

July/August 2017  
Vol. 6, Issue 4

# Free minds Connect



## THIS MONTH'S THEME: NATURE

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Is brought to you by...

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**(JG WILL BE BACK NEXT ISSUE!)**

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GL, RD, DJ, TTB, MH,  
VM, DC, RODERICK**

FM Members

**JOHN, TOM, RENARD,  
JOHN M.**

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  
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**Next Issue's Theme:  
Labels**

Happy Summer, Free Minds Family!

First off, thanks are in order. Once again, in the process of coming up with ideas for this issue's theme of Nature, I have learned so much. As you know there's nothing I love better than learning something new! Gratitude to you, my Free Minds family, for expanding my horizons.

I learned things like "Forest Bathing," a new form of therapy designed to relieve stress and improve health. Forest bathing or forest therapy first started in Japan in the early 1990s where they call it "shinrin-yoku." It's the practice of spending time in the woods and concentrating on all your senses to fully experience it. There are certified Forest Therapy Guides who lead you. It's been proven to give all sorts of emotional and physical benefits.

Then there's "Earthing or Grounding," which is the practice of placing one's bare feet on the ground (dirt, grass, sand, or concrete, especially when humid or wet). When you connect your bare feet to the electron-enriched earth, you may experience positive effects on your nervous system and immune system. I'm writing this with my bare feet on the grass outside my apartment building, and I do feel better! (Okay, high likelihood it's also because I'm writing to you all - another favorite activity). **It works on concrete, too so take those shoes off for a bit outside, especially after it has rained.**

Now here comes the really good news - you don't have to be in nature to experience these benefits. Science has proven that reading about and imagining nature stimulates the same positive mechanisms in our brains, resulting in lower blood pressure, higher immune response, reduction of stressful thoughts, and overall improvements in well-being. So read away and de-stress!

Inside this issue, not only will you feel peace and relaxation from reading about nature, but FM friend John M. shows us how to write about nature. Our ever-wise advice columnist HF guides us to focus only on what we can control and send compassion to the situations we can't. We get an update on the recent Supreme Court case *Turner v. United States*, which was a hard verdict to hear. But as you know at Free Minds we never give up hope. Our thoughts are with all those involved in that case. FM member Hosea's brother Renard shares the beautiful story of his family working hard to restore ties and be united siblings again. We celebrate Roderick who is nourishing us not only with his great culinary talents but his incredible journey of recovery from alcohol addiction. And of course, there are many other awesome articles! Finally, a big surprise can be found in the middle of this wonderful issue, so do like Terrell encourages in his article: fire up that Free Minds imagination and get reading!

Until next time,  
Tara

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

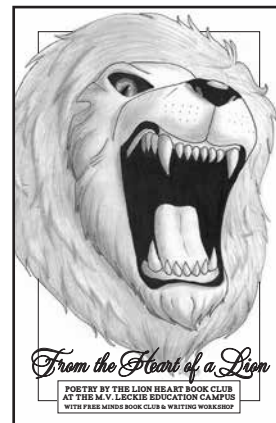
## FREE MINDS HQ



By Melissa

### Lion Heart Book Club Poets

Students in the Lion Heart Book Club at Leckie Elementary School in DC were inspired by The Untold Story of the Real Me (poems by you all!) to write their own book of



poetry. We worked with them to write and produce a short book of thought-provoking poems about their lives and the world around them.

### Freedom Writers Teachers Institute

Terrell and Julia traveled to Long Beach, California, to attend a five-day training at the Freedom Writers Teachers Institute. Do you remember them from the book (and movie) The Freedom Writers Diary? Their motto is "pick up a pen instead of a gun."

### Voice of Witness Training

Kelli traveled to San Francisco, California, to attend a four-day training at Voice of Witness: Amplifying Unheard Voices Oral History. Voice of Witness amplifies the voices of people directly impacted by injustice using a humanizing, literary approach.

# RAINDROPS

*By JW, Free Minds Member*

Those in solitary confinement usually get one hour per day out of their cell. They might be surrounded by walls when they go outside, but they can see the sunlight. In the times



I found myself in that kind of situation, I still found a way to connect with nature... An example of this is tonight I walked

outside and I felt the raindrops touch my skin as they fell from the sky. Those raindrops felt so good. That type of thing is taken for granted by many, but it's appreciated by me. In a place like this, it's easy to long for touch. Those raindrops were like touches that I long for. Hope will rise, the sun is shone, the rain will pass, my eyes are open to the works of wonder, oceans will flow, rivers will go in their proper directions, light goes forward, the moon comforts - yet, I'm still in prison, longing for more light, more smiles, more touches, more smells, more sights, more love, more whispers, more nature...

# LOOKING AT TREES

*By Terrell*

When I first got locked up at the DC Jail, I was sad whenever it was sunny because I knew everyone was having fun without me. I could imagine everyone chillin', watching the girls walk past, and all the kids playing. I loved the rain because I knew they weren't outside, which is more fun. Everybody runs into the house when it rains. At that time, I'll admit I wasn't happy for other people. I wanted to be home with other people, not happy for them. I was young.

It took me a year to be happy for other people and to accept the fact that I can't expect them not to live their life just because I'm not there.

The turning point was when I was able to go outside myself at the feds. I was lucky: I was in New Jersey and had trees. I always knew what time of year it was. When leaves were dry, it was fall; naked, winter; and when they blossomed up, it was summer. I paid no attention to trees before I was locked up, but when you're not looking at the walls, you're looking at the trees.

Looking at them was relaxing. It also gave me something to look at other than an ugly dude in my face. Ha ha, my cellie!

When I was in solitary, I kept the image of the trees in my mind. I went to the hole every year for two months. When I got out, I appreciated everything more around me. If you are lucky to be able to see or be near any kind of nature, my advice is to soak it all in. If you aren't, get that great Free Minds imagination fired up. It really helped me.







# THE WRITE WAY

## Writing About Nature

By John M., author and Free Minds friend

John M. is a freelance writer who has published three books – *The Natural Traveler Along North Carolina's Coast* (John Blair), *The Canoeist* (Jefferson Press), and *Hope Valley* (Red Lodge Press).

Why write about nature? We often feel far removed from it, except to complain about the weather or the deer in the garden. But the natural world surrounds us no matter where we are. It goes on unnoticed at the cosmic level, the micro level, and everything in between. By choosing to write about some facet of nature, we open ourselves to unappreciated worlds.

A few years ago, I dug a small water garden in my backyard and made a point of cataloguing the wildlife that came there. Within days, water striders and water beetles appeared, from where I don't know. Frogs arrived within a week and a water snake a few weeks later. This is in a suburban neighborhood of manicured lawns and paved streets. Somehow, the word went out and the creatures came.

Writing about the water garden heightened my awareness of a magical process and turned into an article that I sold to a national magazine. Few of us are going to get that lucky, but even writing for your local paper, or for yourself, is a worthwhile endeavor. My mother recently died, and going through her old letters, I found some commentaries that told me more about her than I had known in 65 years of living together.

I recommend that first time nature writers choose a place or subject physically close to them and focus on recording information about it from different perspectives. Our strongest sense is sight, and most nature writing relies heavily on visual descriptions. But other senses, smell in particular, can have a powerful effect. What does the wind

coming off the water smell like? What does it remind you of? We don't have many words in our vocabulary to describe smell, so conveying it can be a real challenge.

Sound is another powerful descriptor. Metaphors are usually employed to describe sounds, but stay away from clichés. A creative one is author Alexandra Fuller's description of a raven's cry "as if two marbles were rolling around in its throat."

A third sense is feel. What does it feel like when you lay your cheek on a bed of moss? Put these senses in play while writing about some aspect of nature and you may come up with an essay, poem, or story you can really be proud of.



The water garden. Photo by John M.

# FREE MINDS MAILBAG

We love getting mail from our Free Minds Family. Write us, and let us know what you thought of this issue!

"The study of 'self' is a never-ending process and I'm sure that this month's theme 'Inside/Out' has helped readers reflect and come closer to knowing who they truly are on the inside so they can influence – positively – the outside world. Like QS wrote on page 6: 'I've come to realize that my life is a reflection of my feelings toward myself.' Surely, this month's theme doesn't get any more realistic than that. (Of course, that's just my opinion). I really enjoy (and appreciate) the writings by those willing to share a piece of themselves in the 'Inner Me Versus the Outer Me...' column. It's not always easy to share with others what is our 'inner me.' It can leave us open and feeling vulnerable. So I respect those who shared their inner and outer selves with us in this month's issue." – JL

"I thoroughly enjoyed last month's issue. Not only was it very informative, but it also had some deep articles and stories. It's always inspiring to read where someone who has been incarcerated comes home and has a successful transition back into society. I really enjoyed your 'Family Ties' section. It shows the enduring love and devotion of a father towards his son who made a mistake in life. I also enjoyed the 'Conversation with Kelli' and 'Around the World' sections. These sections really allow one to expand their minds and understanding of the rest of the world." – QS



# FAMILY TIES

The column where FM family and loved ones weigh in.

## Filling a Parental Void with Brotherly Love The Story of Renard, Brother of Free Minds Member, Hosea

Interviewed by Kelli

Renard, now 33, is one of five children in his immediate family. In 2016, his youngest brother, Hosea, returned to DC after serving five years in federal prison for a crime committed as a 16-year-old. Renard continues to support and guide his brother every day, despite the broken family relationships they've endured over the years growing up.

As the big brother, I was away at Christchurch School Virginia in middle school, when Hosea began to grow up and start his independent stages of life. My focus was to be a leader and good example for all of my immediate siblings by attending school and playing sports to gain education. I wasn't always around my siblings to give guidance, so I knew to lead by example.

The overall problem with our upbringing was our parents. Neither were really strong individuals in terms of education and sticking to the right path of life through God. They had very little education, along with very little work expertise. As I got older, I realized in life there were so many holes in our growth that should have been filled, but were left blank. Our mom dealt with a bad mental illness. Raising five kids alone with no education was tough for our mother, because now at this point my parents had been separated already. She had broken down and never gotten back to getting fixed. She left the family when Hosea was between the ages 2-3. We had to be sent away to foster homes, group homes, and the younger children were sent to live with family. We've not been together living in the same household since. This downward spiral really interfered with everything in terms of religious beliefs and faith, education, morals, and values. Our discipline and life's lessons came only by learning from mistakes.

We never got the chance to find out if we could become one strong family, forming a strong unified circle, utilizing our gifts and talents. Despite glorious hopes, everyone got into trouble with the law, school, or family – even me. I have never had to serve time, but a couple of my brothers have gone back and forth, and a couple of sisters have made a few visits themselves – all for their own different reasons. I have dedicated myself to giving everything that I know and have to lead my siblings on the right path, and no longer be led by those who are blind. I am always looking and searching for ways to improve my environment.

There were no teachers, doctors, or lawyers in my neighborhood to guide me or anyone else. I had help from our neighborhood community center, The Beacon House, and learned other life lessons through playing sports and the help of my coaches. My social worker saw something in me and helped me get into Christchurch School in Virginia. She was God-sent. I got lucky, and from dark came the light.

# ASK HF ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Dear HF

I got two boys who I'm barely in touch with because my baby mom's is running around poppin' pills and partying. She's dealing with another man, which doesn't bother me, but it's the things she doing. My sister used to get my boys, but since homeboy been around it's all bad. It's been 5 months. It's driving me nuts! Plus he putting hands on her, is what's being told to me. What do you think I should do? I was sending \$100 a month home but I stopped because she poppin' molly and drinking.

AD

Dear AD,

Oftentimes, a lot of us come to prison and get ourselves together and forget that we were once the same people out there selling and using drugs, robbing and killing people, and being a poor example to our youth. If you send your children's mother money for your kids, then keep sending it to her. If she is the one responsible for housing, feeding, clothing, and nurturing your children, then just because she may have a substance use problem right now doesn't mean that all of her money goes into drugs and partying.

Allow her situation with the guy to be her situation. Don't worry about him and what he is doing to her. It is out of your control for now until you can come home and gain custody of your children. For now, just focus on preparing yourself for your return and doing what you can for your children from where you are. Worrying about things that you cannot control will only make you bitter, and like most guys in prison are, miserable.

Pointing out your children's mother's faults will only make her resent you more. Just keep telling her that you appreciate what she is doing for your children while you are away. Build her up with kind words and allow nature to take its course. We all had to get ourselves together to now see how many of our loved ones are in a dead-end maze out there. Never stop loving her because she gave you your most precious gifts on earth, your children!

HF

I've been around people getting locked up for so long, it gets to a point where you figure a person needs to figure things out on their own and there is nothing else you can show or tell them about how to live right. Maybe someday people will improve their act and get things in order, together. When Hosea got arrested, the feeling was bad. I wondered, "When will he improve on his decisions? Is he about to get on the correct path now?" Because, I can remember him being so great in school, he was doing great at sports, but then, I remember thinking, "Damn, he's on the same road!" At that point I figured his chances were 50/50.

I stayed in touch with Hosea while he was in prison as much as I could.

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# NATURE: A DEVELOPING APPRECIATION

*By SR, Free Minds Member*

**Little Kid:** Nature? Bleh! As Grandpa would say, "Seen one leaf, you've seen 'em all."

**Teenaged Boy Scout:** Nature? Monthly weekend camping trips in "The Great Outdoors," lots of fun and challenging experiences.

**Young College Student:** Nature? Grand Canyon National Park, One word...AWESOME! My first real feeling of connection to this thing called nature.

**Young Professional in the Non-profit World:** Nature? Church mission trip to Bolivia to help those in need, sitting alone high in the Andes Mountains - not another soul in sight - the bright blue sky, fluffy marshmallow clouds, bright vibrant green grass, rich life producing black brown soil. Hawk lazing through the rays of the mid-day sun. There is no doubt God exists. He created all this stuff called nature for us to enjoy. Nature!

## QUOTE-I-VATOR

*"However long the night, the dawn will break."* - African proverb

*"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly."* - Langston Hughes, poet, novelist, activist

*"Allow Nature's peace to flow into you as sunshine flows into trees."* - John Muir, a naturalist, author, and early advocate for the preservation of wilderness in the United States

*"You are not a drop in the ocean, you are the entire ocean in one drop."* - Rumi, 13th-century Persian Sunni Muslim poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic

*"Nature does nothing uselessly."* - Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist



Langston Hughes

## DC PHOTOS OF THE MONTH



Part of the Ben's Chili Bowl mural on U Street.



Can you guess where this is located? Write in with your answers!

Have a request for next issue's DC Photo of the Month? Write us at 2201 P St NW, Washington, DC 20037 and let us know what you'd like to see!



# CONVERSATION WITH KELLI



Hey Free Minds,

We should probably share iced coffees over this issue as the mercury hovers in the 90s... maybe Frappuccinos? (Starbucks' version of a coffee flavored Slurpee!) It's hot here in DC and I know it is even hotter where some of you are. High today in Adelanto, California, will be 97 degrees, eek!

I love Washington, DC. But honestly, I prefer nature to the city. The mountains, the beach, or a hike in the woods...they are all calling me pretty much on a daily basis. Last week, I had the good fortune to be in San Francisco (again!) for a writing training workshop (side note: It was awesome ☺). After the first day's session, I decided to walk back to where I was staying. The training was in a beautiful part of downtown, where I figured I could just walk in the right direction for a while, and if I got tired, I could find a bus. I wasn't paying attention and walked into a district called "The Tenderloin."

Weed smoke filled the air, tons of people were hustling, peeing against buildings, and there were more than a few fights going on. And then there was me. With my flip flops, my Starbucks cup, my bad sense of direction, and a backpack full of handouts from my writing workshop. The sidewalks were full of people not moving anywhere.

I made my way through one crowd at the end of a block. One of the guys smiled and said hello, so I smiled and said hi back. Then he started to follow me, calling out "Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!" (a reference, of course, to the best television show of all time - *The Brady Bunch*) So anyway, this guy walked behind me for more than a block calling me Marcia. It was funny the first time he said it. The eighth time...not so much. By now, I know you are all dying laughing at me, right? Yeah, so was everybody else on the street ☺

When I finally got to where I was staying a couple of miles away, I realized I could see the Pacific Ocean! I put down my stuff, put on sneakers, and I walked. And walked. The sun started to fall and shadows got long. The streets were lined with these small little houses painted all different colors - light blue, pink, green, orange. For about a mile of the walk, there were only Asian markets selling fruits and vegetables I'd never seen before.

You know when you see a tall building and it looks really close, but you keep walking towards it and never seem to get any closer? That's what happened to me with the ocean. I swear it looked 10 blocks away, max! I walked 45 blocks and it took almost two hours. But there was no way I was giving up, because the closer I got, the more I could smell the salt water and feel the breeze coming off the water. That alone energized me.

Finally, I crossed a highway, climbed a dune covered in sea grass, stood at the top, and there was the water. Just the sound of the waves crashing on the shore was like medicine for the soul! I breathed it in and just felt peace filling me up. A handful of people were on the beach - all of them soaking in the goodness too. A couple of kids burying a third kid up to his neck in the sand. A woman throwing a stick to her dog. A guy surfing. I wished all those people I saw in the Tenderloin district could be there, getting filled up by nature too (well maybe, the Marcia-Marcia-Marcia guy could come on a different day from me...).

I believe we *NEED* to experience nature on a regular basis. It's easy for me to say because I'm free and can access nature easily. I so wish there were a way for me to transport the real experience - the scents, sounds, sights, and smells of that sand dune to each of you right now, but I hope that my written description makes you feel it in some measure ☺



This is it! It's called Ocean Beach.  
Original name, right?

But even if it's just looking at and connecting with clouds from the rec yard, or closing your eyes when you're outside and listening for the Earth's sounds, or lying on your bunk, using your imagination and your mind muscles to recall the things in nature that you love the most, I wish you the beauty of nature!

Your friend,  
Kelli



# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Untitled By DP

I am trapped in a cell with no possibility of being free.  
 Free Minds is me.  
 For as I close my eyes, nature appears in front of me.  
 The sweet smell of flowers and the lovely birds that sing.  
 Allah has blessed not only me, but also the animals that are free.  
 Nature is to me a place for all to see.  
 It's the beauty of the sky and the ground beneath my feet that holds.  
 A mystery present for all to see.  
 Nature isn't me, but I am trapped.  
 In a cell with no possibility of being free,  
 When I close my eyes this is nature to me!

## One of Nature's Sons By TTB

When I step outside to a clear blue sky I close my eyes and imagine  
 that I can fly.  
 Fly free like a bird moving freely through the wind, we become one.  
 I am the wind.

So beautiful all of the trees that surround me.  
 Small ones, tall ones, flat ones, slim ones, and the fresh cut grass  
 that makes me sneeze,  
 but I am at peace. Enveloped by so much green.  
 Green that is the sign of spring and summer time, and picnics and  
 family outings;  
 the buzzing of bees in my ears and the sweet smell of flowers  
 in my nose,  
 and the feel of soft blades of grass in between my fingers,  
 and the sunshine -  
 the wonderful sunshine on my skin, this is nature, and we are one.

From nature, I was born and to nature I shall return when my time here  
 on earth is done. To live and die and to be reborn again, as one. I am  
 one of nature's many sons.

## Jungle Love By VM

*Written from the perspective of a tiger*

She was raised in the jungle with exotic features  
 I was so excited to meet her  
 And when I met her I knew I would never mistreat her  
 She was humble, kind, swift, and charming  
 She only feared what feared her  
 And making her jealous only made her very treacherous  
 My love for Tonya the tiger

## Serendipity By JW

Sweet pillows of rest  
 Dripping flowers  
 It's everything I need

At night, I look up twice  
 That sunlight tastes good in my mouth  
 I will do what I'm supposed to do

Birds are singing  
 We're all different  
 Yet all the same

You say one, I say two  
 My knees hurt  
 I have cried more than once today

## I Can See the Wind Blow By GL

Through my window, I can see the wind blow...  
 I can see the wind as it blows...  
 Angels dancing in the snow  
 Debris swirling in the flow  
 I can see the wind blow...  
 I can feel the wind blow...  
 Stimulated off the indo  
 I can see the smoke blow  
 Wind flow  
 Momentum grow  
 You can see the wind blow...  
 The wind and trees, converse in tones that's low  
 I just heard the wind blow...  
 The Earth whistled through my window...  
 And she asked me... "Do you think I'm pretty?"  
 And I replied... "Stop being silly"...  
 "I think you're the most beautiful girl in the solar system...  
 so beautiful, the thought kills me"  
 I envy the wind as it blows... with the freedom to go, here and fro,  
 as it pleases  
 We express our concern for humanity when one sneezes  
 "GOD BLESS YOU"  
 You can gain strength, when he test you  
 For the body, is but a vessel  
 We may tend to create wind, when times get stressful...  
 or we may create water  
 Teardrops and strong emotions  
 Feelings are bruised, when hearts are broken  
 Trust is fragile, when certain truths are spoken  
 For the truth don't indulge in feelings  
 No sympathy, when tears are spilling  
 Dear world... I'm a complex human being  
 Like the seasons I change...but I'm more at ease with spring  
 I love to see the planet "green"  
 As fertile as the womb of Queens  
 Manifesting the visions of King  
 "I HAVE A DREAM"







# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Artificial Elements By MH

Naturally brown skinned but  
Turned pale from lack of sunlight  
Haven't seen the moon in many moons  
Entombed by elements holding me hostage  
Some cement, sand, gravel, whipped with water  
Makes these walls of concrete  
Iron treated with intense fire made this steel  
Restricting my hands and feet  
Only breeze I can feel, comes from a dusty vent  
Perverted minds twisted nature's true intent  
Instead of nature's nurture  
Deprivation of nature  
Is a form of torture  
Slight relief comes through a rec cage  
Where I glimpse the heavens for one hour  
Yearning to feel the rain  
I settle in this all aluminum shower  
A shame that seasons continue to change  
I only view these bare cells  
That stay the same

## I AM NATURE By QS

It's a golden yellow sunrise in spring.  
It's the glory of witnessing the beautiful colors of falling  
leaves that autumn brings.

It's the sight of a spectacular rainbow after a quiet rain shower.  
It's in the flames of a blazing fire;  
Such purifying, raw, and awesome power.

It's a blistery winter storm, falling flakes that puts you in a trance.  
It's in the sweet, warm breeze of a summer night;  
While watching fireflies dance.

It's staring into a starry midnight sky;  
Clusters of celestial diamonds sparkling in the moon light.  
It's in the brilliance of a powder blue sky while gazing upon the regal  
motion of a bold eagle  
as it flaps its wings in midflight.

It's the vastness of the ocean, a mystery immeasurably deep.  
It's in a ragging stream, a winding river, even a tranquil lake,  
Where you can hear the voice of the divine speak.

It's in the swirling currents of a majestic Himalayan mountain top.  
It's in a soft wind, a gentle breeze, even the hypnotic rhythm created  
by falling raindrops.

It's in the devotion of an elderly couple, a love supreme  
beyond compare.  
It's in the cries of a newborn baby; the smell of its breath:  
Three of nature's greatest wonders, so precious, so rare.

It's in the destructive forces of a hurricane, a tornado, an earthquake,  
even a tsunami.

These are the instruments God uses to keep the earth balanced  
and in universal harmony.

It dances to its own beat; flows to its own rhyme,  
The wonders of nature will continue to mesmerize and amaze us until  
the end of time.

We often take it for granted; depriving ourselves of its grace  
and splendor,  
So do yourself a favor and take the time to enjoy the beauty of nature.  
A spiritual experience you'll always remember.

## Dear Mother Nature By DJ

Dear Mother Nature:

I wish to thank you for all that you offer, which gives me a fresh start;  
a new lease on life each day. From your rising sun to your glittering  
rainbows, my eyes experience your brilliant burst of colours. Thus, my  
days are structured and my nightly dreams are cajoled by your stars.

O, the garden of glory which is adorned by your trees and flowers;  
pollenating the message that nature is evidence of renewed creation.  
Renewed creation which carries our past with us through the chirping  
birds and buzzing bees. There is always a connection.

Under your fluffy clouds, I live in the branches of sequoia trees,  
making myself a character; a character linked to nature's oldest and  
continuous stories. The charge from your lightning and gusty winds,  
scribes the next chapter in your chronicles, swirling memories which  
solidify relevance in nature beyond what it constructs on its own.

Your beauty is never ending; renewed creation.

## Things of That Nature By DC

Yeah they say I grew up where I'm not wanted.  
Where my surroundings are beautiful,  
and all the others growing look different than me.

But who's to blame?  
Cause I know I was planted here for a reason.  
Even if the world don't know or see.

They trust all the others,  
with their pretty faces that just make you give them attention.

And their sharp bodies that make people be careful how  
they handle them,  
if touching them is their intention.

Who's to say I'm not just as beautiful, and deserve some  
respect and power?  
Cause even though they're roses and I'm a dandelion,  
I'm still considered a flower.



# REENTRY PROFILE / THE WORLD OF WORK

## Cooking with Love Provides Food for the Soul The Story of Roderick, Free Minds Member

Interview by Kelli

I love cooking. I enjoy putting the plate together, being creative with it, knowing that somebody I don't know from a can of paint 'bout to enjoy this meal I'm putting together. That in itself is just heartwarming, you know? Especially when the rush comes and you got a rack of tickets up there and you got your team together and everybody's on their station and you're ready. You're professional and you're doing it, takin' everything seriously, sanitation, your plate presentation, the whole nine! I wanna feed someone else the same way I wanna to be fed.

My arrest record is like a phone book. It's big. I'm 55. I've put in 'bout 23 years behind the fence - in installments. That's insane! They let me out, and I used to tell myself, *You know what's on the other side of the fence, Rod. You know that's gonna take you away from your family.* But I'd do it anyway. I just don't know what it was.

I caught this last charge because I was drinking. I had a bad drinking problem. I wasn't a social drinker. I had to get twisted. I was in a blackout when I went into this restaurant, pulled out a knife, and told these people "give me all your money." I can't remember none of it. I'm not trying to justify it. I did it. But my mama been sendin' up prayers for me all my life. Finally, something shifted. And, when I woke up on that gurney and got into that police car, I knew my life had to change. I said, *Rod, you can't keep doing this. You got to learn to love yourself and want to enjoy life! The stuff you been doing, there ain't nothin' hip about it.* This time was different because I had started to think about my legacy. I knew I had to be there for my family. I am obligated to them to change my life.

As soon as I got released in January, I came to the Free Minds office. Ms. Keela referred me to DC Central Kitchen's 14-week Culinary Training Program. Personally, I didn't need to learn how to cook because I'd worked in kitchens at various times in my life. But I needed the daily self-empowerment program, where you take all the garbage you got in you - your quirks, your anger issues, your temptations - and you put it on the table and you go from there. 'Cause if you can't get that out the way and deal with it, you know, you're not gonna make it in nobody's kitchen! In 14 weeks there, they give you what culinary schools teach in a full year. The program is worth \$10,000, but if you are accepted, they not only train you for free, but they pay you a stipend. In the first third of the program, you receive \$50/week. The second third is \$75. The last third is \$100. You get a savings account at the credit union. You get financial literacy training. I'll be honest: DC Central

Kitchen's regimen is strict. But you get all of this!

They give you basic skills to land yourself a job. We learned the ServSafe training and certification program. We

learned about food allergies, recipes, and knife skills, which are very important. We learned organizational skills, how to work well with others, kitchen etiquette, standard operating procedures - all the basics that you're gonna use constantly in a kitchen job. The people at DC Central Kitchen are phenomenal. Thing about it was, just about everybody over there came through the program themselves and came with some baggage. So they have walked in our shoes. They not only teach you how to cook, but how to reenter society and succeed.

I am thrilled to be back in the kitchen, to have on my checks (checkered black and white kitchen pants) wearing a chef's coat, with a chef's knife in my hand. I'm at home. I want to grow in my career and I know that I'm gonna excel. I want to be able to pull people up with me. I am going into it with a humble attitude. I want it to be an enjoyable experience, which it will because I'm a different person today. I'm off the streets.

What I've learned is if you want something out of life, you have to work for it. And that's the honest piece. You must give something, to get something! I think I'm worth a whole lot. So I'm gonna grind on the legitimate as much as I can, you know! 'Til I can't do it anymore. So I wish that men coming home from prison would just make the decision to say, "Man, that's enough. I want to LIVE today! We wasn't living' when we was out there doing that s\*\*\* we was doing. C'mon man! Look at the good people out here in the world." It's hip to be square today (laughs).

*Free Minds Member Rod recently graduated from DC Central Kitchen's 14-week Culinary Job Training Program. He started his new job at the downtown DC location of a renowned international restaurant chain. He has been clean and sober from alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes for two full years! If you are interested in pursuing a job in the restaurant business, please consider the DC Central Kitchen program.*









# MEDITATION

*By Keela and Kelli*

*As some of you may remember from the DC Jail, we love to begin every session with a short meditation to help us relax. Try reading through this meditation script. Picture the scenery in your mind's eye, and let your imagination transport you...*

Let's begin. Take a deep, slow breath in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Keep breathing in and out, focusing on how your body feels at this moment. Feel the pace of your heart and lungs becoming slower. With each breath, breathe IN relaxation and breathe OUT tension and tiredness. Feel your body sinking more and more into deep relaxation.

Now, imagine yourself on a beach in the early evening. (You can use this picture for reference) The salty sea breeze is still warm against your skin, but the sun has just begun to retreat into the horizon. As you sit in the white sand on the edge of the surf, you can feel the cool water washing gently over your toes as the waves roll in. Take a deep breath in and let it out.

Allow your body to sink into the sand. While you look out over the deep blue waves into the sky, you see the brilliant orange sun dipping below rows of clouds to meet the horizon. The sun sets,

and clouds drift in and out as their shadows rest on the surface of the water.

Far off in the distance, you notice the mast of a sailboat as it gently glides across the water. The peacefulness of the waves is calming and comforting, and your thoughts float in and out. Allow your chest to rise and fall as you take a slow deep breath in and let it out.

Soak in the last rays of the golden summer sun, and fill your lungs with the crisp ocean air. Let out a big sigh, relaxing into the moment, letting everything else melt away.

Let the imprints of your thoughts drift in like the clouds forming shapes across the sky, floating weightlessly. In the peacefulness of this moment, time passes without measure.

As you slowly open your eyes, you return from this motionless state feeling relaxed and calm. You discover that the warm summer day has given way to a beautiful moonlit evening. The clear night sky reveals bright clusters of stars as the reflections glisten on the water and when you are ready, open your eyes and discover the new and refreshed you.





# REENTRY CORNER

By Keela

Fellas, what's up?

Please bear with me as I poetically convey this information to you today  
As usual, I look forward to delivering to you some knowledge aimed at  
enhancing your lives like college. Although with this you don't have to  
take no courses

Just sit back and read while I deliver these verses.

This information is tailored just for you to make you feel special  
like the chosen few

So I'm a rip with this data that you need to know and even if  
you don't respect my flow

You are guaranteed to learn some things

And for real for real, that's really all that matters

Everything else is just plain chatter

Although I want to impress like Kendrick and Chance

But trust me I know that that's just too advanced

So for now I'm good with sounding like me

While I give you this info for you to use when you're free

## Voices for a Second Chance

Voices for a Second Chance (VSC) provides services to women and men  
incarcerated in the DC Jail as well as to returning citizens who have  
served their sentences and are transitioning back into the community.

VSC provides case management, housing referral resources, tokens for  
transportation, job placement assistance, and health and mental health  
workshops. VSC is located at 1422 Massachusetts Avenue SE and their  
number is 202-544-2131. They are open Monday-Friday from 9:30-3:30.

## MBI Returning Citizens Division

The Returning Citizens Division is designed to be a one-stop solution for  
those released from incarceration. Services with the Returning Citizens  
Division will help you start transitioning prior to your release date from  
incarceration with a comprehensive plan and community resources.  
Services include education counseling, housing placement assistance,  
job readiness, job coaching and job placement, supportive employment  
services, rehabilitative services, and case management. MBI is located  
at 4017 Minnesota Avenue NE, Washington, DC and their number is  
202-388-9202. They are open Monday - Friday 9-5 and Saturdays 9-2.

Okay so I want to leave you with some instructions

I need some feedback on my production

On a scale from 1-10 I need to know how much you respect my flow

But don't be too harsh cause trust me I already know

I should keep my day job

And that's cool you know why because I really love it

Working at Free Minds, nothing can touch it!

# FREE MINDS BIRDS!

By Kelli

In June, a robin built a nest just  
outside our back door. My family and  
I were able to witness the miracle of  
new life. We want to share it with all  
of you.



The robin laid brilliant blue eggs.



The hatching. Each baby bird struggles for  
nearly 24 hours to get out of its shell. And  
they were very funny looking.



The Mama and Papa birds feeding and  
nurturing their children.



The babies getting too big for the nest.



And finally, one by one, the little ones  
took flight!



# COLLEGE

*By RD, Free Minds Member*

I hope all who read these words find some type of enlightenment. Everything I am writing is for the benefit of the reader. Hopefully this brief piece will be an encouragement for you to do better.

I won't go into detail about myself, because I want to keep this brief. I am incarcerated and have been since I was sixteen. If the courts have their way I will continue to be incarcerated until I am thirty. I am currently enrolled in Glenville State College striving to achieve an associate's degree in business science.

I believe that educating yourself is the only way you will get ahead in life. Yet you must learn about things that will be beneficial to you. When I go home I don't want to be subject to only being able to work at someone's grocery store, that's why I am in college. The knowledge I have obtained has opened my mind to new thoughts. I'm familiar with business plans, marketing plans, and other things. But you must want the knowledge. You must first want to change, you have to think differently. You can't go into a legal field and think

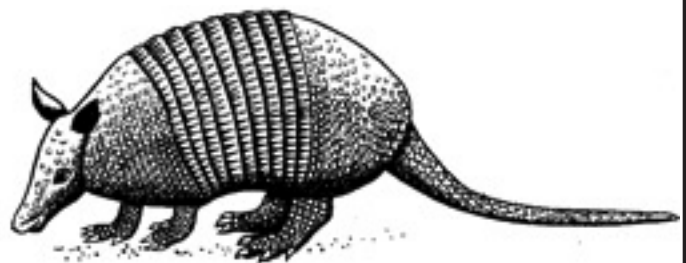
illegal thoughts, you're only going to get so far before you end up at square one...in a cell. What you know will show in your actions; what you learn affects your traits. I no longer care for the streets. I want to figure out the next best thing that will make me a success. Where does being a success in the streets get you? Yeah, you get a name, you get respect, females will be on your line, but what do you change? What difference in the world do you make? Nothing is the answer, that stuff doesn't last either. Someone is coming to rob you or the police are coming, so why not invest your time in something that will benefit you with no liabilities to your life or freedom?

My advice to those locked up and also to those who aren't: wake up. The world waits for no one. I attend college because I want to at least be in the race when I come home. I continue to educate myself because I want better not just for me but also for my family. What the next man is talking about or where they have come from is not important. What you want in life, and how you plan on getting it, either you can be a loser in jail or a success on the streets. It's your choice.

# ON THE REC YARD

*By Hosea, Free Minds member*

I felt most connected to nature on the rec yard. That was my peace of mind for real. Feeling the weather change was the closest thing to freedom. Having the sun on my skin, the wind blowing, seeing the clouds move across the sky. I was outside every chance I got and never wanted to go back inside. We even worked out in the rain.



I saw an armadillo for the first time in my life. It was stuck in the barbed wire fence. We all were happy to see an animal. Any type of life is good to see when you're locked up. The Central American inmates used to capture birds on the yard and cook and eat them to celebrate special holidays. The first time I saw this, I was shocked, but then realized that you can take us out of nature but we are still going to find a way to connect with it.



# THE LEGAL PAD JUSTICE WITHHELD? THE MURDER OF CATHERINE FULLER

*By Tom, attorney and Free Minds Friend*

One of the most violent crimes in Washington, DC, history was the killing of Catherine Fuller back in 1984. Fuller, the mother of six children, was kicked and beaten to death, and her body left in an empty garage. The police said it was a robbery gone bad.

Based on a telephone tip, the detectives on the case quickly decided that a gang – supposedly called the 8th and H Crew – was responsible. In the next few months, they arrested 17 young people and charged them with first-degree murder. In 1985, 10 of them went to trial in DC Superior Court.

The defendants all offered alibis: "I wasn't there." With one exception, they hadn't been arrested until many weeks after the crime. They couldn't remember very well exactly where they had been when the killing happened, and neither could their friends and families. So their defense was weak.

There was no physical evidence tying any of the defendants to the crime, and no uninvolved witnesses. But the prosecution did have two teenage witnesses who testified against the others in exchange for plea deals, and an unforgettable story about a tiny woman brutally beaten for a few dollars and the cheap jewelry she wore. The defense had no story.

After a five-week trial, eight young men were convicted for the crime, and sentenced to life in prison, even though they all said they were completely innocent. It seemed like the case was over.

The defendants and their lawyers didn't know that during their investigation the police had found evidence that the killing wasn't really a gang attack; that it had been committed by just one or two people. But the prosecutor knew that if he told the defense lawyers about it, his case might be ruined. So he decided it wasn't true, and kept quiet.

When prosecutors hide evidence that could help a defendant, it violates the *Brady* rule, which says they must disclose that kind of information. In this case, thanks to a reporter from *The Washington Post*, and the work of the Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project, the defendants learned about this hidden evidence and filed motions asking for a new trial.

One of the convicted men, Chris Turner, was released on parole in 2010. He was in the courtroom on March 29, 2017, when the US Supreme Court heard arguments in the case.

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*Tom retired in 2013 after 13 years as a staff attorney at the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, where he worked in both the trial and appellate divisions, and tried 25 homicide cases. He is writing a book on the Catherine Fuller murder case.*

## **Update by Free Minds intern Susie:**

On June 22, the Supreme Court upheld the lower court's decision, so the convicted men will not get a new trial. The vote was ruled 6 to 2 by the eight justices. Justices Elena Kagan and Ruth Bader Ginsburg dissented, arguing that there was no physical evidence tying the defendants to the crime and that the withheld evidence would have changed the case entirely. The defendants' attorneys will continue pursuing other options.



# IN THE NEWS

By John, Free Minds Friend

## WORLD

On July 4, North Korea announced it had successfully tested an inter-continental ballistic missile that the North Koreans claim could reach Alaska. It is yet another in a series of antagonistic actions taken by the North Koreans this year that are forcing America to contemplate the prospect of heightened conflict with the rogue nation. There really isn't a good choice available for handling a North Korea that can strike the United States with a nuclear weapon. They boil down to this set of options:



Kim Jong-Un,  
leader of North Korea

- 1) War with North Korea with the objective of occupying and then transferring power in the nation
- 2) A more surgical military operation aimed at dismantling the North Korean leadership, chiefly the country's leader Kim Jong Un, and its nuclear capabilities
- 3) Diplomatic negotiations aimed at some normalization of relations between North Korea and the US, including lifting of economic sanctions. The United States has had some form of trade embargo on North Korea since 1950
- 4) China, by far the country with the closest ties to North Korea, is able to exert enough pressure on the country to roll back its nuclear program

The first option is hard to even fathom, and would without question lead to a massive loss of lives. And dependent on the reaction of other nations to such a war, it is the sort of powderkeg situation that could touch off a much larger slate of international conflict.

The second option is equally fraught with peril. For starters, they could potentially deploy nukes aimed for America before the strike was completed. Second: Seoul, the major urban heart of South Korea, is just 35 miles from the North Korean border. It is unlikely that the United States could dismantle the North Korean regime before it destroyed a metro area of 23 million.

Negotiating with a regime that has antagonized America and its allies will be a hard pill to swallow for any administration. And it would certainly be predicated on the idea that North Korea is willing to roll back or eliminate its nuclear program. Chinese influence in the matter is not entirely up to us of course, but would be the path of least risk toward some sort of de-escalation.

## US

Meanwhile, two stories are dominating the headlines in America: Russian involvement in the 2016 election and efforts by the Republican Party to pass a new healthcare package.

There are few people left in need of convincing that Russia attempted to mess with the 2016 election, in the very least by hacking the Democratic National Committee and publicizing internal emails. The investigation continues regarding whether it went further than that, and if any member of the Trump campaign was complicit in helping the Russian efforts to hurt Hillary Clinton's chances of being elected.

Though leaks of information on the subject are keeping this story in the headlines, it is likely that no action will come of this until the man hired to investigate the matter – Special Prosecutor and former FBI Director Robert Mueller – shares his findings with Congress and the Department of Justice.



Robert Mueller

Meanwhile, the Senate has been trying to push through a bill that would replace the Affordable Care Act, the healthcare reform enacted by former President Barack Obama in 2010. The House passed its version of a health care bill months ago. Currently, there is not enough support for the bill in the Senate. The GOP is going back to the drawing board in their efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

## SPORTS

A few months ago, the Supreme Court ruled that a rock band





## IN THE NEWS

using a racial slur in its name was allowed to trademark and operate with that name, even though the term was an offensive way to refer to Asians.

Why are we mentioning this in sports? Because many in the legal world believe that this decision will help the Washington Redskins maintain the rights to their name, even though the word "redskin" is a slur for Native Americans.

A few years ago, the US office that manages patents and trademarks scheduled the Washington Redskins' trademark for cancellation because of its



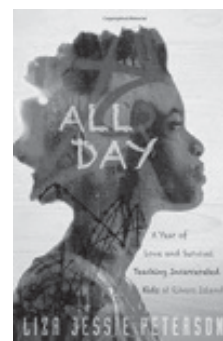
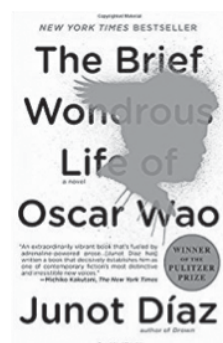
disparagement of Native Americans. The team could have kept its name afterward, but would not own any exclusive rights to market itself through the sale of jerseys or other merchandise.

The Supreme Court decision means that the Redskins are legally allowed to keep their name, and keep the exclusive right to sell that name. But the question remains: Should they keep it, or opt for a new name that is not offensive to an entire ethnicity?

The owner, Dan Snyder, has said he does not intend to change the name. However, the team has discussed the prospect of building its new stadium in Washington, DC, and Mayor Muriel Bowser has said a name change would be necessary to do so.

## WHAT WE'RE READING

- Julia: [The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao](#) by Junot Diaz: This novel follows a Dominican-American teen named Oscar as he tries to find love despite the curse placed on his family. Oscar is the main character, but the novel delves deeply into his entire family, and how they escaped (or didn't) the bloody reign of the dictator Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. I know that doesn't sound funny, but the author writes with incredible energy and humor. I haven't finished the book yet, but it's a page-turner!
- Tara: I'm reading [You Don't Have to Say You Love Me](#), a memoir by Sherman Alexie. Julia and I went to hear him speak at a book reading. Although I wasn't that interested in this book's topic, Julia convinced me to give it a try. Now I can't put it down. I find myself crying and laughing on the same page. Alexie is a master at capturing the complicated feelings we have about our loved ones. His mother was brilliant but also addicted. She could be extremely cruel but he still felt a deep attachment to her. He is Native American and describes life on the reservation so richly. I give this book 10 thumbs up!
- Keela: [The Thin Green Line](#) by Paul Sullivan. This book shows how others can make better financial decisions – and come to terms with what money means to them. It lays out how they can avoid the pitfalls around saving, spending, and giving their money away, and think differently about wealth to lead more secure and less stressful lives. An essential complement to all the financial advice available, this unique guide is a welcome antidote to the idea that wealth is a number on a bank statement.
- Kelli: I just finished [All Day](#) by Liza Jessie Peterson, an African American spoken-word poet, actress, and art teacher. The book describes her year spent teaching GED classes to juveniles on Rikers Island in New York. Peterson's memoir authentically captures the humor, the love, the hope, and the heartache that one experiences simultaneously when working with 16-year-olds in jail.
- Terrell: I'm reading [1,000 Places to See Before You Die: A Traveler's Life List](#) by Patricia Schultz. I just got my passport and I need to figure out where to go first!





# AROUND THE WORLD: YAZIDI REFUGEES IN KURDISTAN, IRAQ

*By Tara and Julia*

In April, I traveled to Kurdistan, Iraq, with my good friend Sue. She is writing a book about the Yazidi genocide that occurred there in 2014 (genocide is the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation). I went to help her document the stories of survivors who live in refugee camps not far from their former homes that were destroyed by the Islamic State (ISIS, aka Daesh). The stories of brutality and suffering that I heard were hard to comprehend. I found myself struggling to put into words both the inhumanity and the resilience that I witnessed. I put into practice a cornerstone of our Free Minds methodology: I asked for help to share my story. Julia interviewed me and put together this article. Thank you, Julia.



The refugee camp in Kurdistan

## **Who are the Yazidis and why were they targeted by ISIS/Daesh?**

The Yazidis are an ethnic religious minority from Kurdistan, a region that stretches across parts of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. The Yazidis practice their own religion, which they have kept alive despite centuries of oppression and attempts at genocide. ISIS incorrectly believes that they are “devil worshippers,” because they pray to an angel that takes the form of a peacock. Their religion is monotheistic (characterized by the belief that there is only one God) and combines elements of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism.

In August 2014, ISIS attacked Yazidi towns near Mount Sinjar, a Yazidi holy mountain in Iraq. When ISIS attacked the villages, they massacred the men and older boys, and kidnapped the women and children. The women were forced into sexual slavery, and the young boys were taken to training camps where they were brainwashed and trained to be child soldiers (similar to Emmanuel Jal in the book *War Child*). The families who could escape fled onto Mount Sinjar, where they had no food, water, or protection from the boiling sun. They were surrounded by ISIS fighters and their only choices were to leave the mountain and be killed, or stay on the mountain and die of thirst and heat stroke. Obama launched airstrikes that allowed aid (food, water, and medicine) and an escape route for the 50,000 people trapped on the mountain. 5,000 Yazidi adults and children died in the attack and on the mountain. Those who escaped have now been living in refugee camps for the past 3 years.

## **What is the situation like now for the Yazidis?**

They are really suffering. There are operations by private rescuers to liberate the women and children, but they cost a lot of money that families do not have. It is estimated that three thousand women and children are still in captivity. Those who aren't in captivity are living in refugee camps in Kurdistan, in northern Iraq. They are afraid to go back to their homes, and need resources to rebuild. They face a great deal of discrimination because many non-Yazidis consider them to be “dirty.” Some charities are helping them, but they can't meet the many needs. They have lost so many loved ones and suffered so much trauma. The community is struggling in particular to help the young boys who were brainwashed into fighting for ISIS, some of whom were as young as 5 years old when they were taken. I met one boy who could only sleep if he held a plastic machine gun toy, and he frequently lashed out at his mother and others around him.

## **You told me many stories and I wish we could share all of them. Is there one particular story that struck you for our Free Minds readers?**

There is a place in the mountains called Lalish, about a couple hours away from the camp, that Yazidis consider their holiest site where they practice sacred rituals that have been passed down for thousands of years. One day, I traveled to Lalish with a mother and her two sons, ages 8 and 10, who had been kidnapped and forced into being child soldiers by ISIS. On the drive to Lalish, they didn't utter a single word and didn't make eye contact with anyone. The mother was desperate, and was taking them to the shrine in the hope that this connection to their culture and religion would somehow bring her sons back to her.

When we reached the shrine, I was struck by the natural beauty of the place. It was a stunning mountain scene, with clear spring water flowing from the ground. When we got there, we all took off our shoes and one of the spiritual elders welcomed the two boys. They seemed nervous and unsure what to do, but their mother guided them into the spring and they poured the water over their heads. After this they



seemed to look around with new eyes – suddenly open and eager. I watched as the mother showed the boys how to do all the different rituals, and with every step they took they grew more relaxed.

By the time we left Lalish, they couldn't have been more different. The car ride back to the camp was filled with conversation and laughter. Even though I couldn't speak their language, I taught them how to thumb wrestle and play games like tic tac toe. I taught them a few words in English, like "Hello, how are you?" and my catchphrase, "Oh so good!" That night, the family cooked dinner for me and we ate delicious bread and rice dishes. Their mother was so relieved. The visit to Lalish didn't erase the trauma they had endured, but finally the boys seemed to be coming home.

A few days later I saw them again, and one of the brothers called out to me in English: "Oh so good!"

When you're as young as those children are, you are shaped by the world around you. If all you see is violence, what hope do you have for a peaceful future? But I was also amazed by the strength of the Yazidi people. They hold on despite constant persecution to their religion, their culture, and most of all, their hope. The Yazidi faith preaches peace and forgiveness. Despite the horrors they have endured, not a single person spoke of revenge to me. They have started schools in the refugee camp for the children. One remarkable thing that's come from all this violence is that women are being welcomed back after being the victims of rape and sexual slavery. In many cultures women are ostracized after being raped. The Yazidi are true leaders of healing in this regard. The community as a whole has welcomed with open arms the boys and women who were held captive and forced to do unspeakable things.

**What message do you want to share about this experience?**

There are so many things I want to share and I want to continue to work for help for the Yazidis. One main hope is that we all stay aware of what's happening in the world, and remember that everyone

deserves dignity and human rights no matter how different our beliefs are. The only reason ISIS didn't get away with massacring all the Yazidis in 2014 was because one brave Yazidi woman, who is a member of Iraq Parliament, spoke out and Obama heard her, halfway around the world.

Continue sharing your story and listening to other stories around the world so we can stop the brutality and bring safety to everyone. There are many ways you can come to the aid of the Yazidis. Write to us and we will send you a list of ways you can help. You can write to the International Rescue Committee and ask them to create a special division for the Yazidi genocide to provide safety and promote refugee resettlement.

International Rescue Committee  
122 East 42nd Street  
New York, New York  
10168-1289



The 10-year-old boy looks out the car window on the way back to the camp



The boys and their mother practice the rituals at the Lalish shrine

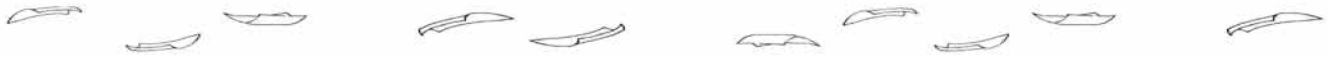
## FAMILY TIES

*continued from page 5*

After high school I went to college and graduated with a degree in business administration specializing in marketing. I work with DC Public Schools now as an administrator.

When Hosea came out, he came to live with me. I have an open door policy because we don't have any other support. That's my brother. I didn't even think about it. Hosea's grown up a lot but it's not like growing up out here, in the world, living every day, experiencing stuff. Growing up in jail, you're growing up with people who have regrets. I can see he's matured and he understands what he doesn't want to be and what he can be. He really likes what he does as an Outreach Assistant with Free Minds. He got a promotion – that's big for him! He feels like he might finally be a part of something positive. He loves going to the schools and sharing his story with the youth and knowing they look up to him.

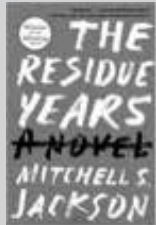
I'm proud of him. I feel good about him! I think he is on the right path. He sees that as an adult now, he can't be around any type of circle that involves the violent mind of people. He wants to get better and that's good! I tell my brother, whatever you want to do, you've got to find out the steps you need to take in order to accomplishing it. Don't get discouraged. It's good to always be in an uphill battle, because that means you're getting better. We should always want to be getting better!



# BOOK BALLOT!

By Julia

Those of you who were in our book club at the DC Jail will remember this...it's time for a BOOK BALLOT! What does that mean? We want YOU to help us pick the next BAM books. Please write in with your vote from this list. If you have other recommendations, feel free to send those along too! The top two vote-getters will be our book club selections for the rest of the year.



**The Residue Years** by Mitchell S. Jackson. An autobiographical novel (loosely based on the author's life) about a family struggling to stay together through the crack epidemic in Portland, Oregon. The two main characters are Champ, a young man balancing college and the drug game, and his mother Grace, who just got out of a drug treatment program and is working on getting clean and reuniting with her family.



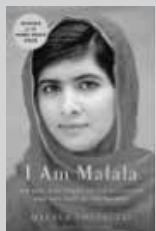
**Get Lit Rising** by the Get Lit Players. This book features the work of nineteen teen poets (the Get Lit Players) who use poetry to tell their stories and inspire others. Sound familiar?? This book features the poetry by the Get Lit Players, the poems that inspired them, and interactive creative writing exercises to inspire others!



**Hidden Figures** by Margot Lee Shetterly. The book that inspired an Oscar-winning film, **Hidden Figures** tells the true story of the African American women who contributed to some of NASA's greatest achievements. Before John Glenn orbited the earth, or Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, a group of dedicated female mathematicians known as "human computers" used pencils, slide rules, and adding machines to calculate the numbers that would launch rockets, and astronauts, into space.



**Bastards of the Reagan Era** by R. Dwayne Betts (author of **A Question of Freedom** and **Shahid Reads His Own Palm**). Poetry by formerly incarcerated author (and Free Minds friend!) Reginald Dwayne Betts. Dwayne Betts grew up in District Heights, Maryland, and at the age of 16, he and a friend were arrested and charged as adults for carjacking. He spent 8 years in prison. While in solitary confinement, he decided to become a poet. When he got out, he went to college (and eventually Yale Law School!) and published a memoir and two books of poetry.



**I Am Malala** by Malala Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner in the world. Malala Yousafzai was a normal teenager living in a remote village in Pakistan when the Taliban invaded. They tried to prevent Malala and other girls from going to school, and shot Malala in the head when she stood up for her right to an education. Incredibly, she survived. Malala told her story and became an activist for girls and women all over the world.



**We Were Here** by Matt de la Peña (author of **Ball Don't Lie**, **Mexican Whiteboy**, **The Living**, and more). After a tragic incident, Miguel gets sent to juvenile detention, where he meets Mong and Rondell. The three of them hatch a plan to escape –and so begins an adventure as they explore the California coast on their way to the Mexican border, all while they're on the run.



# PAYING IT FORWARD: GREEN INITIATIVES IN PRISONS AND THE DC COMMUNITY

By Emma, Free Minds Intern

Although there have been governmental cutbacks to environmental sustainability and conservation projects, several correctional institutions across the country are working with their local communities to become more eco-friendly and self-sustainable by growing their own produce, using solar or wind energy, or recycling.

For example, some Oregon correctional facilities are working with the community to harness local, sustainable resources to feed the hungry, provide inmates with fresh produce and fruit, and to provide valuable job skill education and experience. Inmates, COs, and community members are all involved in sustainability and conservation efforts. Local colleges and community groups work alongside the facilities to create a more eco-friendly environment.

This push for green initiative has also saved taxpayers over \$100,000 annually, enticing other states to consider green efforts.

In DC, there are local initiatives that work to conserve the parks and waterways. One of the groups is the Earth Conservation Corps, which works with youth in the community to educate about the importance of conservation and hold weekly programs

where they clean the Anacostia River. Youth learn about the wildlife and plants to enrich their appreciation for parks and conservation. But, if working to restore the Anacostia isn't their ideal choice, Earth Conservation Corps also has programs that teach youth technical, writing, public speaking, and other important life skills.



One of these programs is called "Guns to Roses," where youth and young adults work with welders to turn guns into benches and other artwork in high-crime areas. By the end of their work, the youth are equipped with entry-level welding skills. The programs run by Earth Conservation Corps provide their members with job skills and a sense of community service and commitment. There are a number of local organizations working to keep DC clean and beautiful; all you have to do is look!

## OUR GLOBAL SUMMER INTERN

By Susie, Free Minds Intern

My name is Susie and for the past three weeks I've been lucky enough to help out in the FM Office as an intern. I live in London, England, and I've been visiting DC for about a month now. As well as having the good fortune to be able to visit DC and help out with Free Minds, I've also grown up in many different countries across the world, including the likes of Jamaica, Lebanon, Germany, Egypt, and most importantly to me, Malawi. The small, thin, land blocked country, nicknamed the warm heart of Africa, is home to the 10th biggest lake in the world: Lake Malawi. One of my favorite spots in Lake Malawi was a small uninhabited island that the locals nicknamed Bird Island. It was a great place to really connect with nature and relax, a nice break from the bustling city I lived in, Lilongwe. Six years on from when I

was last there, I miss the nature and environment Malawi has to offer, every day.



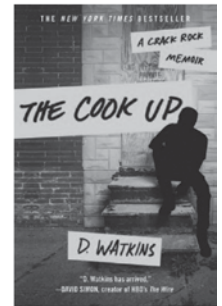
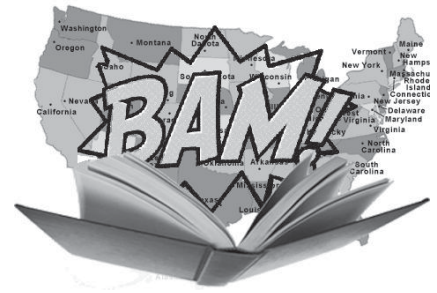
Lake Malawi



# BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

By Julia

The Cook Up by D. Watkins is on its way to you. Enjoy, and send us your thoughts on the discussion questions and the book as a whole! In the meantime, don't forget to vote in our inaugural (first ever) **Book Ballot on page 20**.



Discussion questions:

1. In the chapter called "The Beast," what is Dee referring to as the Beast and when did he start to notice that the Beast was changing him? Dee says of the Beast, "your mother can't protect you from it." Is he right? Why or why not?
2. He doesn't talk about his brother much after the first few chapters, but how does his brother's death affect D. in the long run? Can you relate to what he's going through?
3. D. says one of his biggest fears is "not dying, but dying with the same story as everyone else." Do you understand how he feels? What can people do to make sure their stories aren't the same as everyone else's?
4. D. wrestles with the idea of leaving home and the drug game. Why is it so scary for him? Why do so many people talk about going straight, but so few do it? If you had the opportunity to leave your hometown, would you do it?

We can't wait to hear what you have to say!

The next BAM book...is up to you! Send us your top picks from these selections:

- The Residue Years (fiction)
- Get Lit Rising (poetry)
- Hidden Figures (non-fiction)
- Bastards of the Reagan Era (poetry)
- I Am Malala (non-fiction)
- We Were Here (fiction)

## NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: LABELS

Did you know that last year, DC residents voted for a proposed state constitution (if DC ever becomes a state) that would rename the "District of Columbia" the "Douglass Commonwealth," choosing to honor Frederick Douglass rather than Christopher Columbus? Think about the labels we give to objects, places, and people. Are you labeled based on where you're from, or where you've been? American, immigrant, felon, poet, troublemaker, athlete, Muslim, Christian, LGBTQ, etc. What meaning do these labels carry? What labels have people applied to you? What labels would you apply to yourself?

Until then, stay strong and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!