

September/October 2019  
Vol. 8, Issue 4

# Free Minds Connect



*This issue is dedicated to the memory of Joshua Samuel (4/10/1993–9/29/2019), the Free Minds Congressman John Lewis Fellow. May we all carry with us his passion for peace and healing.*

## ON THE SAME PAGE

**HOW A "TWO-PERSON  
BOOK CLUB" WITH MY  
NIECE IS CREATING A  
BEAUTIFUL BOND**

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**"IT'S A WHOLE  
DIFFERENT WORLD":  
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THROUGH THE POWER  
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We are ALWAYS looking for new contributors. Write or draw something for our next issue and send it to us! (Pieces not published in the *Connect* 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  
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**Next Issue's Theme:**  
**Forgiveness**

*The Connect is a bimonthly creative writing newsletter published by the members, staff, and friends of the Free Minds Book Club. Each issue focuses on a specific theme as well as highlights the discussions of the Free Minds long distance BAM! (Books Across the Miles) book club. We publish five issues per year.*

## TALK BACK WITH TARA *Letter from the Editor*

Greetings Free Minds "Reader Leaders" and "Poets with a Purpose!"

The fall air in DC has swept in, signaling a season of change and preparing us for colder winter weather ahead. It's the perfect time for this issue's theme, *On the Same Page: Connecting* through Reading and Writing, to provide warmth and comfort for us as a community. As you know, at Free Minds we believe in the awesome power of reading and writing to help us cope with life stress, expand our worldview, and, most importantly, connect us to each other. Even though we are of disparate backgrounds, ages, races, and religions, we can all jump "on the same page" to understand each other and spark personal and societal change.

I experienced this just yesterday when we began a partnership with a new program in the city called Pathways. It is run by the DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement. It is for young men under age 30 who are at risk of being the victim or perpetrator of gun violence. Approximately 25 young men participate in a paid training program and then are placed on a job site for 6 months. They receive wraparound support 24/7 from Credible Messengers – men who have experienced incarceration and can speak with knowledge about the challenges of leaving the street life.

Pathways asked us to bring our proven methodology to their morning journaling sessions. We relied on your incredible writing and brought along our book, *The Untold Story of the Real Me*. We read and discussed pages from the book and used the poem titles as writing prompts. What unfolded was amazing. The young men immediately related to the poems. They shared deep insights, and their pens spilled out their experiences of the false promises and pain of street life onto the paper. Everyone united *On the Same Page*!

What occurred would have made Josh, our Free Minds Congressman John Lewis Fellow, so happy. Recently, we lost

Josh in a tragic accident. He was an invaluable member of the FM team. I've had the privilege to know him since he was 16 years old, and to witness the remarkable transformation that he went through. I have struggled to grasp the injustice of how little time he had—and I am trying to practice gratitude for the opportunities that we were able to create together, and to focus on what we can do to honor his legacy. He contributed to this issue, and you can see the photos he wanted to share with you all on page 11.

We are dedicating this issue of the *Connect* to his memory, and to the memory of all the Free Minds members we have lost. We carry them with us as we recommit ourselves to our mission. They will always be with us, strengthening us as we continue to build a community of love.

In this issue, you'll find incredible stories of meeting on the same page, like Leonard and his young niece creating a 2-person book club; Kareem, the first person released under DC's Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act, adjusting to life in DC after 21 years and immediately giving back to Free Minds members who are still behind bars; and Free Minds Facilitator Eyone sharing his writing tips for bringing readers on a journey through the pages. You'll be uplifted by beautiful poetry and many other stories of uniting through the written word.

After all, isn't that what we're all trying to do? Find a community to travel with us on this journey? As you read this issue, keep that community in mind, and remember that even though we may be separated by hundreds of miles, we're reading these same words and meeting you on these same pages.

Until next time, keep your mind Free!  
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

*All the latest updates on what's going on at the Free Minds office*

*By Jordan and Janet*

### New Staff in Town

Over the summer, Free Minds has recently added 2 members to our very small staff. Yusef and Melody are now a part of the Free Minds staff as Reentry & Outreach Educator and Reentry Coordinator, respectively. Yusef has helped spread our message of hope and healing through community outreach and education, and Melody has been a great support for members looking for jobs and other reentry services. Welcome to the Family!

**Homeboys Conference** Over the summer, Free Minds was able to attend a conference in Los Angeles, California called Homeboys Industries. Tara, Yusef, and Joshua represented on behalf of Free Minds and spent time learning about the reentry services this program provides to formerly gang-involved youths and adults, and also stressing positive ways to heal. If you are ever in LA, this is something you should definitely check out!

### New Partnership with Life Pieces to Masterpieces

Free Minds has launched a new partnership with Life Pieces to Masterpieces, an organization in DC that uses artistic expression to develop character and leadership, unlock potential, and prepare African American boys and young men age 2-25 to transform their lives and communities. As part of our "On the Same Page" community outreach program, Free Minds Poet Ambassadors work with the boys, who range from first graders to eighth graders, every week, showing them how reading and writing can help them through difficult times in their lives. Our Poet Ambassadors lead group games, read aloud to the boys, facilitate meaningful discussions, and give the boys opportunities to express themselves in words and art.



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

# IN LOVING MEMORY

It is with the heaviest of hearts that we share that Free Minds Member Joshua passed away in September in a tragic accident. In addition to being a member of the program since the time he was 16 years old, Josh was working full-time for Free Minds as the 2019 Congressman John Lewis Fellow, using poetry and storytelling to mentor youth and promote peace and healing in our city through our On the Same Page program. We are heartbroken and devastated by this loss.

Josh overcame enormous obstacles in his effort to transform his life after his experience of incarceration, including almost 4 years of solitary confinement. He was tireless in his mission to bring healing and love to all who suffered from trauma. Josh could be found each week speaking at community events, testifying at City Council, helping a fellow Free Minds Member, or doing what he loved the most: mentoring youth.

Josh was always looking to do more. We'd like to share an email he wrote recently to all of us on staff. He had just co-facilitated a session with members who'd been recently released from prison, and he wanted to tell us how well it went. He wrote:

"We have a wonderful family and we are opening our arms to so many people... The people who are coming home, they need those of us already here, those who have elevated, evolved, and made a transition. We can help them understand that this is a process. They need to feel comfortable sharing their experience when they return into the community... We are family, and everyone can feel safe and be open without judgement when we are sharing space with each other."

These are the types of things he said on a daily basis. He was passionate about service. He was always asking, "What more can we do?" And so, as we struggled with this loss we realized that Josh left us a road map in the way he lived his own life. We are supposed to keep loving each other and lifting each other up and fighting for justice. The way Josh would do.



## Going Forward By Josh

The mind is like a sponge  
So the more we educate ourselves  
And stay around positive energy  
And begin to seek  
We shall find our gift and our sole purpose  
Which God created us for

We can't change the past  
But we can build on today  
So let's unite and let the love circulate  
By giving respect and helping one another  
To make society and our world a better place

Free Minds Member Jameon wrote the following poem in his memory:

## Life By Jameon

What is the meaning of life?  
We often ask  
Especially in times of solitude and discomfort  
Within the dark moments of our midnights.  
What is the meaning of life  
When our expectations are unrealistic  
And we've given more only to receive nothing in return?  
What happens when our best efforts are unpopular  
or unnoticed?  
What happens when a tragedy  
Highlights a plethora of inconsistencies, confusions,  
unfairness and unanswered questions?  
What is the meaning of life?  
What happens when we question life

to demand answers,  
But those questions have descended off of a cliff,  
Falling for rescue.  
What is the meaning of life when we stop asking life what  
it means?  
And start asking ourselves  
How can I make my life more meaningful  
Despite the circumstances I may find myself in?  
When I reverse the question,  
Even in the face of death I discover  
A life worth celebrating,  
A life that's liberating,  
A life of value,  
And a life immortalized in the faces of family and friends.

*Dedicated to Josh and His Family, and also to Viktor E. Frankl (Author, Man's Search for Meaning)*

If you would like to write a poem or essay about Josh or another loved one, please do so; we would like to dedicate a future issue of the *Connect* to his memory and to the memory of other dear friends and family members who we have lost.

We dedicate this space to the Free Minds members we have lost; they live in our hearts forever.

2000 - 2019

Glen  
James  
Cortez  
Derrick  
Christian  
JohnQuan  
Nadar  
Andre  
Darond  
Dontel  
Tyree  
Antwone  
Amari  
Kuron  
Dwayne  
Darnell  
Marcus  
Wayne  
Eric  
Sharod  
Arthur  
Isaiah  
DeMario  
Mshairi  
Tahlil  
Joshua



# FREE MINDS MAILBAG

**We love getting mail from our Free Minds family. Here are some of your thoughts on the July/August 2019 Connect on Adulthood.**

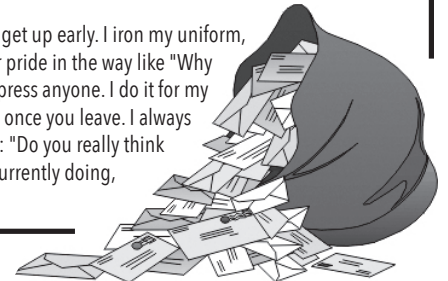
**GD:** The poems were awesome and all of the articles were on point. I saw that there's a lot of support for the Second Look Amendment Act of 2019. That's great because I will be eligible for it "when" it passes. I also loved the theme Adulthood.

**KB:** Even though "on the same page" is our next theme, I must say that I had my "on the same page" moment last night and this morning reading my *Connect*. Page for page, the whole issue was a smash hit (like that/awesome). All of the great information on all of the updates to the juvenile laws was very heartwarming, inspirational, and hopeful. As you may or may not know, I have a brother who's eligible for a sentence reduction consideration. So the situation is personal for me and my family. I enjoyed each of the poems especially the one titled Adulthood: How I Participate by TS. I loved the column about fireflies and meditation. It took me back to my childhood in Southeast DC, when my comrades and I used to capture fireflies, detach their bellies, and place the glowing bellies onto our ears to resemble earrings. It's crazy how those parts of my childhood have been buried away somewhere. It took me reading my *Connect* to take me back to that wonderful place. Those innocent years.

**SC:** I really loved this month's *Connect* about adulthood. It was nice to see different people come to just about the same thing on one topic. Everyone agreed that being an adult meant learning from life lessons good or bad, but also being able to see their mistakes and wanting to correct them the right way. I'm grateful to have received the Free Mind *Connect* to see that it's a lot of positive people that's in jail and at home. Please y'all: stay that way. Also I want to ask DK why you can't forgive yourself? I been there before that's where you start ask yourself that first. You have to be honest with yourself. I'm a be honest, it's a process. By asking for help you're ready to forgive yourself. What helped me is accepting everything I ever did right or wrong – we can't take those things back – and started trying to better myself one day at a time. It ain't starting over, it's moving forward. You're sorry, that's all you can be, now try and make someone else life better from the mistakes you made. I hope I helped you in some way. Your Free Minds Brother, SC.

**DK:** For CM (My Life), I would like to express that you appear to be a very resilient man despite the traumas in your childhood. It appears that the cycles of negligence that you faced and the 'curse' you were born with as you called it robbed you of a true childhood. It is truly my hope for you that you remain thinking the way you currently are. You are an inspiration. Once you get out, please, stay crime free, if not for yourself, for your daughter. Our children NEED us in society. Put family first before our desires. I'm proud of you for the way you're thinking!

For JG (Growing Up Is A Decision), WOW, I agree with you 110% regarding adulthood, that it's continuous growth! I too get up early. I iron my uniform, and stay with the positive things. Although I get comments from those here in prison who don't want to change or have their pride in the way like "Why you ironing?" "Why you taking classes?" "Why you always writing?" Well change starts within ourselves. I'm not trying to impress anyone. I do it for my own self-respect and because I am a FIRM believer that how you live out your life behind these fences is how you keep living once you leave. I always hear "I'll change what I do when I leave," "I'll stop smoking the K2 once I leave." Well here's a wake up message I give them: "Do you really think walking through that gate changes you?" NO, change is a continuous process. So JG, I commend you for doing what you're currently doing, I wish I had a mentor like you here. They are far and few between here, sad to say. Keep your faith and stay strong!



## QUOTE-I-VATOR

**"If art doesn't make us better, then what on earth is it for?"** – Alice Walker (Author, *The Color Purple*)

**"... the truest writers are those who see language not as a linguistic process but as a living element..."**  
– Derek Walcott (Author, Poet, *Omeros*)

**"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you."** – Maya Angelou  
(Author, Poet, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*)

**"Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced."** – James Baldwin  
(Author, *The Fire Next Time*)

**"To succeed in life you need three bones: wishbone, backbone, and funny bone."** – Reba McEntire (Musician)

**"If there is a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, you must be the one to write it."** – Toni Morrison  
(Author, *Beloved*)

**"What can a pencil do for all of us? Amazing things. It can write transcendent poetry, uplifting music, or life-changing equations; it can sketch the future, give life to untold beauty, and communicate the full-force of our love and aspirations."** – Adam Braun (Founder of Pencils for Promise educational nonprofit)

**"When I began to listen to poetry, it's when I began to listen to the stones, and I began to listen to what the clouds had to say, and I began to listen to others. And I think, most importantly for all of us, then you begin to learn to listen to the soul, the soul of yourself in here, which is also the soul of everyone else."** – Joy Harjo  
(First Native American US Poet Laureate)

**"I believe in communication; books communicate ideas and make bridges between people."** – Jeanette Winterson (Author, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*)



Toni Morrison, Author (*Beloved*)

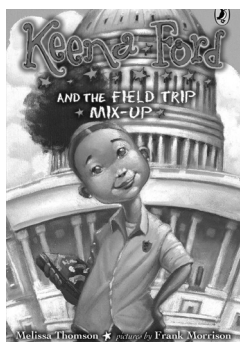




# FAMILY TIES

## How a "Two-Person Book Club" is creating a beautiful bond between one FM Member and the 7 year-old niece he has never met

*An Interview with FM Member Leonard By Kelli*



Free Minds Member Leonard never learned to read as a child. He doesn't remember ever being read to by an adult. Now 44, Leonard says he didn't truly learn to read until he was a 28-year-old man. In prison, he taught himself to read Donald Goines books (popular urban novels written in the seventies). Reading opened up his world and he embarked upon a journey of learning. Now, he says, he hates urban novels because he believes they paint a negative and one-dimensional view of African Americans. He prefers to read true stories, especially memoirs.

Leonard has an extremely close relationship with his 25-year-old daughter, but still feels enormous sadness that he was not able to be there by her side to help raise her. Everyone tells Leonard

that his 7-year-old niece, Kizzy, looks a lot like his own daughter. Since his mother cares for Kizzy, Leonard speaks with her nearly every time he calls home. Recently, Kizzy started talking about books, and that gave Leonard an idea. What if he created a two-person book club with Kizzy?

**KELLI:** So what is Kizzy like?

**LEONARD:** Oh, she is a beautiful little girl! She is so outgoing. She loves to talk! She loves to eat. She is so kind-hearted. I'm always hearing stories about how she's trying to give her toys away to other little kids! And she loves playing outside. But it's not always safe, so she spends a lot of time indoors. Recently, she was talking about how she just started the second grade and she is getting into reading. That gave me the idea. I ordered two books for her and got the same books for myself so that we can read them together.

**KELLI:** What did Kizzy think of the idea?

**LEONARD:** (Laughs) Well, her grandmother said that she was so excited when the package came from Amazon. She'd never gotten anything in the mail before. My mom said she wanted to sleep with the books that first night!

**KELLI:** How is the book club going so far?

**LEONARD:** Great! We started with a book called *Keena Ford and the Field Trip Mix-Up*, by Melissa Thomson. It's about a African American girl in the second grade in Washington, DC who goes on a field trip to see the Capitol. I never had books growing up. I thought this could be something good. I just want her to love books and experience and explore all kinds of books.

**KELLI:** Does Kizzy like the story?

**LEONARD:** She told me the book is challenging for her, so we are just getting on the phone every two days and reading from one picture page to the next. But she named one of her dolls Keena, after the main character. And I just heard she's asking to wear her hair like Keena too. So yeah, I'd say she likes it (laughs)!

**KELLI:** What do you hope this book club does?

**LEONARD:** Books are ageless. Anyone can connect to the same story. And for that reason, if you read a book together, you can get to know each other better. You share what you thought about a book and that will give me a better perspective of who you are. I hope that by the two of us reading together, she may become more comfortable sharing her thoughts or fears with me. Sometimes talking about a character helps you to share something that otherwise might be hard to say. No matter what, I think reading together will help an adult better understand a child. Kizzy may have goals she didn't even know about or understand was something that she could do. For example, who knows? Maybe this book will make her want to go visit and learn about the US Capitol building!

# ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

*Hey Free Minds Fam! As our long-time readers know, FM Member HF used to be the "Advice Man" in this column, but he was released this spring (Congrats HF!). We want to get your input on the future of the "Advice from the Inside" column. We're going to print the question as well as a response from this issue's Advice Man, TH, but we want to hear your thoughts and perspectives too! Send in any advice you have for W.W., and we'll compile it and print as much as we can in the next issue. We want to hear from you!*

**Dear Advice Man:**

I need your help. I have a girl on the outside and she's stuck with me this whole time. We talk on the phone, and we write letters. But sometimes I feel like she has to be getting bored of me. Her letters are full of so many stories about what she is doing, what she's seen, who she's talked to, where she's been, etc. My life is the same - day in and day out. Same boring gray walls. Same old faces. Same old, same old. I feel like every letter I write to her sounds just like the last one! Do you have any advice on how I can talk to her where it doesn't feel like she's in drive while I'm stuck in neutral?

Sincerely,  
W.W.

My Brother W.W.,

First let me commend you on having the maturity and insight to think of the impact your situation has on your loved ones. Now, the sad reality is life goes on out there in the "real world," while we sit in here feeling like we're stuck in the movie "Groundhog Day," where each day is the same routine. Just like that reality is a product of our choices in life, we still have the power to choose how we deal with this reality. This is the perfect time to motivate yourself to write her about the most interesting things you can find about the thing that she is most interested about... YOU! Share with her things about you that she doesn't already know, tell her the things you remember about your childhood, your greatest strength, your worst fear. If you're comfortable enough with her, share something you've never told anyone else. Let her see how you've changed and are growing in this process and the things you are learning about yourself. If you don't feel like you are ready for that, look around you. I have met good people in here from all over the world, Colombia, Sudan, England, Russia, Nigeria, etc., and have had amazing conversations about what it's like in those places. Think outside the box, talk with people you might not usually talk to, read a book that you wouldn't think you'd read, and just share these new things with her. Most importantly, do not allow your physical confinement to stump your personal growth. Broaden your horizon and free your mind in ways you never thought were possible. You'll be surprised at what you find and what you will have to share with her. If none of that works, you can always ask her questions about the stories she is sharing with you, about her hopes and dreams. Use this opportunity to build a solid foundation of honesty, trust and communication in this relationship; these skills will serve you well in all areas of your life. Also, even in neutral, if you have someone give you a push, you can still steer in any direction. I just gave you a push, now the steering is up to you! Good luck.

Until Next time, B.Y. B.Y. (Be Your Best You)  
TH



# MEMBERS *CONNECT*: ON THE SAME PAGE

## On the Same Page

By AME

To get On The Same Page:

I had to open my eyes,  
I had to listen,  
I had to take heed,  
and overall I had to understand.

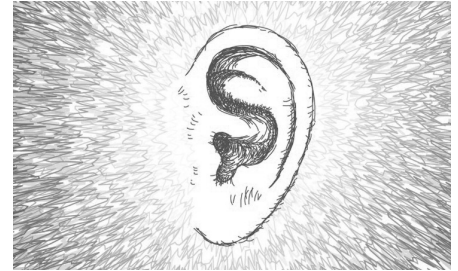
One day my late grandfather and I was doing some yard work. He sent me into the house to grab something. He gave me instructions to follow – so I could go locate exactly what he sent me for. However, I entered the house in the dark and did not find what he had sent me for. So I returned to the yard empty handed and reported to him that I couldn't find it. He stopped what he was doing and ordered me to follow him back in the house to the pinpointed location that he had instructed me to follow. Once we got there, he turned on the light and moved a box to display the item that he had sent me to get. He picked it up and told me: "In order to get On The

Same Page – you must move something to find something"!

The overall understanding of this story is before you can get On The Same Page with anyone else, you must first get On The Same Page with yourself by following the simply guidelines stated above...

With that being said: now we are On The Same Page!

God Bless



## Media Misrepresentation about Incarcerated People

By GD

Question: Why is it that every time incarcerated men are depicted on TV or movies, they're tough, tattooed gangsters looking to stir up mischief?

Why are they always shown only advocating crime and ignorance, instead of education and change?

Why is it only the negative side of prison and the "convict" get promoted, instead of letting society see the positive men and women who are incarcerated fighting to change their lives?

Answers: The number one reason why they keep the positive prison image shadowed is because in order to keep the already existing negative opinion, perception, and overall view society has about "convicts," they must constantly perpetuate the negative stereotype through TV and other media. We all know that drama and conflict sell, and what better drama than prison drama! Who wants to see people in prison educating themselves, learning how to be a better person, or denouncing the criminal life all together? No one!

Therefore, they will continue to depict the stereotypical "convict" and the prison they're held in as the bad, nightmarish and dangerous place where no one is safe. They will forever propagate the narrative that the prison environment is the land of the predator and prey, and nothing positive comes from prison, only the chance to further your criminal career.

What society doesn't see is that there are a lot of good men and women in prison and the overall prison life structure isn't predicated upon violence or a stepping stone for more criminal activity. Most prisons offer a wide variety of programs that "convicts" often take full advantage of. There are many men and women who've gotten their G.E.D. and have gone to college while still incarcerated, and obtained many degrees. Prisons also offer trades in many fields, jobs training and certification in various industries.

The light hardly ever shines on the inmates who are becoming doctors or mastering trades and learning to practice life skills. Far too often does the negative overshadow the positive when it comes to prison. Yes, we should expose the unfair treatment, sentences, and

disregard that comes with prison, but we also need to debunk the unfair stereotype placed on all "convicts."

This is not to say that prison isn't a bad place or dangerous place. I'm not in any stretch of the imagination trying to "praise" prison and the life thereof, but to acknowledge those men and women who are incarcerated and dedicated to changing their lives and the lives of those around them.

Take me for instance, I am a 38-year-old black man from Washington, DC who is 19 years in on a 60-year-to-life sentence. While incarcerated, I've maintained a positive outlook and pursued an education. I've obtained my G.E.D., then went on to teach G.E.D. classes. I have many certifications in business, health and wellness and computer. I've participated in various positive inmate run organizations that mentor fellow inmates. There is much more to my evolution; I just wanted to share a portion to show that there can be positivity and productivity from us who are incarcerated.

My goal for this article is to draw attention to the good that a lot of inmates, convicts, or simply put... men and women are doing while incarcerated. I also want to help change the negative perception held by most of society, and create a new and positive image for the incarcerated. Though there is a percentage of inmates who are troubled and help give this negative perception credence, it doesn't mean that this is the side of prison life that should be used to represent us as a whole. So, instead of constantly demonizing prison and painting all inmates as blood-spilling villains, let's focus on the positive, educated, changed and productive human beings that deserve a second chance.



# CONVERSATION WITH CRYSTAL

*The column where different members of the Free Minds family – staff, volunteers, interns, members, and more – share their perspective on the theme*

*"My students were so inspired by the Poet Ambassador's stories. Though they haven't been incarcerated, we're all 1-2 degrees away from a bad choice. Through their storytelling, I was able to spark a conversation about fatherhood. I learned that my student's father had been murdered and I was in a position to develop a deeper relationship with him because of this." – Paul P., Executive Director of RISE (Resources to Inspire Students and Educators)*

Hi, everyone!

My name is Crystal and I am the Communications and Community Engagement Specialist at Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop! Do not worry; I will not casually speed by that title because I know it can be a bit of mouthful – and honestly, no one outside of our office really knows what exactly that title means. At the organization, my primary duties are to draft Free Minds materials (newsletters, reports, website articles, etc.), help create social media material, coordinate online campaigns and fundraising events, and manage all of our community outreach through our non-violence prevention program known as, "On the Same Page: Free Minds Poetry in the Community and the Classroom." Free Minds might be a small organization, but we keep busy! Currently, I am sitting at my desk (where I share an open office space with four other staff members) with a mouthful of macaroni and cheese (the super cheesy baked kind) trying to finish writing this piece for the *Connect* so I can get back to checking my emails. For those of you who are wondering where I got my lunch, all of my DC natives should be familiar with the historic Florida Ave. Grill on 11th and Florida Ave., which is a short walk from our office and Cardozo!



Now that I have briefly brought up our "On the Same Page" program (which I am sure you all have guessed is this issue's theme by now...), I wanted to dig a little deeper into what all is included and the role that you all play.

Upon our members' release, we offer an opportunity for them to give back to the program by serving as Poet Ambassadors. As Poet Ambassadors, members facilitate our community outreach project (On the Same Page), in which poetry, creative writing, and powerful personal testimonies of change are shared in local schools (youths and adults), workplaces, and community groups to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of youth incarceration. Most of our members thoroughly enjoy this part of our program because it allows them to speak to their younger selves, as well as elevate their voices to share their most vulnerable, raw, and successful parts of their upbringing, incarceration, and post-incarceration experiences. For many of our Poet Ambassadors, it is the first time they have felt heard, seen and valued, or received any form of sympathy/empathy. It is truly remarkable to witness how sharing some of the most difficult times in someone's life can be so therapeutic while in the presence of people who care to listen. It is also equally moving to experience the outpouring of emotional intelligence from the students, educators, churchgoers, lawyers, etc. that we speak to – they become so committed and invested in the work that we're doing and go above and beyond to make what we do possible. Fortunately, unlike most non-profits, we are able to spend most of our time doing "the work" as opposed to strenuously cultivating a community of supporters to aide in our programming. Instead, most of our supporters come straight to us with an eagerness to assist. The power of sharing your story.

Which brings me to the other half of our outreach program, Write Night. While, I have only been with the organization shy of two years, I have heard many members say, "We really thought it was the staff writing all of these comments on our poems and switching the color of the pen and names like we wouldn't notice." Therefore, I could not end this without laying this to rest. **It is not us!** Write Night is a monthly volunteer event that uses poetry to bring about understanding between our incarcerated members and the outside community, leading to healing and true connections; we believe this keeps our poets more invested in the community and makes the community more invested in equity and opportunity for all. At the event, Poet Ambassadors are also in attendance to sit with volunteers, as well as respond to poetry.



I really hope this offered a deeper look into our outreach program, On the Same Page: Free Minds Poetry in the Community and the Classroom. We are looking forward to hearing from you all soon. Keep writing!!!





# THE WRITE WAY

## Bring Your Reader on the Journey

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

*By Eyone*

I've been writing for some years now and I'm always learning new ways to tell a story or express a thought. I began writing while serving a 15 to life sentence that I received at 16 years old. Reading taught me many things, but one of the best things that I got out of reading was an education on writing. I read everything and all genres (types) of books. My favorite books when I first got to prison were urban novels and history books. However, it was urban novels that inspired me to begin creative writing. From my prison cell, I wrote more than 20 books, 11 of which have been published. I'm here to tell you my secret. I learned to write by reading the works of authors that I respect and admire. I studied the way they put their sentences together. I studied the way they transitioned from story breaks to story breaks and chapter to chapter. As time went on, I began writing articles for magazines. In order to teach myself to write clear and concise articles, I began studying publications like the *Washington Post*. I practiced writing small articles and then longer ones until finally I made the cover of a few magazines with articles that I had written. Anyway, my point is that there is a good lesson about writing in every piece of writing by an author that really knows what they're doing.

One thing that I've learned to pay close attention to is the rule of not losing the readers. Many times we can forget that some of our readers may not be from where we're from and may have never been through some of the things that we may have been through, no matter what walk of life we are from. For an example, if we refer to the Washington, DC area as the DMV broadly in a writing of ours it is pretty likely that someone from another part of the country may not know what we are talking about. I've found that before using broad terms like DMV I would explain to my reader "within my piece of writing" that the Washington, DC area is comprised of DC and parts of Maryland and Virginia. Once this has been taken care of in our writings, then our readers may come along on the reading journey without being confused.



Another example is writings like legal writings or other types of letters. For an example, say we were writing a letter to the United States Parole Commission, we could say United States Parole Commission one time and then explain to our reader that The Commission will be referred to as the USPC, which is often done.

Moving back to creative writing for a second, I'd like to visit Donald Goines's writings. He wrote gritty street novels in the 60s and 70s. He used the slang of his area and his time to paint a clear picture of what urban life was like. When writing dialogue, he would many times use slang for words like "cigarette" and called them "shorts" or "squares." However, at some time before he begins to use slang in the writings, he informs the reader of what it is that he is talking about.

For a better example, let's look at one of the ways I would use "Uptown" in a sentence when describing the area of upper northwest, Washington, DC, which is better known as Uptown.

*Shorty Redds stepped off of the Metro bus just after noon on a cold winter day in December. He was just finishing a ten year prison sentence. He was now back home, in his own little part of Northwest, Washington, DC aka, Uptown. Shorty Redds was proud to be from Uptown. He was proud to be from DC, but he was more proud to be from Uptown. To him, Uptown wasn't just northwest, DC, it was from Morton Street up to the Silver Spring line, and was where his whole family was born and raised.*

After making such an introduction, as a writer, you can be confident that your reader will know and understand what Uptown is when you use it in your writings. This same method can and should be used in your poems as well in order to paint the correct picture.

### Writing Exercises:

1. Write a poem using slang (like "moe" if you're from DC). Try not to define the slang, but use it or describe it in such a way that the reader can understand even if they aren't familiar with the word. This is called **context clues** (when the context, or surrounding information, clues us in to the answer).
2. Write a poem or story using your five senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell) to describe your hometown or another place that you know very well. What can you see? What can you hear? What can you smell? Etc. For an extra challenge, don't name the place you're describing, and let's see if your reader can figure it out!









# REENTRY PROFILE

## The First Person to be Released Under the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (also known as IRAA)

*An interview with FM Member Kareem*

*By Kelli*

*By now, most of you know about IRAA, the DC law passed in 2017, which allows for individuals originally charged and incarcerated as juveniles under Title 16 and sentenced to 15+ years to seek resentencing after serving at least 15 years. Last summer, FM Member Kareem became the first person to be released as a result of the law. Recently, Kelli caught up with Kareem and asked if he would share his experience with the Free Minds family.*

**KELLI:** Can you tell us about your childhood?

**KAREEM:** Well, I was raised by my grandmother, over by Hechinger Mall area. It was during the early 90's, when DC was known as the murder capital and the crack epidemic was devastating our community. Both of my parents had been in prison, and both were drug users (though they're now sober). I saw a lot of negative things. A lot of positive things that should have been celebrated in our community, were not. For me, it was drugs, guns, and violence that made an impact. I saw people from that world with nice clothes, nice cars and they were renowned in my neighborhood. As a child, I was impressionable. I experienced an enormous amount of trauma as well. I saw one of my close friends get killed when I was 13. When I was 16, my best friend got killed and he died in my arms. That same year I got shot. Twice, the police ran up in my house looking for my mother. My story is a traumatic one, but unfortunately my story is not unique. There came a point where all of these traumatic experiences no longer felt traumatic. It just seemed to be a normal part of life.

**KELLI:** You were convicted as an adult for a crime committed when you were 17 years old, and sentenced to 35 years to life. What was it like to learn about the IRAA law?

**KAREEM:** I had already served 18 ½ years when I first heard about the IRAA law. I remember after the Supreme Court abolished the death penalty for juveniles, my codefendant and I would go to law library to research. We saw the language the court was using in which they said the brain wasn't developed or matured until age 25. If that science could be used to knock back the death penalty for juveniles, then that same science should be used to get juveniles up from under life sentences. Once I started to hear about Comprehensive Youth Justice Amendment Act (which would abolish life without parole sentences for juveniles) I began to get very excited about what was happening.

But then we learned that the legislation as it was written, was primarily aimed at people getting sentenced in the future, and wouldn't cover us. We got together and began a campaign with our family, community, and other prisoners to urge the City Council to add an amendment to the bill that would benefit us. It passed in April 2017, and I was brought back to DC.

**KELLI:** Tell me about the day you were resentenced.

**KAREEM:** Well, it was my third hearing. The courtroom was packed. My lawyer came in the back to see me and he said, "The judge is going to grant our motion." I was still nervous as I walked into the courtroom. Then the judge said she wanted to read aloud from something we had submitted. It was an article I wrote for *The Connect!* She read a few lines, and as soon as she did, I started to cry. She had already reached her conclusion, but that sealed it. When the judge articulated how moved she was by my writing, I was overwhelmed with good feelings, because all the years that I have been reading, writing, and studying manifested itself in that one beautiful moment. Because of something I wrote, she knew she was doing the right thing. I knew then, I was going home.

**KELLI:** And how was coming home?

**KAREEM:** After 21 ½ years, it was exciting! I had just gotten my life back and everything was just so new to me. The city had definitely changed, so everything was a new experience, an adventure. I couldn't wait to go see everything! The most challenging part was learning to be around a lot of people. I was always looking around, watching peoples' hands and being uncomfortable with people walking close to me. I wouldn't even ride the subway until I'd been home for seven months! The pace of everything is so fast, and you have to find a way to process things and be patient with yourself. I realized that you can't act out here in society the way you act in prison. This is a whole different world. It takes time.

**KELLI:** You were lucky to have a supportive family and not have to find housing. But what about employment? Was looking for a job scary?

**KAREEM:** Thankfully, I had worked hard prior to my release to gain the skills I needed. I took college courses, and earned an Associate's degree in paralegal studies from Ashworth College. Right away, I got a job as a Community Outreach Coordinator and Violence Interrupter in Ward 8—something I still do. I also enrolled and graduated from a paralegal program with Georgetown University. Through one of the people that advocated for the passage of IRAA, I heard about a job with the Corrections Information Council (CIC). It's an independent monitoring body mandated by the US Congress and the DC Council to inspect, monitor, and report on the conditions of confinement at facilities where DC residents are incarcerated. I got a job as a program analyst, monitoring the living conditions of our DC Youth Act offenders who are housed in custody of BOP and DOC. I visit the BOP facilities and also the DC jail. I was so excited to find work that was important and meaningful to me. I love my job. We have the opportunity to uncover problems and make them known to the public. We are the voice for the voiceless.

**KELLI:** Yours is truly a success story! What advice would you give to your Free Minds brothers about coming home?

**KAREEM:** I would tell them that prisons are not really in the business of rehabilitation. You've got to take that on yourself. Educate yourself. Establish relationships with agencies and organizations, and become familiar with the resources that DC offers returning citizens. *You have to have a plan! Then take steps to implement that plan.* If you don't have a plan, then whichever way the wind blows, that's where you'll find yourself. With a plan, you create a space and conditions, where you can not only survive, but *thrive*, taking care of yourself and your family. The main reason people recidivate is because they can't take care of their families and so they go back to that street where they feel like they can make a dollar. But I assure you, if you have a plan, and you have prepared yourself to execute that plan, you can make it!

**How Kareem is On the Same Page:** Kareem wasn't an avid reader or writer until prison. He credits reading and writing with exposing him to true freedom and education, and making him the person he is today – one who is skilled at communicating with diverse people. While confined in a super maximum security facility, Kareem read *Soledad Brother*, by George Jackson, which played a huge role in his self-transformation.



# DC PHOTOS

By Josh



This new mural of Buck Hill, a native Washingtonian and local jazz legend, has just been unveiled in an area of DC that used to be known as "Black Broadway." Can you name this neighborhood, or the intersection in the photo?



This mural in DC is a memorial to Maurice Scott, a student who attended Ballou High School and was shot and killed earlier this year. He was a role model in school, and was known for smiling and making others laugh. If you could paint a mural to anyone in the world, who would you choose?

Have a request for the next issue's DC Photos?

Write us at 1816 12th St NW, Washington, DC 20009 and let us know what you'd like to see!

## JG'S WORDS OF WISDOM

### Poetry

By JG, Free Minds Member

*This issue, JG, shares a poem about the transformative power that words and pages have had in his own life. JG began writing poetry as a 16 year-old at the DC Jail. His work has been published in the Dragonfly Arts Magazine and he is working on his own book.*

Painting vivid images with words that capture the meaning of life  
Is the gift of the poet  
Capturing the meaning of life  
While simultaneously exploring the questions and answers  
That drive and motivate us is not an easy task  
But it's one that the poet does willingly and effortlessly  
Poetry is a gift given to the poet  
And it is his/her responsibility to share that gift of light with the rest of the world

Poetry is objective  
Poetry is subjective  
Poetry is right  
Poetry is wrong  
Poetry is heinous and evil  
Poetry is pure and godly  
Poetry is truth and falsehood strangely mixed  
It's all the beauty of humanity mixed with all its ugliness  
Poetry is the spirit of the written word  
Poetry is the rise and fall of Hitler

#### Poetry

Poetry is the murder of Malcolm X  
Martin Luther King Jr.  
And Huey P. Newton.  
Mass incarceration  
And what it has produced

That's poetry

Poetry is sitting on the deck with a loved one  
Watching the sun rise while blowing some tree and reminiscing on  
the good old times  
The nostalgia of it all is life giving  
Poetry is Sunday morning in a Baptist church when the choir is going in  
And people are fainting and catching the holy-ghost  
Poetry is that moment you and your boo first locked eyes and really  
noticed each other  
And the first kiss the two of you shared shortly thereafter

Poetry is life and death itself



# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Same Page Different Book

By KW

Have you ever read a book  
And was like, "I've read this before."  
The story felt the same.  
Only the Book felt different.  
Like, "This wasn't the author."  
You recalled their name and the title.  
But this story felt like theirs.  
You would know because you read it before.  
So it seems like I've lived this life before.  
The story feels the same.  
Only the body is different.  
The story: Black-Man  
Degrade  
Renamed  
In Chains  
Abused  
Misjudged  
Oppressed  
By whom...  
The same people who say, "justice for all"  
Yet sentenced me to 226 years on my  
first offense  
Legally reestablish me as the slave who  
life I feel  
The story feels the same.  
Have you ever read a book,  
And was like "I've read this before."  
Only the book felt different?

"When an individual is protesting society's  
refusal to acknowledge his dignity as a  
**human being**, his very act of protest  
confers dignity on him."  
- Bayard Rustin 1912-1987 (pictured  
below right)

## On the Same Page

By AD

When I read my mind opens up  
The words tell me things I've never felt before  
On the page, I've met my inner self  
On the page, I've been free  
On the page, I've felt good to relate  
I read to ease my stress  
When I read, I feel less stress  
When I read, I know that things could  
be different  
When I meet you on the page it opens  
my eyes up

When I write it comes from within  
My words express a mixed feeling of  
everything  
I want you to understand how I see and  
feel things  
Hear me out understand what I'm writing  
My pen is my sword of ink  
I write to tell you things to make you  
feel better  
When I write, I feel better that it did its work  
When I write, you know how I feel  
When you meet me on the page it's pure love

## On the Same Page

By SM

When I think of the reflections in the mirror  
or the where did I go wrongs  
I see my words painting perfect pictures of  
me being the king of my throne  
ON the same page  
Revolutionary thinking and battles of  
staying strong  
What can I say...my mind is drifting like  
propellers on a drone

A worldwide struggle under the thumb  
of Donald Trump  
The gift of gab on the spectrum of business,  
pockets full of lumps  
On the same page  
Ignorant to politics, government caught in  
the web of Donald Trump  
The bulls\*\*\* is obvious, something like  
the essence of a skunk

A platform of music, bubble of influencers –  
pure negativity  
Leading to the destruction of civilization,  
the opposite of tranquility  
On the same page  
What happened to the Tupacs – the Biggies,  
the voices of productivity  
Full of knowledge on the spectrum  
of serendipity

Modern day slavery within these prison walls;  
full of oppression  
Everything is done at the oppressors'  
discretion, people pay attention  
On the same page  
School of the hard knocks, an opportunity  
for transgression  
Only if we can learn to forgive and heal  
the recession

Education; broken and misleading to the  
people of color  
Economics; why  
stop the cash flow  
from coming across  
the border  
On the same page  
What do I know, the  
truth is immortal  
Sometimes I feel  
the system is like a  
broken stall "Out  
of Order"



- Bayard Rustin 1912-1987

## On the Same Page

By AHA

When I read, I'm free.  
The words tell me its narrative.  
On the page, I've met the author.  
On the page, I've been inspired.  
On the page, I've felt elated.  
I read to learn and free my mind.  
When I read, I feel good.  
When I read, I know I'm in the story.  
When I meet you on the page, I connect  
with you.

When I write, I free my mind.  
My words express how I feel.  
I want you to understand me.  
Hear me out and listen to my story.  
My pen floats on paper.  
I write to tell you an exciting story.  
When I write, I feel happy.  
When I write, you know I'm into it.  
When you meet me on the page, you get  
to know me.

## When I Read, When I Write

By AC

When I read I look forward to learning  
new things  
The words tell me to build my knowledge and  
activate the brain  
On the page, I've met my inner self  
That consists of no name  
On the page, I've been lost but found  
In my own Hall of Fame  
On the page, I've felt guilt, love,  
Encouragement but never forgot pain  
I read to expand the mindset and stay sane  
When I read, I feel smarter and willing  
To teach what my mind obtained  
When I read, I know that I'm determined  
to be something  
In life through change  
When I meet you on the page, I want you  
To take my advice and use it for yourself  
If you do the same

When I write, I give off a message that I want  
seen but put in their own perspective  
My words express feelings, knowledge,  
wisdom, and everything in life that's  
effective  
I want you to understand that my past led up  
to me wanting change through the  
obstacles I've been through in life as  
a collective  
Hear me out – I don't consider myself better  
than anybody else  
My pen shows my gift and talent of what I can  
do independent with no help  
I write to tell you I've noticed the test that  
God gave me so I'm playing my hand how  
the cards was dealt  
When I write I feel believed because I  
accomplished something by myself  
When I write, you know that I will never  
disappoint you in no type of way  
When you meet me on the page  
You will look me in my eyes and know exactly  
what to say





# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## On the Same Page

By GD

When I read, I escape to a world of enlightenment and excitement  
All while interpreting what the writer meant...  
The words tell me things I didn't know...  
Like, how to grow, mature and endure hardships...  
On the page, I've met Malcolm X, shared Martin's dream and started a revolution with Huey P. Newton...  
On the page, I've been to Egypt, Nigeria, France and China,  
All over the world, even my own island...  
On the page, I've felt liberation, connected to all nations, equal, peaceful...  
I read to broaden my horizon, expand my education and explore situations deemed otherwise impossible...  
When I read, I feel in tune with the thoughts of my favorite author, and farther... and father away from the hard reality of my circumstances  
When I read, I know that there's more to life than what's outside my window.  
A boundless sea of opportunity created for me and you...  
When I meet you on the page, your image is so vivid, thank you for the visit.  
You couldn't have been depicted more perfectly...  
This isn't a by chance meeting or a simple greeting, your teachings are with me at all times. We are of the same ilk, on the same stage...  
And will forever be on the same page...

When I write, I become the father of my universe, the creator of all worlds, the illustrator of endless concepts to share with my peers...  
My words express the deepest depths of my soul, my heart as a whole and all things known and unknown...  
I want you to understand that to be a prolific writer one must be vulnerable, honorable and not afraid to show emotion...  
See, there's no secret potions, just a notion, that once you open and start flowing...  
The words start glowing...  
Hear me out because the words I write may be the very words that ignite your motivations, provoke your thoughts or encourage you to reach for unlimited limits...  
Hear me out because...  
My pen is an instrument that can be used to move the spirit...

My stanzas are above standard...

My pen commands the...  
Attention of the most powerful!

See...

I write to tell you my pain, sorrow happiness and glee...

I write to tell you my past, present and future.

I write to tell you me...

When I write, I feel alive, as my pen glides cross each page, the very same page I share with you.

When I write, I feel you and your truth...

When I write, you know... ME! 100%

Every ounce!

You experience my passion, ambition, perspective and worldview....

When you meet me on the page, my image is so vivid, you thank me for the visit.

I couldn't have been depicted more perfectly...

This isn't a by chance meeting or a simple greeting,

My teachings are with you at all times.

We are of the same ilk, on the same stage...

And will forever be on the same page.

## On the Same Page

By SH

When I read, I read to learn

The words tell about the person

On the page, I've met the good and bad

On the page, I've been this person and that

On the page, I've felt nothing at times

I read to build and learn

When I read, I feel free

When I read, I know what I'm reading

When I meet you on the page, I smile

When I write I express me

My words express who I am

I want you to understand my feelings

Hear me out and try to respect

My pen speaks truth

I write to tell you my story

When I write, I feel sad, alone, mad

When I write, you know I'm real

When you meet me on the page don't judge

## On the Same Page

By SL

When I read I feel transformed

The words tell me a story

On the pages I've met family, friends and my nemeses

On the pages most of the time I dream of being the hero

Sometimes I'm the misunderstood bad guy with a good heart

On the pages I've felt so many emotions while reading

It's like riding a wave of tranquility leaving everything else behind

I read to escape this place that's not home, to get a sense of peace

When I read I feel set free, alive flying soaring above all others

When I read I know my life isn't over, my story is still being written

When I first meet you on the page I'm shocked! I can't believe it!

You've been in these books the whole time? Wow you are pretty amazing

When I write I feel a great release

My words express my gratitude

I want you to understand how tough it was for me to open you up and read what you had to say

Hear me out they told me you were an amazing storyteller

That you would change my life

I was stubborn now, that's something I can admit

My pen is my heart and the ink is my blood I write to tell you my story, I feel it's only right

I was a boy lost trapped surrounded by darkness with no light in sight

Until you came along shining so bright

When I write, I feel no longer misunderstood

When I write, you know I'm sincere

When you meet me on the page I hope you accept my friendship

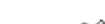
Because without you I feel trapped in torment, shaking in fear

So know even though I'm finished this story

I'll never forget where to find you, in a book

Always know my pen is my heart and the ink is my blood

My friendship is everlasting, I'll always keep you near



# 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."*

## Sweden

*By Marlin, FM Volunteer*

Hej, Free Minds. That is Swedish for "hello" and sounds like "hey" but said a little quicker. I said it a lot this summer when I visited my inlaws' old family farm in southern Sweden. It is in the middle of a forest, a really rural area called Småland ("Smo-land"). This is Marlin and I may have met you through the letters I write to Free Minds Members from the office on Monday nights. In any case, Hej! Here are a few summer memories from the Swedish farm.

Landing in Copenhagen, Denmark, we take a very short boat/train over to Sweden and drive a few hours through flat fields until we get to the forests. Old, dark red cottages and barns with white trim dot the landscape and there are cows, sheep and some horses. "Old" here typically means hundreds of years old; this farm is from the 1600s. There are Viking sites nearby from the 9th and 10th centuries, and even some Bronze Age stones set in a mysterious circle that are at least 3,000 years old.

The first time I visited Småland, it was so storybook quaint that I half expected to see some trolls. (They have a lot of stories about trolls in Scandinavia.) If I am lucky, though, I will see a moose or two, usually at dusk, which is about 9 or 10pm. It stays light in the summer until late, almost all night long in the northern region above the Arctic Circle.

At the farm, we leave the sheep and chickens to the family that runs things year round and spend our time rowing boats to the small islands nearby, looking for berries and chanterelle mushrooms in the woods, and setting wire traps in the lake for the local specialty: crayfish! Like small lobsters, these crustaceans are a Swedish favorite in the summer, eaten with the extra strong drink Aqavit. Like the Vikings, everyone (including the 97-year-old head of the family) toasts by saying, "Skål!" (pronounced "skole"). Rumor has it that the word comes from the Viking practice of drinking from the *skulls* of their slain enemies, but Swedes today are too cool, kind and laid back to deserve that. Let's just say it means "cheers!"

After dinner, we run back and forth from the cold lake to the hot sauna, built by some Finnish refugees who hid out on the farm during the Winter War between Finland and Russia at the beginning of World War II (1939-1940). Sitting in the sauna, we pour water on the stones in a burning fire, which steams the cedar wood. It is a crazy contrast between the cold lake and the hot room that somehow feels great. This is how Scandinavians relax.

Tack så mycket, Sweden. Thanks so much for another summer visit.



Marlin's inlaw's old family farm in southern Sweden.



Bronze Age stones set in a mysterious circle that are at least 3,000 years old



# REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

Hey Family!

So awesome to connect with y'all again. Speaking of connecting, I am loving this month's theme "*On the Same Page*." When I hear the phrase "*On the Same Page*", I think of synchronicity, everything and everybody on the same vibe simultaneously, and I like to think of the Free Minds family that way.

When I think about the reciprocity of what it means to be a part of the Free Minds family, uniqueness comes to mind. As a staff, we gain so much by interacting with you whether you are home or incarcerated. I cannot count the number of times I have been so blessed by reading a poem, letter or essay that came to us either via mail or Corrlinks.

So much talent, insight, intelligence, brilliance, creativity, honesty, vulnerability, real and introspective content, it blows me away! It feels like family, it feels like connection, it feels like, "man I can relate to some degree with what our members go through." Not so much the incarceration part, but the real life parts, and it feels like at times, we are on the same page regarding the human experience.

On the flip side of that, when we host our monthly Write Nights and then send the feedback from the volunteers to you guys, we get flooded with letters of appreciation and gratitude from you. It's awesome to read antidotes and details about how Write Night comments changed ones whole day or in some instances, whole week! It's a true case of reciprocity, and it is special and unique, and in that sense we as a Free Minds family remain "On the Same Page!"

As always, I cannot part from you without passing along some very beneficial resources waiting for you upon your arrival back here in DC.

## **H.O.P.E. PROJECT - 202-449-8663 • 3230 Pennsylvania Avenue S.E. • Washington, DC**

The H.O.P.E. Project is FREE information technology-training program dedicated to providing technical training and development for district residents. The I.T. training program is designed to prepare students for entry-level positions as Helpdesk and Application Support Professionals. I am so excited to report that I.T. is now becoming an industry that more and more people of color here in DC are breaking into. When I first started referring Free Minds Members to H.O.P.E. Project some years back, very few people considered it as an option and honestly, I think that people were intimidated, but not anymore! More and more people in DC are taking advantage of these FREE classes and are getting hired in positions starting at \$40,000 and above. H.O.P.E. Project has become so popular in DC that they now have a waiting list. However, the good news is that they have now added night classes as well. They also pay a stipend to their students for participating.



## **DC INFRASTRUCTURE ACADEMY - 202-889-6040 • 2330 Pomeroy Road, SE • Washington, DC**

Infrastructure is one of the fastest growing industries in the country. Mayor Muriel Bowser launched the DC Infrastructure Academy, FREE to District residents at the Department of Employment Services, to meet the needs of skilled infrastructure professionals in Washington, DC.



DCIA coordinates, trains, screens, and recruits District residents to fulfill the needs of the infrastructure industry and infrastructure jobs with leading companies in these high-demand fields:

- Commercial Driver's License (CDL)
- Energy & Utilities
- Auto Mechanic Training
- OSHA 10
- Solar Panel Installation
- Interview Skills
- IT Helpdesk Training & Cisco Network Training
- Job Fairs
- Job Referrals and more!

I am so also excited to announce that several graduates of DCIA's Energy & Utilities program were hired at Pepco!

Family, it's been awesome getting *On the Same Page* with you, until we *Connect* again, as always,  
- Ms. Keela

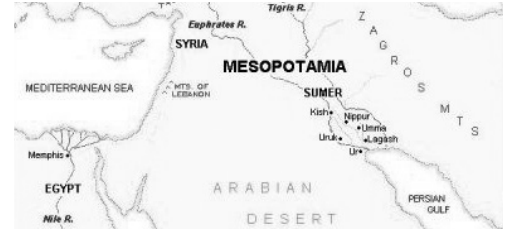


# DID YOU KNOW?

## The History of Languages

by Imanee

What is the history of the written word? Who created the first letter? Writing is such a powerful tool in today's society, so it's hard to imagine where our civilization would be without it. There would be no letters, emails, or poetry without writing – proving how powerful of an impact the written word has. Though little is known about who thought of the first letter, historians do know that alphabetical language emerged between 3400 and 3300 BC in Sumer – now Mesopotamia – which is approximately 5,419 years ago.



Mesopotamia is a historic region that consists of present-day Syria, Jordan, and Iraq, all of which are situated in the Middle East between North Africa, Eastern Europe, and West Asia. While alphabetical writing has been around for 54 centuries, numerical writing or numbers have existed for 10,000 years, the first counting system dating back to 8000 BC. Numerical writing laid the foundation for alphabetical language, as clay tokens – which were used for accounting – slowly became engraved with pictures then *phonetic syllabic* signs or consonants and vowels. The *Sumerians* or Mesopotamians' ancient writing system was called 'Cuneiform.' Cuneiform consists of wedge-shaped characters written on clay tablets; the name "cuneiform" itself means "wedge-shaped."

Two other civilizations – ancient Egypt and the Xia Dynasty of China – developed writing systems shortly after the Sumerians, Egypt falling 300 years short of developing the world's first written language. *Hieroglyphics* are pictorial (picture) characters where each symbol represents a word. Chinese is a pictorial writing system as well: each symbol is a complete word with a distinguished sound.



Cuneiform

The history of the written word is vast, yet oral or spoken language began 100,000 years ago when the first Homo-Sapiens or *humans* in Africa – who emerged 200,000 years ago – began using sound to represent objects. However, due to globalization, the spread of ideas and cultures across international borders, and colonization, many languages are going extinct. For example, before Christopher Columbus colonized America, many Native Americans spoke "Chemehuevi;" now, only five native speakers are left. Ts'ixa, spoken in Botswana – a small, landlocked country in Southern Africa – is only spoken in one village, the village of Madaba. There are less than 200 speakers today, most of whom are adults. "Wiradjuri," a language belonging to indigenous Australians, has only 30 speakers left.

Why is the survival of a language so important and what can we do to preserve it? When a language is lost, it's not only the alphabetical system that disappears, but an entire culture is lost as well. Language holds the entire history of ancient civilizations, allows generations to connect with their ancestors, and possesses the entire foundation for a community; however, when that language is no longer spoken, all culture – all connection – is lost.



Hieroglyphics

Imagine if Cuneiform or Hieroglyphics were fully understood – we would have access to the knowledge of nations that predated us. The mysteries of how civilization first emerged or how the pyramids were created, and still exist, would no longer probe the psyches of millions of historians and scientists alike. Now, imagine if English became an endangered language: only 30 speakers were left. That means you could only communicate and understand 30 people out of the 7, 700,000,000 (7.7 billion) that exist today. For many people, that is a daily reality.

Becoming fluent in dying languages is a feat that *would* help in their preservation; but, with the advent of technology, it's easier for everyday people to engage in language conservation efforts. For instance, many historians record speakers of dying languages, to create a database that permanently saves and identifies the language. Other scientists and archaeologists are collecting ancient tablets where early languages were written. Additionally, serious researchers are making grave efforts to learn and document endangered languages.

Though some languages have disappeared, there is still hope that many will remain for the next generation to learn from. Language is an inseparable part of human history, and a true mark of how far civilization has progressed. Language is who we are, as communities, as people, as individuals. Words hold humankind's legacy, and each person has the power to shape their legacy through *writing*.





# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## On the Same Page

By TH

When I read with an open mind.  
The words tell me there are treasures to find.  
On the page, I've met people who I'll never see.  
On the page, I've been to places I'll never be.  
On the page, I've felt what it means to be free!  
I read to be different from the same.  
When I read, I feel alive, a spark, a flame.  
When I read, I know more than I did yesterday.  
When I meet you on this page, smile and  
just say, Hey! :)

When I write sometimes, the words  
flow effortlessly.  
My words express the true essence of me.  
I want you to understand my honesty  
from the start.  
Hear me out, listen with your ears and  
your heart. <3  
My pen is a reflection of the world I see.  
I write to tell you what it means to be me.  
When I write, I feel humble and no longer smug.  
When I write, you know my heart is easy to tug.  
When you meet me on the page, please take  
a second to give me a hug.

## On the Same Page

By DJ

When I read manga\*  
The words tell me a story I could never forget  
On the page, I've met a Fallen Angel  
and some really cool kids  
On the page, I've been to their school and  
sat at a play  
On the page, I've felt like the world  
stopped as I turned the page  
I read to the end of the book  
When I read I feel like I'm no longer  
behind bars I'm free of this place  
When I read I know people want to read it  
after me  
When I meet you on the page you are going  
to thank me this story took your pain away

When I write I have the world at my hand  
My words express life at its bare form  
I want you to understand I'm a POW in a  
place that is distant lands

Hear me out: they take us from our state and  
move us to a new land  
My pen is the world  
I write to tell you never to give up there is  
always a better way  
When I write, I feel like I can take the  
pain away  
When I write, you know I been through a lot  
When you meet me on the page let's put our  
minds together and win the game

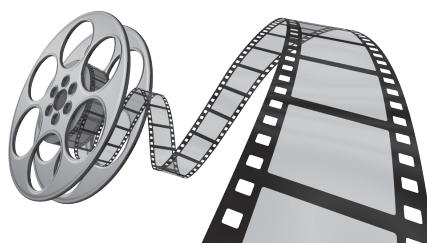
\*manga is a style of comic books from Japan

## On the Same Page

By BKC

When I read I become the narrator  
The words tell me to walk it like I tell it  
On the page, I've met many Super Stars  
On the page, I've been the most valuable  
Super Star  
On the page, I've felt the glory of it all  
I read to stay on top of my game  
When I read, I feel a better part of myself  
When I read, I know my game is reversible  
When I meet you on the page it's official

When I write it's to make a breakthrough  
through someone  
My words express valuable meanings  
I want you to understand the value each  
word holds  
Hear me out through the value you see in  
the words  
My pen is the starting point of my outline  
to my blueprint  
I write to tell you how I've been walking it  
like I talk it for so long  
When I write, I feel I'm uplifting someone  
else as well as myself  
When I write, you know my words are  
like dreams coming true  
When you meet me on the page you tell me,  
"I've been waiting to meet you in person for  
a long time coming."



## The Movies (rewind and see)

By PJ

I can see:  
You like stories.  
Maybe, that's why you like poetry.  
Me too.

Have you ever heard  
Of the phrase: 'The soundtrack to my life'?  
Well, movies are like  
That for me, instead of songs.  
Many times, I've longed  
To be like certain characters in movies.  
It's always seemed:  
Films can take me somewhere else;  
Watching a good movie, I can see myself  
Doing things I don't have the courage  
To actually do  
Maybe that's why I watch; to  
Live vicariously through  
The character.  
Sometimes, I'm bolder  
Than the portrayals; as I watch, I scold  
the character.  
Other times, I fall in love,  
As someone I'd only seen one side of  
Has transformed to another  
character.  
How can I be so drawn-in?  
Developing a deeper appreciation,  
as the plot thickens.  
A beautiful face...  
It always starts with the eyes.  
Slowly, I begin to relate,  
As I recognize:  
The scene, the set-up;  
I begin to empathize.  
Even though not exactly or per se,  
But I've seen this before...  
I fall in love with the actors.  
I think that's what it really does  
Come down to... or is it the character?

I can see:  
You like stories.  
Maybe, that's why you like poetry.  
Me too.



# FROM A FREE MINDS VOLUNTEER: MEETING ON THE SAME PAGE

*By Lynn, FM Volunteer*

I'm so happy to write a few words to all of you in DC and around the country. Many of you have gotten letters from me as a volunteer letter writer at FMBC. So how did I get here? How is that I am writing letters to you? I had a good career in science studying heredity and cancer for many years. I have also had a nice life in the suburbs of Washington, DC, where my husband and I raised two daughters. But a couple of years ago, I was ready to retire and pursue other activities. In addition to having more time for the gym, cooking dinners, and seeing friends, I was looking for ways to give back to society. A few years ago, I read the book *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson and was greatly affected by the realities of the criminal justice system – mostly how the “justice” piece is not always there. At the end of this book, Stevenson writes:

***“With more than two million incarcerated people in the United States, an additional six million people on probation or parole, and an estimated sixty-eight million Americans with criminal records, there are endless opportunities for you to do something about criminal justice policy or help the incarcerated or formerly incarcerated.”***

I took these words to heart. Fortunately, I found out about the Free Minds Book Club when I attended a Write Night event at a university where I attend lifelong learning classes. I was so impressed by the poetry written by FMBC members and was also impressed by the important work done at FM. I inquired about other volunteer opportunities and have now been involved for about a year. I participate in the letter writing circle where a group of us come together on Monday nights and respond to letters written by members. This is such a wonderful way to connect with some of you. I hope that our letters help you realize that people in the community care about you as individuals and care about what you read and write. It is especially satisfying when we get to hear that something we wrote was helpful or meaningful. This sense of community puts us all *On the Same Page* so we're all working together to help you make a new life in our community.

I also type poetry and give Write Night feedback on poems. Reading the poetry and letters has opened up my mind to the hardships you experienced which I previously had not given much thought. I learn so much from you. I am constantly amazed at your beautiful poetry and how it expresses a whole range of experience and emotions. It is a privilege for me to read it. I often send poems along with my letters so I spend time searching poetry websites. I also read the book club books so that I can discuss them with you in my letters. My volunteering at FM has opened up my own mind to lots of new poetry and literature and has changed the way I think about the world. In Michelle Obama's book, *Becoming*, she quotes Barack as saying, “Do we settle for the world as it is or do we work for the world as it should be?” While I can't change the world, perhaps my letters help brighten your day and give you more encouragement in your efforts to make changes. And I keep reminding myself that one letter at a time will add up!



# THE REAL WORLD OF WORK

## JOINING A LABOR UNION

By Jerry, FM Member

As a little kid, I wanted to be a police officer. In the SW DC neighborhood where I grew up though, it was the drug dealers who had nice cars, nice clothes, and money to hand out to us little kids every day. It wasn't the people with regular jobs. I looked at that and more and more, I saw that as the good way to live. I knew there were some horrible things that may come out of it. These were things that affected my own family. But honestly, it became the only thing I knew. And when you're in the same environment where everyone is selling drugs, eventually it's going to rub off on you. And sure enough, it did. I came home four months ago after serving three years for drug possession.

A lot of people I met in prison thought that someone owed them something, or that they were a victim because they were locked up. I can't blame anyone for what happened to me. The police were just doing their job. The only person I can blame is myself. Being in prison made me want to get out and stay out. I wanted to take care of my family, take care of myself. There's no amount of money in the world that would make me go back and do the same thing. I'd rather be broke and free with my family. I'm 29 now and I can say: *I'm done with prison.*

I knew if I was going to stay free, I had to change my mindset. First, I cut off a lot of the old people I used to deal with. I knew from experience that if I wanted to be different, I had to change my environment. I also learned how to challenge my own irrational thoughts. For example, I used to just assume that I could get away with things when rationally, I know, if you're doing something wrong, eventually you're gonna get caught. I learned while I was incarcerated to block out all the negative thoughts and negative things. Getting rid of those negative thoughts has changed the way I react to things, which in turn, has brought about more positive results in all of my actions. I took programs to better myself and worked on all of this while I was incarcerated because I knew it would assist me throughout my life.

I wanted to plan for my release. A buddy of mine told me about joining the labor union. He told me it would help me get on my feet. As soon as I got out, I hit the halfway house. I took care of all of the important steps, like getting my ID, etc. Then I went to apply at the labor union.

I was definitely a little nervous, but I discovered that it is all about how you present and sell yourself. I just made the decision to be honest with the person who was hiring. I told him the truth, that I just came home from prison, and I needed a job because I'm trying to stay on the right path. A lot of people say it isn't good to give your whole history, but if you let them feel where you're coming from, I think you have a better chance. People appreciate honesty. At least this person did. I was accepted!

I work with the union preparing for Metro's new purple line train. The purple line will be 16.2-mile line with 21 stations connecting Prince George's and Montgomery counties in Maryland. When I first started, they had me doing anything and everything! We don't even have the tracks down yet. We're doing the foundation now. The project won't finish until 2023-2025. And that's good

news for me, because I'm guaranteed a job working on this project.

The good thing about unions is they help you prepare for your job. You don't necessarily have to have skills, but they'll pay for you to take the training. They taught me how to be a pile driver.

**A pile or piling** is a metal beam that is part of a deep foundation for any large construction project. As pile drivers, we're driving the metal beams deep into the ground that will be the foundation for the metro train tracks.

Not only that, but they already promoted me! Now I'm working with another foreman, and we go to different job sites on the line. If they need additional equipment, we help lay everything out for them. We make sure the crews have everything they need to do their specific job well.

To succeed as a laborer, a person needs to be dependable, willing to learn, and able to follow instructions to get the job done. If you have these qualities and are interested in joining a union when you come home, my advice is to take care of your ID (birth certificate, Social Security card, etc.) first thing. Then you can go up to whatever labor union you feel does the type of work you want to do. There are a lot of different unions. The laborers union and the carpenters union are two that will give you a feel for construction in general. You can always start there and move up as you get more training and more experience. It's great hands-on learning!

You may be wondering about the money. I make \$24/hour. It's good pay. But I would have gone down this path even if the pay weren't this good. I'll be honest, the job can be really physically demanding. You often have to lift extremely heavy equipment. I love my job, though. I'm helping to build the new metro line. This is something that's going to be around forever. And I will be proud and can tell people that I helped build it.

**How Jerry is On the Same Page:** Jerry learned to love reading while behind bars. He says books and reading have played a huge role in his journey. He credits books with not just teaching him many important things, but keeping him sane. His favorite book is *Standing at the Scratch Line* by Guy Johnson. Jerry and his wife read regularly with their young son and daughter and intentionally expose them to all kinds of literature to broaden their horizons!



Jerry works as a pile driver, providing foundations for construction projects



# IN THE NEWS by John, FM Friend

## DEEP DIVE: IRAN by Max

*In every issue, we will bring you an in-depth analysis of a particular topic.*

For the last forty years, women have not been allowed to enter soccer stadiums in Iran. This was a result of the Iranian revolution, which replaced the secular dictatorship of the Shah. When the revolution deposed the Shah in 1979, the Ayatollah, leaders of the revolution, sought to remove what they saw as western influences. Alcohol was outlawed, women were forced to wear headscarves and men were not allowed to wear western ties, and places like colleges were segregated by gender.

Likewise, in 1981, women were no longer allowed to attend soccer matches. Soccer has always been important in Iran, with their men's national team consistently attending the FIFA World Cup as one of the best teams in Asia.

As the Ayatollah and the Iranian Parliament settled into power, they have slowly allowed for more protest and personal expression. Since the early 2000's, women have been organizing and protesting for their right to watch soccer games with their male counterparts. Since then, greater momentum for women's rights in the country has taken place, with women refusing to wear a hijab in public, and posting their protest on social media.

However, authorities still monitor the behavior of everyday Iranians, especially Iranian women.

This September, Sahar Khodayari set herself on fire after a court hearing in Tehran, Iran's capital city. She was charged with "appearing in public without a hijab," a sentence that could be paired with a prison sentence. This trial was in response to her arrest in March, where she was caught trying to enter a soccer stadium. She had been wearing men's clothing and a fake beard. She died a week after setting herself on fire.

Because of Khodayari's protest, international attention turned to FIFA, who is allowing Iran to host World Cup qualifying games for the 2022 tournament. As a result, FIFA has required Iran to open up these games for women.

The first such game occurred this October, in a match between Iran and Cambodia's national teams.



Sahar Khodayari



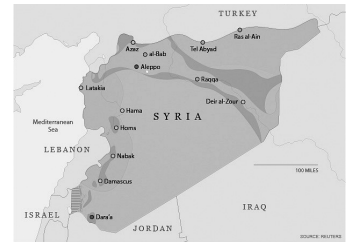
The game took place in Azadi Stadium in Tehran, the same stadium Khodayari was prevented from attending.

Women were required to sit in a separate section from men, but this was the first time in almost forty years that Iranian women were permitted to attend soccer games. Iran went on to win a lopsided rout, 14-0.

## WORLD

### Syria

Syria, a Middle Eastern country on the Mediterranean Sea, continues to be the most tense conflict zone in the world today. And it just got more contentious with an abrupt decision by President Donald Trump to withdraw U.S. forces from the area.



Syria

There are a lot of factors and factions in play when it comes to Syria, so we'll try to break down what's happening in a few paragraphs.

The Syrian government and its military have been fighting a civil war for years now with militias within its borders.

The U.S. has been critical of, but not proactive in countering, Syrian military operations. But we have been engaged in fighting ISIS, the terrorist group once housed largely in Syria, which is also an enemy of the Syrian government and its leader, Bashar Al-Assad.

While the U.S. used air strikes to cripple ISIS' operations, we did not fight them on the ground. For that, we mostly partnered with a group called the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a militia led by an ethnic group called the Kurds.

That's where Turkey, one of Syria's bordering neighbors comes in. The Turkish government has been fighting a rebel group of Kurds called the PKK, which it considers to be a terrorist group. Turkey considers the Kurds in Syria to be a part of that terrorist network, and has long seethed that America works with them so closely in Syria in an area right next to the Turkish border.



Turkey

In October, Trump announced after a call with the Turkish president that we would be withdrawing our small allotment of ground troops and personnel from the Kurdish area of Syria. Turkey immediately invaded and has engaged in a battle with the Kurds to take control of the region with the state goal of creating a safe zone. Turkey's plan is to use that zone to help thousands of Syrian refugees return to their country.

Trump has long made it known that he hopes to get America out of conflicts in the Middle East, but he has been criticized harshly by both parties and former military leaders for this move. The disruption caused





# IN THE NEWS (CONTINUED)

by John, FM Friend

by America's withdrawal on short notice has prompted a mass exodus of people from the region, and has allowed potentially thousands of ISIS members to escape from prisons that were mostly being guarded by SDF and the Kurds.

## Hong Kong

Earlier this year, authorities in Hong Kong introduced a bill that would allow China to extradite suspects to Beijing more easily. This means that if a citizen of Hong Kong was a suspect of a crime in China and has returned to Hong Kong, Chinese officials can extract that suspect and put them on trial.

Hong Kong is semi-autonomous, with partial elections, but their Chief Executive is selected by Chinese leaders in Beijing. As China has grown more powerful and more aggressive in the region, tensions have grown in Hong Kong, coming to a head with this extradition bill in the spring.

What followed was a summer of massive protests, with millions of people flooding the streets of the city. Discontent to this extent had not been seen since China received ownership of Hong Kong from Britain in 1997. While it started as a protest over Chinese encroachment, the protests grew to become pro-democracy rallies, as citizens of Hong Kong feared extradition would be used to target political dissidents.

This October, the extradition bill was withdrawn by the Hong Kong authorities. As it stands, it is unclear if this will stop the protests, which are calling for greater democratic change in the face of growing authoritarianism.

## Space Walk

On October 19th, the first all-female spacewalk occurred. The American astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir were tapped to install a 230-pound battery charge into their lab's solar power system. They are two of the four astronauts who are currently staying in the International Space Station. The mission took seven hours and seventeen minutes.



Christina Koch and Jessica Meir

Although the first spacewalk occurred in 1965, October 19th marked the first all-female spacewalk. When NASA originally designed space suits for astronauts, they designed the suits based on body types of male astronauts. The control module designed for the suit, which is sealed to the chest, was too large for female astronauts, and would have required a redesign for smaller torsos. Only recently has NASA altered the suit design to be more modular, so that people with different body sizes can participate in spacewalks.

## US

Meanwhile, at home, President Trump is now facing an impeachment

inquiry by the U.S. House of Representatives. If the House does vote to impeach the president, there will be a trial held in the United States Senate, where two-thirds of Senators would be needed to expel the president.

The move toward impeachment escalated last month after mounting evidence that the president had pressured the leader of the Ukraine to investigate the Democratic Party and Hunter Biden, the son of presidential candidate Joe Biden. This pressure may have involved the withholding of U.S. financial aid for Ukraine, which remains in a tense standoff with Russia over control of certain parts of its territory.

On the election 2020 front, there is a long time and still a lot of candidates vying to take on Trump next November. But after several debates, the candidates drawing the most support in polls are Biden, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Bernie Sanders, and Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana.

## SPORTS

Is Washington, D.C. poised to be the new "Title Town?"

Just two years ago, the Washington Capitals iced their first Stanley Cup in the franchise's 45-year history. The city poured into the streets to watch the games on giant screens or in bars, and hundreds of thousands gathered for the parade down Constitution Avenue.

Now the Washington Mystics, the city's WNBA team, has locked up its first-ever championship, knocking out the Connecticut Sun in a five-game series that turned into a real dogfight. The Mystics best player, MVP Elena Delle Donne, hurt herself in Game 2 and fought through painful back spasms to return for the final three games of the series. She led the squad with Kristi Toliver, who in 2006 delivered an NCAA title to the University of Maryland.



Elena Delle Donne



Kristi Toliver

And as we write this, the Washington Nationals are about to begin their first World Series since moving to the city in 2005. The Nats won a one-game Wild Card round against the Milwaukee Brewers, outdueled the Los Angeles Dodgers in five games, and then swept the St. Louis Cardinals in the National League Championship Series.

They now face the Houston Astros, who won a staggering 107 games in the regular season and come off a 6-game battle with the New York Yankees. Both teams are paced by a pair of ace pitchers: Max Scherzer and Stephen Strasburg for the Nats, and Gerrit Cole and Justin Verlander for the Astros.



The Washington Nationals celebrating their sweep of the St. Louis Cardinals



# MEMBERS *CONNECT*: ON THE SAME PAGE

## The Power of the Page By ACV

For the next *Connect* you ask: How can we use reading and writing to communicate and connect?

I feel that even if I make it to 100 years old, that would still be just a "blink of an eye" when we think of the time that lays before us and the time there is ahead of us all. That being said, I feel we can always learn tons from books. We can learn from the past, from different people/cultures/points of view and yes, from other people's mistakes. By absorbing what has been said, thought, and lived by others, I can have a fuller life than if I only stuck to what I know and crossed my path. I connect.

Now with writing, we can put our thoughts on paper, which is very therapeutic, but more importantly we can help others avoid the obstacles we run into. By sharing our stories, our poems, our ideas and thoughts, we are either connecting with someone and proving to them that in fact they are not alone, or we are providing a preview/glance into a life they have not lived or a thought/idea that they have not contemplated. Regardless, we are bettering people's lives because we are willing to write FOR them, TO them. They connect (the readers of my writings) to me and I am better if I have helped anyone in any way.

Your next question was: Can you recall a time when you felt like you truly understood an author, or when you felt like the author was writing about you and your experiences even if you had never met them?

Yes, that has happened to me on a number of occasions. One of the most recent and powerful occasions was when I read *Voces Sin Fronteras* (*Voices Without Borders*), a book of true comics written in English and Spanish by the Latino Youth Leadership Council of LAYC. Every one of the young writers telling their stories struck a note within me. They were all describing emotions, fears, concerns, and even events that actually occurred to me too. This felt bittersweet because I was once in their shoes and I chose wrong in life and placed myself in this particular situation. I could have made different decisions in life and been someone trying to help the next generation follow the right steps; instead I am an example of what not to do and what to avoid. But yes, by writing about themselves, it almost felt as if they were writing about me.

Your third question is: Have you ever read a book, story, poem, or article that made you change your perspective on something?

This question is very interesting to me in the sense that it actually makes me think. Would I say something has changed my perspective? I'm not really close minded about anything so I don't feel I've ever gone to read a book believing the sky is red and then been proven wrong. I am an open minded individual about pretty much anything. So many times I have read something and gone, "Oh, cool, I never thought that way." But I wouldn't say that my perspective was "changed" rather than broadened or even enlightened. Bettered by the addition of someone else's.

In the *Connect*, you also challenge the reader to "think about the power of the page to connect us, and the ways we can build bridges between people and communities."

I like this; it actually made me think. I feel the benefit of literature is that readers can always learn at least a little something from writers, and the great thing is that everyone can be a reader as well as a writer. So basically anyone has the chance to express themselves and share a little from their lives or from their thinking. In this way we can all learn to empathize and sympathize. Different types of people can share common ideas, emotions and even concerns that they may have never had the chance to share if it weren't for "The Page." This common understanding creates bonds/bridges to other people. On a greater scale, any bridge that can unify entire communities would be an amazing feat and it can literally mean the difference between two countries declaring war on each other or coming to the understanding that people are people regardless of color, religion, gender or language. Now that's power. And yet, we don't use that power enough. The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to people who seek to do good and have a great impact on their communities or even the world, all in the name of peace. But I say ANY writer, any poet, any singer that makes other people see the world through their eyes, has the power to change the world for the better. That would be the true power to connect us. That would be the true power of "The Page."



# MEDITATION

By Kelli

The meditation script is written for one person to read to another. If you can, partner with someone taking turns reading it aloud. Otherwise you can read through it a few times by yourself, and then just close your eyes and focus on the main points that you recall.

**MEDITATION: *The Approach of Autumn (aka Letting Go)*** As we consider nature's rhythms, think about autumn. It's still warm in DC, but over the last week, there have been little glimpses of the approaching change in seasons... shortening days, longer shadows, and that certain feeling in the air. The leaves are even beginning to fall. By publication time, fall will be in full swing! Let's meditate about the season of autumn, and especially what it can teach us about letting go...

*Find a comfortable position. Now close your eyes, and begin to think of fall. Picture yourself outdoors. It's a Saturday, and you're just beginning to notice some of the signs: the tiniest chill in the air, the changing slant of the afternoon sunlight. As you walk along a winding trail, you come upon one enormous tree whose trunk has grown up right in the middle of the trail. You can tell by its thick truck that the tree has been growing in this spot for decades – maybe even centuries. You touch its brown bark. Feel the roughness on the palm of your hand as you think about what the tree has endured over so much time. Excessive heat, rain, snow, wind. Yet it still stands strong. Just like you still stand strong. Despite any and all challenges and pain you both have endured, you and this immense tree stand next to each other.*

*You look up to see how high the tree rises into the sky. Its leaves are lush green with a few golden and orange leaves. As you look up, you see one, and then another leaf drop from its branch and sail, this way and that, down through the air, before landing on the ground. You think about how the tree is preparing itself for winter. And how it is getting rid of what it no longer needs. And how spring will bring beautiful new growth.*

*Now think about yourself. What have you been hanging onto in your life that you no longer need, or that is no longer good for you? Realize that you can shed these things. They have been a part of your life, but they no longer serve you or the person you are trying to become. Maybe you have been clinging to these things out of habit. Or maybe out of fear. Maybe they are things that have never been good for you... jealousy, bitterness or resentment. Whatever they are, in your mind, let these things go. Just like the leaves, picture them falling away from you, and sailing down to the ground.*

*What would you like your life to look like and feel like in a year? What do you need to learn, address, or resolve in order to get there? Fall is your chance to let go of the old and make way for the new. Realize that by getting rid of these parts of "the old you" you create space in your life for the new magic to unfold. So go ahead and let go of what's dead and useless to you now. Once you've rid yourself of all the extra weight, you will wonder why you held onto it for so long. And you will have the space you need to move forward in all the ways you've been hoping to.*





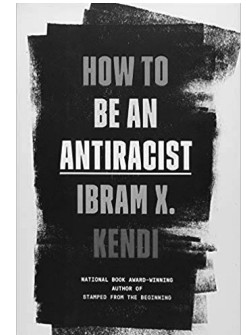
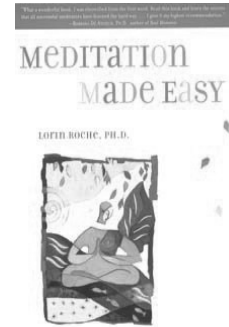


## WHAT WE'RE READING

Have you recently read something that inspired, amazed, or left an impact on you and want to share your thoughts with Free Minds Members? We want to know! Send your impressions to us (approximately 100 words) and we may feature your book in the next "What We're Reading."

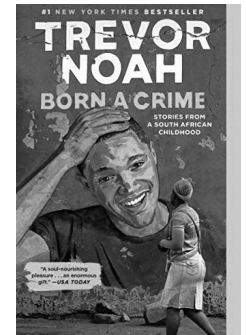
- **Tara: *Meditation Made Easy* by Lorin Roche**

More of a workbook with meditation exercises than a traditional book, I read through it like a regular book because the descriptions of both the benefits of meditation (for example a sharper mind, lower blood pressure, etc.) and the simple techniques are so captivating. Roche really has a way of making you want to try meditation and gives ways to slip it into your daily life for just a couple minutes at a time. I'm using the "Salute of the Senses" meditation now in fact, as I feel the sensation of my fingers on the computer keyboard. So refreshing!



- **Julia: *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi**

I just started, but I think this is going to be a very illuminating read and I'm excited to dig into it. The author is a professor and the Founding Director of The Antiracist Research & Policy Center at American University here in DC. The book is part memoir but with history, law, ethics, and more woven into the narrative about the author's lived experiences. He challenges the reader to rethink and reexamine our beliefs and societal norms and to imagine and work towards a truly antiracist society.



- **Ben, FM Volunteer: *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong**

This book is framed as a letter written from an American son to his Vietnamese mother and highlights the value of storytelling as a means to personal discovery that heals generational wounds. Vuong skillfully articulates the ways that the words we use (and don't) can shackle us or set us free. Our narrator, Little Dog, weaves his stories as an immigrant struggling to define himself in the context of modern American culture. I have not encountered a more beautifully written story this year.

- **Kaili, FM Volunteer: *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah**

Noah is South African who is currently a comedian in the US and hosts Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*. He was born just before the end of the apartheid in South Africa, where the government sanctioned racial segregation and discrimination against the nonwhite majority. How can a book about that be funny? His book is ridiculously funny but also deeply intelligent and hugely thoughtful. I fell in love with this guy and learned more than I ever imagined about another place in the world where slavery and repression was at the foundation for the success of the ruling classes.

- **ACV, FM Member: *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo**

A classic of the Spanish literature, Rulfo tells the story of a man who goes searching for his father in order to fulfill a promise that was made to his mother. In his search, he finds the old town where his parents were born. He also finds all the history that goes along with old towns. The images described in this book are so well written that they are imprinted in your brain and continue to haunt you long after you close the book. Great book.

## NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: FORGIVENESS

I got the idea for this issue when I read a poem on the subject from Free Minds Member DK (you'll see it in the next issue) and I was struck by the profound questions he asked. How do we forgive people who have harmed us? How do we earn forgiveness from those we have harmed? And how do we forgive ourselves? Do we forgive someone because they need or deserve to *be forgiven*, or because we need or deserve to *forgive*? Is it possible to learn from past mistakes and move forward without forgiveness? Have you ever forgiven someone? How did this affect you? Have you ever been forgiven, by yourself or someone else? How did you feel? *Important reminder:*

*do not write about any open cases, appeals, or resentencing petitions, without consulting with your attorney.*

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!



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



## Books Across the Miles

Free Minds members voted and we listened—the next book club book is *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds. This 2017 *New York Times* bestseller follows Will on his 60-second elevator trip where, once he steps off, he plans to avenge the death of his older brother, Shawn. On each floor, the elevator stops and someone gets on that is somehow connected to the death of Shawn. Will soon finds out that bullets miss and these missed bullets can impact an entire community. We hope you enjoy this book, and we are excited to read your thoughts!

- 1.) Throughout the book, Will talks about the importance of following the “rules” of the neighborhood (see pages 31-35). Were there rules in the neighborhood you grew up in? What happened if you didn’t follow them? Is following them your only option? Who sets these rules and why? How would you go about changing them?
- 2.) Reynolds uses poetry to narrate the story. Why do you think he does this? Do you think it impacts the reader in a way that normal sentences would not?
- 3.) Will says that no matter the tough situation he finds himself in, he is always comforted by the moon (page 21). Is there someone or something in your life that you always rely on to give you comfort during difficult times?
- 4.) One of the rules in Will’s community is, “Don’t cry.” Why do you think this is a rule? Do you think when people refrain from crying it has an impact on them and the larger community? Has a rule like this had an impact on you or people you know?
- 5.) The ending of the book is **ambiguous** (open to more than one interpretation). What do you think happens? Why do you think the author ended the book this way? If you were writing the sequel, what do you think would happen after this?

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Next Issue's Theme: **Forgiveness** (Volume 8, Issue 5)

Forgiveness is a journey. Have you ever embarked on this journey? Why or why not? If you have chosen to forgive someone, what steps did you take in this process? If you have chosen not to forgive someone, what was that decision like for you? How do we forgive people who have harmed us? How do we earn forgiveness from those we have harmed? And how do we forgive ourselves? Do we forgive someone because they need or deserve to be forgiven, or because we need or deserve to forgive? Is it possible to learn from the past and move forward without forgiveness? If you have forgiven someone, how did this affect you? If you have been forgiven, by yourself or someone else, how did you feel? *Important reminder: do not write about any open cases, appeals, or resentencing petitions, without consulting with your attorney.*

And a preview of Volume 9, Issue 1: We want to make sure people have time to write in with their submissions, so here's a heads up for the next-next issue! We'll be writing about **Remembrance**, how we remember and honor those we have lost.

F.O.R.G.I.V.E.N.E.S.S.	Forgiving Myself
<i>Forgiveness includes the word "give." Write a poem about what you must give in order to forgive—especially when someone has taken things from you. If you want, try starting each line with a word beginning with each letter in the word "forgiveness."</i>	<i>Try this fill-in-the-blank writing prompt, or write your own poem on the subject!</i>
	At times I wonder _____
	My past self would say _____
	I want the courage to _____
	When I look up I see _____
	Inside my heart I hear _____
	My heart desires _____
	My circumstances _____
	Forgiveness is wealth _____
	_____ I love myself.