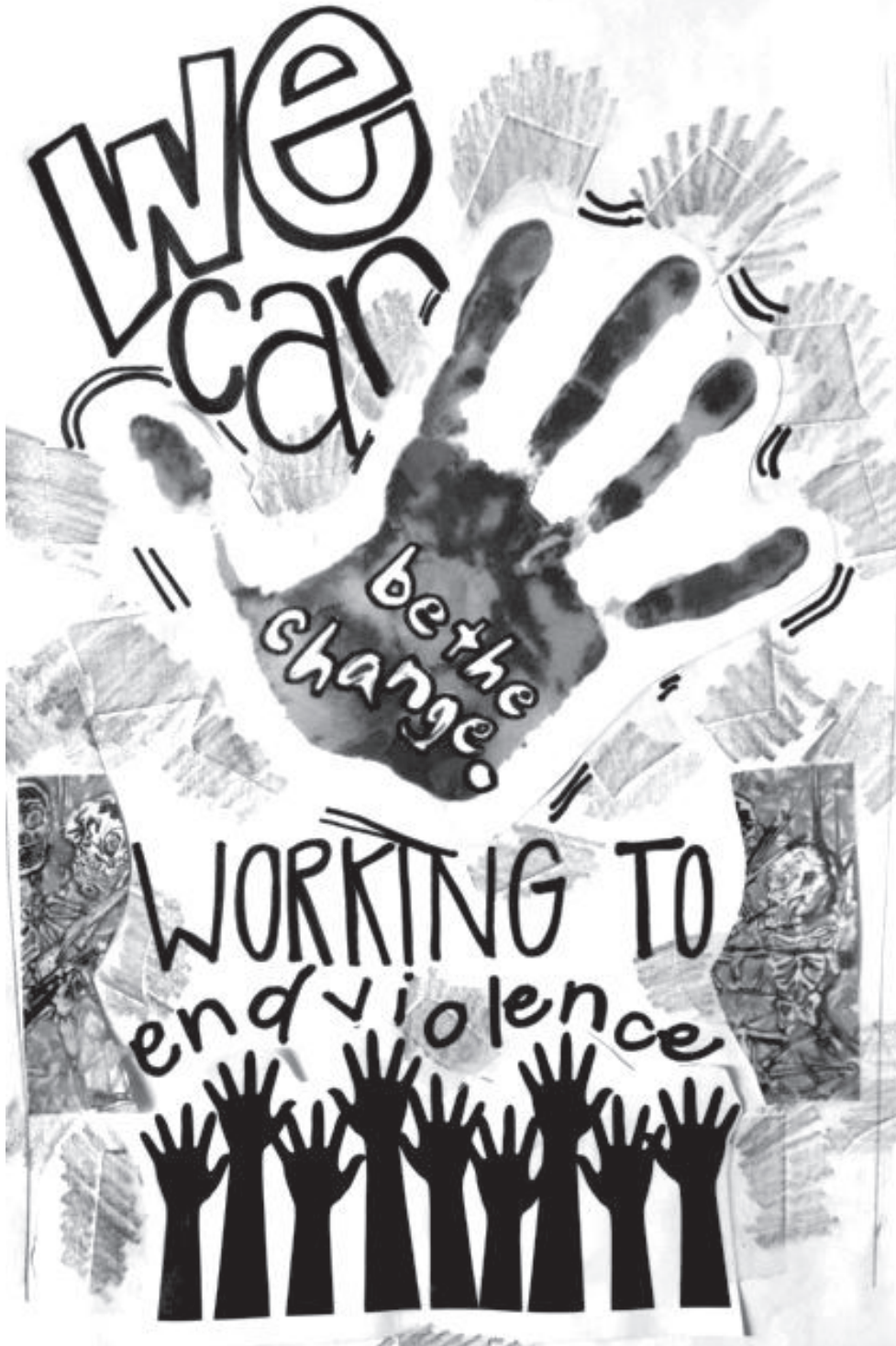


Free minds Connect

THIS MONTH'S THEME:



IN THIS ISSUE:

**“Never get lost
in a sea of
despair”
Civil Rights
Hero Rep.
John Lewis
Visits Book
Club (page 7)**

**FM Mom:
“I Lost My Son
to Street
Violence”
(page 5)**

**FM Member,
Doug: “Proud
to Earn a
Paycheck!”
(page 11)**

Is brought to you by...

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**MH, IS, AR, AN, DJ,
DH, BH**
FM Members

**HF, CM, CL,
Vincent, BH, Jan**
FM Friends

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

Free Minds Book Club
2201 P Street NW
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**Next Issue's
Theme:
Belief Systems
& Faith**

Warm Spring Greetings Free Minds Change-Makers!

I hope this issue finds you well and deep into your 2016 goals. If you recall from our last issue on Resolutions I was inspired and adopted a mantra "LEAN in Twenty-Sixteen" wherein I vowed to shed worry, old belongings and bad habits all weighing me down.

I'm happy to report I've started down, as our Job Site Supervisor Tony always says, my "success path." I haven't traveled far yet mind you (my old stuff reduced by only about 20%) but I had a big "aha" moment. Before I can start to shed things from my life, I need to bring one really important thing in...and that's compassion. Specifically, compassion for myself and realize that it's difficult to make outer changes until the inner attitude towards myself shifts.

Which brings me to this issue's theme: *We Can Be the Change: Working to End Violence*. When thinking about this issue I had so many things I wanted to share about ways we can all work together as a community to end violence and then Congressman John Lewis walked into the Book Club on the juvenile unit (see Kelli's story about the historic visit of Civil Rights hero p. 7) and it all became crystal clear. One of the most powerful things we can all do to begin to end violence is to embody peace within ourselves. As I write this, I'm sipping from my favorite coffee mug with the famous saying by another peace hero, Gandhi: "Be the Change you wish to see in the world." After all the violence he's suffered and witnessed, Congressman Lewis maintains an aura of pure peace that radiates to everyone who meets him. You all know I love yoga and totally believe that the energy fields we create can influence others. His presence had a surreal, calming, immediate effect on our Book Club boys before he even said one word. It was amazing. His own aura of peace transformed them. They went from rowdy to listening with rapt attention. Meeting Cong. Lewis and seeing the effect he had on the Book Club members will forever be one of the highest moments in my life.

So my message of how to end violence is to bring kindness, love and compassion for yourself and it will radiate out to others. Easier said than done, right? Well this is where we, your FM family, comes in as in this issue you will read wise words from HF, JG, and CL who have all transcended above lives filled with violence and pain. They are on another energy level like Cong. Lewis.

HF shares what he thinks being a Free Mind really means, JG shows us there is a third way separate from being feared or being full of fear, and Free Minds mom CL writes to pass through the darkness and pain of her son being killed. They all show us that the very first step to ending violence is to look inside ourselves at our own thoughts and feelings.

So look inside this issue and be inspired, uplifted and write back. Share your stories. That's the only way we can educate the world. As FM member JP says, "We can't change things if people don't know what to change." Tell us your experiences so we can spread them to the world.

I asked Congressman Lewis how he and his fellow nonviolent demonstrators were able to withstand the vicious beatings and taunts hurled at them and he said first, they had a cause greater than themselves and they stuck together. They weren't alone. "We leaned on each other," he said. So my LEAN IN 2016 means leaning on each other to bring about peace.

Sending you love and compassion,
Tara

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

FREE MINDS HQ



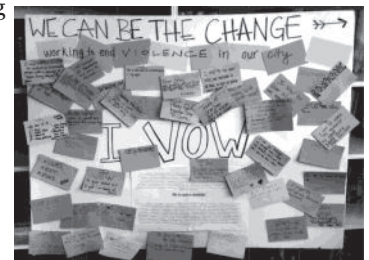
By Jess

APPRENTICESHIP UPDATES

On February 5th, we celebrated the graduation of 11 new apprentices (our largest class ever!) from our Job Readiness and Personal Skill Building Apprenticeship Program. Free Minds Reentry Coach Marcus shared words of encouragement and purpose with the audience, before introducing graduate Alvin, who spoke about his passion for writing and the power of community to bring about change. Then Tony Belton, a returning citizen and our Apprenticeship Job Supervisor, shared his message of perseverance and hard work as the co-owner of a successful contracting business that hires ex-offenders. Each apprentice walked across the stage and received a certificate and honorary Poet Ambassador shirt, before gathering with friends and supporters for lunch and celebratory cake! One month later, two of the graduates are working full-time, seven are in job programs, and two are continuing their education. We are so proud of these incredible young men!

TRIBUTE EVENT IN JANUARY

As people across the world spent January making New Year's resolutions, members of the Free Minds family gathered to resolve to end the violence in our city. On January 14th, a group of 35 FM members and friends came to an event called *We Can Be the Change: An Evening Dedicated to Our Fallen Brothers and Sisters*. Tara and Kelli welcomed the crowd and several FM members shared poetry by fallen brothers. We gathered in a circle around a glass bowl filled with water. One by one, people placed small stones in the bowl and called out the names of each loved one they were honoring. Marcus explained a new Free Minds initiative called #IVow, a chance for each person to make a personal commitment to rid our community of violence. Marcus shared his vow to never make a decision while under the influence. He wrote this on an index card, and placed it on a board. Others followed, making personal pledges about ways they can reduce violence in our city. We will launch this as a media campaign on Twitter. What is your #IVow?



(Continued on page 3)



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

By Kelli

To My Free Minds Family,

In the final four months of 2015, three young Free Minds members lost their lives to violence in the streets of DC. They were 21, 28 and 24 years old. The world lost three bright, creative and generous souls. And for what? I don't understand why, any more than any of you do. The grief and frustration we felt when these young men were murdered led us to hold our Tribute event on January 14th. We would gather to honor their lives and to challenge ourselves and our community to name out loud and in front of each other the ways that we can contribute to ending the violence. We wanted to be held accountable.

On the day of the event, Keela and I went to the juvenile unit. We told the young men what we'd be doing that night and asked them to write down on a blank piece of paper the names of people they wanted honored. In just minutes, the page was filled. There was not one young man from the Book Club who had not lost multiple people—to violence. That night, standing at the glass bowl filled with water, as I recited each name from the paper on their behalf, I dropped a smooth river stone into the water. Stone after stone after stone after stone...

It's not right. It's not how it is meant to be. Individually and together, we HAVE to do everything we can to stop it. This isn't something that we can afford to think about just at funerals, or when the theme of the Connect is "Stop the Violence." I am pleading with every single one of you, every Free Minds member and friend to join the struggle to end the violence. I believe in the power of the Free Minds community. Do you all believe that we can be the change?

Love the hell out of everyone.

Stay strong and keep your mind free.

Your friend always!

Kelli

WORDS OF WISDOM

By JG, FM Member

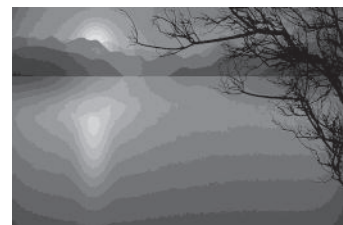
The Illusion of Violence

Growing up in DC shaped the way I viewed violence growing up. Coming up, all I was around was violence. Nearly everyone I knew sold drugs, did armed robberies, extortions, pretty much all the under world has to offer. There was fist fighting, which led to a lot of shooting. The mindset was "kill or be killed."

I was told, "There's only two things in this world, the predator and the prey." At a very young age we were forced to make the decision as to which one of these we would be. This was a very black and white way of seeing things, but we were being raised in a concrete jungle. At the time, it made all the sense in the world. I chose to be a predator. I felt I'd rather be feared than be full of fear. It seemed like the more out of your mind and crazy your actions were, the more people respected and feared you. In DC it was all about being thorough, ballsy and unafraid to do whatever it took to get some money and maintain your respect amongst your peers.

Since I've been incarcerated though, I've realized it was all an illusion we were chasing. The violence was reckless and a sign of weakness when I really look at it. Instead of power, my actions were proof of the fact that I had no control over myself or my own emotions. My mental and emotional state at the time was dictated by the words and actions of others because of the spell I was under, and the illusion I was chasing.

In the back of my mind I knew what I was doing was very wrong. But contrary to what I know now, I believed that to do anything else would be a sign of weakness. Now I know that I can fully take control of any situation that I may find myself in and avoid violence. Just because another person is angry and raging doesn't mean I have to be too. In most cases, when you're cool, calm, and collected, and you're not letting your ego control you, you're able to show some understanding and compassion to the person that is trying to provoke you and calm them down. That's all most people want anyway. This doesn't always work, and its not always easy, but I believe it's worth striving to make these connections rather than resorting to violence.



(FREE MINDS HQ Continued from page 2)



#WECANBETHECHANGE EVENT

On Thursday, February 18th, we held our **We Can Be The Change: Working to End Violence in Our City** event downtown at the Shakespeare Lansburgh Theatre on 7th Street. Over 150 people packed the standing room only event, hosted by ABC7's Leon Harris. Free Minds members read poems, and there was a panel discussion including authors George Pelecanos, Tony Lewis Jr., and WJLA/ABC7's Jennifer Donelan. Guests were overwhelmingly supportive, and had great questions for our panelists on causes and potential solutions for violence in our community. Everyone added their own "vows" to the board started a few weeks prior—all while a TV news crew filmed and interviewed Free Minds staff, poet

ambassadors, and guests. We're so grateful for the chance to spread the message of hope and change in the new year, and look forward to our next panel event in April.





THE WRITE WAY

Change

By Julia

One of the things we've been talking about a lot around here lately is the idea of *change*. How can we be the change? Change is important in life, and it's important in writing. When you're writing a story or a book, something always has to change. Usually one of two things has to happen:

- 1) The main character changes
- 2) The reader's understanding of the character or world changes
- 3) All of the above

The first option is probably the most common: the main character changes. Whatever is happening to them in their life is worth writing a book about, so it must have an effect on them, otherwise we wouldn't be reading about it!

A very, very, very basic outline of most stories goes something like this: Main character wants or needs something, main character tries to get what they want/need but there are obstacles in their way, main character succeeds or doesn't, but ends up in a different situation and maybe with a different way of thinking.

I'm writing a story right now about a young woman named Nita who has just gone through a breakup and she's struggling to figure out how to live alone. She ends up reaching out to this complete stranger named Marta, and she tries different things to connect with her ex or with other people. In the end, she doesn't get back together with her ex, but she's learned to be okay with being alone. (That's the idea anyway—I haven't written the end yet!)

A character who doesn't change is not very interesting. If your main character doesn't change, think about this:

- 1) How would the situation in the book affect you or people you know? How would it change them?
- 2) If your character really won't be changed by the events of the book, are you sure the book is about them? Maybe someone else is the main character...

Writing Prompt

Describe yourself at the beginning of your story (remember—you can start wherever you want!). How have you changed as a person?

If you're writing a book, try this with one of your characters. What were they like in the beginning of the book? What are they like in the end?

FREE MINDS MAILBAG

I've learned a hope like no other through reading and writing. It is now impossible for my mind to ever be locked in any space ever. So, please continue to spread the hope because it is working. —MH, FM Member

I loved the way that you described NY; I felt as if I were actually there at the M&M store with you! —HF, FM Friend

*Again, thanks a lot for letting me be part of y'all family. And as far as the poems, I didn't have just one favorite and that's being honest. I really loved the book as a whole and the creativity plus the way the guys got a chance to express their inner feelings through words. Every soulja has a story to tell.—CM, FM Friend (after reading Free Minds literary journal, *The Untold Story of the Real Me*)*

Really you guys were the ones who unlocked this hidden talent. If it weren't for you I don't think I would enjoy writing as much as I do. You guys gave me another way to express myself that allows me to connect with others.—IS, FM Member



FAMILY TIES

The column where FM family and loved ones weigh in.

Paying the Cost

By CL, Free Minds Mom who lost her son Derrick to gun violence in 2008.

My son Derrick was shot and killed in 2008 just a week before his high school graduation. He was 19. I remember waking up that morning, waiting for the bus, and seeing police activity down the street. I didn't think that had anything to do with me, so I went to work like normal. Later that night when I found out what happened, it was like an out of body experience. I didn't even let the detective finish his sentence. From that moment all the way until about 2014, a lot of things were foggy for me. I was angry and hurt for a long time. I would try to think about the happy times, but at first even thinking about the happy times just made me hurt more.

I remember going to Cardozo to pick up Derrick's cap and gown. I was in a daze. I remember coming up the stairs with his diploma in my arms. I was supposed to walk the stage at his graduation for him, but I was so distraught I couldn't go. That day was the first time I actually let the tears just flow. He wasn't here to graduate, and that felt so unfair. He was delayed coming out of high school, but he was getting his life together, and I was so proud that he was going to graduate high school and enroll in college. I was angry that he was gone.

I can relate to how people feel when they act out of anger and retaliate when a loved one gets killed. I came from the projects and grew up around plenty of people who stirred up trouble and turned on each other when they got older. When you experience that kind of loss and anger, I can understand why people think about payback. But I always thought that particular way was wrong. When it comes to something as heavy as that, I definitely had to turn it over to God. If I had done something to retaliate, I knew it wouldn't help the situation and I couldn't have lived with myself. I live by my conscience and I like to be at peace and at ease.

I stayed angry and numb for a long time. I have a tendency when I'm hurting, I keep myself busy. If I keep doing things, before I know, time's passed. I turned to my faith. I have always been a person of strong faith, because that's how my mother raised me. My mother passed away when Derrick was young, and I thought of her often when I was dealing with losing him. Another thing that helped me was writing. Some days, I would grab a piece of paper and write a poem or whatever I was feeling, because writing always made me feel better. Free Minds helped me as well. They framed some of the poems that Derrick had written and gave them to me. I have experienced death a lot of times. When I lost my son, some days I didn't feel like I had the energy to do anything at all. I remember not wanting to get out of bed; not caring about the fact that life

(Continued on page 15)

ASK HF: ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Dear H.F.,

I'm only two months from my release date. I been saying all the right things and up til now I believed them. But now I'm thinking about all the dudes I heard say the same things over the years, and then within a year they are right back in here. Fact is, I was once one of those guys. This my second bid. It feels different this time though. I know they call it "prison talk," and even my family don't seem to believe me when I tell them all the things I'm gonna do right. It's making me doubt myself. I'm starting to wonder if I can stay away from the streets... Everyone says they are going to be so happy to see me back out there. But will they feel that way when they see that I've changed? Have I really changed? I guess I'm just losing my confidence. I really want to make it this time. Help!

Sincerely, A.R.

Dear A.R.:

Your problem is not that you are confused about if you have really changed. Your problem is whether you are ready to be who you really are around others who may not be ready for the new you. Being a Free Mind is *not* about reading books and writing poems. Being a Free Mind is about having the courage and strength to be the person that you really want to be, regardless of how anyone feels about it. If you are afraid of being who you really are, then you might as well stay behind bars the rest of your life because living your life within the confines of others' opinions about you is more of an imprisonment than any cell that you may ever find your body in. If you have really changed, then you have changed. If you really want to make it this time, then make it work. You're never going to be Free until you overcome the shackles and chains of worrying about what others think about you! Just my thoughts.....

Your Free Minds Brother, H.F.

THE LEGAL PAD

by Vincent, FM Friend and DC Attorney



In this issue we will look at the similarities and differences between probation, parole and supervised release. Thank you FM friend Vincent for taking the time out of your busy days in court to share your legal knowledge!

As a lawyer who specializes in working with people facing violations of supervision, I am often amazed at how little is known about the three forms of supervision: probation, parole, and supervised release, and how those differences determine whether someone might go back to prison on a violation for a few months or many years. Hopefully, this will give you a clearer idea of what the terms mean. In the District of Columbia everyone who is on supervision is supervised by the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) –whether on probation, parole, or supervised release.

Let's start with probation. Probation is simply a sentence imposed by a judge instead of sentencing someone to prison or jail. The client is placed under the supervision of CSOSA **instead of incarceration**. If the CSOSA officer tells the judge he/she is unhappy with how the person on probation is doing, the judge can

(Continued on page 8)

BY FM MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

The Streets of DC

By BG, FM Friend

Losing friends
Drowned out with sirens
Has me searching for peace
Hating to have to carry a piece
Just to hang
Violence is not the answer
But all who think so
Are embracing a blood bath
Leaving no one to survive
A simple act of genocide
Leaving no sides
Just a series of acts of violence
Raising the salaries of homicides
I question
Why should there not be peace
In the streets of DC?
We can be the change
Just think how beautiful it will be...
I do not want us to perish
Let's end the violence
In the streets of DC
We are the change
Starting with you and me

Hope

By AN, a FM Sister

I hope I grow up one day
I hope I live to see 90+
I hope the anger in me goes away
I hope I don't just give up
I hope I'll have a family soon
I hope someone claims me as their own
I hope I'll still see the sun and moon
Each day is a blessing and I won't give up
I hope I can right my wrongs
I hope I can start over new
I want to be a better person
And not a simple fool
I hope prison changes me for the better
I don't want to be institutionalized
I hope this keeps me from stealing
And telling stupid lies
Now I'm free!
I can finally make things right
No more hoping
It's time to live my life

Sins of the Father

By DJ, FM Member

Where should I start
Or how do I begin?
I know you're wondering
Why I am never there
Or where I've been
Visits through a glass
You ask me why
And I say I'm at work
I know you don't believe me
Sometimes grownups lie
Where should I start
Or how do I begin?
Now mom's dating other men
Should you be mad?
I wouldn't say so
It's my fault I'm not around
So I'ma take the first step
To atone for my sins
I am sorry
It won't happen again

The Story of My Life

By DH, FM Member

My life is like a notebook
Filled with empty pages, bitter words, and blank
statements
I stare at the pages and try to picture what should go in
those spaces
When I can't make my own I take from others and try to
trace them
I'm not being a follower, I just use the leaders' example
As inspiration, persuasion and sometimes motivation
Convincing me to keep the ink on my paper
The bitter words are like lemons or grapefruit
If you put enough sugar on it, it will taste true
People sell it everyday like Minute Maid
But a lie will stay sour until its lemonade
And these statements that I make that seem so bold
Are often the ones that makes my heart look cold
Someone said if you can't take the heat
You should stay out of the kitchen
But even if you don't like the truth
You should still listen...

PAYING IT FORWARD

“I believe in nonviolence as a way of life, as a way of living.”—Congressman John Lewis

BIG NEWS!

Congressman John Lewis Visits Free Minds Members at the DC Jail

By Kelli



Co-authors of *March: Book One*, Andrew Aydin and Congressman Lewis after visiting the incarcerated juveniles of Free Minds. (Check it out: They are each holding a copy of your book *The Untold Story of the Real Me!*)

Have you started reading our new *Books Across the Miles* title, award-winning graphic novel *March: Book One*? Yes? So you know that Congressman John Robert Lewis (D-GA) has been *paying it forward* most of his life. As a young boy in Alabama, Lewis saw how he and other black kids were riding raggedy school buses and attending substandard schools while the white kids rode to new schools, in nicer, cleaner buses. He knew it was wrong. So when he heard about Dr. Martin Luther King’s movement using nonviolent protest to create change and equality, he wrote King a letter saying he wanted to help. Lewis knew his actions could bring him personal harm, but he wanted to make this country better for the rest of us.

At the age of 20, Lewis joined a sit-in at segregated lunch counters in Nashville. Angry whites who didn’t want them there, spat in his face and put cigarettes out on his head. Lewis and his fellow demonstrators vowed not to respond with violence, but only with peace and love. At 23, he led a group of 600 protesters across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama on their way to Birmingham to protest discrimination. They were met by baton-wielding Alabama state troopers who beat them as they knelt in prayer on the bridge. It was so violent that the day came to be known as “Bloody Sunday.” The shocking images of the brutality were seen across the country on TV and that helped the tide begin to turn. Slowly but surely, discriminatory laws have been struck down and greater equality has been achieved. But not without a continued struggle. And the fight is far from over. Yet John Lewis has never given up.

On Tuesday, February 23rd, we welcomed Lewis and his aide and co-author Andrew Aydin to the Free Minds Book Club. More than 20 of your young FM brothers, all of whom have read the book, gathered in the CTF chapel. For two hours, Lewis and Aydin shared their stories. Lewis told of growing up the son of sharecroppers in rural Alabama, and of being beaten arrested and jailed over 40 times for participating in nonviolent protests. Aydin told of being a lonely young teen, angry at the violent father who had abandoned him, and turning to comic books as a refuge. (The two met when Aydin volunteered for Lewis’ congressional campaign. Eventually, Aydin would suggest Lewis tell his story in a graphic novel. While other staffers laughed at him, Lewis did not. He agreed. The result is an amazing book that takes this monumentally important part of history and makes it accessible to millions of people.)

On that Tuesday afternoon, all of us sat in a big circle. We were on the edge of our seats as Lewis described the violent confrontation on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. “Did you ever think you were going to die?” asked one of the book club members.

“I thought I was going to die there that day on the bridge,” he said. “I thought I saw death.”

Another asked how Lewis dealt with the killing of his friend Martin Luther King, without wanting to get revenge. “That’s not what he would have wanted,” he said. He used to tell me “Love everybody. Just love the *hell* out of everybody!”

Someone wanted to know what MLK might say to the young men in the Book Club if he were alive. Lewis sat silently for a moment. Then he said, “MLK would say to you, get the best education you can find. When you go home, find something that is so dear, so right, and so necessary. And then follow your dreams.”

(Continued on page 10)



THE LEGAL PAD

(Continued from page 5)

hold a hearing. At a probation violation hearing, the judge can continue probation, or revoke it and impose the sentence up to the amount of time that was suspended.

Parole and supervised release are forms of supervision that occur **after the judge sentences a person to prison**. They are always for felonies. A person on parole or supervised release reports to the same CSOSA officer as someone on probation, but the consequences for a violation are very different. When the CSOSA writes a violation report for a parolee or supervised releasee, they write to the United States Parole Commission and the Commission issues an arrest warrant. Once the person is incarcerated, the hearing process moves forward.

Parole is the old system which was replaced by supervised release in 2000. While there are still many people on parole, judges stopped sentencing people to parole after 2000. Now all people sentenced to prison terms are released to supervised release, not parole. Under a parole sentence, the judge would sentence to 5 to 15 years or 6 to 18 years, 7 to 21 years and on. Do you notice a pattern? The first number, usually a third of the second number, was when the person was eligible for parole and the second number was the end of the sentence. So in the first example, after 5 years, the Commission would conduct a hearing. If granted parole, then the person would be released and stay on parole for the next 10 years. During those 10 years, the Commission could decide, after receiving a report from CSOSA and holding a hearing to revoke someone's parole and the person would be returned to prison. Under the parole system, parolees were on supervision for a very long time, often decades. The Commission has tremendous power over someone on parole, because the Commission can send a parolee back to prison for many years.

Supervised release sentences are very different than parole sentences. First the judge sentences someone to one sentence followed by a period of supervised release. For example, let's say the judge orders a sentence of 2 years, followed by 3 years of supervised release. A person must serve at least 85% of the time in prison before being released. Once released, the person is placed on supervised release.

Unlike parole, the amount of time that someone can go back to prison for has nothing to do with the sentence the judge gave. Back to the previous example, you might think the amount of prison time this person faces would have something to do with either the 2 year sentence or the 3 years of supervision, but it does not at all. Instead, it is determined by the charge the person was convicted of. Every criminal charge has an amount of time known as back-up time. Back-up time is either 1, 2, 3, or 5 years. Serious charges like murder carry 5 years of back-up time, but most charges carry 2 or 3 years of back-up time. A person who received 6 months incarceration from the judge faces the same amount of back-up time on a revocation as someone who received 15 years. Similarly, the person who received 1 month of supervised release faces the same amount of back-up time that the person who received 5 years of supervised release does.

Back-up time does not get shorter as a person nears the end of their supervised release. If a person is revoked when they have just 1 day left of supervised release, they face same amount of time they did the first day they started supervised release. While a parolee can receive credit for the time they were on parole, a person on supervised release never receives credit for the time they were on supervision. A person can have 1 week left of supervised release, see the Commission and receive a sentence of up to 5 years!

Finally, if you are revoked on supervised release, the Commission gets to give you an entirely new sentence that can be much longer than the sentence the judge originally gave. In fact, the Commission can impose a new sentence up to the maximum the judge could have imposed. So even if the judge gave 1 year of supervised release, the Commission after revoking supervision can and does resentence people to up to 5 years of supervision.

QUOTE-I-VATOR



"Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon, which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals." – *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

"Peace cannot be achieved through violence. It can only be attained through understanding." – *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

"Let the music play, me don't want no more gunplay / When the bodies hit the ground, there's nothing left to say / Me don't want to see no more innocent blood shed / Me don't want to see no more youth dead." – *Snoop Dogg*

"An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind." – *Gandhi*

"Sick of the blood / Sick of the thugs / Sick of wrath of the next man's grudge." – *Nas*

DC Photos of the Month:



The Friendship Arch over H Street NW in Chinatown. If you haven't been home for a while, you'll be surprised how much this area around Gallery Place/Verizon Center has grown! Tons of good

restaurants and shopping. It's always bustling!

This statue of Mahatma Gandhi, the famous peace activist and practitioner of nonviolent civil disobedience who fought for India's independence from Great Britain, is at 21st & Massachusetts Avenue, NW. Have you ever seen it?



IN THE NEWS

By John, FM Friend

WORLD

World powers are hoping that a truce in most of Syria will enable the Middle East to stabilize somewhat while the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS) and other terrorist entities wages on. Early on, the truce has produced a tremendous drop in violence while airstrikes against the area controlled by ISIS continue.

NATIONAL

The race to succeed Barack Obama has produced, at least on one side of the aisle, one of the craziest primary contests in modern history. Here is how things look at the moment:

Democrats: Hillary Clinton is in the driver's seat now. She won many of the states up for grabs on "Super Tuesday," which is a day when about a fifth of the U.S. states vote in primary elections. Her opponent, Bernie Sanders, continues to draw support from young voters.

Republicans: There are three gentlemen remaining in this contest: Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, and John Kasich.

After Super Tuesday, the math suggests only two likely outcomes. One is that Donald Trump will be the Republican nominee for president.

The other outcome: All of the other guys put together get enough primary delegates that Trump does NOT win a majority, and the nominee is decided at the Republican National Convention this summer. This rarely happens, and when it does you can bet that the outcome is decided with lots of backroom deals.

Trump came under fire in late February when, in an interview with CNN, he refused to totally "disavow" David Duke, who had suggested Trump would make a good leader. Duke is a former legislator from Louisiana, but he is also a former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Republican establishment is extremely wary of supporting Trump as a candidate. But if he earns enough delegates during the primary season, the choice to not support him becomes very difficult.

GRAMMYS AND OSCARS

The major American award ceremonies for music and movies – The Grammy Awards and the Academy Awards – were held recently. Here are a few of the big winners:



Best Rap Album, Best Rap Song, Best Rap Artist: Kendrick Lamar (left), who led everyone that night with five total awards.

Best R&B Song: *Really Love*, by D'Angelo

Best Movie: *Spotlight*, a film about how the newspaper in Boston uncovered a massive sex abuse scandal involving Catholic priests.

Best Actor: Leonardo DiCaprio (right), who finally won an award, 22 years after his first



nomination, for his role as a man attacked by a bear and left for dead by his companions in *The Revenant*.

LOCAL

In January, President Obama announced he would use his executive powers to ban the use of solitary confinement for juvenile offenders.

Now, to be clear, the president's ban on solitary applies only to juveniles incarcerated by the federal government. He does not control the policies of state or county-run systems. And the federal government does not put juveniles into prison until they turn 18 years old.

So the real impact of this announcement will be at facilities that hold federally incarcerated juvenile offenders until they turn 18.

But advocates hope that the president's announcement will trigger similar changes in state prisons, and that eventually we will see a growing trend against the use of solitary confinement altogether.



President Obama continues to press for justice reform by banning solitary confinement for juveniles in federal prison. Obama became the first sitting President to visit a federal prison at FCI El Reno last July.

SPORTS

On the basketball court, it's been a tough winter in D.C. The Washington Wizards have been underachieving, and currently are on the outside looking in when it comes to the playoffs. They'll need to dominate in March and April, and hope that the Detroit Pistons and Charlotte Hornets play badly.

Same for the Georgetown Hoyas, who never got it going this season and missed making the NCAA tournament.

Meanwhile, the Maryland Terrapins have been one of the hardest teams to figure out in college basketball. They are probably one of the three most talented teams, but regularly lose big road games in the Big Ten. Our guess though is that this team will make a deep run in the tournament.

On the ice, the Washington Capitals have a chance to finish with one of the best regular season records in the history of the NHL. The Montreal Canadiens scored 132 points in 1976; the Caps have 107 points with 11 games left.

In hockey, you get two points for a victory and one point for a loss in overtime. If they hypothetically won all those games, the Caps would finish with 129 points. **L-E-T-S G-O C-A-P-S!**





PAYING IT FORWARD

(Continued from page 7)

At the end of the session, members of the Book Club rose to perform this poem they had written together for Congressman Lewis.

Free Minds March

*Sacrificing myself and my family for rights and education
 Fighting through these ropes of segregation
 Killing them with kindness and no irritation
 To make an impact on this great nation
 We would take the word “nigger”*
 Instead of pulling a trigger
 We were beaten and broken down to little pieces
 To pave the way for our little nephews and nieces
 We wanted nonviolence, but they gave us hatred
 We gave it to the world, sat back and were patient
 Rosa Parks wouldn’t give up her seat
 Because she wasn’t going to let racism repeat
 So we sat at lunch counters asking to be served
 We got spit on and yelled at, but didn’t get disturbed
 Congressman Lewis ...
 If you and Dr. Martin Luther King didn’t have a dream
 We wouldn’t have equal rights in 2016!*

Congressman Lewis and Mr. Aydin stood and applauded the Free Minds poets! Everyone was eager to get their books autographed and shake hands with the Congressman, and then it was time to say goodbye.

As we rode down on the elevator, I told Congressman Lewis about all of you—the hundreds of Free Minds members serving time in federal prisons across the country. I asked him if he had a message for you, and here is what he said:

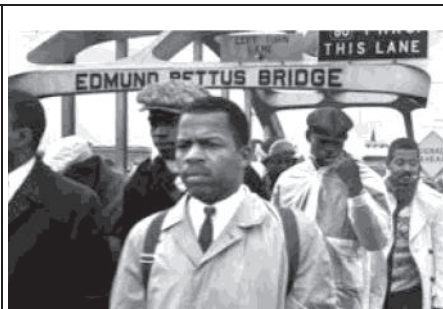
***“Tell them to keep the faith. Never get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful.
 Never hate. The way of love is the way.”***

Both John Lewis and Andrew Aydin are role models for *Paying it Forward*. Meeting them, and hearing the uplifting message they shared with the members of Free Minds was truly one of the most inspirational experiences of my life.

**The Book Club members agreed that this word is a hateful racial slur. Because John Lewis and his fellow civil rights leaders endured this word over and over during the movement, and because Lewis recounts this in his book, the young men felt strongly about including it in their poem.*



John Lewis was arrested more than 40 times for nonviolent protest.



On March 7, 1965, when Lewis led more than 600 people protesting racial discrimination across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama state troopers responded by attacking and beating them with nightsticks and bullwhips. The protesters refused to fight back.



Lewis himself was beaten and knocked unconscious. He still bears the scars





REENTRY PROFILE

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

An Interview with Doug

By Alison

Doug joined Free Minds when he was incarcerated as an adult at the age of 16. After serving seven years in federal prisons across the country, 24-year-old Doug returned home in the fall of 2015. He sat down with Alison to discuss the challenges and successes he has had so far.

Alison: Tell me about what you've been up to since you came home.

Doug: I completed the Free Minds Apprenticeship last fall. Through Free Minds, I was able to get some real job experience. I took advantage of that opportunity, and it led to a full time job with a contracting company called Perspectives. It's the first job I ever had. Every day I look forward to learning something new, and I'm just happy they took a chance on me. I want to make sure I don't let them down.

Alison: What has been the most challenging thing about returning to your community?

Doug: I would say settling down. When you first come home, everyone expects so much from you, and it can be overwhelming. Everyone wanted to see me and spend time with me since I was locked up for so long. I want to spend time with everybody, but I need to stay focused on my goals too and take my time.

Alison: What has been your motivation to stay on a positive path?

Doug: My older brother is my biggest role model and my motivation. He was incarcerated, and he came home a few months before I did. Now, he motivates me and gives me advice. If he can get himself together and stay out, I know I can. When people stress me out, he always tells me to not worry about other people and to stay focused on what I need to do. I have a greater appreciation for my freedom now. I'm trying to stay home, stay positive and enjoy freedom, because I know not everyone's got it.

Alison: What are your goals this year?

Doug: I want to tone down my lifestyle a little, and live life and accept things for what they are. I know I don't always need the best and newest things. Sometimes what you've got is good enough and you need to be satisfied but keep working and better things will come.

Alison: You were recently featured on NBC4's Viewpoint TV program. What was that like?

Doug: It was a good feeling, something new. It was nice to be recognized, and to see my hard work paying off.

Alison: This issue's Connect theme is about ending the violence. What can we as a community do so the next generation of guys coming up doesn't have to live through some of the same violence you did growing up?

Doug: We need more programs that help bring us young guys together, because through the system, 9 out of 10 of us know each other, and I think through those relationships we can bring some of these unnecessary beefs to a halt.

Tense

by BH, FM Member

The violence in D.C has caused me to become tense
 I have to remain in defense
 Mode while walking the streets
 Carrying weapons
 With the perception
 That this is the only way I'll make it home safe
 Violence in D.C gives me anxiety attacks
 Scared to look someone in the eyes
 Because of the hostility in their faces
 Violence in D.C has caused me to commit crimes
 Carry a pistol without the right to protect yourself
 I once thought it would be best to approach the younger generation coming up
 The problem lies in our old generation
 Adults who were supposed to set the example
 It's disappointing when I see guys in the late 30's or 50's

Acting like they have no sense
 Instead of correcting those childish behaviors
 Influencing the younger generation
 Who think it's cool
 It's like trying to teach an old dog new tricks
 Even though it is not impossible
 Turning the tide is beyond my understanding
 But I can do something
 It's simple...
 Share my life
 Encourage the youth to set goals
 Share experiences from my youth in the streets
 Not glorifying
 But telling the truth
 About the nightmares, stress, mental pain, physical pain
 Sharing examples of how pride is their worst enemy





THE LASTING EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE

Special to *Free Minds Connect*: A Conversation between Sean and Lee Smith that was recorded and recently broadcast on StoryCorps (www.storycorps.org).

StoryCorps' mission is to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate world. We do this to remind one another of our shared humanity, to strengthen and build the connections between people, to teach the value of listening, and to weave into the fabric of our culture the understanding that everyone's story matters. At the same time, we are creating an invaluable archive for future generations at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

On June 5, 1989, Sean Smith, 10, and his younger sister Erin, 8, were alone in their Florida home when Sean came across a .38-caliber revolver in his father's dresser drawer. Sean began playing with the gun, and unaware that it was loaded, he pulled the trigger, fatally shooting Erin in the chest. Now 36, Sean lives with constant pain and guilt about what happened. Storycorps recorded a conversation between Sean and his mother Lee about that day.

Sean Smith (SS) and Lee Smith (LS)

SS: I remember taking the gun out. My sister was off to the side of the room. I distinctly remember her saying, "You should put it back," and she ran across just as my finger hit the trigger. It went off and, in a flash, she was down. My ears were ringing and I remember picking her up and sitting her in my lap. I had my hand over the wound and I grabbed the phone and I was calling 911, trying to talk to the operator.

<< 911 call >>

Young Sean: I didn't know my dad's gun was loaded and I shot her.

SS: I remember trying to do CPR on her but there was no response to it.

<< 911 call >>

Young Sean: ...she's dead.

911 operator: She's dead?

Young Sean: Yes. Please get my mom and dad. Oh my God...

SS: Once the cop got there I remember him bringing me into the living room and sitting me down and, you know, I was just trying to wrap my 10-year-old mind around what had happened. That, you know, in an instant my sister wasn't there anymore.

What do you remember about that day that Erin died?

LS: It was just a blur to be honest with you. You know, when something happens, like when a crime happens, you're mad at this person but we had nobody to get mad at, because how can you get mad at a 10-year-old little boy?

Do you remember any conversations you had with your dad at that time?

SS: I just remember him saying, "It's not your fault." But I couldn't help but blame myself at that point, you know, I didn't even think of where he might have felt some guilt as well. I mean, any little mention or memory of Erin would break me down and, you know, I'd be a crying mess.

LS: Even though you fought like brothers and sisters, whenever there was a picture opportunity, you always put your arm around her like you were protecting her.

SS: Yeah. We were only a year apart, and we definitely had that sibling love.

LS: You know, I had the hardest time when people asked me how many children I have. They go, "Oh, what's their ages?" And I say, "41, 36 and eternally 8."

SS: How did you see this change me?

LS: When you were younger, it seemed to me that you just pushed it aside, but as you got older it seemed to come more to the surface.

SS: Yeah. I dropped out of high school, got introduced to drugs, and cocaine was definitely a big factor in my drug use. But then my son, Dylan, was born and I didn't want to go back to that life anymore. So my son pretty much saved my life.

If you could speak to Erin now, what would you want her to know?

LS: I'd love to be able to tell her that you were okay, but I'm worried that you're not. I'm worried that this is going to haunt you forever.

SS: I would want to tell her I'm sorry. I regret every single thing that happened that day. And I wish one day that I'll be good and it'd be nice to finally say that and, you know, and mean it.

LS: —and mean it. (laughs)

SS: Yeah.

StoryCorps





REENTRY SPOTLIGHT

By Keela

Hi Guys,

I want to tell you about some awesome job readiness options right here in the nation's capital! Our goal is for you guys to embark on a successful re-entry path, and I've found some options that might interest you:

The Center for Empowerment & Employment Training - CEET offers educational and job training in the following areas:

- Customer Service and Sales
- Preparation for A+ Certification Examination
- Business Writing
- Public Speaking
- Accounting and Bookkeeping Classes
- Entrepreneurial Development Training
- Personal Development Seminars

CEET is a partner of Greater Mt. Calvary Holy Church and manages its job bank. The program places 75% rate of individuals in jobs! CEET is located at 600 W St. NE. 202-832-4070.

Labor Local Union 657 – Labor Local Union 657 offers a plumbing apprenticeship and training program to develop skills needed to obtain steady employment in a demanding and complex working world. As an apprentice, you will have access to the following:

- Hands on training
- Job placement assistance
- Full membership upon completion of the apprenticeship
- On the job representation upon completion of the apprenticeship

Labor Local Union 657 is located at 5201 First St. NE. 202-726-3326.

The first step we hope you each take upon release is to enroll in the Free Minds Apprenticeship Program. However, there are many options depending upon your interest and background and we are grateful they exist, so please don't hesitate to take advantage!

Until we CONNECT again! - Ms. Keela

REMINDER: If you will be coming home soon, let us know your release date so we can reserve a spot for you in our one-month paid Free Minds Job Readiness and Life Skills Apprenticeship.

AROUND THE WORLD...

The column where we explore places near and far on our miraculous planet. The writer is guide and the readers are on "vacation via imagination."

AUSTRALIA: THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF OZ

By Jan, FM Friend



G'day Mate,

Yes, we really say that in Australia (aka "Down Under") where I come from! I live in Washington, DC now, but I go home at least once a year. Otherwise I start to miss the Australians' crazy sense of humor and a good Cherry Ripe (an Australian chocolate bar that is to die for!) I just flew home last month, and thought I'd take you on a little virtual journey with me.

"Washington: We Have Lift-off!" Flying to Sydney, Australia's largest city, with a population of almost 5 million, takes me 24 hours from Washington, DC. So, although the pilot might only say "fasten your seat belts" rather than "we have lift-off" I am still in for a loooong journey. (Just to give you an idea, the trip to the moon in 1969 took 72 hours.)

I buy myself a couple of good books, settle into my seat and relax thinking about the sunshine that awaits me. In February it is cold in DC and hot in Australia. No matter what the time of year, the northern and southern hemispheres always experience opposite seasons, because one part of the planet is more directly exposed to the rays of the Sun than

(Continued on page 14)





AROUND THE WORLD...

(Continued from page 13)

the other. This exposure alternates as the Earth revolves in its orbit. My point is, it's worth spending 24 hours to get closer to the sunshine and further away from two feet of snow in DC!

A bit of history about my country -- Australia was originally inhabited by indigenous people known as Aborigines. Then Europeans landed in Australia in 1606. Like Native American Indians, the Aboriginal people were displaced and forced to submit to European rule. You may have heard of Australia's unique history as a penal colony. From 1788-1852, Great Britain sent their convicts to Australia as punishment. After finishing their sentences, most former prisoners decided to stay and join other British settlers. Australia became a commonwealth in 1901.

Wow, I am already landing in Los Angeles, where I see eucalyptus (gum) trees which are native to Australia but often planted in California -- hooray, Australia can't be too far away...right? NO! After flying another 14 hours over the vast Pacific Ocean, I finally see Sydney's beautiful beaches with lots of folks out surfing; and parading in tiny cozzies (more about that later.)

Sydney is on the East Coast of Australia -- kind of our New York City. If you laid a map of Australia on top of a map of America they would be approximately the same size. But America's population is almost 330 million while Australia's is just 24 million. Interestingly, on average, Australians live approximately five years longer than Americans...Maybe it's all that space? The vegemite? Or maybe its universal health care for all its citizens?



Vegemite is a sandwich spread made from yeast which Australians eat like peanut butter. Many Americans don't think it tastes good!



There are 1,332 steps to reach the top of the bridge. Whew! That strangely shaped building is the Sydney Opera House.

I spend a couple of days exploring this beautiful city, joining a group of other slightly scared, but ultimately exhilarated, folks climbing the Sydney Harbor Bridge to gain a bird's eye view of the city and Sydney Harbor from 500 feet up. Climbing the bridge takes 2-3 hours, but the sights in every direction are extraordinary!

Another must-do in Sydney is to take a ferry around the harbor. Check out the beaches, tour the inside of the Opera House, and then get off to tour the Tooronga Park Zoo to see the weird, funny, fabulous animals that exist only in Australia. Australia is such an old island, having broken away from a super continent (Gondwana) 180 million years ago, that it has animal and plant life that exists no where else. When you go, check out the kangaroos, koala bears, wallabies, wombats, platypus, as well as the emus and a host of colorful parrots.

Aside from Sydney, what Americans often hear about in Australia, is the Outback. This is a bit like America's west. It is the desert portion in the remote interior of the country. Australia's indigenous peoples create beautiful artwork of this landscape, often portraying a story only able to be

told and passed on by a small group of people. (*Come visit the Australian Embassy in DC when you return to see some of this art on display!)

Up for more adventure? Head north to the area of the country known as Queensland. Here you can go surfing or take a catamaran out to the Great Barrier Reef and swim with the beautiful tropical fish (and a few of those monster sharks)

Before I leave you to reunite with my Australian family, I must teach you some Australian slang to help you through your stay:

Here are a few bits. Can you guess their meaning? (answers on next page; don't cheat!)

Tucker

Sheila

Bruce

Cozzie

Cobber

Stubbie

Long Drink of Water

Eat a Dead Horse



A green sea turtle swimming among the colorful coral of the Great Barrier Reef (I know the pic is in black & white so you'll just have to trust me!)

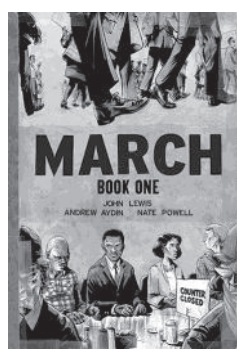




BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

By Julia

You will soon receive your copy of *March: Book One*. Here are a few more questions to consider as you read. Send us your answers!



- How do you think John Lewis felt preparing for Obama's inauguration given all that he had seen and experienced?
- After getting home from Buffalo with Uncle Otis, Lewis said, "After that trip, home never felt the same, and neither did I." What do you think he meant?
- When John wanted to transfer to Troy, an all-white university, why do you think his parents said no? Would you have done it?
- Why did nonviolence worked for John Lewis and Martin Luther King, Jr. to bring about social change? Would other methods have worked?
- How is the Black Lives Matter movement today similar and different from the Civil Rights movement? What about the fight for immigration rights?
- What do you think of the notion of "loving one's attacker?" See p.82.. Have you ever had to try to see the good in someone who was your adversary? Was it possible?
- How does reading this book affect you? Is there a modern day issue for which you would be willing to take a stand or march? If so, would Lewis' nonviolent techniques work?

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: Belief Systems and Faith

Do you believe in God or a higher power? If you do, how do you describe it? Were you raised in particular faith tradition? What do you believe now and why? Do you have doubts? How does your belief system shape you? How does it sustain you/ give you hope? Do you think there is an after life? If so, describe it. This is an enormous topic. We can't wait to read what you write!

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

(FAMILY TIES Continued from page 5)

was still ticking away. My son was gone. I didn't care. Everybody's experience is slightly different. You have to find a way through the darkness to get where the light is.

Since Derrick was in the process of turning his life around, I knew he would want the same for his younger siblings. I have two other sons and a daughter, and I needed to pull through my grief for their sake. I took my kids to meet with a therapist. I had to explain to them that this was not to say that you are crazy or a bad person. There should not be a stigma on going to seek help. Sometimes you need to see somebody who doesn't know you but is willing to listen and provide the encouragement you need. Counseling definitely helped my children deal with losing their brother.

I still think about Derrick every day. When somebody close to you dies, they take a big part of you with them, but they also leave a big part of themselves with you. You only find out what it is over time. Every once in a while we have a moment as a family where we remember Derrick, something silly he did or said, and we have a few laughs. We try to enjoy the memories of the good times to help us get through the pain.

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.

ANSWERS TO AUSTRALIAN SLANG:

Tucker (Food). *Sheila* (used to talk about any woman—like "lady" or "chick"). *Bruce* (used to talk about any man—like "dude"). *Cozzie* (Bikini). *Cobber* (Friend). *Stubbie* (Small bottle of beer). *Long Drink of Water* (Tall person). *Eat a Dead Horse* (Have a hamburger...by the way there are now more McDonalds per square mile in Australia than in America, and Australia's obesity rate rivals America's (thanks a lot!))