes dirty looks to get hurt. Words do have meaning but we can't always be listening to everything. It was a big temptation I used to have. At times I did act without thinking.

Another time I felt tempted to steal just cuz it was easy and I knew I'd get away with it. But I was taking from people I knew. Something inside wanted me to steal, but there was this other part of me that knew that I shouldn't steal from my friends. See with other things like drugs, it don't even cross my mind. It's because it's unnecessary and I know it's only going to harm me.

Temptation is a Daily Dose

By DR, Free Minds Member in Federal Prison

When trying to premeditate temptation I never came out victorious. I always go into it with a game plan, but once I get into it, I see things differently. So when temptation comes, I try my best to embrace it and take my time! That will allow me to make few mistakes. Because we all know where it gets us when we don't think. So when we get tempted, we just have to have the ability to think things through! Because temptation is a daily dose that come in all shapes and forms. We can't stop temptation. But we can start thinking. Think NOW!

Temptation Can Also Be Motivation

By AJ, Free Minds Member in Federal Prison

What's good, Free Minds? Well, first of all, temptation is the reason that most if not all of us can say we're here. We were tempted by money, women, clothes, cars, etc. And we used those things as goals. But in actuality it was nothing but our temptation. So if we use temptation for something positive rather than negative, we can make something out of ourselves, because temptation can also be good motivation. It's all about what we choose to make our focus point. So stay on point and don't let your man tempt you with his whip with the chrome rims on it. If he does, set something positive in your mind to do to get the whip. A'ight everybody, keep y'all head up and stay focused. —AJ



SEPARATING YOUR NEEDS FROM YOUR WANTS

An Interview with MK, Free Minds Member Home in the Community

Free Minds: *You've been home for almost two years now. That's a big accomplishment! What's kept you on track with your reentry process?*

MK: My family's kept me on track. They gave me the support. And also me not wanting to become a statistic. I'm trying to be successful and have a lot to prove for myself. One of my goals is to become a great musician. So to stay on track I stay out the way. I had to change my environment, my state of mind, and the people I deal with.

FM: *What challenges have you faced coming home?*

MK: People try to get you to come back to the streets and to go back to your old criminal ways to get money. But you have to fall back from those people. I let them know it ain't because I think I'm better than them, it's just because I'm trying to do better for *myself*. I talk about it like a business decision. Another issue I've faced is housing obstacles. I couldn't live with my mother because she's on Section 8 Housing and you can't live there if you have a record. And I could have stayed in my grandma's house but it was in my old hood, which I was trying to fall back from. So for a while I had to go stay in homeless shelters just to stay out here.

FM: *What do you wish you'd known when you first came home? What advice would you tell yourself?*

MK: I would tell myself to watch who your friends are and who you associate with. A lot of times dudes say they're your friends, but when you're in jail they ain't. If you weren't there for me when I was in jail, don't bother being there when I come home. And I would also tell myself to have patience. A lot of stuff is going to come at you, and if you don't have self-control you'll do something dumb. For example, one day someone showed me \$50,000 in cash. That person wanted me to go rob somebody. It was tempting, but if I go do that and the police shows up, then I'm in big trouble. If you don't have self-control, then you'll lose sight of your goals. So I passed the situation up. It's crazy because the person who showed me that money was someone I met in prison. And guess what? That dude's back in jail now.

You've got to look at it like a chess game. Make your first move your best move or that will be your last move. You have to think way in advance. There's a lot of obstacles, but when you think you're about to do something crazy, you've got to have people you can call who are positive influences. That's why I come up here to the Free Minds office. I'm coolin' up here. I don't have to worry about anyone robbing me up here. So having that positive space you can go to really helps in having that positive support.

FM: *We've heard you say in the past that you have a problem with instant gratification and distinguishing your needs vs. your wants. Can you say more about that?*

MK: It's important to separate your needs from your wants because otherwise you'll be trapped in an illusion. All the shoes, the clothes...you don't really *need* that stuff. You just

want it. I fell victim to all that. But your shelter, your food, your freedom...that's what you have to focus on. Now I try to be my own person and not worry about appearance. You've got to cool it. For me, it's life or death. Do you want to risk your life for some shoes? Are you going to do 20 years to impress a girl with some shoes? And you can't impress girls with clothes anyway because are they really going to want you if you end up in jail or dead?

You've got to learn to build your confidence from other places and throw off your fear of rejection. I love me. I've got confidence in who I am. There's a difference between fresh and fly. I used to try to be fly—cool and everything. But now I'm fresh. Fresh is having the necessities you need like clean clothes. Fly is all the materialistic things. Fresh is better because if you can't be happy off the basics, then you ain't nobody. When you build your self-esteem then you look good no matter what you do. I like to be original so I get cheaper things and I *make* them fly. You don't have to fit in—we've been conditioned in that state of mind for a long time so you've got to learn to break the conditioning.

Want to know why I went to jail for all those years? Clothes. Money. Drugs. Bottles. Girls. Cars. That's why. I thought that's what made you a top dog. But now I know that it's about your personality. When you're in jail and they strip you down and you don't have any of that stuff, that's the time to find yourself. That's the time for you to reflect and make a change in your outlook.

FM: *You're a Free Minds Poet Ambassador as well as a spokesperson for the Campaign for Youth Justice. Doing that, you've met a lot of people. Can you tell us about your experience networking? What does that mean and why is it important?*

MK: It's important to network because it can open doors. You never know who someone might know. If you're friendly to people then that could make the difference in getting a job. Do a lot of reading when you're locked up so you have an expanded vocabulary and can talk to any type of person no matter who they are. And you can practice that while you're in there because you're locked up with people from all over the world. When I was in jail I would meet people from different neighborhoods because they might have something in their neighborhood to help me get a job—some different opportunity. You have to move around and meet people. You can't stay stuck where you are.

There's a difference between "cutting in" and networking. Cutting in is when someone's coolin' and you just interrupt and are doing too much and trying to get with them. But networking is you bringing something to the table and the other person bringing something to the table so that everyone can benefit. So I look at it like a business meeting. You've got to get to know someone first. Versus cutting in is for your benefit only. When I network I know I can learn from that person and that person can learn from me too.



THE STREETS KEEP CALLING ME

By Lamont Carey, FM Friend, Slam Poet, and Author of *The Hill, The Wall, and Reach Into My Darkness—I Hate This Place*
www.lamontcarey.com

Today is my first day back on the streets
And I got a secret to tell because this was a rude awakening for me
All those nights I sat upon that bunk and thinking about this day
Now reality and hope just don't look the same
So instantly I'm drained
This is the first time in my life that I felt ashamed
See I have to go live back at my mother's house
And including her everybody in there wants me out
See they say I'm just another mouth to feed
And there isn't no room in there...for me to sleep
And the streets start to whisper to me....

Lamont, come back.
You ain't got to live like that.
The streets ain't change
You still know this game.

See the streets keep calling me by my first name

And all my buddies I thought were going to take care of me
when I came home
Now they moving in the cell I just left or they dead and gone
So I'm out here alone trying to fend for myself
And every time I look in your direction
You lower your head and eyes so from you I can't get no help
And then the streets start to whisper to me...

Lamont, come back.
You ain't got to live like that.
The streets ain't change
You still know this game.

See the streets keep calling me by my first name

The other day I go see my parole officer
And she's telling me I have to do "A", "B", and "C"
Or she guarantee me
She gone take me off the streets
And all I want to do is say, Ms., just help me
But it seems she got her guards up
Like I'm here trying to make her job rough
So I keep my mouth shut
And promise myself that I'ma do as I'm told
And then the streets start to whisper to me...

Lamont, come back.
You ain't got to live like that.
The streets ain't change
You still know this game.
See the streets keep calling me by my first name

IN THE NEWS

By FM
Friend John

News

Since we last updated you, the biggest national news was probably the revelation that the National Security Agency, part of the federal government, had a secret program that traced phone and Internet use to detect potential security threats to the country. The news of the secret program brought up a lot of questions about how far the government can go to infringe on privacy in order to prevent serious security threats to America. The person who leaked the program to the media is named Edward Snowden. He has been traveling between different countries and is wanted by the US government.

In DC, former city councilman Michael Brown plead guilty to taking \$55,000 in bribes from men he thought were businessmen, but who were actually undercover FBI agents. Brown is cooperating in an investigation of an actual D.C. businessman suspected of secretly helping the campaign of Mayor Vincent Gray. Despite the investigation, Gray looks like he plans to run for mayor again. Among the candidates expected to challenge him in 2014: Tommy Wells, Jack Evans, and Muriel Bowser.

Finally, last month, the *Washington City Paper* published an excellent story about a shortage of restaurant employees in the city. Dozens of new restaurants have opened in the last year, and that has left owners and managers struggling to bring in enough workers to fill all of the jobs. It will be interesting to see whether the city supports its new restaurants by helping to train the many young people in DC who want and need to work.

Sports

They were the favorites to win it all from Day One of the NBA Season, and they will almost certainly be the favorites again when the 2013 season starts in October. The Miami Heat won their second consecutive NBA championship last month in an amazing seven-game series against the San Antonio Spurs.

At times during the series, it looked like the incredible team offense of the Spurs would be too much for the Heat. The Spurs were up 5 points in Game 6 with less than 20 seconds left, but late three-pointers by LeBron James and Ray Allen sent the game into overtime and the Heat won.

In the end, the difference in the series was simple: The Heat had LeBron, and the Spurs didn't. James finished 2013 with 26 points, 8 rebounds and 6 assists and 2 steals per game, the kind of stats that nobody has seen since Magic Johnson retired.

Entertainment

Summer of 2013 is already a big one for Hip-Hop releases. Kanye West released "Yeezus" last month, and Jay-Z put out "Magna Carta" just before July 4 weekend. Also among the major rappers to release albums this summer: D.C.'s own Wale, whose "The Gifted" dropped in late June and is currently 13th in Album sales.



CAREER CORNER

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!

REENTRY PROGRAMS TO CONSIDER:

By Ms. Keela, FM Program Manager

WEATHERIZATION TRAINING PROGRAM

202-526-2644 or 202-526-2643
915 Girard Street NE
Washington, DC 20017

The UPO Environmental and Construction Trades Training Academy program offers a full range of training courses for individuals interested in developing technical skills in the growing fields of weatherization and “green” construction. At the state-of-the-art academy, students are trained using cutting-edge technology. Individuals in the program can earn national certifications in the following areas: Building Analyst, Crew Chief, Installer, and Auditor. DC residents aged 18 and over are eligible to enroll in free courses. The state-certified training courses include:

- Weatherization Tactics
- Lead Safe Practices
- Air Sealing
- Blower Door Operation
- Mechanical Ventilation
- Energy Auditing BPI Certification
- Heating Systems, Gas & Oil

MAYA ANGELOU YOUNG ADULT LEARNING CENTER

202-289-8898
5600 East Capital Street NE
Washington, DC 20019

The Young Adult Learning Center provides academic and work force development to youth ages 17-24 who don't have a high school diploma, and particularly those transitioning from incarceration. Maya Angelou's academic program helps students earn their high school diploma or GED. The workforce program also offers career internships that provide employment and skills training. Additionally, the program offers a counseling and youth development support system to help young people get back on the right track.

Finding a Job With a Record

By Jeanna, Free Minds Friend

Hi, I'm Jeanna—a law clerk for the Employment Justice Center and a second year law student. Looking for a job can be difficult, especially when you have a record. But I'm here to provide some tips and steps you can take to help you find employment.

The first thing to do is request a copy of your criminal record. You can get a copy of your record from these offices: Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), D.C. Superior Court, U.S. District Court, and FBI. After you receive a copy of your criminal record, look for any mistakes or incorrect information. Sometimes your record will be incomplete; other times, it might list the same charge twice. One thing to keep in mind is that charges while you were in the juvenile system should NEVER appear on your criminal record. This ONLY applies to the juvenile system though, not Title 16 charges. If you do see a mistake on your record, gather evidence of the error and send copies to the MPD Records Division and FBI CJIS Division – Record Request. The best way to prove the error is to request the original criminal case jacket at the Superior Court or contact a lawyer.

Generally, private employers can consider an employee's record before hiring. However, there are certain rights you have if an employer does not hire you because of a criminal background check. You have to first give permission for the employer to do a check. If the employer denies you a job or fires you because of your criminal record, then the employer has to let you know that was the reason. Also, the employer has to tell you which credit reporting company sent the background check report. Not only do employers have to give you notice, but you have a chance to contest the report, especially if there is incorrect information on the report.

As for the job application, the main thing to remember is to answer truthfully and only answer what is asked. If you lie on the job application and the employer finds out, there is not much you can do about it later. It is important that you tell the truth about your criminal record, but do not leave it at just “Yes.” Provide an explanation and describe how you changed your life. Tell them some of the things you've done since then. Also, you are not required to give more information than what they asked for. If the application does not require you to provide information about your criminal record, you have no obligation to provide it.

The next step – and probably the most intimidating – is the interview. The employer may ask questions about your criminal record during an interview. Breathe and relax. Looking nervous can make you look guilty and leave a bad impression. The best way to handle this is to come prepared with an explanation. Know what you want to say beforehand. Also, take control of the conversation by focusing on the positive things you have done and what makes you qualified for the job. Show the employer that you have changed and are ready to move on with your life. Stay polite throughout the interview. While it may be tempting at times to call it quits, it's important to have confidence in yourself and remain positive.

The mission of the Employment Justice Center is to secure, protect and promote workplace justice in the D.C. metropolitan area. For more information about your workplace rights, come to EJC's Workers' Rights Clinic when you get out. The clinic runs from 6 – 9 p.m. on Wednesdays at 1525 7th Street, NW or at the SE Clinic on the first 3 Fridays of each month from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. at 1640 Good Hope Road, SE. The clinic is first-come, first served. For more information, visit the D.C. Employment Justice Center website at www.dcejc.org.



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



We'd like to give a shout out to this month's featured guest poet, James. Like you, James was incarcerated as an adult when he was in his teens. It's different for him though because he's the only juvenile in his facility in MA. As you can imagine, this is a very isolating experience. The good news is that James' caseworker Lauren reached out to us, and now she and James have formed their own "satellite" Book Club. We didn't get to include James's "What's Your Number?" poem in the Tribute Issue, so we're sharing it now. Feel free to write us with your feedback and we'll send it to him. And James, a warm Free Minds welcome to you.

?NUMBER YOUR WHAT'S

By James, Free Minds Friend in State Prison

(Blood from the concrete works its way
Back into the victim's body)
Victim's eyes re-open
The victim grabs a hold of his chest a
And cries out, "?me why God"
As his tears flow back into his eyes,
He's back in a standing position
The bullet exits out of his chest and re-enters
Back into the barrel of the suspect's gun
"out look mister hey!" (A young girl screams)
Urine on the concrete flows
back up the young girl's pants
The yolk on the concrete flows
back into the shells forming eggs
The grocery bag rises
back into the young girl's hand
She takes a good look at the suspects
And takes a few steps backwards
and reenters the store
The suspects run backwards a few feet
And place their guns back in their holsters
and enter back into their car
One of the drivers' hands points right ahead
And he says to his partner, "Goes he there"
The driver reverses the car four blocks down
Right where they get the call from the radio
The End.

Hey Free Minds, did you get to read Joe's article "Writing Your Own Words" on page 4? Well James's poem here is a great example of taking inspiration from someone else's work without copying exactly—it follows the same idea and pattern as Nas's song "Rewind," but changes the story to make it his own. Remember though that if you take inspiration from someone else, it's important to cite them by writing something like "Inspired by [author, singer, or title here]"!

PAY IT FORWARD

Hi Free Minds! We're happy to introduce our new "Pay It Forward" column. Every month we will highlight a way you can exercise your voice and play an active role in creating a better world and justice system for the next generation of youth. Please send us any ideas you have about topics you would like to see featured in this column!

WHY YOUR VOTE MATTERS

By Shae, Free Minds Reentry Specialist

Hi Free Minds! My name is Shae, and I'm joining the FM team to help locate job training programs and reentry resources for returning FM members. I'm writing today about an important step you can take to make sure we have reentry resources available in DC. We all have to vote! I would like to let you know why taking part in our democratic process is especially important to FM members. As you know, DC is changing, and poverty, jobs, and affordable housing are all issues that might affect you when you come home. Decisions on these issues are made by the people elected to the DC Council and other offices. So, in order to impact the decisions that affect YOU, you need to exercise your voice and vote! Here are some current facts about DC:

- The # of homeless families has increased by 40% since 2009!
- By 2018 only 9% of DC jobs will hire persons without HS diplomas.

Our elected leaders choose how money is spent in DC. **Do you have a job or place to live lined up for you when you come home? If not, using your voice to vote is extremely important.**

In 2014, DC will vote on a mayor and two Council-at-large seats. These offices make decisions about the budget and also have the power to "ban the box" (stop allowing employers to ask if you have a felony conviction on job applications). That could be the difference in getting an interview for that job that you desperately need when coming home! They can also allocate money to provide more affordable housing in the city and more job training programs, but only if voters send a message loud and clear about the issues they want to see improved.

The great news is that in the District of Columbia if you're awaiting trial or have served your time, you have the right to vote. So when you get home, we will have a voter registration form waiting on you! Voting is power; use it to make elected officials hear you!



Resisting the Temptation of Food: My Experience Fasting for Ramadan

By Shannon, Free Minds Intern

I can say the hardest part about Ramadan is the temptation. I'm around food, snacks, and goodies everyday. We even had a lunch for interns in the office this week and I couldn't eat anything! Discipline is key. If you lay the foundation of disciplining yourself, you can achieve so much during the month of Ramadan. It's all about discipline, fighting temptation, building resistance, and most importantly respecting thyself, and your higher power.



AROUND THE WORLD...



Decadence and Despair: Dubai, a City of Extremes

By Tara, Free Minds Co-Founder & Executive Director

Did you all receive my postcard last spring? If you did, you'll know that I recently visited Dubai. If for some reason you didn't get one (most likely we had the wrong address) I apologize and please consider this article your postcard! So, Hello from the Middle East! Dubai is a city in the country United Arab Emirates, right near Saudi Arabia. It is a land of luxurious excess for many and misery for most.

This is a millionaire's playground—Las Vegas on steroids. It all began with a little thing called oil discovered underneath the desert sands. The native Bedouin tribesmen who found it struck it rich...I mean really rich. Just think of all the oil used to fuel the world today. Today only around 15% of the people living in Dubai are actually from there. The rest of the folks come from all across the globe to try to strike it rich themselves, but in business instead of oil. So how do I sum up a country that evoked so many conflicting emotions in me? I'll start with some of the amazing things the country has accomplished.

Luxurious parts of Dubai

- World's tallest building. It's 163 floors—Scaredy-Cat me went to the top! It felt like I was in outer space.
- Most people drive luxury cars. Not a Hyundai in sight. The police drive Bentleys, Ferraris and Lamborghinis!
- World's biggest shopping mall complete with indoor ski slope (yes, you read that right), amusement park, ice rink, and aquarium filled with 400 sharks!

Now for the worst parts of Dubai

So who builds all those landmarks of luxury? 250,000 young men from poor countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal desperate to provide for their families



Dubai laborers waiting for work and the world's tallest building

back home. They work outside all year round in the extreme heat and live in labor camps where they sleep often 10 to one room with no air conditioning. They are paid low wages and are sometimes denied wages completely. If they voice a complaint they are deported back home on the next plane, and it's illegal to unionize or go on strike. There's nothing like the Employment Justice Center (see p. 8) in Dubai!

So why is this allowed to continue? First, Dubai is not a democracy and people can't vote to change things (see Shae's article p. 9). Second, even if all those men quit tomorrow, 10,000 more would come. There is so little opportunity in their own countries that this is their only option.

There is almost no crime in the country because if you are accused of a crime, you are either deported or subject to severe punishment. If you are found with drugs it's a minimum of 4 years in prison. Intent to distribute is 10 years and drug smuggling can get you life in prison or a death sentence. But most people I talked to said it's worth the price for no crime. They were from places like Pakistan and Lebanon where car bombings and violence are a regular part of life and were ready to pay that high price for safety.

So what do you all think? The good, the bad, and the ugly of Dubai. Write and let me know your thoughts!

Wheelchair Basketball in Uganda

By Shannon, Free Minds Intern



Wheelchair Basketball in Uganda and the United States

You may already know about our office neighbors The Advocacy Project (AP) from a past issue of *The Connect*. AP sends students around the world to help marginalized communities share their stories. One of their fellows recently worked with the Gulu Disabled Persons Union (GDPU) in Uganda, a country in East Africa. The GDPU runs disabled

sports programs for 600 disabled children as well as 120 able-bodied kids who participate as well. The games include wheelchair basketball, volleyball for kids with hearing impairments, and a game called showdown for those with visual impairments.

Over 100,000 people worldwide play wheelchair basketball. Wheelchair basketball follows most rules of regular basketball and includes a 10-foot hoop and standard court size. Some rules have been changed, however. For example, "travelling" in wheelchair basketball happens when the athlete touches his/her wheels more than twice after receiving or dribbling the ball. That person has to pass, bounce or shoot the ball before touching his/her wheels again.

GDPU is creating a new generation of disabled youth who will be empowered to expand their rights and express themselves through sports. In DC, there are a variety of programs and camps that provide free wheelchair basketball clinics for disabled athletes such as Emory Recreation Center and Walter Reed National Rehabilitation Ambassadors. The National Wheelchair Basketball Association (<http://www.nwba.org>) has a list of resources for people interested.





Thirty Days Clean and Sober

By Pat, Free Minds Friend

I'm 28 now, but I was 14 years old when I first used drugs. I had a big group of friends with older brothers around, so I was exposed to drugs that way. Everyone just did it to be in with the crowd. Now I know that my addiction is a disease that was passed down from my biological father. My uncle and father were always rolling joints. I think I've tried every drug except crack. The drug that almost killed me, however, was the prescription painkiller Percocet. My doctor gave it to me for pain after I had surgery. I wasn't supposed to continue taking the pills after my recovery from the surgery, but I liked the way they felt. I began taking more and more. My tolerance got so high that I was going through 100 pills each a week. My pills became like coffee. I had to take them as soon as I got up.

Addiction to painkillers is an epidemic right now. When I first came to rehab, I wasn't ready to admit I had a problem. I thought I could quit on my own. I kept saying, I'll quit after this weekend. Then it would be the next weekend, and then before I knew it a year would go by and I was still taking pills just to get through the day. It was an ego thing—a control thing for me. I am a stubborn person, so I thought I could pull myself back. I was letting everything around me fall apart. I didn't care if I was going into work late—I had to have my pills every morning. Most people didn't even know I was high because I was taking them just to feel normal. My habit cost me \$6000 a month.

To realize you have a disease is the hardest thing to do. Even when my marriage started to fall apart, I didn't face it. I lost my marriage, my money, my house. Now I say I didn't just lose all that...I threw it away with my actions. Now I'm starting all over. There are these pills that help you get through the physical symptoms of withdrawal such as Suboxone, but I went through withdrawal in the hospital without them. It was hard because it takes a long time for your body to recover, but now I feel better than I have in 8 years.

Right now I don't have the urge at all. I'm sure that's going to come, but I'm taking it day by day. In rehab I did have a week or two where I thought that I could drink or do pills on weekends at least, but now I know I can't because addiction doesn't work that way. If you have an addictive brain then you can't just have a beer...you have to have ten. Don't try to figure out why you abused drugs. You were born with the disease and you activated that gene by using. It isn't anyone's fault. It's in your genes, you have to accept that and learn how to utilize the tools to cope with it.

I quit for me. When I would try to stop in the past, I would say, "I gotta quit so I don't lose my wife and kids." But this time I already lost all the material things, (money, house, businesses, etc.), so I'm doing this just for me. I also know I can't do it by myself. They say in Narcotics Anonymous that the first step is to admit your life has become unmanageable. I never wanted to go to meetings but now I look forward to them. I go every day. I was released from rehab at 11:30 AM, and I went to an NA meeting at noon. The main thing is you are with a group of people who have the same problem as you. There are different types of meet-



PROUD TO BE
DRUG
FREE

ings. You might talk about steps or have speaker. I love going. When I got my 30 days clean I got a coin and everyone hugged me and congratulated me, which felt really good.

There's a line in the program that means a lot to me: "Rarely has a person failed who thoroughly followed the steps and rules of this program." One of the big tenets is to give back to others who are in the same position. I've already been asked to come back to the rehab place and speak. I asked why they asked me when I'm only 30 days out, and they said it's real for people sitting in a seat on day one. They see that if I can do 30 days, so can they.

The thing is, you have to want to quit. I was in there with people who were court ordered and were going to go out and use the minute they completed the program. I was always a person who liked to help people so it's natural for me to help others in the program now. This thing helped save my life and I want to help others save theirs. You have to hang out with positive people. If you don't have any in your life, you will meet people at meetings who put their name and phone number down so you can call them when you need to. It's been such a long time since I've hung out and not been high. I forgot that was possible.

You might feel weird when you first go to a meeting but there's nothing to feel weird about. Have enough guts and force yourself in. You don't have to talk. You can just listen. That's the most important thing I can say. That you can't do it alone and there are people that can help you through it. Thanks for letting me share.

The People Worth Fighting For

By Sherman, Free Minds friend home from prison

Temptation will always happen in life, but it's up to you to say no. What helps me is to find somebody worth fighting for—your child, mom, family, girlfriend, etc. Then ask yourself, "If I go this route, how will this affect the people I love? How will this help or hurt myself?"

Dealing with your emotions will always help with the temptation to give up. For example, recently I got hired for a job. I was so excited to celebrate the fact that I finally found employment. But a week later I found out that I couldn't start the job because of my record. Immediately I started to cry, because I was thinking, what's the point in even trying if I have a record? I was also embarrassed because I had already told everybody that I got a job. But after talking to the people that are worth fighting for in my life, they all told me that it's ok and to keep pushing and it will pay off in the end. So that's what I will do—keep pushing no matter what.



BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!



Hey Free Minds, Kelli's regular **BAM!** column will be back next month, so if you haven't sent her your thoughts about Detoured or Bombingham it's not too late! In the meantime, we wanted to share some book recommendations from Free Minds staff and members. As always, if you have a special request for your next book order, call or write the office! And feel free to send your own book reviews to share!

From the Staff: **Julia:** Long Division by Kiese Laymon. It's about a 14-year-old black boy growing up in the South and struggling to deal with racism. When he finds a way to travel through time, he has to go back to the past to save his grandfather's life. I thought the book was really powerful and thought provoking. Five stars!

From Free Minds Members: **T.T.:** He-motions by Bishop T.D. Jakes. It's a beautiful book to read for women and men. It's based on strength and how to work through tough situations.

R.W.: Trouble Man by Travis Hunter. It's about a man who is in the streets, who has a body on the way and already has a son whose mother is off the chain. But he realizes it's time for a change. My favorite character was Jermaine because he was a forgiving and kind person and he didn't give up on life. Instead he made wise decisions which led him to change. Reading this book encouraged me to change for the better. I would recommend this books for everybody: kids and adults, and especially, those who keep getting into trouble with the law. It was a ten.

QUOTE-I-VATOR

We gain the strength
of the temptation we
resist. —Ralph
Waldo Emerson

Never succumb to
the temptation of
bitterness. —MLK, Jr.

And at last you'll know with surpassing
certainty that only one thing is more
frightening than speaking your truth.
And that is not speaking.
—Audre Lorde

I'm hungry for knowledge. The whole thing is to
learn every day, to get brighter and brighter.
That's what this world is about. You look at
someone like Gandhi, and he glowed. Martin
Luther King glowed. Muhammad Ali glows. I
think that's from being bright all the time, and
trying to be brighter. —Jay-Z

Timmy Temptation

By DC, FM Member in Federal Prison

Picture this...

Lil Mikey, tired of being preserved
Thinking he should have
All the pleasures he deserves
Timmy Tim Temptation, he overheard!
About to trick the kid,
See how much trouble he can stir

Timmy introduced himself
Said, 'My friends call me Tim'
And Tim was kinda fly
So all Mikey could do was grin
Timmy said, "I got your back;
It's just me and you!
I can help you have fun,
Whatever you wanna do!"
And Mike ain't have a clue
He fell for the okey doke
Mike was just tired of being the butt
Of other people's jokes
So him a Timmy got tight
They was drinking and partyin' all night

Timmy had a sister, a real good girl
She stayed on her brother cuz he crushes
people's world
She did all she could to warn lil Mike,
But he was far gone & Timmy was his man
Tim's sister he couldn't understand
Now Mikey dead. To Tim, it's part of the
game
He tricked Mikey, ain't tell his whole name
He said it was just Tim, not Temptation
Mike shoulda took heed to his sister —
Pretty P Patience



NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: PAY IT FORWARD

Have you ever heard the phrase "pay it forward?" Pay it forward is the idea that if someone did something kind for you, you can repay them by doing something kind for someone. For example, Free Minds sends you books for free and gives you feedback on your writing. If you have ever given your book to a cellie to read or inspired someone else to find their own voice, then you are already paying it forward! Paying it forward is a great way to start a cycle of positivity and to spread compassion rather than negativity or violence. The main idea behind the concept is that you are doing something nice for someone else, not because you owe them something or expect them to do something back for you, but simply because you want to give back by helping someone who needs it.

So for next issue we want you all to think about the ways in which people have paid it forward to you, and how you can pay it forward to other people. Maybe you had an older brother or mentor who looked out for you, and now you're giving advice and support to a younger brother or cousin. Or maybe you've started thinking about how you can help the next generation stay out of jail when you come home. Or maybe it's as simple as someone said something that really picked you up when you were in a bad mood the other day, so now you're giving a compliment to someone else who may be having a hard time. Who are the people in your life who have most helped you to mature and grow? Who do you want to help and why? What are some steps you can take right now and in the future to spread hope or encouragement to someone else? Whatever your "pay it forward" story is, we want to hear it! Send us your poems, stories, essays, and especially artwork for our next issue of *The Connect*!