

January/February/March 2025
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Free minds Connect



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: BETTER TOGETHER

Dear Free Minds Forward-Thinkers!

I hope you are in strong spirits not only for today but for all your tomorrows too, in keeping with the theme of this issue: The Future! Ever since I was a little kid, I always wanted to be a prognosticator, telling anyone who would listen what I thought lay ahead. Unfortunately, my self-appointed "seer" status didn't quite pan out (we usually didn't win the game, get a certain toy from Santa, or have sunshine on the field trip day 😊), but it never stopped my fascination and curiosity about all things futuristic. I love watching shows like the Jetsons, Star Trek, and Black Mirror, and am constantly checking if foretold inventions have come true (whatever happened to flying cars?). There's a saying I like that has been attributed to management consultant Peter Drucker: *"The best way to predict the future is to create it."* It is with great confidence that I predict the creation of this captivating issue will rank as one of your favorites!

This issue is filled with the imagination of our FM community, drawing upon the vision of science fiction storytellers, Afrofuturist writers, Indigenous futurists, and community organizers. As Free minds member RB wrote to us recently, "Free Minds fam, you always come through. Your timing is always on point." Consider starting your time with Kelli's meditation on page 29, which can really help with manifesting a positive future. On page 16, Rebecca speaks with Arielle, a high school senior who is two years into running her own climate change nonprofit. She discusses what inspired her to start Changing Planet Justice, and talks about the *"millions of kids and adults who are in the climate movement who are doing what they can in their own way,"* incrementally paving the way for a cleaner, healthier future environment for us all.

In "Real World of Work" on page 18, Jennifer interviews Terrell about his job as a Campaign and Advocacy Fellow at the DC Justice Lab, where he is

currently working on a project focused on passing legislation for DC residents housed at the DC Jail to be able to testify at DC Council hearings. Hearing directly from those most impacted by policy changes first is essential for legislators to pass effective laws in the future. On page 33, you'll read about how LaVander used art as a way to cope with his incarceration and at the same time create a future plan for when he came home. Join Carlos in conversation with Wayne Wayne on page 8, about how he persevered through 32 years behind the walls. He never stopped imagining and believing his future would include his freedom and being with his soulmate, whom he recently married. He shares, *"If it wasn't for always having our eyes fixed on the future, we would not be here as a family together."* Congratulations Wayne Wayne! One of Free Minds favorite authors, the creative genius Octavia Butler (author of *Kindred*, *Parable of the Sower*, and many more books) never stopped fixing her eyes on past racial injustices and oppression in the US, which made for keen insights into futures that she so vividly dreamed up in her books (page 14). We hope that the stories in this issue inspire you to start dreaming, writing, and sharing your own visions.

MG shares his beautiful wish for all in his poem "My Future Vision." Read the full poem on page 12.

My dreams are of a future where all that are living
can safely, happily
Plan for their future without the worries of their
lives being cut short
Where they can dare to be great while chasing
their aspirations

Until Next Time,
Tara

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

Next Issue's Theme: Goals

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!

Free Minds Book Club

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Club & Writing Workshop, 2025

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FREE MINDS HQ

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

By Sofia

Free Minds Hosts Monthly "Free Write" Events for Reentry Members

The Free Minds team has been holding monthly "Free Write" events for members in our Reentry Book Club (RBC) since this past September. During the Free Writes, RBC members and Free Minds staff have time set aside to work on any personal writings while being in community with one another. The Free Minds staff provides new writing prompts for each session, as well as publishing and performing opportunities, and a list of other writing resources and workshops in the community. Free Writes are open to members regardless of where they are located because they can either join in person at our office, or through Zoom, a virtual video conferencing platform. Everyone is invited to share what they have been working on if they are comfortable doing so. We hope to see you at a Free Write session soon!

Free Minds Changemakers Travel to Boston for Emerging Adults Conference

Co-Founder and Executive Director of Free Minds, Tara, traveled to Boston alongside Free Minds members and Changemakers, James and Curtis, for the Emerging Adults Justice Innovation Site Convening Conference. James was representing Thrive Under 25, a transformative coalition that uses advocacy, legislation, and public education to support young adults under 25 who are in the criminal legal system. Free Minds is a founding member of this coalition. The conference included experts and practitioners who work on issues relating to justice-involved emerging adults (ages 18-25). Curtis spoke during the conference, shedding light on his first-hand experiences with the criminal legal system and was extremely well received.

Free Minds Poet Ambassadors Meet "On the Same Page" With Reentry Coach and Professor Jennifer's Class at American University

Free Minds Reentry Coach, Jennifer, has been teaching a course at American University on the topic of mass incarceration. The class is specifically for students taking part in a program where they come from all over the country to study and work in Washington, DC for a semester. Jennifer has made it a point to have the students learn about the criminal legal system from those with firsthand experience, so for the first day of class, she invited Free Minds Poet Ambassadors Keonte, Regina, and James to share their experiences and answer questions. Keonte, Regina, and James each read their own poems in addition to poems written by Free Minds members who are currently incarcerated. Keonte was able to shed light on the experiences of being incarcerated and home in reentry as someone under the age of 25, while Regina could speak specifically to the experiences of a woman being incarcerated. James was able to highlight the experience of being incarcerated for decades as well as the impact of the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act, which allowed him to have a reduction in his sentence. The students were engaged throughout the session and asked a variety of questions related to mass incarceration. After the session, the students took home poems written by our members currently incarcerated, which they will leave positive comments on that the Free Minds staff will mail back to our members.



In Loving Memory

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

Rest in Power:

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

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 August/September 2024 Connect Liberation, and the November/December 2024 Connect Community.

JJ: The book I'm reading now is *The Four Agreements* and there's a lot of wisdom in a lot of the book and I really enjoy reading it because it gives me an understanding on life.

RB: Free Minds fam, you always come through. Your timing is always on point- whether it's the bi-monthly magazines, letters, puzzles, acknowledging DC facts and history, or the many books geared towards my particular interests as well as the various titles introduced via "Books Across the Miles" or "What We're Reading" which opens my mind to many other genres.

AC: I really like the seamless transition of the Ancestors issue into the Liberation issue writing prompts. I like that concept of seeing the future and the concept of visualizing our future selves giving a message to our present selves, or the idea of describing a future that has already arrived.

CS: *Washington Black* was a great book and honestly I wouldn't have picked it up if it wasn't for you guys at Free Minds. I really appreciate the program. It helps more than you know.

AHA: The Liberation issue was another well put together issue. I enjoyed it like I always do. Every poem and article showed what liberation means to us all.

MR: The previous BAM book *The Other Wes Moore* was fire. It's amazing how small our world can become due to things that are circumstantial, or divinely put in place to serve greater purpose! I was blown away for real.

AW: I just received the Community issue of the Free Minds *Connect*. I enjoyed it, learned from it, as I do all issues, and was inspired. Inspired especially by the next issue's theme: The Future. I just completed Julia's piece on her trip to the Philippines. Once I read it, I began to meditate and imagine myself there on the white sand beaches of Boracay. I was there, as I read. I was there in my imagination, even though I have an authentic fear of large bodies of water, but I allowed myself to venture beneath the surface and explore the beautiful coral reefs, unafraid. Thank you for the adventure.

QUOTE-I-VATOR

"The future rewards those who press on. I don't have time to feel sorry for myself. I don't have time to complain. I'm going to press on."

- Barack Obama, 44th U.S. President



Barack Obama

"The essence of optimism is that it takes no account of the present, but it is a source of inspiration, of vitality and hope where others have resigned; it enables a man to hold his head high, to claim the future for himself and not to abandon it to his enemy." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German Lutheran Pastor, Neo-Orthodox Theologian, Anti Nazi Dissident

"Map out your future - but do it in pencil. The road ahead is as long as you make it. Make it worth the trip." - Jon Bon Jovi, American Singer, Songwriter, and Guitarist

"Life is divided into three terms - that which was, which is, and which will be. Let us learn from the past to profit by the present, and from the present, to live better in the future."

- William Woodsworth, English Poet

"Without forgiveness, there is no future." - Desmond Tutu, South African Theologian and Priest

"Happy is the person who knows what to remember from the past, what to enjoy in the present, and what to plan for the future." - Arnold H. Glasow, American Author

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

- Eleanor Roosevelt, Former First Lady of the United States

"You are always free to change your mind and choose a different future, or a different past."

- Richard Bach, American Writer

"You can't let your past hold your future hostage."

- LL Cool J, American Rapper and Actor



JUST LAW: IRAA – CURRENT CASE LAW UPDATE PART 2

By Tim

In 2016, the Council of the District of Columbia enacted the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act ("IRAA"), which allows for persons serving a term of imprisonment for violations of the law they committed before they were 25 years old to seek modification of their sentence. This information is provided as a reminder to men and women who are seeking reduction of their sentences and release pursuant to IRAA to stay on point with their research and up to date with current case law. Below, a summary is provided of two interesting recent (2024) IRAA cases decided by the DC Court of Appeals.

CASE A:

The District of Columbia Court of Appeals reviewed an appeal for a reduced sentence under the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA). The appellate court found that the trial court had applied an outdated version of the IRAA and failed to consider critical expert testimony.

The appellant was convicted of first-degree murder in 1991, when he was twenty-one years old, for which he was sentenced to a lifetime in prison. Having spent more than three decades imprisoned for an offense he committed in his relative youth, he is now eligible for a sentence reduction under the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act, and he thus moved for IRAA resentencing. Beyond mere eligibility, an inmate seeking IRAA relief must demonstrate that they are no longer a danger to the community and that the interests of justice warrant a sentence reduction. The trial

court denied his request for a sentence reduction after holding an evidentiary hearing and considering all of the relevant IRAA factors. See D.C. Code § 24-403.03(c)(1-11). While it found that a number of factors favored a sentence reduction, one overriding consideration precluded it from finding that he was non-dangerous: his disciplinary record while imprisoned.

- **Background of the Case:** The appellant was serving a life sentence for a first-degree murder committed at age 21, filed a motion for a reduced sentence under the IRAA, which the Superior Court denied, leading to his appeal.
- **Trial Court's Errors:** The trial court applied an outdated version of the IRAA, incorrectly counting the lack of an adult accomplice as a factor against him.
- **Expert Testimony Overlooked:** The trial court failed to consider expert testimony from a former Bureau of Prisons warden who stated that he had substantially complied with prison rules and was not a danger to the community.
- **Disciplinary Record Misinterpreted:** The trial court focused on his disciplinary infractions, particularly incidents in 2016 and 2021, but did not adequately address the expert's interpretation of these records.
- **Appellate Court's Decision:** The Court of Appeals vacated the trial court's decision and remanded the case for further consideration, instructing the trial court to address the expert testimony directly.

- **Additional Issues:** The appellate court rejected his other claims, including procedural complaints about the hearing being rushed and technical difficulties during his testimony, as these issues were not raised at the trial court level.
- **Future Proceedings:** The trial court on remand may reopen the record to consider any new evidence but must directly address the expert's testimony regarding his disciplinary record.
- **Trial Court's Decision:** The trial court found that he was not sufficiently rehabilitated, and that immediate release was not in the interests of justice, citing the victim's family's opposition, his weak release plan, and his letter to the court.
- **Appeal Review Standard:** The Court of Appeals reviewed the trial court's decision for abuse of discretion, examining whether relevant factors were considered, improper factors were relied upon, and if the reasons given reasonably supported the conclusion.

CASE B:

The appellant's appeal for immediate release under the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA) was denied by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals, which affirmed the trial court's decision to reduce his sentence but not grant immediate release.

After serving twenty-six years in prison for a crime he committed when he was twenty-three years old, the appellant moved for a reduction in his sentence under the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA), D.C. Code § 24-403.03. The trial court reduced his sentence so as to make him immediately eligible for a parole hearing but declined to release him. He argues that the trial court abused its discretion by not ordering immediate release. The DC Court of Appeals disagreed with him and affirmed the Superior Court Judge's decision.

- **Background and Appeal:** The appellant, after serving 26 years for a 1997 conviction of first-degree murder and other charges, filed a motion under IRAA for a sentence reduction, which the trial court partially granted by making him eligible for a parole hearing but denied immediate release.
- **Standard of Proof:** The Court of Appeals presumed the trial judge applied the correct standard of proof, preponderance of the evidence, despite not specifying it, and found no indication of applying a higher standard.
- **Affirmation of Trial Court's Decision:** The Court of Appeals affirmed the trial court's decision to grant a limited sentence reduction, making him eligible for a parole hearing but not immediate release.

We hope that these updates have been useful to you. Please let us know if you have any questions for future Just Law columns!

CELEBRATING MEMBERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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

- ★ VL passed his Driver's License test
- ★ CL got his GED
- ★ DR graduated high school
- ★ GB's mural was featured in a local elementary school
- ★ JT graduated from college
- ★ JB was promoted to supervisor at his job
- ★ KT graduated from a construction program, where he earned his Flagger, First Aid, OSHA 10, and Core credentials
- ★ MP got his paralegal certification

Please share your accomplishments with us to be featured!

FAMILY TIES: INTERVIEW WITH DUANE

by Carlos

Greetings everyone. I pray that this finds you in the best of strength, both mentally and physically. There are times that the future seems so far away and at times dimmed, and while never losing sight of it gives hope and strength, we must keep moving forward toward a better future. Today I had the chance to talk to Duane (Wayne Wayne), who recently came home, and we talked about the future and a little of the past.

Carlos: Duane, welcome home and thank you for being here with us today. Tell me, how long have you been home now?

Duane: Thank you for having me here. I have been home 63 days now after serving 32 years before being released under IRAA (Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act). I was incarcerated at the age of 20; I am now 52.

Carlos: Wow! That's a lot of years. I was only able to be around you for a little bit of time, but one of the things that I always remember is that you were always writing something. What role did education play for you while you were incarcerated?

Duane: It meant everything! It is the reason why I am out now. I have a saying, "Learning is my heartbeat and knowledge is my path." I learned through education to be aware of things, to know things. It opens so many doors and avenues where you are never alone. When you read, you get to meet these characters whether they are fictional or real and you spend time with them and for that moment, the characters become a part of your life. Education is everything.

Carlos: Were you always interested or pulled by education or was that something you picked up in prison?

Duane: I was always smart, always wanting to learn. I was an honor roll student; education was fun to me! But growing up in the area where I did, needing the things that I needed, I was forced to make some decisions that someone at that age should have not been making. When you are young, it is easy to be impressionable. All sorts of crime took place in my neighborhood and it all was normal to us. So when you grow up around and those that are close to you were a part of this, you don't see it as something bad, you see it as normal, not negative. To us, it was a way of living sad to say.

Carlos: That's a very important point. Most people fail to understand that the conditions that we were forced to live in played a major role in the choices we made as youth. We

talk about it, not to justify our actions nor excuse them, but to highlight just as you said, that these things do have an impact on the choices we made while growing up. The thing about it is that even while growing up in these conditions, we always looked towards the future. When you hear the word future, as it relates to then and now, what does that mean to you?

Duane: When I was younger, I used to tell my brother all of the time that one of my top three goals was to make it to 21. So when I thought about my future then, that was my goal, to make it to 21. Now my goal is to make sure that my grandkids, my great nieces and nephews don't have to do the things that I was forced to and not have to go through what I did for 32 years. That's my future right there.

Carlos: I like how you added family to it, and I know you just recently got married to your long-time fiancée, now wife. What helped you maintain those ties of communication with your family throughout all of those years?

Duane: What helped me the most was letters. We were locked down a lot of the time so all that I had was the letters. Writing letters helped me express my emotions and keep close to my family and fiancée. She took her time to write back. I have to give the credit to her as well, because she did her part, a 50/50 thing. The family was always doing their thing as well, pictures, letters and emails. The telephone—when we were able to use it—helped as well. The emails, though slow, helped me say things in between and it kept me grounded and focused. Faith, belief and hope allowed us to keep looking to the future that we are living now. If it wasn't for always having our eyes fixed on the future, we would not be here as a family together.

Carlos: Tell me a little about the feeling of coming home. Because there was a point where the future and freedom seemed so far away. But look at you now, talking about grandkids and being out here for them as well as with them. What is that feeling like now and the future with them?

Duane: Every night I FaceTime my youngest grandchild. She is 14 months old. It is hard to put into words. My kids were 2 years old when I went to prison, now they are 34. So it feels good to be there with them, be there for them. But when I see them, I am like, "yeah, everything that I'm about to do, this journey I'm about to take is for you." Our family ties are strong. We have group chats and are always communicating with each other. We share as many moments as possible together and it only makes us stronger. Family to me is

everything! To my grandkids I'm not Wayne Wayne, I'm "Pop-Pop" and that feels great. I just smile. In the future, I see them being CEO's of the companies that I will leave behind for them, those that I am building right now. That is the future that I see.

Carlos: Glad to hear that you have a sight of what your future will be. What else is in your future?

Duane: Right now I'm working on starting my own businesses. I am also helping my wife's nonprofit. The name of her group is called "Single Lives for Prison Wives," created in 2016. Though I play a small role by getting people to join, I find it peaceful to be able to help other families with incarcerated loved ones by informing them of what prison truly looks like and educating them on what to do. It is also a space where they get to talk about what they are going through and learn from each other's experiences. I also add what I know and what I have been through. We talk about the different conditions as well as the different rules that the prisons have for things like visitation so they do not feel blindsided when they encounter those rules. Through the group, they get to know that they are not alone and they are not the only ones that are going through it while their loved ones are in prison. Giving the families an easier passage as they do their time with their loved ones.

Carlos: I know that there aren't many programs that cater to the families that are going through incarceration themselves, so to have a group that can help with all of that is important to the families as well as for their loved ones that are incarcerated. In a way, it gives a voice from the outside. Let me ask you something else about family. I'm realizing that you just spent your first holidays after 32 years with your family. Tell me about that, what was that like?

Duane: My family threw a Thanksgiving/Welcome Home Wayne Wayne celebration and I met so many different generations in that household. It was a great feeling to be connected with them in harmony and it's something that I was missing for a long time. I met people that were born while I was incarcerated, met their kids and at times it even felt surreal. It was special.

Carlos: Thank you so much for being with us. You have a great vision of the future, I wish you success in all of your endeavors.

DC PHOTOS *By Darrion* *As requested by our readers*



McPherson Square Park in NW DC

MEMBERS *CONNECT*: THE FUTURE

Traditionally Fun By PD

As a lifelong person obsessed with everything surrounding interior design and architectural design, I think it's only natural that when I picture my future self working, it would be in the design field. I have no formal training but I am blessed with a good eye and the gift of gab. My tastes lean towards traditional but not rigidly so. Picture bright bold colors for paint and wallpaper and wild fabrics on classic pieces of federal and Queen Anne furniture. I see myself being successful and building a nice business, and having a lot of fun doing it. Everyday will be different, which is so appealing. Some days may be spent researching the client's property that I am working on, absorbing its full history. Picking and choosing the perfect colors for the walls, fabric for the furniture, down to picking the perfect lamp. Meeting new people, developing relationships with vendors that turn into friendships that I can text, suggesting meeting for a glass of wine. At the end of a long busy productive day, I know that I will fall asleep quickly knowing I am happy, I love my job, and I am able to wake up the next morning and do it all over again.

A World Where Everyone Has the Freedom to Pursue Their Passions By AC

Today we celebrated "Education Day," one of my favorite holidays. Who would have imagined 17 years ago, in 2031, that this special day would be so meaningful to the entire nation: The day when the USA decided to help the people make their dreams come true. You dream of your future career, you apply yourself to it, you take vocational steps towards your goals and the USA government sponsors your school and career choices so that you can successfully pursue your passions without financial constraints. Today was the 17th anniversary of this amazing day, surprisingly it's not a day that's celebrated with alcohol, it's celebrated with family talks and planifications for education paths that will lead to the creation of businesses which will eventually yield family success. Today was a good day.

DC PHOTOS *By Darrion* *As requested by our readers*



Cars from the DC Auto Show that took place at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in NW DC January 31- February 9, 2025

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!

Our Advice Man TS is currently in transit so AA offered to fill in for him!

Dear Advice Man,

I am the mother of an 8 year-old daughter. A year and a half ago, we moved to DC from another state to get away from my husband who was abusive. We are separated, and when I was incarcerated, he was able to gain temporary custody of our daughter.

I have no other family members able to help. Because I have pending charges against him, my husband refuses to provide money for me to even call and speak to her. Even when I get access to a free call, he starts an argument and ends the call.

I desperately want to stay in touch with my daughter to maintain and nurture our bond, but he is standing in the way of this. He even blocked me on the Getting Out app, where I would be able to have a video call with her. I will be released in a few months and am working to put together funds to go pick her up. But how can I deal with this stress between now and then? I need my daughter to understand how much I love her!

Thank you for any advice or guidance you can offer.

**Sincerely,
S.H.**

Dear S.H.

Yes, even though you are currently incarcerated, you still have parental rights, including the right to visitation and legal custody. Losing physical custody because of incarceration does not terminate parental rights.

According to legal information website HG.org, "There are specific conditions necessary to force a spouse to bring children for visitation when the other parent is in jail or prison. These conditions include an emergency visitation order or court order requiring this person to follow through. However, the other parent can use the incarceration to try to sever visitation rights until the parent is out of prison." HG.org went further to explain emergency visitation as a situation "if the parent that has current custody of children is not willing to bring them to the jail or prison for the other parent, the judge in the court can order him or her to through an emergency visitation order. This will require the person to

bring the children to the penitentiary even without holding a hearing with the parent. This order usually only lasts up to 30 days. However, these orders are normally for the parent that is part of a domestic violence case and seeking emergency custody of children to get them away from the aggressor."

It is important to note that visitation rights are not a given when one parent goes to jail or prison and the other parent gains custody but, visitation and parental rights aren't terminated at the will of the parent who has just gained custody. Many times, it takes the custodial parent going to court and requesting that a judge legally terminate the incarcerated parent's visitation or parental rights for them to no longer be entitled to see their child.

Unless you are willing to file an emergency visitation order with the court, there is little that can be done to force your husband to either bring your daughter to visit you or to compel him to let you talk to her even though it's your right.

My advice will be to keep writing letters to your daughter. When you come home in a few months, you will have the opportunity to present her with all the letters. Also, Free Minds can help link you up with organizations that can assist you with enforcement of your parental rights.

I wish you and your daughter all the best.

*Sincerely,
Advice Man*

Editor's Note: Here are some additional ways Free Minds members have told us they have maintained an emotional connection with their children when they were unable to talk with them or see them on visits: writing a daily diary to your child as if you were talking to them, describing what you were doing, thinking about, dreaming about, and what your hopes for them are; writing a children's book with you and your child as characters, including how much you miss them and want to be in touch with them and any wisdom you would want to share with them; draw pictures, write poems, share books you recommend for them to read and letters addressed to them; you can save all of these creations to share with your child when you have the opportunity. This will make a difference!

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

My Future Vision

By MG

I have hopes and dreams for a future where all of the next generation
Are free from the bondage that threatens to deplete them,
Drugs and crime

I want to know that I no longer have to worry about if my children will
Fall victim to an overdose or die in a gun battle
Where a stray bullet claimed their lives

I have dreams of seeing a community take part in raising its youth
As one family, where the divide caused by melanin of the skin, or the
Lack thereof, play no part in how people are treated or classified

My dreams are of a future where all that are living can safely, happily
Plan for their future without the worries of their lives being cut short
Where they can dare to be great while chasing their aspirations

Equality and justice will only come about when we as a people
realize that we are more alike than we are different
That together we can accomplish any and everything
We put our minds to

In order to achieve this, we need to start by reaching out to the parents
Children are our most prized possession
And we must treat them as the precious gems they are

Through the parents, we can raise them to embrace all cultures
and creeds
Show them that the meaning of life is to love
The strongest emotion on the planet

We must show them that life is more precious
Than any amount of money
And it is the greatest feeling in the world

If we take this first step, we will conquer all of the injustices
That are prevalent today

Untitled

by AC

The world spun again last night;
Today, the sun has chosen to smile upon us with its warmth;
Tomorrow is not promised to me, nor you, nor anyone,
Yet something tells me those stars will hang
up there for one more day to bless us with their light.

Be free to see your freedom,
know you are free, these gifts of creation
are there for you to enjoy them,
you need only to open up your eyes and see.

Future Celebration

by AW

Picture me
My release from prison will be
A personal achievement worthy of celebration
with those folks who care in an open natural space,
sunshine in my face, smiling and dancing
and walking in a park somewhere-where?
I don't care,
just as long as I am not alone
and able to share that moment with all who care.

Hello Child

by CD

Although you're grown,
Stretching my heart into a wider smile,
Hello Child!

I can feel the rain of your tears heavy upon my chest.
So I hold you to comfort years of non-existence.

Indeed the physicalness was missing but the third eye has
never forgotten.

Then I rubbed your shoulders and kissed you on the forehead,
and when we finally released our embrace,
I witnessed the beauty of your smile radiating.

So let's tour the world hand in hand.

Let's delve into the mysteries of the ocean.

Then let's explore the dreams that it all began?

The bond between father and Child,

HELLO CHILD!

To my Daughter,

The apple of my eye.

Future

By DK

My future celebration is me celebrating my 1 year of freedom
and releasing my second poetry book.

I see my family, friends and Free Minds family all there and more.
I want to rent a ballroom and we are going to eat hot dogs,
hamburgers, chips etc.

I'm going to have a few speakers and poets to speak.

I'm then going to read a few poems from the book

Then I'm going to sign everybody's books and take pictures.

The Future

By JS

The future,
as elusive as the wind,
I can't see it but I can feel it coming.

I work hard to carry the burdens of my past,
like an oxen pulls a car.

The only thing certain about my future is that it will come to a halt,
as death overtakes,

like the sprinter that passes the other in a race,
the finish line is the grave, an unfortunate end,
to those that don't see the blessing,

like the hunter that feeds the hunted with its body,
the future is a part of a cycle that will overtake everybody,
we all live in the future, but none of us will ever see it,
we must plan for the future because how we act now
will determine who we will be,
in the future.

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Look Back by ER

Survived the tortuous journey through a land of waste
and greeted home to take my rightful place
Although I recognize the maternal face
Love felt foreign, being engulfed in a stranger's embrace

all because she said - DON'T LOOK BACK

A friend of mine seems to worry and insist that
I be kind to self
Time has changed us all, and the torment has
affected my mental health
I was confused as to did I betray her or myself?

She had tears in her eyes, saying - DON'T LOOK BACK

What do you know of survival, being dropped behind enemy lines?
Standing on business? Maintaining integrity? Or,
Banding with brothers through hard times?
You may have walked in other's shoes but don't
pretend to walk in mine

and never tell me - DON'T LOOK BACK

We all have scars, often the kind you can't see.
It could be survivor's remorse, anxiety, or PTSD.
I scorn your medicinal therapy
May cope with peer support. Could care less if you
question my sanity
Vowed to be all I can be
Salute my comrades lost. Never question my heart
or humanity.
To forget and move on isn't that easy

I will ALWAYS LOOK BACK

Hope In Our Future by MM

These spoken words,
protesting their way out of my mind like a thunder-clap!
They say that we should look towards the future in hope!
But we ask, why look to the future when tomorrow ain't promised?

I'm told health is wealth!
But why are our communities marginalized in health and wealth?
So does this mean that we're twice as poor,
due to poor health and ambiguous wealth?
Will all of our struggles and efforts to hurdle these margins
succeed in securing a better future for our offsprings?

This dark Black skin has been kissed by the sun!
Well maybe I should migrate this sun kissed Black behind back to
my motherland.
Maybe the land there, I cultivate to sow my seeds,
will yield an everlasting harvest,
to secure a more promising future for my offsprings to thrive
outside of, and above every margin created by the so-called elites
of this society.
Thrive like our ancestors did before enslavement.

These spoken words, protesting words
the sounds of thunder-clap,
saying never despairing of God's mercy in
Hope in our Future.

The Future RJ

We lost most of our heart in the Darkest Place...
So many years...
So many opportunities have passed...
So much so...
The past come around, birthdays, old-faces...
You, Me, Him, Her...
Caught-up in the world of Move after Move...
Darkness has been my heart...
Seeing the light of hope...
Hope of opportunities...
COME YOU...
See my Future...
Freedom from my Darkest Past...
My Heart has softened...
From the Harden of Hell...
Not caught-up in Wants, Pride, or Recognition...
FREEDOM...From that cycle that leads to that Dark-hole...
Mine, Yours, His, Hers...
The Future I see...
Step Young-Boy, Step...
And let Your Growth Show...

Free By TC

I see the future as something special in which I am governor of my
own land.
Within my own community.
A community that has been formed by many people that are family
and friends.
That I know respect the
traveling mind...
A community that holds one another to the standards in which they
all own.
They are loving and they are intertwined with each other's love.

They are one another's brother, sister, neighbor and friend...
They are a loving community of family.
This future holds the land in which they own and harvest.
They are cultivators of this land and
tillers toward the future far and beyond!

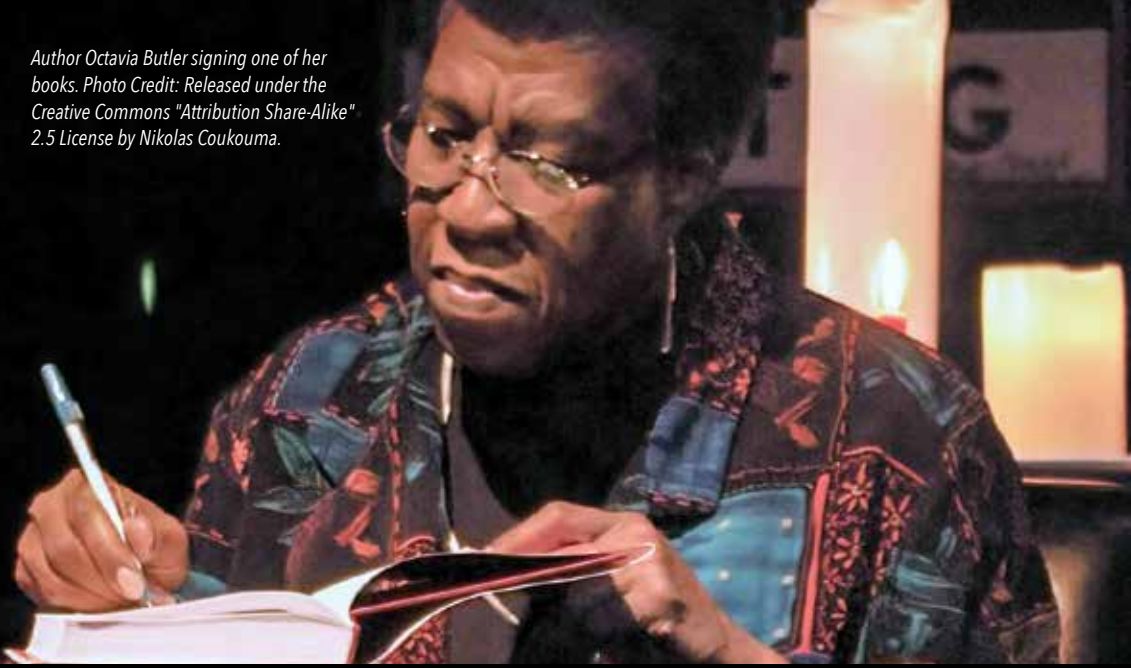
I plan to build a 10,000 square foot ranch style home sitting on
acres on top of acres.

As I travel toward the mountains beyond the horizon I taste the
sweetness of the love within.
Love that has become the lifetime partner in which holds the joyful
spirit of the journey before
us. Love that embraces the warmth of each step as we partake this
exotic and enticing
embarkment of intimacy..
To know a day that is perfect is to look at this love, to taste her kiss,
and to feel her warmth.
It is that which fantasies are made yet she is real as I am real to her.

She is my job and I work hard to keep her and to make her smile.
It is my one and only job to please her very existence and it is
most exciting!

I celebrate her and she is all that I need to celebrate with for she is
my biggest achievement.
I celebrate her each and every minute, for she is...
Loooooooooooooooooooooove!

Author Octavia Butler signing one of her books. Photo Credit: Released under the Creative Commons "Attribution Share-Alike" 2.5 License by Nikolas Coukouma.



THE WRITE WAY: TIPS FROM FOUR SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS

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

By Matty

Science fiction (sci-fi) is a genre of fiction that explores the impact of science and technology on society and the human experience, often incorporating futuristic aspects into the plot or setting. Since this issue is all about imagining new futures, we wanted to share some tips and perspectives on writing from four famous science fiction writers across the ages. Use these tips to refine or explore new approaches to your writing.

HEARING THE SOUND OF YOUR WRITING

Ursula K. Le Guin is an American speculative fiction author whose fantasy and science fiction writing explored social and political themes (such as race, gender, sexuality, and coming of age) and sometimes alternative political structures, such as in the utopian novel *The Dispossessed* (1974). In *Steering the Craft*, a book developed out of a writing workshop that Le Guin teaches, Le Guin offers self-guided exercises and discussions focused on the craft of narrative prose. One of the exercises involves practicing "Hearing the Sound of Your Writing." Have you ever read prose that feels rhythmic, almost musical? Le Guin says that all writers should work to refine the *sound* of their writing. Think about the placement and timing of words, the way they sound when read aloud, the way the rhythm of the sentence embodies the emotions

of the characters. One might use contrast – juxtapose (place close together for contrast) a choppy, jerky, or droning sentence with a lively, flowing, and well-paced one. Le Guin suggests this exercise:

"Write a paragraph to a page of narrative that's meant to be read aloud. Use onomatopoeia (a word meant to sound like what it describes, such as buzz or hiss), alliteration (words beginning with the same letter), rhythmic effects, made-up words or names, dialect – any kind of sound effect you like – but not rhyme or meter."

Imaginative and fictional elements of a story that feel *real* to the reader are very important to science fiction writing. The rhythm and music of your writing has the ability to embed your reader in the story through sound. *Hearing the sound of your writing* can be an excellent tool to refine your story. Or, you can use this concept as a writing prompt!

REFLECTION/REFRACTION: PLAYING AROUND WITH THE PAST/FUTURE IN YOUR WRITING

Samuel R. Delany is a writer and literary critic from New York City, famous for his fiction and nonfiction writings that span

the subjects of Afrofuturism, lesbian and gay studies, science fiction and fantasy. *Reflection and refraction (the action of distorting an image by viewing through a medium)* are common themes in his work – in imagery, text, and concept – for example, the prisms, mirrors, and lenses worn by several characters in his novel *Dhalgren* (1975). In the article “Why I Write,” Delany says that:

“Early on, I wrote because I began to realize (to borrow William Blake’s words from Proverbs of Hell), ‘Eternity is in love with the productions of time.’ It keeps producing them—and it keeps destroying them. As one reads, one learns that writing has a relationship with the past. Whether from half a second or half a century ago, all writing comes from the past. [...] Does one write for the future? I believe we have the best chance of future interest if we write as intensely as possible for the present.”

Delany’s relationship with the past, present, and future is where the “reflection” and “refraction” in his stories come alive. Science fiction is often about imagining the future (or re-imagining the past). How could you craft a narrative around your (or a character’s) relationship with the past or future? How is this reflected in your own writing?

PERSISTENCE, HABIT, AND INSPIRATION

Octavia Butler is an American author known for her blend of science fiction and African American Spiritualism. Born in 1947, she was the first science-fiction writer to receive the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 1997. Common themes in her writing include critique of hierarchy, the remaking or evolution of the human, creation of alternative communities, and Afrofuturism (read more about this on page 41). Butler set out to write a memoir, but she found that “it felt too much like stripping in public,” so she abandoned it. All of her autobiographical reflections are now collected in *Octavia E. Butler: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. In one interview, on the topic of inspiration, Butler says:

“First forget inspiration. Habit is more dependable. Habit will sustain you whether you’re inspired or not. Habit will help you finish and polish your stories. Inspiration won’t. Habit is persistence in practice.”

Butler has also described her commitment to her creative pursuits as “a sweet and powerful positive obsession.” Using these quotes from Butler, reflect on your writing habits. How might you develop new habits or routines to support your writing?

SCIENCE AND MAGIC

N.K. Jemisin is an American science fiction and fantasy writer whose work explores a wide range of themes, including cultural conflict and oppression. Her debut novel, *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* (2010), and the subsequent books in her *Inheritance Trilogy* received critical acclaim. In her stories, Jemisin wanted to explore the idea of science as magic. The “people of the Stillness” in her book *The Fifth Season* have unique capabilities to manipulate energy, including thermal and kinetic energy, and practice certain forms of science that would be advanced in our society. Jemisin said that in her stories, she wanted to play around with the idea that “any sufficiently systematized magic is indistinguishable from science,” in other words, once “magic” becomes part of an organized and commonly-practiced system, with rules about what works and how things work, it becomes accepted as “science.” What do you think of this idea? If you’re a sci-fi writer, how can you use this notion of science as magic to create worlds, characters, and plot in your story? If you’re not a sci-fi writer, reflect on your idea of “magic.” Are there certain things that are commonly practiced in our society today that feel like magic? How would you define magic? What feels magical to you?

These four perspectives are meant to spark inspiration or reflection in your writing, science fiction and to provide some insight into the genre of science fiction from four different famous writers. We would love to know what you think about these prompts. Have fun, and happy writing!

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.

Any Last Words by Cedric Spicer and Ryan Newman

Description provided by the author: This novel co-written by two Free Minds members tells the story of a young man’s possible future after leaving the house on bad terms.



PAYING IT FORWARD: CHANGING PLANET JUSTICE

By Rebecca

It's not every day you meet someone with their own nonprofit. Even less typical is meeting a high school senior with their own nonprofit. But when it comes to one's passion, no one is too young (or too old) to take action. I had the absolute pleasure of speaking with Arielle, a high school senior who is two years into running her own climate advocacy nonprofit, Changing Planet Justice. Arielle's involvement in climate advocacy started at a very young age and grew from an emotional place. While on family trips to national parks (she's been to 90% of our national parks!), Arielle learned from the park rangers about the toll that climate change was taking on the parks. This hit her on an emotional level. As Arielle put it, it was like learning that a friend had a terminal illness. Arielle's passion for the environment and a desire to do more in that vein led her to embark on two impressive projects. First, Arielle launched the Changing Planet Justice podcast. Five years later, wanting to connect with her listeners who were as far away as Zimbabwe and South Korea, Arielle created her nonprofit, Changing Planet Justice. Effectively pin-pointing the heart of Changing Planet Justice's mission ("Equipping future generations to tackle climate change and food insecurity through a social justice lens") is the new-to-me term "climate justice." I asked Arielle what climate justice means to her:

"I think the definition probably differs from person to person. For me, I would say climate justice is primarily about equity in terms of climate impacts, and certain communities bear the brunt of climate change and its impacts." She went on to share how we can see this reality in Washington D.C. due to racially discriminatory housing policies that created segregated neighborhoods. "Even though today there are no housing policies saying that Black people will live here and white people will live here, the impacts are still manifesting in climate vulnerability. When you look at the heat maps, you see that Southeast D.C. is bright red in terms of heat. Areas with more pavements and buildings absorb and retain heat whereas areas with more vegetation and green space tend to be cooler. The wealthier, historically white communities, can be up to 10 degrees cooler than urban communities in the same city. I think climate justice is making sure that everyone does their part to the

capacity that they can to fight climate change so it's not falling on the shoulders of some people and not others."

In addition to Changing Planet Justice's Climate Leadership Curriculum, through which youth can earn different levels of Climate Leadership Certification, Arielle's nonprofit also has the Changing Planet Justice Journal, a digital platform where kids from all over the world can send in writing, artwork, and photos to share their "climate story," describing how climate change is impacting their community. "One of the biggest reasons I wanted to create the Changing Planet Justice Journal in addition to the leadership curriculum is because I really wanted to be a conduit for youth who feel like their voices are kind of swept away or get drowned out. The Changing Planet Justice Journal is a place where even kids as young as six years old can post their thoughts, even if they don't know the whole story behind climate change or all the science. They can see that the stream near their house is polluted, or the pond in their neighborhood is covered with algae blooms. They can see those things. I think it's really important to promote everyone's voice. I always tell people that I hate the term "a voice for the voiceless." I think that's silly because everyone has a voice, everyone. My goal is just to amplify those voices because I have a privilege of my voice sometimes being heard more than other[s]...I think it's up to everyone to use what they have to empower others. And so I hope to amplify those whose voices are historically underrepresented."

Beyond the curriculum and the digital journal, Arielle provides one-on-one assistance to youth who are developing climate action projects, helping them fine tune their ideas as well as giving them encouragement and support. And, Arielle explained, a climate action project "doesn't have to be massive. It doesn't have to be getting your city to invest in better water infrastructure or something like that. It can be as small as teaching your brother why composting is good for the

environment." One particularly unique example of a climate justice project is from a girl in England who contacted Arielle about an idea to make a series of educational videos about climate justice for other youth. Arielle helped this youth think through different elements of her idea, like what to include in the scripts. The resulting videos have reached a lot of youth who have, in turn, reached out to Arielle, saying they were inspired by that video project and want to do something like it. Arielle sees this as the "cascading effect of kids reaching one another and inspiring one another."

The climate movement is unique in that it is very much of the now and of the future. How we think about the future has a big impact on how we choose to act right now, especially when it comes to the environment. Arielle sees thinking about the future as a bit of a balancing act. "[A] lot of people say to have hope for the future and I think that's wonderful advice and I sincerely, wholeheartedly embrace that advice, but I also think there's a very fine line with hope. Too much of hope can kind of turn into passivity and I think in the context of the climate crisis, that's the most dangerous thing...[F]or me, thinking about the future is just navigating this very fine line of hopeful but also motivated, but also not becoming too wrapped up in my own frustrations." And one thing that's keeping Arielle hopeful? "[T]he millions of kids and adults who are in the climate movement who are doing what they can in their own way," she says. "Just the thought of that is what motivates me to keep going and gives me hope for the future." In carrying out the work of Changing Planet Justice, Arielle is also very much doing what she can in her own way to bring about more equitable outcomes for all who will experience the impacts of our planet's changing climate now and in the future.

DC

JUSTICE

LAB.

REAL WORLD OF WORK: TERRELL'S STORY

Interview by Jennifer

When Terrell texted me a close-up picture of him with his arm around Angela Davis (Yes! Angela-famous-author-educator-and-social-justice-activist-Davis!) I just knew he'd be the perfect subject for this Real World of Work column because it was his job - and his hard work at it - that got him into the 2025 Peace Ball: *Voices of Justice and Liberation* at Arena Stage on the Saturday of inauguration weekend, where he thoroughly enjoyed being in a space with people who are similarly working for freedom, justice, and equality. Here's our discussion:

Can you tell me about your job at the DC Justice Lab, which purchased your ticket to the Peace Ball?

DC Justice Lab is a team of law and policy experts researching, organizing, and advocating for large-scale changes to DC's criminal legal system. After being accepted into the BreakFree Education Fellowship last spring, I interviewed to work full-time at the DC Justice Lab, where I was hired in May. My official title is Campaign and Advocacy Fellow.

What drew you to work at the DC Justice Lab?

You see so much injustice in this city, but they're fighting for justice, so I was drawn to them.

It seems like you're always at the Wilson Building (where the DC Council and the Mayor's office are located). What are you working on?

My main project has been trying to pass legislation to get DC residents housed in the DOC to be able to advocate for themselves at DC Council hearings so we can create a more inclusive society for returning citizens and people impacted the most by the laws being enacted by the DC Council.

Unfortunately, the DOC Director says the facility doesn't have the technology. We're making the case that public safety would be improved if all people have a voice and responsibility in law making.

For example, in October the DC Council held a hearing on the *Safe and Supported Pregnancy and Delivery for Incarcerated Individuals Amendment Act of 2024* to ensure that incarcerated pregnant women at the DC Jail received proper prenatal, birth, and post-natal care. There were 2 women at the jail who had experienced terrible pregnancies and deliveries and wanted to testify, but were not allowed. I want to give them access.

Are there other projects you're focused on?

Yes! I am still researching halfway house options for DC residents. It doesn't make sense for DC residents to be released to the VOA Baltimore halfway house because it's too hard to reconnect with family in DC, access resources, or start training programs when you have a 4+ hour round trip commute between the MTA bus, MARC train, and then a metrobus or train around the city.

Of course, it would be better to have a halfway house for DC residents in the community we are returning to, but housing 300 people under one roof is challenging and can wind up feeling like a "mini-jail". I'm recommending a different halfway house model - smaller facilities where case managers can be more hands-on with residents as individuals and the setting will feel less like incarceration and more like true reentry.

What are you most proud of at this job?

I am most proud of myself to be able to not just work in

this professional environment but to learn at the pace I'm learning at working with policy experts.

Okay, back to the Peace Ball, how is it you got to hug Angela Davis???

I have driven past Arena Stage (a theater near the Wharf) many times, but this was my first time inside that beautiful glass building. It felt great to be among people who share my passion for justice.

There were so many incredible speakers and guests like,

- **Ibram X Kendi** who wrote books like *Stamped from the Beginning* and *How to Be an Antiracist*. I got a picture with him, too!
- **Congresswoman Cori Bush** who was the first African-American woman from Missouri to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- **Mehdi Hasan**, British-American journalist who is the CEO of the new media company Zeteo News.
- **Medea Benjamin**, who cofounded CODEPINK, a

feminist grassroots organization working to end U.S. wars and support human rights.

- **Neeraj Taylor**, who leads Harriet's Wildest Dreams, a Black-led community defense hub centering all Black lives most at risk for state-sanctioned violence in the DC area.

My wristband was purple for a general admission ticket, but I walked into the VIP arena where everyone had a yellow wristband like I belonged there. I couldn't believe I was in the same room with Angela Davis and that I got to hug her, thank her for her contributions, and tell her my story, including 24 years of incarceration and my current advocacy position. I got a signed copy of her book *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* I even got her email address!

What advice would you give those preparing for reentry?

Learn everything you can before you come home.

CONNECT ON CORRLINKS

By Aneka



If you have access to Corrlinks or Getting Out, you can send in your submissions and receive writing prompts and other *Connect* related updates via Corrlinks or Getting Out. Members without Corrlinks and Getting Out access can continue to send in *Connect* submissions via mail. New email requests are responded to once a week. **This email correspondence will be solely for the purpose of exchanging Connect related information. We will not respond to emails that are not Connect related. All personal correspondence will continue to be through mail.**

Free Minds Corrlinks Info:

Corrlinks First Name: Free Minds

Corrlinks Last Name: Connect

Corrlinks Email: connect@freemindsbookclub.org

Free Minds Getting Out Info:

Getting Out First Name: Connect

Getting Out Last Name: Free Minds

Getting Out Email: connect@freemindsbookclub.org

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

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

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

REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

Hope for the Future

Happy New Year Family! A new year, new hopes, new possibilities, new future! I certainly aim to give you hope and encourage you about the wonderful possibilities of the future. In times of uncertainty, hope remains one of our greatest strengths. It's a force that keeps us moving forward, even in the face of adversity. As we look to the future, there are countless reasons to hold onto hope. From technological advancements to social progress, to a renewed sense of collective responsibility, hope for the future is more than just an idea, it's a powerful motivator that keeps us encouraged.

At the heart of hope for the future is the understanding that change doesn't come from waiting—it comes from action. While we may face difficulties, it's the collective will of individuals and communities that will determine the world we leave behind. Each positive step, no matter how small, adds to the momentum for a brighter tomorrow so please do not underestimate your efforts no matter how small you may think they are, they are monumental because they are all planting seeds for your future.

It's also very important to remember that hope for the future is not a passive belief that everything will work out on its own; it's an active commitment to contributing to solutions, both big and small. It's about believing in the possibility of progress and recognizing that even in moments of uncertainty, our collective strength can pave the way for a better you, a better future and a better world!

So, while the future may seem uncertain at times, hope remains our guiding light. With continued innovation, social progress and a deep commitment to action, the future holds boundless opportunities. All together, we can create a world filled with possibility, compassion, and resilience. The future is not something to fear, but something to shape with hope from efforts from you, me and everyone!

Now bringing you some resources that can help to make your future bright!

The United Planning Organization (UPO)
301 Rhode Island Avenue, NW
Washington DC, 20001
202-238-4300

The United Planning Organization has recently expanded their training programs, and they now include stipends for those who participate. Classes are offered during the day, in the evening, and weekends to offer flexibility. They have four locations throughout the city and can be easily accessed via subway or bus. Below are a list of their programs:

Courses for National Certifications:

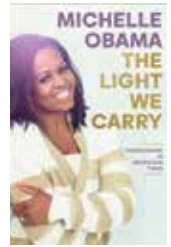
- Child Development Associate
- Commercial Driver's License – CDL Class A & B
- Culinary Arts
- Electrical Technician
- Information Technology – Helpdesk A+
- Plumbing
- Professional Building Maintenance
- Telecommunications

Until we *Connect* again!
– Ms. Keela

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

with Neely

The time has arrived to announce the next book you all voted on! We are excited to share that the next BAM book will be *The Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times* by Michelle Obama. Through a series of stories and reflections on change, challenge, and power, Michelle Obama offers a fresh perspective on how we can build up others and the wider world around us by discovering deeper truths and new pathways for progress. We are so eager to hear your thoughts about this powerful book!



- 1.** In the introduction, Mrs. Obama discusses the process of finding strength and light within yourself: "I believe that each of us carries a bit of inner brightness, something entirely unique and individual, a flame that's worth protecting." What is the "inner brightness" that you carry? If you choose to, how do you share it with others?

- 2.** Mrs. Obama writes a lot about the idea of home, and how it can mean different things for different people. She also explores the idea of making your own home, a place where joy lives and you want to return to. What is home to you?

- 3.** Throughout the book, Mrs. Obama shares pieces from her toolkit on how to protect and grow one's light. Some of her examples included knitting, filling the seats at your "Kitchen Table" with loved ones, and "going high" in the face of challenges. What advice stood out most to you? Do you have any tips or advice to share from your own toolkit?

4. On p.56, Mrs. Obama talks about her childhood fear of a turtle, which she now sees as silly. Did you have any childhood fears that you now think seem silly? How were you able to get over them?
5. It can be easy to forget that famous people are humans too, and have similar experiences to us. Were there any stories that Mrs. Obama shared in her book that you found relatable?
6. Mrs. Obama shares the following quote from Jeanette Winterson: "Language is a finding place, not a hiding place." What does this quote mean to you? If you are a writer, have you experienced this in your work?

Name _____ Date _____

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: GOALS (VOLUME 14, ISSUE 2)

Hey family! Here are some writing prompts to help you get started on submissions for our next issue on **Goals**. We also want to give you a heads up for the issue after that. Volume 14, Issue 3 will be exploring the theme of **Entrepreneurship**.

(1)

Think about the new skills you've acquired over 2024. These can be tangible ("I learned how to build something") or more abstract ("I learned how to be more confident"). How have you used these skills? How have they aided in your personal or professional growth?

(2)

What themes, patterns, or symbols have you noticed in your life lately? How might they reflect your goals, ambitions, or life path?

(3)

What are your personal values, and how do they relate to your goals?

(4)

The SMART system is a great tool to help develop your goals. Here is what SMART stands for and an example of how it can be used. You can use the SMART system for your personal goals, writing goals, education goals--anything! Do what feels right for you in this activity.

Simple goal example: I want to be more spiritual

- **Specific:** I want to better myself by starting a daily spiritual practice
- **Measurable:** I'll journal about my practice every day
- **Achievable:** I have time to practice every day, and I've joined a spiritual community to hold me accountable
- **Relevant:** This will allow me to live the better quality of life I've always wanted.
- **Time-Based:** I'll start my journey on January 1st and will track my progress for a year, after which I will re-evaluate.

Now that you have an idea of how to create your SMART goals, use the template below to write out your goals!

- **Specific:** _____

- **Measurable:** _____

- **Achievable:** _____

- **Relevant:** _____

- **Time-Based:** _____

(5)

Title: My New Chapter

My name is _____.

In the future I seek to be _____.

I want to _____, but I need to _____.

I need to _____, but I want to _____.

I never _____ enough and wish I could _____
_____ more.

I always _____, but don't _____ enough.

I want more _____ in my life
and less _____.

I need more _____ in my life
and less _____.

I am strong because I _____.

What I love most is _____.

The biggest obstacle to getting my needs met is _____.

I can move through/past this obstacle by _____.

I will try to balance my wants and needs by _____.

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



TECH TALK: ONLINE CALENDAR

By Emily

Hi everyone! In light of the “future” theme, we are covering electronic calendars in this edition of the tech column. Some people use a physical datebook or other personal planners to keep track of their schedules. Others keep track of it all online, using an online calendar. This can be particularly convenient because you can access it any time, as long as you have your phone on you! The two main types of smartphones, Androids and iPhones, both come preloaded with a calendar app. You can also download different calendar apps from the app store. I like Google Calendar because it syncs to my email. Also, I can access it on my computer and on my phone.

Online calendars are helpful because they can remind you of appointments and other important dates that you don't want to miss! For example, I input all of my family and friends' birthdays into my Google Calendar. Then, I set up my calendar to send me a notification whenever there is a birthday. I get the little notice on my phone, and it reminds me to send my loved one a happy birthday message. I can also set the event to occur once a year, so that if I put in someone's birthday once it will remind me every year. I also really like Google Calendar for remembering doctor's appointments. I can input the time and date of the appointment, as well as the address that I need to go to. Half an hour before the appointment, my phone notifies me that the appointment is upcoming and the address comes up on my phone.

Online calendars are also important at work! Sometimes, a potential employer will send you a calendar invite with your interview information. A calendar invitation is essentially when another person puts something on their online calendar and adds you as a guest. If you accept the invitation (often by clicking yes or a check mark

symbol), the information will automatically populate on your calendar as well. This invite will most likely include the date and time of the interview, as well as the video conferencing link if it is via video call. Once you accept the invitation, all you have to do is open your calendar when it is time for the interview and click on the link to start the video call.

If you are managing multiple schedules in one household, you can also take advantage of the “share” feature. All you do is click “share” and type in the email of the person you want to share your calendar with. For example, I know a family that uses Google Calendar to keep track of their high school-aged kids' schedules. Each of their kids uses their own calendar on their phone and inputs their sports practices, school dances, etc. They share their calendars with their parents, so that mom and dad can see when each kid has each practice and can figure out when to pick up/drop them off.

Personally, I like to color code my online calendar so that I can easily see what my day looks like. I use blue for my work meetings, green for trips, yellow for appointments, and purple for anything personal like dinner with a friend. You can view your calendar by just looking at one day at a time, one week at a time, or one month at a time. The color coding system helps me when I am looking at it one week or one month at a time to know what is coming up next.

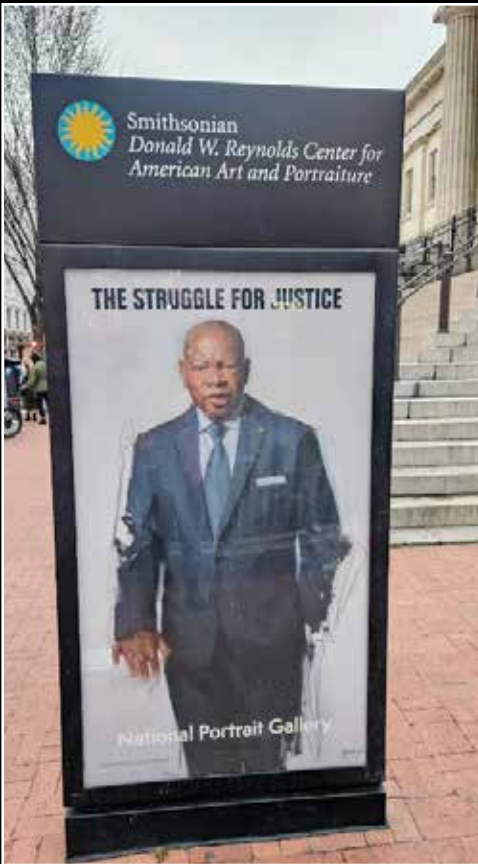
Alright, those are some of the most helpful online calendar features. As always, if you have any additional questions or have a tech topic you would like to know more about please write to us and let us know.

DC PHOTOS *By Darrion*

As requested by our readers



Sycamore and Oak- a multi use retail and community space with a playground located on the former St. Elizabeth's campus in SE DC



A Portrait of Congressman John Lewis In Front of the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery



She Will Rise- A mural on the side of a house on 9th Street NW in the Shaw/Howard area of DC



The Carter G. Woodson statue located in the Carter G. Woodson Memorial Park

DC PHOTOS *By Darrion*

As requested by our readers



A mural across the street from the Shaw library on 7th st & Rhode Island Ave. in NW



CareFirst Arena- a multi-purpose events facility where the Washington Mystics play, located on the former St. Elizabeths East Campus, in Congress Heights SE DC



Audi Field- a soccer-specific stadium where the Washington Spirit and DC United soccer teams and the DC Defenders American football team plays in SW DC

DC PHOTOS *By Darrion*

As requested by our readers



It's Cherry Blossom time in DC and even the metro cars are blooming



Metrobar- A DC metro train car transformed into a bar located in NE DC



The inside of Metrobar

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!



MEDITATION: CREATING AND BUILDING A POSITIVE FUTURE *By Kelli*

Hello Free Minds Family,

Since we're focusing on the future in this issue, I wanted to raise the idea of manifestation. I know, I know, it's seen by some as a woo-woo word referring to the pseudo-scientific idea that we can manifest happiness simply by wishing it into existence. It would be nice, but I think we all know it's not *exactly* the case.

What is true, is that research supports the idea that a positive mindset, meditating using visualization techniques, and goal setting can significantly increase our likelihood of experiencing happiness. It does so by motivating us to pursue positive behaviors and outcomes.

Let's say, for example, you dream of owning your own restaurant. But you constantly think about how impossible that is, feeling jealous of successful business owners you've heard about. "Who do I think I am? That will never happen for me. Who is going to ever give me a loan? I don't even know how to cook!" you tell yourself. Guess what? If that's how you continue thinking, you're probably right!

But what if instead, you thought, "Why not me? I like good food. I'm a people person and know how to organize tasks. I'm going to first hone my cooking skills. Then I'll take some business courses. Maybe start a home catering business to get started..." Well, it will take hard work and patience, but you are ready to hit the ground running. Because of the way you are thinking, you certainly have better odds than the first guy, Negative Ned, LOL! You may have heard it called a "growth mindset." And it makes sense! So, in that way, what we think about, and the way we think can lead us to behave in a way that leads us to a happier tomorrow.

It's easy to get bogged down in negative emotions like fear or anxiety when we consider the future, simply because it's unknown. Of course, there are things beyond our control. And for that very reason, we shouldn't waste time worrying about them. But we can impact our future in many ways. Most importantly, through our thoughts. What we think, and the way we think, strongly influences who we are, and who we become.

So, let's meditate **positively** upon our positive future. If you can, find a buddy to read this script aloud to you while you meditate, and then return the favor. Otherwise, you can read through it a few times on your own before closing your eyes to meditate on what you've read.

Find a comfortable position. Close your eyes and take a deep, cleansing breath in through your nose. Hold it for a few seconds, before releasing the air through your mouth. Repeat this until your body begins to release tension and you feel ready.

*Let's start by choosing a point in the future somewhere along the timeline of our life. Imagine you can step inside of a time machine and transport yourself to that moment in the future. It could be as soon as next week. Or maybe it's the day you walk free. Whatever future moment you choose, let's engage all five of your senses to imagine experiencing that moment, that point in time, **positively**...*

Picture yourself, emerging from the time machine into that moment in your future... what does it look like where you are? Look around yourself and take in your surroundings... Imagine a powerful golden light. The light surrounds and bathes your future self. You are cocooned inside of this light... Breathe this image in... and release it.

Now, still occupying that moment in the future... Bring to your mind a favorite sound... maybe the rhythmic sound of waves crashing upon a sandy shore. Maybe the sound of a sweet child's sleeping breath... Whatever this sound is, let it repeat in your ears like a soothing melody, as you breathe in... and out...

As you continue breathing, imagine you inhale a lovely and intoxicating scent... something that makes you feel calm, and happy. Maybe it is the smell you experience when entering a loved one's home... Maybe it is the scent of a rich chocolate cake prepared just for you, being pulled from a warm oven... Maybe it is the smell of the pavement after it rains in DC... let the smell you love infuse your lungs with comfort... Breathing it in... and out.

What do you taste during this moment in the future? Maybe it is salt from a dip in the ocean? Or the taste of rich, freshly brewed coffee, waking you up in the morning before work... Experience whatever delicious flavor you have chosen for this future moment... inhaling... and then letting your breath go...

Now, hold out your hands in front of you... what do you imagine your fingertips touch in this future moment? Maybe the soft cheek of someone you love. Or maybe the weathered hand of a grandparent held inside of your own... Maybe your fingers tap the keys of a laptop as you write your book... Or perhaps they lift something heavy as you complete a difficult yet satisfying task... Or maybe your fingers bury themselves in the fur of your happy dog who leaps out to lick your face.. Breathe in all these sensations... and exhale...

Finally, what exactly are you doing in this future moment? Are you talking to customers in your newly launched restaurant? Or driving across the country in your new 18-wheeler? Maybe you're simply free, sitting with your family, enjoying stories and laughing together. Whatever you imagine yourself doing in this future moment, it is good. Feel yourself, entirely centered and grounded in this moment in the future. You feel content. You feel loved. And you feel hopeful... Just sit in this moment appreciating it and believing in it...

Meditate upon what you saw, heard, smelled, tasted, and felt. Know that you can manifest this happiness through your positive thoughts and behaviors. In doing this exercise, you are reminded of what you want for yourself, your life, and your future.

Now imagine that you step back into the time machine and return to the present moment.

Take another deep breath before opening your eyes. Continuing to think positively, with your growth-mindset, you can take steps that will help you move towards and actively build your bright future.

IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

DEEP DIVE:

THE LIFE OF JIMMY CARTER

James Earl Carter Jr. was born on October 1, 1924, in Plains, Georgia. The son of a peanut farmer would graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy, become Georgia's governor, and eventually, the 39th president of the United States. On December 29, 2024, Jimmy Carter passed away at the age of 100, just a year after the death of his wife of 77 years, Rosalynn Carter.



President James Earl Carter Jr., the 39th U.S. President

Carter's path to the presidency was not a direct one. After graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1946, he served in the Navy's nuclear submarine program. The death of his father in 1953 prompted him to return to Plains to take over the family's peanut farm, and during his time back at home he became involved in local politics. The Carters were two of only three congregants to vote in favor of integrating their church. After the Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional, a wave of segregationist sentiment tore through the South, with White Citizens' Councils popping up. In Plains, Georgia, Carter was one of the only white men who refused to join the local council.

He was elected governor of Georgia in 1970, campaigning on a platform of reform, particularly in the area of civil rights. He challenged the state's entrenched racial segregation policies and worked to make government more efficient and responsive to the needs of its citizens.

Six years later – with the Watergate Scandal that prompted the resignation of President Richard Nixon still fresh on the minds of Americans – Carter won the White House with a sweep of the Southern states that would be inconceivable today. Domestically, he appointed more women and people of color to government positions than any previous president while working with Congress to strengthen environmental protections. Abroad, he won a Nobel Peace Prize for his role in securing a peace deal between Israel and Egypt, and normalized relations between the U.S. and China.

But his only term in office was beset by challenges. A global energy crisis sent gas prices soaring, which in turn led to historic inflation and one of the nation's worst economic recessions. His loss to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential election was likely sealed by the very public Iran Hostage Crisis, during which Iranian revolutionaries held dozens of Americans at our embassy in Tehran for more than a year.

Carter's post-presidency was even more impactful than his time

in office. He dedicated his life to promoting peace, human rights, and democracy through the Carter Center, which he founded in 1982. The Carter Center has worked to eradicate diseases such as Guinea worm disease, river blindness, and polio; monitor elections across the globe; and assist in the mediation of conflicts to prevent violence and promote peace.

Carter was honored at a state funeral service at the National Cathedral in DC in January.

NATION

In January, Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 47th president of the United States. He is the first person to serve non-consecutive terms as president since Grover Cleveland was elected for a second time in 1893.



President Donald Trump, the 45th & 47th U.S. President

Trump's first two months in office have seen a flurry of provocative actions from his administration, several of which have already triggered legal challenges. A few of the big moves made by Trump in his first year already:

Department of Governmental Efficiency: Led by Elon Musk, this newly established project has cut thousands of federal jobs and cancelled contracts. This helped prompt the largest number of layoffs in a single month since the past two economic recessions, one in 2009 and the other in the summer following the outbreak of COVID-19.

Immigration: As the president promised during his campaign, his administration began an aggressive schedule of raids and deportations. He has also declared several international gangs and drug cartels with roots in Mexico to be terrorist groups.

Trade: The administration has imposed a steep tariff on goods coming from China and has several times gotten to the brink of imposing tariffs on Canada and Mexico, two countries with whom the United States has had comprehensive trade deals for decades. He has also vowed to impose what are called "reciprocal tariffs" on all countries effective in April, meaning that any fees imposed on American goods by other countries would be met with identical costs on our end.

WORLD

Trump has already changed the American role in two of the world's wars: the one between Russia and Ukraine and the one Israel is waging on the Palestinian territory of Gaza, which many experts have described as genocide.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

Trump has pushed for a quick end to the war in Ukraine while pressing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for a deal that would give the U.S. access to mine rare earth minerals in the country. A White House meeting where Zelenskyy was expected to sign that minerals deal went sideways in March when Trump and Vice President JD Vance got into a pointed argument over the trustworthiness of Russian President Vladimir Putin.



U.S. Vice President
JD Vance

On Gaza, Trump stunned everyone by saying he intended for the United States to “own” the territory and develop it while forcibly relocating the Palestinians living in the besieged area. The nonpartisan group Brookings Institution called Trump’s plan “immoral and illegal.”



Russian President
Vladimir Putin

SPORTS

Two sports teams entered this year with a chance at a historic “threepeat”: The Kansas City Chiefs, winners of two straight Super Bowls, and the University of Connecticut (UConn) Huskies, who cut down the nets at the past men’s college basketball finals.

The Huskies have struggled this year after losing four players from last season to the NBA, but still have a prayer as March Madness approaches. Though the UConn women’s program, the single greatest dynasty in the history of American sports, is a stronger candidate to take the title this year. They are led by Paige Bueckers, a fifth-year senior widely expected to be the first pick in next year’s WNBA draft.

But in early February, the Chiefs fell flat in their attempt to be the first NFL team to win three straight Lombardi trophies. The Philadelphia Eagles trounced the Chiefs and Patrick Mahomes 40-22 in Super Bowl LIX, held in New Orleans. The Eagles were led all year by a stout defense, one of the heaviest offensive lines in the history of the league, and running back phenom Saquon Barkley, who the Eagles snagged from their rival, the New York Giants. But it was the team’s true leader, quarterback Jalen Hurts, who played his way to the Super Bowl MVP trophy with two passing and one rushing touchdown along with 72 rushing yards, a Super Bowl record for a quarterback.

Perhaps the spiciest sports news from the past few months though, involves a trade in the NBA that many have already come to consider the single worst trade in the history of American sports. In the late hours of February 1, it was

announced that the Dallas Mavericks had traded 26-year-old point guard Luka Dončić to the Los Angeles Lakers for 31-year-old big man Anthony Davis .



Luka Dončić

Now, Davis is hardly a slouch. One of the greatest college basketball players of all time, he helped LeBron James bring home an NBA title to the Lakers in the strange COVID year played largely in empty arenas. He is one of the most effective defenders in basketball, though his professional career has been marked by several prolonged injuries.



Anthony Davis

But Dončić is widely considered to be one of the three or four best young players in the NBA, and was beloved by the Dallas fan base, who saw their star lead the team to the NBA Finals just last year. Mavericks management indicated that the move was made to put the team in a better position to win right now, expressing concerns that Dončić was keeping himself in strong physical shape leading into a year where they would be forced to sign him to a \$345 million contract or let him head into free agency.

Immediately, sports analysts howled at the idea that the Mavericks would trade Dončić without seeking offers from the entire league, as probably dozens of teams would have sought to make a deal for him. Things got worse for the Mavericks almost immediately, when Davis injured himself in his first game with the team. He remains out indefinitely. Since then, the Mavericks other star, Kyrie Irving, has torn his ACL and will miss this season and probably part of next year as well.

MUSIC

Awards season has wrapped up. At the Grammys, Beyoncé finally took home Album of the Year for her first country album, Cowboy Carter. That was one of 11 nominations she received this year. The night’s other biggest winner was Kendrick Lamar , who took home five Grammys for “Not Like Us,” his diss track on Drake. Lamar was also this year’s performer at the Super Bowl Halftime Show.



Beyoncé



Kendrick Lamar

DC CULTURE: OSGEMEOS: ENDLESS STORY EXHIBIT AT THE HIRSHHORN

By Sofia

One of the major perks of living in Washington, DC is the easy access to the many Smithsonian museums which are free to visit. My personal favorite is the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Located on the National Mall, the Hirshhorn Museum features modern and contemporary art from all over the world. Exhibits at this museum typically rotate annually.

On a chilly Sunday, I spent my afternoon checking out the OSGEMEOS: Endless Story exhibition which began showing at the Hirshhorn in September 2024 and will run for a year. The immersive exhibit features art from world-renowned Brazilian artists, identical twin brothers Gustavo and Otavio Pandolfo, known around the world as OSGEMEOS, which translates to twins in Portuguese. The duo are known for being street artists, crafting magical murals that interact with the different elements of the buildings they're thrust upon.

The pair's artistic roots trace back to their youth in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in South America, where they got their creative start in the hip-hop and graffiti scene, inspired by the street art and music scene happening thousands of miles away in New York City. The exhibit began by showcasing these early days in the twins' artistic journey. The first room in the exhibition features early childhood scribbles that evolved into simple graffiti tags and later complex graffiti sprayed on the sides of buildings and sketched out in journals. This room also featured an archive of childhood pictures, videos of hip and breakdancing gatherings, t-shirts designed by the twins when they first started out on the hip-hop scene, and family memorabilia.

As I walked deeper into the exhibit through the next room, I was struck by how the OSGEMEOS' hip hop and graffiti roots inspire pretty much all of their work to this day. They are known for their trademark cartoonish characters, often yellow but crafted in all colors, which typically have large heads and far apart eyes. They usually don colorful and extremely detailed attire. It's hard to do this art justice, so I encourage you to take a look at the images I've paired with this article!

After taking in the duo's creative journey and upbringing, I was transported into a surreal and bright room that took me to Tritrez, a mystical universe the artists invented as children and continue to add onto as adult artists. I was awestruck in this room that had more of the twins' paintings, but that also showcased their sculpture and installation work. The figures in this artistic world are meant to feel magical and utopic, combining mystical imagery with the hip-hop and streetwear elements central to the twins' upbringing. This world and its characters were also inspired by Afrofuturist styled groups like Afrika Bambaataa's Soulsonic Force (an electro-funk and hip hop band). I stood in front of an altar installation, taking in the high rainbow steps, and layered green foundation framing a glowing figure unzipping their yellow flesh before entering the next part of the exhibit which featured video art created by the twins and more paintings with an unimaginable level of detail and texture.

The twins are also inspired by their dreams and this was showcased in a dreamy installation called *The Moon Room* that included a large illuminated sculpture crescent moon laying in a childhood bedroom.



One of my favorite parts of the exhibit was the room that highlighted the importance of music in the twins' artistic realm. The twins also DJ and draw inspiration from many genres of music. There was music blasting in the background of this room that included a wall of album covers and on another wall, a complex stereo installation. I was immersed in this exhibition for over an hour and felt so inspired by how the OSGEMEOS intertwine elements of American hip-hop, Brazilian folklore, their own family history, and their dreams to craft such a beautiful and creative world. The twins' art encourages audiences to never let go of their childhood imaginations and reminded me of the theme of this issue in that we can use our wildest imaginations and childhood dreams to work towards a better future, with the sky being the limit.

Is there any specific art, music, literature, or something else you'd like to see covered for the next DC Culture article? Write to us and let us know!

REENTRY PROFILE: INTERVIEW WITH LAVANDER

Interview by Arva

For this reentry profile, Free Minds member LaVander takes us along his personal story of finding resilience through creativity and paving the way for his best life through the power of having a future focus. LaVander has come a long way from learning how to make art in prison out of survival to now co-curating an art exhibit elevating and affirming the humanity of incarcerated artists. Our conversation tackles this month's theme of "The Future" as LaVander shares how writing down his goals and using what he has as stepping stones has helped define his purpose and direction in life. He also touches on how having a support system and allowing others to help him has made a big difference in overcoming his fears and fulfilling his goals.

Arva: Hey LaVander, tell me a little about your journey.

LaVander: I'm from Washington, DC born and raised. I'm the youngest male out of six siblings. My mother passed away when I was young so I was pretty much raised by my grandmother. I'm really a nerd, I love computers, music, arts, all that. When I first got to prison, I realized there was a lot of negativity to get caught up in... it was a lot. The big thing that helped me get through that was reading books sent by Free Minds, writing poetry, and making cards which one of my homies taught me. Crafting was my peaceful place. A lot of other artists also took me under their wing because they saw the path I was trying to be on. People will look at that and say "Oh, that's soft", but I made it out alive so I'm okay with being soft!

Arva: So, I heard you're curating an art show right now, what other things are you up to?

LaVander: Yeah, I'm living my best life! I'm co-curating the art show, I'm working as a barback at a bar near the White House, and I'm also starting an IT school next month. I got my learner's permit which is a pretty big accomplishment for me since I've never driven a car before. The art show is another big accomplishment. It's really opening my eyes to how people in society view us incarcerated folks while also getting to see how people appreciate my artwork.

Arva: How would you say art has helped you through your tough times?

LaVander: When I went to prison, I learned how to make art mostly out of survival. I didn't want to be a burden to anyone so I started making money by selling cards. Every morning I knew I had something to get up and do. Then over time, drawing became therapeutic for me. It allows me to get my mind away from what I'm stressed about. Some of my best art comes in my times of depression.

Arva: I love that drawing has become therapeutic for you. Moving on to the theme for this *Connect*, I wanted to ask how you go about planning and setting goals for yourself?

LaVander: I like to have goals set in mind for what I'd like to do. Nothing super strict like having a specific timeframe but more like knowing what I really want for myself. Before I left prison, I had a lot of anxiety because I didn't know what the world had going on. One thing that helped me get over that fear was making a list of all



The Queen That Came Before Us by LaVander


the tangible things I wanted when I got out: like a keyboard, a PS4, colognes. And since I've been home, almost everything I've wanted has fallen into place. The next steps for me now are getting my own apartment and car.

Arva: Did you have any goals before incarceration that you've had to pivot from?

LaVander: Not really because before I got incarcerated I didn't know what I wanted to do in life. I was really moving from a place of trauma and hurt. A lot of it came from feeling neglected, unwanted, and unloved throughout my childhood, so I really didn't care about what direction I was going. There's a lot of things I understand differently now, and I definitely would've told younger me to do things differently. I'm blessed though, because since I've been home I've had a lot of help. I honestly thought I'd have to do everything by myself but Free Minds, my legal team, and support from family have really helped me transition back into society. I was so programmed into thinking I had to do everything alone but letting that mentality go and putting my guard down has made everything a lot smoother. It felt like a big hug from everybody.

Arva: For sure, it is never a weakness to ask for help, we are all here to help one another. How do you think having a future focus helps us achieve what we want?

LaVander: I think you have to look into the future if you want anything out of life. If you're constantly living in the moment, you're not preparing yourself for anything. If you don't have an idea of what you're working for, then what are you even doing it for? You really have to set a plan and purpose for everything, without that things will usually crumble. My job right now is great and I'm learning a lot about the business, so now if I wanted to open my own bar or restaurant, I could do it! I'm always having that future focus and using what I have now as a stepping stone to get further. I like to have a plan for everything in my life, it helps me to stay focused and motivated.



An art installation capturing the history of the Nacotchtank American Indians (also known as the Anacostans) located in Anacostia park created under the direction of Tendani Mpulubusi El with assistance from students at Eastern and Ballou High School in DC.

INDIGENOUS FUTURES

By Sofia

In the mainstream Western world, indigenous groups (such as Native Americans in the US) are often presented in the past tense. For example, growing up in school, you may recall education around Native and Indigenous groups as being here “before” us. Yet, Indigenous communities are still present across the U.S. and around the world. To challenge this exclusion from the contemporary world, Indigenous communities, artists, scholars, writers, and more have used a framework known as “Indigenous Futures” or “Indigenous Futurism.”

Indigenous Futurism envisions the future from a Native perspective in fiction and in visual arts, according to scholar Suzanne Newman Fricke. The concept was coined by Dr. Grace Dillon (a member of the Anishinaabe indigenous group). This is where Indigenous futures originally emerged from, but the framework has expanded to be applied to things like environmental activism and a more general way of working towards a better future and reflecting on the past. In a report, the United Nations defined the concept as working to “connect past to present and potential futures, defined... as cyclical processes of balanced flourishing that are deeply place-based, and include human and non-human well-being – especially native flora and fauna, lands and waters.”

One of the central ideas to Indigenous Futures is not seeing time as linear (in a straight line), which is how it is often viewed in Western ways of thinking, but as cyclical and interconnected. The framework sees what lies tomorrow as deeply embedded in what happened yesterday. In other words, the past is constantly informing how we should look towards the future and how we should act in the present. So while envisioning a better world is key to Indigenous Futures, so is reflecting on the past and ensuring that stories of the past do not get lost.

For example, in the news platform “The Imprint,” Nancy Marie Spears highlighted how a group of traveling Indigenous oral historians have been working in collaboration with the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition and the U.S. Department of the Interior to fully document the systemic abuse endured by generations of Indigenous people under the U.S. government’s use of abusive boarding schools that aimed at forcibly assimilating Indigenous people beginning in the 1800s and lasting well through the 20th Century. Those who were forced to attend these boarding schools suffered abuse of all kinds and were forced to deny their cultural practices, such as clothing, spirituality, and language.

This is the first-ever oral history project of its kind and is working to incorporate ceremonial practices particular to each Indigenous community where the oral histories have been collected and shared. The aim of the project is to allow those who have survived the boarding schools to heal and to educate future generations of Americans on a shameful part of our history to help us in envisioning a better future where Indigenous practices and culture is uplifted.

Other examples of Indigenous futures in practice include science fiction stories centered around Indigeneity, visual art, and efforts to ensure that Indigenous practices are being learned and advocated for in protecting and stewardship of the environment to fight against climate change. While Indigenous Futures center and uplift Indigenous communities, it is a framework that is meant to be embraced by all so that we can work towards a better future that does not displace, colonize, or exploit.

Let us know if you would like to read a book about these topics!

UNDERSTANDING THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY MODEL

By Sydney

There is one economic model that has received considerable attention in recent years, and that is the solidarity economy which provides a different route to the classical capitalist system. The solidarity economy is at the same time a system and a way of thinking. It emphasizes collectivism, recognizing that individuals are interconnected and that working together for the common good can lead to shared prosperity. This economic model proposes that by encouraging working together, asset-sharing, and mutual aid, not only could communities flourish but also individuals could flourish. Through the lens of social well-being, the solidarity economy seeks to ameliorate (make better) inequity and manage social issues by means of collective action.

Perhaps one of the easiest ways to understand the solidarity economy is to think of it as a community garden. Instead of a supermarket, where everyone competes for the best produce, a community garden operates on the principle that everyone sows, and so everybody reaps. In the same way, businesses and organizations in the solidarity economy take the welfare of their workers, communities, and the environment into consideration right alongside making profits. This approach encourages cooperation over competition.

That said, the solidarity economy is not a new concept; it has deep historical roots. Though mutual aid and collective economic practices have existed in communities worldwide for centuries, the formal concept of “*economía solidaria*” was first advocated by Felipe Alaiz during the Spanish Civil War in 1937. He proposed economic solidarity between worker collectives as a means of resisting fascist forces. In the 1980s, the solidarity economy evolved as a more contemporary concept, emerging in both France and South America. In Europe, it was influenced by the “social economy” tradition, which sought to address social and economic exclusion by creating alternative institutional structures.

Today, key components of the solidarity economy include worker cooperatives, community-based organizations, and mutual aid networks. Worker cooperatives are businesses that are owned and managed by their workers. Employees share in decision-making and profits, creating a more equitable work environment. Although they do not involve shared ownership, labor unions similarly focus on advocating for workers' rights within traditional business structures. Both worker cooperatives and unions contribute to protecting workers' rights and promoting fair labor practices. For instance, according to the Economic Policy Institute, unionized workers earn approximately 13%

more than their non-union counterparts and have better access to health insurance and retirement benefits. In Washington, D.C., where unions are well-established and community organizations play a vital role, growing the number of worker cooperatives could further support fair labor practices and strengthen economic equity. Worker cooperatives and unions help to improve wages, enhance working conditions, and foster community resilience.

Further, in Washington, D.C., the solidarity economy is especially relevant given the city's socioeconomic gaps. A 2023 blog post from Cornell University's D.C. program documented how lower-income neighborhoods in the city experience higher rates of youth-related issues. It observed that many of the children in these neighborhoods are likely to become perpetrators of violent acts, just as they are more likely to be victims themselves. By supporting community networks, the solidarity economy seeks to address these challenges and advance long-term social stability and solutions.

The solidarity economy also emphasizes sustainability practices, whereby, through sustainable business operations, damage to the environment is minimized along with dangers to public health. Some of the most important features of this model include sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and circular economy, or the recycling and reusing of materials. These activities would minimize foodborne illnesses, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which have affected approximately 48 million people annually. Sustainable farming practices, such as composting instead of using manure prone to contamination, for example, reduce the risk of disease outbreaks and promote overall health and safety.

Other core components of the solidarity economy include public banking, fair trade markets, and participatory governance (a framework for decision-making and governance that emphasizes the active involvement of all citizens in the process for developing and implementing laws and policies). These structures help ensure that economic decisions are made in a democratic and transparent manner.

The tools for creating a solidarity economy already exist. Their broad and intentional implementation could promote shared prosperity and reduce disparities among D.C.'s residents. What do you think? Could these tools be the blueprint for a brighter future?



DID YOU KNOW?

AI's Impact on the Workforce

By Darrion

Many economic experts and think tanks predict Artificial Intelligence (AI) will permanently transform the job landscape – maybe as soon as 2030?

The World Economic Forum, a wealthy think tank and policy-influencing organization based in Switzerland, surveyed large companies in January 2025 and uncovered that 40% of employers plan to cut their workforce and replace them with AI automation. And according to their *Future of Jobs Report*, 77% of large companies they surveyed planned to train their employees to work alongside AI by 2025.

So what exactly does this all mean for the working-class human?

Will AI's quick evolution elevate and enhance us? Or will automation erase and replace us?

Who'd have thought those epic chess matches in 1996 and 1997 between Deep Blue (AI) and Garry Kasparov (Chess legend) were precursors of things to come.

AI Could Replace...

Clerical roles and mid-level software engineers may be the first to be made obsolete.

Many tasks in process-driven jobs like administrative and clerical work, data entry, and customer service are not (mostly) being handled by AI-powered systems. Companies are already using AI chatbots, virtual assistants, and automation tools which require little (human) interaction and oversight.

Even software engineers are quickly being replaced. AI-driven coding assistants can now generate, debug, and optimize code faster than most human developers. Free apps like Blackbox.ai can accurately write and duplicate code for free. How do mid-level programmers compete with machines that never tire, demand raises, or even ever need to take a vacation?

Major tech companies like Meta (Facebook), Google, Microsoft, and Amazon are already exploring AI-driven automation to replace mid-level software engineers. Financial giants such as JPMorgan Chase and Goldman Sachs are already using AI for risk assessment, fraud detection, and for trading algorithms. Healthcare companies like IBM and UnitedHealth Group are already leveraging AI for diagnostics, and data and analysis. Even government agencies are incorporating AI to automate administrative tasks and cybersecurity operations.

AI Is Changing the Landscape...

But don't panic yet. The emergence of AI isn't all apocalyptic.

Prompt engineering is one of the top and one of the most sought after new positions in all industries. This AI driven field requires workers with expertise who know how to craft the right inputs to garner the best responses from AI models. Businesses need professionals who understand how to utilize AI effectively, ensuring it produces valuable and accurate results.

Other new career titles the AI driven workforce is birthing are ethics specialists, human-AI collaboration managers, and digital content verifiers to verify information and combat any misinformation generated by artificial intelligence.

It's Already Here

Notable companies of varying sizes across various industries are already training their employees and creating and implementing these new positions to integrate with AI.

In January 2025, Google announced the plan to invest \$120 million in AI training for its workforce with their "Grow with Google" initiative.

Banking giant JPMorgan and Chase already offer comprehensive training programs to ensure employees across various departments can effectively collaborate with AI technologies. IKEA invests in AI training to teach their employees to integrate the technology into their operations, supply chain management and customer service.

And lastly, Price Waterhouse Cooper, a professional services firm, integrates AI into daily tasks to boost productivity.

These initiatives reflect a broader trend of organizations recognizing the importance of AI proficiency. By investing in upskilling and creating new AI-focused roles, companies aim to stay competitive and ensure their workforce is prepared for the evolving technological landscape.

Still, people should be mindful of over-reliance on generative AI tools that may produce inaccurate information, as they are largely designed to produce responses that look correct, rather than are correct. Additionally, a recent study from Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon University found that people who rely too much on generative AI may experience a deterioration of their own critical thinking skills.

Global Impact

The environmental impacts of AI are a growing concern as the technology becomes more widespread. AI uses a substantial amount of energy which relies on critical minerals and rare elements, which are often mined unsustainably. The data centers that house AI servers also use large amounts of water to cool servers. Additionally, the production and disposal of hardware needed for AI systems – such as servers, chips, and data centers – can lead to e-waste, which is difficult to recycle and harmful to the environment.

While AI has the potential to address environmental challenges in areas like energy efficiency and climate change monitoring, its own ecological footprint raises questions about the sustainability of large-

scale AI deployment.

The Big Question...

So, is real-life *Skyнет* and *The Matrix* a force for good?

The future remains uncertain. AI has the potential to boost efficiency, free people from mundane tasks, and create new opportunities. But it also threatens job security and raises ethical concerns about bias, misinformation, control, and the environment.

One thing is clear: AI is here and it's important for us to educate ourselves on all the potential implications and consequences AI will have on society as technology continues to evolve.

CONVERSATION WITH KELLI

Hey Free Minds Family!

I've had the privilege to meet many of you in person. Maybe it was the first time you ever walked into a book club session at YSC, New Beginnings, the DC Jail, or the Correctional Treatment Center. I've seen that look in your eyes as you wondered, "Wow... who is this goofy lady with her big ol' tacky see-through tote bag overflowing with books?" Others, I have been honored to get to know as I read your letters and have been blown away by your talent as poets. And for the rest of you, I feel like we aren't strangers, we are friends who just haven't yet met.

If you have met me, you know I like silly icebreaker games and asking a lot of questions. So now it's my turn to do my nutshell introduction: I grew up in Eugene, Oregon. I love coffee, dogs (especially our five-year-old Pitbull mix, Archie) books, writing, hiking, basketball, football (Ohio State Buckeyes and Cincinnati Bengals), all forms of water (lakes/ rivers/oceans), books, the mountains, books, traveling to new places, board games that have to do with words, books, movies, live music, ice cream, tacos and chocolate... I also love my family. My husband/best friend and I have been married for... drum roll... 33 years! And we have two grown children – a daughter and a son.

Working at Free Minds has never been a J-O-B to me. It's been a gift, getting to do what I love, each and every day: reading and writing with all of you. Did I mention I love books? Books have played a major role in my life ever since I learned to read. They have been my friends when I have been lonely. They've offered excitement and adventure when I have been bored. Books have given me solace and hope when I have been down. And they've taught me about people, places and ideas I never otherwise would have known. Books are straight up magic, and my "job" allows me to share that magic with other people.

As Free Minds' Book Club Manager, I oversee all nine different in-person Free Minds book club sessions that happen every two weeks led by a team of five. Along with Rebecca, my co-facilitator, I get to develop curriculum and lead five of those. It is, in a word, STUPENDOUS!* (This word comes courtesy of FM member "FR" at CTF, who added it to our group vocabulary list after I told him I need a new word for AWESOME, which I tend to overuse!)

Over the last 22 plus years, the Free Minds Family has grown and attracted so many amazing, interesting and compassionate human beings, as both staff and members, including all of you, using varied talents and skills to bring us together as a community and to lift one

another up. I believe we are all better for being a part of it. I know I am.

So... about this issue's theme, "The Future." The future is fascinating and captivating. But as we all know, it isn't promised. I am, what I like to call, "old-ish." When you are 22, the future feels like endless possibilities. As I've gotten older, my perspective on the future has changed. I used to have a long bucket list of things I hoped to see or experience some day in the future. Now, I feel a greater sense of urgency. There are fewer "somedays" coming, so I'm going to make each one count. If there's something I want to do, someone I want to spend time with, or a place I want to experience, it's time to make it happen!

One of the items that's been on that bucket list for the longest is to see the Grand Canyon. And guess what? I'm going to Arizona to see it next month! I can't wait to share photos with you all in an upcoming issue...

We don't have to be able to travel to live each day to the fullest though. Really, I think it is just a mindset of not putting anything off if it will enrich our life or the lives of others right now. So, for example, if you plan on learning to speak Spanish "someday," don't wait until you can formally enroll in a class if there is a Spanish speaker nearby. Ask him/her to teach you some Spanish while you teach him/her English. Now you're getting language skills today AND maybe a new friend! If you really care about someone, don't plan to tell them someday how you feel. Tell them now. There is a Latin phrase for this. Maybe you've heard it before. *Carpe Diem!* It means "Seize the Day!"

I'd love to hear what you all think about this. Do you *Carpe Diem*??? I'm not sure if that's grammatically correct in Latin, but you know what I mean.

Thank you for taking time to engage in this "conversation" with me! Until we meet again, keep reading, keep writing, keep being kind, and always, keep your mind FREE!

Your friend,
Kelli

***Stupendous adjective** stu-pen-dous stü-pen-dous styü-
1: causing astonishment or wonder : **awesome, marvelous**
2: of amazing size or greatness : **tremendous**

WHAT WE'RE READING

with Neely

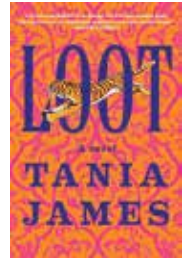
Have you recently read a book that left an impression on you, good or bad? We want to hear about it!

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

"What We're Reading."

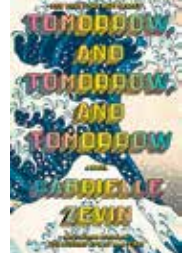
- **ROB: *A Human Being Died That Night* by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela**

This book is about the Apartheid in South Africa and their reconciliation process. I loved this book. A reporter goes into prison to interview a government hitman who has been incarcerated for his killing of hundreds of Africans, and finds not only understanding in who he is, but an understanding of how the Apartheid government used him to do their dirty work. It was riveting to me in the sense of how governments are able to commission people to kill on their behalf when it's beneficial to them, then distance themselves when it isn't. Also, it illustrated fully my thoughts about how people come to commit such atrocities as murder.



- **Jennifer: *Loot* by Tania James**

I enjoyed this historical fiction novel because it was a chance to learn more about a place and time I'm not very familiar with. Most of the action takes place in India in the 18th century and follows the adventures of Abbas, a 17-year-old gifted woodcarver, who was drawn into service in the palace of Tipu Sultan to build a giant tiger automaton. Spanning more than a half century, I found the novel to be a compelling hero's quest with themes of colonialism, love, and plundered treasures. Afterwards, I looked up the automaton and saw that it's actually on display in England over 200 years later!



- **Julia: *The Parisian* by Isabella Hammad**

This book is historical fiction, following a young man from Palestine through the 1910s-1930s, during a period of great tumult with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and British rule over Palestine. The main character is a young man named Midhat who travels to Paris in 1914 to study medicine before returning to his home in Palestine, where he is known as "the Parisian." Despite the political changes going on around him, the book focuses a lot on Midhat's personal journey of love, family, and self-discovery. I really appreciated this book and would definitely recommend it!

- **Sofia: *Chain-Gang All-Stars* by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah**

This book was incredible, but I will warn that there is a lot of violence and death. Adjei-Brenyah crafts a dystopian not-too-far-off United States where the prison system has been transformed to include a brutal, televised bloodsport called the Criminal Action Penal Entertainment (CAPE) program. In this program, people incarcerated who participate are known as "Chain-Gang All-Stars" and must fight each other in deadly, gladiator-esque matches to entertain both live and at-home audiences. The victors who survive each fight can potentially earn early freedom. The story centers around Loretta Thurwar and Hamara "Hurricane Staxxx" Stacker, two of CAPE's biggest stars who are romantic and battle partners. While this book was disturbing and hard to keep reading at times, the concept and plot are very impactful at crafting necessary commentary and criticism about entertainment, racial capitalism, and mass incarceration. A powerful read that also really highlights survival and resistance amongst marginalized groups, especially those who are incarcerated.

- **Emily: *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* by Gabrielle Zevin**

This book explores the evolving relationship between two childhood friends who become video game co-creators. I don't have a strong interest or knowledge of video games, but I was unable to put this book down. The characters, though at times thoroughly unlikeable, were extremely compelling, and Zevin captures the essence of the dynamics of changing relationships in a way that feels extremely authentic and original. The author has a vast vocabulary, and halfway through I began keeping a list of the words that I had never even heard of before – I ended up looking up over 35 words!

CONVERSACIONES DE MENTES LIBRES/ FREE MINDS CONVERSATIONS

Por/By Carlos

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

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

Saludos mi gente! Antes de todo, quiero darles un fuerte saludo, que al momento de leer este artículo, se encuentren con la mejor salud... mental al igual que física.

Para los que no me conocen o están aquí por primera vez, mi nombre es Carlos. Fui deportado a mi país natal, Honduras, después de haber cumplido 25 años y ser liberado por la ley de IRAA (Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act) en 2020. A veces me pongo a pensar el mucho tiempo que fue eso. No les voy a mentir, hubo momentos que no creía que iba a salir de la prisión. Por 25 años pensé mucho en el futuro, y aunque en esos tiempos, ese futuro se miraba tan lejos, pensar en el futuro me dio mucha paz dentro de mí al igual que una sanidad mental. En otras palabras, el siempre pensar en libertad y en mi futuro, me ayudó mucho en pasar esos años en prisión. Este es el tema de este mes en nuestra revista *Connect*: El Futuro.

Cuando mi petición de IRAA se acercó y las probabilidades de ser liberado era más verdad, me puse a pensar mucho en ese futuro cercano. En ese tiempo no sabía dónde me iba a quedar. Tenía familia, pero no estaban dispuestos a darme un lugar de vivir. No les voy a mentir, el que ellos me dijeron que no, me dolió mucho. Pero al mismo tiempo entendí que ellos no me conocían y que tal vez sería una persona peligrosa para ellos o que de una manera o otra, iba a causarles daño. Esto me puso a pensar donde vivirían y con quien. Después de 25 años, no tenía nada. Ni un centavo a mi nombre que me pueda ayudar. Para ese tiempo yo estaba en Lewisburg, Cadre (un programa de trabajar: servíamos a los que estaban en máxima seguridad) y recuerdo mirar mucho el Atlas en la librería de la prisión. Miraba el mapa de Honduras y miraba a mi futuro sin rumbo. Mi preocupación era llegar a un lugar lleno de crimen y que perdería mi vida por simplemente no ser de allí. Tenía miedo de llegar a un lugar donde sería forzado a escoger una vida que no era para mí. ¡Temía por mi vida! Empecé a mirar una isla aquí en Honduras que se llama Roatán. Es una isla hermosa donde llegan muchos turistas de muchos países. Mis pensamientos eran de ir allí por medio de bus y ferry y poder encontrar un trabajo donde podría usar mi inglés. Empecé con mi plan y lo primero que hice fue ahorrar dinero. Sabía que el dólar estadounidense tenía más valor que el dinero nacional de Honduras. Así que en mi mente, si ahorrra como unos \$1000 dólares, sería suficiente para llegar a mi planeada destinación. Este dinero tenía que ser suficiente para transporte, vivienda y comida. Este era el único plan que podía construir con el poco tiempo que me quedaba. Para ese entonces, ya estaba en comunicación con mis abogados. Ya me habían dicho que pronto sería trasladado a DC para la petición de IRAA. Así que no tenía mucho tiempo. Empecé a ahorrar todo el dinero que pude, cortando esos gastos que no tenía necesidad. Comía en la cocina donde trabajaba y sólo compraba lo que ocupaba. En Septiembre del 2019, fui trasladado a la Cárcel de DC. Podía ahorrar casi \$875. No era mi meta, pero me sentí bien de que no iba a llegar sin nada en mis bolsillos. En verdad, no sabía lo que traería el futuro, pero quería estar lo más preparado posible.

Al final, les cuento que he tenido la bendición de tener a mi familia a mi lado. Mi esposa y la familia con quien crecí, encontraron un apartamento estudio. No era muy grande, pero definitivamente, era más grande que una celda, así que me sentí estar en un castillo. Esto quitó muchas preocupaciones que tenía antes de salir. Y aunque puedo decir que me prepare un poco. El no saber que traería el futuro me daba mucho temor. El no saber que sería, que vendría. No saber dónde dormiría ni con quien, era una de las cosas más miedosas que he experimentado. Ese momento me enseñó a estar preparado para lo que sea. Así es el futuro. Como dicen por allí, "uno planea, Dios dispone". Siempre pensar en el futuro es cosa de importancia. Tener un plan. Y por mientras están detrás de esas paredes, no paren de pensar en el futuro que viene. Siempre tenemos que estar preparados para lo que sea. Y ustedes, ¿qué ejemplo tienen? ¿Qué piensan del futuro? ¿Cuáles son sus planes para el futuro? ¿Dónde te miras en 5 años? ¿10?

Greetings my people! First of all, I want to give you a big greeting, hoping that at the time you are reading this article, you are in the best of health... mentally as well as physically.

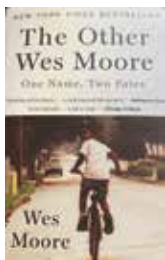
For those who don't know me or are here for the first time, my name is Carlos. I was deported to my home country, Honduras, after serving 25 years and being released under the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA) law in 2020. Sometimes I think about how long my sentence was. I'm not going to lie to you, there were times when I didn't believe I was going to get out of prison. For 25 years I thought a lot about the future, and although at that time, that future seemed so far away, thinking about the future gave me a deep sense of peace and supported my mental health. In other words, always thinking about freedom and my future helped me a lot in spending those years in prison. This month's topic in our *Connect* magazine is: The Future!

As my IRAA petition grew closer and the odds of being released became more certain, I began to think a lot about that near future. At that time I didn't know where I was going to stay. I had a family, but they were not willing to give me a place to live. I'm not going to lie to you, hearing that from them hurt me deeply. But at the same time, I understood that they did not know me and that perhaps I would be a dangerous person for them or that in one way or another, I was going to cause them harm. This got me thinking about where I would live and with whom. After 25 years, I had nothing. Not a penny in my name to help me. At that time I was in Lewisburg, Cadre (a work program serving those that were in maximum security) and I remember looking at the Atlas a lot at the prison's library. I looked at the map of Honduras and looked aimlessly at my future. My concern was that I would arrive in a place full of crime and that I would lose my life for simply not being from there. I was afraid of reaching a place where I would be forced to choose a life that was not for me. I was afraid for my life! I started looking at an island here in Honduras called Roatán. It is a beautiful island where many tourists from many countries come. My thoughts were to go there by bus and ferry and find a job where I could use my English. I started with my plan and the first thing I did was save money. I knew that the US dollar had more value than the national money of Honduras. So in my mind, if I saved about \$1000, it would be enough to get me to my planned destination. This money had to be enough for transportation, housing and food. This was the only plan I could build with the little time I had left. By then, I was already in communication with my lawyers. They had already told me that soon I would be transferred to DC for my IRAA hearing. So I didn't have much time. I started saving all the money I could, cutting out those expenses that I didn't need. I ate from the kitchen where I worked and only bought the essentials that I needed. In September 2019, I was transferred to the DC Jail. I saved almost \$875. It wasn't my goal, but I felt good that I wasn't going to arrive with nothing in my pockets. In truth, I didn't know what the future would bring, but I wanted to be as prepared as possible.

In the end, I tell you that I have been blessed to have my family by my side. My wife and the family I grew up with found me a studio apartment. It wasn't very big, but it was definitely bigger than a cell, so I felt like I was in a castle. This removed many worries I had before leaving. And although I can say that I prepared myself a little, not knowing what the future would bring made me very afraid. Not knowing what would come. Not knowing where I would sleep or with whom was one of the scariest things I have ever experienced. That moment taught me to be prepared for anything. This is the future. As they say here, "One plans, God provides." Always thinking about the future is important. Having a plan. And while you are behind those walls, don't stop thinking about the future that is coming. We always have to be prepared for anything. So I ask you, what example do you have? What do you think of your future? What are your plans for the future? Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years?

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club



The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates by Wes Moore

with Neely



Our recent Books Across the Miles selection, *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* by Wes Moore, is about Maryland governor Wes Moore, a recipient of the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship. He grew up near another Wes Moore, who was convicted of being involved in the killing of a police officer. Wes wrote a letter to the "other" Wes, now serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. He quickly discovered that the other Wes had a childhood not unlike his own, and that they were more alike than different. Here is what some of you had to say:

1. What are some of the main similarities between both Wes's childhoods? What are some of the main differences?

ER: *The Other Wes Moore* highlights the point that we all have more in common than we perceive. It also reveals that outcomes for the youth hinge on support systems and decision making. Depending on which fork in the road one takes, they can either end up a governor or a lifer.

TZ: The main similarities between both Wes Moores are that both of them grew up in areas with high crime and poverty. And the main difference between the two young men were the role models both of them had in their lives growing up. Governor Wes Moore's parents were college graduates, and after Wes's father passed away, his grandfather stepped up and became a positive role model in his life that was willing to help him and his mother mentally, physically, spiritually, and financially in his struggling times.

PF: Both Wes's grew up in difficult neighborhoods. In the 1980's and 1990's, crimes were high in major US cities, especially in Baltimore and New York City. Also, they both suffered from a lack of fathers. After a bad experience with drugs and arrest, they had opposite support from their mothers. I think that Wes, the author of the book, was saved by the military school he attended. On another hand, the mother of the other Wes struggled to discipline her son.

ROB: Some of the similarities were that they were both growing up in crime-ridden lower class areas. But the main differences were the structure of the families they had and parenting.

2. On p. 44, Wes describes "neutral grounds" in his neighborhood in the Bronx as a meeting place where every young man from the community could unite as neighbors (such as the basketball court in his neighborhood). Was there a neutral ground in your childhood neighborhood? How would you describe it?

TZ: In my neighborhood, the basketball court was most definitely

the meeting spot and neutral grounds for kids and young adults in Potomac Gardens, which was right outside the rec center. So I can most definitely relate to Governor Wes Moore.

PF: I was born and raised in France. My family was considered middle-class. My parents were strict and didn't really let us wander in our neighborhood as we wanted. In fact, my parents were overprotecting us. So, I don't know about any "neutral ground" in my neighborhood.

3. What impact does fatherhood play in the lives of both Wes's? How do the absence of their fathers and the differences in the reasons for their absences affect them?

ROB: I think fatherhood plays a huge part, or the lack of, in both of their lives. The one that succeeded lost his father. But he was a "responsible" father and he saw that model of what a man was supposed to look like, while the other Wes Moore's father was completely absent. And from growing up fatherless, I know what this did to me. A child (especially a boy) needs positive male role models to model his life after or to understand what manhood is. And when they don't have that, it leaves them suspect from "learning" or emulating negative influences. So, this played a huge role in how both Wes's lives played out.

PF: Wes, the author of the book, lost his father early in his childhood because of a medical problem; the other Wes saw his father sometimes, but it was so rare that he didn't really know him. The problem is that children need a father model, or at least a male role model. This need is especially important for boys. Wes, the author of the book, had no real male presence in his family besides his grandfather and an uncle. He has only sisters. I think it made him seek a model among his peers, his friends. Eventually the military school fulfilled this need and gave him a structure in his life. The other Wes has a big brother, Tony, who was his model. He admired his strength, his independence, his easy money. Even if Tony tried to prevent Wes from following his path, his authority was not sufficient.

AFROFUTURISM

By Makenna

This column was originally printed in Volume 13, Issue 1 (Dreams).

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

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

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

Afrofuturism can be reflected in the visual arts, poetry, creative writing, filmmaking, music, dance and more. Musicians and bands like OutKast, Sun Ra, Parliament, Funkadelic (eventually merged into one band, Parliament Funkadelic), Earth, Wind & Fire, Grace Jones, Shabazz Palaces, and Missy Elliot all embody Afrofuturism through imaginative lyrics and creative visuals in their music videos, photoshoots, and even on the red carpet. Painters such as Ellen Gallagher, Lina Iris Viktor, Wangechi Mutu, and Cyrus Kabiru are known for incorporating Afrofuturistic themes into their work. Afrofuturism is all around us because we make it so.

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

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

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

TZ: The governor Wes Moore's father had a big impact on his son's life in a positive way, and that impacted, inspired, and motivated his son to want to do better. The other Wes Moore's father was an alcoholic and his actions most definitely had a negative effect on his son's life.

4. How did you feel when looking at the early childhood photos of both Wes's? Did you notice any similarities and/or differences between the photos?

TZ: The similarities between the two Wes Moores are that both of them were willing to do anything to see their families do better. Also, they both grew up in similar neighborhoods where the crime rate was really high in the area they grew up in. And the difference between the two boys is that one of them became the governor of Maryland and the other Wes Moore ended up serving a life sentence in the Maryland system.

PF: In all the photos, the two Wes's seem happy. But we can see that one Wes had more adult male presence in his life, even if his father was no longer there.

5. On one of his visits to the prison, Wes wonders how far back in time they would have to go for the other Wes to be innocent again. How far back do you think they would have to go? What was the turning point in the other Wes's life?

PF: There are several turning points in the other Wes's life. The first one is when he wanted trendy clothes that his mother could not afford so he started to be involved in the drug business. Easy money attracted him as well as a lot of kids in the neighborhood. After that, he was a father at a young age. So, providing for his children and their mothers was important and took a lot of money. But he eventually reached a saturation point and tried to straighten up his life thanks to Job Corps. He got several jobs, but they were menial jobs that didn't pay enough for his needs. After reading the book, I wonder if the other Wes is in denial of his participation in the robbery, or if he said the truth when he said that he was not there. I wonder also what kind of father model he tries to be with his children while he is in prison.

TZ: You would have to go all the way back to when Wes was a kid, maybe 10-11 years old when he was truly innocent. Wes's turning point was when he came back from Job Corps and realized that he was still in the same position he was in before he left (he still did not have a job or any money to provide for his family).

AROUND THE WORLD: SPAIN, SCOTLAND & ICELAND *By Aneka*

Hey FM fam! I know it's been a while since I've taken you all on an adventure with me, but no worries, I have so much in store for you in this segment of the Around The World column. This past November, I went on yet another European tour and added a few new countries to the repertoire. Now one thing about me, I love to maximize my trips by visiting as many countries as possible. In this 2 week long vacation, I visited Dublin, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Edinburgh, and Reykjavik! Since I've already shared about Dublin, Ireland and Amsterdam, Netherlands in both Resilience (Vol. 12, Issue 5) and Growth (Vol. 12, Issue 4), I'll jump right into day 3 of my trip when I arrived in Barcelona.

Barcelona, Spain is a beautiful city located in the northeast region of Spain, right below France. I spent 3 days exploring this country with a couple of friends who were also visiting Barcelona at the time. I usually travel solo, so it was exciting to find out that my friend from DC, a friend from Dublin, Ireland, and a friend from London, UK were all planning to be in Barcelona at the same time I planned to visit. My friends from Dublin, London, and I stayed at this beautiful hotel called Hotel SB Glow located less than 15 minutes from the infamous Basílica i Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família (La Sagrada Família for short) - the largest unfinished Catholic church in the world! This massive structure has been under construction since 1882, making it over 140 years old. La Sagrada Família is expected to be completed in 2026 so you know I'm going to have to make it back out there to see the finished product! The hotel was also directly across the street from the Torre Glòries, a groundbreaking geyser-shaped building that is illuminated with a multitude of mesmerizing colors that change throughout the day (but is best viewed at night).

Besides being surrounded by really cool architecture, I used my time in Barcelona to have some very memorable experiences with my friends. For example, after visiting the Sagrada Família, my friends and I saw a tattoo shop that had a deal for 2 for €60 tattoos! We all ended up getting 2 tattoos that symbolize something special to each of us. One of my tattoos was a postage stamp ha ha. We also visited Park Güell, and as true Millennials, we recorded ourselves recreating the infamous Cheetah Girls dance that they performed when they visited the park as well in the second Cheetah Girls movie. Now I'm not the shyest person in the world, but being that person who makes social media content in public places has never really been my thing. Let alone performing a dance while people are waiting to walk down the stairs 😂, but I did it and the video turned out super cute!



Victoria's Street in Edinburgh, Scotland.



La Sagrada Família and Torre Glòries

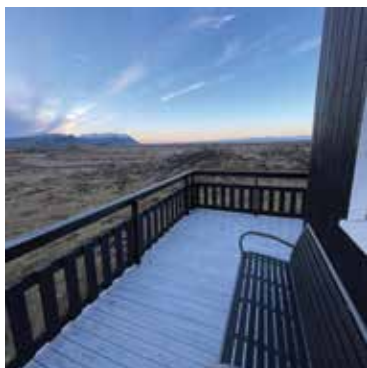
After leaving my friends in Barcelona, I flew to Edinburgh, Scotland: home to beautiful castles, rich history, and Harry Potter themed experiences! As an avid fantasy reader, you know I had to experience everything I possibly could in my one full day there. Technically, I was there for 3 days but I arrived at night on the first day and left super early on the third day. Since I was solo again, I stayed in the Castle Rock Hostel located directly across the street from Edinburgh Castle! Fun fact about Edinburgh Castle: Not only is it the most besieged castle in Great Britain (it was attacked 23 times throughout its history), it also sits on top of an extinct VOLCANO! Nevertheless, this conveniently located hostel was not only across the street from a castle, it was also a block away from Victoria's Street—J. K. Rowling's inspiration for Diagon Alley in her Harry Potter series! And on top of that, right down the street was a Harry Potter themed bar called The Department of Magic where you could make your own "potions" (cocktails) from a spooky curated menu! The bar was definitely the highlight of my Harry Potter experiences ha ha. I really enjoyed putting my drink together and how they presented my specialty shot to me in a smoke-filled wooden chest!



The ceramic bench that the Cheetah Girls danced on at Park Güell



Edinburgh Castle and Castle Rock Hostel



The view from my cabin right outside of Reykjavik.



The walkway to the springs from the main building at Hvammsvik Hot Springs.

The last stop on my European tour was Reykjavik, Iceland. Now I know what you're thinking: "You went to freezing cold Iceland in November?" Yes, I went to freezing cold Iceland in November and had the audacity to only pack a thin winter coat! This was actually a last minute add-on to my trip that I hadn't fully planned for. For lodging, I booked an isolated Airbnb cabin in the middle of nowhere, an hour and a half away from Reykjavik's airport. I read that in order to best see the Aurora Borealis (the Northern Lights) you have to get as far away from the city lights as possible. The cabin was located 15 minutes from the nearest town of Borgarnes and 12 minutes from the Hraunfossar Waterfall. The first 2 days of my trip was spent relaxing and exploring the local attractions. Unfortunately for both of those nights, I didn't have the opportunity to see the Northern Lights despite being far removed from the city lights. On my last day there, I decided to go to Hvammsvik Hot Springs located on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean. A hot spring is a natural spring where water comes out of the ground at a significantly warmer temperature than the surrounding air. Many resorts will build themselves around a hot spring and turn it into an amenity for their guests. Most hot spring resorts will also allow the public to purchase a day pass to use the hot spring and spa services for the day. I purchased a day pass to the hot spring and during my swim, I met a bunch of women who were also from the states! A mother-daughter duo were from the DC metro area, one woman was from New York City, and the other woman was from Tampa, Florida. After talking and becoming fast friends, we decided to do a cold plunge in the Atlantic Ocean together!

The woman from Tampa recorded myself and the other ladies running into the ocean, submerging our bodies all the way up to our necks, and then running back out to hop in the nearest hot spring! The resort had 8 hot springs that varied in temperature with the springs closer to the building being the hottest and the springs closer to the ocean being the coolest. That was the most exhilarating experience of my life! Have you ever hopped into an unexpectedly cold shower before and felt the chill coursing through your body? Well imagine that feeling plus being outside in under 20 degree temperatures! Afterwards we all exchanged numbers and talked some more before I headed back to my cabin. Later that day in the cabin, I was sad and disappointed that I hadn't seen the Northern Lights during my trip and it was my last night there. That evening around 7:30 pm, the ladies from earlier texted me and told me to go outside and see the lights! In November the sun sets around 5 pm in Iceland so by 7:30 pm, it was pitch black outside. They told me that in order to see the lights, I would need to use my cellphone camera in night mode.

Seeing the Northern Lights in person actually brought me to tears. I was hysterical and in awe seeing the lights right above my head while I was surrounded by nothing but mountains and open skies. I know I say this every issue but this really was the trip of a lifetime. I can't wait to see what's in store for me on my next adventure Around The World. ✈️



Photos of the Northern lights above my cabin in Reykjavik, Iceland

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NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: GOALS

By Julia

I'm guessing that everyone reading this has at least one goal that they'd like to accomplish. Now, some things that we want for our future are outside our control, but for this next issue we're going to focus on the goals we can set for ourselves and the steps we can take to accomplish them. Maybe you want to improve your vocabulary, or learn a new language, or set a new personal best in the gym. Maybe you want to score some literal goals in your favorite sport! Your goals could be short-term or long-term. Like, I'm trying to get better sleep in the short-term. And in the long-term, I want to finish writing another book! Whatever your goals may be, I believe that the first step to accomplishing them is to imagine them (and even better – to write them down!). Then, once we have our goals written down, we can practice writing an action plan that breaks them down into smaller pieces; this can make a challenging goal feel more attainable. As the saying goes, "A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step." So for me, I might say step one to finishing my book is writing an outline of the whole plot, or improving my writing habits – like writing for a few minutes every week. Then my next step could be building from there – maybe writing every day! I can't wait to hear all about your goals...and I know you'll be accomplishing them soon!

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!



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