

July/August 2022
Vol. 11, Issue 3

Free minds Connect



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: BETTER TOGETHER

Dear Treasured Free Minds Members,

I hope you are well and rich in hope and joy. This issue's theme has created a lot of discussion here on the Free Minds homefront. There's nothing like the topic of money to get folks' attention! 😊 The conversations quickly turned into powerful exchanges about the informative articles, thought-provoking essays, and soaring poetry you will find inside.

We've been having debates such as, what can we do about the dramatic disparity of Black homeownership in DC (page 29), will we turn into a totally cashless society where everyone has to have a credit card, and what exactly is cryptocurrency (page 18)? Will FM member James include bitcoin in his investing portfolio and in the financial literacy workshops he teaches to youth (page 16)?

It's impossible to talk honestly about wealth and class in America without grappling with the entrenched history of racial inequity that goes all the way back to the enslavement of Black Africans and Americans. The New York Stock Exchange is just blocks away from a site where enslaved Black people were once bought and sold, and the famed Wall Street is actually named after a wall that enslaved Black people built. We must address this history and the current practices that have continued to perpetuate inequitable access to resources, opportunities, and wealth. Turn to page 28 for a conversation with Dr. Richardson about how we can close the racial wealth gap – an important first step.

This discussion prompted powerful, emotional sharing about the concept of value and what is most valuable to each person. We loved reading Gene's story recognizing the wealth he possesses in his family (page 6). As he writes, "I knew that somebody out there was not giving up on me. That was worth more than gold to me!" He recalls that mail to him was "like money in the bank," words that really hit home too as we read AC's essay on page 25. As AC said, "It's too easy to think that an inheritance or a loaded bank account might have more 'value' than a cheap and simple 'I love you.'"

After reading the writing in this issue, you will be rich with wisdom and upliftment. I love how DA calls on us to "ALWAYS love and bank on yourself" (page 12). AEC gives us sage advice: "The same way you fill your piggy bank and watch it slowly grow/Fill your mind up with knowledge until it too overflows" (page 13).

On page 24, read TT's essay illuminating the many facets of social, financial, intellectual, and cultural wealth. The poems and essays in this issue remind us that another aspect of wealth is being part of a community, and as we know here at Free Minds, books can build those community connections. You don't want to miss out on Free Minds friend Emily's offer for free children's books on page 37. AHA's essay about what he wants to leave behind for the next generation sparked a robust dialogue at the Build Up, our weekly reentry book club session (page 23).

"For another kind of generational wealth, I would like to pass down my collection of books that I'll continue to build upon over the years. I believe that the knowledge and insight within them will be valuable for the next generation and many to come who may take from it and learn how to apply to create a good life for themselves. With this you not only learn from the others before you who experienced something but they can also be a guide for you in life to seek your path and purpose in life."

Thank you AHA for showing us the power of books to leave a legacy of knowledge, and thank you to every one of you reading this issue – you have made our community wealthy in creativity, compassion, and support!

Until next time,
Tara

*May the long time sun shine upon you
All love surround you
And the pure light within guide your way on*

Next Issue's Theme: Belonging

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 Nakai and Yamini

On The Same Page Community Outreach to Social Workers and Nurses

Free Minds staff, Poet Ambassador Doug, and Congressman John Lewis Fellow and Poet Ambassador Gene led an On the Same Page community engagement earlier this summer with healthcare professionals. Doug and Gene shared their own poetry and personal stories, and the social workers and nurses at the On the Same Page session read and provided feedback on your poetry as well, just like at Write Night. They led an insightful conversation about mental and physical wellness, health inequities, and the importance of access to health care and healing spaces during and after incarceration. Know that your writing is reaching new audiences and inspiring change in the health field.

Special Guests at the Reentry Book Club

As we do every other month, our reentry team recently had a special guest speaker, Ms. Smith, attend the Wednesday night virtual "Build Up" session to speak on the salient and prominent topic of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). Ms. Smith is the founder of Momma's Safe Haven, an organization which provides a multitude of resources for those in need, including support for those experiencing IPV. Other topics that have been discussed in the past months include relationship communication, fatherhood, and the racial wealth gap. Free Minds members that attend are encouraged to share their opinions on the topics and ask questions after the guest speaker has finished their presentation. The Build Up is also an important resource where members learn of opportunities. The weekly "News You Can Use" is a compilation of job openings, social service assistance, community events, and family friendly support offerings gathered by our reentry team. The Reentry Book Club builds social capital as members exchange job leads, tips, and resources with each other. It is very true to its name: The Build Up!

Where Tomorrows Aren't Promised: Author Visit with Carmelo Anthony

Free Minds staff and youth book club members, alongside the Maya Angelou Academy at the Youth Services Center, got an exciting visit from NBA superstar Carmelo Anthony to discuss his memoir, *Where Tomorrows Aren't Promised*. The memoir deals with Anthony's childhood and growing up in the housing projects of Baltimore. When asked who he wrote this book for, Anthony said, "I wrote this book for them: young men who can relate to or see themselves in my life experiences." Anthony discussed his journey writing the book, how he developed a love for books and learning, and the impact that this had on his life. FM Co-founder and Book Club facilitator Kelli asked questions about why Anthony emphasized the importance of mental health in the book, and Anthony explained: "Being able to just go tell someone, especially the adults in your life, that you're not feeling great or you're depressed wasn't even something that was accepted. You were just expected to deal with it and push through." Finally, to close out and make the visit even more meaningful, our youth members shared their poetry with Carmelo and the audience. Every poet was met with great applause. We are so grateful to everyone who made this event possible!



In Loving Memory

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

Rest in Power:

Glen, James, Cortez, Derrick, Christian, JohnQuan, Nadar, Andre, Darond, Dontel, Tyree, Antwone, Amari, Kuron, Dwayne, Darnell, Marcus, Wayne, Eric, Sharod, Arthur, Isaiah, DeMario, Mshairi, Tahlil, Donta, Joshua, John, Delonte J., Eddie, Gary, Benny, Michael, David, Navaras, Dewayne, Tyrone, Darius, Aaron, Harold, Anthony, Donald, Bruce, Delonte K., Shawn, Roderick, Antoine, Davon, Jahmeze, Deonte, Stephon, Kavon

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 April/May/June 2022 Connect Sports.



DK: I was just re-reading the latest *Connect* yesterday. I was reading Cliff's part about being a coach. He was a really good person at Petersburg, I am so glad that he was released. He deserved it; to see him in prison and how he carried himself, he just didn't fit in prison, he deserved freedom!!

MH: I want to say thank you for my latest *Connect*. It was so good and well put together, one guy asked could he read my magazine when I was finished. To me, every part of the *Connect* was on point. I especially appreciated Maria's article on steps to getting a book deal. One of my goals before getting released is to pen a book. FM is definitely helping me with the prompts to get my pen moving.

AC: First of all, I want to say that I loved reading the poetry and essays of my fellow FM members. It's great to see how sports deeply changed people's lives and how sport plays a huge role in the upbringing of so many people. Great work from everyone.

Intern Miesha's writing was interesting, then it was immediately followed by the question, "Who do you write for?" To be one hundred percent honest, I write for my beloved reader; you, yes you right there reading my writing. I write for you. You see, I don't write for myself because my thoughts are already in my mind and my emotions are in my heart. I write for you in the hopes that any of my silly thoughts or any of my clumsy feelings can somehow help you my reader in any way, shape, or form. Maybe my opinions might resonate with your own; maybe my words make you realize that you are not alone; maybe my concerns remind you that none of us is alone on this giant space rock; maybe you have a surge of compassion, or sympathy, or a beautiful smile props up on your face – whatever the case, maybe you remember that we are all such beautiful creatures in every way.

I write for you, my beloved reader, my fellow human being, my friend. I write for you, hoping that these symbols I ink on this paper can somehow make your world a better place. Thank you my dear reader for reading what I write. You are amazing, you are great, and there is nothing but love for you in my heart.

Thank you for being you, thank you for being alive.

The More Than Our Crimes by FM member RB was great. Many times society gets stuck on ONLY seeing who we were at the time we made our mistakes: We are effectively the worst version of ourselves, at our worst moment. We are monsters.

But the thing is...I'm not. I made wrong decisions, yes. I was reckless and shortsighted, yes. I was an idiot for not seeing the long term consequences of my actions, yes. But then, I'm also more than that. I am a son, a brother, a cousin, a nephew, a friend, a student, a teacher, a worker, a listener, a speaker, a human being with a past that existed prior to my mistakes, a living sentient life form with a future that will have included the time period after my mistakes.

I am not just the man that stood in the courtroom as the gavel was slammed. I am more. **I AM POSSIBLE.**

AHA: I appreciated every piece and each member experience with sports in some type of way. Spinning the Track with the Advice Man is always full of wisdom and advice for all to take in, so the advice he gave was right on point for the person question, and to use the words of not just a famous coach Pat Summitt, but a legend, was words to take in showing us to never give up hope nor the fight despite our setbacks. May these words inspire many to grab hold of hope, faith, education etc, and come out on top better than before.

I like Antwan story in the Real World of Work, as a coach working with youth, which is something I aspire to do in one way or another. His story from his perspective was good to be heard. The quotes from legends in sports throughout generations I enjoyed also since these words come from some of the best who ever played or engaged in their field in history. Thanks for sharing the DC photos also since a lot of those new things wasn't built or wasn't in the city when I was home. Sports are special to us all so I appreciated and enjoyed another well done issue.

FAMILY TIES: THE ROLE OF FAMILY SUPPORT IN BEING “WEALTHY”

A conversation with Free Minds' current Congressman John Lewis Fellow, Gene

When he was 19 years old, Gene was arrested and he served 21 years behind bars before being released under DC's Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA) in 2021. Kelli sat down with Gene to talk about how his family taught him the true meaning of wealth.

KELLI: Gene, can you tell me about what you thought that “wealth” meant when you were growing up?

GENE: I grew up in a very impoverished home in Southeast DC in the 80's and 90's. And I was surrounded by everything that embodied that: low-income housing; single-parent homes; and a lot of folks who needed to receive welfare payments. It's crazy to me now, but at the time I felt like I was born to the wrong family, like it wasn't meant for me to be living in this way. I always wanted the most expensive things, and I thought I was supposed to have it. My understanding of what wealth meant was simply material and financial. I just felt like I needed to be surrounded by things and material wealth. But I overlooked the other things that embody wealth.

Now don't get me wrong. I did have the things I needed. My mom provided for me, but in my mind I was confused between “want” and “need.” I always wanted the most expensive “this” and the new “that”. Had me believing that “want” and “need” were the same thing. I thought I was supposed to have it! I was confused!

KELLI: I think that happens to a lot of us! You've talked a lot about your family and how instrumental they have been in teaching you to think of wealth differently. Can you describe that?

GENE: I have five siblings. Originally, I had six, but one of my sisters passed away years ago. We are very family oriented. We rely on each other. We have so many gatherings for holidays, birthdays, any day! We believe in family support and being able to hold each other up. As I've grown and matured and started to reflect, I've been able to see and understand that all this time I had this twisted idea of what wealth meant, because it turns out all along, I had true wealth because I had my family's support.

KELLI: How was your idea of wealth impacted by your incarceration?

GENE: Being incarcerated was very instrumental in the change of my perception. When you are incarcerated, you are literally and figuratively stripped of almost everything. When they take everything away from you, you look around and see what you can grab onto. What's left. All of us did this. We all looked for something to grab onto in terms of emotional support. Yeah, financial support too, but to have people to rely on from the outside, because nobody wants to be alone. So that's how I began to measure wealth. I saw that in comparison, I had more people in my corner than a lot of others. So now I'm like, “Oh, okay. *I am wealthy.* I am rich!” Yes a lot of people DO jump ship but some people stayed and those people were my blood.

My oldest sister Lisa is the best example. To some people it may not seem like much, but she just consistently wrote me letters. And those letters were always positive, they were always uplifting. She told me that no matter what I was going through, she would be there. On the envelope of every letter she sent me she wrote, “God's in control.” That always stuck with me because I knew that somebody out there was not giving up on me. That was worth more than gold to me! Everything she said she'd do, she did. I knew I had a source I could always go to and the well would never dry up.

KELLI: It's interesting you say that because we often hear about the value of letters in prison. Can you explain why they are worth so much?

GENE: Oh, yeah. Getting letters was like getting money deposited in my account. Sometimes when I got mail, it was more important than getting money. Because all of us in prison want love and to feel like we are not forgotten. So when that CO walks to your cell and stops and slides something under the door it makes your day every single time. A card or letter to say “I love you,” filling you in on what's going on. These pieces of mail are so important to our mental to stay focused in prison. This is what I mean when I say that wealth isn't primarily about money. And because of the way my family has always been there for me, now that I'm older, I know now that I was absolutely born into the right family!

KELLI: Can you tell me about the time in your life when you have felt the most wealthy?

GENE: Now is the time I feel more wealthy than any other time in my life. Being home after doing all that time. I get to be with my family and help and support them for a change. I always say when I was incarcerated I got a wealth of knowledge, both through reading and education, but also through experience. Now I get to take everything I learned in prison and bring it out here and apply it to my life in society. I feel the most wealthy now because I feel like I can go in any room and afford to be there. I don't mean that financially, I mean intellectually. I can walk into any room and I can have a conversation with a person, or if I need to get in this door, or fill out this application, or experience a situation that most people would be intimidated by. I feel like I equipped myself with the education and experience.

KELLI: I LOVE this idea of education as a tool for wealth in all of its forms! People talk a lot about the idea of generational wealth, and how so many people don't have that privilege because of the inequities in America. You have a 21-year-old daughter. How do you think about the idea of generational wealth?

GENE: Passing on generational wealth is important to me. My daughter, that's my baby girl! I am trying to teach her about financial literacy. Like how to build actual wealth. But all the while also teaching her that wealth means more than money. It's support, and having values like integrity and honesty. Ultimately, my own family taught me this lesson and so now I am passing it on to her. I try to show my daughter that she absolutely needs to go out and work for it. But in order to achieve wealth, you still have to develop tools, honesty, reliability, moral principles and high standards. I'm talking to her about it but she looks at my actions and that says the most. If you walk into a room equipped with these things, people will already see you as an asset because you've developed the internal tools.

Family, love and support, and education. This is having wealth and riches! Trying to attain actual financial wealth will come with all of that!



JUST LAW: FINES, RESTITUTION, AND FEES

By DJ, Free Minds Member and Paralegal

Considering court-mandated, child support arrears, fees, restitution, and fines, defendants who battle with the DC justice system experience a money-taking list of expenses – in many instances leaving them as debtors and subject to a revolving door of incarceration. It's difficult to imagine that a defendant would still be subject to so many different things that could lead back to prison even when they get released and are doing all the necessary things that are required of them. It is very important to note that part of your conditions of release such as probation and parole requires an individual to pay their fines, child support, restitution, and any fees associated with their criminal cases. If you do not already know, not paying your court-imposed fines, restitution, and fees could ultimately lead you back to imprisonment for a violation of your release conditions. It is very important to remember that you have a responsibility to pay what is owed to you even if you are having a difficult time in other areas of your life.

The system is quite brutal in this area as there are no debt protection laws for safeguarding struggling returning citizens against the court imposed fine, fees, or restitution. As such, as a returning citizen, you'll be subject to wage and tax garnishments; parole violations; probation violations, and incarceration. This places you in a difficult position to figure out how to pay what is owed to the government, as well as avoid returning to prison. Not paying places a huge barrier to employment in front of you in large measure because criminal justice case debts can be transformed into civil debt situations wherein not only can you return to prison for failure to pay, but the government can sue you to collect. Now, you have to hire an attorney and if you lose the civil suit, you may be responsible for paying the fees and costs of the government for having to take you to court. Having this debt hanging over your head can interfere with your credit history and can impede the government assistance you can receive. This can be an unbelievable reality. Also, it can be a hurtful one. If you find yourself in a pickle and cannot meet your court-imposed obligations, you should discuss this issue with your probation or parole officer. If you have neither, you may wish to consider writing the judge and explaining your difficulty in paying and request that your fine or restitution be waived or reduced. This is a lot better than not paying at all. Just think, there is a cost for everything, even not paying your court imposed financial obligations. So, consider the responsibility here and do the best that you can in order to stay up-to-date on the financial obligations imposed upon you by the courts. You can always ask Free Minds to research any programs or payment plans if you find yourself in this situation. There are also a growing number of nonprofits that are working on this issue of debt due to the legal system; this is a hopeful sign that the public is starting to recognize the injustice of this system.

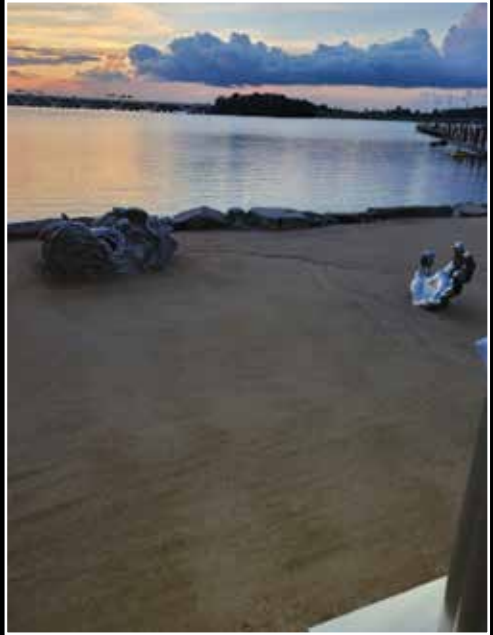
**NOTICE THIS DOES NOT CONSTITUTE LEGAL ADVICE!
YOU MUST STILL CONSULT YOUR ATTORNEY**

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DC PHOTOS *By Craig, Melissa, and Julia*



The Capital Wheel at the National Harbor on the banks of the Potomac River



The Awakening, a famous 72-foot statue that was once at Hains Point in DC and was moved to the National Harbor. It depicts a giant man struggling to break free from the earth.



Outside the MGM hotel and casino at the National Harbor. Many famous acts play here. Recently, Bruno Mars wow'd the crowd!



DC PHOTOS *By Craig, Melissa, and Julia*



Completed Edgewood Terrace Apartment buildings in NE DC.
(by request! Let us know what you would like to see in future issues)



The Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens, a 700-acre park in the Kenilworth neighborhood of DC, featuring a tidal marsh (left) and water gardens with lotuses and water lilies (right).



A mural dedicated to Nipsey Hussle in the Shaw neighborhood of 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!

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've been incarcerated at the DC Jail for four years now. I just got sentenced to 12 years. I have been with my girlfriend for five years. We've known each other ever since we were kids! She understands me better than any female I've ever known. She wants the best for me and doesn't try to change me. She loves me for me. It's hard to be apart from each other. Times been rough, but we are managing. But I'm worried! I want her to be my queen forever, until death calls. What I want to know: is it possible to keep her by my side? And how do I make sure it lasts?

Sincerely,
SE

Greetings SE and his young queen! First let me say, though I regret hearing what you both are presently dealing with, hold on and hang in there together. Look forward to "this too shall pass", and all things do pass eventually in comfort when it's done in unison with someone else. Keeping with FM's Connect theme, I would like to point out and ask you both: What is wealth to you, and are you both on the same page of life? I believe the most valuable and precious things to us are "time" and "relationships." In chasing false dreams, we miss out on so much with those who we love and who love us, especially when we don't have the right values and we are not on the same page with those who we are blessed to spend this life with.

Currently, time is of the essence for the both of you to dig deep; work on and know your young selves; know what's valuable to you, especially while you both cultivate a bond of unconditional friendship first and second cultivate a bond of love that will withstand the test of time. Frankly, I've only known long-lasting relationships that were developed over time - through lots of hard work and plenty of nurturing, season after season. What is that saying you used? "I want her to be my queen, until death calls." Well, you both are going to have to keep each other engaged until the casket drops, and it's going to take lots of hard work on character like open-mindedness, willingness, and patience.

I was once you, trying to have a dream that would last forever with a queen. How do you make that work? Consistent, open dialogue with honest and positive

communication, building, growing, understanding, sacrifice, compromise, trusting, putting yourself in the other shoes, being level-headed, and integrity between you two. There's no ground to lash out at one another when dealing with emotional issues (because they will arise). If so, you guys will wipe out right under you the very foundation you both would have worked so hard together to build.

Your girlfriend seems wise! She knows with only her encouragement, change is going to have to come from SE's hand through his beliefs, choices, and actions. It's a beautiful thing seeing the day when you both are encouraging each other on higher aspirations and peacefully challenging one another on nonsense; moreover seeing you both safe laughing and happy in each other arms. That's my prayer for you.

SE, I asked some other men on the yard what they think, and here's EG's advice: with the time left you have to do, give your girlfriend a reason to continue to stay with you by not wasting your time in prison. Acquire a GED if you haven't graduated from high school. Take advantage of the various classes, programs, trades offered. Your queen wants to see the maturity and growth in you. Do your time with her in mind. Lastly, there's no guarantee that she'll be able to weather the storm for 6 more years, but you stand a good chance that she will if you strive to be the best man that you can be.

I leave you with the words of Steve Jobs, a multi-billionaire dying of cancer on his sick bed: "You can employ someone to drive the car for you, make money for you, but you can't have someone to bear the sickness for you. Whichever stage in life we are at right now, with time, we will face the day when the curtain comes down. Treasure love for your family, love for your spouse, love for your friends... Treat yourself well. Cherish others."

My Best to SE and his queen and the FM family.
TS

P.S. More advice from others...

RP: SE, yes! It's possible to keep her by your side during your "Jacion" providing that you follow these simple steps: (1) you can't be on or have any vices, like gambling; drugs; other women visitors that aren't related to you; or do anything that you wouldn't like if the tables were

SPINNING THE TRACK WITH THE ADVICE MAN

turned. (2) You can't be possessive (asking where she's been etc...)(3) You have to listen more than you talk. (4) Remember that you are locked up, not her. (5) Keep what happens in prison out of your everyday conversation with her. (6) Never forget that you can't do a damn thing, but this time on your own. Don't make her feel bad that you are in prison. Like it's her fault.

I stick to these, and that's how to make it last with a Queen. I've kept mine for 30 years so far. If the woman wants to work with you during this bid, she will. And if she needs a break, let her know it's still all good. This is a rough occupation that you are a part of and it requires a clear head from everyone involved, so stay focused. You should be good. Peace Be Unto You!

LW: Well SE, the first thing that you have to keep in mind is that one of the main things in your relationship is the friendship that you share, because without being friends first you could never be soulmates. Along with friendship you need communication, honesty, and trust. You must never try and make her live up to your expectations and she must do the same for you. Last and most important is to always know that when you have a life to live in prison, she still has her own life to live on the outside in society. So you can never think that you are in control of how she lives that life. So always give thanks to her that you are still in her life.

We also received some additional advice for AA, who wrote into the previous issue (Sports) with this question:

Dear Advice Man,

People are always saying things like, "Hard times don't last forever," and "Tough times don't last; tough people do," and "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." To be honest though, I'm young and might be facing a lot of time. To me, it absolutely feels like hard times are gonna last forever. And for real, it feels like what doesn't kill me, is doing everything but kill me! What advice do you have for someone like me? I can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. How am I supposed to do this without just giving up? Because that's how I feel sometimes.

Thank you in advance.
Your friend,
AA

I was 26 years old when facing 16 years in prison for something I did at 25. No matter how I played with the math, I just couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. I know exactly what AA is talking about. But then I realized that freedom is not a simple state being, it's not a location, it's not restricted to a physical thing, it's so much more.

Freedom can come in the physical form, I won't deny that, but people can also get mental freedom and we can also get spiritual freedom. By spiritual freedom I don't necessarily mean through religion, I mean that we can sleep better at night knowing the world is so big and time is so long as long as we can find peace in our hearts.

Then mental freedom comes from understanding that a place doesn't define a person. We, as people, can grow; we can soar to such great heights regardless of where we might find ourselves.

So if we can love in prison while our loved ones are out there, if we can learn in prison while knowledge is out there, if we can still change the world – one grain of sand at a time – in prison while the world is out there; then who is to say we are not free?

"Tough times don't last, tough people do," means be perseverant; "hard times don't last forever" means you can always find a silver lining to everything; "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger" means that though it may seem like everything sucks right now, your fighting spirit will go through it until you are eventually stronger than your worries, and you will grow as a person, and you will learn your life lessons as a person, and you will be better as a person because life will have molded you to be the person that YOU want to be – as long as you keep your fight to be who you want to be.

Just remember, the clock keeps on ticking and life does go on. You can continue to live it and become a better man day by day no matter where you are. And trust me, I know life seems like it sucks sometimes, but keep faith, stay strong, and keep your head up.
AC

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Opulent Life

By PF

I want to be rich, but not wealthy.
Following my values, I refuse to be greedy.
Once dead, you have no properties.
Material legacy creates conflicts,
Spiritual ones make good memories.
In paradise, more valuable are your actions
Whatever during your life is the list of your possessions.
Try to follow this recipe:
Abundance of love in your heart,
Cornucopia of wisdom in your mind,
Plethora of kindness in your spirit.
Don't forget your integrity,
And a plenitude of positive mental attitude.
Wealth is a burden, but spiritual fortune is the key for success.
Then the little pleasures of life will be the stones that
 will guide you
On the way to heaven.

Wealth

By DA

I am wealthy for real,
Even beyond my wildest dreams,
If I tried to store it in a safe,
It would burst from the seams.

No I'm not talking about money,
But real wealth: family, loved ones, and friends,
A solid investment they are,
As they do more than meet the needs.

I also have generational wealth,
Wisdom passed to me so I could learn,
So I use that knowledge wisely,
Like investing in the next generation so they earn.

I paid attention and listened over the years,
And went from earning a small profit to accruing real wealth,
But the most important advice my investors gave me was:
"ALWAYS love and bank on yourself."

Untitled

By JK

My, money money money money
It's fun-ny!
Hey, I wish I had it,
it laughs at me because I can't hold on...
Once I get it, it's gone.
Can't call on the phone.
I gots ta spend it...
I cannot save it...
So it leaves me.
Oh no, I'm broke as a joke,
it's funny.



Now I Know Why the Best Things Are Free

By BB

The best things in life don't cost a thing
Look inside yourself and see that love is king
There are some things that can't be paid for
Precious gifts that can't be bought at the store

Nature isn't suppose to come with a price tag
Love isn't found in a brown paper bag
God has given mankind the best gifts free of charge
The quantities come small and large

Talent is instilled in us when we are born
Our outlook on life need not be forlorn
Money can't buy us everything that we need
We must free ourselves from our own greed

Human companionship is given to us naturally
We all share our humanity
There is nothing better than can be given
Appreciating life is a goal to which we should all be driven

As I feel love, I know it can't be bought
It is something that doesn't cost
Life's greatest gifts don't cost a fee
Now you should know why the best things are free

Green of Your Eyes

By AC

How cold your fingers as they intertwine with my own;
How cold my reflection in the windows of what you
 call a soul

How fast you run to the arms of many more suitors,
 my dear;
How fast you turn your back when I need you the most

But I don't blame you nor the way that you are,
I know you're not mine, you belong to us all;
Yet I can't keep my mind off of you, my beloved
You are you the one I can't help but to love

Day by day I am a victim to my own incoherent illusions,
Dreaming falsely I am getting closer to you
I take steps towards a sunset filled with your presence,
You take steps towards a sunshine that is void of me

And this silly impossibility keeps spinning around
 and around;
The green of your eyes blinds me from all truth and reason
Learning me with one little wish I can pray for tonight:
I pray for the warmth of your smile
To continue comforting my life

About this poem: I don't really "love" money, but when I personified money, I personified my feelings for it as well. Maybe one day fortune will actually smile to me and money will "flirt" with me.

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Wealth

By AEC

Diamonds from Maya Angelou
Pearls from Robert Frost
Rubies from Langston Hughes
Emeralds from Ralph Emerson
With those Gems and Jewels, made my grandson a necklace
Told him, "You wanna be wealthy, you have to protect this..."
The most valuable possession the kings kept to themselves
It was the lessons to the peasants that true wealth is with self
In their hearts was the desire, in their minds were the keys
To open doors they felt were locked until they studied Ali
Offer a penny for his thoughts, he might give 'em for free
If it's interest that you brought, it's interest you will collect
What you give you'll surely get, that's including respect
The same way you fill your piggy bank and watch it slowly grow
Fill your mind up with knowledge until it too overflows
Read you some Amande Byrne – Robert Kiyosaki is nice
He had a Rich Dad and a Poor Dad, why not take his advice
If you're going to follow a rapper, follow the example of Jay-Z...
...Ice Cube and Nas, be inspired by Nipsey
Don't bet so much on blind loyalty, above all, know your worth
Stocks and Bonds? Stock your bookshelf, Bond with
your family first
Invest heavy in patience, it's the best for long-term
Security in a future, what's a better return
Go all in in discipline, cut your losses with pride
Integrity you never spend, push emotions aside
One man had it all but his honor he sold, one man
had nothing but his word's good as gold
The price of anger is too high, don't be so quick to buy
Loan your time to good causes, let people's smiles be your profits
Even if money's looking funny, you're still rich so why worry
Let them dig through dirt looking for treasure while you find
yours in Granddad's library

Wealth

By JH

Wealth is in the eye of the beholder
Many find wealth in money and clothes
Some find wealth in what they're told to
They don't value their souls like they're supposed to
A lot of us go into the world
And don't find wealth in what we're supposed to
So we get ate alive like crows' food
Bad decisions will have you down bad pockets flat
After that you considered old news
We all need to realize that GOD
Is the most precious thing we have
He'll hold you together like bold screws
The wealth of his word will never lose value
Not now or in the future
Even though his principles are considered old school
He will provide everlasting life
Considering anything wealthier than that
Is a bold move
But wealth is in the eye of the beholder
These are just my own views

To Find You

By MH

I've never get enough of you
Wanting you around to get what I need
Messing with you brought out my greed
Had me breaking law, just to hold you
Got me tighter then a picture with a locket
Hoping you would fill all the space in my pockets
Seeing your tattoos, in god we trust
You set my heart on fire with lust
At times you spoiled me with finer things
But you didn't stay for very long
Then I'd have to find you again and again
Searching so hard and reckless, I found myself in the pen
Needing to cancel the prison trip
I'd have to change our relationship
So you became my study and the ways of you I learned
Understanding that having you was something to earn
No longer will I be with you except
With intention pure and true
And I still won't get enough of you

Money My Love

By JP

Money, why do I love you so, you have been the motivation
for all my life's dreams and all I ever wanted was for you to
love me the way I love you.

I give my blood, sweat, and tears to make you mine. When
together, you make me feel special but where the loyalty
is. To see you with others, the jealousy I felt wondering
how could you ever belong to me when being shared with
everyone else.

I envy every person you've been with, questioning myself
how could there be a me without you. Money, if you ever
loved me you wouldn't treat me this way that you do.

It's like the more you give of yourself the more I would
want and just to be seen with you warmed my heart. I hated
parting from you, but I do have needs. When you are gone,
I would daydream of you swinging from a tree, smiling,
whispering to me. I am yours to keep.

I would marry you at the drop of a dime but you could never
be faithful. You are desired by many and so we can never be.
Your control is too much and you manipulate me. I settle for
what I can get and hold on to you tight, knowing if I have
you in the morning, chances are you'll be gone by night.
Only if I could clone you, that would be a crime but hell I've
broken laws for you. Not too proud to say but the truth is
"Money My Love" you'll forever and always be my bae.

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Thin Love

By TT

My pursuit of you has been oh so bitter sweet
Somehow you grew in me a burning desire which at times
feels almost alien, its origins were so discreet
What are you truly, to motivate men in such ways
That just to possess you they threaten life
and risk the freedom of their dying days
I'm awestruck, dumbstruck, confounded and befuddled
Contemplating the versatility in your provocations has
left my mind somewhat muddled
You turn mankind in on itself, pitting brother against brother
Making strangers attack one another, and in the most
unthinkable twists even cause a rift between a son
and his mother
Still in each of you iterations you are such a great sight
to behold,
whether in the sheen of your copper contours,
The gleam of your sliver curves, or the smooth textured,
sharp edged green of your paperback... Stacked!
Yes indeed. Newly minted or freshly printed
I want to grow you as my own and learn the intricacy
of your prosperity,
the origins of your mystique,
so that the legacy we create embodies a virtuous intent,
but plainly stated I want you all to myself,
that's what is meant and still what's truly funny?
All of this much inspired by my simple love of money

Money

By AHA

You are my support when needed,
My way to live in comfort and peace,
Enjoying the things you bring in my life.
Too much of you leaves me hungry for more,
So I only seek to have you
In a time of need and not want in my life.
This love I have for you is mutual
Since I only possess it for you to
Survive when needed.



MEMBERS CONNECT: WEALTH

Value

By VC

On this topic of "Wealth," I'm only speaking from my perspective and I'm not opposed to anyone else's perspective because I live to learn. Do I personally think that one could have a "Wealthy" life without a lot of money? Well, yes, I most certainly do. If this question is being asked according to the general world's view, then the answer would be definitely NO! I believe in the world's view one thing is certain about the (extremely) materialistic world we live in: it's that to be considered wealthy, one must attain as much money as possible. However, from a personal perspective, "Wealth" can be much more than monetary. A person can be considered to have a "Wealth" of knowledge as is usually described of respected elders in a community. One could go as far as describing a person as "Wealthy" based on the said person's large and successful family.

What is valuable to one, might not be valuable to another. That said, what comes to mind for me is experiences. Most people are familiar with the phrase, "Learn from other's mistakes." What better to pass down to the next generation than life lessons learned and so that's what I would like to pass on to future generations. My mistakes and faulty way of thinking. No one wants/likes to learn the hard way (shouldn't anyway), but to each their own. Anyway, although for myself and my peers this has been the primary way of learning... just look where

I currently reside! So in my opinion there is nothing more valuable to pass down (especially in this day and time) than successful/unsuccessful experiences. This can indirectly/directly be applied to attaining "World Wealth" as well. If I can show someone a mistake to avoid or a sure and profitable decision to make, well these experiences could be said to carry their weight in gold. Literally.

If one's motive is strictly and solely to make as much money as possible no matter what the cost, then it could be said that this person has a love of money. In the materialistic world that we live in, it is not possible to say (my opinion... which I know can be argued) someone wants to make large profits while refraining from doing "Evil" things. Do I think it is possible to maintain a balance between being successful (monetarily) and not doing "Evil" things while attaining such "Wealth"? Of course I do. However, it is much easier said than done. One must have firm beliefs in something greater than themselves and set down strict guidelines to which they will not compromise. To recap: evil is a moral viewpoint. It can be avoided while attaining "Wealth." If a person is grounded with positive attributes and surrounds him or herself with like-minded people, then they can definitely be a successful person while not allowing evil to invade their actions of acquiring "Wealth."

REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

What's up GOOD Men?!

I hope this summer weather isn't too much of a bummer, although I'm not too concerned about it for you guys cause y'all some cool dudes (I hope that went over like it was supposed to LOL). Thinking about this month's theme, the first thing that came to my mind was money, money, money. But then I stopped and really thought about it and came to the conclusion that for me, true wealth is really sound health and peace of mind, two things money cannot purchase.

I mean after all, you have to have the peace of mind to enjoy it or else, what's the point, right? Peace of mind goes hand in hand with being healthy when it comes to true wealth in my book. How can one enjoy life if their mind is in a consistent state of instability, worry, doubt and fear? Peace of mind and money are totally different aspects. Peace of mind depends on the mental state of a person. Money is an essential requirement for every human on this planet; however, relying only on money, in the long run, deteriorates your health and mind. Without money people would starve to death, so yes, the idea that money is very important is the right argument to put forth. However, material things only provide happiness for a short period and peace of mind is lasting. It brings a sense of contentment that material wealth doesn't. One may ask "how do I attain and maintain peace of mind?" My answer to that is that peace of mind varies from person to person, yet I have found that the root of attaining and maintaining peace of mind starts with being grateful and appreciative for your life and what you have. There will always be something to complain about but why bother? It only results in making you feel worse about your circumstances. Take the necessary steps to improve your circumstances and focus on the blessings that you have and that will lead to gratitude - which then leads to lasting peace of mind!

Now, let me hip y'all to some resources that will add to your sense of wealth and peace of mind!

Capital Area Asset Builders

1444 I St NW, Suite 201
Washington, DC 20005

Capital Area Asset Builders (CAAB) empowers low- and moderate-income residents of the Greater DC area to take control of their finances, increase their savings, and build wealth for the future. Since its establishment, more than 2,000 people have participated in CAAB's matched savings program, saving over \$1,100,000 and earning over \$3,500,000 in matching funds. Here is a list of educational courses that you can take advantage of when you come home!

Money Management 101 Classes

CAAB's Money Management 101 is a five-module series made up of two-hour classes. Participants will learn how to gain control of their finances by acquiring knowledge of: setting financial goals and tracking expenses, budgeting and saving, credit and compound interest, and credit reports. These 5-part series cover the basics of money management, including setting financial goals and tracking expenses, budgeting and saving, credit and compound interest, and credit reports.

- **Class #1:** Understanding Your Financial Relationship
- **Class #2:** The Art of Budgeting
- **Class #3:** Take Charge of Your Credit
- **Class #4:** Know Your Financial Rights
- **Class #5:** Pay Yourself First: The importance of Saving

Money Management 201 Classes

CAAB's Money Management 201 is designed to educate participants in the areas of increased savings and investing, retirement, insurance management (asset protection), estate planning, and college planning.

- **Class #1:** Savings & Investing
- **Class #2:** Retirement
- **Class #3:** Estate Planning
- **Class #4:** Insurance
- **Class #5:** College Planning



Until we *Connect* again,
Ms. Keela

REAL WORLD OF WORK

By Shannon and Araba

Free Minds member James is a Free Minds Peer Supporter, credible messenger, business owner, options and stock market trader, and financial strategist. He recently launched "From the Streets to Wall Street," a program that was developed to introduce youth in urban communities to the stock market and expose them to the inner workings of America's financial center in New York City. Free Minds Advocacy and Leadership Development Specialist, Shannon, with Free Minds Program Specialist Araba, sat down with James to learn more about his advocacy around financial literacy.

Shannon: What made you learn about financial literacy, and how did you get into this particular field?

James: I made a lot of mistakes as a young child chasing wealth and going about it the wrong way. Once I made the conscious decision to do things the right way, I started reading and educating myself about wealth. Everything that I read pertaining to wealth revolved around real estate and investing in the stock market. I started reading about generational wealth and started hearing terms like "trust fund babies." I found information about how grandparents and great-grandparents would invest in companies back in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and those mutual funds, hedge funds, and securities funds grew. [The grandparents] lived off the money, but as they passed away, they left these funds to their children to live off of, and now the wealth is being passed down from generation to generation. It's up to us as individuals to break the cycle and dysfunction when it comes to financial literacy. We have to start somewhere. If I want my family tree – my grandkids or my great-grandkids – to have better lives, I have to make the sacrifices now to start investing. That's why I chose to educate the youth, because if I knew what I knew now back when I was 16 or 17, if I'd started investing in these companies like Apple or Google 20 or 30 years ago, I probably wouldn't have to work today.

S: After breaking down why financial literacy was important for the kids, why did you choose to take the kids to the stock exchange?

J: That was always one of my dreams, to visit the stock exchange myself. When I started talking to [the youth] about investing, the questions started coming up: "Where does all of this action happen?" "Where do they trade?" So I said, "I'm going to teach you how to invest in mutual fund, I'll give you stipends to invest in your first fund, but also I'll take you to New York so you can see where these mutual, hedge and equity funds exist." So not only did I take them to Wall Street to see the New York Stock Exchange and NASDAQ, I also made a partner, a guy who's from DC working with a \$30 billion equity fund. I was able to take the kids there and we were able to talk to [the equity fund manager] about his journey in case one of these kids wanted to become a partner in Wall Street.

S: How did you stimulate the kids' interest in financial literacy?

J: Money motivates everybody, I believe. We're all out here chasing a dollar, so whenever I can give them an alternative to doing something negative and show them that their money can double every two, three, or five years, I show them they don't have to [do those negative things]. I started showing them statistics, numbers, and how to read this information, and they were blown away. They said "I love Jordans." I told them "Did you know you could invest in Nike?" So I started showing them charts. If you had invested in Nike ten years ago, your money would be 5 or 6 times what it is. So if you had put \$1000 in there, it would be \$6000-\$7000 in there right now. [The kids] didn't know that these opportunities existed. When you hear "financial literacy" in most instances, they're talking about credit, opening a bank account, paying your bills on time. They're not really

talking about investing – they're talking about CDs that the bank may offer, giving you these 3% returns but you have to leave it in there for three years and things like that, but they're not talking about where the real money is being made. If the kids can take this [information] at their age and run with it, we'll have some future millionaires.

S: You mentioned an equity fund manager that you met from DC. Can you break down the importance of relationships and how that can impact your journey with regard to gaining wisdom and knowledge?

J: The thing I always try to tell the youth is that we can either invest in the right things or the wrong things. We need to learn how to invest in relationships that are going to help us grow in our lives. An old saying that someone told me was: "You need to learn to put fertilizer on these friendships so they can grow." What we've also talked about is community, [building] community and partnerships. This [equity fund] manager extended himself to these kids and said, "If you all are interested in what I do, you want more information or you need some assistance, I'm going to make myself available to you. I come from where you come from, I know what it's like and I know what you're up against. I'm not saying it's going to be easy, but if you're willing to put in the work, I'll help you." Having those conversations and seeing people of color like themselves shows the youth that there are endless possibilities that exist that they never even knew. A lot of [the kids] had never been to New York, and they walk in, they see the skyscrapers and be in these 50 feet buildings. I wanted to give them an experience to go along with the knowledge – something to open and expand their minds. A lot of them think that the corner is the only place that exists, or that DC is the only place in the world. The people who funded it were really excited about the work and they funded it for a second round, so we're doing it again!

S: What are questions or something that sticks out to you that the youth asked on the trip in terms of how the trip impacted them?

J: There was one young man who was overly excited, and he just left no stone unturned. He was asking a bunch of questions, seeing dollar signs and opportunities. To me, he was one of the ones who was going to excel, take this information and run with it. We only had a short period of time with [the kids] but we made ourselves accessible to all of them if they had any questions we could answer. [This young man] started asking about investing in foreign countries. I was showing him examples of other traders.

We started talking about how you invest in stocks: you want to look for companies that have a niche, that have come up with something new, innovative, something that nobody has ever done. If you think it's a good idea, you might want to invest in them. This young man started saying, "I heard about this company over in Egypt, in Africa and I want to invest. Do you think it's a good thing to invest in?" It was questions like that that let me know that the information I was sharing with these kids was resonating.

Araba: For other Free Minds members who might want to start a program or an initiative like this, how did you go about creating the program and finding funding for it?

J: It's really about who you know, especially in DC. When I first was trying to create this program a lot of people were spinning me. By the grace of God, I was able to meet someone who worked in the field who was familiar with grant-writing, and that was one of the building blocks. I applied for a mini-grant of \$5000, they awarded 30 people, and I was one of the participants that won the grant. If you can come up with a creative idea, especially [one] that you feel could stop gun violence or get the kids off the street, I would advise you to find a grant writer and shoot your shot.

S: Do you have any tips for whoever might be reading about what you know and how it connects to your purpose of working with kids?

J: I feel like a lot of the things that are going on in our neighborhoods stem from poverty. If a lot of these kids didn't grow up in poverty, if they had a better upbringing, better education, a better way of living, finances that they didn't have to get by taking chances with their lives, they wouldn't be in the situations that we're in and we wouldn't have the circumstances that we have. So that's what my goal is, to try to give these people alternatives. When I decided that crime was no longer an option for me, I chose to find an alternative to make money besides just working. One of the things I try to teach is that there has to be a shift in your thinking, because we have been conditioned to be consumers. We have to be conditioned to save and be good stewards of our money. Once I learn how to make money, I learn how to save money. Once I learn how to save money, I learn how to invest money. I start to figure out how to make this money grow for me. Investing in houses or apartment buildings, or putting my money in the market and letting it sit over time – those are the two keys to success when it comes to building wealth in this country. Unless you have some great idea, you're innovative and you're going to be the next Bezos or Elon Musk. I'm not saying that's not possible either because we have some creative people, we just have to get our minds in the right place.

[Note: Trading can be risky, and usually benefits the wealthiest Americans. According to a 2021 CNBC Wealth report, the wealthiest 10% of Americans owned 89% of all stocks.]





CRYPTOCURRENCY 101

By Yamini

In today's world there isn't anything you can't find online and access through your smartphone. From buying groceries to having someone else stand in line for you, there's an app for virtually everything under the sun. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that decentralized digital currency, or "cryptocurrency," is the new wave taking over the market.

So what is cryptocurrency and how does it work? "Crypto," as it's known, gets its name from cryptography, due to the fact that it's nearly impossible to counterfeit or double spend such currency. Most cryptocurrencies are based on blockchain technology – an online distributed ledger that records every transaction made as a unique interaction. Blockchain and decentralization (the fact that there is no central authority that manages or maintains the value) make crypto's exclusive assets, like minimal government intervention or manipulation, possible.

There are disadvantages as well. Since control over the value and other aspects of crypto are in the hands of users, cryptocurrency prices are often volatile and unpredictable, due to the natural movement of markets. For many people who invest into the market, this means they are at risk of suffering severe financial losses. Additionally, because you can also digitally mine (mining is how new units of cryptocurrency are released, generally in exchange for validating transactions), crypto-mining farms can often consume

a lot of energy, harming the environment as a result and deepening the growing climate crisis. Although the idea behind digitized currency is novel, crypto hasn't found its footing yet in the market as a legitimized currency and even very popular forms such as Bitcoin aren't used in everyday transactions, despite millions of users online. Not backed by any particular government or entity, they sometimes aren't even legal in different parts of the world. In the United States however, cryptocurrency is treated as an asset and any profit made through crypto transactions is taxed by the IRS.

When you invest in cryptocurrency, you are investing in a digital currency – think of a dollar bill, but one that only exists in a digital space. The value of this currency can go up or down, just like any other stock, meaning that if you invest at the right time it can be very valuable. If the market is doing badly, however, you can lose money in your investment. Because cryptocurrency is so new, there is potential for government agencies to seize it if new regulations are put in place. As with any form of exchange, it's important to understand the risks involved when making investments. Despite the uncertainties, there continues to be a growing user base and rapid increase in platforms targeting crypto-exchange and investment. Researchers and investors are unsure where the crypto market is headed, but it remains a curiosity for many.

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

with Neely

Thank you to everyone who cast their ballot for the next BAM book! The next BAM book will be *Concrete Rose* by Angie Thomas. This book follows the story of seventeen-year-old Maverick, whose life forever changes when he finds out he's going to be a father. If you've read *The Hate U Give*, you probably remember Maverick. This book is a prequel, meaning it takes place before the events of *The Hate U Give*. We can't wait to hear your thoughts!



1. Maverick goes through numerous challenges over the course of the book – any one of which would be traumatic – and yet he is dealing with them simultaneously. With everything he has going on, who in his life do you think had the most positive influence on him? Why? Who has had the most positive influence in your life, and why?

2. King's relationship with Maverick is complicated, and when they disagree, Maverick feels like he doesn't even know King. How do you feel about their friendship? Did you ever feel forced to choose between what you believed in, and a friendship? How did it make you feel?

3. How does learning that he is a father change Maverick's life? Does he see his life differently? If so, in what way? What is an event in your own life that changed the way you viewed things? How did/does it make you see things differently?

4. On the drive home from visiting Markham's campus, Lisa lets Mav know she has no intention of pursuing a relationship with a "gang-banger." Mav is devastated. On p. 279, he writes, "Since I ain't shit, I ain't got shit to lose. I may as well kill the person who killed Dre." What are your thoughts on this reaction?

5. How did you feel about what happened with Maverick and Red, and the decision that Maverick made about his plan? Did his choice show weakness or strength? What motivated his decision? Have you ever made a choice that others might have seen as weak, but that in reality, took a lot of strength on your part?

Name _____ Date _____

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: BELONGING (VOLUME 11, ISSUE 4)

Hey family! Here are some writing prompts to help you get started on submissions for our next issue on Belonging. We also want to give you a heads up for the issue after that. Volume 11, Issue 5 will be exploring the theme of **Celebration**.

(1)

Humans have been creating a sense of community for a millennium. How would you describe belonging?
Where/how do you seek or find belonging in your everyday?

(2)

To you, what characteristics best foster a community? What do you define as a safe space for expression?

(3)

Take a look at this quote from F. Scott Fitzgerald.

"That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong." What books/literary works have made you feel most seen? What about it made you feel like you belonged?

(4)

Write a poem to your younger self about belonging. What do you wish they had to make them feel included? seen? belonged?
What advice would you give yourself?

MEMBERS CONNECT: WEALTH

What Wealth Means to Me

By AHA

The definition of wealth (to me) is to have a lot of money or possessions you've earned over a period of time. This isn't always measured by dollars since you can have many possessions that can create a lot of wealth that turn into dollars or more possessions on top of what you already have. Growing up in the community I did, I wasn't taught to use these means in a positive way in order to create more, but instead, to survive and provide for my family by any means necessary. The impact this created for me, my history, has made me not seek to save anything, possess it, or use it in a way that I would now know to be responsible. This effect is due to being used to living in the fast lane and so you squander it, believing it's always easy to get back to doing it all over again.

I see generational wealth as what was passed on from your loved ones and ancestors from generation to generation, keeping them stable in order to continue and keep in the family. When none of our ancestors were wealthy, some challenges are faced to create wealth if you have not been raised in an environment that seeks things in a positive way or knows where to begin. Some go through poverty and other conditions that make them seek to get wealth by any means, which may lead to a negative outcome and continue a cycle of incarceration or death.

For another kind of generational wealth, I would like to

pass down my collection of books that I'll continue to build upon over the years. I believe that the knowledge and insight within them will be valuable for the next generation and many to come who may take from it and learn how to apply to create a good life for themselves. With this you not only learn from the others before you who experienced something but they can also be a guide for you in life to seek your path and purpose in life.

Other kinds of wealth or abundance I've sought to create is from the knowledge I receive and possess, and to create other things from this based on what I've learned— from art to making things that would help me survive or just teaching someone else what I know, so creating anything that can be left behind is key.

To me, wealth is only a part of being successful but I believe the knowledge you have is what leads you to be wealthy. So educating oneself and learning in a field one chooses is the major success. I have looked at wealth differently since I was young, when I could care less about how it was earned or spent as long as I had it. Now I see the big picture and take a different approach. Working together with others is always the best way to achieve wealth on a greater scale. With different ideas and many doing the work, it can change lives and teach others how to do it the right way.

A New Idea of Wealth

By MH

Growing up, my thoughts on wealth were living in a mansion, draped in designer everything, rocking diamond jewelry, with a garage full of expensive cars. In all actuality this image of wealth was projected onto me through TV, music, and movies. Honestly, back then I didn't know what wealth really meant to me. My original idea of wealth slowly revealed itself to be just an illusion. With reality setting in and time passing, my idea of wealth transformed itself. It shifted from being solely material objects to being based on important concepts now. I base my wealth first on my health. Being healthy is my foundation. With this, everything else is possible; every day that my mind and body is healthy is a day that I'm wealthy. My "peace of mind" is another component of my wealth. To wake up to life at ease and content gives me wealth. Reality has shown me, money doesn't equate to happiness. With a peace of mind, I can endure any and everything coming my way. Another part of my wealth is the knowledge and skills I instill into my mind. All of these attributes add to my personal wealth. Learning new things gives me a sense of worth. I say my health, my peace of mind, and my knowledge make my wealth right now over any material possession. Life has

taught me to place value in things that cannot be bought, stolen, or destroyed. I've been able to accumulate nice things and have experienced the heartache of losing these same things. I would be a fool to say I lost my wealth when I lost those things. I'm the same person who abstained from them in the first place, so my current ideas of wealth are things no one can ever take from me. All I can do is add to it.

For generational wealth, home ownership is something that I'm being groomed to inherit and something I plan on passing down to the next generation when the time comes. I will cherish my parents' hard work by keeping and upgrading the family homes. My father stressed how much he struggled and how proud he was to help his mother leave public housing, Sursum Corda. I plan on continuing the steps my parents made to break the cycle of poverty. I understand owning property is a key part to building wealth. I will add more to this financial foundation so myself and the next generations can prosper. I feel blessed to know home ownership is now something that is a part of generation wealth in my family.

MEMBERS CONNECT: WEALTH

The Parable of Four Girlfriends

By AK

There once was a man, a wealthy man. He worked very hard to provide for his girlfriends, to ensure they had the most lavish things life had to offer. I'm talking mansions, designer fashion, luxury whips. Basically, whatever their heart desired they got without a second thought. He was so caught up trying to appease them that he neglected one of the girlfriends until it got to the point she was the Forgotten One. During this journey in life, he got sick. He tried his best to ignore it for a while thinking that it would run its course and he would be straight. However it seemed like by the day, his health got worse. So, he went to consult a doctor. That's what he got the news that hit him like a ton of bricks. The doc told him he had an extremely rare condition. This disease was moving through his body at a rapid pace. The doc gave him a very short time to live and advised him to say his goodbyes...

Distraught to say the least, he sought to tell one of his girlfriends the news. He told her, "I've gave you all that you ever asked for, especially houses. You've got more houses than a real estate agent. Surely you'll stay with me forever, right?"

She replied, "I'm sorry, I can't do it. You're on your own."

Disappointed, he went on, thinking, *Hey, I've got a couple more girlfriends.*

He went to another girlfriend and told her the news. He told her, "I've gave you all that you ever asked for, especially all them designer clothes. You've had more fits than a supermodel. I know you'll stay with me forever... right?"

She replied, "I won't be able to do that. I gotta go... sorry."

Now, the pressure was so intense that he felt like his head might explode. It was clutch time, this was his last shot. He

sought the third girlfriend and told her the news. He told her. "I've gave you all that you ever asked for, especially all the exotic cars. Baby Birdman got nothing on you. Without a shadow of a doubt I know you'll be with me forever... right?"

She replied, "I'll walk you to the grave but that's it."

That wasn't good enough for him, so he was on his own. He went off, defeated. He found a seat on a stone and buried his head in anguish, lost in his thoughts. He heard a voice say, "I'll be with you forever."

He thought, *I'm losing my mind, now I'm starting to hear voices.*

Then he heard the voice again, this time a little clearer. He looked around and said, "Who are you?"

Then, before his eyes, he saw a disheveled, malnourished woman with shreds of a dress on her thin frame. He asked again, "Who are you?"

She got closer and said, "It's me, your fourth girlfriend. The one you neglected. I'll be with you... I'll be with you forever."

Ashamed, the man said out loud, "If only I would have treated you better when I had the chance."

He died a short time later.

Author's Note: This story is a metaphor about what's truly important. The first and second represent possessions of this world, cars, clothes, houses, money, etc. All materialistic things. The third girlfriend was his family. The fourth girlfriend, who was really important but often neglected, was one's soul. Your soul will be with you forever.

Forms of Wealth by TT

Wealth has many forms with material wealth being the most conspicuous. Lavish physical attainments are eye-catching and inspire a great deal of envy or adulation. And therefore is considered to be the most obvious or prominent form of wealth. But lacking money, the tangible aspects of wealth are usually beyond one's reach. However, social wealth – having a wide and richly diverse group of reachable associates to assist one in the procurement of experiences or material gain – can be a substitute for what an individual may lack in personal finances. Then again, spiritual wealth could be a catalyst for someone to set themselves in a perpetually euphoric state, finding fulfillment and joy in pursuits beyond material substance.

Cultural wealth likewise may steady a person in the frame of mind that they have no need of certain items or particular

appearances and only require specific intellectual or ancestral attainments that one must possess in order to further the pertinent legacy of a certain group of peoples.

I personally believe that wealth is obtained through various facets of life experiences. Meaning wealth is based on one's unique perspective. Someone with a keen intellect who is said to possess a wealth of knowledge can be satisfied by just knowing and having an abundance of truths. Just as a person of moderate to modest means with a robust and happy family structure can be the wealthiest and most content person in the world by their own standard because they have something of immense value to them. Which is why it would content me to one day create a healthy mix of social, financial, intellectual and cultural wealth that I can share with my family in the future.

MEMBERS CONNECT: WEALTH

Defining Wealth

By AC

The definition of "wealth" is the abundance of valuable possession or money. That sounds about right, however, this notion leaves us to figure out how we define value.

Value is decided by what we are willing to give for a certain thing. Value would seem to be the trade we are willing to make with the things we can live without in exchange for the things we need or want.

With that in mind, I can go back to exploring what "wealth" may mean to me. What makes a person wealthy? Can I be wealthy without money? Can I create other kinds of wealth?

I personally believe that as with all living things in the universe, death is the final step in the cycle of what we call "life." I think death is in fact part of life. I think that by the end of a person's cycle, wealth is measured by the amount of treasurable memories and experiences accumulated throughout the person's lifetime.

This might sound counterintuitive to some people because it's easy to assume that we'll lose all memories once we die. It's also easy to believe that money can buy most, if not all, of these experiences. It's too easy to think that an inheritance or a loaded bank account might have more "value" than a cheap and simple "I love you."

But I like being honest with myself and I like being honest with

the world, so I must point to the fact that no amount of money can turn back the hands of time to bring us back to those moments that we miss. There is no amount of money that can purchase another hug from a loved one we have lost. There is no bartending of any kind that can bring back first steps, first words, first kisses, and last goodbyes. There are some things that we are simply not able to do.

Some people would give fortunes to hear the words "you are cured," to hear "she will be okay," or to hear "he will be happy." All the money in the world means nothing when compared to the magical words "you have another chance."

I'm not rich by any means but I still feel happy and extremely fortunate to feel that I have amassed so many beautifully priceless memories, to feel I have created an abundance of experiences, to feel I am wealthy in love. And perhaps even more important, I am so extremely thankful for the fact that I am breathing this very second so that I can still experience love within my heart.

I am sure that if I were rich I would be writing a whole different thing because I would be measuring wealth through stocks and investments. But the truth is that I'm not, so I measure my wealth in laughter, smiles, passion, knowledge, wisdom, peace, friendship, and love. But then again, if I win the megamillions I might write another essay – just a thought.

A Nimble Brain

By MJ

Life has shown me that the greatest thing one could be wealthy in is a nimble brain, but the brain needs to be constantly fed with new ideas to function properly. Much like updating a computer system. Not only has life revealed this to me personally, but the study of hominid evolution shows that those with the most wealth in skill and knowledge are those who ultimately survived in the environment in which they were placed. The same laws of nature apply today: ADAPTATION or EXPIRATION.

We must methodically rid ourselves of bad habits as a first step in personal growth to become wealthy. If you bring forth what is best in you, it will save you. If you fail to bring forth what is best within you, then it will destroy you. We essentially get out of life what we accept and expect we are worthy of. If we pay close attention, then we'd be able to see just how amazing life is in organizing around the standard we set for ourselves.

In closing, wealth comes to those same nimble brains who are prepared to recognize opportunities and capitalize on them when they present themselves. One must become wealthy and resourceful so that they become wealthy in resources. Be forever mindful that wealth is never owned, it is only rented, and rent is due every day.

Hotep (Peace)

Investing in my Family

By JP

I have been very happy in life with little to no money. As long as I have a roof over my head and food to put on my table and everyone I love and care about is good, then I am good.

I would like to create wealth in my family. I come from a large family and I believe when you invest in a family with love and togetherness it helps build a strong foundation of each one helping and teaching one. In my family someone would always step up and help or fill a void. The greatest wealth is LOVE!!!

To the next generation, I would love to give them a better world, safe communities, a clean environment, and a better example of what loving and living a free world is supposed to be like.





THE WRITE WAY: SPOKEN WORD POETRY

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

By Gene

Most people look at someone that does spoken word poetry and think that it's really hard to do or that you have to be born with a special gift of speaking to be able to be great at spoken word. Don't get me wrong, it does take a certain level of talent, but for the most part anyone can be a great spoken word poet if they put their mind to it. Every issue of the *Connect*, there are poems by many Free Minds members, some of whom have never recited their poem aloud and feel that writing it and saying it are two very different things. Well, I am here to tell you that you are absolutely right!!

I have been writing and reciting poetry for many years and I have mastered the art of spoken word. So I am well equipped to tell you what the differences are, but I can also tell (show) you how to transform your written poem to spoken word and master the art just as I have. Some of the differences are structure and cadence. When writing poetry, oftentimes the structure and cadence aren't very important, because the reader will read it and interpret the stanzas and their own pace. There's no right or wrong way to read a poem, especially one that wasn't written with the intent to be performed. However, a spoken word poem has to be written with more precision in terms of word placement, pregnant pauses (a pause that makes people think something significant is coming next) and rhythm.

In other words, you write it exactly the way you would say it. Another difference is delivery. When someone does choose to read a poem that wasn't meant to be read aloud, they are just saying the words and hope it's conveyed impactfully (sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't).

When you recite spoken word, your delivery is a poem in of itself. You can take a not so good poem and have a brilliant delivery and turn it to a great poem all in how you said it! I will talk more about that in a bit.

I know that the idea of becoming a great spoken word poet overnight might sound far fetched and unrealistic, but I will provide you with some very important tips that will have you on your way to wowing all your friends and being the great spoken word poet that you want to be!!

(TIP 1) We all love music right? Well, start off by reciting one of your favorite songs (the one that you know all the lyrics to). This exercise is to remind you that it's possible to memorize and recite words. It also

creates confidence in knowing that you can recite. If you can sing their song, you can memorize and recite your own.

(TIP 2) Once you have committed your poem to memory you have to work on your delivery. Remember, your delivery is just as important as the poem itself. To create the best delivery, start your poem off as if having a conversation with someone that you really want to get a point across to (we've all had those conversations). Don't forget the tip about your favorite song; you are performing when you do spoken word so you have to have energy and connect with your audience. Body language is key! You have to make every word you say show in the motion of your body, the same way you would do if you were performing your favorite Michael Jackson song... Oh, now you see!

(TIP 3) You have to be completely comfortable in front of an audience in order to be a great spoken word artist. I am not talking about nerves, nerves are good. The number one confidence builder and comfort when performing spoken word is being prepared! When you are fully prepared to perform you don't have to worry about the crowd, only wowing them!

One sure and original way to get prepared and used to the audience is perform your piece in front of the mirror, believe it or not it works. Once you get used to seeing yourself and how your body moves, that is all you will see when you look into the audience. You'll feel even more prepared if your piece is memorized!

(TIP 4) And the one to take the most heed to is...

Practice! Practice! Practice!

This is all the other three tips rolled into one. When you practice your pieces and know them by heart it comes to you like second nature (remember reciting your favorite song?).

When you practice, you learn your poem by heart, and when you learn your poem by heart you can focus on your performance (the other poem), and when you have all of that on one accord you will be a master spoken word artist!

Follow these tips and you will become a great spoken word poet in no time!



CONVERSATION WITH ALLEN

Wealth can mean many things to different people. To me, it means the ability to live a life with financial freedom. I am fortunate that I have this financial freedom. I can trace this primarily to the influences of my mom and dad. Growing up in the DC area, they instilled in me the following principles that have served me well:

- 1. Live Within Your Means** – Going shopping with my mom was a big treat when I was young. At the grocery store, I witnessed how my mom would mostly purchase goods that were on sale, buy private label brands and buy items with a lower unit cost. At the department store, she would never buy anything at full retail price and loved perusing the clearance rack. With my dad, he emphasized repeatedly to me the importance of paying off the credit card balance on time and in full every month. By doing this, I avoided interest charges and late fees.
- 2. Start Early** – My dad opened savings accounts in my name where I would deposit monetary gifts that I would receive from other family members and my allowance for jobs completed around the house. This taught me the values of discipline, goal setting and planning. Saving also builds security and independence.
- 3. Start Small** – Another thing that my dad did was open a custodial brokerage account where we invested in stocks (shares of ownership in a company.) The amounts

invested in the brokerage account was relatively small. He picked most of the stocks (conservative stocks such as AT&T and utility companies) but he did empower me by allowing me to pick a couple of companies. Not so humble brag: one company I recall picking was PepsiCo (makers of Pepsi and Frito Lay snack products) which increased in value by 5x during the 1980s. By investing, you hope that the company grows and performs well over time which allows your investment to grow as well.

- 4. Contribute Consistently** – Many of the companies that we invested in issued dividends. Dividends are a cash payment paid regularly to its shareholders. Instead of receiving the cash payment, my dad would reinvest the dividends by purchasing additional shares of stock. In recent times, the advent of automatic contributions has helped make saving and/or investing more painless and less emotional.

I am so grateful and appreciative for what my mother and father have done for me. I also realize how fortunate that I had this infrastructure in place that allowed me to reach this financial freedom. I have been truly blessed. And what this calls on me to do is to continue to use the knowledge gleaned to pay it forward and help others who have not been as fortunate. I enjoy working with our Credit Builders program and assisting our members who have savings and tax questions as well.

THE RACIAL WEALTH GAP

*An interview with Free Minds friend Dr. Richardson,
Professor of African American Studies and Anthropology at the University of Maryland*

With Neely

What is the racial wealth gap to you?

The number of assets in a household creates one's net worth, and this net worth is what creates wealth. It's important to note that one's income is not equivalent to one's wealth. People can have high-incomes, but not high-levels of wealth. You may have two high-earners in a household, but that means nothing in terms of wealth. It might mean something two generations from now, but right now it doesn't mean that these two individuals have high-levels of wealth. For example, let's make the distinction that taking out a mortgage is not the same as owning a home. The bank still owns your home. So even if someone is making a ton of money, if they don't own anything, they don't have wealth.

Take Prince George's County in Maryland, for example. The narrative tells us that in 2021, they were the wealthiest Black county in the United States. But what does this mean in relation to white counties? When looking at the wealthiest counties, Prince George's County does not even rank in the top 90. It's not even close to the #1 wealthiest county, which is actually Loudoun County, Virginia. 4 of the top 10 wealthiest counties in the United States are located in the DMV: Loudoun County, Fairfax County, Howard County, and Arlington County, which are all predominantly white counties. That speaks volumes about Black wealth.

What impact, beyond financial, does the racial wealth gap have on Black communities?

Housing impacts determinants of health. So not only are communities being impacted economically, but they are also being impacted in terms of physical and mental health. Neighborhoods that suffer from significant wealth gaps between white people and Black people, you see the same health disparities play out in terms of life outcomes.

Having more wealth allows you to live in an environment where you're not going to take on specific stressors. There is a documentary called *Unnatural Causes*, which looks at how a ZIP Code affects one's health. Based on your wealth, you have opportunities to live in neighborhoods where your health will be higher. For example, the life expectancy in Woodley Park, a primarily white neighborhood, is 89.4 years. In this neighborhood, you don't have the same levels of toxins in the environment, concentrated poverty, food deserts that inhibit access to quality food, or medical deserts that prevent access to medical services. Then you go to the St. Elizabeths neighborhood east of the river, and the life expectancy becomes 68.2 years. Within the same city, 15 minutes apart, you lose roughly 21 years of your life. Again, this is based on your wealth and the ZIP Code it allows you to live in.

What are some policies that influence the racial wealth gap?

We didn't just arrive at this place in a vacuum. *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein dives into the history of how housing policies have affected Black wealth. The historical impact of redlining* has created a lack of development in the wealth of African Americans, particularly in cities like DC. Because of redlining, the net worth of white

households in DC is 81 times greater than Black households.

After World War II, the GI Bill was created to provide benefits to WWII veterans. Part of it was providing mortgages for veterans to buy houses. White veterans coming home from the war were able to purchase houses, while redlining meant lenders refused to give mortgages and loan assistance for Black veterans trying to buy houses in Black neighborhoods. Meanwhile white veterans were able to purchase homes for \$10,000-\$20,000. Those homes are now worth \$500,000, and the white veterans were able to give those houses to their children, who have now inherited a house mortgage-free. Their wealth was transferred to generations down the line.

A recent article came out about Wells Fargo Bank's discriminatory mortgage practices, and the inability for Black prospective homeowners to successfully move through the home-buying process when compared to white prospective homeowners. Black prospective homeowners with excellent credit scores were getting denied mortgages, while white prospective homeowners with similar credit scores were receiving mortgages. These policies are still happening.

** The discriminatory practice in which services, including financial and housing, are withheld from certain neighborhoods that have been deemed "risky" to investment. These neighborhoods consist primarily of Black residents.*

What do you see as the solution moving forward?

We cannot educate ourselves out of the racial wealth gap, education will not close it. Studies have found that white people who have not completed school and do not have a high school diploma have more wealth than Black people with a college degree. We're making these arguments that education is the answer, but this is a false narrative.

How did we arrive at this disparity? Through the institution of slavery, which gave white people a 250 year financial head start. Then another 100 years' head start due to legalized segregation through Jim Crow laws. There is no way to close a 350 year wealth gap unless the government gets involved and accounts for those crimes.

The only way to immediately close the racial wealth gap is to repair people financially, and make them whole through reparations. But we need to be clear about what reparations are. To me, it's not about forgiving student loans. We shouldn't mix up housing programs with reparations. We're also not talking about Black Americans whose families arrived here through immigration, we are talking about Black Americans who can trace their ancestry back to Africans who arrived here as enslaved people. Reparations is providing financial remuneration for every Black American based on the accumulation of white wealth that was built on the back of Black Americans since our arrival in this country. Several states have initiated commissions to look at reparations, but there should be a federal reparations program based on that number of accumulated wealth. Nothing else counts as reparations, period.

BLACK HOME OWNERSHIP IN DC

By Yamini

Known as Chocolate City, Washington D.C. has been home to the nation's largest Black community, encompassing a vibrant culture and history. However, with rising costs and rapid transformation of land, gentrification is the most notable cause for the displacement of low-income and Black residents in DC – a population that has been steadily dwindling over the last 10 years. Wards 7 and 8, although historically home to people of color and affordable housing options, are quickly becoming the hottest real estate markets in the city. Luxury apartment highrises and lavish retail and food enterprises have overtaken the landscape.



Nationally, over 70% of Black wealth is tied to homeownership, yet only 34% of homeowners in D.C. are Black, compared to the 49% that are white. Although millennials (the generation born between 1981 and 1996) are the primary drivers of Black homeownership nationwide, millions of Black and brown buyers who are creditworthy, pre-qualified, and who would buy homes are disadvantaged by a lack of affordable inventory in areas that are lucrative economically and geographically. Discriminatory lending practices lead to huge disparities in the market, with data from the federal Home Mortgage Disclosure Act showing that in 2020 approximately 32,238 loan applications were made in DC. Of those, 4,945 applications by potential Black buyers were approved in contrast to the 16,227 approved white applicants. The disproportionate nature of the D.C. housing market is only made more apparent if compared to neighboring areas such as Prince George's County, MD, where the rate of Black homeownership sits at 61.1%.

Opportunities to create equity and generational wealth through homeownership are harder to come by for Black residents, who are playing in a tax system designed for those who own property. With current trends in the housing market and generational wealth distribution, research shows that it will take over 200 years for Black families to only just equal the wealth that white families have today.

Furthermore, studies show that Black individuals who were able to achieve homeownership or wealth acquisition often fall back in future generations because of the challenges of everyday Black life. Economic power also enables access to political strength and it's not inconsequential that voter suppression often occurs in Black neighborhoods as they begin to secure financial prosperity.

New initiatives by the office of Mayor Bowser, which are set to take place this fall, hope to combat the decline in Black residents in D.C., citing it as an imminent crisis we must confront. An allotment of \$10 million dollars makes up the Black Homeownership Fund which will focus on driving down costs of rent and home prices and ensure that the city has enough capacity for an affordable housing market. In addition to this, a 21-person strike force will work quickly to come up with ideas to help the city support this goal.

While this is a step in the right direction, there are numerous proven solutions to help fight deeply ingrained inequities, with methods such as cash assistance programs and universal basic income. Conversations surrounding reparations on a federal, state, and local level is another. Experiments with baby bonds also have also yielded exciting results, with a study from Prosperity Now showing that if the U.S. government invested enough money for a youth to have \$45,000-\$50,000 upon high school graduation, they would have the opportunity to invest in college, homeownership, etc and close the wealth gap in their own communities. DC is pioneering a baby bonds program that will put up to \$1,000 per year into a trust fund for children in low-income families. The children can access the money once they turn 18, but can only use it to access education, buy a house or commercial property, start a business, or invest in stocks, shares, or bonds. Entrepreneurship is another data-backed solution to wealth inequality. Research from the University of Washington business school showed that Black families who had entrepreneurs within the family closed the gap almost completely in a ten year period. The Washington area has more Black-owned businesses than other parts of the country. If we commit to investing in them and seek to provide them with the capital, technical support, and access to the markets that they need, we could revolutionize the financial landscape for Black communities across the country and eradicate barriers associated with discrimination, racism, and classism.

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.

Felon: The New Slur Word by Justin Guyton

This collection of essays shares the author's insights on education, mass incarceration, the criminal legal system, daily realities of prison life, preparing for reentry, and much more. This book is available both as a physical book and an audiobook. From the author's description: "The book will illustrate how and why the term 'felon' is systematically used to degrade, and to implement discriminatory practices against those with criminal convictions. This brief, but informative book will put to rest many misconceptions pertaining to the American justice system."



IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

DEEP DIVE: SRI LANKA

This edition of the "Deep Dive" demonstrates some of the many ways that political leadership impacts the economy and the daily lives of people around the world.



It was not all that long ago that Sri Lanka, an island nation of just over 20 million off the coast of India, was one of the most ascendant developing economies in the world. A major hub of tea, rice and textile production in South Asia, the country boasted one of the region's strongest economies and was also regularly rated as one of the most charitable and giving nations in the world.

So it was fairly shocking to see the nation's economic freefall transpire over the course of 2022, culminating in its former president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, fleeing to exile in nearby Thailand as protestors surrounded and then occupied his palatial estate. After racking up massive debt over the past decade, \$51 billion of which remains, Sri Lanka has stopped repaying its creditors for the year.

So what happened? The demise of Sri Lanka appears to be a lesson just how fragile most of the world economy is in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war waged by Russia in Ukraine. And it raises questions about who might be the next major player to find themselves in trouble.



Source: Eshan Fernando

As Sri Lanka continued to grow its economy, the Rajapaksa family – which has long filled the top of the government leadership ranks – grew increasingly connected to China, which has become a major

lender to dozens of countries around the world, including the United States. In the past two decades, Sri Lanka was given \$12 billion in loans from the Chinese.

Had those investments gone to things that improved or strengthened the Sri Lankan economy, in all likelihood those loans would have been easy to pay back over time. But that was not the case. The money went to a cricket stadium (cricket is a bat-and-ball sport that originated in England and spread throughout the world) and a conference center that were located at the tip of a jungle, barely used after their completion.

And the most infamous: the construction of the Hambantota Port, a project that became a boondoggle (a project considered wasteful and useless) for the Sri Lankans to the point that they were not able to keep up with payments on the loan. In the end, China actually took control of the port for its own business interests as a form of repayment.

And despite many bad investments and mounting debt, Sri Lanka was chugging along for years... until the COVID-19 epidemic hit, sending the world economy and its related supply chain into a tailspin that it has yet to fully recover from. Add to that the war in Ukraine, which has disrupted the international markets for food (especially wheat) and fuel (especially natural gas).

All of a sudden, inflation in Sri Lanka rocketed up, devaluing the money that everyday people relied on to live. Energy and fuel shortages led to rolling blackouts, and people unable to run their cars or machines. In March of 2022, protests began around the country, growing in size by the day, calling for the end of the Rajapaksa government.

By early April, most of the president's cabinet had resigned. By July, protesters had occupied the president's compound in the city of Colombo. Rajapaksa fled to Thailand, though the newly established leadership are working on returning him from exile with heavy protection.

Sri Lanka is hardly the only country for which China, and other government and private lenders, hold significant debt right now. It was long considered the crown jewel of China's "Belt and Road Initiative," a strategy of building the nation's economic influence and strength around the world with major investments into economies. Not all of these nations have mismanaged or spent frivolously with Chinese money, as Sri Lankan leaders did...but there is growing fear that debt-laden countries will face grave circumstances if global inflation continues into the end of 2022. Also on the horizon: a winter in Europe where the cost to heat homes will skyrocket if the war in Ukraine continues, as Russia is the major supplier of natural gas to the continent.

The International Monetary Fund has recently moved to help Sri Lanka, with a \$2.9 billion aid package. Time will tell if any other countries follow suit and, if so, if the global community will be ready and willing to help all of them.

IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

WORLD

There have been a number of major emergency weather events over the summer, but none as deadly and catastrophic as the recent flooding in Pakistan. Rainfall in the nation's populous Sindh and Balochistan provinces is five times its normal rate, which has caused the Indus River to overflow and essentially create a 62 mile-wide lake on top of areas inhabited by many people. So far, more than 1,000 people have died, and an estimated 33 million Pakistanis have had their homes and livelihoods threatened by the floods.

NATIONAL NEWS

COVID-19 continues to mess with the global economy, and the continuing war in the Ukraine has worsened the situation. The combined effect of these factors have spurred inflation, particularly in the fuel and food markets.

In the United States, there is some room for optimism that the worst has come and gone. Inflation reached a peak of 9.1% in June of 2022, by far the highest it's been in decades, but dropped back to 8.5% in July.

The Federal Reserve has helped to suppress inflation by raising interest rates, which tends to prompt less spending and thus less demand in the economy. Driving demand too far down, however, risks the start of a recession, which could hit the United States in the coming months or year. One key factor will be whether the cost of fuel – a major factor in household budgets and for manufacturers – goes up or down this winter.

DC

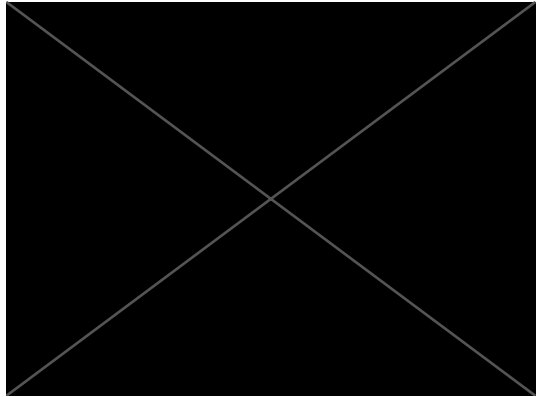
Mayor Muriel Bowser has asked for additional help from the federal government to assist thousands of immigrants that have been bussed into the city from the State of Texas. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who opposes President Joe Biden's immigration policies, has begun to bus some new arrivals to cities outside of the state. Bowser wants to establish the Armory as a respite shelter for people arriving from the border, and has twice asked the Pentagon for permission to deploy some of the DC National Guard to help in that effort. Thus far the request has been denied, though FEMA has provided assistance to the city for accommodating new arrivals.

SPORTS

By the time you read this, one of the most interesting and successful careers in sports history will have come to a close. Serena Williams, who once spent 186 consecutive weeks as the number one-ranked tennis player in the world, retired after her final appearance at the U.S. Open in September.

Williams, and her sister Venus, burst onto the scene in 1995, turning pro at the age of 13. In 2017, she won her 23rd Grand Slam title, passing Steffi Graf for most in the modern tennis era. Margaret Court, who played in the 1960s and 70s, has 24...if Williams wins this final U.S. Open, she will have tied that all-time record.

Williams has also won 14 major women's doubles titles, all playing with Venus, and the pair are unbeaten in Grand Slam doubles finals. King Richard, a film about the sisters and their father Richard, who has also been their coach, was nominated for Best Picture at last year's Oscars.



High gas prices are displayed at a Mobil station in Los Angeles in March 2022. *Source: vimbuzz.com*



Mayor Muriel Bowser. *Source: Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images*



Serena Williams. *Source: Getty Images*



MEDITATION: ABUNDANCE

By Kelli

I think a lot of times we think of wealth in terms of a pie. If he or she takes a big piece, there is less for me. But when we think of wealth more broadly as opportunities, experiences, love, friendship, support, physical, mental and emotional health, it turns out there is an infinite amount available – there can be enough for everyone. And the beauty is that this type of wealth can be intentionally created. This meditation is meant to create a sensation of abundance in your mind.

Are you ready? Find a comfortable position, take a deep breath and let's go...

Imagine you are walking on a mountain trail, in the soft glow of the sun that streaks through openings in the tree canopy above. The gentle wind causes the branches and boughs to sway in rhythm. The pleasant scent of the fir trees intoxicates you as you deeply inhale the air.

Pay attention to your breath as you inhale the abundant oxygen. After breathing in through your nose, hold it for a moment, and then slowly release the air through your mouth as you continue along the trail.

As you're walking you notice many signs of abundance. You see gigantic dark green fir trees as far as the eye can see. They provide enough shade for your comfort as you hike. And in the clearing, you come upon a field of gorgeous wildflowers in all colors of the rainbow. You can hear the soft hum of bees that feed on the flowers' nectar and collect and spread loads of pollen to keep the production cycle going, ensuring the growth of future flowers... Finches and sparrows land and pick up seeds before flying off to disperse them across the land.

You feel a part of the world's ecosystem. You feel motivated to protect these resources. And you know that if we treat these resources with respect, there will be enough for everyone to be wealthy beyond their wildest dreams.

At the edge of the wildflower field, you discover rows of thick blackberry bushes covering nearly an acre of ground. The berries are plump, juicy and perfectly ripe. You pick one and pop it into your mouth. You close your eyes as the sweet juice of the berry as you bite into it. Pulling a cloth bag from your backpack, you begin to pick berries and fill the bag all the way up to the top.

You hear the faint sound of voices in the distance. You cinch the bag closed and begin to follow the sound. As you get closer, the voices grow louder and you hear people laughing. At the edge of a creek, you find a group of people of all ages and backgrounds seated around an enormous oak picnic table. When they see you, they call out to you, waving... A child beckons you with his little hand to come closer. Normally, this might feel strange, but these people are all smiling and they are genuinely happy to see you. You feel welcome. They want to know all about you and your life and invite you to join the picnic.

You sit down at their table which is covered with so much food. Fresh homemade bread with butter sits next to a plate of freshly caught and grilled fish. You share your berries with your new friends and they appreciate your generosity. There is an enormous salad, corn on the cob, and a platter overflowing with cakes and cookies and sweets. One of the women brings a large bucket of icy cold water she has collected from a spring and pours everyone a glass. You feel a warm breeze blow across your skin as you drink the water which quenches your thirst.

The sun begins to drop in the sky, and the shadows lengthen. When everyone has eaten their fill, and has talked and laughed until they are sleepy, you and your new friends clean up the table and gather the leftovers and trash. The little boy points up into the sky which is now dotted with an infinite number of stars. It's been a day full of riches.

You feel comfortable. You have the sense that you have enough. That there is plenty. That you are enough. You feel abundance!

REENTRY PROFILE

By Keela

The Free Minds Credit Builders Program was established in 2020 as a way to give our members a head start in establishing credit. We recognized that today's economy runs on credit, and if anyone wants to get a mortgage for a house or a student loan to pay for college, or if you just want to do something as simple as charge your lunch on a credit card, you're going to need a lender to extend you a line of credit. However, even if you're not in the market for a loan, having good credit can still have a major impact. Landlords, insurers, and employers often use credit information as a litmus test to see if the people they're dealing with are reliable and responsible and in these instances, bad credit can suggest you're a risky bet. So as usual, we want to have y'all backs and help set you guys up for success, and it was through that passion that the Free Minds Credit Builders Program was birthed. As part of the Credit Builders Program, members who are working and have no established credit can get a secure credit line to get them started. As they work to build credit and pay their bills, they can graduate to their own unsecured credit line. I had the opportunity to chat with Lester, a Free Minds member who joined the Credit Builders Program in 2020 and here's how that conversation went!

Keela: Les, when did you join the Credit Builders Program?

Lester: I joined the Credit Builders Program in June 2020.

Keela: What motivated you to join?

Lester: I joined because I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to build my credit. However, when I first started the program, I wasn't taking it seriously, but the more I attended the meetings, I started to see the full benefits of the program and how it could actually change things for the better for me and started to really lean in and get invested.

Keela: What are some of the things you learned while

in the program?

Lester: One of the biggest things that I learned was how to manage my money, that was huge, I also learned how to make a budget and save. I never realized how important these things were until I joined the program.

Keela: In what ways have learning these principles helped you?

Lester: It has helped me to actually build my credit and helped to make me more financially responsible because at one point, I would spend all of my money without any clear goals in sight.

Keela: What are some of those goals?

Lester: My goal is to start a cleaning business and being in the Credit Builder program helped to set that goal in motion because it gave me the business mindset that I needed in order to be in position to accomplish that goal.

Keela: Lastly, would you recommend fellow Free Minds members to join the Credit Builder program and if yes, why?

Lester: I would certainly recommend the Credit Builder program to members because I saw what it did for me, helped me to gain a better perspective on credit, helped me to manage and save money, and gave me a business mindset, which helped me have a desire to open my own business. So absolutely yes!

****If any Free Minds member is interested in joining the Credit Builders program once you're home, the only requirements are being employed with no established credit****

QUOTE-I-VATOR

"We have yet to confront and solve the international problems created by our wealth in a world still largely hungry and miserable."

- Martin Luther King, Jr., leader in the American Civil Rights Movement

"Wealth is of the heart and mind. Not the pocket."

- Pharrell Williams, Virginia-born producer and entrepreneur

"We have the blessing of the wealth of our vast resources, the power of our talents and the potentialities of our people. Let us grasp now the opportunities before us and meet the challenge to our survival."

- Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, first democratically elected president of Ghana

"The first wealth is health." - Ralph Waldo Emerson, American essayist

"Let the world blot / obliterate remove so-called / magnificence / so-called / almighty/ fathomless / and everlasting / treasures / wealth / (whatever that may be) / it is this time / that matters." - June Jordan, Black American poet and feminist



Pharrell Williams



DID YOU KNOW?

Budgeting: Key Steps to Financial Stability

By Jamilah

It took me several years after returning from the federal prison camp, Alderson, in 2010 to learn the concept of budgeting. Even after spending 10 years of my life in banking, I could never get it right for my own household. After my years in banking and my short stay at Alderson, I decided to attend culinary school (a local program in DC where I was born and raised). That program is where I realized my place as a returning citizen: in social services through Workforce Development. I soon learned that an important part of Workforce Development and pursuing my career goals successfully included practicing the key steps to financial stability – budgeting.

Free Minds has allowed me to join their amazing team of reentry Coaches as the Reentry Specialist this summer. I would like to share with you some of those key steps to budgeting that have been working for me.

Getting Started:

- Review your current cash inflow (earnings) and outflow (spending) for yourself and your household.
- Decide what changes are needed to improve your cash flow
- Designate an amount to put aside in savings to work on your financial goals.
- Estimate how much money it will take to fulfill your financial goals.

Fixed Expenses:

Fixed expenses are expenses that you must pay every month, like rent and utilities.

- You should have a good idea of the amount needed to cover these expenses each month.

Plan for big, fixed expenses that might not happen every month.

- Example: Car insurance

Even if an expense is fixed, sometimes you can still make changes.

- For example, how might you lower your utility expenses?

Flexible Expenses:

Flexible expenses are those you can choose how much and when you spend.

- Examples: buying clothing or eating out

Some expenses can be flexible but also hard to control, like paying to service your car today or paying for a bigger repair later. (*Savings help cover these hard-to-control flexible expenses.*)

Making Savings a Fixed Expense:

We are more familiar with the formula

"Earnings - Spending = Savings"

The smart way to allow for unexpected expenses and financial goals is ***"Earnings - Savings = Spending"***

It is recommended to divide up your money strategically. Here are the suggested percentages to follow when creating your monthly income/cash inflow budget:

- Savings 10%
- Housing 35%
- Food 15%
- Transportation 15%
- Other Living Expenses 25%

Be Budget Wise:

- Know your average monthly income.
- Learn and practice how to manage your "must-haves"
- Keep your "wants" under control
- Be sure to actively save and invest in your future
- Make sure outflow is less than inflow and know what changes or adjustments are needed to meet your monthly budget goals.
- Keep in mind you will have income ups & downs
- Remember the way you earn and spend your money should reflect your values and priorities!

A Simple Monthly Budget Worksheet

(show to the right)

This budget worksheet can help you plan and evaluate your expenses. It can be used to budget for a specific period of time (such as weekly, biweekly, or monthly) according to your pay schedule. Because income and expenses can vary from week to week, month to month, prepare a new budget each and every week or month. Enter all income and expenses each time you prepare a budget.

INCOME	PLANNED	ACTUAL
Wages/Salaries (after taxes)		
Other income		
Total income		

EXPENSES	PLANNED	ACTUAL
Savings		
Food		
Mortgage or rent		
Utilities		
Transportation		
Insurance		
Telecom/cell phone		
Childcare		
Medical		
Payment on loans		
Clothing		
School expenses		
Other expenses		
TOTAL EXPENSES		
TOTAL INCOME - TOTAL EXPENSES		

CELEBRATING MEMBERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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

- ★ JG is taking college classes and made the Dean's List with a 4.0 GPA!
- ★ MV was accepted into a certification program to become an alcohol and drug counselor!
- ★ JK just completed an apprenticeship program for Office Manager/Admin Services!

Please share your accomplishments with us to be featured!

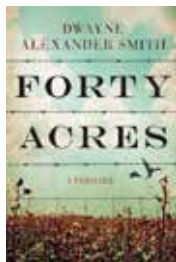
WHAT WE'RE READING

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."

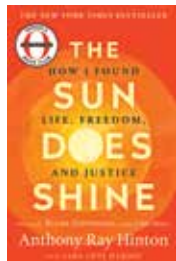
- **BG: *40 Acres* by Dwayne Alexander Smith**

I wasn't expecting to enjoy this novel, but by the middle of the book I was fully invested and couldn't wait to see what twist was waiting at the end. The book is about Martin Grey, a Black lawyer who becomes friendly with a group of some of the most powerful and wealthy Black men in America. They invite him for a weekend away from it all – no wives, no cell phones, no talk of business. But far from home and cut off from everyone he loves, Martin finds out that his glittering new friends are part of a secret society dedicated to the preservation of the institution of slavery – but this time around, the Black men are called "Master." Joining them seems to guarantee a future without limits; rebuking them almost certainly guarantees his death. Trapped inside a picture-perfect, make-believe world that is home to a frightening reality, Martin must find a way out that will allow him to stay alive without becoming the very thing he hates.



- **Julia: *Bird Uncaged: An Abolitionist's Freedom Song* by Marlon Peterson**

I recently read *Bird Uncaged: An Abolitionist's Freedom Song* by Marlon Peterson. *Bird Uncaged* is a memoir about Marlon's experiences growing up in Brooklyn, NY, and serving 10 years beginning at age 19. While incarcerated, Marlon became deeply involved in education and activism. It was especially interesting to me to read about how he designed a curriculum to work with an Inside/Out style program with students coming in from a local college to study alongside Marlon and others in the New York prison facility. I appreciated his insight and found this to be a moving personal story.



- **Neely: *Guantanamo Voices: True Accounts from the World's Most Infamous Prison* edited by Sarah Mirk**

This graphic novel is an anthology of interviews with people whose lives have been shaped by Guantanamo Bay, the US military prison in Cuba that has been used to house people convicted of terrorism against the US since 2002. The book features interviews with people currently and formerly incarcerated there, military officials, attorneys, and more. Most people sent to Guantanamo Bay, and a majority of those who are still housed there, were never charged with a crime or went to trial. This book amplifies the injustices, inhumane treatment, misunderstandings, and targeted attacks against hundreds of people believed to be associated with Islamic terrorism, many of whom were accused simply because of the color of their skin and religious beliefs. It was eye-opening and powerful.

- **AHA: *The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row* by Anthony Ray Hinton**

This book is a must read. How he found life, freedom, and justice after being falsely convicted as an innocent man to death in Alabama is remarkable. How he overcame, fought, and lived through the nightmare he was living. Because of this man and the likes of Bryan Stevenson, I believe the death penalty will end in America one day. This is the most amazing and heartwarming story I have ever read, and showed me how one man's journey can open many eyes to what this system really is.

ANNOUNCEMENT: BOOKS HALL OF FAME!

In our first issue of the year (Wellbeing), we asked you, our readers, to nominate your all-time favorite books to the Free Minds Books Hall of Fame. Please continue to send us your book nominations or votes for the nominees along with your reasons why you think it belongs in the FMBHoF! We'll announce the top choices at the end of the year.

Our current nominees for the FMBHoF:

- *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein
- *The Autobiography of Malcolm X As Told to Alex Haley*
- *David Walker's Appeal* by David Walker
- *Blood In My Eye* by George Jackson
- *The Throne of Glass* series by Sarah J. Maas
- *The Godfather* by Mario Puzo
- *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand
- *Standing at the Scratch Line* by Guy Johnson
- *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
- *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones
- *The Richest Man in Babylon* by George S. Clason
- *The Matarese Circle* by Robert Ludlum
- *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson
- *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela
- *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah



What books would you recommend for the Hall of Fame?

BUILDING BONDS THROUGH BOOKS: REQUEST BOOKS FOR YOUR CHILDREN! WRITE BACK NOW!

By Emily, Free Minds friend

Reading can be a powerful tool to nourish us individually and books can help strengthen our understanding, compassion, and familial bonds. The simple act of reading with a child is an important tool in creating a bond between parent and child. Incarceration is a difficult subject to explain to a child, and books can be a way to help bridge the gap between parent and child and explain the situation in a more sensitive way.

Building Bonds Through Books would like to offer Free Minds parents and their children the opportunity to receive a children's book that speaks about parental incarceration and some additional resources. Parents can either request a copy for themselves and their child or just for themselves. These books can be a resource for parents struggling to explain their incarceration to their child or a bonding tool. You may pick any **one** of the three books below for yourself and your child(ren).



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

If you are interested, please write your request to:

Building Bonds through Books

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

When you reach out, please include the title of the book you want and your mailing address.

If you wish to send the book to your child, please also include their name, age, **their guardians' contact information (phone/email address)**, and mailing address. We will be asking for their guardian's permission before sending the books, so please make sure to include this information!

Due to limited supplies, I am only able to send one book per request (and one book per child) so please make sure to only request your favorite book for me to send to you, your child, or both.

AROUND THE WORLD: ISRAEL

By Zoe, Free Minds Intern

This past May, I had the opportunity to go on a Birthright trip to Israel through my university. I honestly had no idea what to expect from this trip and was very close to bailing on it just a week before I had to leave. But, I gathered the courage to go and I can honestly say that it was one of the most impactful experiences of my life.

Taglit-Birthright Israel, also known as Birthright Israel or simply Birthright, is a not-for-profit educational organization that sponsors a ten-day heritage trip to Israel, Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights for young adults of Jewish heritage, ages 18 to 32. Taglit is the Hebrew word for "discovery." The idea behind Birthright is to connect young Jewish people around the world to help build connections to Israel, nurture strong and proud Jewish identities, and strengthen the Jewish future.

For me personally, this trip was about connecting to my Jewish identity in a way in which I had never had the opportunity to before, and to be able to create a community of Jewish friends at my university. I have never been a very religious person and after this trip I still would not consider myself to be very religious, but it gave me the opportunity to explore this side of my identity and my history in a way that I never have.

Given that this experience had such a positive impact on me, I want to share other programs similar to the one I was very fortunate to go on. In 2015, Birthright Africa was founded. Its mission is to inspire youth and young adults of African descent to explore their cultural roots and

legacy of innovation within the United States and select nations in Africa as a birthright. I think that creating other programs like Birthright Israel and Birthright Africa would be incredible in helping youth connect to their heritage, culture, and history.

I love to travel and traveled often with my family, but this trip to Israel was one of the first trips I went on since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was so happy to be able to travel and have some semblance of "normal."

As I said before, the trip was ten days and the program was filled with lots of activities all day so that we could see as much as possible. Israel is a very small country; it is around the same size as the state of New Jersey (so small!), so we were able to see a lot of the country in a short amount of time.

First, we spent four nights in the north taking several day trips to places such as Safed and doing fun activities like cherry picking and rafting down the Jordan River.

Then, we spent two days and one night in Tel Aviv. We went to the neighboring city, Jafa, which is an ancient port city. Here are pictures of spices from a market we visited in Tel Aviv (right), a view of the city of Tel Aviv from Jafa (above), and some hummus and pita that I ate in Tel Aviv (right). Since the city is right on the water we were also able to swim at the beach! Tel Aviv is filled with a rich history and culture.

The next day, we went to the desert and slept in tents. While in the desert we had the opportunity to ride camels! This

was my favorite part of the whole trip! In the photo to the right you can see the camel I rode. The next morning we hiked Masada which is 1,424 feet (434 meters) tall. At the top of Masada, there are ruins from ancient palaces and forts.

After a long day of hiking, we cooled off by swimming in the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is the lowest land-based place on Earth. Despite its name, the Dead Sea is actually not a sea, but a hypersaline lake. No life forms (plants or living creatures) can survive in its waters, although it does contain microbial life. Because of the high levels of saline (salt) in the water, you can naturally float. It was one of the most strange sensations I have ever experienced. If you lift up your legs even just slightly, your whole body floats to the top. Fun fact: you can't put your face in the water because the salt will burn your eyes.

During our last two days in Israel, we were in Jerusalem where we learned a lot about the history and various groups that have held claim to Jerusalem over the years. The history was fascinating. Jerusalem is revered by three religions - Islam, Judaism, and Christianity - and as such has been a site of many violent conflicts for generations. One of the most well-known of these is the Crusades, a series of medieval wars in the early 1000s directed by the Latin church. The history of Jerusalem is complex; let us know if you would like to read more about it.

After our visit to Jerusalem, it was time to go home. As I look back now on the trip I treasure the experiences that I had and the new friends that I made. I feel very fortunate to have had an opportunity like this. You learn so much from visiting a place, and I hope you all will have the same opportunity I did!



Left to right: Hummus and pita, Spices from a market in Tel Aviv.



The camel I rode.

THE PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT

You know we love to "connect" our Free Minds members with as many resources and opportunities as we can. Check out this opportunity to learn more about journalism and submit your writing to the Prison Journalism Project! If you are interested, write to them at the address below to get a copy of their submissions guide.

Today most stories about prison are written with an outside perspective. Prison Journalism Project publishes stories by incarcerated writers and others who know the system from the inside and want to take the power of journalism into their own hands, learn the craft of journalistic storytelling and share their stories of life behind bars.

Each incarcerated person who expresses interest in writing for PJP receives a detailed submissions guide that includes writing prompts. As they submit stories, we share journalism training handouts that we have developed, including an instructional newsletter by a former Reuters editor with four decades of experience. This fall, we sent each writer a copy of PJP x Inside, a print newspaper embedded with training tips for incarcerated writers and their communities.

Contact:

Prison Messaging

We are on JPay, Securus, Corrlinks, GTL Connect Network and GTL Getting Out. Our email is pjp@prisonjournalismproject.org

Postal mail for WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Prison Journalism Project
2093 Philadelphia Pike #1054
Claymont, DE 19703

Postal mail for HEADSHOTS, PHOTOS AND ART (DO NOT SEND stories to this address unless they are accompanied by art):

PJP Art Department
2624 Alcatraz Ave., #328
Berkeley, CA 94705

FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB & WRITING WORKSHOP

1816 12th Street NW
Washington, DC 20009

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: BELONGING

By Julia

Our next issue of the *Connect* will focus on the idea of BELONGING. What does it mean to you to belong – to a place, a group, or a community? There's a term that some people say now called an "affinity group," which means a group of people linked by a common identity, interest, or purpose. What affinity groups might you belong to? Besides Free Minds, of course!

Tara likes to say that Free Minds is all about "books and belonging." Have you ever felt that sense of belonging after connecting on the page (with an author or character in a book, with a person writing a letter, or even with the reader of one of your poems)? Another Free Minds member, YA, once wrote a poem called "Belonging to Love" that I think of often. In the poem he writes, "I want to belong to something / to something positive / to something that makes me grow." What do you want to belong to?

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!



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