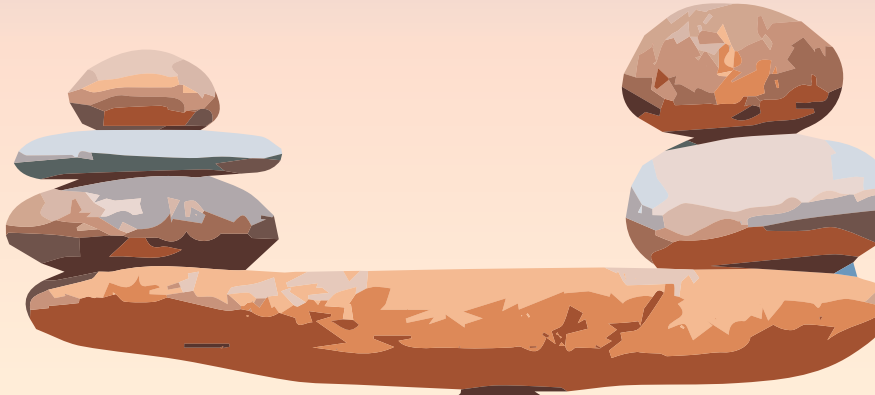


April/May 2023
Vol. 12, Issue 2

Free minds Connect



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: BETTER TOGETHER

Dear Balanced Free Minds members,

I hope this issue finds you feeling proud of yourself, deep in a learning journey, and connected to others; and if not, I know after reading this issue, you will at least be on your way! This issue is filled with practical, concrete steps we can all take in the constant movement that is equilibrium. Balance is a state I find many people aspire to but often fall short of, and that includes me. When I was a kid, I was always fascinated with the balance beam in gymnastics. I could not understand how the gymnasts could flip high in the air and land on such a narrow strip of wood – and stay on! FM poet DT expresses this challenge on page 12:

Walking on that beam takes everything I have in me
The nerves, the weight, the agony & gravity

What does it take to achieve balance? Well, as I'm still learning, it takes a lot; and as our amazing contributors and writers share, it's not something you achieve once, but is an ongoing back and forth. A literal "balancing act." My senior dog Diego flops over all the time, but he's got me there to pick him up and help him regain his balance. As for the gymnasts, they've got those spongy mats to land on as they are constantly learning new moves. The Free Minds Family can be one of those mats to soften the landing, or a helping hand when you're feeling unsteady.

But balance isn't just personal; so many things in this world are unbalanced. In the Deep Dive (page 26), FM newsman John discusses how risky investments by banks skewed their balance sheets, and cost taxpayers over \$20 billion. And on page 9, AA shares about the unbalanced scales of justice. I'm amazed by the incredible thinkers, writers, and changemakers in the Free Minds family who are working to right these wrongs.

You will read about Rodney (page 6) who has only been home a year and already has 2 daughters and a bull puppy. He lets us know how his family keeps him centered and on his purpose. Jordan found a new sense of identity as a college student and was able to balance his coursework with his other responsibilities thanks to DC's updated YRA Youth Rehabilitation Act (page 7). Araba offers some awesome advice for when life feels overwhelming and that sense of equanimity disappears: take it one day at a time and even one hour at a time (page 8). You all are true masters in this area as we read

from your letters.

FM member HH reminds us that life is a duality with both positive and negative, and shares some deep insight describing how his mental health condition creates constant imbalance in his thoughts and feelings, but with understanding and accountability he is able to bring his actions into balance (page 9). That's a much harder feat than any balance beam gymnast can do!

In our Paying It Forward column (page 16), we learn about a company with the goal of balancing being good stewards of the environment with serving customers ethical, natural products – and how one of their team members went the extra mile to bring restorative practices into their workplace. We are so thrilled to partner with Lush as they donated facial scrubs and sweet smelling lotions for our reentry members (I can still smell them wafting through the office as I type).

Free Minds friend Peter, who is a published author, shares about working with an editor and the push-pull of revisions to ultimately strengthen his work (page 24). FM member Broderick admits his hard-fought career success in the culinary world has not allowed for perfect balance, but it's a goal he's working towards (page 33).

KW shares how the rigid expectations of what a man should be brought dangerous imbalance to his life when he was growing up (page 13). His ability to recognize that he only needs to measure up to his own standards is a true recipe for peace and centredness.

Lastly, SV takes us to a moment of true equilibrium, listening to soul-replenishing music (page 13), "[a]nd of course my writing completes the feeling of fulfillment that I get."

May we all keep working towards this sense of fulfillment, and no matter what, keep lifting each other up as we walk on the balance beam of life!

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: Hometown Pride

The Connect is a bimonthly creative writing magazine 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 Meg

NoName Book Club Connects to Free Minds Book Club

Rapper and poet Nonaime visited our Jail Book Club on March 1st, 2023. As the creator of the Nonaime Book Club, she is dedicated to shining a light on the voices of young people of color. In preparation for the book club at the DC Jail, members read the book *The Stars and the Blackness Between Them* by Junauda Petrus, along with nationwide chapters of the Nonaime Book Club. The novel's love story celebrates the enduring bonds of two people determined to persevere together, as well as the intricate relationships among family. Member Shaneeka loved the reading, saying "I love this book. It helps me through the hard days." Nonaime participated in invaluable conversations with our members, covering topics from self love and forgiveness to incarceration and liberation. Members shared their own writing, responding to a prompt about layers to comment on the importance of finding yourself and living unapologetically. Nonaime shared her own writing and talked openly with our members about her own experiences and what she's learned on her journey. She expressed her passion for literature and elevating voices and was met with incredible insight and valuable perspectives. She really connected with our members despite the shortness of the meeting, and we are incredibly grateful she was able to join us for such an impactful day. Member Rob had this to say on behalf of the Men's Book Club: "We appreciate Nonaime for stopping by, and if there is anything we can do to help her mission with the Nonaime Book Club she can count on us!"

Peer Support Graduation

In March we recognized and congratulated our fifth cohort of Peer Support graduates! This 12-week program offers intensive training in peer support and leadership, and graduates are integral resources for other members in reentry. The program, dedicated to member Joshua Samuel who advocated for the importance of healing in light of trauma from incarceration, highlights the fundamental network of support Free Minds members find with one another. Using their first-hand experience and training, Peer Support graduates help others navigate the traumas of incarceration and the complexities of reentry. We are incredibly proud of our graduates' accomplishments and cannot wait to see them continue to succeed!

Job Readiness and Personal Skill Building Apprenticeship

In April, 12 Free Minds members participated in our Job Readiness and Personal Skill Building Workshop, where they worked on interview skills and heard from fellow members successfully working in various fields including real estate investment and non-profit work. Members took a field trip to the Martin Luther King Jr. Library, where they were given a tour by fellow member Charles. Members picked up library card applications for future visits, events, access to books, materials, and other resources they may need. For many members, this was their first time visiting a library. Member Daniel put his new knowledge to use and took part in a virtual job interview using the library's resources. Daniel has secured a second interview. We are so proud of all of our apprentices, and are excited to see where their new skills take them!

Free Minds Members on the NFL Network

The NFL Inspire Change initiative selected Free Minds to be featured on the NFL Network as an organization creating lasting change on both the individual and community level. Their film crew went inside the DC jail and filmed one of our book club sessions, as well as interviews with Free Minds staff Shannon and Kelli, and Poet Ambassador Joe. They also interviewed NFL All Rookie Special Teamer Johnson Bademosi about his experiences and advocacy with the criminal legal system. The segment aired on the show NFL Now, and is also available online. Your friends and family can find the video on our website at freemindsbookclub.org/about-us/in-the-press/. We are so grateful for the recognition and everyone who worked hard to make this possible!

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:

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., Shawn, Roderick, Antoine, Davon, Jahmeze, Deonte, Stephon, Kavon, Damani, Kelvin, Melvin, John

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. Here are some of your thoughts on the January/February/March 2023 Connect on Expectations.

MP: I got the Free Minds *Connect* magazine. This is special what y'all are doing. It's so much, but in such a small dynamic. Thank you all for this. The photos of the city gave me and a couple of guys something to talk about. The YRA article really taught me some things I was confused about.

AA: I just received the *Connect* issue on Expectations. I must say that I am moved and impressed on how people can put some of their deepest thoughts down on paper... All the poems and essays in this Expectations issue are mind-blowing. I never even thought about it to be honest. The one expectation I do have is to respect myself as well as others.

AB: I received my Expectations issue today and as I was reading, I came to the poem section; and when I saw my "To Be Great" poem, I was amazed that it got selected to be printed in the issue for others to read. Hopefully this poem will inspire the reader that he or she can be great!

AHA: I am always glad to read about the many achievements

from those returning home or meeting their expectations they have set. This issue on Expectations I enjoyed hearing many different views on it and a lot of advice from many that I enjoyed. We all can learn from those who have returned home before us and from their experiences in areas we may have not experienced yet.

Jamal's story hit home for me since he touched on so much in what we expect coming home but then gives advice on what we expect may not be what it seem even if told different. So his advice to set extremely high expectations for ourselves is best and may not be disappointed in other people when they can't deliver on what they may have said they would. So I enjoyed his piece and many others overall.

To hear from many in the reentry article on page 24 gave me a lot of insight also since anyone like myself who has been incarcerated a long time may have many expectations, but still have to face what everything will be like. For me I'm not 17 no more so hearing from others who have gone before me is good, so now I see why this theme is so important as a topic for discussion.



QUOTE-I-VATOR

"Life is balance of holding on and letting go." – Rumi, 13th-century Persian poet

"Throughout the infinite, the forces are in a perfect balance, and hence the energy of a single thought may determine the motion of a universe."

– Nikola Tesla, Serbian-American inventor

"My point is, life is about balance. The good and the bad. The highs and the lows. The piña and the colada." – Ellen DeGeneres, comedian and talk show host

"What is joy without sorrow? What is success without failure? What is a win without a loss? What is health without illness? You have to experience each if you are to appreciate the other. There is always going to be suffering. It's how you look at your suffering, how you deal with it, that will define you." – Mark Twain, American author (Adventures of Huckleberry Finn)

"The ingredients of both darkness and light are equally present in all of us, [...] The madness of this planet is largely a result of the human being's difficulty in coming to virtuous balance with himself."

– Elizabeth Gilbert, author (Eat, Pray, Love)

"Life is like riding a bicycle. You must keep moving to maintain the balance." – Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist

"There seems in most countries to be either one extreme or the other. Truly a paradise could exist wherever material progress and spiritual values could be properly balanced." – Malcolm X, civil rights activist

"Part of keeping work and life in balance is surrounding yourself with people that have similar aspirations." – Damon Dash, entrepreneur and record executive



Malcolm X

FAMILY TIES: BALANCE MAKES ME HAPPY; IT MAKES ME FEEL WHOLE

HOW THE LOVE OF FAMILY HELPS ONE FM MEMBER FIND BALANCE

By Kelli

In a conversation with Kelli, Free Minds member Rodney shares how the love of his family and his faith help him to find balance.

KELLI: First, congratulations! You just had a baby girl last month!

RODNEY: (Laughs) That's right! I haven't even been home for a full year, and I've got a wife, two daughters and a bully puppy!

KELLI: Which is exactly why I wanted to talk to you for this issue on balance – that is a lot to juggle when you've just come home after spending 28 years in prison! Can you start by telling us what you were like before you got locked up?

RODNEY: I was 19 years old. I was young, running around doing crazy stuff that teenagers do, getting into a lot of trouble. I want to emphasize though, that I have always been family oriented. So, I would never do anything around my family to endanger them. I never got in my mother's car or let a family member in my car back then. I didn't want to mix them up in anything crazy that I was involved in at the time.

KELLI: And what was it like when you got sentenced? How did it impact you?

RODNEY: I was sentenced to 115 years to life. Getting that sentence was like having the breath smashed out of me. I kept thinking: *I just got 115 years! Like I'm never going home. Ever.* Being 19, that's a whole lot to process. I felt like I had to transform into something worse than I truly was, because I was about to travel to a whole different world. I was going to Lorton. I felt I had to become a different individual.

KELLI: Did you have any sense of your future?

RODNEY: To be honest, even early on, I had a little hope. I felt I was lied on and figured if I could find a way to prove this, then there'd be a chance to be

free again. A few years in, I met a young woman named Lanet through a mutual friend. We weren't romantic or anything, just good friends. I could trust Lanet immediately. She had her own thing going on. She was working and just different from the average woman her age. Most people in their twenties and thirties want to go party. But she was focusing on running for council member, and Advisory Neighborhood Commission! When everyone else was at clubs, she was at church. I was like, *This is different, I ain't used to this!*

At some point we started dealing with each other. She came to visit me and our chemistry, our vibe was good. We were in love! We wanted to be together and were planning around my coming home on appeal.

They took more than seven years to deny my appeal. She found out before I did because I was in the hole. She sent me the decision through the mail. I called her right away. When she told me it was true, I felt like the walls were closing in on me!

Lanet said, "You don't need to worry about what's next for us. Just focus on what we're going to do next to get you out of prison. I'm not going anywhere!" Now, I know that's probably the right thing to say at a time like this, but the truth is I still had 100 years to life. I was like, *I hear you, cool, but I know this is where things are going to start to decline... I'm not coming home no time soon.* But instead of declining, it was just the opposite. She came to see me, and she said, I've got an idea. I'm going to law school so I can get you out. I said, "Okay..." but I'm not thinking she really going to law school. Sho' 'nuff fast forward a few months later, she came back to tell me she was accepted to law school, had rented out her condo and was moving to Michigan to attend law school! At that point, I said in my mind, *Whoa. Yeah, I think I need to go ahead and marry her.* I proposed. We were married in 2011. Yeah, she's special.

continued on page 29



JUST LAW: HOW HAVING MY RECORD SET ASIDE CHANGED MY OUTLOOK

Interview by DJ

Free Minds members DJ and Jordan caught up recently to discuss the Youth Rehabilitation Amendment Act (YRA), and how this legislation has had a positive impact on Jordan's journey.

DJ: We are here today to discuss D.C. Code § 24-906, which is the District of Columbia's Youth Rehabilitation law. This law promotes many different benefits for youth who were charged and convicted with various offenses within the District of Columbia. One such benefit being the set aside of the criminal case from public review after the individual completes a term of probation, which is normally the final part of a sentence imposed by a court. Before you learned about the YRA, what was life like with a criminal conviction?

Jordan: Life was tough, especially as a young teen trying to make some money the right way. Jobs wouldn't really look my way, especially being that I was on home confinement, so I was at a standstill.

DJ: What was the first step you took when you learned about the YRA?

Jordan: My lawyer introduced the YRA to me while my case was still open. As a teenager, I didn't know much about YRA or law really.

DJ: Was there anything you had to do in order to prepare your case to benefit from the YRA? Like, did you have to gather paperwork about your case; certificates; support letters from family and work?

Jordan: My lawyer gathered things like college acceptances, report cards, and support letters from my high school, family, and a few members of my community to show my judge.

DJ: Was there support from the government even though you did everything in your power to qualify? What did the government say?

Jordan: Once the government knew I was aspiring to go to college, I think this played a factor in the decision making in my case.

DJ: Did you have to appear before the judge again, like people do for a resentencing?

Jordan: No, I didn't. I just waited for the judge to make the decision to grant the set aside.

DJ: Having benefited from the YRA law, did it change your life in any particular way?

Jordan: Definitely. The YRA allows my conviction to be set aside from employers and the outside world so that I could still pursue the type of life that I want to have. *(Note: the set aside provision under the YRA is not the same as record sealing; having your record set aside means it would be hidden from the public when you may be applying for jobs or housing, for example, but law enforcement and the courts can still access your records).* Having my record set aside helped me feel like I belonged in college. The Youth Rehabilitation Act extends beyond employment as it plays a critical role in a young person developing into an adult altogether. Without YRA, my outlook on life would've probably led me to my demise. In my opinion, YRA gave me a different identity in a way that would allow me to pursue my dreams instead of watching them run away from me. Once I fully understood the YRA, I started to realize how critical its role was and still is in the success I have today.

DJ: What would you express to your fellow Free Minds members about the law?

Jordan: I would say if you are eligible for it in your case, make sure you take advantage of it. It will help you in the long run as someone who wishes to work, go to school, or do anything else you wish to.

The YRA applies to DC Superior Court cases with the exception of homicide, sexual abuse, and terrorism charges. If you were convicted in DC Superior Court of another charge, and were 24 or younger at the time of the crime, you may be eligible for the YRA.

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

Free Minds Connect | April/May 2023



CONVERSATION WITH ARABA

Hi Free Minds Fam,

I've connected with some of you through letters and read your responses to columns I've written in previous *Connects*, but it's a pleasure to be writing to you all in this column. My name is Araba, and I'm a Program Specialist at Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop. I started out at Free Minds as an intern during the pandemic, and I've graduated to co-facilitating book clubs at the DC Jail and supporting the Prison Book Club in their programming.

I've written about this in some of my letters to members before, but my family (and my name) is from Ghana. We're from the Fante ethnic group. One of our traditions is to name babies with a name that corresponds to the Fante word for the day of the week. For example, my name is Araba, and I was born on Tuesday. The Fante word for Tuesday is benada. There are variations on the names for each day – some Fante women born on Tuesdays are also given the name "Abena."

In addition to my work at Free Minds, I am a third year PhD student working toward my doctoral degree. My eventual degree will be in American Studies, but my specific focus is in the study of race, gender, prison culture. There are quite a few steps I must take to advance from being a PhD student to a PhD candidate, which is the state you reach when all you have left towards your degree is the completion of your dissertation (a ~120-page document of your original research and analysis). One of those steps is teaching college courses to a) enhance your training in teaching postsecondary education, and b) demonstrate your mastery in the courses that your degree program covers.

This academic year has by far been the most challenging in terms of balancing my preparations to write my dissertation with the demands of teaching and working at Free Minds. PhD students are usually teaching assistants of a class – meaning they lead discussions and do all the grading – or they are full instructors, meaning they create an original syllabus, with the readings and assignments, lead all class lectures/discussions, and grade all student assignments. If that sounds like a lot... it is! Some people – including myself – work during their PhD programs, but most programs discourage it. I see why. If you are accepted into a five-year PhD program, I strongly encourage you to just enjoy the benefits of the program: reading, writing, and thinking alongside your peers in an academic environment.

When I get overwhelmed, I remind myself to take everything one day at a time. Sometimes, I find myself scheduling my tasks hour by hour, if only to feel like I'm putting effort towards each item on my to-do list. Also, I constantly revisit and re-ask myself about my desire to get my doctorate. Some have quoted an attrition rate (that is, drop-out rate) for PhD students as high as 60%, and I understand why. When it feels like too much, I soothe myself by remembering that each of these obligations is just a job. If it no longer feels worth it, I can always choose a different path. It's all about the balance of finding my greatest good.

I hope to be writing to you all as Dr. Araba someday soon! Until then, keep your heads up and your minds free.

MEMBERS CONNECT: BALANCE

Untitled By AA

"A false balance is abomination to the lord: but a just weight is his delight." - Proverb 11:1

True balance is our ultimate destiny on earth! The ancient Egyptians weighed the character of the deceased in the scales of justice. The scale symbol represents justice, truth, and righteousness. For me, balance has to be constantly sought after. Every day I have to be aware of what I'm feeding my mind, body, and spirit. Our experiences in life lead us to search for balance unconsciously. But when we do become conscious of what we eat, read, and who we spend our time around, we then start to reflect and realize that we have outgrown some things and then start the process of elimination. That's why sacrifice of certain pleasures for me is a must in order for me to be balanced.

Balance By HH

Balance is essential to my continued progress. When I was incarcerated at 19 years old, I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder. From learning more about that diagnosis, I started noticing the symptoms inherent to the disorder. Namely, the constant imbalance, inconsistency in my life and actions. In striving for balance, I found my core life values: responsibility, accountability, and consistency. I'm responsible for my thoughts, emotions, and actions. I hold myself accountable for the things I say, feel, and do. Because I'm responsible and accountable, there's no excuse for any inconsistent actions. I still have inconsistent thoughts and feelings, but I can now identify them before

they lead to a detrimental consequence. In my spiritual practice of Ifa, we don't look at the difference between good and bad. Life itself is balance, a duality. I learned to accept that my plan isn't always my path. I can manifest my desires, but I have to focus my energies on that outcome. Nature is balanced. Water balances fire; air balances earth. The atoms that make up everything are balanced. Protons and electrons have positive and negative charges. Finding balance in life is a matter of shifting perspective and mindfulness. Realizing that life is duality makes finding balance easier.

Finding Balance By EJ

I do believe it's important to find balance in your life. Without balance in your life you'll feel like things are off, something is wrong, something is missing, you'll feel irritated and out of place. How I strive for balance is I keep a certain kind of order in my life. I organize my thoughts, find the bad energy that's around me and get rid of it (that can mean it's some people that's in your life that's no good for you). I exercise physically and mentally. I challenge myself to think rationally when dealing with different people and situations. I embrace myself which helps me to find peace.

then use the best solution to your problems. Build a support team for yourself. It can be a parent, grandparent, sibling, aunt/uncle, cousin, and/or a friend(s) that you trust because sometimes it helps to have a person you can talk to that really is listening, that will give you solid advice. Just getting things off your chest sometimes helps. Write yourself a letter. My last piece of advice is find order for yourself and make rules for yourself, without rules, you won't have order.

My advice to finding balance in your life is to get to know yourself. By getting to know yourself, it'll help you understand why you do certain things or why you react to certain things a certain way, and what triggers you. I say this because what will work for me might not work for someone else. Don't run from your problems, find the root of them,

The area in my life that I struggle to find balance is when dealing with others' suffering. I have to learn to not get stressed out when I hear my family or friends are suffering. I have no balance there. I'm not okay when they're not okay. It's like I can feel their pain. That really throws me off. I try to give mental support to them. That makes me feel okay somewhat, but I be feeling if I was physically there to help, things would be okay then.

My Mindset By CS

I believe that balance is very important in one's life because it helps to even you out. My balance in my life is my spiritual awareness, knowing that it's a higher power than myself. Having that mindset helps me stay balanced.

The areas that I need to fix/change are career, education, and financial security. I need to work on these because to be well off in life I must master all three. Because I can't have one and not the other. Because having a great education leads to having a great career, then having a great career leads to financial security; they are connected to each other, so I must balance to achieve them all.

The advice I would give to myself or someone else is to never give up. Life has its ups and downs, highs and lows. I know that nothing stays the same if you believe in yourself and God. Life will balance itself out if you keep those at the forefront.

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!

XL didn't have a chance to write out his question but described the situation to our Jail Book Club team:

XL: This member has stayed after our book club a few times to talk about challenges navigating his relationship with his girlfriend in light of the long sentence he is about to receive. XL's girlfriend stated a desire to stay together, and has been looking for ways to maintain their connection, like picking a book they can discuss and read together. Do our members have any advice as to how to navigate long-term relationships from the BOP?

Greetings XL and FM family from your brothers who wish you all peace, blessings & growth, and "Balance" moving forward for the future of your lives. This Connect theme is all about "Balance," a thing that correlates or coincides with what we all seem in search for doing these bids, participating in a relationship. XL, man, do I appreciate your question on how to sail through a bid in the BOP with someone else and hold a connection. Let's first share an appropriate definition of Balance that fits with relationship: 1) to bring into harmony or proportion; 2) to be an equal counterpart.

So let me speak and ask you XL and everyone as if you are my sons, brothers, daughters, sisters... well you get it, family, right. What person rationally "signs on" to do a real long bid with someone else? Don't get me wrong, because I'm not saying it can't be done. What I'm saying is it takes two very special and hardworking people.

To my 53 years of surviving, and 20 years living behind these gates, my honest advice to you XL would be to not put the title of relationship/girlfriend on anyone, and just plainly focus on self involvement in mere friendships. You know something that you build upon – a friendship that doesn't allow you to let your emotions dictate irrational reactions to disappointments, or doesn't allow you to try to control anything outside yourself, or put a too high expectation (last mos. theme) on someone else. Why? Because this ride here is like riding the biggest and baddest emotional rollercoaster there is. We are going to go through and see all kinds of things under these circumstances. People are going to die, come, and go; so there's no need to burn any bridges.

To keep moving forward with or with others in our corner, we level up and grow on all fronts together or on our own. And those words that I don't like to use to loosely: relationship/girlfriend. A person and title will bloom into existence later on down the line if it's meant. So things like the book idea or anything learning, sharing, or growing together are great. Friendship is about consistency on a whole lot of fronts and it starts with planting small seeds and cultivating what they produce. In a healthy way one

has to pull weeds to produce growth together. In our communities we have been for a long time are sometimes unconcerned about relationship dysfunction we practice. There's been a lot like me who have moved in a vicious cycle and haven't challenged the dysfunction that have devastated our community's institutions of love, marriage, and getting along. As the physical and mental chains come off, we as adults deserve friendships that are built with truth, integrity, compassion, understanding, and support. Characteristics like these are the building blocks to a strong future together. XL, to be point blank with what it takes to be friends: "consistency at connecting" and "healthy communication" on all levels in life. It will bond people and stand the test of time.

TS

Here's what the brothers had to add:

R.H....: Not saying that it isn't possible, but you can't expect anyone to honor a relationship while we are going through our trials and tribulations. If you do find that one, it's best to have more of a friendship than a relationship. That way you won't expect so much from them.

Greetings from B.M. It truly takes some special people to hold on in the midst of such a storm. I remember being in similar shoes almost 18 years ago, and being told by a wise man, "Never to push away anyone who wants to be there for you, all knowing your circumstances." In time, you'll experience your fair share of let-downs, abandonment, and simply those who let go. I listened and took heed! I'm proud to say, today I'm a married father of two, still with the same woman I started with!! Above all things, you have to focus on finding a balance that's fair and equal for the both of you. Grab hold of things like "sacrifice and compromise." Use them as your allies in times of need. Always be reasonable and understanding, respecting your union. Have realistic expectations that go both ways, communicate up front your worth and deal breakers as well as hers. HAVE FUN!! Use love as a powerful tool that will build you and grow you stronger, and not as a weapon to tear you apart or destroy! Beat the odds, know that you have it in you.

Mr. E.G.: We revisit a frequently asked question: How to navigate long-term relationships from the BOP. Well, I won't sugarcoat it by saying that it is an easy thing to do- it's not! What makes it a struggle to keep a relationship cohesive, even for the short-term, is the natural fact that humans aren't wired to live alone. For those relationships that have defied the odds, a common factor was communication. Utilize the various means of staying connected with your loved one, e.g., e-mail, phone, visitation, cards and letters. Above all, stay above the jailhouse politics, i.e., gangs, drugs, gambling, etc. Become a writer, real estate investor, etc. – a man of value. In other words, give your girlfriend another reason to put her life on hold for years for you.

SPINNING THE TRACK: REENTRY EDITION

This issue, we are taking the spin a little further, and asking Free Minds members home in the community for their advice on life after release. Do you have a question for them? Write to us!

A.C. described the situation to our Jail Book Club team:

A.C.: This member raised the issue of how to stick with the goal she has made while incarcerated to stop smoking PCP. A mentioned that she loves smoking, but she also knows that she can stop if she puts her mind to it. Do our returning citizen members have any advice about how to stick to promises made while incarcerated when released? Particularly, do our members have advice as to how to find that conviction to stop using substances when they return to a less controlled environment?

James D.: I'd just advise you to take your addiction seriously. Addiction can be very sneaky in that it'll tell you what you want to hear. It knows all your secrets, all your shortcomings, everything about you. If the individual does not take their sobriety seriously, it'll rear its ugly head when you don't need it to. This is first and foremost. Because until they can stay sober, things will always be thrown off course.

So drug programs are key along with application.

Carlos: "People, Places and things" is the best thing that I have learnt to keep my promises. What does it mean? That I need to make the best choices about the places that I go to that may trigger that desire to use again. People that have similar habits can never be healthy for me. Choosing who stays around me must coincide with my goals and promises. And lastly, things. Anything that would remind me or trigger those old habits need to throw them away. To make this kind of promise to myself is hard. The real challenge will come upon release. It's easy to stay away when it's not there at my reach. I need to be around people that can help me, go to places that do not give me access to those things that I'm trying to stay away from, and surround myself with new things that can never remind me of those desires. It's not easy and it cannot be done alone. Always reach out to someone that can help you remember the bad choices and their consequences. If not we will be stuck in that revolving door.

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Voices Behind These Walls

By PB

Life is a huge puzzle
A trivia to keep the brain young
We struggle of being heard
Heart's like black ice
Now the oppressor is feared
The ultimate goal is remove the noose
Don't give up your power
We are born kings and queens
It's not always about black and white
More like right and wrong
Strive for balance and harmony
Positive and negative energy can be balanced
But one has to out weigh the other

Balance

By RL

What is balance?
Being steady is balance.
Without balance you will slip and fall!
You can always get up but will never stand
up without Balance.
Most people find it in work, some find it others.
I found it in letting someone else in, and I hope
to achieve it with you.

Balancing Act

By AL

My vision is high definition,
My mission is to evade prison.
And the pitfalls that come along
With it. I'm gifted, but even
That comes with a price tag
That's outrageously high.
I pray to get by. But God
Seems to be on vacation.
Yet I'm patient. Just waiting
For my chance at fame. I been
Quit the game of who's to blame.
So I take full responsibility.
And the humility that comes with
That now lies in my left breast
Plate. Got me balancing the
Scale to get closer to
Heaven's gate!

Balance

By DT

Walking on that beam takes everything I have in me
The nerves, the weight, the agony & gravity
The outside noise while continuing to look straight
The poise I have to finish or I have the abyss date
The fall is never evening; how can I balance it all?
Will I make it through or have to balance the fall?

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Peace Within

By AD

Peace brings contentment,
Regardless the environment.

Peace brings joy to the soul,
When the body is held captured.

Peace brings harmony,
Even in chaos.

Peace brings music to the ears,
When the surroundings are loud.

Peace brings comfort no matter the
Roughness of the surface.

Peace within is a hard thing to have,
But is necessary to survive the hardest of times

Complete Satisfaction

By JJ

Oh! You got it, going on!
By the way of your blood... to back to your remarkable
booming sound...

That designed!

Complete satisfaction guaranteed is how you get around.

Its style is driven with a connection enough of its own.

As beautiful and pretty, teasing and elusive.

A dreamer, or wisher, or chase, or capture.

Results become again and again the most greatest balance

towards sisters, brothers

or homies, lovers, friends.

Wouldn't you want to be the truest and complete
satisfaction as can be.

To every beating balance, this is the HEART. You & Me!

In Perfect Harmony

By EJ

My life in perfect harmony is no worries,
no fears, no anxiety.

Even though I'm sitting in this cell,

I'm still happy,

I still have peace.

No matter where I am or what my conditions are

I still have order in my life, which is bliss for me.

I see the world as a place that has good in it,

I hear each of us in here uplifting each other when we're down.

I feel love everywhere, all over me

and the taste of the air is refreshing.

A Moment of Perfect Harmony

By CS

I would describe my moment at home with my wife
enjoying life from all the hard work we put in to achieve
all that we have

I can see the successfulness of our trucking business

Feel my hands of all the work we put in

I can taste the fruits of our labor by tasting different

foods of the world,

and hearing the great music.

Balance Behind the Walls

By DP

Awake by my inner self,

To control and not allow the balance between good and bad
to dictate my actions with negative thoughts;

faced with a challenge on a daily basis at the USP,

oppressed by whites who keep slavery alive,

in their eyes we as blacks and even Spanish people are worthless,
they beat us like dogs and use racist slurs,

created before these people was a balance of good and bad

regardless of what took place in these Virginia hills

the people of this county no longer remain,

replaced by sons and daughters even cousins

this way of life died with their people,

in memory they oppress the weak only to seem strong

but this balance between good or bad will soon shift

because I use my pen as a weapon

and through this "Bic" my voice will be heard for miles to come

and even heard down the line

so if you hear me then you hear every voice

every prisoner of the USP screaming

we are sick of being beat on,

we are sick of being oppressed by those who are

supposed to help us,

and who took an oath to be good rather bad

all in the name of this so called justice system

that has yet to show us that it works for us,

cut my lights out at 9:30

Why? I am not in the SHU!

Throw my personal property away as if I don't want it,

plant drugs on me only to charge me in court,

give me more time only to keep yourself in power

In power of acting like you belong

when in truth you are worthless without those clothes

or the title of correctional officer

The balance between good and bad is a thin

line to walk but I refuse to give up

So I challenge myself to be in control of the way that

I respond to this foolishness

Thinking on the go that's my balance and peace of mind,

knowing what I can and can't do in order to keep that

peace within myself,

my balance is knowing that

One day in-sha-allah I'll be free!

The New Balance Scale

By CM

Balance is created by self

Pay attention to your health

Don't be afraid to ask for help

Your pain will be felt

We take pride in designer belts

Disregard our wants for needs

The best blessings come from unseen deeds

Follow my lead with 990 New Balance track speed

MEMBERS CONNECT: BALANCE

Balance By SV

My balance is allowing me to stand upright and not fall down by the many "winds" that come throughout the twists and turns of life. To be able to maintain one's balance mentally and physically sustains you. It's you displaying the human capacity of wants and needs, love and hate; the ability to control yourself so that you don't lose control. This is all balance on so many levels. In order for you to conquer the negative, you must first lay the groundwork for positive growth. To maintain a perfect equilibrium in your life, you must maintain balance with all things that are harmonious to your mental and your physical...For myself, after exercising and the dreary aspects of my present environment here I balance my day out, first speaking with my sister on the phone in New York, then relaxing after a shower listening to soothing music. Sade has always been replenishing my soul every time I listen to her. And of course my writing completes the feeling of fulfillment that I get.

This is the balance for me that keeps me motivated and strong and in tune with myself.

Lifestyle Balance By CM

My daily routine is based on five spokes that keep my core beliefs in check. The things I value the most in life like making (STG) short term goals daily. The penitentiary is a hard place to find peace and solace because of negativity or fear. My fear for a long time was being viewed as different because I'm from DC and we stand on principles! Like going hard. But over the last three years I've been going hard in a different way. I've been shot free for five years, I'm deep into solving conflict before it blows up. I do (RSA) Rational Self Analysis when I'm upset, I work two jobs, facilitate parenting class, I'm an inmate companion, I sit on a board called (CRC) Conflict Resolution Committee. I'm currently taking a

12-month trauma class called Resolve with a psychologist. Lastly, I'm a mentor to many men here in the Challenge program which took me two years to complete. I'm proud of my new walk, and I also still have the respect of the men.

The five spokes that keep my busy life in balance are:

1. Meaning and purpose
 2. Emotional health
 3. Physical health
 4. Healthy relationships
 5. Community involvement
-

Balance By AHA

My recipe for a balanced life is to feel complete in all areas of one's life to the point where one doesn't have to worry or believe they have to work on this or that since they already have it. My mind, body, and spirit is balanced when faith is firm, my family is connected and together, with any and all achievements that I have wanted to meet. Even that which is still being worked towards is set, which makes me content that everything is balanced.

All things in moderation is a saying I have heard often and used in daily activities, but just enough to not use as an excuse in things I deem necessary. So if it is something I am obligated to do then I do it, which comes a lot spiritually in my faith since I can't say prayer only in moderation or do something I know is prohibited only in moderation, so being balanced has many forms and things can be added, taken away, or seasoned more as if you made a recipe for your favorite meal... peace.

Moderate Measures By KW

I started life learning "extremes." Lessons like: lil boys don't cry, you gotta be tough to survive, by any means necessary, if they bigger than you – pick up something to knock the hell out of them with, and many more.

When I was growing up, the reality for black kids like me was presented like, in order to "make it" like the successful around, I have to accept going the extra mile, regardless of the risk. Regardless of the sacrifices. The reward is what's favored.

Money, power, women, and the "finer" things in life. Undoubtedly so, I experienced life unbalanced. More often than not, I found myself going way overboard because I believed it was never enough. Never truly measuring up to the expectations.

Like I couldn't just have money – I believed I needed all the money. I couldn't just have a car – I believed I needed a

flying car. I couldn't just be happy with a good woman – I believed I needed them all.

But being unbalanced will take its toll. Everything has its "limit" except GOD (Allah). And after going through the ups and downs of a self-inflicted unstable life filled with heartache and regret... I made a vow to take more moderate measures not only to end up the man I believe me to be but also the man I know me to be... a good, centered, and God-fearing Black Man of America. And though the odds may be stacked against me – ain't no doubt about it... I will still break even.

So today, as a man, I don't deny the existence of tears. I don't lock away the gentle side. I don't chance it all on one roll. I bravely walk away knowing I measure *perfectly* up to the idea of me.



Alabama Avenue Shopping Center



New townhomes at St. Elizabeths, home to the first federally-funded psychiatric hospital in the country. The property has since been redeveloped for affordable residential rental and homeownership properties.



Intersection of Good Hope Road and Minnesota Avenue

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!

DC PHOTOS *By Sonya and Aneka*



The Old Post Office Pavilion on Pennsylvania Avenue



The Waldorf Astoria Hotel, recently opened inside the Old Post Office



Congress Heights Metro Stop

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!

PAYING IT FORWARD

By Araba

In 2022, Lush Cosmetics, an ethically sourced global company, launched a campaign to promote Teaching Truth in History. The campaign supports the teaching of a fuller narrative, including the perspectives of the traditionally disenfranchised: the poor, BIPOC communities, women, and workers. Lush employees selected Free Minds, along with several other charities, to receive funds to buy books as tools for transformation. We are honored and grateful for the support. We recently connected with Aileen, one of the Lush team members, who worked on a project to educate her colleagues about restorative justice, transformative justice, and alternatives to incarceration.

Araba: Tell us a little bit about yourself – who you are, what you do, and why you do it?

Aileen: My name is Aileen. I work with Lush Cosmetics, I'm the manager in training for the Toronto Distribution and Goods department. I've been with Lush for over six years now. I'm also a board member for Elizabeth Fry Toronto, which is an organization that works with criminalized women in the community. On top of that, I also am in school for a degree in psychology in hopes to pursue a law degree in hopes to be able to do some work in the system itself. On top of that, I'm a cat mom and outdoors enthusiast. I love crafting. But in terms of why I do what I do, I'm very passionate about our carceral and criminal justice system, about human rights, and how interconnected with our society and our mentality [this system is].

I've seen firsthand the impacts that it can have on people and there is a whole lot of room for improvement. So I really want to take my drive, my empathy, and my experience into this system and be able to represent people who otherwise wouldn't have adequate representation – so that they have a chance for something different than being within the carceral system itself or having to serve time. I kind of want to be that person to stand in someone's corner when they don't feel like they have anybody. So that's kind of why I do what I do and where I am, and working with Lush is a great company where they're very open-minded and supportive of that kind of thing.

Araba: What is the Lush Writers' Circle, and why did you decide to contribute to it? How did you choose the article topics that you chose?

Aileen: Lush Writers' Circle is a development opportunity for our staff members where members can pitch stories, research and develop those topics, and learn about the editing process to have them published on our internal staff website. Sometimes that has to do with external topics, sometimes it's about campaigns and things we're supporting, sometimes it's about our products and our brand in general – but its purpose is to create a mentorship for our staff who are interested in rolling in the

journalism field. I really feel like it's about building a community of activated writers who are passionate for writing and for Lush as a whole.

The reason that I wanted to join is because I've always loved writing, and I feel like it's a really good outlet for your emotions or your opinions and different ideas. And it can be really mentally stimulating as well! I really feel like I have a voice, experience, and opinions that could contribute positively to our little Lush community, and maybe even make a difference in someone's life or change someone's mind on a topic – have people think about things that they haven't before. So what we do is they ask, "Who has pitch ideas? What is everyone thinking about writing? Give us three pitches and we'll let you know if you've been chosen or not."

So I know we have a lot of lighthearted things on the site, but for me, I've always been really passionate about social justice, focusing on restorative and transformative justice, and highlighting the issues that our system has around equity, fairness, and the issues as a whole. For me, it's always been an overlooked topic of discussion and sometimes people have a hard time talking about it, and I didn't want that to be the case here at Lush. So I decided to be the person and just jump into it and start the conversation about the reality of our carceral system, and what can people in society go through, and to highlight that there are other options than traditional, retributive systems.

Here is an excerpt from one of Aileen's articles about restorative justice:

"Restorative justice doesn't focus on punishment, but rather on making things right and reintegrating the person who caused harm back into the community with the skill set and awareness to make things better in the future and to stop the cycle from reoccurring.

It's about involving the people who were harmed and ensuring that their voice is heard when expressing their needs, the impact the crime has had on them, and being able to move towards healing and forgiveness. The community feels empowered over their own disputes and the solutions that come from it, and the person who caused harm has an opportunity to feel the impact of their behavior and become truly accountable for making it right. Together they create a plan that is restorative in nature, achievable, relevant, and fair."

Araba: What was the response like?

Aileen: After the end of the restorative justice series, many people were moved and inspired by the piece I wrote, especially after they began to see the reality of our prison system and the impact it has on our society. A lot of people were thankful that someone was able to start this conversation in our workplace, and start to learn new things that were otherwise unknown to them. From what I've heard, seen in the comments section itself, and the conversations I've experienced with my colleagues – it was an overall positive experience and very well received among our staff. Now I'd just love to continue that conversation!

Araba: What advice would you give to someone who is interested in incorporating restorative justice into their career or workplace?

Aileen: There are a few different things you can do from your personal level in the workplace or at your workplace in general. When we look at issues or incidents in the workplace, the main focus is usually what policy was violated and what are the next steps in terms of addressing this via punishment, etc. As we shift to have more restorative justice practices included, we incorporate other questions such as who has been impacted, what do they need (or the team needs), and who or how can we address that. When we shift our focus from the person who has caused harm and their punishment, to also address the person(s) who were impacted, we start to see restorative justice in the workplace more. From the other side, we should look at why this individual might have caused harm or breached a workplace policy in the first place. Instead of focusing on the policy breach or the offense itself, we get to look into the root cause of this issue or what that person is experiencing as well to be able to address this harm on an environmental level to help prevent future occurrences.

Araba: Thank you so much for sharing your perspective with us!

Interested in learning more about restorative justice and transformative justice? Write to us and let us know! We'll do our best to send more information and resources.

REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

Springing into this article to say what's up fam!

I hope the spring season will bring lots of hope and encouragement your way and will *balance* out any disappointments left behind from the cold winter months. Speaking of balance, it just so happens to be our Connect theme this month (huge coincidence right LOL). Okay, so I decided to write a poem on the matter and hope that y'all will graciously oblige me in this decision, so here goes:

A million things at stake a million decisions to make
A million things on my plate wish it was all steak
A million things to do if only it were just two
Such is life for me and you
What to do what to do
Settle down and think this through
Take your time and realign
Readjust and redefine
This process will be unique to you
Your life, your peace and purpose too
Achieving balance is the mission at hand
But maintaining that balance is the master plan
Step 1

remove dead things that occupy live spaces
I'm talking people, places and things
That take and don't give
Take back that power
Its ability to live

Step 2

With your new found space
Give yourself some grace
Carefully place
some here a little
Some there a little
Rest, work, exercise, chill
Fun, hobbies, study, thrills

Step 3

Now that things have been removed
And live things added
Your only job now is to just keep at it
Periodically pausing to realign
Readjust and reapply
With this formula
I do declare
A lifetime of balance
Will be your fare

Thanks for obliging me, and now on to some awesome resources!

The National Reentry Network

1200 U Street, NW Washington DC 20009

202-584-1000

info@thereentrynetwork.org

Monday-Friday: 9am-5pm



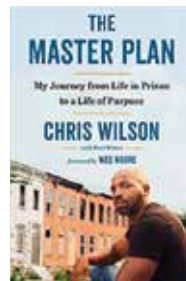
The National Reentry Network's goal is to build a strong, national network of individuals returning from incarceration who support each other's successful reintegration. They use a client-centered approach to identify basic needs and to create a continuum of care that can address barriers to reentry, promote restorative practices, and reduce recidivism. One of their most successful programs is the **Ready 4 Work program**. This program offers financial literacy training, workplace emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills, resumé and interview preparation, and connections to employers. They also have a housing program, the **Supportive Reentry Housing Initiative** is a new housing program that offers safe housing and supportive programming. Contact them at the above address for more information!

Until we *Connect* again,
Ms. Keela

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

with Neely

It's that time again! We would like to send a big thank you to everyone who mailed in their votes for the next Books Across the Miles selection, which will be *The Master Plan: My Journey from Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose* by Chris Wilson. In his memoir, DC native Chris Wilson, shares about his childhood growing up amidst violence and trauma. Wilson was 17-years-old when he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. While incarcerated, he began a personal journey of growth and healing through reading, working out, learning new languages, and starting a business. At 19, he created a list of everything he wanted to accomplish and how he could, calling it his "Master Plan." We hope you enjoy, and we can't wait to hear your thoughts!



1. How do you think Chris' life, and the lives of many children, would be different if the crack epidemic hadn't happened? Did this personally impact you or people in your life?
2. When Chris was sentenced to life, his mother sat quietly, staring straight ahead with a blank look on her face. She didn't cry. Why do you think she didn't cry or react? Do you think she cared? Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't feel like you could express your feelings for whatever reason?
3. Chris says that rock bottom isn't a place: "You can always go lower. Rock bottom is a decision. It's the moment you decide to stop falling and take control of your life." Do you agree? Why or why not?

4. While Chris was incarcerated in Maryland, the Governor took away the option for parole for Maryland prisoners serving life sentences. How do people continue to find hope or purpose when the legal system doesn't seem to offer opportunities for release?

5. Chris' Grandma said, "God don't like the ugly." What do you think she meant by this? Do/did your grandparents or other important people in your life have any sayings? What have you learned from them?

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: HOMETOWN PRIDE (VOLUME 12, ISSUE 3)

Hey family! Here are some writing prompts to help you get started on submissions for our next issue on **Hometown Pride**. We also want to give you a heads up for the issue after that. Volume 12, Issue 4 will be exploring the theme of **Growth**.

(1)

Your hometown is the town that you were born in, grew up in, or where you've spent most of your life. When you think of your hometown, what are your most vivid memories, happy or sad? Write a poem about your memories of your hometown.

(2)

Every city has something it's known for. A historic landmark, a sports team, a signature dish, a university, a style of music or dance, etc. What are 3 things your hometown is known for?

(3)

Imagine that you were transported to the future and the world as you knew it was destroyed. You now live in a colony in space and someone asks you to tell them about where you were from on Earth. How would you describe your hometown to people who have never seen or heard of your hometown before?

(4)

Fill In The Blank Writing Prompt: If you're a fan of the singer/songwriter Adele, you've probably heard of her song Hometown Glory where she sings about her hometown. In this fill in the blank poem writing prompt, you are going to write a poem using her lyrics as the beginning of each line.

Hometown Pride *After "Hometown Glory" by Adele*

'Round my hometown _____

'Round my hometown _____

I like it in the city when _____

I love to see everybody in _____

I like it in the city when _____

'Round my hometown _____

'Round my hometown _____

Friendly Reminder: Your Free Minds Family would like to thank you all for your continuous participation and contributions for the Connect magazine that you all enjoy receiving so much. As much as we would like to include every submission that we receive, space limitations and mail delays prevent us from doing so. However, know that all of your submissions will be shown to our dedicated volunteers and you will receive comments on your poetry, which we will mail back to you. We encourage you to mail in your submissions for the upcoming Connect issues (**Hometown Pride** and **Growth**) as soon as you receive the current Connect so that you have a better chance at being included in the next issue. – Your Free Minds Family



MEDITATION

By Kelli

Hey Free Minds Family,

We are sending you wishes for a happy spring! If you have not made use of these meditations in the past, spring is the season of newness. So how about trying something new – say, like maybe meditating? 😊

In honor of our BALANCE theme this issue, let's meditate about the power we have to experience and FEEL our emotions while also maintaining or achieving physical and emotional balance in our bodies and minds. You may have noticed that the ocean or water are often used in meditation scripts. There are countless scientific studies that have documented the very real healing effect of water and the ocean. Being near the ocean improves overall health and increases mental calmness. Think about it... when people want to unwind, where do they go? To the ocean! Everything about the ocean makes me think of the word "balance"... the tides ebbing and flowing... waves crashing and receding... So I hope that you will indulge me in a repeat trip to the seashore.

If possible, have someone read this aloud to you while you sit comfortably with your eyes closed. If you are solo, read through the script a few times and then sit down, relax and recall what you've read.

Let's start as we always do, seated, with your feet planted on the floor, your arms and legs relaxed. With balance in mind, straighten your spine. Picture your body existing in perfect symmetry... Now, let's take a big, slow, deep, inhale of life-giving oxygen... hold it for a moment... and then let it out. Do this a few more times, breathe in... hold it... release.

Now, allow your breath to slow to its natural pace... Notice how your body takes care of itself naturally, filling your lungs with air, and letting it go...

Think about the word harmony... it's a beautiful word describing the state of all things fitting together in accord... or agreement.

It is possible to live in complete harmony and balance with all the emotions we are feeling.

Know that in this moment, and in all moments, it is safe to feel and experience our emotions. And, in fact, by doing so we can often lessen their intensity. So often, our emotions are out of balance because we've been running from them or pushing them down—trying to hide them—but no matter what we do, they're still always there.

When we allow ourselves to truly feel them, we can exist in harmony with balanced emotions.

Imagine you are standing in the sand, looking out at the ocean. It is deep, blue. It is immense, beautiful, and powerful. You can smell salt on the air. A soft breeze blows across your skin. The sand cushions your bare feet as you walk to the water's edge. The ocean before you embodies balance.

As you look out across the water, allow yourself to notice your emotions. As you do so, watch the waves grow larger or smaller, based on how you are feeling. For example, maybe there has been some anxiety that you haven't been allowing to surface. In this moment just allow it to do so. Welcome it in. And watch it as if it is one of the growing waves. Feel it – and just like riding a wave, it peaks, crashes, and then subsides. The ocean calms back down. When you allow yourself to acknowledge ALL your emotions and say that they're okay, they can just flow to you, and through you... in the same way that the ocean waves crash and recede.

Don't worry about judging any of the emotions that you feel... just let them emerge. They aren't "good" or "bad." They just are.

Continue to notice the waves and the emotions you are experiencing. If a particular emotion or wave feels too strong, use your mind's eye to visualize it calming down – not by making the emotion go away, just by simply saying, "I accept you. I see you, emotion."

Feel the balance in all your different emotions... continue breathing in... and out...

On your next breath breathe in extra deeply and hold your breath at the top. And as you hold your breath, see a very large wave come to a peak, and as you exhale let it crash... and after it crashes, watch the water go back to a calm, still, serene, peace.

As you gaze out, you recognize that the ocean continues to be a beautiful place of harmony and peace, no matter whether the waves are large or small. You too can live that way. You can be a deep well of peace, regardless of what your emotions are. No emotion is useless, and when you just welcome it in and accept it, you allow yourself to ride it like a wave...

Take one last cleansing breath, and exhale. Remember that anytime you are feeling out of balance, you can always come to the ocean in your mind. When you are ready, you can open your eyes and return your attention to your surroundings.



THE WRITE WAY

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

By Meg

*Peter is a full-time doctor and author of several medical fiction and thriller novels. He is the creator of the literary blog, [The Book Stops Here](#), a resource for writers and readers alike. He is an advocate for mental and physical health awareness, as well as an active public speaker. Some of his books include *The Intern*, a story of a woman's journey through her internship at a hospital and her growing connection with a terminally-ill boy, and *The Vatican Conspiracy*, an action-packed adventure of a Vatican priest attempting to stop an assassination. Peter recently sat down with Free Minds staff to share his experiences in the publishing world.*

1. What are some of the benefits you have found from writing?

Many excellent writers don't get book deals, and even writers who do publish their books usually don't make a living from publishing. There's nothing wrong with wanting to earn money, but if you want to write and if you want to publish, it's worth considering why and what you might get out of it besides money. Even if your book doesn't reach millions of people or fly off the shelves, writing creates balance and helps you become more mindful about yourself and your actions.

I started writing because I love to tell stories, and although this is still my primary motivation, I keep writing because it has been such a good window for me into myself. Writing is the best vehicle ever for self-discovery, which is the necessary first step of self-improvement. The act of writing itself has helped me grow in ways I never could have imagined. I believe it has helped me be a kinder and gentler person. It gave me perspective and helped me practice empathy. I am more organized and more thoughtful from the practice of writing. The writing process tells you a lot about who you are and what interests you. Friends and family have told me I'm a more intentional and thoughtful person now that I've gone through the writing process several times.

2. What advice do you have for writers thinking about publishing different genres (different kinds of books, like fiction, nonfiction, etc)?

First, it's important to note that there's a different process for anyone who wants to publish a book of poetry. I'm not a poet so I don't have experience with that process. Write to Free Minds if you'd like to learn more about how that works. In terms of prose, such as fiction and nonfiction, it's beneficial to balance the familiar with the unfamiliar. Having a story grounded in the familiar while appealing to what's new attracts a variety of audiences. Memoirs are in high demand – there is a lot of interest in stories about real life. Start being observant of your life: write a journal, take note of interactions and day-to-day events. Other people will be interested. You don't have to be famous to write a good memoir. What makes a good memoir is having a good story, and stories come in all shapes and sizes. Originality also helps, as does sincerity. The last thing I would mention about memoirs is that there needs to be a character arc, which means that you have to demonstrate how you have grown from all the good and bad things that have happened to you.

3. What are the steps of publication?

First, make sure your manuscript is polished before you send it to anyone. You shouldn't send your first revision. It needs to be extremely polished before agents or editors get their hands on it. When you go about trying to find an agent, you'll need to send query letters. A query letter is a one page letter (do NOT make it any longer) which tells the agent or publisher what kind of book you are writing, how long it is, and what recent books it is similar to. You also have to introduce yourself, and explain why you think your book will sell. Writing query letters can be daunting, but is a good way to grow as a writer, too, and many people send hundreds of query letters before getting an offer. If agents are interested in representing your work, they will respond to your query letter with an offer of representation, or perhaps invite you to revise the manuscript and resubmit it to them. If you sign with an agent, you'll go through a round of revisions, and the agent will prepare your book for submission to publishers. If the editor at the publishing company chooses to publish your book (a decision that can depend a lot on marketing

and industry trends), they will request more revisions to get your book in the best shape possible. Smaller, independent presses (publishing companies) are an option as well, and some will accept submissions without an agent. When it reaches an editor, the process becomes revision after revision after revision. It's a long, hard process, but your book will end up stronger for it.

4. How should I choose an agent, if I get multiple offers of representation?

It's a deep task, and you want to be able to see yourself working with this person way down the line. You want to be able to communicate with your agent freely, even if the truth is difficult. Remember: you don't hire agents. Agents work on commission, so if they ask you for money up front, it's a scam. Agents will ask for a round of revisions before sending your piece off to an editor. Like editors, they have valuable insight and are very familiar with the industry. They want to help you make your book the best it can be, but make sure their vision aligns with yours to ensure the best possible fit. The writer/agent relationship is tricky, and many writers go through several agents before they find a good fit.

5. What if an agent or editor wants to make big changes to my writing?

The publishing process demands a lot of revision, and while it's painful (lots of changes can feel like a loss), I finally concluded that revising and editing are the most important ways to improve as a writer. These editors know their craft, and, in the end, I was much happier with the final product. It can feel personal, when you hand over something you've worked hard on and are really proud of to an editor. When an editor turns around and suggests a lot of changes, it's not because they're rejecting you, but it's easy to feel that way. Editors look through thousands of manuscripts. They know

what works and what sells. Publication is a business, and it's one they are very familiar with. They suggest changes to help you improve, and you'll see that improvement by the final product.

6. How do you go about balancing being your own advocate and accepting criticism?

Part of the journey is learning when you should and should not compromise. Editors and agents know the ins and outs of this craft, and their suggestions come from a place of knowledge. Criticism helps you grow. However, with agents especially, you want to be able to cultivate a relationship with them. Sometimes you don't click with people, or they set expectations that don't align with your goals. Learn the difference between constructive criticism and a fundamental disconnect.

7. How do you balance your writing with other responsibilities in your life?

Writing is, realistically, not a full time job. I wish it were my full time job, because I would get to spend more time writing – and I love to write – but it isn't. It's important to realize you'll need other responsibilities, other sources of income. Writing is a good way to incorporate your passions that don't come up in other activities, but it isn't a great way to pay your bills. Even after successfully completing this process, I need to make a living doing something else besides writing. There are incredible benefits to writing, just keep your expectations realistic. When I started writing twenty years ago, my wife gave me a piece of advice that I have never forgotten. She said: Do not write because you think you're going to be a bestseller, or win lots of awards, or make a ton of money. Write because you love to do it, and that way, you'll never be disappointed. And I never have been!

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.

Poetry and Art: Visions From Inside By Keven A. McIntyre, Seth Morris (Artist), Ellie Silva (Artist)

Description provided by the author: Through traditional and non-traditional poetry, the authors share some of their most poignant life experiences, from finding true love and friendship to the tragic loss of family members to the musings of personal introspection. After years of writing for personal healing and enjoyment, the loss of Keven's mother moved him to share his words with the world to honor family and friends, past and present.

Joined by Seth in compiling this work, the authors have collected a selection of their poems from the last half-decade, each with their own story to tell. The book and poetry are adorned with beautiful, evocative, hand-drawn images from the authors and their dearest friends. The fusion of text and images provides a unique perspective from inside the walls of confinement.



IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

DEEP DIVE: BANKS AND BAILOUTS

You may have heard the term “too big to fail,” a phrase that became popular during the last recession. It refers to the circumstance where a business is so big, and intersects with so many other businesses and people, that its closure would do catastrophic harm to the entire economy. And so even if the company's own decisions led to their problems, some view it as necessary for the government to get involved and keep it from shutting its doors. Hence: too big to fail.

This has come up recently with very large regional banks, especially two California-based ones: the Silicon Valley Bank of Santa Clara, and First Republic Bank of San Francisco.

The specific reasons that these banks find themselves on the brink of extinction are complicated, but it comes down to one general problem called liquidity. That term refers to how much of the money someone or some entity has can be accessed quickly. For example: if I had \$50,000 but \$45,000 of it is in retirement savings that I can't touch for 20 years, I might have some money but I'm not all that liquid.

Banks are required to have enough money on hand at all times to cover every single customer. So if every single customer wanted to take all their money out at the same time, they have to be able to do that. For banks, that is what liquidity means.

For Silicon Valley Bank, or SVB, things were going very well right after the COVID-19 pandemic. The bank is largely used by startup companies and investors in tech businesses, and a lot of money was being pumped into that part of the economy. SVB saw deposits double from about \$60 billion to \$120 billion between 2020 and 2021.

The bank turned around and invested a lot of that money in ways that probably seemed smart and safe. One big thing it did was invest billions of dollars in long-term treasury bonds that only paid out in full after 10 years.

When the value of those long-term bonds took a hit, some customers started to worry that SVB didn't

have enough money to cover everyone. And that nervousness spread like wildfire, with more and more businesses taking their money out of SVB fearing that the bank might go under.

This helped fuel more widespread panic: what if other big regional banks weren't able to cover everyone's accounts? And so it was that in the weekend after SVB started to collapse, there were fears that millions of businesses and citizens would pull their money out of banks all over the country, which might trigger a full-on economic meltdown.

The risk of that was too much for the White House to stomach because such an event could lead to businesses around the country closing, massive layoffs and more. So on March 10, the state of California took ownership of the SVB, and appointed a federal agency to oversee it. It wasn't exactly a bailout: the government basically stepped in to ensure that all of the bank's customers would get their money back. Nobody who owned SVB, or worked as executives for the bank, profited from this takeover.

However, ensuring that customers got their money back has been estimated to have cost the government about \$20 billion in taxpayer money. A large sum, to be sure, but far, far less than would have been lost in the economy had the collapse of SVB triggered a chain reaction where everyone lost faith in regional banks.

But the government's decision to step in and save the customers of SVB did not prevent a serious, but so far contained, banking crisis. First Republic Bank got itself into trouble by loaning out more money than it had



Source: Peoples Dispatch

IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

from its customers, which quickly put it on the path to collapse once people became aware of it. Again, California and the U.S. government stepped in to seize the bank. This time, because First Republic was still a reasonably healthy business, the government was able to find another bigger bank willing to buy it.

It is a tough line to thread for the government when the decision is to either let a massive business go under to prevent the average person or family from feeling economic pain, or saving it and essentially rewarding poor decisions or mistakes. One can only hope that these recent crises with banks will prompt some lessons about how to make sure the companies we trust with our hard-earned money are being responsible.

WORLD

In April, a war between two factions of the military broke out in Sudan, one of the largest and poorest nations on the African continent. The battle between the army and a paramilitary force has largely been concentrated in the nation's capital city of Khartoum. An estimated 700,000 of the city's 5.4 million residents have already been displaced, according to reports from international aid organizations.

NATION

As we write this news update, lawmakers in Washington, DC, are engaged in tense negotiations over a decision that could lead to tremendous economic turmoil here and in the rest of the world. The stalemate is over what's known as the debt ceiling.

Here's the issue in a nutshell. The U.S. government spends more money every year than it brings in from taxes and other sources, which means that it runs an annual deficit. And the government pays for that difference by borrowing money... from its own citizens, from other countries, and others. The debt from all of that borrowing over time is currently just under \$32 trillion dollars.

In order to keep borrowing more money, Congress is required each year to approve an increase in the nation's debt limit. This approval is needed in order for the government to pay down the debt that we as a country have already taken on. And if we do not increase the limit, we essentially tell the world that the U.S. may not be able to pay for what we've already borrowed.



Source: *The Wealth Advisor*

IN THE NEWS By John, FM Friend

What comes next could be a global recession that could cripple the U.S. economy and then spread to other nations. That is how important the United States currency, and our strength as a borrower, is to the global economy.

LOCAL

In 2022, the DC Council unanimously passed DC's Revised Criminal Code Act (RCCA), which was intended to modernize and overhaul DC's criminal code that is over a century old. As we wrote in the last issue, because DC is not a state, Congress has a certain amount of time in which to review and act on legislation passed by the DC Council. Major controversy arose when the US House of Representatives and the Senate both voted to prevent the RCCA from becoming law, and President Biden signed the measure to nullify the Revised Criminal Code Act. This was counter to his previous claim of respecting DC's home rule, which gives DC residents the right to govern their own affairs. Community advocates are continuing to advocate on this issue, with more than 50 organizations (including Free Minds) joining Hands Off DC, a coalition fighting for the right of DC residents to decide their own local policies.



Beyoncé breaks record for most Grammy wins ever
Source: People

ENTERTAINMENT

Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar dominated at this year's Grammy Awards, held in Los Angeles in February, with four and three wins respectively. Beyoncé received her 88th Grammy nomination this year, tying her with an interest that she is somewhat familiar with: Jay-Z.

Harry Belafonte, a renowned civil rights activist and legendary singer, passed away in April at the age of 96. Known for island tunes like Banana Boat Song and



Harry Belafonte
Source: Wikipedia

Jump in The Line, Belafonte was an ardent supporter and friend of Martin Luther King, Jr.

SPORTS



Florida Panthers' Matthew Tkachuk (19), Sam Reinhart (13), Josh Mahura (28) and Anthony Duclair (10) celebrate the team's 3-2 overtime win against the Toronto Maple Leafs in Game 5.

Source: Frank Gunn/The Canadian Press via AP



The UConn Huskies completed what was a dominant March Madness run with a national title win over San Diego State

Source: US Today

As we go to print, both the NHL and NBA are in the middle of the second round of their respective playoff series.

On the ice, the Carolina Hurricanes look like the most formidable team out of the Eastern Conference, along with the Florida Panthers, who shocked the world with an upset of the Boston Bruins in the first round. The Bruins had set the all-time record for wins in a regular season.

In the NCAA Tournament, the women's final shattered viewership records as Angel Reese and the LSU Tigers beat Caitlin Clark and the Iowa Hawkeyes. Both of those stars will be back next year, gunning for a rematch. On the men's side, the UConn Huskies secured their fifth national title with a win over San Diego State.

continued from page 6

FAMILY TIES: BALANCE MAKES ME HAPPY; IT MAKES ME FEEL WHOLE:

HOW THE LOVE OF FAMILY HELPS ONE FM MEMBER FIND BALANCE

Now the next wrinkle in the story is that we decided to adopt a daughter. For the adoption to go through though, we had to get divorced!

KELLI: What? No!

RODNEY: Yes! We both loved Kayla from the beginning, but I couldn't adopt her while I was in prison. So, we got a divorce. It was just a technicality, and it was worth it, because that's our baby girl. And you already know that as soon as I got out, we went straight down there and got remarried! We're in the process now of my adopting Kayla too and her taking my last name.

KELLI: So, here's the big question. How in the world have you managed to maintain a sense of balance throughout not just your 28 years of incarceration, but all these big changes since your release in 2022? *

RODNEY: For me, it's all about my religion. I'm a Muslim. It's taught me discipline, balance, and structure. It humbles me. I have a million different things going on and somehow, I seem to make it work. My religion teaches me that everything happens for a reason. There's not always an answer. I just know it's for the better good.

When I was incarcerated and things got rough or I'd lose hope, I remembered that things are happening for a reason. It's about accepting what I can't change. If I don't have control over it, there's no reason to let it rent a whole lot of space in my mind. I can use that space for what's important.

My love for my family keeps me balanced. I have a beautiful wife, two gorgeous daughters, a job, my license, a car... we are renting to own a nice spacious house with a yard... this is all the stuff that I dreamed of! I just spent 28 years in a space the size of a bathroom. If I can achieve balance being in that small place with people always around me, in an environment where I never knew what was gonna kick off... Well, I can do it anywhere.

KELLI: How do you balance taking care of your growing family with "me time?"

RODNEY: I like to be by myself and collect my thoughts and get my peace. I like to sit by myself or take a ride in the car and be alone with my thoughts. Reflecting is what always brings me back to what's important to me and that's my family.

KELLI: What advice would you share with our readers about balance?

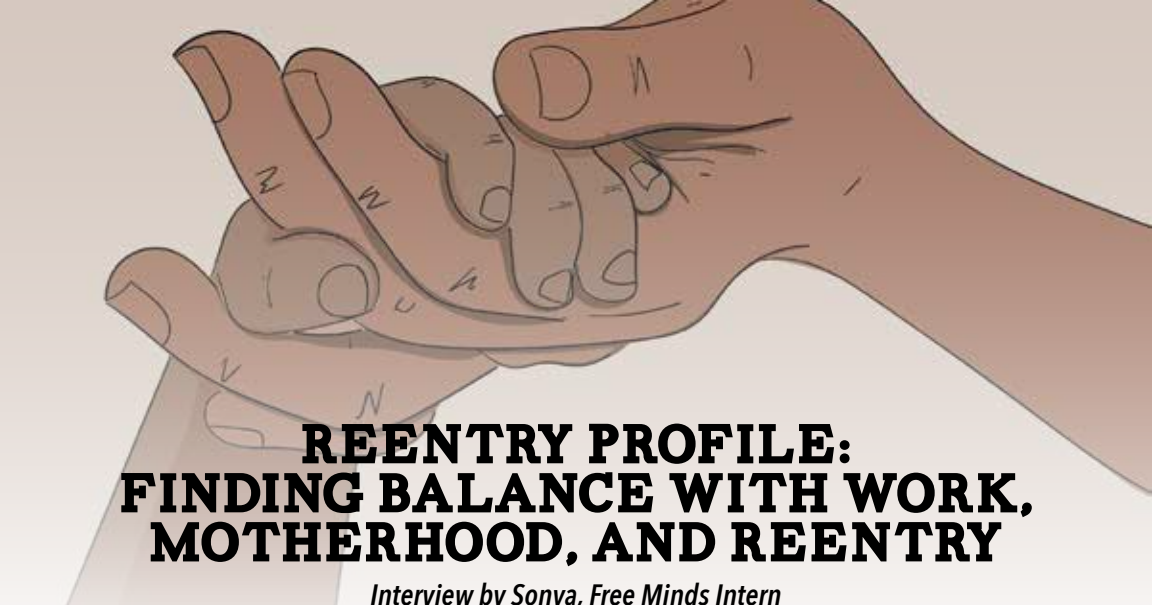
RODNEY: Try to make sure your physical, your mental and your spirit are all right. It's difficult, but slow motion is better than no motion. I try to keep my family in the forefront of my mind and that always helps me stay balanced. I remember I have a mother who supported me, a wife that waited for me, and two daughters depending upon me. So, find that one thing that really brings you joy and comfort. Key in on that thing to find balance and put you in place where you want more and better for yourself.

KELLI: How does balance make you feel?

RODNEY: Balance makes me happy. It makes me feel whole. When you have too much of something and not enough of something else, a lot of time you're not happy. Your body feels off. It's like having a bad tire on a car. You need to rotate them to feel balanced. I do a lot for all those I love and still save a little time for myself.

KELLI: Thank you so much for sharing your experience, Rodney. Congratulations to you and Lanet on your family. And I just have to say that's one of the best love stories I've heard in a long time!

**Rodney was released through the third version of IRAA (Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act) that allows people who were convicted for a crime committed when they were under 25 years old to apply for reconsideration after serving 15 years of their sentence.*



REENTRY PROFILE: FINDING BALANCE WITH WORK, MOTHERHOOD, AND REENTRY

Interview by Sonya, Free Minds Intern

Sonya recently checked in with Free Minds member Regina, who was part of the Women's Book Club at the DC Jail, and is now working with Free Minds through the Lead Out workforce development program.

SONYA: In what moments do you feel the most fulfilled within your work and role as a mother?

REGINA: The most fulfilling moments would have to be being a role model for my kids because they do look up to me, especially when it comes to education. They're always what make me so proud, like when they get the best grades, that's very fulfilling. Being able to provide is a necessity. But whenever I can do things out of the ordinary or norm for them is fulfilling. For example, buying them special things and taking them places, it's always great to be able to do those things.

SONYA: What does it look like to balance motherhood, work, and additional responsibilities such as probation?

REGINA: It can be overwhelming with all the requirements that I have to fulfill before my probation is over with. There's a number of classes I have to take such as driving courses. There's also the urinalysis I have to take every week. I also have to check in with my probation officer. I'm also doing a program every Tuesday and Thursday for two hours a day. There are a lot of requirements, and then I have to go home and feed my kids and do other extra programming that I have to do. It's a lot of programming that sometimes I feel is unnecessary because they're already tracking my urinalysis. But that's the judicial system, so it's out

of my control. Sometimes you have to miss work to see your probation officer. There is a timeframe that the urinalysis place is open so you have to make sure you get there before they close. It's just a lot of running around, and they're not flexible at all.

SONYA: In what ways does motherhood provide motivation for reentry?

REGINA: It definitely makes it better for me to just be a positive and better role model for my children. It helps me to stay focused and puts more emphasis on the fact that I do want to be there for my children because I have that responsibility. And as a single parent, who else is going to be there to take care of my kids if I was to get arrested again or re-incarcerated? It plays a huge role in having a positive mindset and just staying focused.

SONYA: What aspects of being a working mother and somebody who was formerly incarcerated do you feel do not receive much attention?

REGINA: I think a lot of the time the emphasis is primarily placed on men because most time being served is by men who are incarcerated for a long period of time. There's an expectation on the mom to be the nurturer and to be there for the child. But there's not a lot of reunification programs for mothers coming home, especially with adult children. Coming home and having adult kids, you have to build that foundation and build trust. With all your children you have to build trust and a working relationship where they know their mom's gonna be here and she's not

going anywhere. It's tough to build that foundation with children.

Speaking for myself, being a single mother and the provider, I'm everything to my kids. They expect me to be there. So when I'm not there, they question "Who do I go to?" I think the expectations for women are different for men because the prison and the judicial system are not really made up for women. It's generally bred for men so it's not realistic for women to be able to come home and just jump right back into the just normal. It's not normal for men either, but to have to jump right back into taking care of kids, working, and just being able to maintain a level head and stay focused is very demanding.

SONYA: Do you see a gender imbalance in reentry programming?

REGINA: I personally do. I've seen a numerous amount of men come home from prison and jail and land decent jobs and get help. The women I've seen come home from jail and prison just don't succeed as well as men. From what I've seen, I don't think the success rate is as good as it is for men. In my opinion, there's just a lot more stuff available for men such as training. But then I also feel a lot of women who are incarcerated suffer from substance abuse issues, and they don't get the treatment they need. So they generally come back out and then go right back to using substances. So that's their main focus, and at that point they're not really looking for a job or looking for help. There's a lot more jails and there are treatment facilities, and I think that's the problem.

SONYA: What does it mean to manage your time and prioritize so that you can really devote yourself to the things you care about?

REGINA: I've been trying to manage my time and my priorities in time compartments, having something to do every hour on the hour for 24 hours a day, except for the time that I'm studying. I'm doing a whole lot of stuff during the weekdays including working, programs for probation and reentry, my NA groups, and my support groups. My weekends I get kind of tired sometimes, so I set a day, either Saturday or Sunday, just to hang out with my kids and have a full day just for my children. I try to leave at least one full day a week for my kids because my weekdays are just full of just things that I need to do just to keep myself focused and keep myself on an even keel.

SONYA: How do you practice self care while balancing so much?

REGINA: When I think about self care, I think about skin care. I'm always making sure I do my daily skincare routine. That's really refreshing when I can do it day and night. Sometimes I'm too tired to do it at night but if I can get it in day and night and I feel good about myself. I can just take a nice relaxing bath two to three times a week. I get my exercise maybe twice a week. I definitely get my spiritual stuff in too. If I can get in all that stuff and fit it in through the week, I'm good.

SONYA: How has Free Minds been present in your journey throughout and following your incarceration now as a working mom?

REGINA: It's been great because when I was incarcerated, I was a part of the Womens' Book Club. That was awesome. The books, poetry, and meditation got me through my 40 days. Now being at Free Minds is great. I'm helping to make a difference in some of the people's lives that made a difference in my life, doing the same thing for other formerly incarcerated men and women. I'm working with Araba and Kelli to come up with some type of gender response program for women. It feels good to give back to people who have given to me.

SONYA: In looking towards the future, what goals do you have for yourself and what does that future look like?

REGINA: Just continue to stay on the right path, and continue to have my kids look up to me as a role model. I definitely hope to further my education at some point. I want to get my doctorate or PhD in business administration. But my son has a speech impediment and I want to see if I can delve into the speech pathology a bit so I can be able to assist him. As a mom that really cares about her child, I feel like I would be more suited to help my baby.

I really do want to start my own business, my own self care and athleisure brand that I want to do. I'm really into self care, athletics, exercise, health care, and body positivity. So I want people to be able to be comfortable in their own skin and just keep going on the right path. That's the path that I'm on now and it's doing good for me, I'm reaping the benefits of just doing well.



DID YOU KNOW?

Tips on Avoiding Misinformation

By Araba

Did you know that April 23rd is World Book Day? This day was established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). As stated by the current General Director of UNESCO, "books are vital vehicles to access, transmit and promote education, science, culture and information worldwide."

A key component to the promotion of this education is being able to confirm the validity of what we read. We can do this by balancing the perspectives from different sources to determine what information is true, and what information might be misinformation.

How can you tell whether a source is reliable? Most sources contain some form of author bias or personal opinion. However, there are a few different tools you can use to make sure your literature contains accurate and balanced perspectives:

- 1. Consider if the author or publisher is an expert in their field.** Have you heard of this author/publisher before? Do other people often reference this author/publisher (ex. The Washington Post, HarperCollins Publishers, a university press like Duke University Press)? Does the author talk about the credentials that make them an expert in a topic? If so, consider: what are those credentials? Sometimes this information may not be right in front of your face – looking through the *copyright* and *acknowledgement* pages at the beginning of books can give you clues as to where the source was published and who the author relied on for their information.
- 2. Consider if the information you are ingesting is current.** What year was your source published? The information the source is presenting may have been true at one time, but may have since been debunked, disproven, or only partly true according to new evidence. Especially if your source is nonfiction, check to see if it includes a *bibliography* or *works cited* page that lists where the author got their information. If the dates on the author's list of sources are out of date, the information that the author is discussing may also be out of date and inaccurate for the present day.
- 3. Try to evaluate the amount of bias in your source.** Even if an author has a clear opinion about a topic, a good and credible source will try to accurately include multiple perspectives on that topic. To evaluate the level of bias in your source, consider: How does the author of your chosen source compare to other authors that talk about the same topic? Does this author insult people with opposing viewpoints? Does this author reference other experts on the topic, and does the author represent other viewpoints fairly?

Getting into the habit of evaluating your sources can take some getting used to. However, you'll find that the more credible sources you read, the better you'll get at discussing issues with a balanced perspective. Being well-read is more than having read multiple books about a topic – it's also important to be fluent in all the angles so you can continue to change and expand your own point of view!

REAL WORLD OF WORK: WHERE I AM MEETS WHERE I'M GOING

By Meg

In a world of work, it can be difficult to make time for rest. As a chef in a local biscuit company and restaurant, Free Minds member Broderick knows this well. He started as a chef there about four months ago, and so far it's been an incredible experience. Work, especially in the food industry, is demanding. So how do you find that balance to allow yourself time to breathe? I sat down with Broderick to talk about his journey so far and how he manages his responsibilities. Though the work is exhausting, Broderick assured me it is well worth it, and he's proud of what he's accomplished so far.

It can be easy to get caught up in the rhythm of being constantly available, and we often forget to make time for ourselves. Burnout occurs as a result of a high workload over time and can lead to fatigue and severe stress. I asked Broderick what boundaries he's created for himself and others to ensure he has time to rest, and he was very honest in admitting that's something he still needs to work on. His routine seems set in stone, but he's trying to build outlets for other interests. With a packed schedule like his, fitting in time for hobbies and moments of rest feels borderline impossible. He confided in me that he often finds himself persevering through feelings of exhaustion to accomplish important tasks. "I push through until it's done," he told me, "it's worth it." Even during our conversation, business started picking up that demanded his attention. Against the backdrop of his busy schedule, Broderick expressed his enthusiasm for his ambitions, as well as a desire to work in more space for balance.

His work is rewarding, and it's something he sees himself continuing with as the future unfolds. I asked him if his past goals align with what he's currently working towards, and he said they do to a certain extent. He acknowledged his growth while honoring his past ambitions. While an important part of balance is managing your time in the present, another essential way of keeping ourselves grounded is to address how our needs can shift over time. Broderick is present in his current work, but he made sure to notice where he was, as well as where he hopes to go in the future.

In the journey towards balance, one of the most common disconnects we can feel in our day-to-day life is the rift between our passions and means of earning a living. In a fast-paced world, passions and other aspects of life can fall by the wayside. The idea of a dream job or a dream way of life is a source of motivation for many. Broderick assured me that he does have a dream job, but maybe not in the traditional sense. "It's less like a dream position," he said, "and more like the need to build something for myself." He was adamant that while he spends his time at work, he is looking to the future to accomplish his dreams, and he makes sure to devote energy to building the life he strives for. "I want to do real estate," he told me, "it's really interesting to me." He acknowledged the need for balance in the present in order to get to the point of being able to pursue other dreams.

Above all, he keeps a flexible, positive mindset that allows him to tackle his current projects and breathe life into his work. Balance isn't something we can wake up one morning and achieve – it's a constant, conscious effort we make to better ourselves and our lives. It can be difficult, but many like Broderick are making it work, one day at a time.



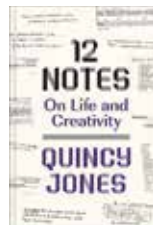
WHAT WE'RE READING

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."

- **Araba: *Fruit of the Drunken Tree* by Ingrid Rojas Contreras**

For our book club with women and young adults at the DC Jail, we're about halfway into the first half of a book we're reading with both the men and women called *Fruit of the Drunken Tree* by Ingrid Rojas Contreras. The author describes the story as semi-autobiographical, and I feel like you can really tell. Much of the story is told from the narrator's perspective in childhood, starting from about seven years old. It takes place in the 1980s during the height of Pablo Escobar's influence in Colombia. The young narrator discusses violence as a daily routine, and we start to see how that violence affects the girl's affluent family differently from their live-in maid, Petrona. When we read the first few pages together, there was some debate between members of the men's book club as to where violence was worse in the 1990s: Los Angeles, where the narrator ends up migrating to, or Colombia where the narrator is born. I'm interested to see how people's perspectives change at the next session after they've gotten more into the book!



- **Free Minds Reentry Book Club "The Build Up": *12 Notes: On Life and Creativity* by Quincy Jones**

This guidebook encourages readers to pursue creative outlets regardless of life circumstances. Using lessons from his own life, Jones demonstrates the power of manifesting self-expression. He covers topics including how to transform grief into power, setting goals, and how to articulate intentions through daily affirmation. He does all of this through a creative process that highlights honesty, hard work, and good relationships as essential for one's career.

- **Julia: *Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi**

I recently read *Transcendent Kingdom* by Yaa Gyasi. The author, Yaa Gyasi, also wrote *Homegoing*, a novel that I loved, so when she wrote another book I knew I wanted to read it. *Transcendent Kingdom* is a novel about a Ghanaian American woman named Gifty, who grows up in Alabama as the daughter of immigrant parents who at times struggle to adapt to life in the United States. Gifty's older brother is a talented athlete and a loving brother, but in his teenage years he becomes addicted to opioids, which has devastating consequences for him, Gifty, and their family. The book is split between two timelines, following Gifty's childhood and adolescence, and her adulthood, in which she has become a neuroscientist studying mental illness and trying to come to terms with her family's suffering and her own challenges with her faith. Yaa Gyasi is a really talented writer, and I thought this book was a beautiful, affecting narrative about love, grief, and spirituality.

- **Jasmine: *The Personal Librarian* by Marie Benedict**

The Personal Librarian is a historical fiction account based on extensive research about the woman, Belle da Costa Greene, who was the personal librarian to J.P. Morgan, an early US captain of industry at the turn of the 20th century. But Bella has a huge secret - she's passing for white. In fact, her father, Richard Theodore Greener, was in the first integrated class at Harvard University and a prominent member of WEB DuBois' 'talented tenth'. But guess what: she's not the only person in her world that is passing for white. This book is a beautiful coming of age story of a woman who worked hard and had to navigate the racist and gendered norms of the times she lived in. This book was co-written by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray.

CONVERSACIONES DE MENTES LIBRES/ FREE MINDS CONVERSATIONS

By Carlos (Honduras/DC)

"Conversaciones de Mentes Libres" es una sección regular de la revista Connect, donde ofrecemos un artículo escrito en español y luego lo traducimos al inglés. Como sabrán, en 2019 lanzamos Mentes Libres, un club de lectura en español en la Cárcel de DC. Free Minds trabaja para trascender todos los desafíos hacia la verdadera conexión humana y la autoexpresión creativa, incluyendo las barreras de los idiomas! Si hablas español y te gustaría contribuir a esta columna, ¡escríbenos y déjanos saber! Y si no hablas español pero te gustaría aprender, puedes solicitar para poder obtener un libro y comenzar tu aventura de aprendizaje de este idioma.

"Conversaciones de Mentes Libres" (Free Minds Conversations) is a regular feature of the Connect magazine, where we offer an article written in Spanish, and then translate it into English. As you may know, in 2019, we launched Mentes Libres (Free Minds), a book club in Spanish at the DC Jail. Free Minds works to transcend all challenges to true human connection and creative self-expression—including language barriers! If you speak Spanish and would like to contribute to this column, write and let us know! And if you don't speak Spanish but would like to learn, you can request a book and start your language learning adventure (that's "aventura" in Spanish!)

Balance

Antes de todo, quiero dar un fuerte saludo a todos la familia de Mentes Libres que se encuentran conmigo entre estas palabras. Espero que se encuentren fuertes y con la mejor salud, mental y física. Y que se encuentren en un estado mentalmente... libre.

Para los que no me conocen, me llamo Carlos. Trabajo con Free Minds en un programa que se llama "On The Same Page" (En La Misma Página). Es donde compartimos los poemas (que son mandados por nuestros miembros que están detrás de esas paredes) con la comunidad (Escuelas/Organizaciones Privadas/Universidades...etc.). Ellos a cambio escuchan nuestras historias para que puedan conocer quienes son nuestros miembros y cuánto desean hacer ese cambio en sus vidas.

Para este artículo, nos dieron esta palabra... Balance. Al pensar en esta palabra, muchas cosas se me cruzaron por la mente. Muchas cosas que relaciono con esta palabra. Balance con mi familia, porque me siento jalado por todos lados por ellos. Con el trabajo, porque me siento tan atrasado con esta tecnología. Balance en comer y hacer ejercicio, porque la comida está tan rica por estas esquinas y me estoy poniendo redondito. Balance en mi relación romántica, porque mi corazón quiere ver todo con ella. Pero de todo esto, para mí, lo más importante sería hablar del balance de mi propio ser.

Les he contado que estuve encarcelado por 25 años. Este mes de Abril estaré celebrando mi tercer año en libertad. Después de tres años, todavía me encuentro adaptándome en todo aspecto. Como bien saben, estar encarcelado no es fácil, casi todo es más mental que otras cosas. Si uno no es fuerte mentalmente, como esas paredes aprietan un poco más, verdad? **Nada** en prisión es normal! Pero la triste cosa es que con el tiempo que pasa, esas cosas, empiezan a ser parte de la normalidad en prisión, y con el tiempo, se pueden hacer normales.

Bueno, les comento eso porque después de 25 años, ustedes se pueden imaginar lo normal que muchas cosas se me hicieron con todo ese tiempo. Les doy un ejemplo; Yo no me considero una persona violenta ni agresiva. La prisión me forzó a comportarme así en momentos. Enseñándome como si esas fueran las únicas soluciones para resolver un problema. Y les recuerdo que la mayoría de los problemas, casi siempre empiezan por algo pequeño o algo que se pudo arreglar con un "perdón" o "disculpa." Estando aquí afuera, se me hace difícil hablar calmado cuando algo o alguien me molesta. Tengo que recordarme que no estoy en esos lugares donde todos esperan una reacción agresiva y violenta. Tengo que encontrar ese balance dentro de mí. Ustedes saben que la cultura en prisión demanda el respeto en todo. Aquí afuera en este mundo, no. Y tener ese balance me ayuda a comunicar mis molestias mejor.

Otra cosa que he tratado de balancear, es que en prisión me hizo cómodo al estar encerrado y solo. Me siento en paz cuando estoy solo. Pero sé que no es nada normal. Hay muchas veces que no quiero salir o no quiero estar con familia. No porque no quiero compartir con ellos o no los quiero. Simplemente es porque quiero estar solo. Reconozco el balance que necesito para salir de ese estado mental y poder disfrutar de esta libertad normalmente. ¡Sé que no es normal! La locura de esto es que, solo los que han estado detrás de esas paredes me pueden entender. Día por día estoy entendiendo mejor las cosas que tengo que balancear dentro de mí. Entiendo muy bien el desbalance que la prisión causó. Mis heridas mentales! Pero solo el reconocerlo, me trae más cerca a mi normalidad y balance mental.

Balance

First of all, I want to give a big greeting to all of the Mentes Libres family who are with me through these words. I hope you are strong and in the best of health, mentally and physically. That you are found in the best state... mentally free.

For those who don't know me, my name is Carlos. I work with Free Minds in a program called "On The Same Page." It is where we share the poems (which are sent by our members behind those walls) with the community (Schools/Private Organizations/Universities...etc.). They in turn listen to our stories so that they can learn who our members are and how much they want to make that change in their lives.

For this article, we were given this word... Balance. Thinking of this word, many things crossed my mind. Many things I relate to this word. Balance with my family, because I feel pulled from all sides by them. With work, because I feel so behind with this technology. Balance between eating and exercising, because the food is so delicious around these corners and I'm getting plump. Balance in my romantic relationship, because my heart wants to see everything with her. But of all this, for me, the most important thing would be to talk about the balance of my own being.

I have shared with you that I was imprisoned for 25 years. This April I will be celebrating my third year in freedom. After three years, I still find myself adjusting in every way. As you well know, being incarcerated is not easy, almost everything is more mental than anything else. If one is not mentally strong, those walls squeeze a little more, right? **Nothing** in prison is normal! But the sad thing is that as time goes by, these things start to be part of the normality in prison, and over time, they can become normal.

Well, I'm telling you about this because after 25 years, you can imagine how normal many things have become to me with all that time. I'll give you an example; I do not consider myself a violent or aggressive person. Prison forced me to behave like this at times. Teaching me as if those were the only solutions to solve a problem. And I remind you that most problems almost always start with something small or something that could be fixed with an "I'm sorry" or "I apologize." Being out here, it's hard for me to speak calmly when something or someone is bothering me. I have to remind myself that I am not in those places where everyone expects an aggressive and violent reaction. I have to find that balance within myself. You know that prison culture demands respect in everything. Out here in the free world, no. And having that balance helps me communicate what bothers me better.

Another thing that I have tried to balance is that prison made me comfortable with being indoors and alone. I feel at peace when I'm alone. But I know it's not normal. There are many times that I don't want to go out or I don't want to be with my family. Not because I don't want to spend time with them or I don't love them. It's just because I want to be alone. I recognize the balance that I need to get out of that state of mind and be able to enjoy this freedom normally. I know it's not normal! The madness of it is that only those who have been behind those walls can understand me. Day by day I am understanding better the things that I have to balance within myself. I understand very well the unbalance that prison caused within. My mental wounds! But just recognizing it brings me closer to my normality and mental balance.

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club

An American Marriage

with Neely



Thank you to everyone who shared their reflections on our current BAM book, *You are Here: Discovering the Magic of the Present Moment* by Thich Nhat Hanh. Thich Nhat Hanh uses this book to provide the reader with insight into how we can use mindfulness to overcome suffering and achieve joy. We loved reading your insightful responses. Here is what some of you had to say:

1. "Home" is a complex word that often has several different connotations. On p. 37, Thich Nhat Hanh defines home as the here and now. Do you agree? What is home to you?

DJ: A home is a place where there are people who have love for one another and are willing to help each other in the time of need.

EJ: Yes, I have to agree that home is the here and now. When I think about home, I think about my family, I think about a place where I'm safe, comfortable, and happy, at peace, and loved by everybody there, including myself.

FJ: Yes, I agree. Home is a place of peace of mind, freedom, family and love. A comfort zone.

MC: I agree with Hanh in terms of having "arrived." What he means is, he has traveled to a place in his life spiritually where it feels like home. He's not speaking on the physical. Home to me is peace and fulfilling my purpose in life.

RB: Home in the context that the author is describing seems to be the stable quality of our minds. We have to train that quality for it to function, but when we recognize that stable quality of mind, then we have arrived at "home." Since we all have this mind, and since we can all train our minds' calm, stable nature so that we can use it as a safe place from the endless difficulties of life, we all have this home within, but we must develop it.

AHA: I agree in how he uses this concept, making it clear in the example he gives as one being there, free and present with those you care for and love in that moment. Home to me is being where I feel most at peace surrounded by loved ones happy, engaged, and free.

2. On p. 74, Thich Nhat Hanh uses cows as a metaphor (when a word or phrase symbolizes something else) for things in our lives that cause us suffering. Do you have any "cows" in your life? Are there some "cows" that are harder to let go than others?

EJ: Right now at this moment I have no cows. For me the cows come and go. For example I used to suffer because thinking if I stay in jail too long I'd become lonely. As time went by I realized that I could never be lonely, I have me. Another example of how my cows come and go, when I used to experience a loss from death in my

family that used to be one that stayed with me for awhile. I used to think about it too much to the point where I got headaches. It hurt knowing I wouldn't see, touch, or talk to them anymore. It wasn't until my grandmother went away that I realized that she was gone. I have her blood inside of me so I have her inside of me, when I look at myself I see her in me. I used to try to block it but it always had a way of showing back up. How I dealt with it is I told myself if I don't let go it'll always hold me back and keep me depressed, for sure that's not what that person would've wanted. I took time to grieve then kept moving, plus I got pleasure knowing that they are still with me inside of me. I wish I had the letter I wrote to my family when my grandmother passed. You all would've loved it.

RB: Cows seem to represent things or ideas that we are attached to that give us a sense of security while causing us a great deal of harm. If I am a member of a gang, for instance, and that gang's main purpose is also causing the destruction of my family and community, but at the same time the gang gives me a sense of respect, and pride, and security; then the gang is a cow. As long as I am attached to myself as a member of that group I cannot evolve beyond that point. So either I have to change the gang or leave. If not, that attachment to my cows will destroy me.

MC: "Cows" I believe refers to materialistic "things." I'm currently incarcerated in prison. There aren't many "cows" we are allowed to have. However I'd like to "own" a few cows. But I don't believe I'm the type of person to fret if I lost my "cows." For some people some "cows" may be hard to let go.

FJ: No. I let go of all the bad friends and involvements and bad teachings. Yeah, because I was raised around bad people and I adapt to their way of life. That caused me to go to jail.

DJ: Yes there are a few in my life right now that only deal with me when they want something or need my help...

AHA: I don't have any cows in my life now but when I did I would use the word "leech" for someone who stuck to me in my life, that was no good for me to grow in my life, that was causing me to fall into the same traps. There are always some harder to let go as a presence in your life, especially if it's in your family but a person you can not let go easy.

3. A major theme throughout this book is the concept of impermanence, and how important it is to acknowledge and appreciate that everything in this life is impermanent. Why do

you think people are so afraid of change? Do you think applying the idea of impermanence to your own life would help you in overcoming adversities you are currently facing?

MC: I appreciate routine. Being incarcerated has shown me that one must spend this time wisely. However I'm not against a change in routine. I'm also not afraid to change my habits or thoughts. I strive to be open minded. To be afraid of change is to deny yourself growth. I think that people are afraid to find out what they may stand for or stand on is truly unstable ground.

FJ: Because they don't have an idea how the results are going to be. Yes, applying that is growth for the better days of not only my future, but the future of the community looking at me following my footsteps/the unseen eyes!

EJ: I think people are so afraid of change because it's new to them and they like what is familiar to them. Us that's locked up should be used to impermanence, because things are changing daily for us. I never thought about impermanence the way Thich Nhat Hanh explained it. Yes, I do think that if I used impermanence to my life it would help me overcome any adversities that come my way. Change is wonderful and helps me build to become a better person.

DJ: No I do not, for as long as you're changing for the better then things should be well.

RB: Absolutely! Realizing that the many negative things that have happened to me in the past have affected me dramatically but the past doesn't control me. Even though the emotions and memories are very strong from past events, when I realize their temporary nature I can start to gain control over my future. Everyone alive 150 years ago is gone. All their loves/hates/demons/angels. The same will be true for me. So I'm not going to fixate on the impermanent past or the difficulties of the present or future. I will decide what I want to accomplish with this short life and go for it. What do I have to lose?

AHA: I think some are afraid of change because they only are used to the things they have become accustomed to, believing it will be the same always. I think applying the idea of impermanence in my own life would help me in overcoming what I face since I will do things in the moment always conscious that these adversaries or obstacles won't last.

4. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an acquaintance of Thich Nhat Hahn, who educated Dr. King on peacebuilding by sharing his own experiences with the anti-war movement in Vietnam (where Thich Nhat Hahn is from). Do you think any of the practices shared in this book could be used in larger movements for social justice? What role might they play?

RB: The main thing I learned from this book is if it's going to happen, I have to do it. If my life or the life of my loved ones is going to improve then I must be the agent of that change. By developing my core life skills I can be more powerful than if I remain at the level I'm at now. For instance, I learned how to do legal work. I can be an asset to my community instead of looking for someone to help me with legal work. To make the world better, I start by making myself better at something productive, like learning to meditate or financial literacy. I think that concept is called agency, we're both the problem and the solution.

MC: Peacebuilding could play a part in getting all the parties at the table. But what's next? Agendas will still remain. Communication will be the key to solving today's social justice issues.

DJ: No I do not, for the days and times are different now. The way they stood together for a better cause back then will not happen in these days and times.

EJ: Yes, I do feel that some of the practices that Thich Nhat Hahn shared in his book could be used in larger movements for social justice. If we all change our perceptions, let go of everything and get the mindset that we are all family, we all have the same blood, we all are part of one race, the human race, then we'll have real peace in this world.

AHA: I think the practices shared in this book and other figures who have promised such can be used in a larger movement. MLK like Thich Nhat Hahn and others have applied what they promoted, succeeding on levels in times that have now shown a lot of progress, so where needed yes it can be used to play a role in peacebuilding in all communities where we still see violence, police brutality, discrimination, and so forth.

5. Thich Nhat Hahn has a positive outlook on death because, according to Buddhist teaching, it's not an end but a continuation. Is this convincing to you? Did his perspective change your own perspective on death?

DJ: No, for Allah said that's the only thing we are guaranteed: death, and nothing else.

EJ: I have to agree with Thich Nhat Hahn that death is positive and a continuation. What got me to that point was when I was seeing people reach out to their ancestors for help and answers to problems. Growing up my family were Christians and tried to give me the Christian doctrine of heaven and hell when death comes... I was told it was bad and shouldn't be done to reach out to the dead... I asked myself if I can get answers that would lead me the right way. Why is that so bad? When I came to the realization that my ancestors were already in me I asked myself again how is reaching within me bad.

MC: My father just passed less than 2 weeks ago. Thich Nhat Hahn is very convincing. To me death has always been a part of the natural order. The moment we are born, we are only promised death. And although our physical bodies may die, our spiritual beings last through eternity.

RB: I've died, I can assure you that only your body dies. The mind continues and all of us are going to experience this sooner or later. Only do things you want to meet up with in the future. If you don't want anyone to steal from you, don't steal from anyone, because there is nowhere to hide from our own creations, we store those actions as memories and we'll meet up with them again, even if we don't recognize them as our own creations.

FJ: It's not, it made me look at life different and want to live long.

AHA: This concept is not convincing to me even though Buddhist teachings are different from what I follow. Death is a part of life and a transition/continuation into the afterlife so to possess a negative outlook on death won't change the result whatever you believe in. It didn't change my perspective on death since mine was positive from my teachings in Islam.



AROUND THE WORLD: THE CITY OF ANGELS

By Aiyah, FM Friend

Free Minds friend Aiyah takes us on a creative journey inspired by being in Los Angeles, California, a city in the southwestern United States, on the coast of the Pacific Ocean.

Ocean waves pass through a narrow parting, a gray cliff drops into the mouth of a cave, a black crow circles his territory. The trail ends here. And so we sit on the cold rock, where the water brushes against the edge and the sun can't reach. We look across the water, to the island. The mist is rising higher as we get closer to sunset. There are very few people here, and the few are quiet and far enough to make you feel alone. Behind you, the mountains rise sharply. You close your eyes, and because the water and the mountains and the silence lends it easily to you, you reach out for the past, review the course of your life...the loved ones you passed through and the ones who passed through you, the stories you've seen through and the ones you left unfinished. You think through this and many things. Your mind between the mountain and the sea is a long trail with many hikers. You let them through, you watch them, you remember, and you pass through each feeling again, the pleasure, the hurt, the nagging regret. Between the stiff rocks and the restless water, years pass through your body.

Before Los Angeles was Los Angeles, it was called "Tongva" and the indigenous people of the land believed that plants, people, and animals were all "interconnected, equal forms of life." . The frothing sea, the restless crow above, the strangers along the shore, they were all considered a single portrait of life, equally contributing to it, in their silence and in their chaos. Maybe part of the reason we do what we do: we leave home or we stay, we resist or we surrender because we are trying to remember and re-experience a time when this singular body that carries so much was once and still can be lighter in its existence. When our presence is only part of a whole, when we can feel like the things around us can carry life with us, then maybe we've learned to travel without traveling at all.

And in the end, it doesn't matter much where we are. This could be any sea, and those could be any mountains. Travel gives what it gives because we open ourselves differently. We become almost entirely different people. It's not only what's in front of us that changes, it's that we become someone else

when we're away, someone who is very alive to the way the sun moves through a patch of wildflowers, the way the shadow of a palm tree plays against the yellow curtains in the early morning...

There's very little left of the sun on the way back. The shore leads you to a trail that hugs the edge of a low mountain, taking you further up. You walk slowly. To your left is a sharp drop into the sea and to your right is a hill full of daisies and tall grass. You pause and lift yourself onto the top of the gate bordering the cliff, and you sit with your eyes closed, the breeze encircling you, the dolphins dipping in and out of the water below you. You are easing into a moment you'll remember for a long time afterwards. You, the dolphins, the daisies and the tall grass all merging into one, all touching and equal parts of a whole. Every moment we remember this, every moment we accept the impossibility of solitude is a moment of travel.





CONNECT ON CORRLINKS

By Aneka

Good news FM fam!

Sending in your *Connect* submissions just got easier! If you have access to Corrlinks, you can now send in your submissions and receive writing prompts and other *Connect* related updates via Corrlinks.

Members without Corrlinks access can continue to send in *Connect* submissions via mail. This email correspondence will be solely for the purpose of exchanging *Connect* related information.

Members should not expect a personalized response when submitting content to this email address. All personal correspondence will continue to be through mail.

Free Minds Corrlinks Information:

Corrlinks First Name: Free Minds

Corrlinks Last Name: Connect

Corrlinks Email: connect@freemindsbookclub.org

CELEBRATING MEMBERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Here are a few of our members' many accomplishments since our last issue!

- ★ DS got his Associate's Degree in Business Management
- ★ RB was the graduation speaker at his Challenge Program graduation
- ★ TG completed 3 college courses

Please share your accomplishments with us to be featured!

FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB & WRITING WORKSHOP

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NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: HOMETOWN PRIDE

By Julia

We all have someplace we're from, and someplace we call home. For some of us, those two places may be one and the same, although for others, their chosen home may be different from where they're from. Whether you choose to write about the place you grew up in, or another place where you feel a deep sense of kinship and belonging, we want to hear all about it! Maybe that's DC, maybe it's somewhere else in the country (or the world!). Take us on a poetic journey through your hometown and how it makes you feel. Challenge yourself to be as specific and descriptive as possible; what can you see on the street? What foods can you smell cooking as you walk through the neighborhood? What music or voices can you hear in the park? Do you have a favorite moment or memory where you felt proud to call this place your home? And if you didn't feel that kind of connection, tell us about your imaginary hometown that does make you feel that sense of belonging and pride?

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!



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