

January/February/March 2024  
Vol. 13, Issue 1

# Free minds Connect

## Dreams

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: BETTER TOGETHER

Free Minds Dreamers,

I hope this issue finds you well in your body, free in your mind, and strong in your vital spirit. This magazine that you hold in your hands is the tangible realization of a dream. A dream from a young man named Glen who was incarcerated at age 17 in one of the harshest places on Earth: death row. If you haven't heard Glen's story before, he is our "original Free Mind." Glen's story and his dream wasn't confined within the prison walls. He became an avid reader and writer, and soon a dream bubbled up as he shared his love of books with others on the Pollock Unit in Huntsville, Texas. He wanted to start a book club and writing workshop for young people like him who had been incarcerated in the adult prison system. He knew he could not fulfill his dream on his own as his execution stay was tragically denied, so he asked others to bring that dream to fruition. That is what our Free Minds community is about: helping you turn your dreams into reality.



Glen, the "original Free Mind."

This past August marked 60 years since the world famous "I Have a Dream" speech that Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. This iconic speech has been voted one of the greatest speeches in the 20th Century for many reasons (cadence, vivid imagery, universal appeal, timing of events, etc.). You can see these qualities at work in this line:

*"I have a dream that one day, even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice."*

But I contend that another reason the speech is so renowned is because it evoked the power of dreams.

Dreams are vital for all of us, no matter our circumstances. Dreams give us something to work towards or look forward to, and something to hold onto in difficult times. In the daily struggle that can be the carceral system, just establishing a dream can be a challenge and if this is you, no worries!

The FM team is here with seeds of ideas and support so you can plant them and see them blossom. Sharing your dreams for yourself, your loved ones, and the world can be a transcendent way to assert your agency and show everyone the incredible gifts and power that you have to create a new future.

In this issue, Free Minds member Cornelious tells us about his dream to open a joint restaurant and barbershop where people can come together to fill their bellies and get their hair on point (page 33). MAR writes about how he manifested his dream to pursue higher education in the facility, despite COVID restrictions (page 8). DA shares his dream (page 37) that I think all of our readers can relate to: the day he will walk outside those walls as a free man!

I love MZ's dream for a perfect world (page 14); may we all get the opportunity to live in such a world some day! AJ takes us on a journey to the beautiful Aztlan island (named for the ancestral homeland of the Aztec peoples), a land of righteousness and peace, where vibrant music "overwhelms every soul with joy" (page 9).

Aneka teaches us about the science of dreaming on page 17, including tips for better sleep and more pleasant dreams. Of course, we're all big believers in the benefits of writing, so learn more about dream journaling and how you can give it a try on page 30. For many people, sleeping and dreaming can be a challenge. If that's you, maybe give meditation a try to get in the zone (page 29). Kelli will have us all dreaming of a perfect day at the beach!

Now, I'll let you dive into this inspiring issue, but I want to close with a quote from AB's poem on page 13:

*Dreams must not be kept asleep,  
So wake up and see your dreams come alive.*

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: Me, Myself, and I**

*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 Sofia*

## **Free Minds Holds Its First Networking Day Event for Reentry Book Club Members**

On December 9th, Free Minds staff and members in reentry came together for our first official networking day. Members were invited to come and share their products, skills, services, and entrepreneurial endeavors with one another. Free Minds members shared their entrepreneurial pursuits and had tables to share more information on their services and products. Several members showcased books they have published and one member, Derrick, showcased his photobooth and a non-profit organization he co-founded called Mute the Violence, which is focused on bringing awareness to gun violence in DC and practicing nonviolent alternatives to conflict between groups of people. Free Minds member Cornelious showed off his catering business by providing a mouth-watering array of soul food for the event. His menu included fluffy jasmine rice, cheesy seafood mac & cheese, and jerk chicken wings, to name a few of the delicious dishes he provided. There was also a children's corner so that families of our members could also join in on the event. Overall, it was a successful first networking day and a great opportunity for our members to learn more about each other's businesses.

## **Black History Learning Group**

In our reentry program, one of our popular initiatives is the Black History Learning Group, led by members Eyone and Charles. This group meets monthly over Zoom (the popular video call platform), and every month they focus on a specific topic important to Black history. These sessions are guided by YouTube videos made by author and the first Free Minds Glen McGinnis awardee, Clint Smith. Examples of some of the topics covered so far include the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Harlem Renaissance, Reconstruction, and the Great Migration. Let us know if you'd like to read a book about any of these subjects!

## **Free Minds Meets On the Same Page with the State Department**

Free Minds had the opportunity to share our mission and the poetry of our amazing members with staff at the State Department (the State Department is part of the executive branch of the US federal government, primarily responsible for foreign policy and international relations). On January 10, Free Minds staff and Poet Ambassadors Terrell and Umar encouraged State Department employees on their lunch breaks to leave positive feedback on poems sent in by our members. Umar and Terrell also shared their experiences with the employees, sharing how the literary arts and Free Minds helped them during their incarceration. The employees have been stationed all over the world as diplomats, with some telling us that they served in countries such as Botswana and Taiwan. The employees were amazed by the poetry written by our talented members and many were interested in volunteering with Free Minds or hosting more events at the State Department with poetry sent in by members. Several high-ranking officials also had the opportunity to stop by and learn about Free Minds including the Director General of Foreign Service and former US Ambassador, Marcia Bernicat, and Former Secretary of State and U.S. Senator John Kerry. It was amazing to see the work of Free Minds' members touch the hearts of government officials who have served all around the globe!

## **In Loving Memory**

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

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### *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, Demetric, Jamal, James, Deangelo, Raequan, Roy

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*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 November/December 2023 Connect Resilience.*

**RL:** Just got the new *Connect*. I like it and have read most of it already. I love the idea of the Go-Go Museum and must admit I am a fan since hearing it back in 2009 on Go-Go Fridays.

**SC:** In the interview, *Mental Resilience: An Interview with a Grief and Trauma Therapist* by Regina, they were talking about how can someone practice mental resilience while in solitary confinement. That answer the therapist gave is really helpful to me in my current situation. I've been practicing every example that the therapist gave in that interview. I really do appreciate his advice.

**HW:** I think resilience and being hard are two different things. Here is the difference between the two. Resilience you learn from your mistakes or if something bad happens to you, you pull through and better from it. If you're hard you put a wall up to protect yourself for trying to prove your resilience. You went through so much that your resilience has made you hard.

**AHA:** The Go-Go's for me were a daily occasion at one point in my life. Even though I was young, I got into many venues by knowing the promoter or being close to someone in my favorite band, Backyard Band (BYB). My best friend was lead for BYB, my cousin and the lead's brother all grew up together in the same Columbia Heights neighborhood, so it was easy access for us. I can recall when there was a venue open everyday of the week in the city alone.

My favorite was the Black Hole on Fridays and La Pena on Saturdays. La Pena, only being a block away from my neighborhood, was our home base spot, which brought a lot of memories before closing in the late 90's. One experience that sticks out at an earlier spot many don't remember was the Ibex. I was very young, to the point where it had closed down in late '96, early '97, so I was about 14 years old. It wasn't easy to get in this young, but we got in. Plus my cousin worked the door. For me, the best was when they eventually started kiddie cabarets so that people, young and old, got in easily to have a blast. A lot of these spots can't be forgotten, which is a part of our history and culture.

I love DC and Go-Go, so this museum is long overdue. Getting shout outs and engaging with the live bands is unlike any other experience. Cranking to the beats, as we would say. Some experiences go even further back, but my era was special, the 90's. So along with the history, I would give mention to all the spots who let Go-Go be heard in the city from early on until they started to fade. So thanks to all the spots and owners/promoters whose venues paved the way. Those I saw and didn't see, but remembered. So to name what I know, thanks to WST, The Black Hole, La Pena, Metro Club, IBEX, Zulu Cave, Ice Box, Brain Manor, The Palace, Ceasefire, The Eastside, D.C. Live, 911 Club, all the block parties, the Revolutions, and all the small venues who gave Go-Go a place to be heard.

*in response to the article about the Go-Go Museum that is being built*

## QUOTE—I—VATOR

***To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.***

— Anatole France, French poet and journalist, active in the late 1800s and early 1900s

***Dreams can become a reality when we possess a vision that is characterized by the willingness to work hard, a desire for excellence, and a belief in our right and our responsibility to be equal members of society.***

— Janet Jackson, American singer, dancer, and actress

***All human beings are also dream beings. Dreaming ties all mankind together.***

— Jack Kerouac, American novelist and poet known for the promotion of civil rights for society

***It is not true that people stop pursuing dreams because they grow old, they grow old because they stop pursuing dreams.***

— Gabriel García Márquez, Colombian novelist and Nobel Prize winner, known for use of magical realism in novels such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien Años de Soledad*)

***Don't give up on your dreams, or your dreams will give up on you.***

— John Wooden, Former head basketball coach at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles)

***Dreams don't have timelines, deadlines, and aren't always in straight lines.***

— Jason Reynolds, American author of novels and poetry for young adults (*Long Way Down*)



*Janet Jackson*

# FAMILY TIES: LESSONS AND ADVICE TO PARENTS AND CHILDREN

By Jae-lynn

*For this issue's Family Ties column, Jae-lynn, our Prison Book Club intern, was excited to talk with Maurice, a Free Minds member who was incarcerated at 22 years old for over 26 years. He returned home less than a year ago on the Second Look Amendment Act and speaks here about fatherhood, celebrations with family, and how to maintain healthy relationships while inside.*

**Jae-lynn:** Who does your family consist of?

**Maurice:** I have a big family that I'm just beginning to meet. When I came to jail, they were real young, they was kids. We didn't spend a lot of time around each other. But now all I do is spend a lot of my time around my family.

**Jae-lynn:** What kind of stuff do you guys do together?

**Maurice:** We go bowling, we go to little gaming events, and we hang out at my mother's house. We just relax and chill. Just a lot of fun. And my brother takes me to go see a lot of my relatives that I haven't seen because I've been gone so long. So I spend a lot of time with them.

**Jae-lynn:** What impact did your incarceration have on the relationships that you had with your family?

**Maurice:** Well, when I first came to prison, they were pretty young, and when I came in, my brother was already incarcerated. My sister and mother were coming to see me a lot. When I came to prison, my son was three. He's now incarcerated. He'll be home in 2027. But I wasn't here to raise my son.

**Jae-lynn:** That sounds really hard. You spend so much time inside and then you come out ready to be with your family and you're still separated from your son.

**Maurice:** Right, and now he's in prison and I'm out here. Like we just traded places.

**Jae-lynn:** What kind of relationship do you guys have now that you're out and he's in? What's that like?

**Maurice:** We cool. That's my partner. I talk to him when he calls. I stay at his head even though he don't want to hear it. I told him I'm gonna tell you what you need to hear, which makes him upset a lot. I'm telling him and he doesn't want to hear it. But he's coming along. He started to be more honest. That's a plus. He's gotten way more vulnerable with where he's at.

**Jae-lynn:** Do you feel like you were in his shoes at one point?

**Maurice:** I was pretty much doing the same thing. I was in the streets when I was a kid. So if he's doing it, I know from experience, because I was there. I've been in that world that he was in, and I know what happens. He may feel like he's gonna be one of the lucky ones that make it. But I'm telling him that you're not looking at the consequences. When I was young, I didn't think about prison or nothing like that. For me, I made myself believe that what I was doing in the streets served a purpose.

I'm telling him, I just did 27 years and I've been where you've been. And you know what I did? I built some knowledge and it got me through it. It helped me change. And I know that everything that I'm doing now, it's in him to do the same thing.

**Jae-lynn:** What helped you keep connections with your family and maintain those relationships while you were incarcerated?

**Maurice:** I mean, just for me, doing the right thing. When I first came to jail I was getting in a lot of trouble. Then I was losing my privileges, I wouldn't be able to call anybody. So once I started straightening up and doing good, I became like a magnet. My mother would bring a lot of my family down to see me wherever I was at. So that part was kind of easy. Just making myself available to be seen. I had to do the work too to stay out of trouble so they could come in.

**Jae-lynn:** What do you remember about the ways that your family

showed out for you while you were incarcerated?

**Maurice:** It was just that same tough love that I'm giving my son. The same thing that I'm saying, it was told to me. You know, that *Man, get you a trade man so if they let you out, you can come home to something.* Get some knowledge in there. Utilize your time. Make that institution your university. So that's what I did. It was also things like letters that helped get me through. Because you have a lot of rough and lonely nights in there, and you need that kind of support. Even a sentence would be good enough, because you never know, you could be going through something at that moment and get a piece of mail and just a sentence can change your whole day.

**Jae-lynn:** Do you have any advice for people who are still on the inside for maintaining relationships with family members?

**Maurice:** I would tell them to work on themselves. Because for me, when I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing as far as working or programming and things like that, nobody wanted to be bothered with me because they look at it like, if you come home today or tomorrow, you're gonna still be doing the same things that got you in prison. So if you work on every part of yourself mentally, physically and emotionally, if you work on every part of your being, you start to get wise. Then, the conversations you have with your loved ones on the outside will have more meaning. That was one of the things with my mother. She was like, *You just seem more like you're content.* And once people see that you're growing they're gonna try to help. They're gonna help you once people see you doing good. The energy you give out is the energy you will receive.

**Jae-lynn:** We have a few family members and friends of Free Minds members that read the Connect as well. What would you say to those family and friends about how they can be a good support system to their loved ones that are incarcerated?

**Maurice:** Be honest, be consistent, and tell the truth, even if you feel like it might hurt. Sometimes your family will tell you what they think you want to hear, as opposed to what they think you need to hear. When I was younger, you know when it came to money or visits, sometimes they'd tell me, *Yeah, we're coming up there.* And then I'd be waiting, and they didn't show up. But they didn't tell me that they couldn't come because something happened to the car or because they didn't have the money. Just being honest about what's going on. And provide that mental support, because doing so much time can have an effect on you. It can change the way you think, the way you look at people because you're in a different environment than in society. Always check up on them mentally.

**Jae-lynn:** What do dreams mean to you in relation to your family or in general?

**Maurice:** For me, I look at it like a lot of the things that I dream about make me aware of what could potentially be in my path or in my journey. I may dream about a friend that I haven't seen in a while and how we may reconnect. And it will prepare me for how that conversation may go. A lot of my dreams have been about a lot of people that I haven't seen since I've been incarcerated. And a lot of the dreams with my family have just been like, you know, a lot of the fun that we have. Then I also have like, a lot of bad dreams, you know, like, a lot of the things of my past, and it's making me aware that this can be a possibility, and if I'm confronted with it, how would I deal with it. For me, my dreams prepare me for the possibilities.





# JUST LAW: BENEFICIAL PROVISIONS OF DC'S YOUTH REHABILITATION ACT

By DJ

DC's Youth Rehabilitation Act, D.C. Code 24-901(6) applies to a person who is convicted of a crime in the District while under the age of 25, except for first and second degree murder, terrorism, first and second degree sexual abuse, or first degree child sexual abuse. In cases covered by the Act in which there is a mandatory minimum prison term, the court may impose a sentence less than the mandatory minimum.

At the time of sentencing, the judge may sentence the eligible person pursuant to the Act, based on a number of factors set forth in the statute. After the sentence is completed, an eligible individual may petition the court to have their conviction set aside. Setting aside the conviction is not expunging the conviction—it remains on the person's record, but is hidden from the public view, much like "sealing". It may still be used as a sentencing enhancement if another conviction occurs later, or for sex offender registration. Oftentimes when this was discussed, we only acknowledged that the District of Columbia Superior Court had the power to grant a set aside. Since the District of Columbia Superior Court is not the exclusive entity to grant a set aside of a conviction in the District of Columbia, we discuss below a second entity duly authorized to grant the set aside of the conviction of a youthful offender.

The Sentencing Reform Act Amendment Act of May 25, 2000 amended the District of Columbia Youth Rehabilitation Act. The change permitted the United States Parole Commission to exercise its discretion to set aside felony convictions of youth offenders. There has never been much discussion about the United States Parole Commission's power in this regard. When there was ever any discussion about setting aside convictions under the District of Columbia Youth Rehabilitation Act, the primary entity thought to have sole authority to authorize set asides of convictions was the D.C. Superior Court. This is not totally correct. While the Sentencing Reform Act Amendment Act of May 25, 2000, also authorized the Superior Court of the District of Columbia to grant set asides, it did not designate it as the exclusive entity to grant set asides. In fact, by way of the noted amendment, the United States Parole Commission is permitted to grant set asides in felony cases. On the other hand, the District of Columbia Superior Court is authorized to grant set asides in misdemeanor cases. Relief is granted to those who meet the definition of a youthful offender and meet the criteria set out by the governing statute.

As a reminder, a youth offender is defined as a person under twenty-five (25) years old and convicted of a crime that is not one of the ones set forth above. Such an individual may be sentenced under the Youth Rehabilitation Act in the discretion of the sentencing judge of the Superior Court. See D.C. Code §§ 24-901(6), 903. Once sentenced in accordance with requirements of the Youth Rehabilitation Act, there is flexibility for the sentencing court to fashion and impose a sentence for a youthful offender. Once the sentence is served and probation is completed, the U.S. Parole Commission has the discretion to set aside a conviction after the completion of the sentence. D.C. Code § 24-906(b). Please discuss this option with your attorney prior to making a determination that this option may apply to your case, as this is not legal advice.

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

# MEMBERS CONNECT: DREAMS

## Prison: Where Dreams go to Die, Resurrect, and then Cross Pollinate By MAR

For all of us Free Minds members our origin stories are similar with its start in the womb. During the 9 month duration of our mother's pregnancy their aspirations for us soared as such. A doctor, a lawyer, or even a professional ball player maybe, but I assure you that absolutely no one conceived of the dreaded thought of their baby boy or girl's DREAMS withering away in the cold confines of a federal prison cell.

While caressing my hand on visitation – as she liked to do – my mother bore a terrible sense of guilt for not being able to pull herself up economically out of the poverty stricken crime infested neighborhoods I was raised in that seemed to have stolen my youthful innocence and corrupted me. With no faith in the criminal justice system, she put all faith in the Creator of the Universe. And sounding apologetic, she would say, "Son, this too shall pass," referencing a verse from the Noble Quran.

Fast forward two decades later with much maturity and spiritual growth on my part, prison, what started out as a place of suffering had evolved into a place of greater understanding and higher truths. Paraphrasing a famous quote from the civil rights icon Malcolm X: "We must start turning these prisons into our universities."

So taking that radical concept to heart, for the past 8 years or more I've designated whatever cell I've resided the lofty title of "4 Walls Institute." My reasoning being that if Meta CEO & founder Mark Zuckerberg could do it from a college dorm room (Harvard), then I figured that I could do the same from a prison cell in bringing my DREAMS to fruition.

Now, with all that said, it was in 2021 that I was anxiously awaiting a phone interview which held the possibility of me being brought back to the DC jail for a program with Georgetown University. I'll admit that in a fit of excitement, I even made a BOLD PREDICTION that I was going to be the first incarcerated male to be chosen to give a virtual commencement speech to graduating seniors \*laughing\*. Unfortunately, though, not long after the program was put on pause due to the COVID pandemic.

Though, lo and behold, the universe was conspiring in my favor it seems, and my prayers were being answered. As fate would have it, a prominent & prestigious well known university was here at the institution I was being housed the entire time though it was being kept tightly under wraps.

You see, Duke University Project TURN is a curriculum graduate level 12 week program out of the Divinity School. Where 10 Duke students and 10 incarcerated students are put together in a shared learning environment located on site at an actual prison.

ProjectTURN was brought to my attention by an older guy out of DC, who at the time had been the only black guy in the course. Steve was in fact a classically trained pianist with a criminal justice degree. We built a bond through small talks and him passing his Wall Street Journal paper along to read. He encouraged me to approach the Christian chapel in person about enrolling. At first, I was told by the chaplain that he would place me on a waiting list, though 2 weeks later he changed his tune. He must have been extremely moved by the essay that I submitted to him by email because he told me that he had contacted those on Duke campus who oversaw the Prison Studies course requesting that the class be expanded by 3 so that 1 and 2 others could be included at the start of the next semester, which was only a few weeks away.

Initially, let me be perfectly honest, I held some sort of self doubt as to if I belonged. Surely, understandably, this was the best & brightest that academia had to offer. And here I was, a 10th grade high school drop out with a prison GED to my name to boast lol. Though Steve's assurance that I was more than capable was a real confidence booster!

In times of uncertainty when our survival is at stake, we as humans possess something almost miraculous within to aid us in rising to the occasion in a major way. And, so, to my amazement, when I stepped into this new arena, dormant faculties, talents & skillsets (known & unknown), charisma, laser focus, lightning memory recall etc, and most importantly, a radiant heart burst forth to the surface like that mythical fiery winged phoenix. And the rest is history.

In this 12 week semester it's usually around week 5 when the ice is thawed and our collective nerves are settled. As you can imagine, for most Duke students this is their first time within an actual prison. And for those here at the prison, for many this is our first contact in years with the outside world besides correctional staff.

The truly extraordinary & priceless experience for me is to witness the moment that preconceived notions, assumptions and the social economic tiers that wall society off crumble right before my eyes. And what sprouts in its absence is a greater sense of humanity, unity, and the forging of bonds.

So whatever came of that BOLD PREDICTION that I mentioned earlier, you may still be wondering. I learned a long time ago from the wise Asian philosopher Bruce Lee, "A goal is not always meant to be reached, it often serves simply as something to aim at." So it wasn't in vain after all!!

Because I may not have given the virtual commencement speech at the DC Jail, though I did speak in open court at my recent IRAA hearing, where several Duke classmates of mine made the trip up to DC to be in attendance to show their support in solidarity with my family. And even the esteemed Dean of Duke University, who happened to teach a semester, wrote a letter to my judge on my behalf.

Though my DREAMS don't stop there. Because as they say, I just jumped the moon, made the ceiling my floor, and now it's time to do it all over again :).

So, now when I feel I have a brilliant idea on my hand that I feel can positively impact society, I'm not just regulated to sending it off to the DC Mayor's office and hoping I get a response. I now have the option of sending it to the Dean of Duke whose worldwide alumni members extend to all major US Cities and private and public sectors of the economy.

So I humbly remind my Free Minds brothers & sisters, as I constantly remind myself on those days when the going gets rough, at all cost, Keep the DREAM alive!! And don't fail to turn over every stone in its pursuit!! Simply stated, a change of attitude brings about a change of outcomes.



# MEMBERS CONNECT: DREAMS

## The Great Aztlan Dream By AJ

There's a radiant and astonishingly built skyscraper in Aztlan that glimmers immensely in the obscure night.

The edifice skyscraper is bright-sparkling red and it's hundreds of stories high; and the shimmering immense windows have engraved gold trimmings. The apex point of the building that is made of solid gold kisses the heavens.

Two enormous and incandescent warrior angels with flaming eyes posture on the entrance.

Lovely brown people of beautiful and bustling Aztlan island delight in the eternal night with crimson red patchy evading clouds in the dim sky.

The vibrant coral reef that encompasses the island is enriched with scents of tropical flowers.

A glistening full moon and illuminating millions of stars surround the glorious island.

Masses of exotic and mysterious quetzal birds glide around the building squawking and flapping their massive wings.

Every Sunday, mellifluous, blaring voices from exuberant worship music in the structure overwhelms every soul with joy.

Saintly and dignified Chicanos in aesthetic and lustering lowrider cars voyage straggling bumper-to-bumper with roaring radio systems around the stellar building.

The irradiating moon mesmerizes over the impeccably clean land with ethereal refined buildings and beautiful society.

There's no presence of police since righteousness and peace resides in the pleasant land.

One night there was an extensive fierce earthquake that rocked Aztlan. It was so powerful that it could have decimated every building and put astonishing fear in every heart, but no one was harmed and there was no damage to the towering, stellar building for the Gente (people) of the pleasant island has chosen God Almighty as their God and protector.

*\*Aztlán is the ancestral home of the Aztec peoples.*

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## Dream, I Dare You By BK

I have a fear that the percentage of people who choose not to follow their dreams is abruptly encroaching on the percentage of those who do. Unfortunately, dreams are being classified in the categories of unrealistic and fantasy more and more these days. I truly believe that if we didn't dream the world wouldn't be what it is today. All of our favorite gadgets, places, and people simply wouldn't exist. Can you imagine a world without our indispensable Apple devices, prominent architectural brainchilds, like the Eiffel Tower in France; or charismatic luminaries such as Denzel Washington and Elon Musk. All of these substantial contributions to our work, culture, products, etc... all started from a thought coupled with a conviction that it can be brought to fruition – a dream.

The beautiful thing about a dream is that it does not discriminate. It comes to the poor; the rich; the healthy; the sick; the strong; the weak; etc. And despite the potency and uniqueness of a dream's message, it is only as resilient and effective as its messenger. We all know the common saying, "get your head out of the clouds." Well I say shame on them. What we should say instead is, "get your work ethic up there with your head." As long as your dream and your drive are on the same level, who's to say what's possible?

I really enjoy watching a show on CNBC called Shark Tank. If you're not familiar, it is about entrepreneurs from all walks of life trying to keep their dreams, either of a product or service, alive by pitching their idea to a panel of investors for an infusion of cash in exchange for an equity stake in their business. This show is palpably inspirational,

especially for dreamers. But, what really astonished me is that the majority of ideas pitched on this show are not out of this world. A lot of these ideas are very simplistic, and I can almost wager they have been thought of by many others. The difference is that some people let that thought die as quickly as it arrived while other people will write that thought down, create a plan to bring that thought to existence and act on it.

Looking back at my pre-adult life, I baffle at the notion that we go from being told, "you can do whatever you put your mind towards," closer to the start of this timeline, to being counseled on a more limited, safer list of options towards the end of this timeline, right when we're about to begin our adult life. What a confidence crusher. Then it's our closest friends and loved ones that preach this to us our whole childhoods, then change course right before we give it a try. And, from experience, I know plenty of people that have gone through this. So, is it their message they have lost faith in? Or, is it us? Should we let our dreams die on account of those who told us to dream our whole lives? Or, do we owe it to ourselves to try?

For the most part, everything you consume, enjoy, critique was someone's dream. Despite the possible adversity they could have, or did, encounter, they dared to dream. In *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor E. Frankl, Frankl quotes Nietzsche who said, "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how." And daring to dream is the galvanizing reason why that our lives need. So, set out to share your dreams with the rest of us. I dare you.

# SPINNING THE TRACK WITH THE ADVICE MAN

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

**Dear Advice Man:**

I suffered a lot of abuse at the hands of family and those who should have been caring for me and protecting me. Instead, I was molested, I was physically abused. These same people are still in my life. I understand the power of forgiveness and I know that will bring me peace. But how do I get there? I feel confused about what to do and I need concrete steps that I can take to turn this pain into something positive. Can you help?

Sincerely,  
DT

*In our previous issue, our usual team of Advice Men were on lockdown. They were finally able to share their advice with DT, whose question was shared in our last issue on "Resilience."*

DT,

What's up champ? I would like to thank you for stepping out there and sharing your story and trauma and thoughts. After serious thought let me first say, I speak from a family member point of view and not that of a professional, and it comes from love and sympathy. So I already see you are actually taking some of the first concrete steps to peace in the form of courage to share and help you and others. The last Connect's theme was "Resilience," and you have already lived that. Your sharing takes guts, courage, and great character. Can't you see jumping out there like this, you've already turned any fear or ill feelings about the situation inside out into a positive? That's guts, turning something negative into a positive not only just for you, but to all the other readers who this will touch, and don't know how to express what seems to be a common occurrence to individuals. That gives others courage. Know this, this thing has happened to more people than we can imagine, moreover to people we hold in high esteem. One for me that surprised me is my idol and great fighter, Sugar Ray Leonard, who shared in his last book that he was sexually abused at the hands of someone he trusted: his coach. With him, and I'm sure there's others, that never seemed to stop their joy and making good on life. Somewhere there, they had to have found peace. Let's see how we can help.

I don't know your pain, nevertheless, like anyone who is dealing with trauma issues, I think the first step has to be recognizing what troubles you and sincerely seeking to rid yourself of negative beliefs and thoughts about yourself and reactions of a moment or space in time that does not define you. For example, peace may be seeking knowledge about our beliefs to fix the issues we are

dealing with, thus helping self and may be in a group sitting helping others. Or it might be as simple as reading a book and getting answers to gain peace, or it may be more complicated because like you said DT, those who once harmed you may still be close. In that case, I suggest a health peer or professional assistance. You know not to bring more harm, but to seek forgiveness for peace of mind.

DT, resilience and your truth is not what somebody has done to you. It is being the best you despite what you've been through, which really defines you. So somebody "thought" they got out on you, turn that around and make that a blessing for you and others.

There's a power to heal and find peace with this kind of issue in both trauma counseling and educating oneself on this particular subject. DT, I'm sorry and regret what happened to you and what it has left. As I shared, it happens to the best, but individually you can make sure something behind you doesn't steal your joy, peace, etc. Unfortunately being an old Lorton-ite, I've sat-down with real soldiers I hold in high regard who also have shared their misfortune stories like yours. In all those dudes I would see pure leaders and gentlemen first, but also something nagging at them behind their fronts. The common denominator I see us all having dealing with trauma is we try to put on a mask of resilience and walk around as if nothing is eating away at us and our beliefs, that holds the pressure on our triggers to irrational actions. We have to use our emotions, words, and reactions better than letting them cause us to pull those triggers on all our future goals, joy, and peace. I do believe we let trauma poison us and kill all of the wonderful things we deserve. DT, if you haven't professionally addressed this, seek that support and find your peace.

As an elder FM member Mr. E and I want to put a halt to our youngsters as well as anyone else in our community dealing with these types of traumas who put on fronts. We can't keep allowing things like this to kill our peace by reacting and buying into self-defeating thoughts and negative feelings lurking behind our fronts. So educate yourself or seek professional support about life. In my book, it will help you let go of some things, heal, and find the joy and peace all resilient souls deserve. Remember no matter what way through the process you take, stay coolheaded and be capable of withstanding shock without permanent deformation or rupture (be resilient)! I hope this has helped. I have much love for you all.  
TS

# SPINNING THE TRACK: REENTRY EDITION

Dear Advice Man,

Once you were released, if you had a place to live on your own or a family member or spouse to live with, how was the adjustment? With bills, responsibility, getting a job, and even having to grasp that mentally?

Sincerely,  
DC

Dear DC,

First off, thanks for sharing, and secondly thanks for allowing me to share. I'm excited, because recently I was granted my release from prison after almost 19 years. I came home to a beautiful single family home, a wife, and kids. After just one week, I was able to both take and pass my learner's permit and driver's test enroute to obtaining my driver's license. About a week after that, I had me a car, which was super helpful when having to deal with all of the supervision and stipulations we face. I think the most challenging thing for me at first was finding the balance in my disciplined punctual approach, and having to adjust to the carefree, sometimes freestyle approach of my wife and kids. In all honesty, when dealing with family you'll need to have a lot of compromise and commitment. As for employment, keep in mind that you have so much to offer employers, especially when considering the conditions we worked under while in prison. Opportunities are all around and humility will determine everything we encounter. This life on the outside with a second chance is undoubtedly one words do no justice to explain. Everything awaits you! Be patient and willing!

BM

## MEMBERS CONNECT: DREAMS

### My Perfect Day By TM

A perfect day is not worrying about how you're going to make a living, not worrying if someone is going to come kill you, and most of all, having people around you that you can learn positive things from. All the people I grew up with are, or were, doing the same things I was doing. I just want to have, or be a part of, another community of people that can bring different things out of me, help me be in better settings, help me meet good genuine people, and help me see a side of me I never thought there was, you know. I

want to meet their families and I want them to meet mine. I want them to share their stories with me and I want to do the same. Having a perfect day seems far away, I want a best friend in my life! Somebody who can embrace who I am at all times. Somebody who comes from a different place than me and won't judge me or my past. I used to think a perfect day was getting a lot of money or becoming rich. I'd rather my perfect day to be happy with people I love. My perfect day is seeing someone smile, helping someone feel better...

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### A Dream By JS

I wake up in my room in my house, an apartment if I'm thinking more realistically, I can't tell. I look to my right and there's a beautiful silhouette of a woman under the covers. The curves of her hips showing as she lays on her side, drawn into a peaceful sleep in a secured position from me holding her the night before as we felt each other's heartbeats and listened to our breath. I rolled over to sleep on my back, not because I was tired of the fragrance of coconut conditioner in her scalp, but to give my shoulder a rest, careful to keep my right arm secured under her side so she knows I'm still here. Time has taken its course, but now I'm home. I check my watch on my left wrist that I keep on so I'm not always looking at my phone, so she knows that there's nobody else who occupies my mind like she does.

Doing time has just made me sensitive to time. I don't have a lot to waste and in a little, it'll be time for me to shine, something I've been planning to do since I've been doing time. I start by waking up when the stock market opens, checking my stocks first, brushing my teeth second, and getting a 30 minute workout in before heading to work. It's been 5 years since I've been home and I'm ready to get my multi-service trade business off the ground. I still like the button up shirt with khakis look that I get from my office job, but I'm into working with my hands. There's something satisfying about seeing something that needs to be done, broken, and in raw form, then fixed and completed. There's something redeeming in working with your hands. There's something calming and peaceful in the lessons learned from exhausting effort and turning nothing, or nothing of use, into something appreciated, cherished, and through the desire of satisfaction, needed.

After 15 years, maybe it'll take a little longer, I'm home. After 5 years of being home, maybe it'll take a little longer, I've learned not just to walk, but to fly. At the time it is decreed, I am realized. A dream. A good friend once told me her favorite quote: "If the plan doesn't work, change the plan, not the goal."

# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Dreams of Liberty

By AC

Through a window,  
to the left I see a fence,  
that looks more like a wall.  
To the right, if my vision doesn't fail me,  
I see my entire universe  
bottled up, small,  
Cut, no, torn from the fabric  
of the rest of this mundane existence.

The birds, the clouds, and the winds fly by.  
And so pass the dreams that I live my life dreaming.  
They come in a flash, fleeting  
making me think about life,  
and all the other things that I've left behind.  
I've been able to capture some of them.  
I embrace them with love and I do not want to let them go.  
And still they slip between my fingers  
with total audacity.

I live a beautiful life in dreams.  
I swim in the waters of beautiful beaches,  
enjoying, before, the warm sand beneath my feet.  
And I run through meadows of flowers and hierba buena.  
I surrender to the arms of some stranger,  
with hope alive in my heart  
that she can give me the love that will console me.  
And then, after a great and full experience,  
it's my turn to wake up and return to my justified punishment.

But everything in life passes,  
and this too shall pass.  
The day in which the doors to this cage of divine justice open for me,  
that precise instance too will arrive.  
And when that moment comes,  
I will take the whole world by the horns.  
That same world that sometimes is cold,  
cutting and with a soul of steel.  
Because I am ready to live, I want to live.  
Of course, if life goes like this and time permits me,  
just like I wish.

## Dreams

By DRJ

I wake from a peaceful sleep  
and I'm so happy to be free.

I'm free, in mind body and soul because  
in my dreams, I never grow old.

I only feel free from the prison bars,  
when I sleep and dream  
I don't see so many faces that are sad and mean

My dreams take me away to a place of complete satisfaction  
and when I awake, I take action  
And read, say hello to others, and  
pray and thank god for another day.

Dreams are so beautiful,  
when I awake from such beautiful dream

Dreams, Dreams, Dreams  
I love my dreams

## Sueños de Libertad

por AC

A través de una ventana,  
a la izquierda veo una cerca,  
la que más bien parece muralla.  
A la derecha, si es que la vista aún no me falla,  
veo todo mi universo completo  
embotellado, pequeño,  
recortado, no, arrancado, de la fábrica  
del resto de esta existencia mundana.

Los pájaros, las nubes, y los vientos pasan volando.  
Así también pasan los sueños que vivo soñando.  
Ellos llegan como un destello fugaz  
haciéndome pensar acerca de la vida,  
y el resto de las cosas que he dejado atrás.  
Algunos de ellos los logro capturar.  
Los acojo con cariño y no los quiero soltar.  
Y aún así se me escabullen entre los dedos  
con una audacia total.

Entre sueños vivo una vida hermosa.  
Nado en aguas de playas bellas,  
disfrutando, antes, de la arena tibia bajo mis pies.  
También corro en prados de flores y hierbas buenas.  
Me entrego a los brazos de alguna persona ajena,  
con la esperanza muy viva en mi corazón  
de que ella pueda darme el cariño que me consuela.  
Y luego, después de una experiencia magna y plena,  
me toca despertar y volver a mi justa condena.

Pero todo en la vida pasa,  
y esto también pasará.  
El día en que se me abra esta jaula de justicia divina,  
esa precisa instancia también llegará.  
Y cuando ese momento llegue,  
tomaré por los cuernos al mundo entero.  
Ese mismo mundo que a veces es frío,  
cortante y con el alma de acero.  
Porque estoy listo para vivir, quiero vivir.  
Claro, si es así como la vida y el tiempo me lo permite,  
tal y como deseo.

## Dreams

By SP

Remember all the dreams you had when you were a kid?  
Of you being a successful leader,  
Of you being a successful business owner,  
Of you having a beautiful wife and family,  
Of you having built a beautiful house,  
Of you having everything you wanted?

This is one of the days in that process!  
You never seen the bad parts of your dream  
Because they don't last long.  
The pain, the hard time in prison, them trial nights,  
The time spent in the SHU, all the fighting,  
Being broke and not being able to get what you need at times...

All them days  
were just a moment in the process that you had to experience,  
so you can have strong foundations to stand on.  
and give you an understanding of what it's like to go through adversity,  
so you can help others and relate to them when they're in adversity.

The most important lesson of what you're going through  
is so that you can learn how to be resilient...  
Remember this quote from Napoleon Hill,  
"All achievements, all earned riches have their beginnings in an idea."

# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Life Is Your Dream 4 You

By DC

Success is what you make it.  
How you perceive yourself, life, and what makes you happy.  
Lately it's been the small things for me...  
Allah's Mercy and Grace,  
eyes to see and lips to taste,  
and being thankful for everyday I wake.

I do visualize a different many days later when I'm out of prison...  
a Lady to hold and a family to live with and achieve goals together.  
Standing on integrity and fully supporting who stood next to me -  
that helped me be open minded to my goals, plans and visions,  
plus a better way of living.

I rather rely on who causes the division between salt and freshwater  
"That man can't see!"  
then not to seek assistance from The Creator of me, you, and our  
sons and daughters.  
With ease he put our Lives in order and created the Sun for light  
and the moon for the glow through the night.

See, my Dream consists of not giving up or acting too tough  
to learn to re-educate and love without fake intentions or self hate,  
but with trust and honesty.  
To want for another what I want for me,  
to build my Family with lessons on hardships and poverty  
and how to overcome it instead of looking for an excuse, and  
complain, then become it!  
Not Us  
Perseverance is the way!!!  
To show generations it's beautiful to use money to help others and  
create wealth to make a monopoly.  
For my seeds and bloodline who lay in wait,  
Allah knows best.

I can't wait for those days to grow old & gray  
with My Lover of today.  
To enjoy life and all parts of the world  
with a son that I raised to be a Man to pass it all to  
and a heart and a character that can leave impressions for a lifetime  
to hold on to and Mold to.  
I visualize more, but I shouldn't hold you because me being me, I  
want you to Dream too  
Better Believe Life is Your Dream 4 You.

## Contaminated Dreams

By RW

I dream about love, peace and happiness in the same sequence as  
the devil capturing me, taking my soul before turning 19 years old.

Each morning I awake feeling uncomfortable, my heart being cold.

Dreams are contaminated thoughts, empirical surreal nightmares  
that your mind bought.

I dream about the power of real love, the kind you will never lose  
or give up.

Happiness is forever rewarded to those who are optimistic, having  
mind control over contaminated dreams.

Peace is in the sky everytime I look up over the pacific ocean. Your  
mind, reminiscent in motion through the blue and white clouds. I  
always dream about the moment making my mom proud and smile  
one day.

I dream about walking out of this place, my family, I will embrace  
outside these prison gates, surrounded with heartfelt warm love  
shattering this hold the devil has on me. Recapturing my soul. I  
dream about love, peace and happiness in the same sequence.  
Something beautiful will make up for this unrealistic experience.

## Dreams

By DVJ

Dreams  
Dreams, I have none  
for they are only Allusions  
of the mind that is make  
believe.

Fears  
I fear Allah Ta'ala  
As He should be  
feared.

Aspirations  
They are above any  
Dreams, fear, or fairytale  
that you can  
think of

Words of advice  
to the one I will  
become, no limits  
push for the highest  
at all you do never  
take less and don't  
be fooled into thinking  
less is well, push for  
high at all times

## Dreams

By AB

Dreams are something that are created in order for them to become a reality  
You have to believe in those dreams.

Dreams are your own creativity,  
You are the only one who can make them come through...

Dreams must not be kept asleep,  
So wake up and see your dreams come alive.

## Dream Again

By KW

If Martin had a Dream...  
Why does it seem... We still living...  
In a NIGHTMARE?  
Tossing and turning and screaming,  
For a True American "Freedom"  
For a True American "Justice for All"  
For a reality full of REAL American "Democracy"  
Martin had a Dream...  
Wake me up!  
No please wake me up!  
For the love of God WAKE... ME... UP!!!  
I don't want to Dream Again  
Tossing and turning and screaming,  
Stuck in this nightmare of Racial Injustice,  
Income Disparity, and  
Healthcare Discrimination.  
Why must you make a Dreamer out of...  
Me?  
It's passed down the pipeline that  
The "American Dream" is only a pipe dream  
So... pipe it down with all these...  
Dreamed realities.  
I guess it's better to dream of  
Mama's Fried Apple Pies  
Because at least that has a greater  
Chance at becoming a  
"Dream - come - true"  
Martin had a dream.

# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Dreams

By CD

I stare at the football game, yet my vision starts to blur  
Upon my make, I gallop with a sword and bow in chase

I knew she needed my help from being captured.  
And when my arrow released – striking the horse in the arse!

It rears up, tossing her into my arms,  
And when I gazed upon the beauty of her eyes,  
Suddenly we were in a ballroom, dancing in arms.

She sent a spark of love through her orbs, then laid her head  
against my heart  
Right then, I felt the texture of her breath as we enveloped–trapped  
in a log cabin, snowed in sharing a single quilt.

Soon after, the kettle whistles and then purrs like a cat, but it was  
only her transforming lying across my lap.

I found myself caressing the nape of her neck; circular,  
until trailing the length of her back.  
Then I heard a tap from my Victorian chair,

But no one was there.  
I could not fathom her gone,  
For I notice it was only a dream,  
For the game was in progress on my flat screen.  
I shook it off and told myself  
What a dream,  
Damn! What a dream.

## Little Secret Dreams

By JJ

The first time I ever began to be proud, it was realized in a Little  
Secret Dream.

It does not mean like these downfaling Dreams.  
What this really means is that it is like many who had a dream such  
as Martin Luther King, with his down to earth beam.

No one can ever battle at least once in dealing with no objective, no  
reality, no created Feelings or Creativity!  
With none willing to speak it, because if someone peeped it,  
It's our Little Secret Dreams, catch up! Rise up!

From sleeping completely  
From sleeping mentally, dead sleep. Within the ignorance, itself!  
If it is to be those many who will take the Blame of Ignorance from  
human beings.

From the cradle to the grave within the first kiss of warmth Felt by  
the Sun.  
This is a wake up call to the chosen one.  
From out of a gleam, a Little Secret Dream worn to rejoice and be  
gladdening that to the understanding with knowledge.

We, while realizing that we're Kings and Queens.  
Through gentle enthrallment, napping or dozing into the Little  
Secret Dreams, focusing with eyes is truth. Your vision and seeing,  
hearing and believing towards which your heart draws, and then  
choose this way with all your strength that you will achieve.

All those Little Secret Dreams!  
Therefore, Never Settle for Less.  
Always try and do your best...

## My Perfect World

By MZ

In my perfect world, there wouldn't be a child without two parents

My perfect world would consist of free college education to those  
who seek it

In my perfect world no one would be homeless or go hungry

Only love, joy, respect, peace, and happiness would be allowed in  
my perfect world

Jealousy, hate, envy, liars, cheaters, and thieves wouldn't be in the  
human traits in my world of perfection

Uplifting one another and spreading positive vibes on a daily basis  
would be the model in my perfect world

Killing, drug dealing, gang banging, and mass incarceration  
wouldn't even be known in my perfect world

Racism, sexism, and police brutality wouldn't exist nowhere on my  
planet perfection

I often dream about a perfect world like this, hoping one day that  
these things would become my reality (wishful thinking, huh?)

## Dream

By JS

A dream is only a dream as long as you don't make it a reality.  
I'm sure someone else has said it,  
but this is a truth I've learned from the short 27 years that I've lived,  
and the things that I've seen and come to understand.  
I have things I want to accomplish and goals that I want to reach  
that manifest itself into a dream, but not just one dream,  
multiple dreams that I put together to envision what I want,  
what it's going to look like when I get it, and what I'm going to do  
when I get it.

## Dream

By FJ

My dream,  
to be released into the world,  
and have my fiancé and kids and the rest of our family  
to be right there waiting with love and positivity.  
Then, have a child with my fiancé,  
so we can have a total of five kids.  
Then, get married and have a long,  
successful life building our business,  
our dream house for our family,  
and a long happy future!

## If I Were Free

By HW

If I were free, I would cherish  
every breath I breathe

If I were free, I would cherish  
every hug, and every kiss for everyday that I missed

If I were free I would show the world  
My presence is love for I am blessed from above

If I were free, I would prove people can change  
And we shouldn't be punished forever for things we did at a young age

If I were free, I would cherish every moment  
outside of this cage  
If I were free...



## While I Was Sleeping...

By RL

Seems like yesterday I dreamt

The cell door was not closing

On me for the first time...

I slept and while I did

My dreams of the future

Vanished

I woke and tried to

Remember freedom

Remember love

Remember touch

Remember me?

Grasping with

Invisible hands

Just like you would for

That wonderful scenario

Of imagination only

Closed eyes find

While dreaming

Of falling forever

Into my lover's arms

Out of that front gate

Away from the past

Towards the Sun

And Peace

Some dreams are nightmares

Like the news of my son

Being buried at

The ripe old age

Of 28

Or the cold sweat terror of

Those USP days

With a dying man

Praying for Jesus

As they are stabbed

Those things come

And they go less

Often now with

24 years on along in

This daylight prison

But still...

And like any soul

Who Morpheus claims

I will find freedom tonight

With hope and a sweet

Whisper of peace

In my mind's eye

And dream of

Going home

# REAL WORLD OF WORK

By Carlos

Looking back at where we came from and the things that we have been through, allows us to reflect back at a time when all we could do was dream. I connected with a good friend of mine, Joseph, who was released home in 2021 under IRAA (Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act) after 25 years of incarceration (sentenced originally to 94-269 years). We kicked it a little over Zoom about the work that he does and those dreams that once upon a time, seemed that they would never be.

***Welcome home Joseph! I know you have been home for almost 3 years, but I still like to remind us that we are home now. What do you do for a living?***

I cook for a living. When I first came home in 2021 during Covid, there weren't that many jobs available. No real jobs. I went to UPO (United Planning Organization). I was there for 3 months. After I graduated, in May, I took a job at a drug treatment program by Rhode Island Ave as a cook. It just landed on me. But it was a blessing in disguise. I get to share my story with others and it makes me feel as if I'm giving back to my community.

***Let's go back a little bit. While you were incarcerated, did you work in the kitchen?***

I was in UNICOR (factories within federal prisons – high paying jobs) for the most part. But I used to cook special religious meals, like Ramadan. It was my field. I went to school for it prior to my incarceration, it was my passion. Before I got locked up, I was cooking at Maryland University. I enjoyed doing it. At times, it even made me feel free.

***I'm picturing you in a kitchen at one of those places, because I met a lot of people that have said that cooking for them is not only therapeutic, but satisfying to see others enjoy their work. What is cooking like for you?***

It is an art. While incarcerated, the main thing for me was that I was cooking for people that have not been able to eat all day. It felt good to do that. I chose the drug treatment program because of that. Helping others is something I enjoy. DC has some of the best reentry programs available. It makes me feel as if I am giving back to the community. And it's another reason why I enjoy cooking at the center. I get to feed those individuals that may have been starving or going back and forth to the jail. I use this connection to give advice and sometimes even things like breaking up fights at the treatment center. They accept this kind of help rather than to be written up and be sent back to jail. Today, it is a blessing to share my story. I get to touch others by sharing what I have seen.

***What goes through your mind as you go back into those days of incarceration and your now?***

It's a beautiful feeling! They gave me a lot of

time. I stayed busy while I was incarcerated. Knowing that I would get to see the parole board made me program even more. I was hopeful. In between that, I learned to appreciate the little things. Then I was just hoping and praying to have the little things. Education was always important to me, so when the Second Look Act came around, I was ready. I had over 100 certificates. Now, I get to live it, just the simple things like cooking yourself something for breakfast. Going to the store. Reading the newspaper outside. The little things! I held on to hope and dreams that one day I would be back again. I'm living that dream now. Cooking something for yourself is freedom; eating what you want is freedom.

***What would your dream job be to you ?***

Cooking at a restaurant down south by Waterfront where I do not have to break up no fights (we both laugh). Earning 55,000 a year. I got all of my certifications, but it's just coming home and being an ex-offender that's a challenge. For now it is just about being patient until those dreams do come true. I am underpaid right now, but what motivates me is the people in that program because they want freedom too. They want to be free from addiction. They want a full time job, a house, and a car. So I like to help. This is not my dream job, but it makes me feel good to feed them and talk to them. Share my story so that they can see through my downfalls and my small successes now.

***I can see that it makes you happy as you talk about it. It is easy to see that you have a passion for helping others indeed. Do you have something that you want to add?***

I will say that while waiting for my dream job, a lot of other things have taken place for me as well. I'm off papers; I completed an HVAC program; I'm a first-time home owner. I voted for the first time. I have been able to talk to troubled youth. Those have been "beautiful dreams that have come true." So being patient has had its rewards too. I was just facing so much time and now I'm free. I came home and I was bouncing around from one house to another and now I'm a homeowner. Those are the dreams that are coming true for me and I enjoy it all. Those are my blessings.

***I'm happy for you, my brother!***

***Congratulations on all of your successes. I know it is not easy out here. Most people do not know the challenges that reentry brings about. Especially after doing 25 years and trying to play "catch up" with life. I'll tell you what else is a blessing: to meet people like you in freedom. To talk to people like yourself about freedom is a blessing. I believe dreams and hope go hand in hand; it creates something within us to reach out for. Keep dreaming, my brother.***

# PAYING IT FORWARD: SHARING A LOVE OF BOOKS

By Kelli

Have you ever seen, or been inside of a bookmobile? A bookmobile is basically a moving library housed inside of a truck, a bus (or sometimes inside of a boat or on top of a donkey, as I've recently learned – more on that later). I will never forget the first time I ever set foot inside a bookmobile. It was the 1970's in Eugene, Oregon (which is still known as the "hippie capital of the United States"). Our town bookmobile had a funky paint job and the woman who drove it wore big bell bottom jeans and a headband. I was in second grade and just couldn't get past the obvious – it's a van, but it's *also* a library! It was pure magic.

The history of bookmobiles in this country goes back more than a century. The first record of a working bookmobile in America was in Washington County, Maryland in 1905, where a couple of horses named Black Beauty and Dandy pulled a carriage transporting a janitor named Mr. Thomas and his 200 books to then-remote areas outside of Hagerstown, MD (just 68 miles outside of DC). At the time, more than half of the residents had no access to libraries.

Today there are more than 670 bookmobiles operating in the United States, and many imaginative variations of this idea that exist around the world. Some operate as lending libraries, while others give away free books for readers to keep. In Stockholm, Sweden, a boat named *Bokbåten*, serves as a floating library delivering books to people living on 23 different islands. In Pakistan, *The Camel Library* (you guessed it, camels carrying books!) visits tiny villages to bring books to the children that live there. And in Colombia, a man named Luis runs *Biblioburro*, a library that travels by donkey.

If you know Free Minds, then you know that our work is born out of a firm belief that books have the power to change lives. Anyone with a mission to get books into the hands of people who otherwise might not have them is an honorary member of our Free Minds family.

On that note, I'd like to introduce and welcome Mia and her colleagues at the House of SpeakEasy to the Free Minds family. This awesome Manhattan-based nonprofit organization is dedicated to the idea that literature matters, and books unite us. Their mission is to bring authors and diverse audiences together. Mia is the coordinator of the House of SpeakEasy Bookmobile Project. The city government recently cut the budget of the New York Public Library, forcing libraries to cut their hours, and increasing the already large number of New York's "book deserts," or neighborhoods without easy access to libraries or bookstores. The bookmobile – a modified box truck with 54 feet of shelving holding up to 3,000 books – travels to these neighborhoods including East Harlem, Little Haiti, and the Bronx, to give out brand-new books that have been donated by publishers and bookstores.

"We believe books should be a right, and not a privilege," Mia tells me over the phone. She points out how expensive books have become. "People in these communities are deciding: 'Am I going to buy a new book for my kid or am I going to use that money for food?' We think that sucks. Having access to books should not be contingent on how much money your parents have, especially if you're a kid that loves reading. It's so easy for people to say, 'just use the library,' but what happens when there aren't any libraries in your neighborhood? Or the libraries are closing several days during the week because of budget cuts?" she asks.

While more content is available to us now online and on our phones, there is just something special about the feeling of physically holding a book in your hands. Don't get me wrong, I fully appreciate technology that allows greater access to information. But to me, reading something on a screen will always be different than reading a book. And it's not just me and my warm and fuzzy nostalgia. Studies have shown that our comprehension is better when reading a printed book. This makes sense because when we read a book, there is nothing but the book claiming our attention. With an e-reader (digital book) or smartphone, we can be easily distracted, looking up word definitions, or suddenly find ourselves checking our email. Research has also shown that when we read on a

screen, we often "skim" rather than read more deeply. Not surprisingly, since printed books hold our attention better, we are more likely to absorb and retain the information. Finally, studies have shown that printed books literally bring readers more joy.

Mia sees this every day that she is out on the bookmobile. She describes a recent trip to an elementary school. "All the kids kept coming up to me. They were maybe 8 or 9 and just really cute. They would look up at me and say, 'How much are the books, Miss?' I would tell them, 'They're free. They're for you.' Their little faces just lit up, huge smiles, and suddenly all these kids are running to the bookmobile, choosing their books, holding them in their hands, and getting so excited. That does something to my heart."

Mia and her team believe the current political climate makes their work especially important. Many local governments across the country are banning certain books from public and school libraries because they address all the facts of our nation's history as well as respect people across our differences. Last October, the Bookmobile launched a cross country journey during "Banned Books Week" to raise awareness, promote Americans' First Amendment rights, and fight censorship. Theirs was one of three bookmobiles on the tour distributing books in states that have witnessed the highest incidents of banned books, including Texas, Florida, Missouri, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

"As long as there is inequality, we will continue this work. Reading is such a powerful equalizer. Honestly, that is the reason so many people in power are afraid of giving everyone equal access to books," Mia says. Her comment reminds me of the scene in *Kindred*, by Octavia Butler, which Free Minds members at the DC Jail read recently. If you read *Kindred*, you'll recall that the enslaver, Tom Weylin, did not want the people he enslaved to learn how to read. Many white people like Tom feared that if the Black people read books about freedom, they would rebel. Knowledge is power, right? That's why Mia and her team are so passionate about their work.

"Now more than ever, it's urgent that we get people to read, and get books in peoples' hands. We go out for Juneteenth and make sure people have books by Black authors. And during Pride month we share books by LGBTQ writers. Kids are growing up in very uncertain times right now, and books can help them navigate the world," Mia says.

Mia believes in paying it forward and says she gets this from her parents who wouldn't always buy her the latest plastic toys when she asked for them. But they would always give her books. "Right now, I'm talking to you from the living room of my apartment where I'm staring at a wall full of *hundreds* of books," she explains. "I am so lucky. And that is not fair. Not everyone has this access to books. Kids have no control over where they're born and there is so much inequality because of systemic issues that this country seems so unwilling to face head on. The least I can do is do my part to make sure other kids can experience the joy that I did reading books."

Mia's dream for the bookmobile this year is to launch a series of author readings where poets and novelists come to bookmobile events and read their work in the streets to connect even more people with the power of literature. She also dreams of another bookmobile road trip—this time to the Midwest.

Let's close with a message to Mia and the team at the House of SpeakEasy: Free Minds hopes all your bookmobile dreams come true. Thank you for paying it forward!

For all our FM readers, be sure to check out our extensive Free Minds library too when you come home!



# SLEEP CYCLES AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DREAMING

*By Aneka*

Have you ever wondered what happens when you sleep? I did a little digging and discovered that we go through 5 stages of sleep. When you first close your eyes and settle into sleep, you experience the first stage of sleep: Stage 1 of NREM sleep. The acronym NREM stands for Non Rapid Eye Movement. Stage 1 of NREM sleep is characterized by the cessation (temporary or final ceasing) of muscle movement and the slow movement of the eyes behind the eyelid. This is the "twilight" stage of sleep where you are probably still aware of some of the things going on around you. This is a light stage of sleep and you can usually be woken by noises or other disturbances. This stage lasts for about the first 7 minutes of sleep. After Stage 1 you transition into Stage 2 of NREM sleep where you're actually fully asleep and not aware of your surroundings. During this stage, the heart rate and breathing regulate, the body temperature goes down, the eye movements either slow or stop completely. This stage lasts between 10-25 minutes of sleep. After stage 2, you move onto Stage 3 of NREM sleep. In this stage your brain waves slow down and only have a few bursts of activity. This is a deep sleep where muscles relax and breathing slows even more. This stage of sleep is difficult to awaken from and you may feel disoriented if an alarm or disturbance pulls you out of it. This stage lasts for about 30-60 minutes. And now, the final stage of NREM sleep: Stage 4 NREM sleep. Stage 4 is an even deeper sleep where the brain waves further slow down and sleepers are very difficult to wake. It's believed that tissue repair occurs during this stage of sleep and that hormones are also released to help with growth. This final stage of NREM sleep lasts 20-40 minutes. So if you ever had someone tell you growing up that you grow while you're sleeping, they were absolutely correct!

After you've gone through the 4 stages of NREM, you transition into the final stage of sleep: REM (Rapid Eye Movement), the dreaming stage. While in the REM stage of sleep, the eyes move rapidly behind the lids and breathing becomes shallow and rapid. Blood pressure and heart rate also increase during REM sleep and the arms and legs stay still so that sleepers can't act out their dreams. The purpose of this stage (and of dreams) is thought to stimulate the sections of the brain that are needed for memory and learning and a way for the brain to store and sort information. REM sleep occurs approximately 90 minutes into the sleep cycle. Keep in mind that the length of each cycle changes throughout the night, but the typical sleeper will cycle through the stages several times before waking. Unfortunately, for those with sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea, the deeper levels of sleep may not be reached as frequently as is normal because they are constantly being woken. This can lead to the body's inability to repair damage, fewer dreams, and increased fatigue upon waking and throughout the day.

When we dream, it is believed that dreams help us process memories and emotions, and may even be a way for our brains to practice problem-solving. Typical dreams last anywhere from a few seconds to 20 or 30 minutes. However, most people only remember their dreams if they are woken up during the REM phase. People typically have multiple dreams each night that grow longer as sleep draws to a close. Keep in mind that it is possible to dream in the other stages of sleep, but REM sleep is where you are most likely to dream.

As we all know, nightmares are bad dreams that wake you up. Nightmares occur more frequently during REM sleep. Nightmares can create feelings

of terror, anxiety, or despair, and lead to psychological distress or sleep problems like insomnia. Research has identified a range of causes for nightmares, including post-traumatic stress, anxiety—especially the presence of generalized anxiety disorder, dissociation, and physiological changes. "Re-experiencing" is a common symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, also known as flashbacks. These involuntary recollections often manifest in the form of nightmares that can cause significant emotional distress. Even when the dreams are not exact replays of a trauma, they may have a strong symbolic or indirect connection to the event. According to research, children tend to have nightmares more often than adults, which is unfortunate because for children, their nightmares are more vivid and they have a harder time separating fantasy from reality. So if you were a child who had nightmares or if you know a child who has nightmares, it is normal. The best advice for anyone who suffers from nightmares, is to try focusing on positive elements of your day before going to sleep. That will help reduce the chance of nightmares. And if your nightmares are tied to PTSD, visualization treatments in which patients replay traumatic memories in a "safe" way have shown potential to bring relief. According to Cork Psychotherapy and Trauma Centre, "visualization or guided imagery involves the use of symbols, images, storytelling, and metaphors which can be used to create positive images in the mind. Because trauma may be stored in the unconscious processes of the brain, talking about the traumatic event may not be able to access them. Using visualization can enable us to access sensory memories deep within the brain so helping to reduce the physiological effects of the trauma, bringing balance and harmony to the mind and body, reducing numbness, promoting self-soothing during a flashback or nightmare, increasing confidence, reducing shame, stress, anxiety and depression and improving sleep." Here are a few other tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Mayo Clinic on improving your sleep health:

- Be consistent. If you can, try to go to sleep at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning.
- Make sure your space is quiet, dark, and as relaxing as possible. If you're unable to have complete silence (we know this can be a challenge inside!), you can use earplugs if you have them, listen to soothing music, train your brain to ignore the noises around you, and practice breathing exercises and count each breath in your mind. If you're unable to have complete darkness, cover your eyes with your blanket, pillow, or a piece of clothing to drown out the light.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.
- Get some exercise. Being physically active during the day can help you fall asleep more easily at night.
- Limit daytime naps and avoid napping late in the day.
- Manage worries. Try to resolve your worries or concerns before bedtime. Jot down what's on your mind and then set it aside for tomorrow.

I hope you enjoyed learning about the different stages of sleep and the psychology behind dreaming. If you want to learn more about the benefits of writing down your dreams, check out The Write Way column on dream journaling on page 30. The article includes a step by step guide on jotting down your dreams which gives you the opportunity to analyze your dreams and discover their meanings. Until next time, stay safe and keep DREAMING!

# TECH TALK: ACTIVATING AN ANDROID

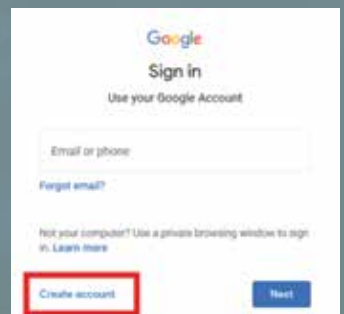
*By Carlos*

Welcome to the new column dedicated to technology. We realize that a lot of us have been kept away from modern technology for so long that, at times, can be a little challenging. Everything is done through technology and keeping up with it can be overwhelming and stressful, even for those that have been exposed to it. There is just so much to learn and everyday there is always something new. So in this new column, we will try to touch on those little "tech" things that are so important today in order to, at least, have some sort of direction.

Being incarcerated for 25 years kept me away from technology. I remember the first cell phone I ever had before going to prison in 1995, a Motorola flip with an antenna that you had to draw out and a fat and heavy battery pack. Now everything has changed. You can say that everyone is literally walking around with a miniature computer in their hands and you can do just about everything that a computer can do. I walked right into this new way, a new world of communication. At first it was intimidating! I was afraid that I would mess something up or somehow, damage my phone or computer. I understood right away that it's the new way to communicate and being far away added an extra emphasis to this need for me to learn (for those that do not know, due to immigration status, I was deported back to my country). I know that for many, it will be their first time as well. So I share my personal experience with tech and the challenges I encountered at first.

The first phone that I got to activate and set up on my own for the first time may be a good way to highlight a few things. I should highlight that it makes a huge difference for me to mention that the phone that I am referring to was an Android. Activating an iPhone is a different method that we will leave for another article. For those that may not know, Android, in a nutshell, is the operating system developed by Google which includes core apps such as Google Chrome (internet browser), Google Play (to download free games and apps) Gmail (email) and much more. Over 70 percent of all smartphones are Androids.

After being asked for WiFi connection and all of that basic stuff, I was asked to type in my email address. I came to learn that an email address is one of the most used tools to communicate information. You will be asked for it in just about everything that you do. If you apply for a job, you will be asked for it. If you download a



Google  
Sign in  
Use your Google Account

Email or phone

[Forgot email?](#)

Not your computer? Use a private browsing window to sign in. [Learn more](#)

[Create account](#) [Next](#)

new application, you will be asked for it. For certain transactions, a confirmation code is sent to your email. Most of us get comfortable with just texting and forget that emails are used just the same. There are many platforms that provide email services like Google. And creating an email address is easy and free. Because I did not have an email address, it gave me the option to create one. I typed my name, nothing fancy. Then it asked me to create a password, to protect your privacy and for security reasons.

Which brings to another important thing: passwords. I'm old school, so for everything that needs a password, I write it down just in case in an address book. Most devices provide the option to save your passwords, but I always think about things like, what if I lose my phone or something. Whatever system you use is up to you, but keep in mind that you will have important information on your device so safeguarding your passwords is important. It is also not a good idea to use the same password over and over again. Everything is now tech, even theft. So use different passwords!

The other thing that I needed at that moment was to download WhatsApp. WhatsApp is an App that allows you to make video and voice calls only needing an internet connection. Because I live in another country, I need this App so that I can communicate with those in the



United States free of charge. The only other thing that is needed is for the other person to have WhatsApp downloaded as well. Downloading an app is easy. On an Android, you just go to the Google Play Store, type in "WhatsApp" in the search bar, and the app will pop up. Choose "download" and that is it. When first installing any app, it will ask for either your number or your email address (also known as username). The other common thing is that the app will ask for permission for things like, to use your phone's camera, mic or access to things like Photos and Contacts. I remember at first thinking that they would somehow steal information, but the apps cannot function completely unless you give permission. Again, you can always decline, but the app will not function completely or some functions may not be available to you. For example, WhatsApp asked for permission to use the Camera of my phone. If I decline, whenever I would have wanted to make a video call, whoever is on the other end will not be able to see me because the app needs access to the camera.

Again, tech can be challenging and overwhelming. Tech Talk is not only about phones. There are many things to talk about. Let us know if there is anything that you would like to talk about or interested in learning about. Let us know what your experiences have been with tech. Maybe you can share something that will teach us. There is just always something new to learn and we want to learn together.



# REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

Happy 2024 Fam!

I'm hoping that 2024 will yield you the best that it has to offer! I love this month's *Connect* theme Dreams. I love it because dreams are something that can never be taken away from us. Every day that we wake up, it's a brand new opportunity to dream and not only dream, but dream BIG! I wanted to do something different for this *Connect*; I wanted to give y'all a very wide and varied picture on what Dreams look like from the perspective of people from history, so let's check out some quotes!

***"Whatever we believe about ourselves and our ability comes true for us."*** – Susan L. Taylor, journalist  
Susan L. Taylor is an American editor, writer, and journalist. She served as editor-in-chief of *Essence* from 1981 through 2000. In 1994, *American Libraries* referred to Taylor as "the most influential black woman in journalism today."

***"Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us."*** – Wilma Rudolph, U.S. track and field athlete  
Wilma Glodean Rudolph was an American sprinter who overcame childhood polio and went on to become a world-record-holding Olympic champion and international sports icon in track and field following her successes in the 1956 and 1960 Olympic Games.

***"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."*** – Booker T. Washington, author and politician  
Booker Taliaferro Washington was an American educator, author, and orator. Between 1890 and 1915, Washington was the primary leader in the African-American community and of the contemporary Black elite.

***"When I dare to be powerful to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."*** – Audre Lorde, poet and activist

***"The need for change bulldozed a road down the center of my mind."*** – Maya Angelou, an American memoirist, poet, and civil rights activist  
She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, and is credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees.

***"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly."*** – Langston Hughes  
James Mercer Langston Hughes was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from Joplin, Missouri. One of the earliest innovators of the literary art form called jazz poetry, Hughes is best known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance.

***"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."*** – Harriet Tubman  
Harriet Tubman was an American abolitionist and social activist. After escaping slavery, Tubman made some 13 missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved people, including her family and friends, using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known collectively as the Underground Railroad.

I hope that these quotes inspired and encouraged you just as much as they did me! Now onto some resources that could be a stepping stone leading to the path of your dreams!

## STRIVE

1516 Hamilton Street NW, Washington, DC 20011  
Main Phone Number: (202) 722-2280  
Monday, Tuesdays and Thursdays: 10am–2pm



STRIVE is a program of Samaritan Ministry of Greater Washington

STRIVE provides employers with a pipeline of workers determined to succeed. Their groundbreaking approach of intensive attitudinal training and long-term support has proved to be a successful model for helping people gain sustained employment and transform their lives. Armed with 36 years of experience, they are constantly seeking to achieve new levels of excellence in cities across the nation.

All STRIVE DC participants are automatically eligible to receive additional support through the Next Step program. This program provides casework, professional clothing, food, referrals, advocacy, and other supports to help STRIVE participants succeed!

Until we *Connect* again,  
Ms. Keela



## BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*with Neely*

Thank you to everyone who sent in their vote for our next Books Across the Miles selection!

It was a close race, with *Washington Black* by Esi Edugyan eventually coming out on top. This novel follows the story of George Washington Black, as he escapes slavery on a Barbados sugar plantation and travels from Canada, to England, to Morocco in search for his true self and what it means to really be free. We are so eager to hear your thoughts on this novel.



1. Wash wanted to capture everything about Bridgetown in his memory so he could draw it later. If you could capture a place you've been, or a memory you hold, forever, what would it be?

2. A book's "setting" refers to the time, place, and environment where a story takes place. What impact do you think Esi Edugyan's choice of settings had on this story?

3. The perspective of Wash is written by Edugyan, who is a female author. Do you think this impacted the way his narrative was told? Do you think it might have been any different if Wash was written from a male perspective?
4. What do you think happened at the end of the book?
5. Edugyan shared in an interview that, "I didn't want these abolitionists to be viewed as the great white saviors. It's not just black and white." What do you think of, when you think of abolitionists? Did this book challenge or support the way you view them? If you were unfamiliar with the word before, what does it mean to you now?

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

## **NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: ME, MYSELF, AND I (VOLUME 13, ISSUE 2)**

Hey family! Here are some writing prompts to help you get started on submissions for our next issue on **Me, Myself, and I**. We also want to give you a heads up for the issue after that. Volume 13, Issue 3 will be exploring the theme of **Ancestors**.

### **(1)**

Create a character sketch of yourself as if you were a fictional character in a novel. Include quirks, strengths, weaknesses, and your unique journey of self-discovery.

### **(2)**

Reflect on your cultural background and how it has influenced your identity. Consider traditions, values, or customs that play a role in shaping who you are. Then write a poem that delves into the different facets of your personality, exploring the light and dark sides, the strengths, and vulnerabilities that make up the unique tapestry of "you."

### **(3)**

Consider a relationship that has had a significant impact on your life. How has it influenced your personal development, and what lessons have you learned from that connection?

## (4)

Imagine you have the ability to switch identities with someone for a day. Whose identity would you choose, and how do you think it would change your perspective on life?

## (5)

Explore the idea of self-love through the lens of embracing scars – both physical and emotional. Write about the stories behind each mark and the strength gained from overcoming adversity.

## (6)

I Am Poem: I Am (name) \_\_\_\_\_

I wonder (something you are actually curious about) \_\_\_\_\_

I hear (a sound, a voice) \_\_\_\_\_

I see (a sight, a scene) \_\_\_\_\_

I want (an actual desire) \_\_\_\_\_

I am (name again) \_\_\_\_\_

I pretend (describe a secret wish) \_\_\_\_\_

I feel (an emotion related to the secret wish) \_\_\_\_\_

I touch (an imaginary object) \_\_\_\_\_

I worry (something that really worries me) \_\_\_\_\_

I ask (a question without a simple answer) \_\_\_\_\_

I am (name) \_\_\_\_\_

I understand (something you know is true) \_\_\_\_\_

I believe (something else you know is true) \_\_\_\_\_

I dream (something you can actually dream) \_\_\_\_\_

I trust (something you believe in) \_\_\_\_\_

I hope (something you actually hope for) \_\_\_\_\_

I am (name) \_\_\_\_\_

*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 (**Me, Myself, and I**) 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*

# CONVERSATION WITH JULIA



Hey Free Minds Fam! Most of you know me at least by name, but for those who I haven't had the opportunity to get to know yet, I'm the Deputy Director at Free Minds and one thing to know about me is that I LOVE reading and writing. Right now, I'm sitting at my kitchen table listening to some music (Tracy Chapman) and brewing some tea (green – I need a little caffeine boost!). Since our topic today is dreams, I want to tell you about one of my dreams: to publish a book. When I was a kid, I used to make up elaborate stories with my friends. By the time I was 10 years old, I had decided to write books and I have never changed my mind. Now, some decades later, I've written a couple of books but haven't published any yet.

There are generally two ways to approach publishing: self-publishing and what they call 'traditional' publishing (in short: working with a literary agent to sell your book to an editor at a publishing house). I know myself, and I know that I wouldn't be very good at self-publishing (I don't have that hustle) so my dream has been to get a book deal through traditional publishing. For more information about what that process can look like, check out the Write Way columns in Volume 12, Issue 2 or Volume 11, Issue 2. But lately, when I think

about my dream, I think about holding onto a dream when you may feel like it's slipping away. I'm sure you can relate to the feeling of rejection or fear that your dream may never become reality.

Okay, that's a real downer, right? The reason it's been on my mind is because as of this writing, my latest book has been rejected by a grand total of 68 (and counting) literary agents. Sometimes, I can't help asking myself why I keep putting myself out there and pursuing this dream.

I think the most important thing for me has been to remember that my dream is just that: mine. Ultimately, I write for myself because I love writing. It helps me feel balanced, it helps me process the world around me, and it helps me feel more like myself. When I remember that, then the anxiety about whether or not I'll accomplish my goals begins to fade.

There are a lot of things about my dream that are outside of my control; I do my best to focus on what is within my power – like my commitment to my craft and to continually growing as a writer. No matter what happens in the future, I want to know that I gave it my all.

One of my favorite writers, Octavia Butler, once said, "There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns." Octavia Butler wrote science fiction (I do too), so to me this quote is a reminder of the breadth of possibilities with a free mind. We can write new worlds and new futures into existence. But we can't do any of that if we don't dream them first!

*Remember that Free Minds is not a publisher, and we do not have the capacity to assist anyone with publishing, but if you are interested in learning more about this subject, write to us and we can send you more information about the publishing industry.*

## CONNECT ON CORRLINKS *By Aneka*

Good news FM fam!

Sending in your *Connect* submissions just got easier! If you have access to Corrlinks or Getting Out, you can now send in your submissions and receive writing prompts and other *Connect* related updates via Corrlinks or Getting Out. Members without Corrlinks and Getting Out access can continue to send in *Connect* submissions via mail. **This email correspondence will be solely for the purpose of exchanging *Connect* related information. All personal correspondence will continue to be through mail.**

### Free Minds Corrlinks Info:

Corrlinks First Name: Free Minds

Corrlinks Last Name: Connect

Corrlinks Email: [connect@freemindsbookclub.org](mailto:connect@freemindsbookclub.org)

### Free Minds Getting Out Info:

Getting Out First Name: Connect

Getting Out Last Name: Free Minds

Getting Out Email: [connect@freemindsbookclub.org](mailto:connect@freemindsbookclub.org)

\*If you're not already a member, below is a checklist for our eligibility criteria.

- I am a youth charged as an adult from DC and/or an incarcerated young adult from DC, currently between the ages of 18-24
- I am eligible for D.C.'s Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act or Second Look Amendment Act (also known as IRAA 3.0) which allows D.C residents who were under 25 at the time of the offense to petition the court for resentencing after serving 15 years or more. As a DC law, this only applies to individuals sentenced in DC Superior Court.

Do you fit into one of these categories? If you do, please write us back and let us know so that we can send you the form needed to join the Book Club. Our address is 1816 12th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20009



# DC PHOTOS *By Aneka*

*As requested by our readers*



Foggy day at the Malcolm X Park in Northwest DC



Sunset in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood, Northwest DC

Have a request for the next issue's DC Photos?  
Write us at 1816 12th St NW, Washington, DC 20009 and let us know what you'd like to see!



# DC PHOTOS *By Aneka*

*As requested by our readers*



DC metro passing the Shell gas station on Benning Rd,  
Southeast DC



Epic Market on 7th & L St, Southeast DC



Street view of the Arthur Capper neighborhood in Southeast DC

Have a request for the next issue's DC Photos?  
Write us at 1816 12th St NW, Washington, DC 20009 and let us know what you'd like to see!

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF ASTROLOGY AND ACHIEVING LIFE DREAMS

*By Sofia*

"What's your sign?" is a question I'm sure you've heard at some point in your life while someone was getting to know you. When people ask this question, they're usually referring to your astrological sun sign, or where the sun was positioned in relation to earth when you were born. While sun sign astrology is commonly what we see in newspapers, TV, or magazines, the history and full practice of astrology has much more depth and history.

Free Minds is not officially endorsing astrology; we respect all beliefs and spiritualities so long as they do not harm others. However, keeping with this issue's theme of "dreams," I'll be sharing a brief history of astrology and how different cultures and practitioners actualize it spiritually and philosophically.

Astrology uses the skies and stars to tell a story about our personal journeys and human behavior. Through analyzing and observing celestial bodies, astrologers have sought to make predictions and explain human behavior. There is debate about where astrology originated but the 12 zodiac symbols can be traced back to the early Mesopotamian civilizations at around 3000 BCE. Other early civilizations also had their own forms of dividing the heavens and partially because of trade along routes like the Silk Road, astrology across different parts of the world began to spread and intermingle. It's widely believed that astrological ideas came together when Egypt came under Greek Hellenistic rule around 330 BCE. In the city of Alexandria founded by Alexander the Great, ideas flourished and scholars created Horoscopic astrology by merging Babylonian astrology with the Egyptian tradition of the Decanic zodiac.

It was during this period that the 12 star signs of the Western zodiac emerged—Aries (roughly March 21-April 19), Taurus (April 20-May 20), Gemini (May 21-June 20), Cancer (June 21-July 22), Leo (July 23-Aug. 22),

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22), Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 22), Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21), Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21), Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19), Aquarius (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18) and Pisces (Feb. 19 to March 20). The zodiac signs were named after constellations and matched with dates based on the apparent relationship between their placement in the sky and the sun. Each of the signs has their unique characteristics that were theorized to help describe why humans behave the way they do. The "movement" of stars in Western astrology is not actually movement since stars do not move, but because the Earth rotates on its axis and orbits around the Sun, they have the illusion of moving.

Early Indian and Chinese societies also made their own meanings from the sky, but Western civilizations have historically used the early Greek astrological beliefs. Astrology was considered a serious academic discipline for centuries, but declined in popularity and legitimacy as the church gained power across Europe. During the Age of Enlightenment (1650-1780), societies began believing in science over astrological beliefs and astrology was considered a pseudoscience (a collection of beliefs or practices mistakenly regarded as being based on scientific method), but has persisted as a form of entertainment since. Although many consider astrology as mere entertainment, there are still astrologers and practitioners who seriously study the stars and find meaning from them.

One such astrologer is Chani Nicholas, a popular Canadian astrologer and activist. She authored the book *You Were Born for This: Astrology for Radical Self-Acceptance* and views the birth chart (where all the planets, stars, and moon were positioned at your birth, not just the sun) as a source of personal power and holding the keys to achieving your life purpose.

So how does Nicholas view our sun, moon, and rising signs (known as the

big three) as helping to determine our life's purpose and how we can actualize our dreams? According to her and as outlined in her book, your Sun describes your life's purpose, your Moon helps to determine your physical and emotional needs, and your ascendant (rising) and its planetary ruler helps to determine your motivation for living and how you go about achieving your dreams and purpose. Her book gives in depth descriptions of each sign and aspects of a birth chart to guide readers along the path their charts have laid out so they can live the life they were born to, according to her website.

Knowing the time and location of your birth can help to lay out your birth chart. As an example of a birth chart and its reading, according to Nicholas, I'll use my own big three to demonstrate. After plugging in my birth date, location, and time of my birth into her website, I saw that my sun is in Aquarius, my moon is in Taurus, and my rising sign is Gemini. According to Nicholas's interpretation, this apparently means that my identity and life purpose (determined by my sun sign) are driven by intellectualism, rebellion, a passion for social justice, and caring deeply about equality and humanitarian causes. It also means that much of my purpose in life is dedicated to wanting to understand how systems work and how to make them work as efficiently as possible. My moon in Taurus, according to Nicholas, means that my emotional and physical needs are driven by a desire for stability and a grounding nature. Lastly, my Gemini rising means that my motivation for living life is driven by my curiosity and constant communication with others.

Astrology can be a fun source of entertainment and topic of conversation, and for some, as I detailed, is a source of belief and inspiration for achieving life dreams. What's your sign? Would you use astrology to understand your life purpose, or just as a source of entertainment?

# MEDITATION *By Kelli*

You may think that meditating about being at the beach feels cliché. But ask anyone where they feel most relaxed, and I guarantee a large percentage will answer “the beach.” When we write guided meditations for FM members at the DC jail, they often request that we “visit” a seashore locale. There is a reason for this. Psychologists say that three natural elements that we typically experience at the beach – the sun, the ocean, and the air – literally promote and enhance positive mental health. One scientist reports that staring at the ocean changes our brain waves’ frequency, putting our brains into a mildly meditative state. Others have shown how breathing in negative ion oxygen that is present in an ocean breeze has a soothing effect on our bodies.

So right now, as we shiver amidst the seemingly never-ending winter, I’m thinking we should take a meditation trip to a beach together. This is the DREAMS issue, which means NO LIMITS. So yes, we could go to Ocean City, or Virginia Beach, but nahhhh! Let’s dream big! Let’s transport ourselves in our minds to the Seychelles, an island nation in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa. It is said to have some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. One beach, called Anse Source d’Argent (which means “source of money” in French) even has bright pink sand!

As usual, if possible, have a friend take turns with you. One reads while the other meditates. And then you can switch. If this isn’t an option, just read through the meditation a few times before closing your eyes and reflecting upon what you’ve read.

*Find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take a deep breath in... hold it... and exhale. Continue to focus on your breath... in... and out. Now, beginning at the top of your head, concentrate on relaxing each part of your body... your face... your neck (feel free to do a few neck rolls)... your shoulders and arms... all the way to your fingertips. Now focus on relaxing your chest. As you focus upon your heart, imagine your heart opening to your dreams... Now move down to your belly, your hips, your legs... all the way down to the toes on your feet. Your body is relaxed, and your senses are ready... it’s time to go to the beach!*

*Imagine you are transported... across the globe... landing in the island nation of Seychelles, just over 1,200 miles east of Kenya. You find*

*yourself sitting on the soft, pink sand of the beach called “Anse Source d’Argent.” Pick up a handful of sand... hold it in your hand... and then gradually let the grains sift through your fingertips and fall back to the ground. Imagine yourself doing this again and again... focus upon how the soft sand feels upon your skin...*

*The sand is a gorgeous, light, pastel pink... it is lovely and soothing to look at.*

*As you inhale, you smell the warm, salty air... it smells clean and fresh... filling your body with a peace and calm that is real. You breathe it in and imagine it flowing to all parts of you... relaxing you. The scent and the feeling it creates are intoxicating...*

*About 30 yards in front of you is the Indian Ocean. The sunlight reflects off the crystal clear, turquoise blue water. You can feel the sun on your skin and imagine the Vitamin D nourishing your body. The waves crash gently upon the beach as you watch and listen. The water douses the beach... and then recedes. Over... and over... and over again. The sound of this natural cycle, which has occurred without pause for billions of years... the regular ebb and flow of the ocean soothes your soul...*

*Breathe in all this natural beauty. Hold it inside of your body. Let it become a part of you. Now release your breath...*

*Remember, this is our dream day at the beach... So we’re not going to go hungry! A new friend brings you a plate and sets it down on your blanket. The aroma of fresh-caught fish grilled over coconut husks fills the air... You take a bite, and it is incredible! Savor the taste of the fish, lightly seasoned with garlic, ginger and chili. You chase it with a bite of sweet, fresh mango. Then wash it all down with a swallow of fresh squeezed orange juice. Yum...*

*This is your dream... luxuriate in it for as long as you wish. You are **worthy** of your dreams. So, whether you are imagining, or planning your future – DREAM BIG! Inhale all the sights, sounds, sensations, smells, and tastes of a dream day at one of the most beautiful beaches in the world!*





# THE WRITE WAY: DREAM JOURNALING

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

*By Aneka*

In our last issue of the *Connect* (Resilience – Volume 12, Issue 5), we discussed different tips for journaling. In this issue, I'd like to introduce a different type of journaling: Dream Journaling. Dream journaling is a great way to track your dreams and can even help boost creativity and help you with problem solving in your everyday life. Have you ever had a dream that made you feel like it was trying to tell you something or warn you of impending doom? Or how about a dream that predicted a certain outcome? What about the feeling of déjà vu, like you've seen something happen before? Do you ever wish that you could remember your dreams? If so, dream journaling is perfect for you! Below you can find 10 tips to help you get started on your dream journaling journey.

## 10 Tips for Journaling Dreams

### **1. Keep your dream journal near your bed.**

Place your dream journal within reach of your bed so that you can easily record your dreams as soon as you wake up.

### **2. Record your dreams as soon as possible after waking up.**

Before the details fade from memory, be sure to start writing about your dream.

### **3. Write in the present tense.**

Write your dreams as if you are currently experiencing them. This can help you to remember the details more clearly.

### **4. Include sensory details.**

Try to include as many sensory details as possible, such as sights, sounds, and feelings. This can help you to recall the dream more vividly and to understand the emotions that you experienced during the dream.

### **5. Record your emotions.**

Note any emotions that you experienced during the dream or upon waking up. This can help you to identify any unresolved emotions from your waking life that may be affecting your dreams.

### **6. Keep track of recurring themes or symbols.**

Note any recurring themes, symbols, or patterns in your dreams. This can help you to better understand your subconscious thoughts and emotions.

### **7. Use sketches or drawings.**

If you are a visual person, you may find it helpful to include sketches or drawings in your dream journal. This can help you to visualize the details of your dreams more clearly and remember your dream in more detail.

### 8. Don't worry about grammar or spelling.

Don't worry about making your dream journal perfect. The goal is simply to record your dreams as accurately as possible. You can always go back and revise or clarify later if needed.

### 9. Interpret your dreams.

Take some time to interpret your dreams and reflect on what they may mean. You can use resources such as dream dictionaries or consult with a therapist or counselor to help you interpret your dreams – or just write what you think it means. You can also read more on understanding your dreams.

### 10. Regularly review your dream journal.

Take some time to review your dream journal regularly, and look for patterns or recurring themes. This can help you to better understand your subconscious thoughts and emotions.

Now that you have read the tips to dream journaling, if you're interested in giving it a try, copy the **Dream Journal Template** into your notebook or on a sheet of paper and answer these questions the next time you dream!

#### Dream Journal Template:

- What happened in my dream?
- Who was in my dream?
- What was the setting of my dream?
- What symbols or metaphors appeared in my dream?
- What emotions did I feel in my dream?
- What thoughts did I have during or after my dream?
- How did I feel upon waking up?
- How does this dream relate to my waking life?
- What might this dream mean?



There are many benefits to dream journaling. The main benefit being that keeping a dream journal may increase your ability to remember your dreams. Remembering your dreams and recording them can help you find links between your dreams and your waking life. Having that reference to look back on can help you make more sense of yourself and your role in the world. It also helps alleviate stress by allowing you to externalize and explore feelings that may be difficult to confront in waking life. After you give dream journaling a try, write us and let us know if it provided you with clarity or not. We look forward to hearing from you!

## 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.*

**Creating Wealth: Unleashing Your Ultimate Prosperity Potential by Johnny Lee Wesley, Jr.**

**Description provided by the author:** A compilation of informative financial strategies. This book encapsulates multiple facets that is a blueprint for securing wealth and financial freedom.



# IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

## DEEP DIVE: THE QUEST TO BAN LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE FOR JUVENILE OFFENDERS

In 2013, Sheldon Mattis was convicted of first degree murder for his involvement of the killing of Jaivon Blake two years earlier. At the time Mattis, an accomplice in the crime, was 18; the shooter was 17.

Earlier this year, Massachusetts made history as the first state in the nation to have a ban on the practice of committing anyone under the age of 21 to die in prison, a sentence referred to frequently as Life Without Parole or LWOP. That ban was imposed by the state's supreme court in an appeal of Mattis' case, in which they ruled that he should have the same parole review afforded to him that his 17-year-old co-defendant had the right to.

The court had ruled in 2013 that issuing LWOP sentences to juveniles was cruel and unusual because "it is not possible to demonstrate that a juvenile offender is 'irretrievably depraved.'" This new decision, extending the ban up to age 21, acknowledges that the brains and decision-making of "emerging adults" is similar to that of older teens.

This notion has gained traction in recent years, the idea that the concept of youth and the development of the brain does not align neatly with our traditional societal view that people become adults when they turn 18. The concept is not really all that new though; all states maintain a drinking age of 21, reflecting the collective wisdom that anyone younger will, on average, have a hard time moderating their consumption safely.

Will more states consider following Massachusetts' path? Too soon to tell, but this decision comes after decades of advocacy, activism and legal challenges that narrowed the right of governments to take youth out of the public forever. Here is a quick history of the major U.S. Supreme Court battles on juvenile life without parole.

- 2005, *Roper v. Simmons*: The high court banned the use of the death penalty on juvenile offenders.
- 2010, *Graham v. Florida*: Terrance Graham was convicted of armed burglary and sentenced to life without parole, a crime he committed at age 16. The court ruled that LWOP could no longer be used as a sentence for juveniles who were not accused of a homicide.
- 2012, *Miller v. Alabama*: In the case of a 14-year-old who killed his neighbor, the Supreme Court ruled that life without parole could be imposed in juvenile homicide cases, but it could not be a mandatory sentence...a judge would have to consider a multitude of factors about the defendant. Several years later, another court decision made clear that this new rule should apply to people who were already in prison due to convictions they received as juveniles.

So over a two-decade period, the highest court in the land cut down on any state's ability to issue LWOP sentences to people under the age of 18. They used to be able to put a youth to death for their crimes; now, states could only issue LWOP in homicide cases and only then if the judge had actually given weight to their age,

behavior, the nature of the crime, etc.

Since that string of court cases, 1,091 people sentenced to life without parole as children have been released, according to the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth. And in the entire country, less than 100 people have been sentenced to life without parole as juveniles; before these decisions, there would be more than 100 every year.

This fight has now largely moved into the state legislatures, with advocacy campaigns pushing to ban juvenile life without parole outright. Twenty-eight states have already outlawed that sentence for youth; the majority of the states still permitting LWOP are located in the Midwest and the deep South.

## WORLD

We recently passed the grim second anniversary of Russia's war on the Ukraine, which has claimed dozens of thousands of lives, displaced millions of families and shows no signs of ending. A new round of U.S. aid and weaponry support to the Ukrainians has been tied up for months on Capitol Hill, where a faction of the Republican party has voiced opposition to our continued support of the nation of 44 million.

The War in Gaza continues as well, with Israel's continued air and ground offensive in Palestinian territory. The latest battle in this decades-old conflict began when the military wing of Hamas, the group that governs Gaza, executed a surprise attack on Israel and took hundreds of hostages that were taken into Gaza.

Since then, Israel's siege on Gaza has killed more than 30,000 people, including over 12,000 children. As we go to press, diplomats are furiously negotiating for a prolonged ceasefire that would allow the space for hostages to be returned, and increased aid and support to flow into Gaza to help the Palestinian people.

## NATION

It is all but official: we will have a rerun of the 2020 presidential election. All serious challengers to Republican candidate Donald Trump have dropped out of the race, meaning that the former president will be unopposed in taking on the incumbent Joe Biden, who defeated him in 2020.

Trump will pursue a second term while facing scores of criminal charges in federal and state court over a range of things related to business practices, political activities and the handling of classified documents. Biden will seek reelection while attempting to assure the public that even at the age of 82, which he will turn just weeks after Election Day, he is capable of the grueling demands of the job.

One thing we know will be an issue in this election is U.S. policy at the Southern border with Mexico. With record numbers of people from South and Central America, Haiti and even Asia arriving at the border in search of asylum, polls show that a high percentage of voters rate the border as a top issue in this race. The Biden administration recently helped broker a deal on border policy that



# IN THE NEWS *Continued*

would have limited admissions into the country, which former president Trump scuttled by telling members of his party to vote against it.

## SPORTS

Between 2001 and 2019, the New England Patriots put up the kind of dynastic numbers that made sports fans think they might never be touched. Coach Bill Belichick and Quarterback Tom Brady led the team to six Super Bowl titles and nine Super Bowl appearances.

But we might already be witnessing the coach/QB duo with a chance at equaling or even surpassing the Patriot run. In early February, the Kansas City Chiefs – led by Coach Andy Reid and Quarterback Patrick Mahomes – won Super Bowl 58 in Las Vegas, their third title in the past five years. It was just the second Super Bowl in history to reach overtime, with the Chiefs beating the San Francisco 49ers in a rematch of Super Bowl 54.

Can they match the production of the nearly 20-year Patriots span? Adding another trophy in the next two years would put them on a strong path.

The NCAA tournament is still weeks away, but the legacy of the 2023-2024 season is already set, in this writer's opinion. It is Caitlin Clark, the phenom guard from the University of Iowa, and the overall surge in popularity for the women's game that she surely helped drive.

Clark, a Minnesota native, just finished leading Iowa to its third straight Big Ten Championship on the way to a certain #1 seed in the national tournament. Once there, Clark will lead her squad in a field that will include South Carolina (without question the most dominant college team of the past five years, of either gender); the reigning champs LSU, who bested Iowa in last year's final; and a slate of other terrific teams that have drawn sellout crowds and record TV ratings this year.

At the center of it has been Clark, who set the all-time NCAA scoring record held since 1970 by LSU great Pistol Pete Maravich. In her four-year career with the Hawkeyes, she is now averaging 32 points, 7 rebounds and 9 assists per game.

On the men's side of this year's tournament slate, the UConn Huskies will be looking to become the first team to win back-to-back titles since Florida did it in 2007. They'll have some stiff competition from the likes of Duke, North Carolina, Houston, and Purdue, whose big man Zach Edey is probably going to win Player of the Year for a second time this season.



From the top:  
Andy Reid and  
Caitlin Clark

# REENTRY PROFILE

*By Regina*

I recently had the opportunity to talk with Free Minds member Cornelious about his dreams and I had the pleasure to taste his food at the Networking Event (see page 4), which I must say was absolutely delicious. The interview took place over the phone and here is what he had to say:

## ***What is the biggest dream you achieved in your life so far?***

Receiving clemency from President Obama before his term ended! I had 30 years but ended up doing 17 years and 7 months and I've never stopped being grateful for that dream being realized.

## ***What is your biggest dream in life?***

Just doing what I want to do in life. Right now I'm in barber school and selling food. I just want to be successful in those fields. To use my talents and passion for cooking and barbering to help people feel better. If you have good food and feel good about how you look then you have the confidence and strength to go out in the world and achieve your dreams. If I can help make that happen, I'll know I've done my part

## ***If you could wave a magic wand, what is the number one personal dream you would want to see fulfilled?***

I would have a building with two entrances and a connecting doorway. One side of the building would be a restaurant and the other side would be a barbershop. It will be a place where people can come get a haircut and grab a bite to eat, and enjoy each other's company and help get through the hardships that life can often bring.

## ***What is your dream lifestyle?***

My dream lifestyle is being able to be there for my daughter who is grown and my young niece. I love living healthily too, and seeing people benefit from the sea moss smoothie I make every week is wonderful. I look forward to traveling once I've saved enough money.



# DC CULTURE: DC RESTAURANT WEEK

*By Sofia*

One of the best times of year for foodies (people who love food and trying different cuisines) in the D.C. area is mid-January when the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington hosts the bi-annual Metropolitan Washington Restaurant Week. The week-long event that highlights a myriad of restaurants in D.C., Maryland, and Virginia occurs in the winter and summer of each year. This year's winter restaurant week started January 15 and was originally supposed to last through January 22, but was extended until January 28 because of wintry weather that hit the area. 150 restaurants participated and all of them featured \$25 and \$35 prix fixe (fixed price) lunch and brunch menus, and \$45, \$55 and \$65 special dinner menus.

I did not have the opportunity to check out any of the restaurants myself, but my roommate and close friend, Jane, checked out several of the participating restaurants with her father. I sat down with Jane and she took me on a flavorful journey of the meals she and her father enjoyed at some of D.C.'s best restaurants.

Jane and her father kicked off their delectable D.C. voyage with a dinner at Zaytinya, a restaurant located downtown featuring Eastern Mediterranean small plates under the direction of DC celebrity chef José Andrés. The restaurant features light and airy dishes inspired by Turkish, Lebanese, and Greek cultures. They began their meal with Zaytinya's famous creamy hummus and baba ghanouge. Hummus is a smooth and creamy puree of cooked chickpeas, tahini, and lemon juice. Baba ghanouge is often described as hummus's creamier companion and uses roasted eggplant instead of chickpeas. Some of their other dishes included a fresh white bean kale salad, savory shish taouk (grilled chicken skewer), and crispy brussel sprouts. Jane ended her dinner with a rich Turkish chocolate cake (islak kek) that was paired with tahini ice cream, while her father opted for the greek yogurt with pistachio powder and juicy apricots.

For the next day of D.C. restaurant week, Jane and her father found themselves at Ambar, a Capitol Hill Balkan restaurant, for lunch, and Perry's,



Mussels and salmon at Ambar

a sushi restaurant located in the Adams Morgan neighborhood for dinner. Ambar had an unlimited lunch menu of small plates. The Balkans is a region in southeastern Europe. Balkan cuisine is characterized by strong, diverse, and spicy flavors, and consists of food from

Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Croatia, Romania, and Greece, to name a few. Jane and her father took advantage of the unlimited small plates and ordered the entirety of the seafood menu, which included shrimp, salmon, and a rainbow trout with lentils. Jane's favorite dish she had all restaurant week was the buttery, herby, and decadent mussels she had from the seafood menu. She described them as melting in her mouth. Some of their non-seafood dishes included an assortment of roasted vegetables, a hearty goulash (stew of meat and vegetables seasoned with paprika and other spices), braised lamb, and buttery gnocchi (a traditional Italian pasta shape similar to a dumpling and made of potatoes). Jane and her father's dinner at Perry's consisted of classic sushi dishes, with a colorful assortment of fresh raw salmon, tuna, and other fish. One of Jane's other favorite dishes she had during restaurant week was the sweet matcha tarte she ordered for dessert. Matcha is a bright green finely ground powder of specially grown and processed green tea leaves originating in China and most popular in East Asia. Matcha has an earthy and fresh flavor.

For the third day of Jane and her father's tasty restaurant adventure, they started with lunch at another José Andrés restaurant, Jaleo, a modern Spanish restaurant in the Penn Quarter neighborhood. Jaleo serves authentic Spanish cuisine, including tapas, which are small plates of



Breaded shrimp at Perry's



Shrimp at Jaleo



snacks or appetizers, but can be combined to make a full meal. One of the dishes they served for their lunch restaurant week special included a classic tapa, a bright shrimp salad. Jane's favorite dish for their lunch at Jaleo was the flan adorned with sweet vanilla bean shavings. For dinner, Jane and her father traveled to Old Towne Alexandria in Virginia for a French dinner at Josephine's. Jane described the ambiance of a restaurant as classic Parisian with dim romantic lighting. It would not have been a true French dining experience without escargot, also known as snail. Jane described the snail as having an earthy taste with a texture similar to shellfish. The escargot was served in a dark green herb sauce.

Jane and her father's restaurant week experience concluded the next day at another one of chef José Andrés's restaurants, a vibrant Mexican restaurant called Oyamel located near the National Mall. The colorful decor is meant to mimic the urban vibrancy of Mexico City. Jane began her lunch with a warm and comforting tortilla soup and her and her father munched on a classic combination of chips and salsa while waiting for

their main dishes. Jane had pork tacos that were packed with spice while her father ate chicken tacos colored with purple pickled onions. Jane ended her meal with one of her other favorite dishes of the week, a delicious rum cake paired with macerated strawberries and caramel ice cream. Jane ranked

the restaurants she experienced as follows, with the first restaurant listed being her favorite: Ambar, Perry's, Zaytinya, Oyamel, Josephine's, and Jaleo.

Which restaurant sounds the most delicious to you? What other aspects of D.C. culture would you like to see in future issues? Write to us and let us know!



Pork taco at Oyamel

# PRISON SCHOLAR FUND

*By Makenna*

If your dream for yourself involves education, then you may be interested in the Prison Scholar Fund!

The Prison Scholar Fund (PSF) is a program that offers education assistance to currently incarcerated individuals who want to start or continue their higher education journey. Its goals are to offer rehabilitation opportunities, scholarships, and mentor future students in efforts to reduce recidivism. Any currently incarcerated individual at any facility can apply. To participate, the first step is for a student to request an application by writing to this address:

Application Requests  
Prison Scholar Fund  
1752 NW Market St. #953  
Seattle, WA 98107

The next step is to complete a degree plan. Universities available to be funded through PSF include Adams State University (CO), Andrews University (MI), American School (IL), Brigham Young University (UT), California Coast University (CA), Louisiana State University (LA), Ohio University (OH), Rio Salado (AZ), Seattle Central College (WA), Southwest University (TX), University of Idaho (ID), University of Northern Iowa (IA), University of South Dakota (SD), and Upper Iowa University (IA). After the degree plan is created, you can submit your application to the above address. A PSF committee will review your application and notify you of your status.

**It's important to note that the process is very selective**, but students across the country are encouraged to apply. If you are not selected for the program right away, you will be added to a waiting list. The amounts of the scholarships awarded range widely; some applicants need less than \$100, while others may need over \$500. Typically, the PSF will only pay for one course at a time until the applicant proves that they are able to complete the course and meet academic performance standards (minimum cumulative 2.5 GPA on courses taken through the PSF's assistance). Once a track record has been established, the applicant will be considered a Prison Scholar and provided the opportunity to enroll in more than one course at a time.

What are your goals for your education? What do you want us to know about your educational interests?



# DID YOU KNOW?

## Afrofuturism

By Makenna

What comes to mind when you hear the term, "Afrofuturism?" Maybe technology, science, big and bold ideas. Or perhaps you envision a group of Black folks moving across time and space, on Earth or beyond it. Maybe you're reflecting on films like *Black Panther* and *The Wiz*, authors like Octavia Butler or albums like Janelle Monáe's "Dirty Computer." What about the innovative ways Black people can advance in modern society, or even *transcend* it? Afrofuturism is all those things and more – in fact, it's as simple as whatever Black folks want it to be.

Coined in 2018 by American writer Mark Dery, Afrofuturism describes a social, cultural, political, and artistic movement that imagines alternate realities for Black people, encouraging us to redefine our current experiences in hopes of defining our futures. For example, in the 2018 Marvel film *Black Panther* one of the most important components of the storyline is that Black people have a key role in sustaining the world. Wakanda is the only nation on the African continent that was not colonized by Europeans and is the only nation in the world that has access to Vibranium, the most powerful (fictional) metal on the planet. The film is an excellent illustration of Afrofuturism: an alternative reality for a Black population based on creativity, technology, science, fantasy, and even history.

Afrofuturism works against the limitations of oppression and discrimination to give Black people the choice to see themselves, their community, and the world, however they want. It uses our culture and history, combined with new technologies, scientific advances, and unexplored territories to redirect agency to a global population that has long suffered at the hands of the rich and powerful.

Afrofuturism can be reflected in the visual arts, poetry, creative writing, filmmaking, music, dance and more. Musicians and bands like OutKast, Sun Ra, Parliament, Funkadelic (eventually

merged into one band, Parliament Funkadelic), Earth, Wind & Fire, Grace Jones, Shabazz Palaces, and Missy Elliot all embody Afrofuturism through imaginative lyrics and creative visuals in their music videos, photoshoots, and even on the red carpet. Painters such as Ellen Gallagher, Lina Iris Viktor, Wangechi Mutu, and Cyrus Kabiru are known for incorporating Afrofuturistic themes into their work. Afrofuturism is all around us because we make it so.

You don't need to be a specific type of artist – or an artist at all – to appreciate and engage in Afrofuturism. As a member of any Black community all you need to do is envision a future greater than yourself, and be fiercely creative in how you move throughout the world.

Reflect on our history in the United States: centuries of war and violence against Black bodies, racist "explanations" of our supposed inferiority, a corrupt justice system that profits off our labor and restraint. Similarly, think about how innovative Black culture has proven itself to be. Despite their efforts, our joy is not up for grabs. Our community has paved the way in music and film, we have written our way to New York Times Best Sellers lists despite attempts to silence our voices, and we continue to inspire others with viral trends, fashion, and language.

Afrofuturism is our past, our present, and our future. It is our ability to turn our pain into power – to be resilient. To reimagine a world where we are at the center of its creation and its sustenance. What does that world look like to you? What role does technology play in that world? Who are you in that world? Who do you want to be? Afrofuturism is a movement with endless possibilities and without any limitations – whatever you see, is yours.

# MEMBERS CONNECT: DREAMS

## Dreams: A Short Story By DA

I glanced at my watch: 1:17pm. Great pace. I hopped down, did a push-up, hopped back up. 239. I began at 1 pm sharp. My goal is 300 within twenty-five minutes. I normally do them in 21-22, depending on the songs on my workout playlist that find rotation on my MP3 Player. Right now, MoneyBagg Yo's "Me vs Me" is playing.

240.

I survey my unit from the top tier. See the everyday prison activities: guys playing cards. Watching TV. Playing chess. Standing around talking. Walking the tiers. The fifty-six fluorescent ceiling lights make it easy to see the entire dayroom, which is painted off white. The rectangle shaped unit holds thirty-two cells on top and bottom tiers. Cells 1-16 line one side of the rectangle while cells 17-32 line the other. The short and last side of the rectangle is where the ten shower stalls – five on each tier – and the CO's office are.

241.

"Wayne Wayne."

242.

I hop up and look down at my cellmate, Sweet Black, standing in the dayroom. "What's up, slim?" Everyone knows how I feel about being interrupted while working out. This got to be important. I step to the rail.

"Ms. B. is looking for you." He's grinning.

My breath catches. This could be it. I turn around and step to the wall where my water bottle sits. I could be going home today. I've been waiting for a decision on my IRAA reconsideration motion. I make my way down to the bottom tier and to the annex where the Unit Team's offices are.

My heart is pounding.

I take a long swallow from my water bottle.

Thirty-one plus years of this deplorable existence could be ending today. At this exact moment.

I take a deep breath.

Meek Mill's "Litty" is blasting in my ears when I reach the yellow doors. I knock on them.

"Mr. A.?"

Ms. B. "Yes."

"Come on back."

I enter the annex and walk to her office, which is the first one on the right. She's standing behind her desk. A smirk on her face. "There's some papers you need to sign."

My heart misses a beat. My legs wobble. "What papers?"

"Your release papers, Mr. A."

I stare at her. Release papers release papers release papers... I'm. Going. Home. I'm going home. I'M GOING HOME!

I inhale.

Shake my head.

Exhale.

"Oh, okay."

"Aren't you happy?"

"F\*\*\* yeah!"

"What?"

"Huh man. Woman, hand me a damn pen." She does so and I sign the papers.

"Here's your itinerary." She hands me a sheet of paper. "You'll be leaving within...."

I walked away and didn't catch the rest. I was going home so what else was there for her to say? I reentered the dayroom and all of my homies were standing around the DC area of the dayroom staring at me. I noticed the quietness of the unit and glanced around. Most of the guys were staring at me. I walked past the six

phones—only one of the "DC" phones were being used—and entered my cell. I heard footsteps behind me before I passed the porcelain toilet. I sat on my bunk. Faced my cell door. Saw my cellmate, my homies, Seegers-El, the acting Grand Sheikh here at the USP's Moorish Science Temple of America Branch Temple, Wali, E.S.T., Sag from B-More, and a host of others standing outside my cell.

"What's up, Big Homey? Damn, tell us something," Wali said, standing before me.

I stared up at him. Watched as he moved one of his long locks from in front of his face. Looked over at Sweet Black. Grinned. "I'm outta here!"

"You're going home, slim?" Sweet Black walked over and stood beside Wali.

"Do you look like a Black Teletubby?" We all laughed.

"That's what's up!" Sweet Black smiled. He knew he had a few CashApps coming from me.

I looked towards my cell door and saw and heard my homies outside my cell high-fiving each others and saying "F\*\*\* yeah!" I smiled. Wiped a tear from my eye. "Wali, do me one favor."

"What's that?"

"Pinch me."

"Pinch you?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"Because I need to know if this is a dream."

He pinched me.

I didn't wake up.

Yes, I'm going home.

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## Dreams By AHA

I picture myself at the Coliseum or Rose Bowl on the biggest stage in front of thousands of people watching me play football at the highest level. Making plays and standing out amongst many making history that would be spoke about decades later or inspire someone to be like I was on the field or on that day.

I tell myself to follow your dreams and be good at what you love. Stepping on the field with the greats, the legends and those you followed and looked up to and will tell you the same while inspiring you to practice your skill and remain steadfast when one may think they're not good enough. Believe in yourself and become one of the greats in football will make your dream come true.

If I could have any dream come true, it would be to be one of the best football players whoever played the game. A standout that that would have opened doors to bigger and better opportunities due the skills and ability I was given to perform at the highest level. making not only my life better but my families as well creating a change of course in my life that many don't get without determination or dedication. Peace AHA

# WHAT WE'RE READING

with Neely

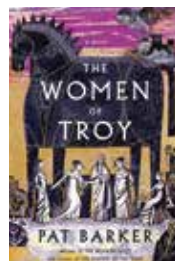
Have you recently read a book that left an impression on you, good or bad? We want to hear about it!

Send us your thoughts (approximately 100 words) and we may feature your book in the next

"What We're Reading."

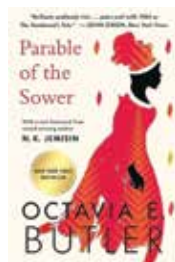
- **MC: *Zealot: A Book About Cults* by Jo Thornely**

This was actually a very good, hard to put down book. Ms. Thornely is from Australia, and she writes in a quite sarcastic, humorous manner. In tackling the subject of cults, she did so in a way that makes the cults seem silly and idiotic, and the cult leaders just complete boneheads. Yet she doesn't shy away from the gruesome details of each cult's practices and beliefs, and even details the illegal activities they got into. I enjoyed reading more about cults I had heard of before, like Heaven's Gate and the Branch Davidians, and it was eye-opening to read about the ones I had never heard of. The Raelians, for example, were a goofy cult that believed that humans were created by aliens and that one day we'd all be procreating with robots. I highly recommend this book if you can find a copy.



- **Julia: *The Women of Troy* by Pat Barker**

I recently read *The Women of Troy* by Pat Barker, the sequel to her previous book called *The Silence of the Girls*. Both books are retelling events from the ancient Greek epic *The Iliad*, but from the point of view of the women in the story who are largely unheard. *The Silence of the Girls* and *The Women of Troy* revolve around a woman named Briseis who was once a queen until the Greek warrior Achilles destroyed her home, killed her family, and kidnapped her. Now Briseis and other captured women live among Achilles and the other Greek warriors who are trying to conquer the city of Troy. I really appreciated both of these books for their deep attention to the victims of war and conquest whose stories often go untold in the larger narrative.



- **Emily: *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler**

I'm reading *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler, which I've wanted to read ever since *Kindred* was the BAM book a few years ago. It follows a young woman named Lauren as she navigates a dystopian version of California where climate change has nearly destroyed society. Lauren creates a new religion, *Earthseed*, to help her understand the world. Lauren's daily journaling reminds me of Octavia's inspiring perseverance to become a writer. She would journal positive affirmations about her vision for her future success as a best-selling author including the phrase "So be it! See to it!"

- **Aneka: *Do Not Become Alarmed* by Maile Meloy**

This is a thriller with loads of drama and scandals. The story is about 3 families whose children go missing on an excursion while on a cruise in South America for Christmas. I haven't finished the book yet but I'm definitely excited to see if the adults are able to recover the children from their kidnappers or not!

- **Tara: *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* by Timothy Snyder**

This is a short book with 10 lessons—1 per chapter on examples from history and present day, and the ways ordinary citizens can resist authoritarianism. It draws on examples of how other countries have fallen to totalitarian powers, and how we have the upper hand to learn from their experiences. This book is a guide to resistance and shares insight to how we can pursue a future of freedom and liberation.

# CONVERSACIONES DE MENTES LIBRES/ FREE MINDS CONVERSATIONS

Por/By Carlos

"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.

"Conversations 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!)

Primeramente, un saludo a toda la familia de Mentes Libres. Deseo que al leer este artículo, se encuentren con la mejor salud, fuerte en todas maneras. El tema de este mes es "Sueños". Soñar, para mí, no solo se refiere a esos sueños que ocurren cuando estamos dormidos, sino también a esos que se nos cruzan la mente al estar despierto, todos tenemos sueños y es algo en que todos podemos relatar.

Para los que no saben o por si es su primera vez leyendo la revista, a la edad de 19 fui sentenciado a 30 años a Vida. Pase mucho tiempo solo soñando. Deseando estar en libertad y poder hacer todos mis sueños realidad. No les voy a mentir, hubo un tiempo que creí que nunca iba a poder salir de la prisión. Haber sido sentenciado a tantos años me forzó a no pensar mucho en libertad. Eso fue durante los primeros años que pasé en mi juventud. No puedo decir que perdí mis esperanzas, pero sí puedo decir que las ignore (o por lo menos lo trate). Fue cuando maduré más y reconocí que mis esperanzas y sueños eran los ingredientes que no me permitían estar preso mentalmente.

Después de haber hecho 25 años, el sueño más grande de todos fue hecho realidad. Por medio de la ley de IRAA (Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act), pude obtener mi libertad. Aunque fui deportado a mi país natal, la puerta fue abierta y aquí estoy viviendo mis sueños.

Una de las cosas que siempre he deseado o soñado, es tener la plataforma donde pueda hablar con todos en la comunidad para poder informarles que el cambio para lo mejor es posible para cualquiera. Pasé mucho tiempo estudiando y educando me en varias maneras y temas. En esos tiempos, abraze la esperanza de poder salir algún día. Y empecé a ponerle más atención a mis sueños. La pregunta que me hacía era, "si me dejan ir mañana, que voy hacer?". Y la triste verdad fue que no tenía respuesta. Así que empecé a leer más, ir al departamento de Educación más para poder aprender todo lo que pudiera. Entre todas esas cosas, aprendí a navegar en la computadora un poco. Digo un poco porque en la prisión, las clases de computadora siempre tienen límites, como por ejemplo, nunca hay acceso al internet. Así que solo nos enseñaban lo básico. Aun así, aprendí un poco! Era suficiente para lo que hago hoy. Porque por medio de la computadora, he podido comunicarme con mi comunidad desde este país. Trabajo para Mentes Libres en el Programa que se llama "En La Misma Página." Tenemos charlas con miembros de la comunidad en DC. Escuelas, colegios, organizaciones... todos quienes nos quieren escuchar. Con toda esta distancia, y sin tener límites virtuales, he podido hablar con mi comunidad. He compartido mi historia, mi pasado, mi experiencia en una manera, no solo para ser entendido, pero para que nos entendieran a todos. Para mí, ser aceptado nuevamente por la sociedad, es el ingrediente más grande al entrar a la sociedad nuevamente. Es sorprendente lo poco que la gente sabe, creo que la media pinta una foto totalmente negativa y la gente solo se basa en eso. Es al escuchar nuestras dificultades que empiezan a temprana edad. Cosas como no tener a ambos padres presente en la vida, el vecindario donde crecimos, la pobreza, adicción, el crimen en nuestra comunidad. Muchos no saben o reconocen que estas cosas o condiciones nos han llevado a perder mucho. No es una excusa ni justificación, solo es pintar esa misma foto con colores más reales, completamente y ser entendido por mi comunidad.

Ha sido impresionante también conectar con personas que han vivido esas mismas cosas, sea directa o indirectamente. Por no ser juzgados, muchos guardan esa parte de sus vidas. Pero al escuchar que no están solos o que no son los únicos que han pasado por esas cosas, sienten una conexión al compartir. Para ellos también ha sido un alivio. Y aquí es donde se comienza a sanar esas heridas! y ese es el punto de esta realidad que antes solo fue un sueño.

Siento un alivio al contar mi historia. Siento que es como una medicina, y no solo para mí, sino también para mi comunidad. Y con esta distancia, siento ser parte de esa misma comunidad que en un tiempo ayude a destruir. He tenido ese sueño de poder reparar las cosas que he dañado de una manera u otra. Y aquí estoy, viviendo mi sueño. Sé que no es algo tan grande, pero fue mi sueño en ese entonces y poder vivirlo me recuerda hoy que estoy libre. Nunca dejen de soñar, y de tratar de alcanzar esos sueños. ¡los invito a compartir un sueño con nosotros! Si hay algo que han logrado en su pasado o algo que sueñan hoy, por favor, compártan!

Firstly, greetings to the entire Free Minds family. I hope that when reading this article, you find yourself in the best of health, strong in every way. This month's theme is "Dreams." Dreaming, for me, not only refers to those dreams that occur when we are asleep, but also those that cross our minds when we are awake; we all have dreams and it is something that we can all relate to.

For those who don't know or in case this is your first time reading the magazine, at the age of 19, I was sentenced to 30 years to life. So I spent a lot of time just dreaming. Wishing to be free and be able to make all my dreams come true. I'm not going to lie to you, there was a time when I thought I would never be able to get out of prison. Having been sentenced to so many years forced me not to think much about freedom. That was during the first years of my incarceration in my youth. I can't say I had lost my hope, but I can say that I ignored it (or at least I tried to). It was when I matured more and recognized that my hopes and dreams were the ingredients that did not allow me to be mentally imprisoned.

After 25 years, one of my biggest dreams came true. Through the IRAA (Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act) law, I was able to obtain my freedom. Although I was deported to my home country, the door was opened and here I am living my dreams.

One of the things that I have always wanted or dreamed of, was to have the platform where I can talk to everyone in the community to be able to inform them that change for the better is possible for anyone. I spent a lot of time studying and educating myself in various ways and topics. In those times, I embraced the hope of being able to get out one day. And I started to pay more attention to my dreams. The question I asked myself was, "If they let me go tomorrow, what am I going to do?" And the sad truth was that I had no answer. So I started reading more, going to the Education Department more so I could learn everything I could. Among all those things, I learned how to navigate through the computer a little. I say a little because in prison, computer classes always have limits, such as never having access to the internet. So they only taught us the basics. Still, I learned a little!

It was enough for what I do today. Because through the computer, I have been able to communicate with my community from this country. I work for Free Minds in the program called "On the Same Page." We have talks with community members in DC. Schools, colleges, organizations... all those who want to listen to us. With all this distance, and without having virtual limits, I have been able to talk to my community. I have shared my story, my past, my experience in a way, not only to be understood, but for all of us to be understood. For me, being accepted back into society is the biggest ingredient of reentry. It's surprising how little people know. I think the media paints a totally negative picture and people only base it on that. It is by listening to our difficulties that begin at an early age. Things like not having both parents present in our lives, the neighborhood we grew up in, poverty, addiction, crime in our community. Many do not know or recognize that these things or conditions are what played a role in our choices. It is not an excuse or justification, it is just painting that same photo with more real colors, completely and being understood by my community.

It has also been impressive to connect with people who have experienced those same things, either directly or indirectly. To avoid being judged, many keep that part of their lives within. But hearing that they are not alone or that they are not the only ones who have gone through those things, feeling a connection in sharing. For them it has also been a relief. And this is where those wounds begin to heal! And that is the point of this reality that was once just a dream.

I feel relief when I tell my story. I feel like it's a medicine, and not only for me, but also for my community. And with this distance, I feel like I am part of that same community that, at one time, I helped destroy. I have had this dream of being able to repair the things that I have damaged in one way or another. And here I am, living my dream. I know it's not something that big, but it was my dream back then and being able to live it reminds me today that I am free. Never stop dreaming, and try to achieve those dreams. I invite you to share a dream with us! If there is something you have achieved in your past or something you dream of today, Share!



# BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

*The Free Minds long-distance book club*

## *Felon: Poems* by Reginald Dwayne Betts

with Neely



A few more responses have come in that we wanted to share about our previous Books Across the Miles selection, *Felon: Poems* by Reginald Dwayne Betts. *Felon* explores the effects of incarceration, written by long-time Free Minds friend, Reginald Dwayne Betts. It captures a variety of emotions and experiences, from domestic violence, to drug abuse, to being unhoused, to being unemployed, to drug abuse, to fatherhood, to life post-incarceration. Thank you to everyone who shared their insight with us:

**1. In "Blood History" (p.3), Betts explores the difference between longing and wanting. What is the difference between these two words for you? Have you ever experienced the difference?**

**AHA:** I see the difference between longing and wanting as the first being unattainable even though that something or someone is there, but it is hard to create what you would like. On the other hand, though, wanting something or someone that is absent or doesn't want to be, not meeting the expectations you thought, is my point-of-view from a relationship point. I experienced it really young when my dad was incarcerated, but it was much of the longing aspect of it.

**MC:** To me longing is a more passionate approach to wanting. "Wanting" is like mashed potatoes. Plain. Bland. But "longing" is mashed potatoes with garlic powder, butter, parsley, etc. I have absolutely experienced the difference between longing and wanting. I experience "longing" in more ways than one daily, particularly pertaining to my physical freedom.

**2. Images revolving around the ocean are used throughout the writing in this book, from references to shipwrecks, Jonah and the whale, and prison corridors being as long as the Atlantic. Why do you think Betts used the ocean as a recurring theme? What relationship is there, imaginary or real, between the ocean and prison?**

**MC:** I feel like Betts used the ocean as a recurring theme in *Felon* because he found solace in imagining the ocean while incarcerated instead of the razor wire and steel bars. I honestly don't see a relationship between the ocean and prison besides what Betts said, but I can see his point and understand his analogies.

**AHA:** I believe Betts used this recurring theme as an image you can imagine, since these are stories you may have read or pondered before to imagine how it was. The relationship there is imaginary but then for some real, who have experienced it, feeling as if they were in the middle of an ocean stranded. The ocean can take you in the middle of nowhere, which you can only imagine how devastating being in a situation out of your control. Prison in a sense puts you in a similar situation in which you try to imagine yourself somewhere other than prison.

**3. "Redacted poetry" is created when a marker is used to black out certain parts of a pre-existing text to create a poem. Betts includes 4 redacted poems he made from legal documents in this collection. How might the original message of the legal documents have changed, and why do you think Betts chose to include this type of poetry?**

**MC:** I think that using the "redacted poetry" was especially special to Betts due to his criminal history. Having a criminal history myself,

I've wished that I could "redact" what's been said about me in legal documents. Betts used the redacted poetry to rebel righteously and show that he has the pen, and having this pen can NOW change the narrative.

**AHA:** I think the original message would just only have given more detail of a full document which only explains more, but him choosing this type of poetry still shows his point and how the system can work even when "redacted." The document still has a flow to show the system injustices.

**4. Throughout this collection, Betts explores the way in which the label "felon" has no time limit, following him and others around even after they are back home in the community. Why do you think Betts chooses to emphasize the persisting label of "felon" in his book? If you were going to choose one word to be the title of your poetry book, what would it be?**

**AHA:** To show that no matter how far you have come, this label will stick with you, so he wants to show how this label "felon" can be a stamp that follows you everywhere. In prison your label is a number, so in society, the felon label is similar to me that will always exist. One word for a title for my poetry book would be "unbroken."

**MC:** Betts chose to wear "felon" like clothing. I think he realized that no matter how much debt he paid to society, good he did after being released, including graduating from Yale, "felon" would still be attached to his image. So he wanted to show everybody how much of a "felon" he was—sarcastically, of course. I'm actually writing a poetry book. The one word title will be "Mantime."

**5. Which poem in this book stood out to you the most, and why?**

**MC:** The poem "For a Bail Denied" stood out the most to me. It stood out the most to me because when I'm released, I would like to represent and advocate for youth. I can feel that Betts deeply cares for the youth. He saw himself in the youth. He knew the "same ol' song" sung about OUR youth. Betts needed to express how powerless he felt in that moment.

**AHA:** The poem that stood out to me was "Behind Yellow Tape." It makes me think of my youth, how we all saw and did things that we regret later in life while seeing all the death and violence early on that put us on the wrong side of our choices we made to navigate into manhood in a treacherous environment.

# MEMBERS CONNECT: DREAMS

## Dreams: The Alternate Reality By KW

Due to my incarcerated state, the "Dream" is my only true escape. It is truly amazing how in the condition of "sleep" one still operates in a realm of realities. Realities which exist only to the one who journeys to these unknown locations by way of the "Dream." I really enjoy this trip called "dreaming." As a fan of fantasy novels, the realities presented to me in "Dreamland" are always mind blowing! I've even made efforts at recording my adventures by starting my very first "Dream Journal" and to my surprise...it is very rewarding.

"Bad Dreams" aren't my favorite as I'm sure they aren't anyone else's either, which is why I do not record them in my "Dream Journal" at all. I do not even discuss them. I treat them like any unpleasant experience. I bury them deep in the fields of "Disregard" in my mind. I intend to never give a "Bad Dream" the chance to come true. Only "Good Dreams" for me.

Here's a powerful "dream" I experienced. I hope you enjoy it.

Dated December 4, 2021 from my "Dream Journal."

*I think I saw my Ancestor... It was during a Festival that my Tribe gathered at the River. The Chief was a tall, well-built man with a Head Full of Hair and a wide smile. His skin was Dark Brown. The women wore their hair in Braids that went across their Head except a single Braid that went down the middle. There was singing and dancing. I saw everything through the eyes of a Warrior who danced with the Princess, who was surrounded by her friends.*

*This Warrior was held in High Regards because he was amongst the Noble Ones while the rest of the Warriors were Marching up the Hills to Display and sing of their Great Numbers and Success in Battle.*

*Then came the British Army with their slave army who attacked my tribe. A lot of my tribe was defeated and taken captive. The Warrior whose eyes I saw through was all that was left of the Warriors and he was set on protecting the Princess and her friends, whom a few were pregnant, including the Princess who also had a small child.*

*The Warrior had tied the small child on to his back but on second thought, untied the small child due to not being able to engage in combat effectively if needed.*

*They began to creep out their land but due to one of the Princess's friends' loud complaints, they were discovered by one of the search parties.*

*Not wanting to risk the life of the Princess against such a large number of foes, the Warrior surrendered his weapons knowing that he – himself – was as great a weapon as was the weapons he handed over.*

*He was then separated from the Princess and her friends who he could still see. The warrior was then haunted by some slave warriors of the British Army.*

*He never flinched nor blinked nor took his eyes off of the Princess and her friends. Then someone tripped him to the ground, blocking his sight, and when he jumped up, the Princess and her friends were gone.*

*In a rage close to madness he went to work and defeated a lot of the slave army, and the British Army, and after escaping began his search for his Lost Tribe.*

*After years and years of searching, he finally tracked down the small child of the Princess, who didn't remember him, so was afraid of him at first. So the Warrior would offer her food.*

*On the day she was going to accept the food her Master tried to trap the warrior.*

*The warrior engaged in a Battle with the Master. The warrior cut every strand of hair from the Master's head without nicking him one time and told him, "If I wanted you dead it would have been easy for me. I just want the girl and I'll be on my way."*

*The End*

I really felt a deep connection with this dream, and really did not do it justice with my pen. There were so many colorful outfits at the Festival and animals. The faces, the smiles, and laughter as well as the screams, and pleas in another language.

Because of this "dream" I long to know exactly who my Ancestors were and I look forward to the journey it leads me on. And once I discover them I'll finally have my "dream-come-true."

## CELEBRATING MEMBERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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

- ★ JC was successfully voted on the Sentencing Commission.
- ★ SH was elected as the first incarcerated woman to serve as ANC Commissioner at the DC Jail.
- ★ DP is currently taking a class to become a GED tutor.
- ★ AA, DL, DR, JH, TP, TH, WM received their driver's licenses.
- ★ JG got his CDL Class A Learner's permit.
- ★ LC & DL graduated from We Work.
- ★ AA graduated from the Auto Mechanic Training Program.
- ★ WM graduated from the DC Central Kitchen training program and got hired at the MLK Library Kitchen.
- ★ JH and DL graduated from Building Futures.
- ★ DS got a special recognition after a customer rated him highly at his dry cleaning job.
- ★ VC got hired full-time permanently at a bakery.
- ★ CL, AP and GD were featured in a documentary called "District of Second Chances."
- ★ HCP received his certification as an electrician back home in Guatemala.
- ★ MH passed his electrician certification test after 4 years of Apprentice training.

Please share your accomplishments with us to be featured!



## AROUND THE WORLD: A SPECTACULAR DUBAI GETAWAY *By Jamilah*

Dubai, a city that effortlessly marries tradition and luxury, became the perfect destination to celebrate my sister-in-law's 50th birthday and bring in the New Year (2024). Our unforgettable vacation was filled with breathtaking sights, thrilling excursions, and moments of pure relaxation, making it a truly remarkable experience. For those who don't know, Dubai is a city in the United Arab Emirates, a country in the Middle East that borders Saudi Arabia and Oman.

### Day 1: Exploring Dubai's Iconic Landmarks

Once arriving after a full day of travel from Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) and an 8-hour layover in London, our adventure began with a hop-on-hop-off bus tour, offering a panoramic view of Dubai's skyline which is absolutely beautiful. Sites like the towering Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest structure, the man-made Island of Palm Jumeirah, and the winter wonderland of "Ski Dubai," which is an indoor ski resort located in the Mall of the Emirates, one of the largest shopping malls in the world. The city's modernness and innovation unfolded before our eyes, setting the stage for an extraordinary journey.

### Day 2: Cruising in Luxury at Dubai Marina

We started the day with an elaborate buffet breakfast at the hotel, and a little shopping at the gift shops in the hotel, then off on our excursion of the day. As we sailed through the gorgeous calm waters of the Dubai Marina, Day 2 treated us to a luxurious dinner cruise. The stunning skyline, illuminated with city lights, created a mesmerizing backdrop. Dining under



Emirates Palace Mandarin Oriental, a luxury hotel in Abu Dhabi

the stars while sailing through the marina was an enchanting experience that will forever be etched in our memories.

### Day 3: Desert Day and Ringing in the New Year

On New Year's Eve, we went on an exciting adventure in the heart of the Arabian Desert. We rode quad bikes and camels through the Golden Dunes, which was lots of fun! Later, we enjoyed a Belly Dancing and Fire Tanoura show, along with an amazing BBQ buffet dinner. After returning to our hotel, we got ready for the New Year's Eve event and fireworks at the Marina. Unfortunately, we were too late for the fireworks show because of the long travel from the desert. When we reached the hotel, traffic was at a standstill, so we decided to walk as close as possible to where there was a great view of the fireworks. We got to experience the spectacular Burj Khalifa Fireworks show from afar, still dazzling and making it a New Year's celebration like no other.

### Day 4: Discovering Abu Dhabi's Elegance



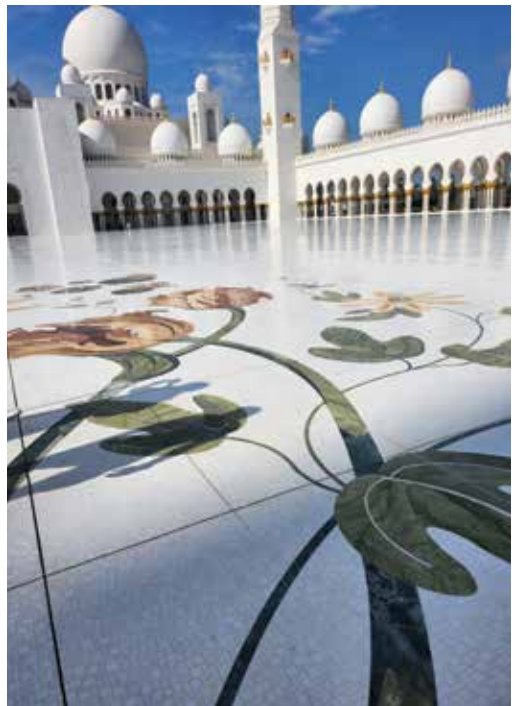
Venturing beyond Dubai, we explored the riches and wealth of Abu Dhabi (the capital of the United Arab Emirates) on the fourth day. A visit to the grand mosque, adorned in traditional Muslim garments, offered a profound cultural experience. We learned great things about the mosque. We entered from the ground floor, surprised to see a mini-mall of stores selling various items like gifts, cologne, rugs, and fast food—I did not expect that at the Grand Mosque. To enter the mosque there were two security checkpoints. We had to be fully covered from head to ankle. Many rules were posted at the entrance, including no holding hands or hugging, no hand signals and no food, and very strict dress code guidelines. We had a guided tour of this impressive mosque embroidered in 24k gold. Once inside we got a glimpse of the biggest chandelier and carpet in the world. The intricate architecture and serene ambiance made our day truly memorable.

**Day 5: Tranquil Retreat and Dinner in the Sky**

After days filled with excitement, Day 5 was a serene intermission by the pool, and indulging in soothing massages. The tranquil setting allowed us to unwind and reflect on the incredible journey. In the evening, we elevated our dining experience with a three-course meal suspended in the sky, offering panoramic views of the city lights below. This was a great way to end our last night in Dubai.

**Conclusion:**

Dubai, with its blend of modernity and tradition, provided the perfect backdrop for an extraordinary celebration. From the iconic landmarks and luxurious cruises to the adventurous desert escapade and cultural exploration in Abu Dhabi, every moment was a testament to the grandeur and diversity of this remarkable destination. Our journey concluded with relaxation and fine dining, leaving us with cherished memories that will last a lifetime. Dubai, with its endless possibilities, truly made my sister-in-law's 50th birthday a celebration beyond compare.



Top: The Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest structure, is located in downtown Dubai  
Bottom: Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque view from the courtyard

# FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB & WRITING WORKSHOP

1816 12th Street NW  
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## NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: ME, MYSELF, AND I

*By Julia*

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Hey Free Minds Fam, for the next issue, we want to dive into the rich topic of ourselves: what we're calling *Me, Myself, and I*. The idea for this issue started with a conversation about strategies to deal with solitary confinement, but also the ways that spending time taking care of and getting to know yourself can be beneficial (in small doses!). So for this issue, we'd like to hear all about you. Imagine you were describing your true self to a stranger; what do you wish people knew about you? What aspects of your inner self might not be obvious to someone just meeting you for the first time? Or, tell us about the people or experiences who have shaped your identity. Who are you today, and how have you changed from your younger self? Who do you want to be in the future? Out here, people talk a lot about the idea of self care: being intentional about your physical and mental health, whether that's through exercise, nutrition, meditation, art, reading...you name it! What practices, large or small, have you found to have a positive impact on yourself? What might you explore in the future? We want to hear all about it!

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!



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