

July/August 2018
Vol. 7, Issue 4

Free minds Connect



THIS MONTH'S THEME: HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

**WORDS NOT WOUNDS:
FM COUPLE LEARNS
LESSON THE HARD WAY**

PAGE 4

**REAL WORLD OF
WORK: DON'T LET THIS
COST YOU YOUR JOB**

PAGE 14

**FM MEMBER INCREASES
HIS NETWORK WITH
THIS SIMPLE ACT**

PAGE 11



THE CONNECT TEAM

Executive Editor
Tara

Managing Editors
Julia, Jessica

Contributors
FM Team

Keela, Kelli, Melissa, Mbachur, Chelsea,
James, Ben, Crystal

FM Friends
John, Caroline, Tony, Elijah, Tanya

FM Members
CD, AC, HW, SC, ET, MH, AL, AB, EH, MS, PJ,
LC, DK, RJ, SCA, DJ, GD, KB, VL, MB, LV, JK,
Cornelius, Charles

THE FREE MINDS TEAM

Tara, Co-founder & Executive Director
Kelli, Co-founder & Book Club Facilitator
Julia, Deputy Director
Keela, Reentry Manager
Mbachur, Outreach Coordinator
Jessica, Prison Book Club Coordinator
Melissa, Program Associate
Crystal, Communications & Development
Associate
James, Reentry & Outreach Assistant
Anthony, Reentry & Outreach Assistant
Tia, Reentry Job Coach
Chelsea, Reentry Book Club Facilitator
Thandor, Reentry Book Club Facilitator
Marcus, Reentry Facilitator
Michael, Reentry Facilitator
Ben, FM Intern Summer 2018

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* may appear on our Writing Blog and at a Write Night Event!)

Please write us when you are transferred so we have your up-to-date address as soon as possible!

Free Minds Book Club
2201 P Street NW
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 758-0829

Next Issue's Theme:
Parenthood

TALK BACK WITH TARA

A warm summer hello, Free Minds Communicators!

Ever since we started planning for this issue's theme on Healthy Communication, it seems like I'm having miscommunications all around - with my friends, family, co-workers, and even strangers on the bus. I've been getting flashbacks of when I worked as a waitress at a diner that was famous for both its cheesesteaks and cheesecakes, and I used to get the orders for both mixed up! The head cook (who luckily was not a screamer like most of the cooks I've worked with) used to tell me the most important part of being a waitress is LISTENING. Wise words that I need to remember more. Now I have this amazing issue of the *Connect* to help.



Cheesesteak



Cheesecake

In my life, I've found healthy communication to be the number one ingredient for positive relationships. I'm so grateful to our contributors for sharing their tribulations and successes with communication. We named our newsletter the *Connect* because we want all of us to feel connected to each other, and the absolute essential ingredient for that connection is clear, healthy communication.

This issue is filled with valuable, touching, insightful writing. Thank you all for your contributions. You will find powerful examples of communication gone terribly wrong and tips for making sure it goes right. FM friend Tanya shares how she held back her true feelings with her boyfriend, which led to a physical fight, jail time, pain, but also lots of insight. FM Apprenticeship Trainer Tony illustrates the literally lifesaving skill he developed during his 13 years of incarceration: using words to prevent conflicts. FM member Charles learned the hard way by losing his job how vital it is

to communicate with your boss. FM Reentry Manager Keela shares stories of workplace misunderstandings that could've easily been avoided. Luckily, it all worked out for the best. A lot of our own communication style is learned from what we saw and observed as children in our families. The FM staff shares the different ways their families express themselves. We hear from our good friend Caroline who runs a wonderful new free service, Community Mediation DC, which brings families together through difficult situations in reentry. We encourage everyone to use this.

As always we are so lucky to read the wisdom in all your poems and essays. Here is an excerpt from AL's profound poem:

*When I have an issue with someone,
I try to find common ground to a solution*

*When I was younger,
I used to express my insecurities through violence*

Finally, thank you EH for reminding us to tell our loved ones how we really feel. He writes,

*One situation I wish I could go back to is before my
mom passed away
I would make it better by saying, I love you, and
hold her hand*

EH, we believe that's one communication your mom truly heard. Love is one emotion that seems to get through the easiest. Keep your hearts up and your minds free.

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

Tribute to Fallen FM Member at Write Night

Recently, we lost Free Minds member Isaiah. He loved Write Night, and attended every month, often with his two-year-old son. We were honored to have his family join us for May Write Night. We gathered volunteers and FM Poet Ambassadors to recite poems dedicated to Isaiah from Free Minds members at the DC Jail. You could feel the love in the room!

Free Minds at the World Congress on Justice for Children in Paris, France

In June, Tara repped Free Minds in Paris, France, at the World Congress on Justice for Children, a conference about strengthening justice systems for children, and spoke about ways to end cruel, inhumane, and degrading sentencing for young people.

Lion Heart Book Club Poets Volume 2!

Remember the Lion Heart Book Club poets of Leckie Elementary/Junior High School? Just like last year, we worked with them to write and create a poetry book! The class we worked with recently graduated and will be off to high school in the fall. We are proud to be a part of this accomplishment.



QUOTE-I-VATOR

"Great communication begins with connection. What makes us different from one another is so much less important than what makes us alike – we all long for acceptance and significance. When we recognize those needs in ourselves, we can better understand them in others, and that's when we can set aside our judgments and just hear – Oprah

"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak."
– Epictetus, Greek philosopher

"A fool has to say something, a wise person has something to say." – African Proverb

"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said."
– Peter Drucker, author and management consultant



Oprah

FREE MINDS MAILBAG

We love getting mail from our Free Minds family. Here are some of your thoughts on the May/June 2018 Connect on Choosing Your Family.

LV: I was captivated by the stories of what is chosen family. You know in my life I have broken bonds with relatives for the simple fact I was running wild on the streets. I have an uncle that is part of the LGBTQ community. My uncle was there for us when we first came to the country. We moved on with our lives due to a falling out he and my mother had. Long story short, I haven't heard from him in over a decade. Now that I hear about all this new movement about LGBTQ rights, I would like to show support to my uncle.

In response to "Does Poetry Have to Rhyme?" by James:

JK: When people write – be they poets, authors, screen writers, or whatever – they are writing what's on their mind, which they deem creative... James wrote that your work is a reflection of you so put an effort into it. Huh? When James wrote that line, I felt that was disrespectful to all writers, beginners and veterans alike. Whether a person's writing is trying to rhyme or not his or her writing is their form of expression, and for James to suggest otherwise is an injustice to any aspiring writer and reader of the *Connect* who looks forward to reading what he has to say in the "written form." I urge James to consider in the future the audience he writes to and encourage all writers – be they beginners or veterans – to continue to write as long as it's positive.

AC: To James, I hear you loud and clear, a poem doesn't actually REQUIRE a rhyme, and if it does rhyme it doesn't hurt it. Just don't force it, correct? I feel like I naturally gravitate towards the rhyming though, and in a way I feel like if I take away the rhyming, I'm taking away from the poem. But that's just the personal feeling that I get.

*I feel that if I change
The way that I do things,
Then maybe I'd forget
All of these concepts
And preconceived notions
That I have learned
To simply just accept.
And to be quite honest with you
I don't know if I'm ready for that yet.*





FAMILY TIES

Defusing Tension Before Reaching the Breaking Point of a Relationship, Tanya & Sean's Story

By Tanya, FM Friend

Free Minds Friend Tanya reached out to us and wanted to share her experience and the insight she gained after a recent conflict between her and her boyfriend, Free Minds Member Sean (names changed for confidentiality).

The courts called it a "mutual altercation" and the case was dropped, but for me and my boyfriend Sean, it opened up the realization that we need to work on our communication in a serious way. There were many factors leading up to the night where we really went at each other and I now understand much better what the triggers were. I'm sharing our experience with you, the Free Minds members, for this issue on healthy communication so hopefully you can avoid some of the pain and fallout Sean and I are going through now. We still love each other and are working on our relationship. I believe we will get through it, but certain things will definitely have to change.

To be clear, we are both guilty in the incident, but he was the one who went to jail for it because of his previous record. I feel bad about it, but I was bleeding from my face, and I felt justified in calling the police because what happened wasn't okay and I don't want him to ever think it's okay to hurt me.

There were so many factors that caused both of us to blow up that night. Sean had just come back from being re-incarcerated for an old warrant. It was a bad time for him to go back to jail (is there ever a good time?) because we had just gotten a place to move in together with my two kids and enough room for his daughter to visit as well.

We were so excited, then boom, he's gone, and I'm stuck doing the move all by myself and holding the bag for all the bills. That was stressful enough, but then my mom had to get more treatment for her breast cancer and my sister got really sick and almost died.

It was all I could do to hold it all together – working, caring for my family and my kids, and being there for Sean while he was inside. I decided I needed to go to therapy to talk to someone so I could keep up emotionally. It was the first time I have done this and I'm so glad I have. The therapist suggested I go on a small dosage of an anti-depressant which really helped, but that night I was drinking too, and it really caused me to behave in a way I never do. I'm not using that as an excuse but it explains more why I got so angry at Sean.

He came home and accused me of cheating on him, and it just caused me to snap. I had turned the cheek so many other times just to help him. I had made so many sacrifices – letting him use my car, my gas, lending him money, driving him all over when he didn't have his license so he could do what he needed to do – and I put my needs last. I was working two jobs paying for everything. I was exhausted. I could have been doing something else for me like sleeping, going to the mall, getting my toes done, anything to help with the stress of my life, but I was always there for him because I know how hard it is when someone comes home from incarceration.

continued on page 12

ASK HF ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

This issue, HF is on break. James filled in to answer your questions!

Dear James,

I need some advice. I've spent a lot of years behind bars and now it looks good for me coming home next year. My question is about my fiancé. We met a little over a year ago through my cousin, and, put it this way, everything happened pretty fast.

She came to visit me a couple times and I really felt like we were in love. We made plans to get married and at first I was on Cloud Nine. She's been there for me, when I needed someone to listen on the other end of the phone, putting money on my books when nobody else did. So what's the problem, right?

The problem is, I'm starting to have second thoughts now that I'm coming home. Don't get me wrong. She is a sweetheart. She's been through a lot and I don't want to be just another man to hurt her. At the same time, now that I'm coming home, I don't think I'm ready to be tied down.

What should I do?

Sincerely,
CD

Dear CD,

I see your dilemma. I know the feeling because I went through something similar.

I had an old friend who I reunited with while I was doing my time and she played a role in my life then somewhat similar to that of the woman you speak of. She did all of the above except visit me, which was OK with me. There were moments I would be on Cloud Nine after certain emails or phone calls, and let my mind convince me it was love. It's easy to feel that way when you're in a place such as prison being that a lot of us get abandoned and want to hold on to whoever shows the least bit of interest in us.

When I realized I was getting in over my head, I began to express to her that maybe we should slow down and wait until I got home to make sure this is what we really wanted to do. I told her that sometimes we get so caught up in the possibilities of something that we run with it and turn it into reality sooner than it should be. I am an incarcerated man who served a certain amount of years and would like to date more women before I engage in any type of serious commitments. She didn't like it, but she respected it. I promised to still give her the time that she deserved for being there for me, and that I still wanted to build with her, but I didn't want to rush the process.

At the time, I grew attached to the support and not the person. It happens at times and especially in the situation you are in. It's easy to accept the love and support of someone and say all the right things to keep it coming. You may care or convince yourself you care, but at the end of the day, you are a person who has been away from the world and would like to explore a little upon your return.

You can like or even love someone from a distance, but when it comes time to be together, there may or may not be much success. There's no easy way to go back on your word but the least you can do is put the cards on the table and get an understanding of what's to come upon your arrival. Healthy communication is the key when life's conflicts come about.

James





MEMBERS *CONNECT*: HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

Understanding

By AC

Some say that words are mightier than swords (it's actually "pens" but by implication, one would assume words are just as mighty). I am one to agree with that. Words are very strong, pens too, and they truly hurt sometimes. You know that "pain" on your chest that you feel as your heart is being broken by someone's words? I don't know for sure if swords can make you feel that as well.

For us to speak, to express ourselves, to make ourselves understood we need to realize, first, that words are powerful. Words can break hearts, and heal them too; they can be hurtful, and they can bring joy as well. Words, whether spoken, written, sung, or expressed through other forms of communication – yes, hugs and kisses count too – can change your whole life and push you to heights you never even imagined were possible. A good conversation, healthy communication, can literally mean EVERYTHING to some people because the whole universe out there, with all those stars and everything, doesn't mean a thing

when you spend time with your loved ones. So how do we make others understand us? We speak from the bottom of our hearts. We say what we truly want to say when we want others to truly understand us.

How can we understand others? I want to say that empathy is the key. Not everyone knows how to speak from the heart so it's up to us to pick up on body language, facial expressions and other hints. Regardless of the form of communication, if we really want to understand someone, we have to put ourselves in their shoes and listen. I don't mean hear them, I mean listen. Then just listen some more.

Oh, and just for your information, not everything that is said to you will be in spoken word, but when that baby's arms go up in the air, you will understand exactly what is being said to you if you just care to listen.

Pictures of Success

By SC

A person has to see themselves in the pictures of success. That's the only way that they will invest their lives toward a certain achievement. Because if they cannot see themselves as a psychologist, pilot, minister, etc., then they will not believe that they themselves can accomplish these goals. What I have learned from speaking (preaching) to so many people over the years is that: Yeah, I can tell you my dreams and goals, and explain to

you how I plan on accomplishing the task. A person can hear my story, and see my vision, but they are seeing me in these visions and not themselves. So I try my best at getting guys to see themselves living that purpose-driven life. Because you know what happens when they see themselves in that picture? They say to themselves: "I can do it

My Wife's Letter to Me

By ET

Healthy communication is imperative for every successful and lasting relationship. I've enclosed a letter my wife sent me in regard to our communicating, our love, and our future. I pray that you put this in the *Connect* to show others that the way she articulated and spilled her heart out is the ultimate level of communication. I also want to share our relationship with the FMF in order to show that no matter the circumstance or situation we're confronted with, healthy and open communication between family, friends, and coworkers gives us complete understanding of each others' feelings, values, fears, and plans.

Excerpt from My Wife's Letter to Me:

I am a straight shooter: I will tell you what I know, what I think, what I feel, and I will tell you about how your behavior impacts me – good or bad. You cannot be my friend, spouse, lover, or even business partner if you are not open to direct communication. I do not like the grey area. I do not like confusion. I do not like "maybes" or "we'll see what happens..." I respect truth, honesty,

and constructive criticism. I am at a spiritual place where I NEED you to tell me about myself too; communicate with me how my actions impact you so I can attempt to grow. We never have to shout, name call, yell, or put each other down, but we owe each other honesty about how we make each other feel. And if you're serious about being in my life, you CANNOT be sensitive to the truth or to feedback. I have to feel like I can be open, honest, and transparent with you otherwise I will pull back and be silent!

Free Minds Fam, what she showed me was that being open, honest, and receptive to feedback will be the only way any relationship will prosper. We're all flawed, but, if we keep it in our minds that we will establish healthy communication with whomever we encounter our lives will be more dignified. I shared a piece of myself for the sole purpose to affect one or more into opting to communicate better with the people in our lives and in turn we understand each other.



THE WRITE WAY

Why Write?

The column where writers share writing tips and prompts to inspire your creativity

By Chelsea

Hello there! I hope this edition of The Write Way finds you continuing to stay strong, keep your head up, and exploring the ways and power of writing. The theme of this newsletter is healthy communication. Often times when we think about healthy communication we think about how we communicate with others. This usually takes us down the path of thinking about our interactions with others, our conversations, and our experiences with others. But, how often do you think about the ways in which you communicate with yourself? You see, writing is a way to take what's in your mind and put it all out on paper. The best part about this is you never have to share anything you write down. Writing can be just for you. But, if you so choose, you can take that moment to share your writing with others as a way to communicate in a very healthy way.

Think about these questions: Why do you write? Why do you choose to put your words on paper? There can be many reasons to these very simple questions. You might choose to write as a way to express yourself. You might choose to write as a way to tell the world what is actually happening. You might choose to write because you want your voice to be heard. You might choose to write because you have no reason not to. You might choose to write to remember and make those memories come to life. There is never one single reason why we choose to write. Writing is a healthy way of communicating with yourself and if you choose, with others. There is no wrong answer here. But, there is always an answer! So, I leave it to you to think about why you write.

Now, take a moment and read Kosal Khiev's poem, "Why I Write." As you read this, think about why he writes. Think about the purpose of his writing. Who is he speaking to? How is he communicating with others? How does he communicate with himself? Why is writing so important to him?

Why I Write

I write 4 men, woman, and children, any1 who ever felt alone, any1 who ever felt disowned,
I write for the bones buried in a country called home,
I write for u the listener so listen up
Take a step back and imagine the bigger picture
Cuz I write the real so feel me
I write for inner city street kids
Struggling to find their place in a world to concerned with race
I write for the momz and pops shops
Struggling to stay atop cuz the dopeboyz got the block on lock
Can't compete with the drama
So I write soap operas
About single mothers and brothers
About the struggle and hustle
The bustling city where empty bellies rumble
Like silent earthquakes we shake
Hungry like young lions
We are defying the odds
Prayin to God Lord give us the strength to carry on.

After reading Kosal Khiev's poem, why does he write? He doesn't have just one reason. But he does have some themes about why he writes. He writes to tell the stories of others, he writes to speak power to truth, he writes to give himself and others strength, he writes to give others hope and the list goes on. This simple poem, "Why I Write," has so much power. Also, look at the unique style and structure that Kosal Khiev uses. He makes the author's choice to use shortened and abbreviated words, cuts his lines in half, and uses a list form at the beginning to write his poem. And now, it's time to put your pen to paper and write about why YOU write. Your task is to write a poem entitled, "Why I Write." Try using the structure and theme of Kosal Khiev's poem and explain to yourself why you write. I look forward to seeing some of these poems, if you choose to share. Go ahead now, write!

DC REENTRY CORNER

By Tia

Hey, it's your Reentry Job Coach, Tia, here with two must-know resources for FM members returning to DC.

DC Sustainable Energy Utility works to connect District residents who are new to the workforce, between jobs, or looking for a career change with local contractors in the green economy. Through job skills development, on-the-job training and certifications, direct work experience with contractors, and job placement assistance, the DCSEU helps externs discover new careers in sustainability and they accept returning citizens! The only criteria for acceptance is that you have to be at least 18 and a DC resident.

They are located at 80 M Street, SE and can be reached at (202) 479-2222.



DC
SUSTAINABLE ENERGY
UTILITY

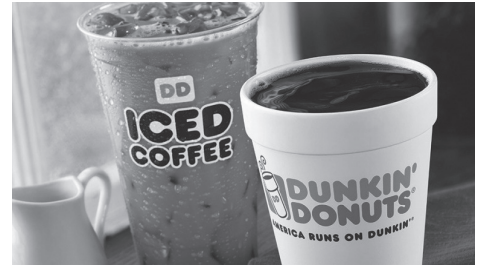
ByteBack provides free computer and job readiness training to District residents, teaching classes in almost all wards of DC and in PG County, and they offer courses in English and in Spanish. They serve underserved populations in DC and Maryland, including returning citizens!

They are located at 899 North Capitol Street, NE, and can be reached at (202) 529-3395.



CONVERSATION WITH KEELA

Fellas, what's up?! I'm just grabbing my morning coffee from Dunkin' Donuts (they have the best coffee, in my humble opinion) on this very hot day and today I'm going to ask them to add extra ice for sure so it doesn't melt before I even get to the office!



As you know, this month's theme is all about Healthy Communication, and one of the most difficult aspects of sustaining employment is effectively communicating with your boss and co-workers. I often get calls from your Free Minds brothers explaining a scenario where they fell out with their boss or co-workers or worse yet, lost their jobs due to either a lack of healthy communication, or no communication at all!

A couple of years ago, I got a call from Free Minds member Kevin. We had been on a tireless job search effort together and he was finally hired at the grocery store Trader Joe's. One day, he was told by one of his superiors that he could take an early break.

As he was outside smoking a cigarette, his immediate supervisor happened by and informed him that it wasn't his break time. He immediately put the cigarette out and went back to work, but was seething on the inside because he felt like he was called out for something that was not his fault.

A couple of days later, they were in a company staff meeting and Kevin took that opportunity to address his supervisor about the smoke break incident. He was still angry about it, and he said some things that may be deemed unprofessional. Well, as you might guess, the supervisor was taken aback, because she had no idea that someone else had given him permission to take a break at that time, and wondered why Kevin hadn't said anything at the time.

I, too, asked him that same question. He said he didn't want to "snitch" on the dude and then have the guy single him out. From that day on, there was consistent tension between Kevin and the supervisor. Eventually, the tension became too much and Kevin ended up quitting.

But what does communicating look like? The very first step is to **refrain** (stop yourself) from making assumptions. Sometimes, we perceive certain things about people and situations, and it turns out that things weren't what they appeared.

For example, your Free Minds brother Andre got a job at the grocery store Giant his first week home. He had just completed a 10-year sentence and was eager to make the best impression possible at his new job. He was hired as a stock clerk, but was one day asked to work in the freezer due to a shortage in staff.

Although Andre hated working in the freezer and being cold all day, he worked really hard without complaining. For the next couple of months, anytime there was a shortage in the meat department, Andre was called in to work. He started to get really angry because he felt like although he never said anything, the dudes in the freezer had to know that he hated working there.

He decided that the next time he was asked, he would decline. So, sure enough, when that time came, he declined. The supervisor was confused and wanted to know why he didn't want to take the shift. Andre explained that he felt like the supervisor kept asking him on purpose just because he knew that Andre would say yes. He also felt like the guy had to know that he didn't like working there because he made a point of not talking or laughing with everyone else and so he was led to believe that the supervisor was just trying to irritate him.

Well, you can imagine Andre's surprise when the supervisor explained that he specifically singled him out because he was so impressed with his work ethic. The supervisor noticed he never goofed off, just stayed focused, and got the job done. He further explained that he had even considered offering him a job in the freezer at a \$2.00 per hour raise! Needless to say, Andre hated working in the freezer so much he turned down the offer, but was really relieved to learn that the guy didn't have any ill will towards him.

That's why it's important to focus on behavior and events, not personalities, to keep things in context. Consider using phrases like "when this happened, I thought..." or "when you do..., it makes me feel..." to describe a certain event's IMPACT instead of directing blame because no one is perfect, but we can all change how future situations go down.

I know that sometimes you are going to be dealing with some very difficult people and things may not go this smoothly, however, you should still put forth the effort to resolve things as much as it is in your power to do so.

The last point I want to add is PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE do not be afraid or have too much pride to communicate that you need help. ASK questions to clarify your understanding and LISTEN carefully. YOU WILL NEED HELP and guess what?! It's okay because none of us can do this life on our own. There are tons of resources available to you (like us!), remember, you are WORTHY and EVERYONE needs help.

Okay, fellas, I hope you all UNDERSTOOD my communication and can't wait until we CONNECT again.
– Ms. Keela



POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

What I Didn't Say By AC

When I say something,
you hear barely a thing
just the way it's always been.
When you say anything at all,
I hear angels singing to my soul.

What I can't say is that I bleed.
What I mean is that I can't tell you what I need
because I fear I might be less
than what you wanted to believe
when you say that you have faith in me.
Do you mean that that's the way it'll always be?

What I wish I'd told you is that
there is nothing special about me.
But what I want you to know is
that I'm still fighting day by day
to transform myself into
the best me that I can be.

Conflict: Before & After By AL

When I have an issue with someone,
I try to find common ground to a solution

When I was younger,
I used to express my insecurities through violence
Now I understand that violence doesn't solve
the problem,
it only makes things worse

If you take the time to talk to me,
you'll get to know who I truly am as a person

Using words for certain situations
can bring about a clear understanding
Actions and words go hand and hand
because they complete who you are as a person

One situation I wish I could go back to is the
day my son died
I would make it better by saying *I love you!*

Conflict: Before & After By EH

When I have an issue with someone I tell them
When I was younger, I used to blow up
Now I understand not to blow up
If you take the time to talk to me you would get
to know me
Using words for certain situations can be good or bad
Actions and words go hand and hand because
every action has a reaction
One situation I wish I could go back to is before
my mom passed away
I would make it better by saying, *I love you*, and
hold her hand

Speak Child Speak By MS

to my daughter, Imani

Speak, child, speak,
hold not your tongue because the question
that you ask,
the answer that it brings may be the solution
that saves us all

Speak, child, speak
Because ignorance is not bliss,
it is apathy to the mind.
It is the residue of stagnant thoughts that
destroys itself fully
with the passions of time
& stagnation is death to young & old minds.

Speak, child, speak,
your voice may be the one that touches the
world & shapes reality
into a paradise that women, men, & children
may grow & peacefully live in.

Speak, child, speak,
Because my voice is old & un-remembered.
It is the weeping in the bowels of coffin ships
& it is the creak of rope & wind
& silent kingdoms swaying in a sultry southern
breeze,
it is the shackles of falsehoods binding me to
inferior thoughts of mental slavery,
It is the sound of a fast life lived & lost in court rooms
silently weeping in cells trying to escape my
self-created hell.

Speak, child, speak,
Because you are the Grace of God & the Dreams
of a Nation.

SPEAK, CHILD, SPEAK

What I Don't Say By AB

When I say freedom
You hear closing cell doors
When you say freedom
I hear soft cries

What I can't say is peace of mind
What I mean is sanity

When you say peace
Do you mean paradise?

What I wish I'd told you is be patient
What I want you to know is hope exists

Words By HW

Words can produce pain
Words can be used in vain.
Words, the reason why some have been slain.
Words describe love and words can show hate.
Words are very powerful, yet some are very great.

Words can push you over the edge,
Words have made people jump off a ledge.
Let your words be love and never hate.
Let your words be real and never fake.
Let your words be true, don't tell a lie.
I wanna feel your words when I look into your eyes.
Say what you mean, and mean what you say
For you won't get a chance to relive today.

The moment you speak, you can't take it back,
So let it out, but stick to the facts.
Your words are real, you can't change that,
You can choke on your words, and there's no
water for that.

Words By PJ

"A lot of meaning into a short form."

Pulling it from me, something
Different and outside the "norm."
These words...
They consume me, bringing to light, things,
Long hidden; never heard and deep.
These words
can be light, but heavy; connecting
others with me.
After all, these words, and I, have
A love affair.
They attach us with our ancestors
And antiquity,
As we both utilize this air; connecting,
Through one, in spirit, and one, in body
These words...
Spoken and written; together, in this
Love affair, they
Free me.
Not just physically, but mentally;
Allowing others to see
Our love affair.
"Words,"
Be my gift, to a humanity, in
Search of
Meaning;
A humanity hoping
These words
Can; spiritually; sincerely;
Express, what it means
To be:
A human being.



POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Family Picture

By LC

Inspired by Slugg

There's something missing with this picture
as I wake on a random day
in a random hood
in a random city
in America
I listen
listen to the voice of my mother
shouting down the bickering of my
little sister and little brother
But there's something missing
So I look
look to find my auntie on the couch
with my baby cousin in hand
look out the window to find the neighborhood junkie
but he is not the MAN
I'm looking for
See that man has been gone for years
gone from this family's struggles
gone from being this family's muscle
gone from this family's daily hustle
Ironical that I used that last word
Cause HUSTLE is what got him sentenced
to no return, L.I.F.E.
So my father is what's missing with this picture
my uncle too
And to every other black child
in a random hood
in a random city
in America
I'm just like you too

What I Don't Say

By DK

When I say "I hate you"
You hear "He's got a lot of anger inside".
When you say "How's it going, are you mad
again today?"
I hear "I hope that you're miserable"

What I can't say is "I'm scared, afraid, and so
mentally alone"

When I mean is "I need a true friend,
companionship, and someone who cares
about me"

When you say "You seem upset"
Do you mean "Is there something you want to
talk about, something I can help you with?"

What I wish I'd told you is "I'm really a good-
hearted person, and want someone to love me"

What I want you to know is "I just want to be
happy, I just wish I could laugh; my soul hurts"

Word Journey

By MH

If emotions take over from its want to speak
their piece
The body will follow and let the message
come out
Now here, lip service can die or travel by word
of mouth
The answer lies
Between words coasting thru ears and
comprehension
Making the sounds worthwhile
Seems like talk is either gossip or gospel
Some truth maybe falsehood intertwined
in the grapevine
I'm wondering who said it best
Politicians, preachers, pimps, professional
Talkers of the same kind
Or is the listener more important
Digesting the verbal fruit into their minds
All depends on what the conveyer has to say
My thoughts end with my pen seeking
to communicate
Thanks to whose eyes reading this page

Conflict Before & After

By ET

When I have an issue with someone I search
for a positive solution
When I was younger I used to act off impulse
and worry about the consequences later
Now I understand the more you live, the more
you learn
the more you mature the better you become
If you take the time to talk to me you'll learn
I'm not defined by my incarceration but my
principles
Using words for certain situations can create a
meaningful platform for understanding
Actions and words go hand in hand because
together the greatly impact a potential
confrontation or reconciliation
One situation I wish I could go back to is the
arguments with my daughter's mother
I would make it better by saying "I understand
and you're right. How can we fix this?"

Communication: What I Don't Say

By RJ

When I say I love you
You hear I hate you

When you say you need me
I hear you could care less

What I can't say is I'm sorry
What I mean is I'm too good to do so

When you say you are sorry
Do you mean it?

What I wish I'd told you is you are mine
What I want you to know is I'm yours

The Best Weapon Ever Made

By SCA

I was taught by the streets
And for the time being I
Was bad, tough, and sleek
Who needs an education, I perfected my slang
My piece and hands are the solution
I can carry on with my head up in the air
Only to fall inside for the havoc I create
I felt like a king but I couldn't sleep
No time for family or playing with the kids
Yet, with my bravado, I had everyone on their heels
But I had no time to be still
Ignorance was chasing me very far
And to me and everything I love beyond these bars
I should scream aloud and say "Thank God!"
That I was forced to think and preserve my life!
Yeah! I think so! For I had no guide
And as stubborn as I was
It had to be someone strong
Like JESUS the Son?
To save me and mine from myself
For I had no clue of life itself
But now I found the word
And I use it like a sword
The best weapon ever made
Before I was chasing little kids
You know big men of the streets!
But now with my pen in hand
I am a threat even to them on Capitol Hill



REENTRY PROFILE: EXPRESSING INSTEAD OF AGGRESSING

Interview with Tony, FM Reentry Trainer

By James

A person's environment can have a big effect on the way they respond to conflict. Some people are taught to take action first and ask questions later – or never! For example, we might feel the need to show people how we feel through violence rather than express anger verbally... and taking that route can lead to greater issues.

Many of us don't learn the value of healthy communication until something happens that's an eye-opener, making us realize our actions only made things worse.

FM Reentry Trainer Anthony "Tony" Belton used to handle conflicts with violence and now he's a sales manager at Flikshop, using the power of words and negotiation to further life success. He shared his story with me for this issue of the *Connect*.

Tony was born and raised in Southeast, Washington, DC, in the Highlands Dwelling housing projects.

"My neighborhood growing up was a tight community atmosphere that became very crime-ridden and drug-infested as I transitioned into my early teens," he said about the Ward 8 neighborhood.

For a while, he was able to stay level-headed in the midst of chaos: "Most of the time I dealt with temptations by playing sports and always being involved in community/recreation-based extracurricular activities."

After a while, temptation kicked in and Tony made the decision to be a part of the streets. He started with selling drugs, and then later he started carrying a pistol for protection during transactions. "It was difficult not to succumb, because all of my friends began to participate in the drug trade, and I wanted to make money as well. Eventually, I began to indulge in the drug world, which led to the gun world – for protection while conducting transactions."

When asked how conflict was dealt with, he told me, "with guns and fighting."

"If you didn't stand up for yourself, you were, from that point going to be victimized by everyone around you and be depicted as 'soft' (never a moniker you want associated with you on the streets)." Eventually, he began to not only sell drugs and carry a gun, but to use his weapon in the commission of crimes which led him to a sentence of 59 years in prison, of which he ended up serving 14.

Once Tony realized his actions not only hurt him but other people too, he began to reflect on his life. Also, while locked up, he became a father and it gave him a new sense of pride

and responsibility. Having to be accountable for another person changed his perception of life and he began to make changes, starting with the way he carried himself and the way he dealt with people and conflict.

In the prison setting he learned the value of using words rather than taking immediate action. "Using words provided a more productive alternative and, in turn, produced a more positive result. It made me more relatable and approachable," he said.

Additionally, Tony expressed how experience taught him that misunderstandings are so easy, especially when communication isn't direct or face-to-face, so instead of creating situations for misunderstandings, he tries to communicate with people one-on-one if he knows that other styles of communication have a greater chance of leading to conflict.

Today, he still **espouses** (champions and promotes) the importance of self-expression: "Being able to articulate what you're feeling and doing is critical for promoting healthy relationships and networks in every facet of life."

There you have it; a man once plagued by violence has changed his life, made it back home, and is now a successful businessman. Communication can cause a lot of problems or solve a lot depending on how you go about it. Recognize the fact that we are all human and make mistakes and that just a few choice words can make a big difference. So, next time you feel the need to react, take a breath, and see if a few choice words won't quiet the storm!





REENTRY PROFILE: COMMUNICATION, INSIDE AND OUT

Interview with Cornelious, FM Member

By Ben

I sat down with Free Minds member Cornelious one muggy afternoon to have some knowledge dropped on me about communication behind bars and upon release. When initially asked about how communicating might differ while locked up, versus on the outside, Cornelious explained, "I was 38 years old when I got locked up, so for me, I was already set in the fact of who I was. Imma present myself one way no matter where I am – prison, the streets, society, wherever... I wanna be respected, so I will always give respect."

After further thought about how he presented himself and interacted with folks in prison, he again pointed toward respect, but recalls making some adjustments: "Your presentation means a whole lot. It's funny when I think about it, for a while, I wasn't having too many people approach me, but what I found out was that people perceived me as, as one guy told me, an 'asshole,' because I was so stern and didn't smile a lot. But now I know that you have to take your presentation seriously. He told me to make myself more approachable, smile more."

"And it really worked," Cornelious said.

"My entire interaction at my job in the law library changed. No one used to come up to me and ask questions. Once I started to smile more and greet everyone in a friendly way, they always came up to me and I got to know some wonderful men I never would have had the chance to know if I hadn't recognized that I wasn't showing the world my true personality. Just a few changes (smile and greeting) changed everything. I recommend it! In prison of course you can't walk around smiling, humming, acting all nonchalant all the time or people will not approach you at all as they will think something is wrong with you. But at certain times, smiling and taking off the stern look works wonders.

"Another time, I used my verbal communication skills to resolve what could have been a very tense situation when I inadvertently left something on someone's bunk and they took it in a different meaning when I was just dropping it off for someone else as a favor. I immediately realized there had been a miscommunication (as people can take that action to mean you have more than platonic intentions for that person) and sought out both parties and directly and clearly explained what had happened and

apologized, asking that they not take it to an aggressive level. They agreed and a serious conflict was avoided. I believe it was because my communication was fast (I didn't wait for any time to pass), direct, clear, and humble. I took ownership of my mistake and I was respected for that. Words can solve conflict. I've seen this to be true so many times while inside."

He understands most conflicts that arose as stemming from some sort of communication barrier. One of which is when a word has multiple meanings, or can be used in different contexts depending on geographic location, age, race, etc. When asked about experiencing any miscommunications, he described, "At some point, everybody runs into that collision. Most of the time it's because there's a communication barrier. Somebody said something that was misunderstood or crossed the line. For example, some people are from a place where they may greet someone 'wassup boy,' but in a different place, that might be disrespectful or mean something different."

When it came to the reentry process, Cornelious started early, through mental preparation, far before he was actually released. "The last 6 months in Petersburg," he remembers, "I worked specifically on myself, in preparation for when I got out. The main thing I did, was make eye contact a lot, and smile."

Cornelious's Tips for Effective Communication While Inside

1. Pause and think about the consequences if you are going to be inflammatory – think about your family and hesitate
2. Be calm and authoritative at the same time. Speak what you know and use your words of wisdom.
3. Watch positive people and stay in contact. Let their words of encouragement constantly feed your brain. They will say those words so you always know they are always there in your corner. I always said, "We all love you. We are going to be right here waiting on you."
4. If I didn't go to prison, I believe I would be dead. I had a short temper and guns were in easy supply. I'm very observant person. Observing, some people are just misguided. I know how to walk straight, but watch out for how many are walking backwards and might bump into you.
5. Stand up for yourself. You don't have to raise your voice or use cuss words if you clearly state the facts.



FAMILY TIES (CONTINUED)

continued from page 4

When he accused me of being unfaithful, something deep inside me snapped, and we both got physical. My face got scratched and was bleeding badly. It was awful. I went off and told him he doesn't understand the extent of what it was like being out here by myself. *I gotta hold stuff together by myself without you, and after I do everything for you, you turn around and accuse me?* I was so mad.

Now I realize in our relationship, I just kept letting things go that bothered me, because I knew he was in a hard place coming home. I justified his self-centeredness as something that would go away.

I should have let it out in all those moments and told him exactly what I was feeling each time instead of just keeping it to myself and letting it build up until I explode. I kept laughing off the harmful things he would say to me, because he would get so sensitive if I said anything. He would take it so personally.

Sean is a very good person, very kind, but every now and then, he can say some stuff that makes me say to myself, "Did he think before he said that?" He gets in these moods and I didn't say anything because I knew he'd been incarcerated and know he's been through a really rough time. He was so mad that I called the police and is working hard to forgive me, but he needs to understand where I was coming from.

From my viewpoint, I see that some men coming home from incarceration don't understand how many sacrifices the women in their lives make. They are very self-centered. They come home with a sense of entitlement and expect people to do things for them. My advice to any women who are in a relationship with a man just coming home, you have to give people time to make sure they can give you anything. Sometimes they expect you to do everything for them, but you will start resenting them if you do this. Don't let it go or it will snowball like it did for me.

With help from my therapist, this time he's out, I'm not so eager to step up and do everything. I'm not his mom. He should not expect to depend on me for everything. At a certain point, they will help you, but you still have to help yourself. We aren't living together now. I can't have my kids around conflict, and kids shouldn't have to suffer because adults can't get along, so I'm still there for my kids and for his daughter, too.

Sometimes you've got to let a man go so he can become a man. If men are being too dependent on you, then they act out childishly. Some women are afraid to be alone and desperate to have a man so they do everything. I understand that a lot of these guys can't find good jobs so they look toward women who can support them, who have a job, credit, a car, a place. They see that and start sweet-talking into living with her, and the girl gets mad, starts feeling used, and puts him out. Add babies in the mix and it's a cycle of drama. Sometimes it's not worth arguing over everything and it's okay to sometimes let stuff go, but make sure it's not all the time and you share your real feelings. I hope my story helps others think before they risk getting really hurt.

Sean and I are working things out. It will be a much stronger relationship than it was. For that I'm glad.

HOW TO USE CONFLICT FOR POSITIVITY

By Caroline, FM Friend

Caroline is the Executive Director of Community Mediation DC, which provides mediation services at no cost to all DC residents, including reentry mediation at the DC Jail. Reentry mediation provides an opportunity for individuals to deal with conflict before release, and/or to make collaborative plans around living arrangements, jobs, recovery, and any topic they care about.

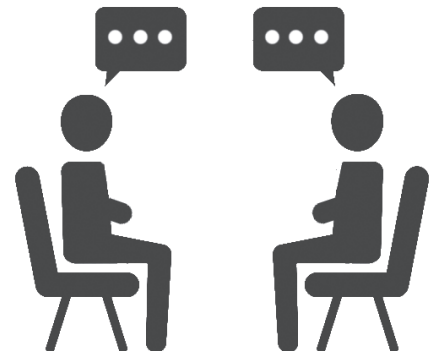
For this Connect, she shares with us what she learned about dealing with conflict through learning how to mediate.

One of the first things I learned in training is that conflict is like a hammer: it can be used for destruction (literally, destroying things or hurting people) or for positivity (building things). Like conflict, a hammer itself is neutral – Depending on how you use it, the outcome will be either positive or negative. When I used to think that conflict was only negative, I reacted with "fight or flight" – I thought I had nothing to lose, so I'd avoid it if I could, or I'd try to tear the other person down and do whatever I could to end the conflict. Now that I understand conflict can be positive, I have way more options of how to respond, beyond fight or flight.

One of the tools I use to get to positive outcomes in my own conflicts and during mediation is called "inclusive listening." Rather than setting ground rules or telling people how to talk to me or to each other, I let people talk however they usually do, and I try to listen for 1) how they're feeling, 2) what's important to them, and 3) what topics they're having conflict about. When my roommate calls me a slob, I hear that they're pissed off and that they care about cleanliness,

rather than just hearing them insult me. Because of this, I react less immediately (even when the insults are far worse than calling me a slob) and have a chance to communicate what's important to me (flexibility, time to relax) and come up with a plan that gets us all of those things.

For example, in one recent mediation, a mom shared with her son the impact his drug use and his time in jail has had on her health. The son shared how isolated he felt after being cut off by both his mom and his eldest daughter, and how this made it even harder for him to stay sober. They were able to talk through some of the pain they experienced and come up with a plan around communicating more often; Mom even agreed to talk to her granddaughter about attending mediation and to talk with some other family members about living arrangements for her son post-release.



FAMILY COMMUNICATION STYLES

FM staff share some of our own communication challenges and successes in our families!

My family's favorite communication style is **indirect**! They all talk "around" some issue and rarely make direct requests or share their feelings in an explicit way. I joke that we all could have been good wartime codebreakers because we are so used to trying to figure out what someone means and read between the lines. I am trying to change the pattern and clearly and directly express my needs and feelings. It's hard to do!

We all have different ways of communicating. I'm more vocal with my issues, whereas my sister keeps things to herself. However, as we grew up, my sister has become a lot more open. My mother reserves her feelings. She is definitely a **problem-avoidant** type of person, but I've noticed now (ever since my parents split) my mother has been a lot more open as well. My dad is the total opposite of my mother and will tell it like it is. I can say my sister and I have a bit of both my mom and dad in us.

On one side of my family, my relatives are very **passive** communicators. When someone is upset about something, they let everyone know about it except the one person who is directly involved and who could repair the situation. I guess they don't want to offend anyone, but I think it would be much better if they honestly told the person and worked it out directly. It gives the other person a chance to explain and improve and then maybe it would strengthen the relationship.

When I was a kid I was really shy and developed anxiety about being ignored, because sometimes when I would talk, no one heard me and everyone would keep talking. It changed for me when I spent time as a teacher abroad and gained confidence by having to speak in front of a whole class. The effect still lingers in a small way to this day though because if someone I've been introduced to doesn't remember my name later, I get that same feeling and get upset.

My family says some **critical** things especially about weight issues with my sisters. They say they are concerned about their health, but it comes across as judgmental, and feeling judged doesn't help anyone's health!

Some members of my family have a very authoritarian style, where they believe automatic respect should be given because of their age and **seniority**. I was a rebellious child who didn't think I should be **deferential** just because they are older. I don't believe people should just agree with other family members just because they say something. You have to earn respect.

I believe communication is THE key to happy and healthy relationships. I was lucky growing up because even though my parents' marriage didn't work out, everyone was always open and honest with each other. I was able to keep loving both my mom and my dad, and not wonder if someone wasn't being truthful, or if things that went wrong had something to do with me. There were not crazy secrets in my family and I am so grateful for that. That doesn't mean everyone was perfect, but we all valued the truth. It taught me that talking things out with honesty is the quickest road to healthy connection and strong relationships. Secrets, holding things in, giving people the silent treatment, and passive aggressive communication – it all leads to nothing but strife and struggle! In communication, strive to be both kind and honest. Sometimes it's a balancing act, but if you keep both of those things in mind, it will help pave the way for more healthy communication.





THE REAL WORLD OF WORK

Learning from a Failure to Communicate: Interview with FM Member Charles

By Kelli

When he was heading home after serving three years, his friend AH, a longtime FM member, told Charles to look us up – and he did. He has been home for more than two years and is active with FM as a Poet Ambassador, often attending Write Nights and sharing his story with people in the community. Now the father of a beautiful 8-month-old daughter, Charles spoke with Kelli to share a valuable lesson he learned about communication while on the job.

Charles: Let's start at the beginning. Looking for work after being incarcerated was scary. I'd been incarcerated on felony charges. I figured, nobody's gonna hire me! To be honest, I was scared to even put myself out there. I'd never even looked for a job before. I forced myself to do it, even though I was scared. I filled out a lot of applications and just like I feared, I wasn't getting any calls back. I was like, Dang! Then one day, my uncle called me. He worked at a restaurant downtown. He told me they needed people. I went down there as soon as we hung up. They hired me on the spot as a dishwasher. I was so excited!

Kelli: How was the job?

Charles: I liked the job a lot. It wasn't easy, it was hard physically, and sometimes I had to put up with a lot from the other people who worked there. I think usually that's a case of people who just don't like how their day is going so they want to mess up yours. There may have been some racial discrimination. But I knew why I was there. I was there to make money. And I liked what I was doing. So, I stayed humble and kept to myself. I kept peace and I never let them break my smile. I just kept going. That's one piece of advice. Don't go to your job thinking you are there to make personal relationships. Remember why you're there!

Kelli: That's valuable advice!

Charles: Yeah it is. But there's more. You see, I'm not working there anymore. I lost my job.

Kelli: What? But you loved it!

Charles: I did, but I made a big mistake. I came into work one day when I wasn't feeling well. It was a really slow work day and my stomach was hurting. I decided

to go down to the locker room and just sit down for a few minutes to rest. One of the managers came in and asked me what was going on. I explained I didn't feel well, and he told me I should go home. I said I didn't want to go home because I needed those hours on my paycheck. He still made me go home. The next day when I came to work, he told me they were letting me go. He said I should have said something to him if I was going to leave my work station. I was costing them money by not working while I was on the clock.

Kelli: Wow. That's too bad.

Charles: Yeah, it is. But I learned something important from that experience. When I wasn't feeling well, I should have called my boss and let him know what was going on and stayed home. You always have to communicate with your supervisor. Communication is really key to doing well at any job. I learned you've got to communicate at all times. So, for example, if you're having issues with anyone, just let a supervisor know before it gets out of hand. If your communication skills are good, you can defuse problems between yourself and others before they get too big.

Kelli: So now you're looking for a job again?

Charles: I am. I'd really love to work in another restaurant. I learned it's something I'm good at and something I enjoy. That's important. Even though I lost that job, I came away from it a better employee. My communication skills are sharp now and I realize that's going to take me far. I already have some interviews lined up. I hope that my experiences can help some of the other guys.

Kelli: That's one of my favorite things about Free Minds. It's a **community**. When one person is struggling, you'll see ten others reach out to help lift him up. Thanks, Charles. And I have no doubt that by sharing what you learned from a mistake that you made, you're going to help a lot of other people!

Join us in wishing Charles good luck on his job search!

DC PHOTOS OF THE MONTH



This is the new Frank W. Ballou High School. They were recently in the news for passing the whole senior class, even though many students were struggling academically and missed more than 6 weeks of school. Despite the scandal, it's in way better condition than most of you may remember and much safer. Source: Bowie Gridley Architects



THEARC, aka the Town Hall Education Arts Recreation Campus, on Mississippi Ave in Southeast, DC, is not only a community center, but also the home of many programs for DC residents including the Covenant House, which helps homeless children and youth. It also houses a gym, ballet program, a movie theater, and place to take the kids for both fun and education. Source: AULtec, Inc.

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



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

AROUND THE WORLD

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

Madrid, Spain

By Elijah, FM Friend

This issue, we welcome Elijah, a friend of Free Minds since he was 6 years old (AKA Kelli's son!). Now finishing his junior year in college, Elijah spent three months earlier this year living in Madrid, Spain. Here's his experience of Madrid.

I am someone who loves adventure. After taking a year of Spanish during my sophomore year, I decided to take advantage of my school's overseas study program to put my new skills to the test. I was excited to immerse myself in a brand new and different culture. So in January, I flew to Madrid, Spain, along with 30 other students from my school.

Communication was by far the most consistent and most rewarding challenge of my quarter in Madrid. I definitely felt like I was fighting an uphill battle at first when trying to communicate with the locals (*Madrilleños*). My Spanish improved, but there were some funny stories of miscommunications. On my very first morning in Madrid, I went with a friend to get coffee and a croissant at a café, and the cashier had to speak to me in English after realizing that she was in the presence of a less talented Spanish speaker (me). I didn't want people pulling out their English for the poor American kid, so I vowed to work really hard to communicate in Spanish.

The transition to living in Madrid was difficult at times. For example, the biggest meal of the day for Spanish families is lunch (*comida*), which is usually eaten around 3 PM. *Everyone* comes home for comida. The metros are packed full of students and business people. They all come home, eat, and go back to school or work. And as a result of eating a big meal this late, dinner isn't usually eaten until around 10 PM and is a much lighter meal. I'm someone who cares about food – A LOT. So I definitely got hungry at the wrong times for the first week or so in Madrid.

We all lived with host families across the city. I was super nervous to meet my Spanish family since I wasn't all that comfortable with the language. I lived in an apartment with a host mom (Maria), dad (Santiago), sister (Maru), brother (Santi, Jr.), and an adorable but annoying dog named Kobe. Maru was 30 and Santi was 24. I loved my family not only because they were incredibly sweet people, but because we had a ton of fun together too. We ate most of our meals together, which were (almost*) always delicious! My favorite meal was called *tortilla española* which is made from potatoes, eggs, cheese and pure goodness.

Everyone in my family was a huge fan of Atletico Madrid, one of the local soccer (*fútbol*) teams. One of my favorite things to do with my host family was watch Atletico during dinnertime.

I loved Madrid. The city has so much to offer, with super diverse neighborhoods to wander and an easy-to-use metro system connecting them to one another. Madrid is full of incredible art museums, beautiful parks, and friendly people that are happy to show you around the city.

My favorite neighborhood is one in central Madrid called Sol (which means "sun"). Any night of the week, you'll find Sol full of life, with people young and old exploring, eating, drinking, and just generally having a good time. My favorite thing to do in Sol was eat churros and hot chocolate at San Gines, a historic shop that had been serving churros 24 hours a day for over a hundred years.

I recommend a trip to Spain if you ever get the chance, regardless of your Spanish ability. I was able to learn a ton about a new culture while having some of the best times of my life. I will never forget my host family, frequent trips to cafes, nights out with my friends, riding home on the metro from class, or exploring new neighborhoods across Madrid. Madrid has a special place in my heart and in my memory, and I hope one day, you are able to experience it too.

** One time, my Spanish mom served me an enormous bowl of chickpeas. Just chickpeas. It took me about 30 minutes to eat it and every bite was pure torture, because she was watching me so I had to act like I was enjoying it!*



Plaza de Toros las Ventas, a massive bullfighting arena across the street from where I stayed.



Churros con chocolate (churros with hot chocolate)



Chocolateria San Gines, a café near Sol that serves churros and hot chocolate.



IN THE NEWS

By John, Free Minds Friend

DEEP DIVE: NORTH KOREA

For decades, the country of North Korea has been known as the Hermit Kingdom, a tightly controlled society lead by a single family with very little connection to the outside world. But as a newly verified owner of nuclear weapons, it is also the single gravest threat to the national security of American and several of its allies.

How did we get here?

After World War II ended in 1945, the Korean peninsula was divided. The North section, which had for decades been under the rule of the Japanese, was now occupied by the Soviet Union and developed into an independent Communist nation. South Korea, occupied initially by the United States, continued as a democracy.

In 1950, the Korean War began when North Korea invaded South Korea with the aid of the Soviet Union and China. The United Nations, but mainly the United States, supported the South Koreans. It is the only war in which American troops came into direct conflict with the Chinese military.

The conflict ceased in 1953, though without an actual peace agreement, when the Korean Demilitarized Zone (or "DMZ") was established as a border between the nations. Since that time, thousands of U.S. troops have been stationed at the DMZ to enforce the border.

The leader who led North Korea to war was "Supreme Leader" Kim Il-Sung, whose family has led the country ever since. Kim Il-Sung was succeeded after 45 years by Kim Jong-Il; 17 years later, Kim Jong-Un became Supreme Leader.



In the late 1980s, as the Soviet Union broke apart and Russia moved away from Communism, North Korea began to develop its own nuclear capabilities. At the time, the central concern of a nuclear North Korea was the country's proximity to two major U.S. allies. Seoul, the massive capital of South Korea, is less than 40 miles from the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. Not much further than that is Japan.

In 1994, the U.S. struck an agreement with North Korea under which the nation was to freeze and eventually roll back its nuclear weapons program. But that agreement frayed under the Clinton administration, and dissolved completely in 2003.

By that time, George W. Bush had named North Korea as a member of the world's "Axis of Evil" along with Iraq and Iran. In 2006, North Korea announced that it had conducted its first successful test of a nuclear weapon.

Since that time, the United States and United Nations policy toward North Korea has largely been to pressure the Kim family with severe economic sanctions that make it virtually impossible to legally do business with the country. The only nation with a substantial trade relationship in North Korea is China.



Kim Jong Un meeting with Donald Trump

In March of 2017, just months after President Trump was sworn in, North Korea launched four ballistic missiles into the ocean, three of which sailed over Japanese airspace. Many nuclear experts believe that the country already possesses the ability to strike America with the most powerful nuclear weapon available, an intercontinental ballistic missile.

Trump's initial approach to the situation was to demean North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-Un, and vow to destroy the country with "fire, fury, and frankly power, the likes of which this world has never seen before."

At the time, the options seemed to be an array of bad choices. A war with North Korea, even if ultimately successful, would at the least have caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of South Koreans and perhaps Japanese people. Meanwhile, even one nuclear weapon fired successfully at the United States would inflict the most massive loss on U.S. soil since the Civil War. The



IN THE NEWS (CONTINUED)

other choice, accepting North Korea as a member of the nuclear club, would constitute an ongoing nightmare for allies in the region.

But in 2018, Trump accepted an invitation to meet Kim Jong-Un to discuss denuclearization of the peninsula, making him the first president to ever meet directly with a North Korean leader. They met in Singapore for a day-long summit, the hope being that this would start a dialogue ending in the removal of nuclear weapons from North Korea.

Most foreign policy experts doubt that North Korea will ever actually surrender its nuclear weapons program. If that is true, then the choices remain the same: find a way to accept a nuclear North Korea, perhaps with less power than it currently possesses, or return to a hostile posture with the country that could one day lead to war.

WORLD NEWS

President Trump has imposed a slate of new international taxes, known as tariffs, on products being imported from other countries into the United States. These tariffs have been targeted at some of America's biggest trade partners, including China, Canada and the countries who are members of the European Union.

This has provoked retaliatory action by some of these countries, with new tariffs being imposed on many U.S.-made goods that are shipped abroad. Trump hopes the new tariffs will give an advantage to American manufacturers, but a "trade war" also threatens to drive up the price of goods for American consumers.

SPORTS

The championship drought is over in Washington, D.C. The Washington Capitals won the Stanley Cup this season, making them the first D.C. squad to take home a major league title since the Redskins won the Super Bowl in 1992.



The Washington Capitals won the Stanley Cup

The Caps started the playoffs with two straight losses, after which coach Barry Trotz reintroduced goalie Braden Holtby to the starting lineup. Holtby had been benched for playing poorly in the regular season, but was locked in as the Caps came back

against the Columbus Blue Jackets and won the series 4-2.

The team then vanquished its main rival, the Pittsburgh Penguins, in another 4-2 series. In the Eastern Conference Finals, the Caps went down 4-2 to the Tampa Bay Lightning before rallying to win the last two games of the series.

In the Stanley Cup final, the Caps faced an opponent that had made history as the first expansion team in any major sport to make a final in its first year of existence. The Vegas Golden Knights had one of the most unpredictable runs a team has ever had, but were no match for the red-hot Capitals, who took the series in five games.

The Capitals championship parade drew hundreds of thousands of fans to the city in celebration.

Around the world, the sports focus this summer has been another cup: the men's World Cup, a tournament held every four years among the best national soccer teams in the world. The United States failed to qualify this year, but it was announced last month that we will host the tournament in 2026, in a joint bid with Mexico and Canada.

This year's tournament saw some surprises early, as the defending champion Germany was eliminated in the first phase of it. Meanwhile the bottom-ranked Russian team, who qualified only because Russia hosted the tournament, made a run all the way to the final eight before losing to Croatia.

As we went to print with the news, the tournament had been narrowed down to two finalists for the trophy: France and Croatia. By the time you read this, one of them will have won the World Cup.



19-year-old Kylian Mbappé from France has been one of the breakout stars of the tournament

The U.S. team's next chance to make the tournament will be in 2022, for a tournament to be played in the Middle Eastern nation of Qatar. The women's World Cup will be held next year in France, with the U.S. as defending champions.



BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club by Julia

Free Minds members discussing *Slugg: A Boy's Life in the Age of Mass Incarceration* by Tony Lewis Jr.

1. Why did Tony Lewis Sr. choose the drug game? Do you agree or disagree? What impact did this have on his community and his family?

AL: Tony Lewis Sr. chose the drug game out of despair for his home situation. His mind was in survival mode, due to a lifestyle of cramped living conditions added to the fear of being eaten by a rat while he slept at night. As an adolescent, growing up in a poverty-stricken environment forced him to morph into a man before his time... I believe he chose the best route for his situation at the time. Our communities will never be what they once were before the introduction of crack cocaine. The impact of drugs created addicts on both sides; the addiction to money and the addiction to narcotics.

GD: Tony Lewis Sr. entered the drug game because, for him and during his time, it was the only way he could escape the poverty that he and many of his peers had to endure. Understanding the position that he was in, I have to agree with his choice because I once had to do the same; in other words, when one has never been shown "a different world" – another way never becomes an option. Some can argue that Tony's actions created chaos and a further state of poverty his community in the long run, but the people around him as well as family did enjoy the fruits of his labor.

SC: Tony Lewis chose the drug game for the same reasons that most of us choose it: the simplicity of it. Sure, we do it for money. But, the reason that most, if not all, do it, is because of availability and simplicity of it. You don't have to take any test; you don't need a diploma. And on top of it all, you don't have to leave your comfort zone (hood). So, a man who may feel insecure or unsure about going to, let's say, Free Minds for a job, will feel more comfortable and secure dealing with the people that he has already built a familiarity with. And, this allows him to be more confident within himself. So, Tony Lewis Sr. sold drugs because it was what he believed that he could do.

DK: I disagree with his decision, because he wasn't contributing to society or to his community in a lasting, and meaningful way. He helped assist with the destruction of his community and in my opinion helped aid the progression of his wife's mental illness. He left his wife without a husband, and a son without a father (in a physical sense). I am ashamed that I too, have left my ex-wife and daughters without me. I took myself away from them. The government didn't do it; I chose to commit my crimes, regretfully.

2. What happened to Tony's mother after Tony got arrested? Can you relate to what she was going through? Do you know anyone that has been in a similar situation? Do you know anyone that has been in a similar situation? Why do you believe there is such a stigma around mental illness in our society?

AC: The stress catalyzed her condition and broke her mind in a way. Her world as she knew it ended, and that proved too much for her already delicate mind. As a person whose life as he knows it is completely done, yes. I can never walk the streets of the USA after my sentence. I will be placed back in my birth country. My friends are here; my family is here; my old prospects in life are here. So yes, I can relate... I believe the stigma comes from people not understanding that a mental illness is like having any other illness. Just because you can't actually see it, doesn't mean it's any less serious. If we can be understanding of someone who was born blind, why can't we be understanding of someone with mental illness? Right? We need more understanding.

AB: I can relate to her because livin' that lifestyle, you hear and see some wicked

things that can mess you up in the long run. Mental illness is not something you sit around and talk about in the ghetto or society, so for her, she took so much and never got help so she snapped (mentally). His arrest broke her.

EH: Yes, I can relate to them – been through it – had money, lost it, went to jail. My daughter is going through what Slugg has been through now.

DK: Tony's mother felt lost, confused and alone as things started to disappear. She simply didn't know how to cope with the change. It could be considered trauma. I can relate yes, to mental illness. See, I myself have BPD (Borderline Personality Disorder). It's a struggle and challenge everyday. It leads to a lot of the frustration and anger that I deal with day to day. I deal with separation anxiety, I'm afraid people are going to leave my life. This comes, I believe from my family not being there for me when I needed it emotionally as a child. It comes with a huge stigma; I'm called crazy sometimes when I have outbursts, I get called bipolar (even though BPD and bipolar are different). It's very shameful for me.

Yes, I believe that others don't seek help in fear of the stigma, being labeled, then losing their children or their jobs. But I have coping skills through Basic Cognitive Therapy that I use to maintain.

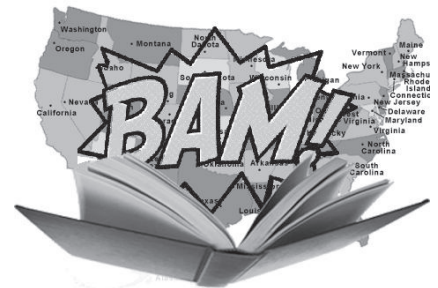
KB: Tony's mom suffered a mental illness following the arrest of Tony Sr. It was sad and hurtful, even for me. It was sad. Tony Jr. handled it like a G though. He was positive about it. I liked that. It inspired me in some ways. I witnessed something similar with my own Ummi. Her being a single mom of three. She lost my older brother A. to a life sentence in prison as a juvenile. To me it seems that her losing my brother had silenced her. I think our communities are not properly educated on mental illness and the effects that this unawareness has on society, on us as a people. Dudes in the hood view mental illness as something foreign, when most of us suffers from it.

3. What does Tony mean by "my lonely internal life began"? What did your internal life look like as a child? What does it look like now?

AC: It means that he started bottling up stuff that he felt he couldn't tell anyone, and that made him lonely within himself. Growing up in the most violent city in the most murderous, crime-ridden, lawless country in the entire planet, during a civil war (ACTUAL war: tanks, soldiers, grenades, bazookas, public mass executions) can really leave a mark on a child's mind. So what did my internal life look like? Very dark, very cold, very lonely... I have always felt safer with the walls up, the doors closed, and the windows shut.

AL: Tony Lewis Jr. meant that life without his heroes had just begun. His father was incarcerated, his mother was there but not there mentally and his family didn't fully understand. So, a young Tony had to go at it alone. My internal life growing up was much like Tony Lewis Jr. My father was not there and poverty engulfed my family like a black plague. With my hero not there, I chose to ignore the real hero (my mother) in my life. Nowadays my internal life is full of promise because I understand that it is truly I, who controls my own destiny.

GD: Tony's lonely internal life deals with in one aspect the loss of his mother



BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

and father; his parents were his only friends, and now without them all he had was himself and his thoughts. The other part deals with his mother's illness because this is something he had to deal with alone because nobody seems to understand or care enough. In some ways, Tony's life stopped there because he wanted to preserve his mother in a state before the illness. As a child, my internal life consisted of being with a happy family and living the happy life that I would see on T.V. now my internal life consists of a longing for to love and be loved.

KB: I was startled to hear Tony mention him feeling lonely at one point. Like nobody was hearing him. I feel that way now actually. Also, when I was 17 years old. I was, what felt like straddling two worlds. One world where I would be holding on to a brotherhood on my southeast DC community. And then another world where I would be in New York City's Chelsea Pier working for a production company. A world my friends back in the hood never knew about. This got to be depressing for me. I felt sooo lonely at times. Today, I've transitioned into a man who knows what his purpose is and what I truly want out of life. I'm happy and at peace with myself. Alhamdulillah.

4. What does Tony mean when he says his life is a contradiction? Have you ever felt like your life was a contradiction?

AB: What I believe it means is that he wanted to do better as a person, but what he grew around was home for him. Even though he didn't live the lifestyle, he condoned it and entertained it to the point that he would contradict what he was set out to do.

GD: Because Tony went to good schools doesn't mean that his life was supposed to turn out as well as it did. He kept hanging out with the same people and around the same way, as if not wanting to change the reality of his life. As the saying goes, "You can take the boy out of the hood, but you can't take the hood out of the boy." Surprisingly, things worked out for the better, but this is an exceptional case. At one time, I too felt as if my life was a contradiction. I was going to college and trying to stay on the right path, but I could not let the weed and the gambling go. Each day, I took an unnecessary risk – and for what?

VL: I believe that he meant that the gangsta, drug dealer in him is always there but he turns it to a positive legit purpose. We as humans can be a god or the devil, choices.

MB: I'm from the area of D.C. that Tony is from so I totally understand what he means because I've lived his life. He says his life is a contradiction because in school he was the person he had to be to be successful, then at home, in those streets he had to be a darker version of himself to be successful in that environment. I myself had to do the same thing growing up.

5. How did Tony and his father maintain their relationship despite his incarceration? What do you think are the most important things for a parent to do to maintain a relationship with his children while he's incarcerated?

AL: Tony and his father maintained a relationship through different forms of communication like letter and phone calls. The most important thing for any parent incarcerated is to stay in contact with their child by phone or through writing letters. Most important is to maintain a healthy relationship with the parent in the house with the child because a child needs that form of normalcy even if both parents are no longer together.

GD: Tony and his father maintained a relationship at first through visits; then once Tony Sr. got moved, he and his son stayed in touch through letters and phone calls. The most important thing for a jail parent to remember is that in order to maintain a relationship with their child is to understand them, and at times encourage them when they are on a path of doing right.

SC: The most important thing that I believe a parent should do to maintain a relationship with their children is communicate. Talk to them; teach them; learn from them. If it's anything that I advise guys to do in prison? It is, I tell them to talk to their kids. I always hear "I don't know what to say" but I tell them to talk to their kids like they are human. I tell them to treat their kids as an individual. Tell them about the headache you had last night, tell them about your dreams. Just talk to them, write them. It is so important for parents to build a person to person relationship with their kids instead of becoming trapped in a parent-child relationship. I tell these guys to give their kids a chance to know what type of person they are, and in turn they will learn what type of person their child is.

EH: The most important things for a parent to do to maintain a relationship with his children while he is incarcerated is to reach out and communicate with your children, to know you love them and talk to them about everything. Phone, email, letters, visits.

KB: The most important thing a parent whose locked up can do to maintain a relationship with his/her child is write letters, send pictures and cards. Be patient in the process. Invest into the child's emotional bank.

MB: He and his father maintained their relationship through "real undying, unconditional love." Being in here and having a 13 year old son myself, I know that the most important thing to do is to show your child that you actually care about them and that you really love them.

BAM BOOK SUMMER 2018:

Bastards of the Reagan Era

The next BAM book will be the poetry collection *Bastards of the Reagan Era* by Reginald Dwayne Betts. Some of you may have read other books by this author, like *A Question of Freedom* or *Shahid Reads His Own Palm*. He grew up in Washington, DC, and was incarcerated as an adult in a Virginia prison when he was 16. Now he is a published author, a graduate of Yale Law School, and a friend of Free Minds. Look for this book in the mail around August/September.



When you read, here are a few ideas to think about:

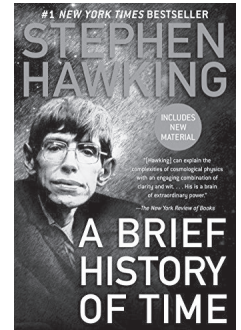
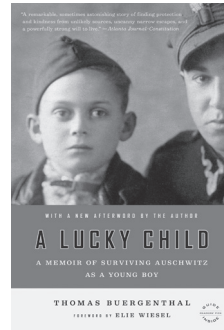
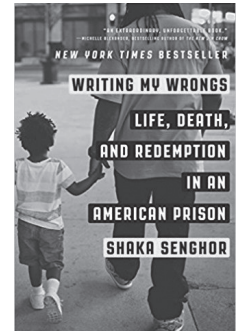
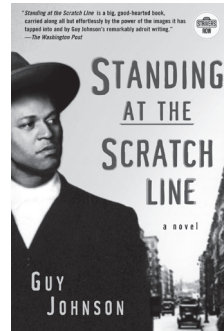
1. The title refers to the author's generation, growing up in the Reagan era, a period of time beginning when Ronald Reagan became president in the 1980s. Do you feel like things have changed? In what ways was your experience different? In what ways was it the same?
2. How is Washington, DC, brought to life in this book? Do you see multiple sides to the city? Do you think he does a good job characterizing the city? Why or why not?
3. There are 11 poems in this book with the title "For the City That Nearly Broke Me." Why do you think he keeps returning to this theme? If you were writing a book of poetry about your life, what idea would you return to again and again?
4. In the poem "Bastards of the Reagan Era" (page 15), he writes about the journey through Virginia in the prison van, but there's another journey in the poem too. On page 26, he writes, "I could tell you I changed/But history will haunt us all." In what ways is history haunting the poet and us, the readers?
5. Do you have a favorite poem in this book? Could you relate to it? Why or why not?



WHAT THE FREE MINDS FAMILY IS READING

Are you reading something you have really strong feelings about and want to share your thoughts with other Free Minds members? Send us your impressions (approximately 100 words) and we may feature your book in the next "What We're Reading."

- **Free Minds Member SC:** *Standing at the Scratch Line* is one of the best books that I have ever read, and the only book that I've read 3 times. Not only is it a great story, it is masterfully written. No paragraph or sentence is wasted.
- **Free Minds Member PJ:** I've just finished reading *Writing My Wrongs* by Shaka Senghor. This book was written from the point of view of a former inmate in the Michigan state criminal justice and prison system...I was struck by how Shaka's life growing up in an urban area was so similar to my own with regard to encounters with violence, drug dealers as "hero" figures, an ease and normalcy of truancy, and a glamorizing of a murderous, law-breaking lifestyle. Later in the book, Shaka touched briefly on how this lifestyle can cause PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) in its participants, which is true, even though a lot of people aren't aware or care about this fact. It's one of the reasons why people in that lifestyle act the way they do. Shaka did a good job in the book of explaining how young people get "caught up" in a "whirlpool" effect of violence, need, want, the will to survive, and emotional separation. This book is very motivational to me because it encompasses a lot of things I want to do. I can relate to a will and want to change, as well as a lot of situations he encountered in prison and on the streets.
- **Free Minds Member DJ:** I just finished reading *A Lucky Child*. It's a memoir of a Jew who survived Auschwitz (a concentration camp where Nazis killed hundreds of thousands of Jewish people during World War II). It was one of the best memoirs I ever read.
- **Free Minds Member AC:** *A Brief History of Time* by Stephen Hawking (thank you, FM!). Even though it's a science book, it opens your eyes and helps you see that there is literally an infinity of things out there. Breaking news, you are not the center of the universe. You can never feel alone anymore when you realize that you are part of something infinitely big and infinitely amazing. You literally are one with the universe



NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: PARENTHOOD

Many Free Minds members are fathers, mothers, expectant parents, or parental figures or guardians to someone who looks up to us and someone who we feel responsible for taking care of. That's why we want to talk about **Parenthood**. I bet you've thought about how to raise a child, whether it be your own child now or because you want children in the future, or even because you reflect on your own childhood and how your parents or parental figures raised you. What are some hopes and desires you have for the next generation? What are ways to be an active parent from prison? What are some ways to stay connected to your kids or your parents from the inside? What are some things you wish your parents did or that you hope to do when raising your kids? What are some things you wish you were taught or that you wish to teach? How do you want your children to grow up? What are some strategies for co-parenting? What do you think are the responsibilities of being a parent? Do you *want* to be a parent?

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!



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