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Vol. 4, Issue IV

Free minds Connect

THIS MONTH'S THEME: Family



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Free Minds Connect

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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
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Next Issue's

Theme:

"I RESOLVE..."

(see back page for details!)

TALKBACK WITH TARA

Happy Thanksgiving My Free Minds Family . I am so thankful for all of you.

I hope this issue finds you in good spirits and good health! If not, read on because the Connect you are holding will lift your mood—almost guaranteed! It's like one big family reunion (without the food of course- bbq chicken, mmmm ☺). Inside you will find inspirational articles on family sacrifices as well as triumphs. Your FM brother Robert will inspire you with his unwavering commitment to be there for his daughter all 21 years he was locked up, while FM brother Kalef demonstrates courage as he shares his own powerful adoption story. After that, FM sister Melissa shares her mother's story of courage to come to the US from El Salvador, and you'll read part two of Logan's amazing story of transformation from gang life to youth educator. You might even find yourself singing when you read about a new way to teach reading to young kids, and that's before you even get to the amazing poetry from all of you. This whole issue is one big celebration of family togetherness!

Having the chance to build your own tribe is an incredible thing and I feel eternally grateful for the Free Minds family we've created by choice and by love. One of my good friends also created her own tribe when she adopted three kids. Every year, they celebrate "Gotcha Day" on the day the kids were officially adopted. Besides referring to the day they come into each other's lives, for me it also signifies that they "got their backs"—that the parents will always be loyal and strive to protect them. I'm so glad we "got each other" to share bonding moments and rely upon each other.

Until our next family get together,
May the long time sun shine upon you
All love surround you
and the pure light within guide your way on
Tara

Free Minds Mailbag

Here is what some of you have said about our literary journal, *The Untold Story of the Real Me*.

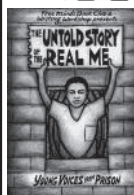
I think it was a complete masterpiece and it made me happy to be a part of the Free Minds family.
~DH, FM Member

I love it. It's so cool! ~WW, FM Member

I really like the book. Tell everyone I said "Good work! And continue to write!" ~EM, FM Member

I love it! La verdad es que esta muy lindo (The truth is it is very beautiful!). I felt so many emotions and to be honest I read all them poems and what the FM members had shared was so powerful.
~LV, FM Member

FREE MINDS HQ



Literary Journal Launch Celebration

On Saturday, October 17th, Free Minds staff, volunteers, and community members gathered at Busboys & Poets Restaurant in Takoma Park to celebrate the launch of our brand new literary journal, *The Untold Story of the Real Me*:

Young Voices from Prison. The night began with food, drinks, and mingling, as people came together to hear the untold stories of Free Minds members. Among the more than 100 attendees were public defenders, the director of Jubilee Jobs, a nonprofit providing job preparation and placement, a UDC law professor, and a government delegate from Maryland.

We dimmed the lights and played a video introducing new supporters to our program. Then spoken word artist Bomani Armah hopped on stage to spread the Free Minds message and pump up the audience! After performing a piece, Bomani introduced Tara and Kelli to speak about the importance of sharing the untold stories of our community.

Poet Ambassadors, Juan and Andre, then took the stage. Juan read Makkah Ali's poem "Free of Charge" (p. 113). He explained that many guys on the juvenile block struggled to read, which is why letters from family sometimes went unopened. Juan said the Book Club brought together guys who normally would not have been friends, describing it as a place where people could come together and express themselves, something that is very rare in jail or prison. In fact, before joining the book club, Juan says, "I practically gave up on myself."

It was Andre's first time speaking to an audience as a poet ambassador. "Free Minds saved my life—not from death, but from giving up," he said. "Free Minds helped me become a man, to walk with my head held high." Hearing Juan and Andre not only share their stories, but the words of other Free Minds members, was the absolute highlight of the evening.

Singer-songwriter LEA performed two original and beautifully moving songs inspired by Free Minds poets. The first was about freedom and identity, and the second spoke of family and love.

After a high-spirited raffle for awesome prizes (including an X-Box One!) Seana closed the evening, thanking everyone and reminding them that when communities come together, real change is made. As Andre said, "Love is priceless. Being there is priceless...this is something that's going to make an immediate impact, immediate change."

FM at the White House

That's right...the WHITE HOUSE! After President Obama proclaimed October as Youth Justice Awareness Month (#YJAM), the White House hosted an event featuring several youth advocates to answer questions from high school students from around the country. One of them was our very own FM member JP who shared his story of incarceration and transformation. It was an honor to be invited and we are incredibly grateful for the growing discussion around juvenile justice reform.



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

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hey Little Brothers & Sisters,

That's right. It's a very small number, but there are female members of Free Minds. Until they turn 18, DC houses juvenile girls who have been charged under Title 16 on the women's unit at CTF. While they can't attend Book Club, we do send them books, and they are an important part of the Free Minds family.

I just returned from a week in Oregon with my own family. I really appreciate how many of you have asked about my Mom since her stroke last year. It touches my heart. She continues to work hard and little by little her speech is coming back. A funny thing that happened this trip was that I bought her a cellphone that is made for older people—really straightforward and easy to see the buttons, etc. The brand is called a "Jitterbug." Anyway, the day we got it, I overheard my mom whispering, just practicing over and over saying the word "Jitterbug." She is amazing.

I know I am so fortunate to have a strong and loving biological family. That said, my definition of the word, "family" is so much broader. It includes friends that I know I can talk to about anything. And it includes you. Free Minds is an enormously important part of my life. **Free Minds is family.** I hope that you feel that way too. Together, we focus upon each of us pursuing a positive path in life. Rooting for each other and celebrating our successes together along the way is what family does.

Keep your mind free and your heart open. ~Kelli

GUEST COLUMN

This issue we hear the story of Free Minds Member and Poet Ambassador, Kalef, who was adopted by a neighbor as a child.

Adopted

by Kalef, FM Member

"Family" is a complicated word for me. When I was born, my mom was addicted to crack cocaine. She didn't stop. My father spent much of his time beating up on her. I am one of nine kids in my family. I don't really even know the whole story, but before I was two years old, I was living with my Grandmother.

Those early years of my life were crazy because the neighborhood we were in was just so bad. I think it was probably really rough for my grandmother, because it wasn't long before I was getting in all kinds of trouble. Every time she turned around, I was ending up at YSC for stealing or robbing. Looking back, I see that I was just lost. I was a little kid looking for love.

When I was 10, there was a single lady living just two doors down from my Grandmother. She saw what we were going through and she took me in. Eventually, she adopted me. I knew her all my life, but suddenly moving into her house? That was a different story. I think it was more than a year before I felt comfortable enough to call her "Mom." Then one day I got into trouble at school, and she came down there to see what was going on. For some reason, it was that day that I realized how much she loved me.

My biological mother is still on drugs. I know my father too, but I don't really have a relationship with either of them. I think both of them wish that things were different. I don't have anger for either of them though. I don't communicate with my brothers and sisters either. I always thought being adopted was just a stepping stone in my life, and I always wished I had grown up in a strong family. But I am very close with my mom who raised me. She means the world to me because of what she did.

I am about to have my own son. I want to give my son the family that I didn't have. A positive upbringing with a family that has overwhelming love for each other and are willing to carry each other through thick and thin. We won't let mindless stuff separate us from each other! My son will have a place where he feels comfortable and never wonders or worries about who his family is.

JG'S WORDS OF WISDOM

By JG, FM Member

When my mother passed away in June of 2006, I'd been locked up a little over three years. I knew she had health issues, but nothing could've prepared me for the amount of pain I felt. I was devastated for months. My mother was my source of strength. She was the perfect mixture of serious and playful, always discerning. She always had some jewels to drop on you at any given time. My mother was definitely the *alpha female*. Back in the day, several of my girlfriends told me that my mother kinda scared them. I would always laugh and ask them why. They would just say it was something about her. It was funny to me because back then, I probably couldn't put it into words, but I knew exactly what that "something" was. My mother was a matriarch, and it was easy for anyone who came into contact with her to sense, because that's the type of aura she exuded.

My mother still is a guiding light for me, and always will be. My father died nearly a year ago now. It took a few days for it to register, but I broke down in tears when I allowed myself to acknowledge it. I didn't know him well, so I never considered how I'd feel if he passed. I think I mourned more so because of the *lack* of a relationship I had with my father. We never had a real opportunity to know each other like fathers and sons are supposed to do. If I'd never known him at all it probably wouldn't have hurt so much. But to have that possibility so close for so long, and then to have it suddenly snatched away was crushing. Despite the anger and bitterness I had felt toward him for the majority of my life, I was devastated to lose him.

Sometimes it feels like I was cheated out of a true family experience. Even now, I've been locked up so long I'm unsure as to what my place is in my family structure. What I do know is that I'm eager to get back to them and figure it out. I know that my aunt and my sister are forever supportive of me in every way.

I look forward to having my own family one day and plan on being the best father I can be. I'm so aware of the impact a father has on a child. So that's a promise to myself that I'm more than determined to keep.





THE WRITE WAY

Writing Other Characters

By Julia

Take a moment to think about the person you know best. What makes them who they are? How would you describe their personality to a stranger? That's what you're doing when you write—trying to explain the essence of a person (whether it's you, your mother, your father, or a character you created) that you know very well to the reader. One of the great joys of reading a good book is getting to know the characters in the book as though they were your friends or family.

Right now I'm reading *The Beautiful Struggle* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (his first name is pronounced: Tah-Nuh-Hah-See) It's a memoir (a true story from his life) about his relationship with his father and his brother growing up in Baltimore. I've never met any of the people in the book, but I feel like I know them. How is this possible?

The author writes about how his father's history shaped him, what he wants out of life and why, and the choices he makes to achieve those goals. As a reader, I don't know everything about him. I don't know his favorite food or even what he looks like. But I feel like I understand him because I know why he does what he does.

In a good book, things don't just randomly happen, people don't just do things with no reason. Every person and every character has **motivation**. What do they want? Maybe they want money, or food, or freedom, or love. Those desires drive their actions—and if we can understand what somebody wants, we can understand their actions.

Writing Exercise

Think of someone who you know really well. Imagine you are that person. Write a poem or a story from their perspective, showing what they're thinking or feeling.

For example, pretend to be your mother. What would say to you if she were here?

Or...

Think about a time someone did something you didn't understand. Maybe your girlfriend didn't write you or your father didn't call. Imagine you are that person. Now, write a poem or a story through their eyes explaining why they did what they did.

No Less

by Ben, FM Friend

Through no fault of my own,
I too have been thinking about what goes into a family.
Meaning, I got dumped earlier this summer to my surprise.

It wasn't a particularly long relationship, nor with somebody particularly special.
But there was just enough of both that the end stopped me cold.
The breakup collided with a couple of other jarring moments, too,
as these things always seem to do.

And so summer ends with a lot of thinking about relationships and family.
How each person has to pitch in to keep it going,
needs to be able to get a point across,
allow the same of others,
and conquer all form of problem.

Clearly this one and I couldn't work together,
Couldn't build something more than ourselves,
Couldn't talk,
(if we could have, I wouldn't have been so damned surprised).

It was good in the end to have ended,
but I remain rather raw.

Family, no matter how it gets stitched together,
lets us in,
knows how to talk with us,
listens,
kicks and screams and fights,
heals, fulfills, and teaches -
Makes us belong.

And settles for no less.

Family

by JP, FM Member

Let me tell you what family is supposed to be
One unit that shows love, respect, and loyalty
Honor, support, and avoids negativity
We are one so who cares about individuality
One unit, standing strong
Congratulates the right but corrects the wrong
Always there, either in person or via phone
One band, one drum, like a mighty fight song
Don't have to be blood-related
Because that's overrated
Being blood is not how family is created
Family... look it up and tell me where is
blood stated
Through the support of my fam my dreams
became reality
And nothing in this world is more important
than family



FAMILY TIES

The column where FM family and loved ones weigh in.

Being There When You Can't Be There: A Conversation with FM Member Robert and His Daughter Rontreal

Free Minds September Apprenticeship Graduate Robert recently came home after serving 21 years in federal prison. When Robert was incarcerated at age 18, his daughter was just 11 months old. We recently sat down with Robert, now 39, and his daughter Rontreal, now 21, to discuss their relationship over the years and across the miles. Robert served time at prisons in Lorton, Virginia, California, Atlanta, and in various parts of Pennsylvania. He and his daughter Rontreal maintained a strong relationship over the 21 years of his incarceration, and are enjoying catching up on lost time now that he has returned to the community.

FM: Rontreal, what are some of your earliest memories of your father?

Rontreal: All I ever remember was his being incarcerated, so it was normal for me. My mom and grandma tried to make sure I saw him as many times as I could, so when my father was close, we visited often. Visits were something to look forward to, and I always had good memories of visits with my father as a child.

FM: Robert, how were you able to maintain your relationship with Rontreal throughout your incarceration? How did you cope with not being able to be physically present in her life?

Robert: I have to give a lot of credit to Rontreal's mother. She helped me play a major role. She jumped through hoops to help me be there even though I couldn't be there. She made sure that my name came up or my presence was felt. She laid the groundwork so that if I wanted to call in to Rontreal's school or take part of major events in her life, I could. That helped me to be a part of Rontreal's life even though I was incarcerated.

Rontreal: My father was always involved. My dad was there for me more than a lot of people I know whose fathers were walking the streets free. My mother would say, "I talked to your father yesterday, he said don't do (this or that) or he's going to call your teachers." My father made sure that he had a strong presence at every phase of my life.

FM: How has your relationship changed now that Robert is home?

Robert: I'm still in the infatuation stage, and I can't get enough of her. I'm scared that I'm going to smother her. I want to show her off to everyone. All I want to do is just be around her. Whatever else comes with that is cool with me. She says "jump" and I'm going to say, "how high?" I tried to hold her hand walking down the stairs the other day! I still call her my little girl, but she's grown now. She's an amazing person: beautiful and personable.

Rontreal: I try to be as understanding as I can. My dad sometimes calls me like, "Where are you now? Where are you going, and who's going to be there?" I'm 21 now and I have children of my own. I feel like now that he can call me whenever he feels like it and come to where I am, that's all he wants to do. But I get it, there was so much time that he couldn't call. He does a lot for me and just wants to check on me and make sure I'm okay. Whatever I ask, he does.

FM: What advice do you have for our members, many of whom may not have family members who are as supportive and consistent as Rontreal and her mother were?

Robert: My advice to everyone is don't give up trying. Try with everything you do. Writing, calling, even if you have to go to your counselor to get calls because you don't have money to use the phone. Even if you have to call your mom to call her mom to get through. There may be a lot of time and distance between you and your children but don't give up trying because it's worth it. Kids remember everything. If you can send something for Christmas, or for their birthday even just one time, it will be the best present they got that year because it came from their dad. Don't give up, always try.

FM: Any advice for family members about being there for their incarcerated loved ones?

Rontreal: You can't expect people to do things for you that they just can't

(Continued on page 7)

ASK HF: ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Dear H.F.: I'm getting ready to be released, and already I feel pressure from my family to come out and provide for them. I've been locked up for seven years – I'm worried about providing for myself! How do I explain to them that I will need some time to readjust to the outside and that I need to get steady on my own two feet before I can take care of them? Your FM Brother, MS

Dear MS: When you enter an airplane, the stewardess informs you that you have to secure yourself in your seat first, even before you secure your own baby. Why is that?

Even though most of us would think that it is common sense to secure our baby in their seat first, the logic to the airplane seat theory is that you cannot rightfully secure anyone until you have properly secured yourself. If someone is drowning in an ocean, the worst thing you can do is jump into the water to attempt to save them. A drowning person will pull you down into the water with them out of their fear and panic. The best way to rescue someone is to throw a raft to them so that they can keep themselves afloat.

Anyone who would pressure a person who has been in prison since they were a teenager and locked away from society for seven years to provide for them when they come home is not concerned with that person's well being.

You cannot help anyone until you can help yourself. That is not being selfish; rather, it is being real with yourself. A lot of our loved ones look to us for leadership as strong men. However, a Captain has no purpose without his ship nor a King with no kingdom to rule. You have to be able to provide for yourself first before anyone else. Pressure from others before that is unrealistic and could lead to your breaking the law, or trying to do too much too fast. Then, you will end up back in prison expecting the same people to hold you down during your bid who cannot hold themselves down in society.

Your FM brother, HF

THE LEGAL PAD

by Janet, FM Friend and DC Attorney



The column that looks at different legal issues that might have practical consequences for you or will teach you something about the legal system in the United States. Thank you FM friend Janet for taking the time out of your busy days in court to share your legal knowledge!

I have heard that some of you are interested in the "Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015," a bill currently before Congress. Its potential enactment could signal a change in attitude about the lengths of sentences for people convicted of non violent offenses. The downside, however, is that the focus of the bill is on persons charged with drug and non violent offenses and, in fact in some cases, suggests harsher sentences for persons convicted of "violent" crimes or armed offenses. In its current form, the bill includes, amongst many things, the following:

- The bill would reduce enhanced penalties that apply to repeat drug offenders and would eliminate the three-strike mandatory life provision for such offenders.
- The bill would allow judges to have more discretion when they sentence certain low-level offenders, but if the person being sentenced had prior convictions for serious violent or drug felonies these reforms would not apply.
- The bill would make more people eligible to be sentenced with

(Continued on page 6)



PAYING IT FORWARD



How Singing Lyrics from *The Weeknd* to Your Baby Over the Phone Now Just May Raise His S.A.T. Scores Later!

By Kelli

Everyone wants their child to do well in school. But sometimes, we don't know where to start. Research shows that children who do not know how to read well by the time they are 8 or 9 years old will often struggle for the rest of their school career. That's why helping our children to read at an early age is SO important. But supporting children's success can be intimidating for parents. Especially when those parents haven't had positive experiences in school themselves. The S.T.A.R. program (adopted and funded by the DC Government) teaches parents that there are three very simple things they can do: Sing, Talk and Read with your child. The awesome thing about this is that even if reading isn't easy for you or your child's caretaker, talking and singing to our children is just as important. And you can start as soon as a child is born!

You may be thinking, *C'mon, singing "Can't Feel My Face" to my four-month-old is not going to help her to read To Kill a Mockingbird in 9th grade!* But guess what? Singing is a powerful way that we can share language and vocabulary with our children. When we sing lyrics, children hear new and different sounds. According to Patty Reeber, the Early Literacy Coordinator at the DC Public Library, it gives them the background knowledge they need to begin developing and growing their vocabulary. And the same goes for talking to our little ones. But we need to be intentional about the way that we do it.

Reeber says there are two different kinds of talking. The first is "business talk." These are the commands we issue to kids, such as: *"Don't touch that, it's hot! Come here and sit down,"* etc. It turns out that all kids receive about the same amount of "business talk" every day. The other kind of talk is called "rich talk." An example would be telling your child: *"Look at this flower. Aren't the petals smooth? Let's smell it with our noses!"* etc. "Rich talk" is deeper conversation that helps children to make connections between words, sounds and the world around them. But unfortunately, not all kids receive "rich talk." The ones that do have **30 million more words** in their vocabulary by the time they start school than the kids who are only exposed to "business talk." Yes, 30 million!!! Crazy, right?

So what can you do? Talk on the phone with your child as much as possible. Take turn singing songs to each other. Tell him or her stories and use lots of details. It doesn't even matter what you talk about. Tell them about things you did when you were little. Reeber says, "Don't be afraid to be silly with your child. They look up to you! They want to have fun with you!" She suggests, "Sing a silly song. Making your child laugh is one of the best things in the world." You can also write letters and stories and ask an adult at home to read them aloud. Draw pictures to go along with it! Encourage your child's primary caretaker to read to him or her every day. Turning the pages of a book and talking about the pictures is just as powerful as reading the words. So even an adult who doesn't read can have an enormous impact. And don't worry. Experts say it's never too late. No matter how old your child is, start singing, talking and reading with them now (although if they are tweens, ...they might be a little judgy about your singing. But do it anyway!)

By constantly exposing your child to new words through singing, talking and reading, you will no doubt help them become stronger readers and better students. But that's not even the best part. Because any time you interact positively with your child, you are creating powerful bonds with them. And who doesn't want that?

(THE LEGAL PAD Continued from page 5)

mandatory minimums for violent firearm offenses but would reduce that mandatory minimum to provide courts with greater flexibility in sentencing. It also would add new mandatory minimum sentences for certain crimes involving interstate domestic violence.

- The bill would limit solitary confinement for juveniles in federal custody. The part of the bill that may have some impact on persons currently serving lengthy sentences is a new requirement (***again only if the bill passes in its present form***) that the Department of Justice conduct risk assessments to classify all federal inmates. Once inmates are classified, the Bureau of Prisons would assign inmates to appropriate recidivism reduction programs, including work and education programs, drug rehabilitation, job training, and faith-based programs. Eligible prisoners who successfully completed these programs could earn early release and could spend the final portion (up to 25 percent) of their remaining sentence in home confinement or a halfway house.

Keep in mind that this will not happen overnight. Also who will or will not be eligible for early release has not been made clear yet as the bill has yet to be passed and signed by the President. As it is written now, if a person is sentenced to any number of defined violent offenses or has a significant criminal history, they will **not** be eligible for early release. However, there would still be incentives (such as enhanced telephone or visitation privileges) for non-eligible inmates to complete these programs.

It is important for you to make sure your presentence report is correct, as this is how your eligibility and classifications are being determined. If you believe that your criminal history has been reported incorrectly on your presentence report, you should write a letter explaining the error to Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (the agency responsible for creating the report) and request that they issue a corrected report. Their address is: Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, 633 Indiana Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004-2902.

This month in DC:



Check out the newest Smithsonian Museum! Located on 15th Street, next to the Washington Monument, the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), designed by David Adjaye, is under construction and will open in 2016. The museum will cover 400 years of African American history and culture. One exhibit will contain shackles recovered from the 1794 shipwreck of a slave ship that sunk off the coast of South Africa, killing half of the more than 400 slaves aboard!



BY FM MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

My Real Fam

By WD, FM Friend

I love my real fam
The ones that are blind to the physical flaws
That most would call ugly
Nevertheless, they kiss and hug me
Because, in their eyes, I am not a sprinkle
In the ocean of similar shapes
That form the category of this world's undesirables

They, that know that my potential is undeniable
Are the reason that I dig deeper into mother earth's
foundation
So that I can create a new bottom that is distinct from the
surface
What purpose is there to live and not love?
And love to not live in denial of oblique truths that seem to be,
but are not

Those who say love, but don't show love unconditionally and
constantly are pawns to be
Converted into something different, when the seasons change
Becuz, like the weather, they are not the same year round
Regardless of who speaks, you will never know how *real* sounds
Until *real* love is repetitiously manifested
And yes, I've watched my fake fam fade
But to my *real* fam, time, or nothing else is a test
So they keep blessing me, and bringing out that best in me
No matter what

And that is why
I love my *real* fam

Your Family

by MM, FM Friend

Family can be built in so many aspects. It may be your blood
relatives, or you can consider all your friends as your family.
It's whom you want them to be. They're the people who mean
the most to you. Those you hold dear and treasure. No matter
whom or what it consists of, it's a beautiful thing to have.
Understand the blessing, cherish the moments, and most of
all, they're made of love.

Unison

By JKB, FM Friend

Like day and night	As brilliant stars
We are halves of a whole	Illuminate the sky
You are the yin to my yang	You are my ray
The twin of my soul	The sparkle of my eye
You are the valley	The moon glows not
Receptive and serene	Without the sun
And I am the river	And alone I am incomplete
Which flows between	But together we are one

Prison Moms

By DD, FM Member

Hi Moms, from a Free Minds member in prison
Who has such a beautiful and wonderful mother
Who I love and cherish and will do anything for
She is my world since childhood
She gave me her all and tried to teach me right from wrong
Sometimes I feel as tho I failed her to be in this situation
But sometimes I know she asks herself if she failed as a
mother
And for all the moms with sons incarcerated
It's not your fault
And never question if it is or isn't

As a woman to raise a boy into a man is impossible
Because you aren't a man
As women y'all only can teach us basic life skills
And as a woman the mental strength and struggle y'all
represent is priceless
No money can buy it and no gift from us
Can show the gratitude or admiration we have for y'all
As a man in the struggle, because being in prison is a struggle
Me and other sons in prison realize that we have choices
And choices define who we are, who we can or will become
And where we take ourselves
Growing into men, we make mistakes
Some cost more than others
But the love and support we get from Moms gets us
through it all
Big or small
And it's very much needed in these situations
So keep up the good work
Praying and being there as much as you can

Much love and respect
To the moms of incarcerated sons

(FAMILY TIES Continued from page 5)

do. You have to understand what they're dealing with. Sometimes people
have to go through a lot even just to get one small thing like a phone call.
The small things that they do for you mean a lot more. They're giving a
lot, maybe the last they have, so be appreciative of that. My dad got out,
but some might never get out. It is important to still be there for your
family, because you don't want to leave that person without your love and
support. That takes a toll on people.

FM: Is there anything you would have changed, or any lessons you learned over time?

Rontreal: I wasn't the best or easiest person to deal with. I wish I would
have done more to try to keep the line of communication with my dad open.

Robert: Girl, you were perfect. I could have been a lot easier on her and I
could have made her more comfortable with me. I don't think she was
comfortable with the overbearing dad that I could be. I didn't realize that
the perfect, loveable girl that she is, I didn't need to be overbearing. I
could have just listened to her and talked to her. She's a very intelligent
girl. I'm learning now to be receptive. It doesn't need to always be daddy's
way. Her way is working just fine.

**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.



BY FM MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

Poems Of A Prisoner

By CH, FM Member

Stuck in the mindset of a convict
Trying to find a way out
Prison populations freed daily
But some never find a way to stay out...

Driving reckless in a hurry to a dead end on a road filled
with road kill
Wreck yards bury lost lives hearsed in every sunrise
While the cell blocks hold dreams and plenty of wishes...

So many nights spent praying for a second chance
Without a real religion just really takin' a chance
Hoping God will listen

Locked down, confined to a cell in hell without room service
And no one to call when I need to talk
So when I am separated in isolation
Secretly confide in the four walls
Where my untold stories reside...

When I take a look in the mirror
I see a disgraced face full of disappointment thinking back
Realize it was my decisions that ruined the lives of my loved ones
Leaving broken hearts open and filled with heavy pain
That runs out over flowin' through the eyes like a waterfall...

As I wipe away the tears my vision starts to reappear
And I begin to focus on the picture I painted full of mistakes
Making the lessons I've learned clear...

Nowadays my circles are full of squares that resemble Steve
Loyal to the fact that family matters
'Cause when the money and the fame no longer sustain
And the fancy cars in the fast lane pull off with your friends
It's guaranteed that your blood remains...

I understand now that game wasn't designed to win
It was made with the plot to control my mind
And to keep my thoughts locked in...
Now I'm trapped in a different world living in a dead end
Waiting to see the beginning of a new life
Where I promise not to do the same thing twice...

Thoughts of a Confined Mind

By DH, FM Member

As a prisoner I think of what my life would be
If my mother didn't have five kids, just them and no me
Would her life have been any better
If I didn't live life as her criminal adolescent?
Do I make her feel like a failure? Is she supposed to feel like a
failure?

I don't want her to think she is
And she's definitely not supposed to
But sometimes when I hear her voice its apparent in her mood

Then my mind starts to drift and I think about Dad
To me he's nothing but a poor excuse of a man
Claiming in his day, he had more money than he could count
But his love for drugs has almost taken him out

Then I think about my brothers
No role models, no guidance
I'm supposed to set an example, give them rules and reliance
But how can I give them what I was never provided?
Then I think about my sisters and almost start to cry
But my ego is too big, so my face stays dry

Everything happens for a reason, so I ask God, "Why?"
But I must not be worthy because he never replies
So these worries stay thoughts trapped in a confined mind

Untitled

By KB, FM Friend

Before coming to DC jail, I was not in a good place with my family. My first cousin, my sister, and I were raised together under the same roof. The men in my family spend most of their years in prison which left the women in my family—my Nana, my auntie, and my mom—with the weight of taking care of the family. I never thought it was cool, nor fair. A man is supposed to carry his family. But they did an amazing job!

I don't recall ever really needing too much or going without things. On birthdays, holidays etc., the women in my family went all out. All the values I've learned growing up came from women—"spit on da grass kevin, not the sidewalk where people walk" or "Kev, them dudes you hangout with are not really your friends" and "Kev, treat them girls better!" those came from women. They sacrificed so much trying to hold our family together. My Nana been working all my life and just retired about four years ago and does not even get a retirement check. I literally watched this lady come and go- working since I was little only to be left high and dry. No certificate or nothing!

Family is not always smooth, we went through tough times! Around 2009, I became very depressed about my circumstances and environment and began to loose my "warmth" to liquor and drugs. This caused my family to push me away. They didn't want me around. I didn't see the "monster" I was becoming. I felt normal, but in their eyes I was losing myself. I felt lost and unloved at that period of time. I began to fight them and argue with them a lot and began holding a grudge. I began to act as if I had a death wish. Time went along and then I ended up in jail. It wasn't until studying my faith that I began to realize and understand the importance of family and holding firm the ties of kinship. There is nothing more precious than God and his creation, than family!

Through all my episodes, my mom never left my side. She even gave me my own space in her house to find myself. There couldn't be a clearer example of unconditional love! Like Paulo (from the *Moving Forward* issue of *The Connect*), I've had to learn to forgive and let go- you have to! I had to stop being selfish, playing the victim and realize that just like many other subcultures, African American tribes and clans never had a true break from slavery and struggle. Throughout the history of slavery, segregation, Jim Crow Laws, heroin, Civil Rights Movement, The Great Migration, Civil War, the War On Drugs- also known as the war on men of color, the crack epidemic, The New Jim Crow; our uncles and fathers never had a real chance. Learning most of these things has gotten me to look at my family in a different light, and notice and reap the importance of my getting a real education, rebuilding my family, reforming our conditions, refining our existence, and redefining our history!

If one man can change the world, then I believe one man can rebuild his family and make firm the ties of kinship!



IN THE NEWS

By John, FM Friend

World News

The center of the world's unrest all connects to one country in the deserts of the Middle East, with a population of about 22 million but getting smaller every day. The country is Syria.

There will be massive books written someday about what's happened in this nation over the course of the past half-decade, but here is an extremely basic explanation of where things stand.

The Syrian government has brutally oppressed certain citizens for years, including the use of chemical weapons. The United States has called for that government, led by Bashar Al-Assad, to give up power. But it has the support of other major powers, chief among them the Russians.

At the same time, the Islamic State (ISIS) has seized control of large amounts of Syrian territory from the government, and now control a significant stretch of land in Syria and Iraq. ISIS is opposed by virtually everybody, including the U.S. and Russia.

The violence perpetrated by ISIS and the Syrian government on the citizens of Syria has caused a massive surge in refugees as millions struggle to escape for Europe in hopes of asylum.

Thus far, the United States has only conducted air strikes against ISIS, as have the Russians. This month, a commercial airline headed to Russia was destroyed in mid-air, and intelligence sources have already said that the Islamic State was likely responsible for the bombing (the group had already taken credit for it).

The U.S. this month sent about 50 commando troops to serve in a coordinating capacity, but many fear that this could be the first of many commitments we will need to make in order to stop the violence in Syria.

National

Most of the national news is focused on the presidential campaign, which still includes a whole bunch of Republicans and a few Democrats.

The leading candidates on the Republican side continue to be billionaire developer Donald Trump and famous surgeon Ben Carson. Neither has ever held office before, which tells you everything you need to know about how many people feel about lifelong politicians these days.

On the other hand, the Democratic side of the race includes two people who have made a very long career out of politics. The frontrunner: former First Lady, Senator, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Keeping the race surprisingly close: Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, whose campaign is centered on pushing back against the concentration of wealth in America by only a tiny percentage of its citizens.

The election is officially a year away, so there is a lot of speech-making and baby-kissing for these folks to do before we even get to the party conventions.

DC

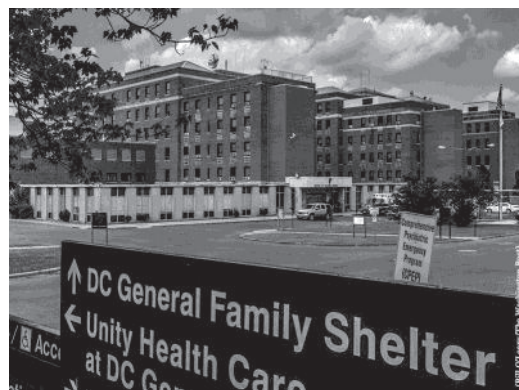
Not a ton of news of late in the District, but one piece of really good news for its citizens most in need of a helping hand. The city approved a plan this month to completely close the notoriously unsafe homeless shelter and open several, smaller sites around the city.

The current shelter houses hundreds of homeless families at D.C. General, and even that does not cover the city's homeless population. There are an estimated 700 homeless families in the

city now, and officials expect the number to reach 1,400 or higher by winter.

Calls to close D.C. General grew loud last year when an 8-year-old girl, Relisha Rudd, disappeared from the shelter. She is still missing, and is presumed dead.

Here's hoping that the city will manage the new slate of smaller shelters well and keep them cleaner and safer.



Sports

On the Redskins beat, there is good news and bad news about this 3-4 team. The bad: DeSean Jackson has yet to play a minute, they are below .500, they can't run the ball to save their lives, and they have coughed up winnable games to the Miami Dolphins, New York Jets and Atlanta Falcons. The good news: The defense is legitimately good, their young talent is developing, and they've notched solid wins against St. Louis and Philadelphia to go along with a historic win against Tampa Bay in which they trailed 24-0 at one point. The NFC East is terrible this season, so 3-4 is good for second place and one game out of first at the moment. The Skins head into Foxboro next to take on the Patriots, and let's put it this way: not too many people are picking an upset there. The list of dominant teams in the NFL is pretty short this year. There are six teams that have clearly separated themselves from the pack. In the AFC: the Patriots, Bengals and Broncos. In the NFC, it's the Panthers, Packers and Cardinals. The Washington Wizards season just got underway, but so far, so good! The Wiz started off the season 3-1 capped by a buzzer-beater win against the San Antonio Spurs. With the Wizards, it's all about the backcourt. John Wall and Bradley Beal have combined to average 47 points per game in the early going, and Wall is averaging a crazy 2 steals and 3 blocks per game.

Elsewhere in city sports:

After 11 games the Washington Capitals are 8-3, good for second place in the Metropolitan Division of the NHL. The team's top scorer shouldn't be a surprise at this point: it's Alex Ovechkin, who already has 6 goals on the season.

In baseball, the Washington Nationals will enter next season with a new manager: Dusty Baker, a veteran coach who has brought postseason success in the past to the San Francisco Giants and Chicago Cubs. Baker is one of only three African-American managers to coach in the World Series.

REENTRY PROFILE: LIVING PROOF

By Logan, FM Friend

In this column 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. In Part I of Logan's story, we read about his childhood in Portland, Oregon, where both of his parents' involvement in the street life led to his joining the Crips at 12 years old. Logan's story continues...

Growing up, I lived with my sweet southern grandmother, but I spent most of my time running the streets with the Crips. I loved school and learning, but I guess I loved the streets more. I grew up looking for a male role model, but I couldn't find it in the homes of any of my friends. Everybody's dad was either drinking, drugging, in prison or just gone. There was only one person – this dad named Alvis--in our neighborhood that did his best to try to breathe hope into us. He and his wife opened their home to all of us. They were the kind of people who had Hershey bars and Pop Tarts in the pantry—stuff none of the rest of us had. Alvis would play football and basketball with all of the neighborhood kids and we loved it! Eventually though, the area got so rough, Alvis moved his family out.

After that, my male role models were the older gang members. I thought these were real men. They say a boy cannot become a man until he holds one's hand. I now believe that with all my heart.

I remember one night coming home to find a box of bullets sitting on the porch. It was a message being sent to me by an enemy. On my 18th birthday, my girlfriend pulled up in a U-Haul at my Grandmother's place. We loaded it up and left. Like most kids that age, I thought I was "grown." I loved my Grandmother and I knew my gang activity was putting her in danger.

After I moved, I went from being part-time in the streets to full-fledged in a hurry. By the time I was 22 years old, I had been shot five times. After the last shooting, I was arrested and sentenced under Oregon's mandatory minimum sentencing law to 10 years in the penitentiary. I served every single day of it.

Because I had a violent gang related crime, my movement through the system had to be arranged thru gang captains. They ping ponged me all over the state in an attempt to break me. I visited every maximum prison in the state at least once.

Ten years gives you a whole lot of time to focus on who you are and who you are destined to be. You have two choices when you walk thru that gate. Do the time or allow the time to do you. I chose to do the time. I realized I needed to get "smarter," not "harder." So I made a vow to change. While others were on the yard, I was in the legal or participating in programs. I joined Toastmasters of America, a speaking club run by people from the outside. That experience changed me. For so long, after all of the dirt I'd done, I saw myself as a bad person. I felt dirty. In Toastmasters though, I was suddenly acknowledged for the good things I could do. It opened my eyes to all the pain I had caused in my community. I began developing plans for an organization to help at-risk youth in the community.

The night before I was released in 2008, I remember being filled with anxiety and a fear of the unknown. I was so nervous I threw up twice that night! Because I was a known gang member, I was released before the sun came up and local police were alerted. The C.O. handed me my parole papers, a brown bag with a toothbrush, toothpaste, and a small bag of condoms, all courtesy of Bob Barker. I walked out—a free man with no worldly possessions but the clothing on my back and that paper brown bag! My aunts met me outside the gates at 6AM in the dark with a full meal of fried chicken!

I knew I had to get out of Portland. There was no way I could escape my past there. My former enemies didn't care about what I'd done in Toastmasters! So I chose to move to Kentucky where I had an uncle who was working with youth.

My number one goal has always been to stay free. Besides that, I am dedicated to being a positive force in my own children's lives (a daughter, 21; and son, 17). For the last seven years, I have worked every single day with our program called M.A.D.E. (Motivated All Day Everyday) in Lexington, Kentucky. I hope we are saving lives. People call it gang outreach or violence prevention, but really, in a word, it's a family. The kids know we care, and that's what makes the difference.

My advice for all of the Free Minds brothers is to never let go of your dreams and goals whether you have a few months or a life sentence. Each day that you are awake is a day to invest into yourself. Take advantage of all that is offered to you. You can't get out and try to catch up with the time that you lost. You will never get that back, but you can catch on to what is going on now. Find something that you love more than the streets. Whatever it is, pour your energy into that and I guarantee you will beat the odds.

QUOTE-I-VATOR

It is not flesh and blood but the heart which makes us fathers and sons. ~Johann Schiller

Call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one. ~Jane Howard

Sticking with your family is what makes it a family. ~Mitch Albom

I don't believe an accident of birth makes people sisters or brothers. It makes them siblings, gives them mutuality of parentage. Sisterhood and brotherhood is a condition people have to work at. ~Maya Angelou

All men were made by the Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. ~Chief Joseph

The family we choose for ourselves is more important than the one we were born into; that people have to earn our respect and trust, not have it handed to them simply because of genetics. ~Charles de Lint



REAL WORLD OF WORK

A Conversation with FM Friend, Frankie

After coming home from the DC Jail, Frankie sat down with Alison to discuss his job as a driver at an academic summer camp and year-round center for elementary and middle school-aged kids.

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

Frankie: In the summer, I drive the kids in a van to different activities and field trips. It's an academic program but they still have fun camp time too. During the school year, I get to the center in the morning, make sure the kids get their breakfast and then clean up after they leave for school. In the afternoon, I pick the kids up from school and take them to the center and help the kids with their homework.

Alison: What is the hardest part of your job?

Frankie: Definitely dealing with the different personalities of the kids. Some of the kids may have behavioral problems, so you have to adapt to different kids' attitudes. You have to be very patient with them.

Alison: What is the best part?

Frankie: Seeing the kids' faces when they're excited and happy. With my past, being incarcerated and being in the streets, it was important for me to find a way to give back. It's the best feeling to be able to help kids, and I feel better about myself.

Alison: What traits does someone need to be good at your job?

Frankie: Patience is the biggest thing. You have to like dealing with kids because they get a little rowdy. You have to be cool and calm, because every action from you has a reaction and you want to be a positive role model for them. It is important to be punctual because the kids, parents, and schools are counting on you. You have to be respectful of the kids. They're big on safety. You have to be a good driver and keep the kids safe.

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

Frankie: The tutors at the center are usually certified, but to have my job, you just need a clean driver's license and have to be a good role model for the kids. Over the summer, I worked with the older boys at the camp, so I needed to be a positive male role model for them. Since I drive a 16-passenger van and not a bus, I do not need to have a CDL.

Alison: Can you share an example of a challenging experience at your job?

Frankie: I had to deal with a boy who has ADHD. Sometimes he would not do what I told him to do and would call me out my name in front of the other kids. I just had to swallow my pride and take it, because at the end of the day, he's just a kid and I want to keep my job. That was a time when I had to be very patient and understanding.

Alison: What about an example of a rewarding experience?

REENTRY SPOTLIGHT

By Keela

What's up my Free Minds **FAMILY**? I know that I'm always writing you guys about all the programs and resources available once you come home. This time, I wanted to let you guys know what some of your Free Minds **BROTHERS** have been up to, and some of the successes we've experienced as a **FAMILY**!

Free Minds **Brother** MK graduated from the Free Minds Apprenticeship on October 2nd, and enrolled in YouthBuild, a GED and Construction Apprenticeship Program in DC the following Monday. YouthBuild prepares you to take and pass the GED while you learn the construction trade. MK says, *"I would highly recommend YouthBuild [to my FM brothers]— they have good teachers who are patient and the fact that you get paid once a week to participate doesn't hurt either."* YouthBuild accepts DC residents between the ages of 18-24 and the program ranges from 8-12 months. MK has not missed a day yet! He is excited about his prospects of becoming a construction laborer upon completion of the program.

Free Minds **Brother** RD also graduated from the apprenticeship where he received job readiness training. Between that and the help of our amazing apprenticeship coach Marcus Bullock, RD landed a job as a Sales Associate for the men's clothing store Jos A Bank. When I asked Robert how it feels to be gainfully employed after serving a long prison sentence he said, *"Words cannot express the gratitude I feel. It's still hard for me to fully grasp the magnitude of it all. There wasn't too many people running around trying to help before I came to prison so to come home and be given this opportunity is overwhelming and I am forever grateful to y'all."*

FM **Brother** SH received his Welding certificate in August 2015. He also graduated from the apprenticeship with MK and RD. SH received certification from Nelson's Welding. He said, *"Nelson's Welding took me to a whole different level because they pushed and motivated me all the time. Even the times when I was late and not really engaged, my fellow students would check me. They just wanted to see me succeed-- the hands-on experience from the instructors was like that."* I asked SH how it felt to complete the program. He said, *"Me getting my certificate just made me feel like a different person. I mean I just felt like I opened doors for myself for life."* It just so happened that the day I talked to SH, he had just gotten been hired as a Welder at a company named Rocket Ship! *"I feel like I now have a new life!"* he says.

I hope your brothers' successes encourage you as much as they do me! Remember to share your own achievements, big or small with us. It brings hope and encouragement to our Free Minds **Family** as a whole! 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 apprenticeship program!

Frankie: There is one kid at the center who doesn't want anyone else to help him with his homework except me. He sometimes acts out with the other staff, but he always comes to me and asks me to help him with his math. It makes me feel good knowing that I'm helping someone and that someone depends on me. That's a good feeling. My job doesn't pay much, but you have to crawl before you can walk. You have to have patience. Sometimes I get frustrated and wish I made more money, but it's worth it to see the excitement and enjoyment from the kids. It's work that I like. To see the smiles on the kids' faces and help them, that's what really gets me through.



AROUND THE WORLD...

From El Salvador to the US: A World of Opportunity

By Melissa, FM Staff

Hi everyone! My name is Melissa and I am the Program Associate for Free Minds. Before I was born, my mother, Maria, migrated to the United States from El Salvador. Although this was a huge life change, my mother doesn't talk about the experience often.

My mother grew up in the countryside of El Salvador, near a city called San Miguel. There weren't many job opportunities in rural El Salvador at that time, especially for women. The only jobs available in her village were creating bricks and clay shingles or fixing damaged houses, and these jobs were mainly for men. Women were meant to cook and keep the house clean, and were taught to do so from a very young age. My mother wanted something better for herself, and for her family.

My aunt had been living in Washington, DC for five years, so when she heard that my mother wanted to come, she told her about the opportunities in the US. Leaving her family behind was extremely difficult. My grandparents supported her decision, but they were very worried about the potential danger.

Melissa: How did you travel to El Salvador?

Mother: From my house, I traveled in a car to Mexico. From Mexico, I traveled on a bus with other travelers to Los Angeles. From Los Angeles, I bought a one-way ticket to Washington, D.C. I have been living here since 1990.

Melissa: What were the potential dangers your parents were worried about?

MOTHER (MARIA): Around the 90's, the border was not as dangerous and strict as now, but there were still some risks. During my travels, there were about 2-3 people who led the group, called "Coyotes." You are traveling with strangers, so you never know what their intentions can be. Unfortunately, people can be robbed or be left behind in unfamiliar areas.

MELISSA: What was your first reaction when you entered the United States?

MARIA: When I first arrived, my first worry was definitely the language barrier. I enrolled in an English class at Carlos Rosario International Career Center near Columbia Heights. It was a daily struggle, but "practice makes perfect." I was able to practice English during my first job at McDonalds. The repetition and talking with coworkers, in a fast paced environment, helped me to learn the language.

MELISSA: What do you miss most about El Salvador? What do you like best about the US?

MARIA: I mostly miss my family back home, but I truly appreciate the unlimited opportunities in the United States. I was able to help my younger sister pursue her associate's degree, and send money back every so often. I also appreciate the opportunities my daughters received being born in the US, especially education. Living in El Salvador, there's a very small chance for you to pursue anything higher than a high school diploma.

DID YOU KNOW?

El Salvador is the smallest Country of all the Central American countries, but at the same time it is the most densely populated.

El Salvador has used the U.S. dollar as its official currency since 2001.



MELISSA: Do you want to move back to El Salvador?

MARIA: No, I've grown accustomed to living in the US. I travel to El Salvador about every 3 years, and it's always so nice to visit family and friends and step away from the city.

I truly admire my mother for making the hard journey to the United States. She made a selfless decision to better her family's living situation and take care of her future family (my sister and me). She continues to support both her family in the United States and in El Salvador.





BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

By Julia

Hey Free Minds Readers! By now you should have received the BAM book Debbie Doesn't Do It Anymore by Walter Mosley, and I hope you've had a chance to read it. We've gotten a few reviews in the mail but as always we want to hear from you so let us know what you thought! Debbie is a porn star who comes home to find her husband dead in a hot tub with a young

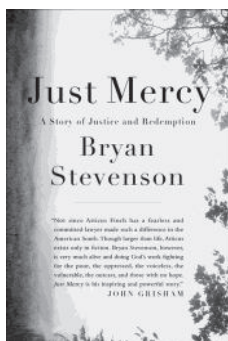
woman. I was going to include a summary, but FM Member, SJ summed it up better than I could!

"This is some real life stuff going on here...Debbie was from the streets, her whole MO was cold. Nice but cold. I mean when you come from the streets you learn to never really show your feelings. It makes you weak, makes you the prey they soon to be eating...Debbie has a lot going on...Her hubby died and left her with nothing but her car. She feel like it's her fault their lil girl died, her hubby left her with a \$10,000 bill that she can't pay, and she ready to kill herself. She sad, lonely, overworked, I mean she going through life. I know it seems sad or crazy but this is the life of more than half of black people in the US... Not all of us will have a helping hand and it's going to be way harder without it. But killing yourself will never be the answer to whatever you're looking for. Live life, love life, and try to see it to the end." -SJ

"I did not like it overall but I do understand why you all would want me to read it. It has a lot of powerful acts and ways to help a person who lived a messy life to look at things in another light. I also got from the book is that when you want to change your life from one that you are used to living it just can't happen overnight and you also need your friends, family, and loved ones to help." -DM

"Debbie Doesn't Do It Anymore...shows you life's challenges in your life, my life, and Debbie's. Next time if you feel like doing something dumb or putting yourself in harm's way, think about the book you have read." -MH

What did you think? Got a suggestion for what we should read? Let us know!



Next BAM book: *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson. Stevenson is a lawyer who founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit organization that defends poor people on death row. Stevenson also went to the Supreme Court and successfully argued against mandatory life without parole sentences for juveniles. *Just Mercy* is about Stevenson's experiences with the criminal justice system, focusing on the case of Walter McMillian, a man who was sentenced to die for a murder he didn't commit.

Questions to think about while you read:

- What role does mercy play in our lives? What about justice?
- Why did they find Walter McMillian guilty even though he had an alibi?
- How did his experiences on death row affect Walter even after he was released?
- What can we do as a community to help people like Walter?

Send your book reviews to Free Minds at 2201 P Street NW, Washington, DC 20037.

WHAT THE YOUNG'UNS ARE READING

On the juvenile unit, we are reading a book called *The Story of a Girl*, by Sara Zarr. It's about a 13-year-old girl whose father catches her having sex with an older boy in the back seat of a car. Her life is changed forever in that instance as her classmates spread rumors, labeling her as a "slut" or "thot," and her father no longer looks her in the eyes. At Book Club, we're discussing the many complicated reasons that people become sexually active at such young ages, along with the consequences. This week we are debating: Why are males and females in their teens looked at so differently for having sex? What do you think?



NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: I RESOLVE...

As the new year is approaching we're thinking about resolutions. Why do people make resolutions? What changes do you want to make in your life? Why? What will it take you to succeed in keeping your resolution?

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

