

December 2021
Vol. 10, Issue 5

Free minds Connect

Nourish



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: BETTER TOGETHER

Dear Nourishing Free Minds Members!

I'm writing this on the day we just got notice all outside programming has been halted and a medical stay in place issued at the DC Jail due to the new Omicron variant and high number of COVID cases. The Free Minds team shared one collective groan, then immediately kicked into high gear planning ways to keep reading, writing, dialogue, and connection going with you all no matter what. It was a powerful demonstration of this issue's theme – nourishment – as the definition says “the necessary substances for growth, health and good condition.”

Inside, you will find energizing examples of ways to keep in “good condition” physically, spiritually, and emotionally with whatever stressors are thrown your way. Being incarcerated and away from loved ones requires a lot of internal fortitude, stamina, and mental strength. Thanks to the powerful essays, poems, and feedback from all of you and FM friends, there is a lot of nourishment to be found in these pages. You'll meet Free Minds facilitator Che, who leads our new peer support training program and describes his groundbreaking work supporting young Black men and women to nourish and heal themselves after violence.

What a wellspring of nourishment you will find with this issue's poems. I want to give a special shoutout to TL for writing his first ever poem. Wow! We see many more to come. The line “Da sun shine after da storm” sums it all up. Keep shining, TL! I was nourished by AC's description of his emotions after reading past Connect stories and loved how he named each feeling he experienced. Experts say that is a proven way to nourish your emotional health, and it made me reflect and name different emotions I experience during my day. Thank you, AC.

Speaking of emotive language, Aiyah's description of Lebanon for the Around the World column will pull at your heartstrings as it reveals the irrepressible beauty and strength of a country despite enduring warfare, violence, and civil unrest. Perseverance and resilience is the hallmark of our latest Books Across the Miles selection, Free Minds' very own publication *When You Hear Me (You Hear Us)*. I can't wait to hear your feedback after reading your fellow FM members' stirring words showing the impact of youth incarceration.

There is nothing better than being fed by work you love, and FM member Irving brings us into the woodshop. Whether it's cabinets or crocheting, the act of creation can be the ultimate nourishment. The ingenuity and resourcefulness of creating delicious food without a kitchen and limited ingredients will amaze you. Check out RS's pizza on page 17. He could win the greatest pizza chefs competition!

As we close out 2021, I want to leave you with you an excerpt of a poem of sustenance by AC, and express my heartfelt and deep thanks for creating such a special, nourishing community!

Gratitude, sweet nectar of life.

I pass your cup to those who surround me.

Until Next time

Tara

May the long time sun shine upon you

All love surround you

And the pure light within you guide your way on

Next Issue's Theme: Wellbeing

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.



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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!

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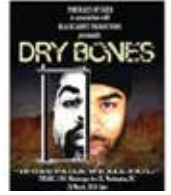
FREE MINDS HQ

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

By Imanee

Dry Bones

Recently, Free Minds members Jameon and Shannon took the courageous step of bringing out their inner thespians (actors) and starred in the play *Dry Bones*. Written by local playwright Ivy Hawkins, *Dry Bones* centers the stories of different men trying to balance the joys of returning home after incarceration with the struggles of transitioning back into society. This play highlights characters of different backgrounds and family situations, such as stories between a father and son, husband and wife, and brothers. *Dry Bones* demonstrates the dedication of returning citizens to turn their lives around, using the stage as a platform to shed light on the lives of millions of men and women rebuilding their lives after incarceration. Shannon and Jameon are an inspiration for those looking to use their lived stories to help others!



On The Same Page Inspiring Future Justice Workers

Free Minds staff and Poet Ambassador Doug met with interns who are training to be investigators with DC's Public Defender Service and Georgetown Law to share personal experiences and provide feedback on FM members' poems. To begin, Poet Ambassador Doug shared his story growing up in DC, and how poetry became a gateway for him to share his most vulnerable thoughts and emotions. Doug read his poem, "Wondering Off," which discusses the beauty of life and genuine connections. "We never pick who changes our lives," one line reads, "but we do pick who stays in them." Doug also read Poet Ambassador Shahid's poem, "Who I Am in One Chapter," which centers on how individuality is taken away from incarcerated people. This poem inspired interns to ask Doug about how he kept his individuality in collective spaces such as a jail. He said that for him personally, poetry gave him individuality, as those words written on paper were unique to only him. The interns left beautiful comments on members' poetry such as one that reads: "I really loved this poem! It really shows the importance of self-care. I hope that writing these types of poems allows you to take care of your mental health. This poem resonated with me because I think that caring for yourself is very important."

Advocating for Food Justice

Congressman John Lewis Fellow Craig was recently a panelist at an event hosted by organizations Don't Mute My Health and Impact Justice. This panel was a community conversation focusing on the 'food apartheid' at hundreds of facilities. The concept 'food apartheid' illustrates how incarcerated individuals are often unable to get proper nutrients from food served within jails. The purpose of this panel was to gather stories from individuals such as Craig on food conditions within different prisons. Don't Mute My Health and Impact Justice are using this valuable input to not only raise awareness but also to create meal programs that give millions of incarcerated men and women the nutrients they need to lead healthier lives. Everyone deserves access to healthy foods – we are so proud of Craig for taking a lead in conversations such as this! Let us know how the food is where you are if you want us to share this with advocates.

In Loving Memory

To honor our Free Minds members who we have lost, we dedicate every issue of the *Connect* to their memory.

Rest in Power:

Rest in Power: 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, Donta, Joshua, John, Delonte J., Eddie, Gary, Benny, Michael, David, Navaras, Dewayne, Tyrone, Darius, Aaron, Harold, Anthony, Donald, Bruce, Delonte K.

If you know of other Free Minds members that we've lost who are not on this list, please let us know so we can include them in our memorial.

FREE MINDS MAILBAG

We love getting mail from our Free Minds family. Due to mail delays, we're printing feedback on the "Accountability" issue of the Connect; we look forward to printing more of your thoughts on the "Joy" issue as we receive them!

Accountability:

AC: As always, I loved the poems and essays in the Connect; I was particularly impressed and in agreement with BB's "The Human Being Behind the Prison Number." To Zion: keep on building on that dream of yours. Rome wasn't built in a day, wise words. Brick by brick, keep building the Zion empire. Good luck. Good luck also to Deangelo, "the sky's the limit" indeed. Restorative and Transformative Justice both sound promising. Not perfect of course, nothing in life ever is, but it allows for the idea of "fixing" something within the community as opposed to what we have now which I think is "eye for an eye" kind of justice. Maji's story is great too. In a way, accountability helped him gain what can only be described as another chance at life. That's fascinating to me. Had that letter not arrived at the very exact time it arrived, who knows what or how things would be different. I'm glad that letter did arrive at the right time in order to help Maji in his personal journey.

Paying It Forward: Mission Rebirth by Imanee was amazing. Kay's story took me on a ride of ups and downs. I felt rage when her menstrual period was not tended to. I felt sad her kid got shot in that accident. I felt disappointed that society as a whole would not have the needed resources and accommodations to provide a job. I felt frustrated that the government used the same scare

tactics they used on us: "Sign here or we'll make sure you get a ridiculously long sentence." I felt hope knowing that Kay is doing something to solve social problems. I cried (Yeah I'll say it, I'm tough enough to admit when I shed tears) when I read about that woman crying after seeing soap – life is such a cruel joke sometimes. I felt optimism that resources will reach Kay's organization so that more women can be helped in more ways. I felt frustration to hear and think about people's judgemental attitudes. And finally, I feel happy to think that even better days are coming and Kay's mission will get the traction it so truly deserves."

RT: I have let prisoners and staff at this prison read the Free Minds Connect issue and the book review of *We Do This 'Til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transformative Justice* by Mariame Kaba to let them know about transformative justice.

Joy:

AC: You ask me to share jokes and my happiest of memories. Well, I don't really have any jokes. I am a bit more of an improviser. I find something funny and something to make a joke out of when I see it. I do, however, have happy memories. Just to briefly share what it is, it's the memory of my brother being born and my Momma introducing him to me. I'm pretty sure that's my happiest memory. 😊 My other brother is my second happiest memory, then all my cousins lol.

QUOTE-I-VATOR

"A poet is someone who can pour light into a spoon, then raise it to nourish your beautiful, parched, holy mouth." – Hafez, a lauded 14th-century Persian Poet

*"Love is the capacity to take care, to protect, to nourish."
– Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Spiritual Leader, Poet, and Peace Activist*

"The arts, quite simply, nourish the soul. They sustain, comfort, inspire. There is nothing like that exquisite moment when you first discover the beauty of connecting with others in celebration of larger ideals and shared wisdom." – Gordon Gee, Academic

*"Whatever we plant in our subconscious mind and nourish with repetition and emotion will one day become a reality."
– Earl Nightingale, Radio Speaker and Author (The Strangest Secret)*

*"Food for the body is not enough. There must be food for the soul."
– Dorothy Day, Journalist and Activist*



Thich Nhat Hanh

FAMILY TIES: MY DAUGHTER MOTIVATED ME TO LEARN HOW TO READ

By Joe, FM Member

I grew up in Southeast DC in the neighborhood known as Simple City. My mother and father tried everything to keep me on a good path. My father was a roofer and he used to take me to work with him on the weekends, or when I was suspended from school. But my larger environment had a more powerful influence on me. Being around violence as a youth triggered an impulsive and reckless side of me. In some instances, it was a means of survival. In others, it was a desire to fit in. I started running away from home when I was around 12.

School was always been difficult for me. I didn't really think that anything was wrong because none of my friends went to school much either. It was around 6th grade when school got really hard. My attention span was on zero. I just couldn't concentrate. I had trouble sounding out words. When they passed me into the 7th grade my social studies teacher tried to make me read aloud out of the textbook. When I couldn't do it, she asked, "How did you make it to the 7th grade without being able to read?" Then she put me out of her class. After that, I just stopped going to school at all.

By then, living and surviving in the criminal element was all I had going for myself. I wasn't even thinking about school anymore, especially when the crack epidemic hit. When I turned 14, selling drugs became a full-time occupation for me. I was making enough money that I no longer needed anyone else to take care of me.

When I was 19, I was incarcerated and sentenced to life in prison. I still didn't know how to read. I used to ask other inmates to read my letters and write my replies. I remember one time I was locked down and had to try to write a letter to a woman I was talking to. When she responded, she made jokes about how I couldn't spell even the simplest words. I was so embarrassed.

Then I had a beautiful baby girl, and she became the most important thing in my world. As Netta grew, I could just tell how smart she was going to be because she was always asking questions. When she was four years old, she asked me where the rain comes from! I decided then and there that I was going to learn how to read. I wanted to be Netta's hero. If she had a question about anything, I wanted her to know she could come to me because if I didn't know the answer, I could go to a book to find out whatever it was that she wanted to know.

I started by learning my ABC's. I bought a dictionary from the commissary for \$1.45. Going to the hole actually helped me learn to read because when I was isolated, I could focus without distraction! Eventually, I started trying to read Donald

Goines novels. I would write down every word I didn't know and look them up in my dictionary. There were a lot of words that gave me problems. I'd write them on a piece of paper and just keep practicing. The more I read, the more familiar I got with the words. I began to feel more comfortable reading different things. I got a Bible and reading it made me feel at peace. It took me outside of the prison walls. I began writing Christian poetry and sending it to my mother. It made her so happy to see I was learning to read and write. She would send me word searches and puzzles and that helped me get even better. It got to the point that my baby's mother thought the poems I was writing and sending her were written by someone else!

The first book I remember reading and loving was *The Count of Monte Cristo*, by Alexandre Dumas. When I started reading it, I just got lost in it. I felt like I was in the story myself. I've read that book at least six times since then!

As Netta grew, she continued to ask me questions. But now I was ready! Over the years, I've been able to help her with her schoolwork, or just to find answers to anything she wants to know – all because I learned to read. Netta not only went to college, she graduated and went on to earn her master's degree! She is my world. I believe that God put everything good in me into her. It makes me feel so proud when she tells me and others that her Dad is one of the smartest people she knows.

Reading helped change my life. I have learned so much about myself. I now understand that the aggression I once displayed was due to my own insecurities. Without reading, I would have never transitioned to become the positive individual I am today. For me, reading is nourishing. Just like any other type of nourishment, books promote growth and development. Whenever I feel down or depressed, I just pick up a book and escape to another world. Reading has taught me that knowledge is power.

I am so thankful to my amazing daughter Netta, as she was my motivation to learn to read!

**Joe is currently a mental health companion in the Skills Program, a modified therapeutic community designed to improve the institutional adjustment of inmates who have intellectual and social disabilities. Joe also teaches a basic reading and spelling class to people in the program. Free Minds is beyond proud of Joe, for his accomplishments, as well as his drive to help others.*



JUST LAW: ERROR CORAM NOBIS

By DJ, Free Minds Member

The writ of coram nobis (commonly referred to as writ of error coram nobis, writ of coram vobis, or writ of error coram vobis – legal terms are often written in Latin) is a historic legal order permitting a court to correct its original judgment upon discovery of a fundamental mistake that did not present itself in the records of the original proceedings and judgment's of the court where the proceeding took place. This particular writ is unique and rests in a very obscure corner of District of Columbia jurisprudence. As of late, it has been very vital for immigrants and people who may be facing a federal sentencing proceeding. However, the writ is not limited to these two areas and the use of the writ to attack prior convictions is undervalued. You must file in DC Superior Court.

When you have been convicted of a criminal offense, and completed your entire sentence, including probation, coram nobis could be the last way to vacate your past criminal conviction(s). Through the context of an immigration proceeding, you can use the writ if the proceeding was connected with immigration consequences that called for your deportation. In federal or state court that uses sentencing guidelines, a prior conviction can lead to a much longer sentence based upon what is called: Sentencing Enhancements! Moreover, these prior convictions designate you as what is commonly referred to as: Career Offender or Armed Career Offender.

If you were to file a petition for writ of error coram nobis and it is successful, you can have your prior conviction tossed out! This means that it is no longer on the table to be used against you. To be successful, you must examine your records or think back to your proceedings and detect a constitutional deficiency, like a Sixth Amendment violation for an issue like ineffective assistance of counsel. The issue could be something like your trial attorney did not explain the scope and nature of the charge before you pled guilty. Also, you could make a claim that the attorney did not investigate your case to the extent that you could have presented a defense or the attorney did not file your appeal after sentencing. Such arguments are supported by DC jurisprudence. A nice winning case to read on this example of the writ is: *Fa-tumabuhirtu v. United States*, 148 A.3d 260 (DC 2016). In this case, the DC Court of Appeals agreed that the attorney in the defendant's prior criminal case was ineffective under the Sixth Amendment during the past representation.

Examine your past criminal cases for error. It's important to do in order to erase your criminal past under the law. The opportunity for a successful coram nobis petition is at your fingertips if you just take a moment to examine the prior criminal proceeding.

**NOTICE THIS DOES NOT CONSTITUTE LEGAL ADVICE!
YOU MUST STILL CONSULT YOUR ATTORNEY**

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LIFE AFTER THE GUNSHOT

PAYING IT FORWARD: INVISIBLE WOUNDS *By Imanee*

I recently spoke to Che, a good friend of Free Minds who works with our reentry and peer support groups. Che is a violence intervention specialist, and he produced a documentary called Life After the Gunshot.

For someone who has never seen this documentary, what is it about?

The documentary is for Black men who have been violently injured. I believe that it really tries to control the narrative concerning Black men who have been violently injured, and help them to articulate their story. It's a reflection of their healing and it shows how survivors overcome and how they are able to begin the healing process. Many people stay stagnant in the actual event. Knowing that the person survives is a whole other realization about life after the gunshot. It takes a very strong individual to be able to overcome something like this. I think it's real important to hear their story, their perspective.

In the documentary, you discussed symptoms of trauma such as your "nervous system being stuck in fight mode." Can you talk more about symptoms of trauma, maybe some we might not even recognize?

How do you deactivate this?

Hypervigilance. Once you've been in a situation like that, your senses become very hyper. Whether in restaurants or around a big crowd of people, you become very defensive. Your senses become very heightened. Even in relationships, with loved ones, or in public spaces, you always feel the need to "pop off" because of what already happened to you. I believe that PTSD is real. When we think of PTSD, we think of those that have been to war. We go through the same trauma similar to those who've been to war. But we live in a warzone, we experience the same trauma, getting shot at. For example, structural violence. It scars you mentally, it's like invisible wounds. I believe you're responsible for your healing. I feel like most things happen to you in life and you can't always point the finger. You have to have self-awareness and self-accountability to understand, like, "This is what I'm going through, so how do I heal from it?" In trying to heal mentally, reaching out to a professional or a peer that can relate to what you've been through is what I would suggest.

How do you want to use this documentary to nourish the community?

This documentary honestly gives the blueprint on how to nourish your community. It gives the blueprint on how to deal with what you're feeling. Just the name behind it allows these gentlemen who are experiencing all these mental health issues to put a name behind it when they initially couldn't.

How do you nourish your own mind/body/soul? Do you have any advice for someone who may be stuck on where to start?

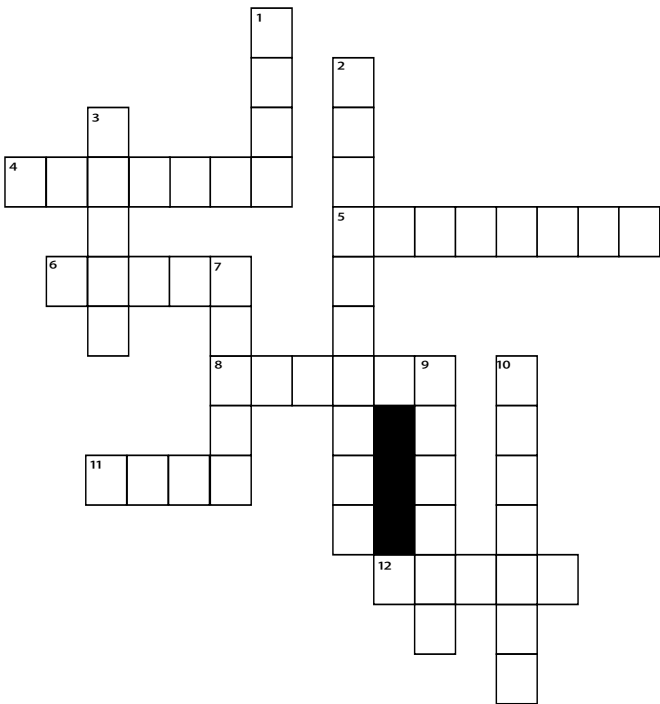
Personally, I do a lot of self reflection. I read up on different things regarding mental health. I believe for me personally, working out helps. Hearing other men talk about similar situations that they've experienced helps me out a lot. Also, having someone to talk to, a peer, who understands you without any judgement.

Are there future projects you want to work on?

Of course. I have a couple projects I'm working on now. I'm about to start writing a book called *Invisible Wounds*. We are also doing a *Life After the Gunshot: Baltimore Edition* that essentially helps women who have been violently injured. Women are becoming violently injured, and we want to offer them the opportunity to share their perspectives. We are also working on a project called "My Hood" where we take the cameras into the communities where these guys are violently injured and talk about the trauma that they've seen. By that I mean, their friends have been killed, their friends have been shot, losing their mother, losing their father, even losing their children. That's what "My Hood" is based on. I would also love to be picked up by a major network, or even develop our own network for people that've been violently injured.

NOURISH CROSSWORD PUZZLE

By MC, Free Minds Member



ACROSS

- 4. She ____ her garden to nourish her flowers
- 5. Read this sarcastic fat cat's strip to nourish your funny bone
- 6. Reading leads to good ____ to write about
- 8. ____ are healthy and full of nutrients whether in a pie or covered in caramel
- 11. If you ____ yourself, you will try to get proper nourishment
- 12. Try to ____ something new every day

DOWN

- 1. When you ____ a good book, you nourish your mind
- 2. Eating a nutritious diet and getting plenty of exercise can lead to this
- 3. ____ something you are passionate about to nourish your mind.
- 7. ____ a good book with a friend today.
- 9. One of the three main meals of the day.
- 10. Join one or watch one; either way, it can be a good way to nourish ideas

Answers can be found on the back cover

SPINNING THE TRACK WITH THE ADVICE MAN

Do you have advice for the Advice Man? If so, write in and we may print your advice in the next issue. And if you have a question for the FM Fam, please send it to us. We want to hear from you!

Dear Advice Man,

What's up? Here's my question: How do I find a soul that believes in me more than I believe in myself? Someone that will help me build my vision, be my legs, my eyes, my voice, so that I can make my mark and find my place even though I am not out in the world? Someone to embrace my interests as well as protect them? What do you suggest?

Searching,
MS

Dear MS,

It's a blessing to dig deep and address some of the issues we struggle with, so I would like to welcome back our FM's family to spin the track with us while I will do my best to give us some insight. I believe this issue theme of the Connect "Nourish" is fitting and offers a commendable companion to MS's questions.

MS, I believe you are in search of a person/vessel that possesses these values or positive characteristics.

Humans are hardwired to commune and evolve together. So when one is incapacitated it doesn't surprise me that they will search for a particular companionship. Unfortunately from prisons, our conditions and abnormal environment, finding another soul with these values is slim to none. Where does one look after one is told the bond of love could never be cultivated in prison on its unfertile soil?

One can only counter that "never" in our situations by using positive persistence (which is another form of

*religion), which is to will in your life that which you know will bless and sustain (nourish) you. **First we have to be in agreement with finding what we're looking for starts with self.** If we take our vessel and ingest, cultivate, and nourish the positive qualities we all search for in others in us, that will give us keen insight to either identify these values in others or see their potential. We then can plant and cultivate and nourish seeds in self and others. We can reap bonds of trust, loyalty, sacrifice, encouragement, and love despite our captivity on unfertile ground.*

*So I'm real opinionated and want others to understand that despite who we are and who we might end up blessed with, no one is perfect. We must have empathy for those who are willing to ride and die for us in whatever capacity they can. Why? Because we can never know the weight of the world on their shoulders. I find it easy networking any support I may need throughout my family, friends, and community. And to make my mark and fulfill all my desires, I know it's my responsibility in all this to be self-sufficient as well. Last but not least, with relationships, **communication is key!** Closed mouths don't get fed, and a dialogue held with parties truly nourishes one another. When we communicate on another frequency, spectrum, or level, life is just bliss.*

I hope that this will assist you, MS, and others. Peace and Blessings!
TS

FAVORITE PRISON RECIPES: "OHHHH WHOP" CAKE

By AL

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 regular or iced jumbo honeybuns
- 1 pack of chocolate chip cookies
- 1 Snickers bar
- 1 cup water
- Small plastic trash bag

DIRECTIONS:

Crush cookies in small bag. Use a fork to cut snickers bar into pieces and add to cookies. Add just enough drops of water to dampen crushed cookies. Mash into a dough. Roll dough out as flat as you can. Take honeybuns and place together on top of dough. If iced, make sure to put the iced sides touching each other. Using bag, fold and wrap dough around honeybuns. Use spoon to spread dough around edges.

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Kids

By EJ

Are one of a kind
We nourish them
And cherish them



We feed them; we need them to do their very best
Some of us can't wait until they leave their nest. SMILE

But all of the life lessons we teach
And the special speeches we give

Won't prepare them for life's many hurdles

So kids I pray that you guys were listening
To all of life's lessons

Because believe me
Life is a blessing

Beauty Is Her Name

By RR

To my future Valentine

_____, stay in the present. Honor each small step in life for as they accumulate, they move you forward on your journey. Life is a journey. Honor your journey, for the journey is your direction. Honor your direction, for it points to the most meaning full views of yourself. Discover your own sunrise and sunset. Move with the clouds to the next moment and like winter -green, you will reflect peace as you sound your joy.

_____, return to the shade of the pines and like winter-green you will root strong and grow with your own unique fragrance. Allow this Earth to nourish you as a woman, as a person, and as a divine spirit. Discover your connection with all who have taken this path before you.

Beauty is your name.

S.T.R.O.N.G.

By ME

At times when I felt weak and hopeless
My circumstances showed me
That I was stronger than I thought
Most wouldn't be able to survive
The battles that I fought
It takes a deep and strong-minded person
Not to succumb to the odds that are against them
Stay True Real Optimistic N' Grounded



Victory Lap

By MK

I'm destined for greatness
I commit myself to everything
No pages left blank here
My ride doesn't end right here
Look in the mirror
Every chapter becomes clear
The game helps me steer
When the dust appears
Acceptin' my greatness
As the true master of destiny
As I cross that line
Success became my victory lap



Living a Miraculous Life

By CM

Living a miraculous life
You have to let your dreams bypass
Living a miraculous life
Going through bumps will always be there
Living a miraculous life
People are going to pull you down
So you can feel like them
Living a miraculous life
If you have a case, you'll be judged by a piece of paper
Living a miraculous life
Nurturing your loved ones is always allowed
I lived a miraculous life

Painfully Grateful

By RD

I'm looking out the window, and the world's beauty
can't stop my pain
As day comes and night falls, it can't stop the rain
The world opens out in front of me, yet it seems I
can't board the train
I'm grateful I'm still breathing, yet there is no oxygen
in my veins
I beg God for mercy, yet it seems as though I'm only
answered in my dreams
However I'm grateful I'm still breathing, even though
everyday it brings me so much pain
I don't know what to do now, even when everyone believes
in me, when I think I can't
I'm looking out the window, and the world's beauty can't
keep me sane
As day comes and night falls, I can't stop the stains
However, I'm grateful I'm still breathing, even if this
is a rotten life to sustain

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

One Sweet Day

By VH

It touched my heart just to hear from you
For my world's been upside down, you can only imagine what I'm
Going through
I've traveled that road and I've had enough
And I've come to learn that I'm not really that tough

Grown men cry, I'm living proof
And the pain I've endured is beyond the truth
I need someone like you to stand by my side
Someone to be there, to let me know I'm still alive

Right now I'm in hell, I feel home's a lot like heaven
So make a toast with me on that day and night the
clock strikes eleven
I can hear their whispers, those dead that I love
Be there to save me, the other turtle dove

I want a life for me, my son, and...
A shoulder to cry on, a friend to take my hand
My road was dangerous but still I'm left to be
So don't be just a voice in the wind, be like the shadow
that walks beside me

Going away's like drowning, so hard to breathe
And it's time that I let go, to God I concede
I know you're there and you're really not that far away
Just know I'll see you soon and that'll be one sweet day

My First Sonnet

By MV

On top of earth's field
I construct a legacy
For a time, talents were concealed
A castle of accomplishments,
for all to see

Materials I use, for what I build
Come together gently
I won't stop, until fruits I yield
Manifesting what's within me

Through trials, and rain being spilled
Motivation to create a future dynasty
Causes my spirit to be refilled
Kingdoms are first built mentally

So it goes, those who would wish to progress
Must, too, work harder than the rest



Current Situation

By TL

*Note from the author: *Say It Slow* 1st Poem Ever!*

A lot of people judge me by my current situation
They think I'm wild
But get to know me and see I'm cool as ventilation

I'm strong
A lot of guys would have broke from all the time I was facin'
Being locked in a cell slowed me down
Cuz I was movin' fast like I was racin'

I never really had it
But dat money I was chasin'
I come from the struggle
The bottom
The basement

Sometimes ain't have a bed
Hadda sleep on the floor in a vacant
I knew it wasn't permanent
Just my current situation
Knew times would get better
Just gotta be patient

Da sun shine after da storm
And life is what you make it
When I speak da truth
People look at me like I'm naked

I'm from Southeast
Where we thought if we want it, gotta take it
But Imma go another way
I'm tryna be part of greatness

Fulfillment

By CK

I was born with a purpose
so I'm grateful to be alive.
I'm able to walk and talk.

I also remember the phone call when my daughter cried.
Alone in my cell, warm tears drip from my eyes.

Rest in power, it seems like a new FM member is always dying.

I'm around people who scream white pride.
Free Minds staff who are white, they never choose sides.

The meaning of love, that's something they never hide.
There should be nothing to keep us divided.

We have to find our purpose, it's buried deep inside.
Your brain connects with the heart,
unlock the truth, your platform is through free minds.



POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Gratitude

By AC

Gratitude, sweet nectar of life.

I pass your cup to those who
surround me

because of their actions and words.

But not for a second do I ever forget

the love and the joy that you bring to my soul

when I drink from your ether as well.



Value

By AW

Focused on those things of value

We are told are Reserved for

Those folks with money and

Connections: life, liberty, happiness.

Bold Enough to Remain Focused

On our own life Force

Still Encouraged to Witness

The beauty of life unfolding

in the growth of a flower

Unnamed and sweet.

Constant graceful motions of

The stars, willing to capture

That motion, that moment in

This poem as I am sitting in

This dayroom surrounded by A

Noise that I cannot hear

Yet I can Feel the source

Of its insanity: the absence

Of Love.

Like when I walked home

From school Followed by A

Stray dog – A Black Lab.

Wherever I walked she Followed.

Never having been Needed or

Wanted I smiled, for the sign

to me was clear: to me in my

Young mind that had never

been allowed to be a boy:

I had value

I was valued

I am valued.

A Step

By MR

The obstacles I hurdled in the beginning were

Structured examples of a pivotal fence...

Metaphorically speaking, those examples provided

Measure to my mental stability in a literal sense...

Therefore, it never took a repetitive source of action

Connected to failures to make me convinced...

Especially when I understood early on the best lesson

In life were those experiences that made me repent...

And seeking prominent knowledge stay away from all those

Who fabricated their character and repeated gossip...

The signs and symbols are for the conscious mind

That provides enough esteem to critique logic...

Though at times it appears I remain lost in a society

Where corruption gestures innocence to those

Who defame laws...

But when you take a walk on my side of life, justice isn't

A contributing element in our society where few are

Honorable and the majority remain lost...

So for once let me not make this biasedly enforced where

The entire message seems provoked and mildly racial...

But for months now I've seen traits without the courts

Involved when police kill a Black man based on

Profiling their facial...

So it's very likely these expressions and forms of

Testimony may somehow cause damage...

Accompanied with enough emotional trauma to affect a

Community, but somehow we still manage

To remain upright through our blood, sweat and tears...

There's a small space available in my life to accommodate

Just a portion of love, death and fears...

Yet, I want for everyone what I want for myself, so

In order to bring this to fruition we must not

Abuse drugs, excuse self or neglect our kids...

So with this long road ahead we must humbly take

Each day one step ahead at a time...

And with efficiency and thorough consistency, the only

Option they have is to welcome our voice and

Celebrate our grind.



REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

What's up Y'all, we made it through 2021. Yay!!

The fact that we have come through these last two unique years tells me that we all need some nourishment in one form or another! Nourishing our bodies and souls is a very important factor to living a healthy and balanced life. Nourishing is something that we all should be practicing every day and is essential to keeping our health, vitality, and peace on point. The idea of nourishing can be so easily over-complicated or just all together forgotten about and overlooked with all the stressors that life can throw our way. Nourishment can be just doing those little things in life that make you fulfilled. Nourishment warms the soul and breathes life into us. When I think of nourishment, I think about our minds, bodies and spirits and how they need to be nourished as often as possible in today's very unpredictable world.

Some ways that we can nourish our minds include eliminating and pulling out the negative thoughts and feelings that we often have of ourselves and others and replacing it with uplifting and positive thoughts. Great tools to use in taking control of your negative thoughts are meditating, exercising, reading and writing. When those irritating, negative, and unproductive thoughts start creeping in, kick that destructive thinking to the curb with positive thinking. I am aware that a lot of times this is much easier said than done; however, if you consistently practice, it will become less challenging and eventually become the norm. Personally, prayer, reading the Bible, and speaking positive affirmations over myself, family, and situations have become my go-to whenever my mind needs to be nourished, and it is very effective in keeping me balanced!

"Give thanks for the simple things in life and take time to laugh, for it is the music of the soul." This very wise quote is so true and profound!

The key to maintaining a nourished spirit is engaging in those things that are right for the spirit. Creating realistic daily affirmations is a very helpful and beneficial tool in keeping that spirit of yours happy. Surround yourself with the affirmations that speak to you the most, so you can manifest and be reminded of your wants, dreams and desires. Oh, and don't stop there... you deserve more than just that! Each day, make the attempt to give yourself compliments and words of support. Of course you might feel uncomfortable doing so at first, but over time it can become second nature if you take the practice seriously, telling yourself that you are worthy, intelligent, caring, compassionate and are doing the best you can at this life. Appreciate yourself and practice some self-love for the soul and spirit!

Each one of us is our own unique masterpiece, and admittedly at times, it can be difficult to see ourselves as an individual piece of art when the world is constantly telling us that "we need to be this" and "we need to be that." The ultimate nourishment of the body is learning the art of being content with what you were born with. So shut down any self-loathing, and start to treasure yourself.

What steps will you take to add some nourishment into your life? Big or small changes, it doesn't matter! The idea is to understand just how special you are, and to take the time to nourish your mind, body and soul.

Now let's get those resources!

Thrive DC

1525 Newton Street NW, Washington DC 20010 • 202.737.9311

Men and women are released every day from jails and prisons without food, clothing, or support. Thrive DC provides all of this without restrictions on sobriety, without time limits, and without judgment over their conviction. The New Directions Re-entry Program is designed to assist people who have been recently incarcerated and/or released from jail or prison, back on the road to becoming successful returning citizens.

It consists of five components:

- Case Management
- Basic Needs Assistance (meals, toiletries, clothing, etc)
- Life Skills Education
- Access to Sobriety Maintenance Assistance and Support
- Employment Assistance

Until we *Connect* again,
Ms. Keela





REST AS RESISTANCE

By Courtney, Free Minds Friend

Hello! My name is Courtney and I am the director of community programs at a racial equity consulting firm, meaning we partner with organizations to develop plans for how they will be more conscious of racism and make changes in how they operate to be more equitable. It is my honor to be writing to you today about our partnership with Free Minds on a new program called 'Rest as Resistance.' We have also been guiding Free Minds to develop a strategic plan for how the organization operates that also has a racial equity lens. If it's not clear by now, we are big fans of you all and want to partner in whatever ways we can.

In our work, we consistently see that people of color – especially Black folks – have to bear the burden of taking down racism. On top of experiencing the daily impacts of racism, many folks of color are dealing with the underlying sense that they always must hustle to prove their worth and that we must be extraordinary to be accepted in a world where whiteness is held up as the norm. With all of those messages, it is no surprise that we are tired.

Rest as Resistance is a four-session cohort program where we gather people of color to talk about all of those feelings, but also to learn strategies for healing and self-care. We recognize that sometimes being in community with other people who can relate to your struggles is the first step in healing. That's why we have gathered ten Free Minds' staff and board members for a special cohort of Rest as Resistance. One of the participants said that "Rest as Resistance forced me to think more seriously about how I am spending my time. It was a good reminder that self-care should be a priority."

But why, you might ask, should I prioritize self-care when there is so much work to be done to survive, to provide for others, to change the world? One thing we know is that the journey to freedom – freedom from prisons, freedom from discrimination, freedom from overwork – is a long one. We firmly believe we can get there as a society, but we know it will take time. The late-great Audre Lorde proclaimed that, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Rest is a way for us to ensure we can make it to that place. Rest ensures we have the health and energy to maintain our efforts for the long haul. And rest is our way of asserting our value. When we rest, we say 'I am worthy. I am important. My life is critical.'

Rest can look like many things, not simply taking a nap! In one of our sessions so far, we talked about the 7 types of rest, which include physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, sensory, social, and creative. Sometimes you may feel like you need to cry, and crying is a way to rest for you. Some days you might feel like you need to connect to a higher power, and reading a religious text is a source of support for you. No two self-care plans look the same, and yet there are many ways of being and mindfulness practices we can learn from one another.

I leave you with a question – what is something you can do to care for yourself today? To nourish yourself? I hope to hear your answer in a future cohort of Rest as Resistance one day!

URBAN FARMING

By Justin

Behind Fort Dupont Ice Arena, out in one of DC's Ward 7 & 8's food deserts – a place where two Safeways grocery stores serve 120,000 residents each, where the many take-out, liquor, and convenience stores lining this urban landscape must attempt to supply the food the few supermarkets can't – there are fresh winter greens growing.

Kale, collards, mustards, arugula, and turnips glisten green under the warmth created by two insulated hoop houses. Summer would be just like this, these rows of produce, but more fruits, more variety. "In the summer, I try everything," Mr. Robinson tells me, chuckling. "It'd be easier to tell you what I don't try!"

A carpenter by trade, Mr. Robinson is now, somehow, a farmer, becoming the owner of DC Urban Greens after stepping in for his mother, the first employee. The organization is one of DC's many urban farms increasing accessibility of affordable healthy foods to residents living in DC's food desert neighborhoods. "We try to grow fresh food and get it into the community at a low cost, so pretty much free."



Today, this area is not only one of the most food insecure (meaning, lacking consistent access to enough food) regions of the District, but of the United States. The pandemic has only made things worse: in May last year, over 1 in 5 DC residents were food insecure. A recent Capital Area Food Bank report on hunger in the DMV area measured a 50-60% spike in regional food insecurity during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, DC already had the highest food insecurity rate for seniors in the United States; DC Food Policy Council data from the start of the pandemic showed that 1 in 3 District seniors didn't have enough to eat. That who eats and who doesn't has everything to do with your race and zip code (two things also quite connected) sums up the structural racism of DC food apartheid. On any given night in the capital of one of the world's wealthiest nations, Black families are 13.5 times more likely – Latinx families 6.5 times more likely – than white families to go to bed hungry.

Small-scale urban farming – which is done throughout the District as well as in food insecure places all across the country – delivers food to food desert residents who need it most. Through partnerships and community connections, DC Urban Greens distributes produce directly to its neighbors. Moreover, they share the wisdom of the work with other Ward 7 & 8 urban farmers, hosting urban agriculture workshops to teach people to grow their own food and thereby helping to build a workforce in the green economy. After all, food desert residents tend to live in places where home



ownership is low; so the lack of permanent access to land makes the innovation of underutilized and temporarily available urban spaces into spaces to grow healthy vegetables a revolutionary task.

Mr. Robinson's DC Urban Greens is its own unique story. And yet, as Ashanté Reese shows in the book *Black Food Geographies: Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, DC*, this story is a part of a centuries-long line of Blacks residents' self-reliance and resistance to unequal food distribution systems – especially east of the Anacostia River – they did not create.

Black Food Geographies zooms in on the history of the majority – Black Deanwood, a NE neighborhood near DC Urban Greens. What is now Deanwood was once farmland worked by enslaved Black people and saw enormous growth from Black migrants escaping racial terror in the South during the Great Migration (from Reconstruction up through the 1930s). Reese writes that they brought with them a complex relationship with farming: slavery was brutal and exploitative, sharecropping was slavery by another name, and slavery continued to persist in the form of convict leasing, where Southern states leased prisoners to private railways, mines, and plantations to work for nothing with no protection from inhumane working conditions. And the Thirteenth Amendment's loophole, which permits enslavement for people convicted of crime, allows for prisoners to work in the same manner in prison agriculture and other industries without pay to this day.

Despite farming being a symbol of subjugation, residents transformed the skills they learned into liberation tools. They "cultivat[ed] a multifaceted foodscape in Deanwood that included gardens, small farms, and independently owned grocery stores" reminiscent of their roots in the Deep South. Just like what DC Urban Greens and other DC urban farmers are continuing, "selling produce from homes or carts and wagons was part of Deanwood's local economy" up until the 1950s when small Black-owned food stores emerged from their segregated neighborhoods to "both serve their [community] and resist racist structures that constrained physical, economic, and social mobility."

As DC's built environment changed drastically after MLK's assassination, the move to industrial, transnational supermarkets was already underway. Embedded in the same

trends of racial segregation and white flight of the time, supermarkets abandoned leave Black inner-city neighborhoods to feed wealthy and white people who left for the suburbs. Between 1968 and 1982, Sandra Gregg wrote in the *Washington Post*, nearly 60 major grocery stores left DC. The presence of Black-owned Safeway and Super Pride did reflect entrepreneurship and commitment (Super Pride closed its stores in Deanwood and Baltimore in 2000) to food access in Black neighborhoods, but cold calculations in the market mean many in Wards 7 & 8 remain hungry, depleted of the nourishment needed for a healthy life.

Step into the two hoop houses and you will find life. Mr. Robinson doesn't try cauliflower anymore – "the bugs eat that stuff up before it even gets started." In just the same way, the bugs of structural racism that create unequal food systems might try to eat away at the hope rooted deep at DC Urban Greens. But here, as well as farms all across the city and country, seeds of struggle are being planted.

Leah Penniman, the founder of Soul Fire Farm whose mission it is to increase farmland stewardship of people of color and restore Afro-indigenous connection to the land, is also in solidarity with Mr. Robinson. As she writes in her manifesto *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*, "stewarding our own land, growing our own food, educating our own youth, participating in our own healthcare and justice systems: this is the source of real power and dignity."

And at New York City's Rikers Island and other correctional facilities, outside-the-box organizations like the Horticultural Society of New York are even using gardening and farming as a space for healing.

In a word, maybe Malcolm X got it all when he said: "Revolution is based on the land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice, and equality."

FAVORITE PRISON RECIPES: RS PIZZA WORKS

By RS

INGREDIENTS:

(Substitute ingredients as needed)

- 2 flour tortilla packs
- 2 mackerel (any flavor)
- 1 summer sausage 5 oz or 1 turkey sausage 5 oz
- 1 pepperoni pack
- 1 pickle
- 1 pasta sauce
- 1 cheese
- 1 garlic powder
- 1 honey
- 1 milk
- 3 butters

DIRECTIONS:

Use cardboard for cooking pan. Cut into square or circle to fit in microwave. Wrap in plastic wrap or similar. Fill water in small bowl. Wet tortilla wraps and place on plastic wrapped cardboard. Use about 8 tortillas in a spiral formation. Add more tortillas to form thicker crust. Once placed in a spiral, roll the ends to form a crust. Use more water to soften the tortilla if needed. Once crust is formed, use butter and spread evenly on pizza. Put pizza in microwave for 1 minute 30 seconds. Let pizza rest for 1 minute. Spread pasta sauce on pizza. Sprinkle garlic over pasta sauce for taste. Slice sausage into small pieces and place in bowl. Empty mackerel into small bowl. Remove bones from fish. Grind fish into smaller pieces. Slice pickle into small pieces and place into a bowl. Squeeze cheese into a small bowl. Add milk to cheese and mix till creamy. Add fish and spread evenly around pizza. Add sliced sausage and spread evenly over pizza. Pour cheese evenly over pizza. Add pickles to pizza and spread evenly. Add pepperoni and spread over pizza. Drizzle honey over pizza. Place finished pizza in microwave for 3 minutes. Add more time as needed. Let pizza rest for 1-2 minutes. Then feast!



THE WRITE WAY: FOOD WRITING

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

By Jonina, Free Minds Friend

Let's talk about soup. What soup comes to mind when you think of warmth, home or love? For me, the soup that comes to mind is "sinigang na baboy." A hearty Filipino stew with a sour tamarind base, pork short ribs that fall off the bone, soft white yams, tender sliced radishes and water spinach. On the rare free evenings when my mother had time to make this meal for me and brother, I couldn't help but imagine another life where we weren't so poor. She'd work two full time restaurant shifts everyday and instead she could be home, making food like this for us. The broth just tasted like a different home, unlike the cramped quarters of the apartment we shared dormitory style with twenty or so other people. I didn't feel crowded and the house didn't feel so small. I didn't feel stressed about how our family relied on the income of one overworked parent when I had a sip of this soup. Sometimes I mashed the yams into the soup to make the soup thicker, creating a delicious base out of the sour broth and starch. Or I'd scoop out the pork with a ladle and eat it with white rice. Somehow the pork, marinated in the salt-sour tamarind broth, brought out the sweetness in the plain white rice. When I had my mom's sinigang, it was like a reset button and I could deal with anything.

Perhaps you've never had any Filipino dishes like sinigang na baboy, but I made you want to try some, right? Or maybe you have zero interest in a soup with radishes in it, but I brought you there with me and my favorite meal. When writing about food, you can choose how your readers will react through the characters in your story. You can reel them in with the taste – is this salty, savory, sweet, bitter or plain? Texture might be important too: is it crunchy or mushy?

Then you go further with how it made them feel. What emotions and feelings did this dish evoke – was it the most yucktastic thing they've ever put in their mouth? Or was the taste comforting to the soul (the flavor reminds me of home) or wholesome for the body (this freshly made meal eased the discomfort in my stomach)?

It doesn't matter if your readers have tasted it before. You hit the mind and then the heart. Write it like they've never had it before. I could be reading about white bread or my least favorite veggie tomatoes but I'd want to go eat some just to experience what a character said they experienced.

Another way to write about food isn't just by eating. Describing the cooking and preparation can bring your reader just as close to



The Philippines is a country in Southeast Asia, made up of over 7,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean.

the experience of eating. The act of spreading cheese over dough and watching it melt in a preheated oven can do just as much to the senses as eating the pizza. If I didn't describe how my mother cooked her sinigang, cooking the pork in the boiling soup first before adding the other vegetables, you wouldn't know the water spinach is added last so that the fresh green stems are the right amount of soft but the right amount of crunch when you eat it.

Whether it is cooking or eating, the best place to start when writing about food is through You, the writer. Everyone's a foodie. We just don't have to write and eat the same. We also don't have to have the most expensive or the most complex, most exotic gourmet meals to write about food. Only your foodie experience can shape the unique way you will write about food. A packet of ramen doesn't have to evoke the same amount of feelings as a mother's home cooked meals – but it could. A cheap can of tuna can be a treasure trove of potential – rich in a character's enjoyment or rich in a series of bad experiences.

But let's start at the beginning. The art of writing about food starts with you and your story. So let's talk about soup. What soup comes to mind when you think of warmth, home and love?



Sinigang na baboy: a Filipino stew with a sour tamarind base, pork short ribs, yams, radishes, and spinach

SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLISHED AUTHOR

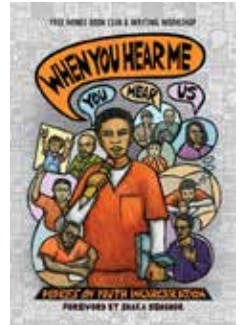
Many of our Free Minds members have published books and we'd like to celebrate their accomplishments! If you have published a book, please send us the title and a short description that we can print in an upcoming issue of The Connect. All books must be available in paperback on Amazon.com. Free Minds will not list books that include explicit sexual material, gratuitous violence, or discrimination against any group of people based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, or disability.

I Am Alive For A Reason by Vance Contee

This short but powerful collection of poems dives deep into the author's view of himself and his own transformation, as well as his perspective on the world around him and the struggle for justice and liberation. The book is dedicated to his sister, and the author's love for his family shines throughout these poems.

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:
WHEN YOU HEAR ME (YOU HEAR US): VOICES ON YOUTH INCARCERATION
with Neely

We take this moment to interrupt our regularly scheduled voting results to bring you our next BAM book, which is a truly special one: *When You Hear Me (You Hear Us): Voices on Youth Incarceration*. Why is it so special, you ask? Because it is written by Free Minds members and friends like you! Its pages are filled with powerful poetry, prose, and personal reflections that illustrate how youth incarceration affects all of us. Our editorial team reviewed over a thousand submissions written over a five year period, and worked with our publisher to feature a variety of voices and subjects while still fitting within our printing guidelines. Even if your poem is not in this book, you have still helped shape this community and this conversation reflected in these pages. We hope that you will all take pride in this book that truly belongs to all of us. And of course, keep writing! There will be more publication opportunities in the future. This collection is a glimpse into the wisdom and hope you all share with us in your poetry, essays, and letters that inspire us every day. We look forward to hearing your feedback!



1. The goal of this book was to show readers the reality and community impact of youth incarceration. Do you think the book achieved this goal? Why or why not?
2. What was your favorite poem and why? (Challenge: If your poetry is featured in this book, try to pick one written by someone else!)
3. Was there a profile of someone who was interviewed in the book that resonated most with you? Who was it, and what about their story meant so much to you?

4. This is our first collection featuring the stories of family members, friends, and others involved in the legal system in different ways. What do you think this adds to the **narrative** (“a way of understanding a situation that reflects a particular point of view or set of values”) of the book?

5. Many of the poems and stories tackle difficult and painful subjects, such as Ebonee’s story of her two sons surviving gun violence in “Takin’ Losses.” What do you think we can do to bring about safety and healing? What has brought you hope and healing in your life?

6. What does the title of the book mean to you?

NEXT ISSUE’S THEME: WELLBEING (VOLUME 11, ISSUE 1)

Hey family! The theme for the next issue of the *Connect* is Wellbeing. Here are some prompts to help you get started. And we want to give you a heads up for the issue after that. Volume 11, Issue 2 will be all about *Sports*!

(1)

Here are the different ‘dimensions of well-being,’ which includes emotional, physical, intellectual and even environmental well-being. Which ‘dimension’ has the greatest influence or impact on one’s wellbeing. Why? For example, you may believe that one’s emotional state plays a bigger role in their personal wellbeing versus their occupation.



(2)

“Well-being, also known as wellness... refers to what is intrinsically valuable relative to someone. So the well-being of a person is what is ultimately good for this person, what is in the self-interest of this person.” Write a list poem about certain habits or practices of yours that are in your self interest.

(3)

Martin Seligman states, "Well-being cannot exist just in your own head. Well-being is a combination of feeling good as well as actually having meaning, good relationships and accomplishment." Write a poem about your biggest accomplishment and how it made you feel. Be as descriptive as possible – set the scene! Do you think you would be the same person without this accomplishment?

(4)

"The Sense of Well-being" is a poem by David Groff. Groff uses imagery or visual symbolism to describe 'well-being' as the lack of all longing, because everything you need you already have. Try writing a poem like Groff's that uses imagery to detail what a sense of well being means to you.

The Sense of Well-being

At dusk's inexact instant
The brownstone sounds, the dishes
Clicking in kitchens,
The whippet's hollow whine,
A siren, someone's distant Spanish
Disappear into silence
Until the street is a hollow thing
Beyond all murmuring
Your footsteps as crisp
As a clock. You lack
All recrimination, pure
As traffic-hum, like a bum
Who doesn't ask for change,
With all the commerce halted,
All the longing gone.

(5)

Your mental and emotional state can heavily influence your overall wellbeing. Everyone can carry emotional or mental baggage, but unpacking this baggage allows us to move forward. Forms of baggage can be anger, a fear of failure, or regret for example. Write a poem about unpacking each 'baggage' you carry. Do you feel lighter after writing this poem? (*Reminder: for your own wellbeing, we recommend not writing about any active legal cases!*)

DC PHOTOS *By Justin and Lancy*



The new Shaw Skate Park in (you guessed it) the Shaw neighborhood of DC



Fort Dupont Community Gardens



Outside doorway of the National Cathedral



The National Cathedral in Northwest DC

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!

MEMBERS *CONNECT*: NOURISH

Nourishment of the Mind, Body, and Soul

By LW

For nourishing my mind, I believe everything can be explained, and I absolutely love to understand how things work. Engineering, if you will. Good books, popular science and numbers feed my mind. I crave numbers. I will at some point seek to continue my education in Investment Management in the not too distant future. So far, all I have had is book learning, which piqued my interest in this field. In addition, I intend to help the youth of my community make better, more informed financial decisions, and to start addressing where they really want to go and the deeper meaning of what they want their lives to be about. Continuous growth is a must for anyone who wants to succeed and thrive in life.

As of late, I have been somewhat slacking in the proper nourishment of my body. Does this sound like the beginning of an excuse? (Because I have voiced this, I will attempt to do better, starting today!) The reason I say that I have been slacking is because over the last 3 to 4 years, I have been dealing with lower back pain. Myself, my attorney and a doctor whom she has consulted believe this is due to chronic kidney disease... Even still, some form of exercising is a must for ALL people, regardless of health conditions and/or body weight. Exercising in combination with a good diet nourishes our bodies in a myriad of ways, including, but not limited to, psychologically and physically. In addition, what we feed our bodies, fuels our bodies. Therefore, if we only feed our bodies junk, it will operate as such. Sport is another form of exercise that not only

nourishes our bodies, but our minds as well. With healthy competition, we motivate ourselves to push our bodies to its limits, in which we continually grow. Handball is my sport of choice because I must utilize my entire body in competition along with improving my hand-eye coordination.

Good friends and family relations nourish my soul, as well as kindness and helping others who cannot help themselves. Throughout my incarceration, I have been studying the law and processes of our criminal justice system. Most people incarcerated have a grade school education, that they did not even complete, and are intimidated by the complexity of reading, understanding, and drafting legal pleadings. I have been a jailhouse lawyer for some time now, in that I have helped many people to bridge this gap. Anyone that wants to challenge their convictions and/or conditions of confinement, I am willing to assist them in helping themselves. I guess I'm just an underdog kind of guy and when the deck is stacked against someone, it bothers me. Not only am I helping them, I am helping myself by knowing that I am making a difference for someone.

My strength, courage, and hope for the future comes from my children, as well as my grandchildren. I do not want to be remembered only for the destruction that I have caused in my community. I am determined to be remembered for the greatness that I have achieved, and the good that I have done for my community, society, and humanity as a whole.



FAVORITE PRISON RECIPES: THE STUFFED STIR FRY

By MK

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 Spanish rices
- 2 mackerels
- 2 green chili fish steaks
- 2 logs (beef or turkey sausage)
- 2 noodles
- 1 mac-n-cheese
- 1 cheese
- Sazon, garlic powder and soy sauce

DIRECTIONS:

First crush the noodles real fine like the rice. Fry the noodles and rice for 10 minutes. Cut and cook the logs in soy sauce with some sazón and garlic powder for 2:30 minutes. Break the fish down and season with garlic powder. Add the fish to the stir-fry and cook for 3 minutes. Add the logs and cook for 2 minutes. Add water to a separate bowl and add the macaroni to it and cook for 3:30 minutes, then add the cheese and stir. Note: put cheese to the side and add sugar and honey with it. Now in the clear bowl start to fill with stir-fry three quarters of the way up. Use a spoon and divide the stir-fry in the middle. Add mac-n-cheese to the middle. Then add the rest of the stir fry on top. Drizzle cheese all over the top and cover to let cheese ooze through the stir-fry. Heat for 1:30 minutes.

MEMBERS *CONNECT*: NOURISH

The Prison Garden (and how it changed my life)

By BB

In December, 1995, DH and I committed two robberies in inner-city St. Louis. Sixteen years old, I was charged with 17 counts and sentenced to 240 years in prison. The rest of my life.

Three years later, I signed up for garden duty – just to get out of my cell. To my amazement, I found peace of mind and tranquility in the prison garden.

Being in prison can make a person feel dirty, and here I was picking weeds from the dirt. But with every weed I pulled out of the garden, I felt like I was pulling out an old part of my criminal self. Weeding became a form of therapy for me.

I looked at the dirt and wondered how something so beautiful could grow from dirt. Then I thought about my own life. My criminal street life was a life of doing dirt, a hard life, like a garden when it is in a drought and does not get watered or weeded. A garden can even look ugly at this time. But when it rains and the weeds get picked, the garden turns into one of nature's beauties. As I worked there, I wondered: How could I turn my dirt-filled life into something beautiful?

I determined right then and there that I would turn my troubled life around. Surrounded by hardened criminals, I would rehabilitate myself and make my life beautiful. In that beautiful prison garden, I made a vow to feed my mind with books and become a contributing member of society.

Now it is 19 years later. I am 38 years old. When I look at the garden, I remember my youthful vow. I am proud of my accomplishments since then. I have written 15 nonfiction books

and eight books of poetry, become a paralegal, obtained a basic business studies certificate, and am currently enrolled in a university to get my Associate of Science degree.

Like a garden that dies in the winter and revives in the spring, I got a new life. Recently the United States Supreme Court ruled that juveniles who were under the age of 18 when they committed crimes cannot be sentenced to life in prison. They must get a new sentencing hearing. So now I have a chance for freedom, as well.

The prison garden really helped me along my difficult journey. It let me know that something beautiful can grow from dirt. Now I hope for the day when I get released to grow my own garden at home and continue to heal myself in the process.

Note from the editors: BB was recently granted parole and will be released in 2022. Congratulations! We can't wait to welcome you home!



To Nourish, To be Nourished by AC

It is easy to think of a mother nursing her newborn baby, or a person caring for a pet in need whenever we try to visualize the meaning of the word Nourish. And, yes, that would be absolutely correct, but there is just so much more behind the meaning of that word.

To nourish, as I see it, is what thousands of people do to their hopes and dreams as they walk thousands of miles towards a seemingly unreachable goal to cross a border, a gate, that symbolizes the end of their current life and the beginning of the next one, in a world they don't yet know, in the unknown.

To nourish is what little boys and little girls practice as they go on living through life, filling the shoes of those who came before them, in search for the passion and calling they heard so many decades ago. The doctors of tomorrow, lawyers of tomorrow, engineers of tomorrow, nurses of tomorrow, leaders of the community, and leaders of the world, all of them sit patiently today nourishing the greatness that lies within them. All of them and so many more.

To nourish, is to contemplate the idea that tomorrow will be a better day. It is to imagine that despite our faults and our mistakes, we can still reach our full potential and our greatness if only we continue on a good path, living patiently day by day.

It is to close our eyes and see today for the future it can become.

To nourish, in my view, is to have the power of foresight, the power to see the good that lies ahead on this road that we call life. The power to have faith, to have hope, to have patience, and to dream. It is to see what exists within our hands and see it for what it will become as we release it, to let it fly into the sky. It is to have patience, show perseverance. It's to love. It is to struggle and fight on.

The same instinct that allows us to care for those who are in need is the same instinct that allows us to help heal the hearts and souls that are partly broken, and we do that by simply being kind. We nourish the souls of those around us, and even our own, not by taking pills or eating some special kind of meals but by practicing what the Good Books of many cultures have been recommending us to do for thousands of years. And just so, we can continue for a thousand more. In my humblest opinion, the best kind of nourishment that anyone can give and can receive is love. We can love, we can believe, we can hope, we can persevere, we can dream, we can endure, and any of these things are just the same as taking the best of pills, eating the best of meals, or drinking the best of potions because in the long run they yield the same results: A better tomorrow. Just a thought.



CONVERSATION WITH JUSTIN

Hi Free Minds Family! I'm Justin, I'm 21, and a new Prison Book Club intern. Before joining Free Minds, I studied English and Philosophy in college, and grew up in Toledo, Ohio (a place so flat our highest point is a man-made highway overpass). I'll describe my apartment here in DC, which is filled with things that nourish me.

A blue couch borrowed from my mom where we used to talk and talk and talk. Hanging from one wall, an indigenous starquilt, red and black, sewn by a Lakota



Starquilt sewn by a Lakota artist

artist. On another, tacked on pictures and art. Martin Luther King looking through the bars of Birmingham jail. Three photos of James Baldwin, all stoic, none comforting. An oil pastel vision of harmony and peace by another Lakota artist, Kevin Poor Bear. A photo of Bryan Stevenson and one of the innocent men he's exonerated, Walter McMillan.

Surrounding myself with these items blankets me in purpose. But none are more important than the bookshelf that occupies, low-key awkwardly, the corner of the room. Stuffed there are books that have nourished me for years. As I look back on my life, I know now that I needed them. Let me tell you a bit about my journey and the books I've encountered along the way.

I will turn 18 and check a box, as all 18-year-old American boys must do, registering for a military draft. No one knows when this draft will happen, presumably in preparation for a war against an unknown enemy at whom I'll be asked with some high honor to shoot. A high school teacher will give me *The Nonviolent Alternative* by a Christian monk, Thomas Merton, about nonviolent solutions to global beefs. He will show me the writings of Dorothy Day, a nonviolent activist and journalist from New York, where I'll discover a whole spirituality of pacifism, a stance of active nonviolent resistance to war, including our American wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the unknown one to come next. I will learn how to file a letter of conscientious objection to being drafted, a piece of paper needed to show to the draft board explaining the beliefs behind why I'd refuse to fight

their war. I will write one. Books will inspire. What have they inspired you to do?

Some months later, after school and before 8pm baseball practice, I will go to the neighborhood library and skim all of the new books of poetry on shelf 811. I will discover *Whereas*, a book of poetry by Layli Long Soldier that reflects back, like a mirror, the lies and coercive language of the US government, its (broken) treaties, and (heartless) apologies to Native American people. Never forgetting its beauty and vision, two years later I will travel to her reservation to understand more her people's way of seeing. A year and a half after that, I will read *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee* by David Treuer and realize I need to rewrite everything I wrote about my experience on the reservation. And rewrite it again. And dialogue more. And learn more. Rather than focus on the losses, I needed to center the resilient Lakota's long line of activism which resisted each era's violence with new ways of survival. Reinvention and revolution was always happening, but I needed the eyes to see it. Books will be the nourishment that points out how unhealthy some of my own ideas are, for me and for those I write about. But books will also reveal a way forward, a healthier diet of perspective beyond the same-old same-old menu of American, capitalist thinking. What books have made you rethink your views?

In college in Boston, I will work at a group home for children who've experienced abuse and/or neglect; now I work at another for DC youth awaiting trial or committed to the system. In both I will feel incredible joy; and every hospitalization, abscondence, and re-arrest will feel like a loss. Slowly I will face it: I am undone by this grief. I will find Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Justice* and she will, somehow, speak for myself: "I think I have lost 'you' only to discover that 'I' have gone missing as well." Just last night, I will barely sleep thinking about one of my residents' mental health crisis, which only escalated after he thrust all the books off the living room shelf. I will seethe that our team didn't let me use my relationship with the resident to calmly de-escalate the situation. Instead they will call the police and criminalize the lived effects of trauma he did not ask for. Actions must have consequences, they tell me. Just to sleep, I will write down everything I feel and open right up to page 166 of Kristin Henning's *The Rage of Innocence: How America Criminalizes Black Youth*. Books will nourish me with the silence to listen to the world within my body. I will learn that some of my best actions begin when I sit down, be still, and grab a book. How do books help you notice your sensations and wait before reacting to them?

I know it's getting late, but just one more thing. That same kid who threw the books was also begging for them. I gifted him Shaka Senghor's *Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison* with a note that said I hope he shares his story one day. Last night he goes: "Aye Mr. Justin, I read the first two pages of that book and I know what this is about. Redemption. There it is. In a week I'm gonna have this whole book done. I'm gonna surprise you, Mr. Justin. You'll see."

So as I sit here with you, thinking about him and these books that fuel me in my every struggle, I can only think: what would we do without their nutrition?

FAVORITE PRISON RECIPES: CHICKEN/CHEESE WRAPS

By AL

INGREDIENTS:

- Pack or can of chicken breast chunks
- Block of white pepper jack cheese
- Pack of Cajun chicken ramen noodle seasoning
- ½ onion
- ½ green pepper
- Bag of white rice
- Butter
- Tortillas

DIRECTIONS:

Cut the onion and green pepper into thin slices. Put them into a bowl with a slice of butter and microwave until soft. Cook rice as directed. Put the chicken into a bowl and crumble the cheese into chicken. Heat in the microwave to melt cheese. Sprinkle the Cajun seasoning onto the rice. Warm the tortillas in microwave. Add onions and peppers to chicken cheese mixture. Assemble wraps, spreading rice on the tortilla and topping with chicken mix. Fold wraps and enjoy!

IN THE NEWS By John, FM Friend

DEEP DIVE: UNDERSTANDING SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES

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

When you go to a store to buy cereal, or a dealership to buy or lease a car, you are going to purchase one product, there for you in a store. But in either case – the seemingly simple box of Cheerios, or the new pickup truck – there might have been dozens of different entities involved in producing whatever you're bringing home. And the complexity of that process, known as the supply chain, was thrown seriously out of whack as the world struggled to get back to normal while continuing to address the presence of the coronavirus.

Your cereal starts as wheat, corn, or rice... sometimes grown in the United States, other times in a field thousands of miles away in Asia. Another company creates the boxes the cereal goes in; still another makes the plastic bag within that box. The box-maker also probably has its own supplier of cardboard.

Another might make the additional ingredients that go into the cereal, or the coating that keeps it from getting soggy. And all of those components might be trucked or flown to the cereal manufacturer by...you guessed it, another company. And then the final product will ship out again, this time on its way to the final stops on the supply chain: retail stores and online shopping warehouses.

There are major advantages to having a supply chain as complex as the one we have in America. By sourcing different parts or ingredients of products to companies that specialize in them, and by partnering with people all over the world, companies can ensure better quality at a better price... that isn't always the case, but it is possible. And that means they can charge you less for the cereal, and still make a profit. So the consumer (you) wins, but the company also wins.

The challenge of supply chains is that they are a delicate dance that really requires every piece to be working with a degree of predictability and continuity. If General Mills has all the ingredients to make Cheerios, but a cardboard

shortage has made it impossible for its boxmaker to send enough boxes for the cereal to go in, we have a big problem. Because less boxes of cereal can be made, and sent to the store, and if that lasts long enough, you'll start to have a shortage of Cheerios.

And since every cereal comes in a cardboard box, along with hundreds of other grocery items, a cardboard shortage would have that same impact on all types of goods. Eventually, because there is less cereal to sell, the price of that cereal is going to go up.

This is a made-up example, but it is emblematic of what is going on in the global economy today. There are dozens of countries that United States manufacturers do tons of business with in order to make products that contain microchips, or finished steel, or wood, or plastic parts. All of these countries have had different policies to control the spread of COVID, as have different states within our own borders, and some places have closed down workplaces and factories, where close working environments in indoor settings make the spread of the virus a danger. The pandemic has also prompted tremendous upheaval in the workforce, with millions of people leaving their jobs and reconsidering their careers or work aspirations.

Technology and innovation has made the global economy a well-oiled machine, designed to get goods and materials across the world in hours. But it still relies on human beings to get the job done. And with massive shifts in the pattern of work in this past year, the supply chain has been shaken on many products from the parts needed to build them, all the way to the ports where things are taken off of ships and sent around the country.

The supply chain will eventually recalibrate itself, once the world either rids itself of coronavirus or figures out a way to live as safely as possible with its presence. In the meantime, the kinks in the supply chain will continue to put pressure on retailers to raise prices on products that are available, and in some cases will delay consumer ability to buy certain things.



Supply chain

IN THE NEWS (CONTINUED) *By John, FM Friend*

WORLD NEWS

The emergence of a new coronavirus variant has governments around the world again grappling with tough decisions about what measures to take to control the spread of the disease and prevent hospitals from getting overrun

The Omicron variant, which was first detected by researchers in South Africa, remains a bit of a mystery. What we know for sure is that it is far, far more transmissible between people than the original version of COVID from early 2020 or even the Delta variant that spread quickly across the globe in the summer of 2021.

What is unclear still is whether or not Omicron is as potent as previous variants, or if it will prove to be a milder version of the virus. Very few deaths have been attributed to the variant despite its meteoric spread across the country, but it is still too early to tell if that is because the variant is actually less dangerous. It could be the case that the variant is just as bad as its predecessors for people who are not fully vaccinated, or who have built-up immunity from previous bouts of COVID.

The Omicron variant already accounts for 75% of all new cases reported in the United States, and its spread unfortunately times up with the holiday season, throwing a wrench in travel plans and seasonal celebrations for millions of Americans.

Russia set alarm bells off around the world in December when reporters broke the story that President Vladimir Putin (pictured to the right) was planning a major offensive against the neighboring country of Ukraine. Once a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Ukraine gained its independence in 1990 after the fall of the Soviet Union. It is now the second largest country in Europe behind Russia.



Russia has already been sanctioned by the United States and other countries for a previous Russian incursion into Ukraine, in 2014, which resulted in Russia taking part of the country called Crimea by annexation.

An attempt to take some or all of the remaining Ukraine by Russia would almost certainly prompt a harsh reaction from the west. President Joe Biden has said that severe economic consequences would soon follow such a move, though he also said the presence of U.S. troops on the ground to deter an invasion is not on the table.

NATIONAL

Since the 1970s, the Supreme Court's decision in a case called *Roe v. Wade* has guaranteed a woman's right to seek an abortion in America. Since that time, state laws and further Supreme Court cases have chipped away at what is guaranteed under the Roe decision, often by limiting the time

window in which an abortion can be sought after conception.

In December, the court heard oral arguments in a case called *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. At the center of the case is a Mississippi state law that bans abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy (a law in Texas passed since then went even further, limiting abortions to the first six weeks). Because most women do not even know they are pregnant until well into the first trimester of pregnancy, such laws offer either little time or no time at all for women to make an often painful and always consequential choice in their lives.

We will not know for months what the outcome of the case is. But the comments of several conservative justices during the arguments made clear that a complete or near overturning of *Roe v. Wade* is on the table. Were that to happen, abortion would essentially become a state's rights issue, with 50 states responsible for deciding whether women had the right to choose.

SPORTS

The NFL season is nearing its end, and the field appears to be wide open. After 15 weeks, only one team has really emerged as a front runner: the Green Bay Packers, led by surefire MVP candidate Aaron Rodgers. At 11-3, the Packers are the only team to have secured themselves a playoff spot, and actually have already clinched their division, the NFC North.



At times during the season, the Buccaneers, Patriots and Chiefs have all looked hard to beat as well. While it's now a longshot, the Washington Football Team is still hanging around in the Wild Card race at 6-8, with three games remaining on the schedule.

In the NHL, the Washington Capitals are out to another hot start, paced by an excellent first few months from its longtime captain Alex Ovechkin. The Great 8 is pursuing one of the most coveted records in sports: the career goals record of 894 set by Wayne Gretzky (pictured to the right).



Ovechkin has already bagged 22 goals this season, and now sits alone at 4th all-time with 752. He has an outside chance to reach 800 this season if the Caps make a run in the playoffs, but would then still need to score nearly 100 more to top Gretzky.

Fun fact about Wayne Gretzky: in hockey, you get a point for scoring a goal or recording an assist on someone else's goal. Gretzky had 2,857 career points; that is nearly 1,000 more than the next highest.



MEDITATION: BREATH AS NOURISHMENT

By Kelli

Hey Free Minds Brothers & Sisters,

I want to take a quick moment to tell you all that I'm grateful for you. I'm thankful that you all choose to be connected with us. I have a feeling that everyone here at Free Minds HQ would agree with me when I say that this connection with you enriches and **nourishes** me enormously in my own life. Thank you.

When we think of the word "nourishment" the first thing that probably pops into our minds is the sustenance of food – all of the vitamins, minerals, protein, etc. that our bodies need to function. Right? But as you read the articles and poems in this issue, you see that we are encouraging the embrace of a much broader definition of our theme. We need to nourish our physical bodies with food, water, sunlight, exercise, and sleep for sure. But we can't forget to nourish ourselves with acceptance, calm, focus, and being present in this moment. These things are VITAL for us to truly be healthy, strong and resilient. The cool thing is that we can access all of these through meditation and breathing, nourishing not just our bodies, but also our minds and our souls! With that in mind, let's MEDITATE!

Find a comfortable spot to sit or lie down. (*Just promise me that if you start to fall asleep, you'll sit up!) You can partner with a friend, taking turns to read the script aloud for each other, or you can read through it on your own before closing your eyes and recalling it as you meditate yourself.

When your body is comfortable, close your eyes and focus upon your breath. The wonderful thing about our breath is that it is always with us, wherever we are, and it can be used as an anchor to the present moment. That's all it takes to be mindful! So take a deep cleansing breath in through your nose... hold it for a moment... and exhale. Repeat these breaths. You may even put one hand on your heart, and the other on your belly. As you breathe in, feel your chest and belly expand... and then as you exhale, feel them collapse.

Breathe in... and out, feeling that warmth and connection between your hands and your body. Let your breath remind you that you are right here, right now, in this moment.

Don't worry about counting your breaths, or analyzing whether you're doing it right. Breathe normally and naturally. Just be aware of breathing in... and out. That's it! Continue breathing until you begin to notice a regular rhythm and cadence to your breath.

Now, as you continue to breathe, notice any stress, anxiety, or tension you feel in your mind or your body. Just acknowledge the feelings you have. They are there, and that's fine.

And now, on your next inhalation, consider the nourishment of this breath. This breath literally feeds our bodies and our minds. Oxygen sustains our life. Breathe it in... and release it... Inhale... and exhale.

Now consider the other things you may be needing right now. Maybe it's strength. Love. Calm. Courage. Acceptance. Imagine you are breathing in these things that you need. With each breath, you feel a softening, a releasing, and an acceptance. Continue to breathe in this natural soothing rhythm that has been innate to you since the day you were born.

In... and out... In... and out... You are right here, right now. You are good and you are worthy.

As you inhale, visualize that breath filling your body, your mind and your soul, with all that you need. Recognize that you are nourishing yourself. You are caring for yourself. You are sustaining yourself. You are loving yourself. Breathe in... exhale.

I hope you enjoyed the meditation and continue to use it. The more we practice meditation, the more beneficial and easier it gets! Wishing you acceptance, peace and strength.



REENTRY PROFILE: TY'S STORY

By Keela

Today I will be speaking with Ty who just came home this year after 23 years of incarceration. Ty went to prison in 1998 at the age of 17 and is now very active in our reentry program. He is also currently participating in Project Empowerment, one of the city's premier programs for returning citizens.

What's up Ty, thanks for agreeing to be our reentry profile for this month's Connect Magazine. Today, my first question to you is what is one of the biggest lessons you learned about being incarcerated?

There were so many but one that stands out is knowing who cares about you versus who doesn't, because had I listened to those who really cared, I would have never been incarcerated. I had time to reflect on this behind bars and I came to the conclusion that it's so important to take heed of the advice that you get from people who you know have your best interest.

What was your first full day of freedom like?

I was very excited. It was very surreal. Of course, I was happy to see my family, but seeing my mom was the highlight. Getting used to my freedom is still a process, I had to find ways to enjoy it and find ways to block out all of the outside noise and stay focused. And honestly, I'm still learning that.

What good advice have you received since being home?

The advice that I received that still resonates with me is to continue to be great, continue to be who I am. The reason why that's the best is because it came from people who really know me as a person, so it wasn't something that someone was just throwing out there. It was genuine. And it meant a lot to feel that we should all think of ourselves as great.

Did anything surprise you or did you expect things to be different about being home and if so what?

What's so surprising about being home is how imposing people can be, because everyone seems to have a plan for you and when their plans don't align with yours, it can cause a strain on the relationship. So, I would say develop a vision for yourself, have a destination and continue to work on finding the best way to get there how you see fit for yourself.

What are some challenges that you've had and how have you been able to move past them?

To be honest, I think when you've been incarcerated, sometimes people expect lower standards for you. But I have always had high standards when it comes to my goals and work ethic because they challenge me to be a better person. So it's important to maintain that standard for myself and not allow other people's expectations to cause me to deviate from them. To me that would be like giving up on myself.

What do you want to see happen for yourself in 2022?

I look forward to working harder, starting my own business, getting my own place, and achieving more goals. One goal is sitting down and speaking with the youth. I really have a desire to help them see the greatness inside of them so that they can know that they already have what it takes to be their best selves.

This month's *Connect* theme is nourishment. When you think of the word nourishment, what does it mean to you?

To me, nourishment comes from being wrapped inside by love from God and the people that I care about the most. I receive nourishment from family, friends and spirituality.



DID YOU KNOW?

DC Foodways: Half-Smokes and Mumbo Sauce

By Sofia

When you think of DC culture, aside from the monuments and politics, you probably think of upbeat go-go music, a flavorful grilled half-smoke, and fall-off the bone chicken

wings drenched in the city's signature mumbo sauce (also known as mambo sauce). But how did mumbo sauce and half-smokes come to be central to DC culture? There's a whole field dedicated to studying the meaning of food in certain cultures.

Foodways refers to the intersection of food with culture and history. Half-smokes and mumbo sauce are more than just delicious foods to be enjoyed, they are symbols of a lively DC history.

Half-smokes are sausages that are usually a combination of beef and pork and have both a spicier flavor and more of a bite than a hot dog. Half-smokes topped with chili are a fixture on the menu of the Black-owned restaurant, Ben's Chili Bowl, which opened in 1958 on U Street.

The restaurant quickly rose to prominence on U Street, once known as Black Broadway, where jazz legends like Duke Ellington and Miles Davis would perform and then stop by to grab a chili topped half-smoke. The restaurant continued to thrive even during times of unrest and economic decline, feeding Black activists during the riots of the late 1960s. Even when businesses on U-Street were destroyed and others fled to the suburbs, Ben's Chili Bowl continued to stay open throughout the 1970s and 80s. The neighborhood underwent gentrification beginning in the 1990s and 2000s and the displacement of lower to middle income Black residents and businesses due to soaring rent prices. Despite this, Ben's Chili Bowl has remained an iconic fixture on U Street, serving everyone from locals to presidents to world-renowned food critics.



Ben's Chili Bowl has helped put half-smokes on the map and an iconic place in DC culture today. Ben's and half-smokes represent the DC community's ability to unite and withstand the most trying of times, cementing a place in DC's rich Black history.

In DC, mumbo sauce originated at a restaurant called Wings-n-Things in the 1960s. There's always been a strong connection between mumbo sauce and DC's Black culture with the sauce being linked to go-go music. In fact, in 2008, the go-go band Mambo Sauce reached the Billboard music charts with their song "Welcome to DC" East of the Anacostia, you'll see plenty

of carryouts (takeout restaurants in DC) where you can find community members enjoying chicken wings with french fries and mumbo sauce. To DC's Black community, mumbo sauce is more than just a condiment that goes great with wings, it's a representation of the city's rich culture, aside from the monuments and government buildings.

Food often means so much more than the nutrients it provides us or the way it makes our taste buds tingle. Food brings communities together and represents rich histories and cultures.

Can you think about the foodways of your own culture? What specific foods come to mind when you think about your own culture or family history? What do those foods represent beyond just how great they taste? Let us know, we would love to hear from you!

SPECIAL OFFER!!!

WHEN A PARENT IS INCARCERATED: BOOKS YOU CAN READ TOGETHER TO CREATE UNDERSTANDING

Free Minds is grateful to George Washington University student Emily, who was motivated to launch the *Building a Bond Through Books* project by her passion for service.

Dear Free Minds Members:

Books can be a powerful tool to nourish us individually as well as in our relationships with our children. The simple act of reading together strengthens the bond between parent and child. Incarceration is a difficult subject to explain to children of all ages, and books that deal with topic sensitively can help bridge the gap and ease the pain of missing a parent, while creating greater understanding.

Building a Bond Through Books would like to offer Free Minds members who are parents the opportunity to receive a children's book that speaks about parental incarceration and separation. These books are a resource for parents struggling to explain their incarceration to their child or those who feel disconnected from their children. Parents can request a copy for themselves and their child (or just for themselves). A description of each book is below. You may pick one of the titles for yourself and your child.

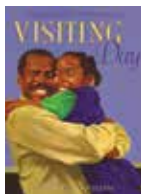
Kofi's Mom, by Richard Dyches
(Ages 3-6)

Kofi's Mom is a story about Kofi whose mother is sent to prison. It explores his feelings of loss and confusion. Through friends at school, Kofi begins to talk about his mom and to look forward to her return.



Visiting Day, by Jacqueline Woodson
(Ages 5-9)

A young girl and her grandmother prepare for a very special day – the one day a month they get to visit the girl's father in prison. As the little girl and her grandmother get ready, her father, who adores her, is getting ready, too, and readers get to join the community of families who make the trip together, as well as the triumphant reunion between father and child.



Ruby on the Outside,
by Nora Raleigh Baskin (Ages 10+)

Eleven-year-old Ruby Danes is about to start middle school, and only her aunt knows her deepest, darkest, secret: her mother is in prison.

Then Margalit Tipps moves into Ruby's condo complex, and the two immediately hit it off. Ruby thinks she's found her first true-blue friend – but can she tell Margalit the truth about her mom? Maybe not. Because it turns out that Margalit's family history seems closely connected to the very event that put her mother in prison, and if Ruby comes clean, she could lose everything she cares about most.



If you are interested, please send your request to:

Building a Bond through Books

ATTN: Emily, George Washington University
Phillips Hall, Office 409 G, 801 22nd St. NW
Washington, DC 20052

When you reach out, please include the title of the book you want and your mailing address. If you wish to send the book to your child, please also include their name, their guardians' contact information, and their mailing address. Supplies are limited to the first 80 requests received.

Sincerely,
Emily, *Building a Bond Through Books*

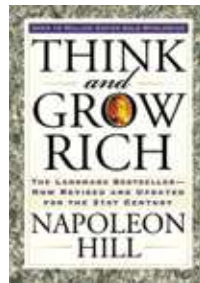
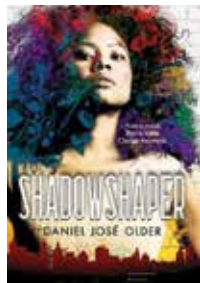
WHAT WE'RE READING

with Neely

Have you recently read a book that left an impression on you, good or bad? We want to hear about it! Send us your thoughts (approximately 100 words) and we may feature your book in the next "What We're Reading."

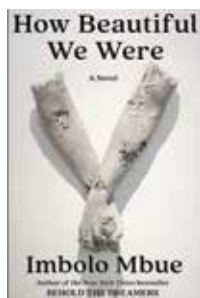
- **TT: *Shadowshaper* by Daniel José Older**

I just finished this today and am definitely thinking about the sequel. I can tell the author is an artsy person and very creative. This book would make an awesome movie or TV series, and it was super funny! I liked the riddle idea too – where do lonely women go to dance: the ocean shore. The characters were great too – lots of emotions and personalities. It's always cool to read a book that relates to you.



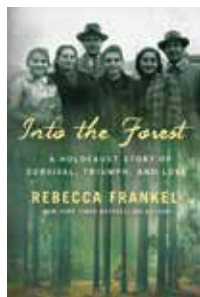
- **Tia: *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill**

I would call this a business and personal development guide. The first chapter, "The Power of Thought," talks about how we can literally think our way into situations and circumstances. To me, that's extremely powerful in itself to think what I THINK has power to manifest what I want or don't. Being in control of my thoughts is something I'm even more mindful of as I'm reading this book. One phrase in the book I've highlighted is, "Every person who starts or gets half way up the ladder does so by deliberate and careful planning." I noticed I underlined the words "deliberate" and "careful" in my book (I haven't always been either) about 6 times because for me this is the recipe and where I've found myself thrive. When I include those two things, I experience the best outcomes or greatest success. And when I don't, it's usually a disaster. This book will be a tool I'll forever use as a reference. Great read.



- **MV: *How Beautiful We Were* by Imbolo Mbue**

This is about a village suffering environmental damage and oppression because of an oil company. The stories of different members are told and they all share similar struggles. This young girl named Thula comes to America and studies and learns about movements, revolutions, etc. She plans a revolution in her home village to overcome the oil company. It was a great book! I don't want to ruin it lol, but the book provokes a lot of emotions, which is a testament to the author's great writing.



- **Julia: *Eve* by Victor LaValle**

This graphic novel is about a young girl who wakes up on a post-apocalyptic Earth that has been devastated by climate change. She is alone except for a robotic teddy bear that claims it's programmed to protect her, and a recorded message from her father about her mission to save the planet. I've read and enjoyed some other books by this author, so when I heard that he was writing this graphic novel I knew I had to read it. Eve's story is exciting, moving, and weird in all the best ways. I would definitely recommend this to anyone who likes graphic novels or science fiction.

- **Allen: *Into the Forest: A Holocaust Story of Survival, Triumph, and Love* by Rebecca Frankel**

This book is about the real-life story of the Rabinowitz family surviving the Holocaust by hiding in a forest in eastern Poland for two years. They miraculously survived two years in the woods – through brutal winters, Typhus outbreaks, and merciless Nazi raids. After the war, they lived as refugees in Italy before immigrating to the US.

- **SJ: *Concrete Rose* by Angie Thomas**

This book that features a teen parent made me look at my son, who is a teenager and has a child, in a totally different way. Since I wasn't a teenage father, reading Mav's story in this book helped me relate to him.

REAL WORLD OF WORK

By Irving, FM Member

Free Minds member Irving tells us about his experience learning the craft of cabinetmaking while he was incarcerated. Irving came home in 2020 and currently works for Amazon delivery. He hopes to one day get his commercial driver's license to operate tractor trailers, buses, and other commercial vehicles.

A couple of years ago, I was going through the beginning stages of IRAA (the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act) and I had a lot on my mind. I needed to find something to do with my time because just sitting around doing nothing was making me agitated. An idle mind in prison is never a good thing.

I'll never forget the time I walked past the program building and the instructor, Mr. J, was trying to get people to sign up for the cabinet-making class. He said to me, "You look like you're pretty good with your hands. Do you want to make some cabinets?" I said, "Uh, sure, I'll try it!" So he signed me up for the class. It was an 11-month course, and we built cabinets that would be sent to affordable housing developments - they were for people who needed a home.

Growing up, I saw my father and uncles build stuff for the house, but this cabinetmaking class was the first time I had done carpentry work. The class was a great distraction for me because the whole time I had to stay focused on what I was doing. To build cabinets, you have to know numbers. That was the best part about it - learning how to do this type of math. When I got my GED, I was like, "When am I ever going to use algebra again? What is the point of algebra?" Well, when I got into this class, I thought, "Okay this is what algebra is for!" You have to have those numbers correct. I've made some cabinets that did not have the numbers correct, and they were hideous, lopsided doors and everything. It was a challenge and it kept my mind occupied and sharp.

When I was making cabinets, I wanted to do it the correct way not just because it was for someone's home, but also because it was my work. It was something to take pride in. Every day, when class was over, I would study when I got back to the unit. We were tested weekly on what we learned, and then there was a final test in order to be certified. The textbook was really thick. I used to think, "How am I going to retain all this information for the certification?" So I read that book every day and studied the questions. I passed with an 87% - something like that.

I wanted to get involved in cabinetmaking because the instructor explained that we could make money off of our skills once we were home. It was a potential path to employment. At the time, I didn't know what the job situation was going to be like when I got out. I figured that having this class under my belt would give me some type of advantage when looking for a job. We were also certified through a nearby community college. I had never been to college before, and I thought it would be cool to be certified and to take an actual college course. Having a college professor grade my work was exciting to me. Getting involved with programs like cabinetmaking have also helped my reentry a great deal. I developed a strong work ethic, which has been important in my job with Amazon. The skills and learning experiences have also made me a better colleague and a hard worker.

This was not one of those programs you could do just to get out of the unit. You had to pass the test every week in order to continue with the class. So my classmates were really serious about wanting to make the cabinets. I've been in places where the tension is so thick you can feel it, but it wasn't like that in this class. Mr. J was one of those

kinds of instructors who didn't want nonsense in the class, so if you were there for it, you were getting removed from the class. It was a great atmosphere and a relaxed classroom. He made everything fun. He even got me watching the home remodeling TV show *Property Brothers*. He would have it on every morning when we came into class. So you would sit there and watch how these guys went about their work. People just started getting really into it. I still do watch them - and a couple other remodeling shows - now that I'm home.

Once, there was a funny moment involving table saws. When we used the table saws, Mr. J used to instruct everybody to stand on the side of it. But I thought it would be better to stand directly behind it because the way he was telling us to do it looked difficult. Mr. J said, "Okay, stand behind it but you're not going to be able to control the wood." So I put a big piece of plywood up on the table saw and stood behind it. As the wood got closer and closer to the blade, all this sawdust suddenly started shooting back at me. But I wasn't paying attention to the sawdust because I was talking to Mr. J trying to show him that I could do it! My mouth was wide open because I was talking, so the sawdust shot into my mouth and got all over my face and clothes. Except for my eyes which had goggles protecting them, every part of me was covered in sawdust. Since this was the middle of class, I couldn't leave to change. I had to sit in there with sawdust all over my face. People said I looked like Casper the ghost, and everything tasted like wood for the next day or so. I was embarrassed, but it was funny. I had no idea the sawdust would shoot back like that!

My advice for Free Minds members reading this from prison would be to find something to get involved in. Try things that you think you might not like, like crocheting. I took a crochet class in prison. I never thought I wanted to crochet! But just learning about it kept my mind occupied with something engaging. Being engaged like that also helps keep you out of trouble. The last write-up I received was in 2004 because between 2004 and 2020, all I did was programs. Whatever program they had available, I signed myself up. The more I got involved in programs, the less I got involved in foolish stuff.

Prison is a place where it is easy to lose hope. You can't lose hope. Good things can still happen. I never thought this IRAA case would get me out. But I'm home now. You can't lose faith. You have to stay focused if you're serious about coming home.



BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club

Free Cyntoia

with Neely



Hello Free Minds readers! Our latest BAM book, *Free Cyntoia* by Cyntoia Brown-Long, follows the journey of Cyntoia, who was sentenced to life as a teenager. Cyntoia's story is one of resilience and determination, which exemplifies the possibilities that can be achieved when we find and hold onto our own beacon of hope. We've received several of your responses since our last *Connect*, and wanted to share them with you all. Thank you for being open and sharing your thoughts, y'all continue to amaze us with your powerful reflections:

behavior and self-destructive choices she made early in her life? Have any of those same things influenced you in your own life?

AW: Environmental and circumstantial pressures, coupled with Sister Cyntoia's lack of definitive identity as a consequence of inhuman racist notions of racial identity – lighter skin superiority to darker skin – and the lack of a community and family support capable of embracing her as an important part of it. These factors and others naturally will push anyone out into the cold, cold streets. Out of hurt, anger, and fear of further abandonment and alienation.

MH: I think the people who were around her, especially in school. As usual, young people think they know better than their families and elders. Who we are with influences who we are.

TT: I think Cyntoia lacked understanding, guidance, and love from a figure she could look at with respect. She did a lot on impulse and I think this exhibits a lack of deep understanding of oneself. She was misunderstood, but didn't even understand herself. I could say I was like this as well.

AH: I think she rebelled and did a lot of the things she did early on due to being picked on by others and wanting answers as to why. By not getting these answers, she began to act out and fight while doing other things to show she wasn't different. This type of behavior and attitude only led her to act out more and become connected with the wrong influences where she thought she was accepted.

1. Cyntoia tries desperately to understand why she rebelled so much growing up. What do you think was most responsible for the negative

2. Cyntoia talks about the transformative power of dialogue she witnesses in her college classes, where people from opposite backgrounds talk with each other to learn about incarceration. Do you think society's opinion on the criminal legal system would change if people were able to hold personal conversations with someone who has been incarcerated? Why or why not?

MH: I do believe so, when you know someone you will see their humanity. If you don't know the people, then you will believe whatever has been said about a person or a group of people. We always assume things about others, whether it's because of something they did or where they are from. For example, when I talk to people who have never known a person where I am from or been there before, they think we live in huts or tents and our transportation is the camel, which we don't. In fact, I have only seen a camel once in real life, when I was driving in a car and passed one.

AW: Conversations, when one's heart and mind is invested in community building, would change society's mind and opinions. Face-to-face, even a voice over a phone, would serve to transform our twisted views of one another on both sides, as the line that separates us disappears and our humanity becomes even clearer over the dehumanizing influence of a system that paints these vicious images and feeds our ignorant views of one another. It is a process that has to be sensitive to all our concerns for a healthy and secure communication. Brutal honesty and truth should never be discarded.

QM: Yes. I think most of society looks at incarcerated people as monsters or something evil. Some are, but not all are. I think once they have a personal conversation with someone who has been locked up, it will change their mind because there are some very smart, creative people locked up.

JS: No, because the criminal punishment system is indelibly connected to the culture of those who oppress us or benefit from our incarceration. So even if we diversified our dialogue, that's all it will be. Although you may have well-meaning people, there's a difference between compassion and empathy. Compassion – feel sorry, but do nothing. Empathy – feel sorry and pain and take action.

3. On page 40, Cyntoia reflects on how she learned more from the girls around her than what was being taught in school. Have you learned more from books or real-life experiences? Do you think it's better to be book educated, life educated, or a mixture of both?

AH: I've learned a lot from real life experiences more early on, but once I became book educated I learned even more. I think it's better to be both book educated and life educated since a mixture of both can help you help others from your knowledge and experience.

TT: I think I have learned the most relative things from life experiences. I believe the latter to be a powerful "inspirer" in grasping the contents in any book worth a study. To have a mix of both is to have a deeper understanding in certain aspects of life, but to have only "book education" is to lack the reality in applying it.

MH: Life experience will confirm whether what you learned is true or false. For example, when I was in school we were taught how mixing elements will create something. But I only knew this from a book, I never experimented to see it. There was a student who was studying mechanical engineering. He spent his days in the classroom and evenings in the garage practicing what he learned. After a few years, he was able to build a new engine. He said if I only spent my time in the classroom, I would not achieve what he did. If we don't implement what we learn in real life, then we will not benefit much from what we learned.

DS: I know it's better to have both, however does "life" educated mean the streets? Because that's what those girls around Cyntoia taught her, and everything they taught her was self-destructive. You can never go wrong with the proper book education that teaches you how to do for self. And street smarts is a must, it'll keep you on your toes and able to recognize deception.

4. The one rule in life Cyntoia sets for herself, and which she refuses to break, is her mother's rule of never asking someone for money. Is there a rule in your life that you refuse to break, no matter the circumstances? Why is that rule so important to you?

QM: My number one rule is to never give up and always have faith that one day Allah will set me free. It's important to me

because who are we without faith?

JS: To never let someone's viewpoint on me be greater than my own view about myself. Many people have negative opinions about others that a lot of times dictate how a person navigates life or sees themselves. Soon you start to seek validation outside of you and you will never be satisfied.

TT: I refuse to insult my loved ones, especially my mother. I won't do anything to make her feel like I resent her or think of her in a demeaning way. It doesn't matter if she does me wrong. If I love someone I will never hurt them. This is important to me because life is too short to love and care with restraint. It is important because of that thin line between love and hate. That line should be miles thick. I also cherish history between loved ones.

DS: A rule I refuse to break is to never be a follower. I refuse to let someone lead me to destruction. I do my best to stay original and take righteous steps. This is an important rule to me because time after time I've seen too many people end up in very bad situations being followers.

5. Free Cyntoia explores the narrative around "trafficking" and how it's often misunderstood (p. 113). Did Cyntoia's awakening to the fact that she had been trafficked change the way you saw this issue at all? If so, in what way?

JS: "Trafficking" is a term I heard a lot in the street, but never referring to the prostitution of underage (or any age) women/ girls. It opened my eyes and heart because all my life I've been around prostitution in the streets, but was stoic to it even when I witnessed the worst of it. It hurt me so much thinking about this young sister, because my sister is in this life.

DS: The bottom line is Cyntoia was taught to use her body to get what she wanted by those she trusted. It's up to real men to make sure the Kuts of the world don't get ahold of our most precious resources: our daughters and women. Period. We have to be held accountable.

QM: Yes, I always looked at trafficking as drug dealing. It opened my eyes at how our young queens are being treated all because of a sweet-talking clown for the name of love. It's crazy.

AH: Yes, it changed the way I saw this particular issue. I was always of the idea of it someone being forced or taken to do certain things out of their control. After reading about Cyntoia's story, it awakened me like it did her after realizing what she was caught up in. So in the way you may have thought something to be may not be exactly how it is and this story made me see that.



AROUND THE WORLD: IF LEBANON WAS A WOMAN

By Aiyah, Free Minds Friend

I am a poet, filmmaker, and Arabic calligraphist, currently based in Egypt but originally from DC. I have spent a lot of time on the road, and much of my art and writing explores the ways in which traveling can serve as an avenue of healing in our lives. I am also a volunteer with Free Minds, and a travel writer. One of the places I have traveled to several times over the years is Lebanon. Lebanon is located in the Middle East, by the Mediterranean sea, it shares borders with Syria and Israel. It's an incredibly small country with a population of about 6 million. The capital city is Beirut. This is my creative take on my experience with Lebanon.

BEIRUT, LEBANON – She moves by the sea, the shape of her lit by a half moon. You can hold her in your gaze for hours, watch her step towards the sea, lay her body over the sand, tilt her head towards the moon.

She closes her eyes. The long strands of her hair dance along the borders of her face. And like Beirut, from afar, she appears in her kindest form: a quiet image of beauty, inviting you.

Come near and you'll find a tangle of unfinished thoughts in her gaze, a look that begs to be left alone, a body that wavers constantly between opposing desires. Her war, her endless tragedy, is that she wants two things at once, two things that cannot be had together: to end it all, and to fight against that end.

For the sake of our story, we follow her, study her, record her, because how else do we gather a country on paper if not through its characters, through a series of fleeting instances, a catalog of images?

There's a traveler standing by the shore. She can't recall what country she is in. She watches a family gathered nearby in a circle of plastic chairs, singing, laughing, running waist deep into the water with their clothes on. A white shack behind them serves coffee to the older regulars who come here to escape, bored of their wives, their lack of options.

Further down the shore, a trio of fishermen from Syria, catching their dinner. In the dusk, then, in the dark.

Up the hill, a woman sits in a messy room, facing the suddenness of her dying, the slow discovery of what it was causing her all this pain. Her husband, his back in agony from carrying her, walks with a cane to the other room. He feels the urge to cry and needs her to be far.

A woman sits with a man she loves beneath a tree, facing the sea. A shadow over a bench, a pair of voices. The city

no longer turns on the lights at night, unintentionally distributes havens of privacy for lovers with nowhere else to go. Hours later, when we'll pass the same bench, the shadow of them will still be there, their bodies emptied of speech.

The truth is something we'd rather leave unsaid. But the longer it lives unspoken, the more insistent it becomes. So here is a bit of kept truth I've been holding: if Lebanon was a woman, she wouldn't last a day. She harbors too many contradictions. Too much of her pulls you in. Just as much makes you want to run. To gather all of her on paper is a messy process, as troubling for the writer as it is for the one who reads.

Think of her this way: she's the beauty in the neighborhood; every man has his eyes on her. Each of them takes turns guessing at her future. No one anticipates anything ordinary. And no matter how far they stray in their predictions of her, each of them submits the possibility of their role in her life by declaring simply, she'll marry the man who can afford her.

Instead, she falls for an idle musician with green eyes who sits by the esplanade, strumming his guitar all day, not a dollar in his pocket. She loves him helplessly, but all he sees in this world is his music, the sea he sings to. Every morning, you can hear her yelling, your music or me. And every morning he chooses his music. She could leave; he doesn't try to stop her. But she resigns herself to an unanswered love, content in her agony.

She defies every elaborate prediction made for her future. She belongs to the one who deserves her least, just as Lebanon belongs to a government filled with men who think nothing of her. Still, she rebels – in the tiny space she fights to keep between Syria and Israel, her insistence on being, despite her smallness, her stubborn way of holding her beauty, even after 15 years of civil war, more years of war with Israel, rampant corruption that has emptied the pockets of the Lebanese people and made millionaires of government officials, and an explosion at the port of Beirut that is one of the largest a country has suffered from.

It's what makes her so precious, so wanted that threatens her each day. Her sea to the left, her large, looming mountains to the right, her pine trees and the enchanting heights of her. It's what makes her wanted, and being wanted as a country has only ever brought trouble.

Let us leave the politics, her tragedy. It's enough. Come, and walk with me over the staggered rocks, towards the fisherman who stand apart from it all, for whom life is a series of nows, now I fish, now the sun sets, now I carry my dinner up the steep hill, towards my family. The fish will cook while we gather on his little balcony, watch the country fall to sleep beneath the last light of the day.

We could almost hold her. It's her most tender hour, the time she appears the most vulnerable.

Lebanon – who wants her wars and wants her peace just as much.



FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB & WRITING WORKSHOP

1816 12th Street NW
Washington, DC 20009

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: WELLBEING

Continuing the conversation of all the different ways we nourish ourselves and our communities, we're going to start 2022 off with a focus on **wellbeing**. What does it mean to be physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy? Do you have healthy habits or exercise tips that you want to share? In what ways do you exercise your mind as well as your body (hint: maybe by reading, writing, or learning?). Maybe you have tips for coping with stress or anxiety – let us know! Taking care of ourselves is vital, but we also want to take care of each other. What does wellness look like for a family or a community? Paint a picture of a healthy neighborhood. What does it look like, sound like, feel like? What can we do to prioritize health and wellness for ourselves and for the people around us? What suggestions do you have for Free Minds as an organization to prioritize wellness for you our members?

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!

CROSSWORD ANSWERS:

ACROSS: 4. Watered; 5. Garfield; 6. Ideas; 8. Apples; 11. Love; 12. Learn

DOWN: 1. Read; 2. Weightloss; 3. Study; 7. Share; 9. Supper; 10. Program



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