

April/May/June 2026
Vol. 15, Issue 2

Free minds Connect

GENERATIONS



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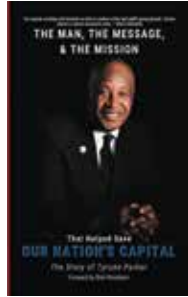
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: BETTER TOGETHER

Dear FM Boomers, Gen Xers, Zers, Alphas, and Millennials,

While demographers divide us into groups every 15-20 years shaped by historical events, culture, the economy, and technology inventions, we at Free Minds are all one big beautiful multigenerational group noted for our love of intergenerational curiosity, learning, and togetherness. 😊

Free Minds is so strong today thanks to the countless contributions of many guides, sages, and unsung heroes. For this Generations themed issue, I wanted you to hear from one of these wise elders who has played and still plays an invaluable part in making Free Minds who we are today. I sat down with my friend Tyrone, who is a nonprofit leader, an author, a peacemaker, an organizer, a visionary, and an icon of our city. We talked about his groundbreaking work as the founder of the Alliance of Concerned Men, connecting youth with mentors to stop violence in DC. You will get an opportunity to hear more from Tyrone in a future issue!



Tyrone started the Alliance of Concerned Men in the early 90s because he and his friends were tired of seeing so many parents losing their children to gun violence. Tyrone himself lost a son to gun violence and he didn't want that gun to claim any other lives. As men who loved their community, they set out first to find out why this was happening. This is a key step that they took in those early days: listening to what the young people had to say. Then, he says, "we tailored what we provided to what each community told us they needed most, whether it was parenting support, mentoring, and more. We asked every community what are your dreams and then set out to help them accomplish them." They also met young people where they were, bringing their programs to the jail, the street, or group homes. They also helped bring young people out of those environments, to see different places and different opportunities. For Tyrone, this relationship building across generations was essential. With that foundation of trust, they were able to step in to stop beefs because the young people involved knew them and trusted them.

Tyrone also credits the Ancestors for giving him "hope and the courage to continue no matter how hard it gets." When asked about generations, he says, "I believe in the power of all people of all ages, all races to unite. The age differences strengthen the mission. We have so much in common when

people are united by a common purpose."

We can't thank Tyrone enough for the hope, support, and vision he's brought to our city and Free Minds. You will get to read about other changemakers in this issue. In the Reentry Profile on page 16, Curtis shares his experiences with older and younger generations. On page 34, Ruby interviews two members of DC Grandparents for Mental Health, about the work they do across DC to facilitate open conversations about the importance of wellbeing for people of all ages. Meanwhile, Jordan shares his perspective on page 39 about the continuous attempts to criminalize young adults throughout the DMV, and his own experiences with the Youth Rehabilitation Act.

For those who may have missed the news about a group of Buddhist Monks visiting DC during their Walk For Peace, Ruby recaps their journey across the nation and talks about their dedication to spreading peace, hope, and mindfulness. I had the chance to share my reflections with her for this piece and talk about how people from all generations and walks of life gathered to see the monks despite the chilly February weather, a testament to how many people were moved by their message of peace.

And of course, what would be a Free Minds Connect without poetry? In this issue, you'll find moving poetry and personal stories like this piece by JS (page 11):

*Generations, evolution and lost nations
stories never told again and fairytales told to incite hope,
dreams of a way of life gone now,
sometimes the past seems better than the present,
but we all wish to see the future,
a better future than where we stand,
in hopes to have something of worth to pass down,
to our daughters and sons,
the generations to come.*

May we all continue working hand in hand towards that better future.

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: Imagination

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!)

FREE MINDS HAS A NEW MAILING ADDRESS!

Free Minds Book Club

P.O. Box 73618

Washington, DC 20056

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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, Shahid, Malik, Joe

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 HQ

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

By Rebecca

Free Minds Moved Offices!

On Friday, March 27th, Free Minds completed its relocation to our new office space! And like everything that Free Minds does, this move was a family affair. In the days leading up to the final transition, several members volunteered their time to help with everything from packing up books to transporting items to storage. As with most moves, there were many items that needed to find a new home, especially books. Thankfully, we were able to donate several boxes of books to Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in SE to help replenish their five libraries and mobile library carts. We want to say a huge thank you to everyone who helped make this move a success! Free Minds magic does it again! And don't worry, we still have no shortage of books waiting for you when you come home. Reminder: please use our new mailing address for all correspondence! **Free Minds Book Club, PO Box 73618, Washington, DC 20056.**

Free Minds Poet Ambassadors Travel to Connecticut

In April, Tara, Regina, and our amazing Poet Ambassadors (FM members who use poetry and storytelling in our On the Same Page community engagement program) Curtis and Kenneth traveled to New Haven, Connecticut to engage with the students and staff of Gateway Community College. Over two days, our Free Minds team presented 5 sessions with different classes where they shared the history and work of Free Minds, their personal stories and poems, and the poems of members still behind the wall. The sessions closed out with time for attendees to leave responses on our members' poetry. The students and staff were very attentive, excited, and honored to have us and to read your poetry. All in all, this event was a wonderful and impactful experience for our team and the attendees alike!

Peer Support Cohort 11

Our first Peer Support Cohort of 2026 has successfully concluded! This unique 12-week training program for reentry members focuses on trauma-informed care and the development of social-emotional support and skills. The 16 graduates of Cohort 11, with ages ranging from 20s to 50s, experienced a supportive space for growth, connection, and accountability. Participants engaged in discussions about recovery, health, navigating conflict with family and coworkers, personal development, and the work of redefining themselves. Many of the participants shared how the program helped them demonstrate their growth and change to friends and family who may see them from a past lens. Through this program, the participants have built healthy support systems and meaningful connections that they can turn to as they continue their reentry journeys. As a popular African proverb says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Congratulations to the graduates of Peer Support Cohort 11! May you all go far together.



FREE MINDS MAILBAG

We love getting mail from our Free Minds family. Here are some of your thoughts on recent Connect issues.

KS: In the Animal Kingdom *Connect*, I'd like to compliment Kelli's The Animals of the Serengeti quote: "One remarkable ability of the human mind is that we can visit places without ever leaving where we are." Elephants, lions, polar bears, and seals are my favorite creatures. Ms. Keela did a piece on the ants. My spirit has been compelling me to present a bible study/message on this subject. I'll seek God's direction for scripture verses in relation to the ant and humans.

AHA: Thanks to you all for more well put together issues. The "Empathy & Compassion" issue prepared me in more than one way to address the victim's family at my IRAA hearing that I have anticipated to do for 24 years now. Along the way, as you grow and come in touch with yourself not trapped in that state where you lacked empathy or compassion, you understand its importance, so thanks for a theme well needed. The DC photos always amaze me with how different the city looks and how well it has evolved in the many areas I remembered growing up in. I can't wait to come home to enjoy these new areas and all DC has to offer.

JS: I liked reading about everyone's hobbies in the Passions *Connect*. I saw a lot of things I would like to do if I find the time when I come home like taking dance classes (like Sofia), doing martial arts (like Neha), traveling (like Aneka and Jordan), learning to cut hair (like Carlos), and experimenting with different foods (like Neely).

JY: First of all, I want to say thank you for everything y'all sent me since I hooked up with y'all. Free Minds is really supportive and I appreciate y'all a lot. I also enjoy the Free Minds *Connects*. I like looking at the pictures in them and seeing the new changes in DC. I also like the interviews with dudes once they come home from prison. I wanted to say something about the books *The Many Lives of Mama Love* and *Free Cyntoia*. I liked those books. I never read books like those and it gave me more hope on me getting out one day soon.

SJ: I've read the whole new *Connect* about "Animal Kingdom" and it was great to actually rethink about the wonderful creation of animals that Allah has created out of nothing. It actually speaks about the creation of animals in the Quran. I like all the Free Minds animals as well. It was funny looking at all the animals and it reminds me of growing up with various animals in my household. I like Aneka's Yorkie, Kelli's dog Archie, Julia's dog Orfeo (Do people really celebrate animals' birthdays? Wow!), Jennifer's cat Mischief, and all the other pets the Free Minds staff own I like as well.

HJ: You know it's been said that life is for learning. And I sure have learned a lot since you all came into my world. The good books, the magazines that have the photos and all the latest legal information that relates to our beloved city, has been so refreshing to me. It helps to keep me current. Ms. Neely and my Free Minds family, I appreciate your patience with me. If the planet was full of programs/movements like you all have, then the world would be a greater world. I'm honored to be writing to you all.

QUOTE-I-VATOR

"Continue to speak out against all forms of injustice to yourselves and others, and you will set a mighty example for your children and for future generations."

– Bernice King, American lawyer, minister, and youngest child of Martin Luther King Jr.



Bernice King

"Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations." – Henry David Thoreau, American naturalist and essayist

"If you look deep into the palm of your hand, you will see your parents and all generations of your ancestors. All of them are alive in this moment. Each is present in your body. You are the continuation of each of these people."
– Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese monk and peace activist

"Struggle is a never ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation." – Coretta Scott King, American author, activist, and civil rights leader

"All we have is the knowledge passed down to us by our elders, experiences we inculcate and hardly negate. But to bridge the generation gap, one needs to adapt to the new while retaining the goodness of the old."
– Sonali Bendre, Indian actress

"The children are always ours, every single one of them, all over the globe; and I am beginning to suspect that whoever is incapable of recognizing this may be incapable of morality. Or, I am saying, in other words, that we, the elders, are the only models children have. What we see in the children is what they have seen in us-or, more accurately perhaps, what they see in us." – James Baldwin, American writer and civil rights activist

FAMILY TIES: SHAWN'S FAMILY HISTORY

By Isaiah

For this issue's Family Ties article, I had the chance to interview our Free Minds member, Shawn. He came home on December 22 and has been on a mission to achieve his goals and spend time with his family. He encourages everyone to trace their lineage back to truly know who they are. This article follows Shawn and his interactions with his family before, during, and after his incarceration.

Isaiah: How long have you been home, and what are you up to now?

Shawn: I've been home since December 22, 2025. Because I did 34 straight years, I didn't have anything. So, I had to get my Social Security card, my driver's license, insurance, car insurance, and everything. I've accomplished all those goals in this amount of time. I even got an EBT card and got food stamps. I've also had a full physical and had a colonoscopy.

Isaiah: How did you stay connected with your family while you were incarcerated?

Shawn: I was locked up from 1991 to 2025. Well, from 1991 to 2014, I was locked up in the state of Virginia. My family was in North Carolina, so they were able to drive and come see me. Pretty much during that time, my mom, dad, and brothers would come to see me, but it was mostly by phone and letters, since there were no emails or texts back then. It was a lot of writing, visits, and pictures. A lot of people don't realize that when you guys send pictures to us, vicariously we can live through you through those pictures.

Isaiah: What was your relationship like with your family before your incarceration?

Shawn: Well, because my mom and dad were both Black Panthers, the way my brothers and I were raised was a lot different from that of regular brothers and sisters who came up in the communities we did. We came up in the 70s, now I'm telling my age by giving you this, but we came up in the 70s. My mom and dad made sure we were really close. They instilled in us that you have to have a strong family. So, it made us be strong in our families. So, my family ties prior to me being locked up and during me being locked up were beautiful. For the whole 34 years, there was never a time when they were not there for me. So, as far as my family ties go, they are strong because of the mindset my mom and dad had coming up in the movement.

Isaiah: Is there a particular memory that you remember from your past that sticks with you?

Shawn: Yeah, one thing I can remember coming up is that my birthday is July 23, and my dad's birthday is July 24. So every year we would celebrate our birthdays together, and that was a special moment for me because I was the middle child. Because my dad's birthday and my birthday were so close together, it was almost like I was getting special treatment from my dad. Even now, I can smile about it, even though my dad passed six years ago, I can still smile about it at this moment.

Isaiah: What advice would you give to folks who are still inside and wanting to maintain those relationships with their family?

Shawn: One of the most important things I can say to the brothers and sisters that's still locked up is to reflect on your life, what you did wrong, and try to apologize to those people in your family, as well as the friends that you have. One of the most important things I learned, because I was a mentor for over 20 years during my incarceration, it's important to apologize for the wrong you did, even if they don't forgive you. At least let them know you were wrong for doing this and that you want to apologize. Even if they don't accept it, you did your part and extended your hand. A lot of times, we get trapped inside the system, and we forget about the wrongs that we did, and we'll reach out to our family and ask for A, B, C, or D, and we won't even be thinking about, "let me apologize for all the

wrong I did." My family is still here for me, even though I did wrong. A lot of brothers and sisters don't realize that, even though we did wrong, our family will hopefully love us and be there for us. But it's imperative that we reflect on the wrong that we did and ask for forgiveness. To me, that's one of the most important things, because once you ask for forgiveness, your family may forgive you because they're going to be there for you, and hopefully it gives you the ability to move forward and stay in contact with your family.

Isaiah: What would you say to family and friends who are on the outside, as far as how they can support their loved ones who are incarcerated?

Shawn: Most brothers and sisters have what's called a go-home date. Because we know we have a go-home date, the family has to help the brother or sister prepare prior to coming out. We know months and years in advance when you will get out, unless, like in my case, you got two life sentences and the laws change to get you out. The majority of the brothers and sisters inside, know when they get out. So, what we have to do is come up with some type of program to get people to start focusing on, basically, I would say, like, a five-year plan before you get out. Now, some people might not even have five years, so it could be a four-year plan, a three-year plan, a four-month plan, or a six-month plan. It just depends on the particular individual, but it has to be done prior to getting out. Like me, they technically released me to a homeless shelter after 34 years. Just put me on a bus, gave me \$19, and said, "Here you go," and released me to a homeless shelter. They let me out on December 22, so it's three days before Christmas. Now, just imagine if I didn't have any family support, I would have been physically trapped in the homeless shelter with nothing. Fortunately, that wasn't my situation, but that's why recidivism is so high. The majority of the brothers and sisters getting out would have been a burden on them, being released to a homeless shelter.

Isaiah: Our theme for this *Connect Magazine* issue is Generations. What comes to your mind when you think about Generations? What generation (like Gen X, Millennials, or Gen Z) are you? What is something that your family did or does that's a tradition for you guys, and could it last for generations?

Shawn: I fall in Gen X. One thing my family does for the New Year is the Black Eyed Peas, so that's pretty much a staple in the community. Given that we're dealing with Generations, I would like the brothers and sisters who read this article to focus on this. A lot of us in our communities are not able to trace our lineage past our grandparents. If somebody asked you, "Tell me your grandparents' grandparents' name or go further back?" The majority of us aren't able to answer those questions. So, let's take this particular *Connect* and say, "You know what, let me try to trace my lineage back and start learning." If you don't know, how can you truly know who you are? You have to know where you came from. Sometimes you have to go back to move forward.

Isaiah: What does your family consist of now, and what have you done with your family since you've been home?

Shawn: Well, right now, my family would consist of my mom and my two brothers. I have a son, and both my brothers have children. So, I got nieces, nephews, and grandbabies. I have a pretty big family. Plus, I have friends. One of the main things I can say is that my family and I go see a movie together once a month. It's like a family time thing.

Isaiah: I thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to talk with me about your Family Ties.



TECH TALK: UPDATING YOUR TECHNOLOGY

By Emily

When I heard that the theme for this edition of the *Connect* was generations, I immediately thought of people of various ages – grandparents, parents, kids, etc. What I didn't think of, until my lovely coworker Sofia pointed it out, is that technology also has different "generations"! And that is what we will be covering in this month's tech column. When you get home, we hope this information will be useful to you in keeping your devices up to date.

The first generation of the iPhone came out in 2007 – almost 20 years ago. I remember when my friend rolled up to middle school one day with a brand new iPhone. We were all so jealous of her! We spent our entire lunch period covertly playing Angry Birds on her phone (for those who have never heard of it, Angry Birds is an old phone game where you slingshot birds into buildings to crush them. Now that I write it out, it doesn't sound as fun as it was at the time LOL). Since then, Apple has come out with over 20 generations of iPhones.

Each new generation of any phone, iPhone or Samsung or Google Pixel or other, will have new features on it. While sometimes these are great improvements (like making the camera better or changing the charging cable port to be more universal), sometimes they feel a little less crucial. All this to say, there is no need to get a new phone anytime your preferred brand comes out with a new generation. That would get expensive and wasteful very quickly.

What is important is to make sure you stay consistent with updating your phone. The software developers that created your phone's operating system (the software that makes your phone work the way it is supposed to) are constantly working to update their work. This includes fixing any bugs (issues with the code) and making changes to the way apps might look or run.

Every two months or so, your phone will have a minor operating system (OS) update. Some people configure their settings so that their phone processes these updates automatically. This will typically happen in the middle of the night while you are sleeping, as long as your phone is plugged in and connected to WiFi. Other people choose to manually start the updates at a time that is convenient for them. Someone might choose this option for a number of reasons – often the update needs a lot of the phone's storage. Also, sometimes updates change how certain apps look on the screen, and some people just don't like change. :)

The number one reason to try to keep up with the OS updates is that sometimes, if your phone falls too far behind, certain things will stop working as well as they should. Occasionally apps are only compatible with the latest phone update. In my case, I didn't update my phone and then when my friend texted me some of the newest emojis, I couldn't see them. While this is hardly a crisis, there are sometimes bigger fixes in the update like changes to phone security.

Other devices, like laptops and tablets, also have different generations. When you get home and are shopping around for a device, it is important to keep the generation in mind. The older devices are typically cheaper because they have been out for longer. However, this also means that they don't have all of the recent updates and might not be compatible with new apps. It is up to you to weigh the pros and cons of affordability versus having the latest and greatest, and it really depends on what you plan to use the device for! If it is mostly for browsing the internet and staying in touch with your family and friends, an older generation will do perfectly fine. If you are hoping to start a business or a podcast using the device, you might want something newer that is compatible with the latest apps. No matter what you choose, Free Minds will be glad to try and help answer your tech questions along the way!

ESSAYS & STORIES BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Listen and Love By AH

I believe that we, as an older generation, can create connection and understanding with the younger generation. But first, we need to see their pain and their struggles. That means we have to *listen*.

We must talk with them and not at them.

Most importantly we must learn how to look at the person and not what they have done or who they claim to be. For example, I once claimed to be a 19-year-old thug when I first came into the system. It took years for me to realize that for real, I was just a young man searching for love and looking for hope in all the wrong places.

I believe that some of us older guys give up on the youth too soon and throw them to the wolves, which makes them easy targets for the "web-life." They see things online and glorify it. They find themselves identifying with social media better than reality – real things and real people.

We can connect with them only if we take the time to sit

them down, listen, and communicate the truth. And that truth is, that in our own way, we were just like them. The truth is, we looked for guidance in things or people that were not worthy to guide us. The truth is, we listened to people who really didn't care about our pain and our struggles and it got us nowhere.

Now as a man – and I mean a real man with a 93-year sentence hanging over my head – I've found hope in such a hopeless place. Yeah, I was once hard headed but the good men grabbed me up and pulled me to their chest and told me that I wasn't in here alone. Like the character Malik told OG Bobby Johnson in the movie South Central, the only way we as men can break the cycle of hate, is if we give to each other the gift of love.

So just like Malik, I give it to you, all my young brothers and sisters. And I hope and pray that you all turn around and give it to someone else.

Ending the Cycle By IK

I'm the first in my family to ever go to prison, I pray I'm the last. My family are from two parts of West Africa and I grew up in a very loving home, despite my parents' divorce. I'm blessed, I have 3 baby sisters. I hope they learn and do better than me just like a parent wishes for their child. In here I hear the cycle trickling down to someone's mom or dad, both sometimes locked up, then a sibling, and so on. I don't want the cycle to continue. I had an uncle get picked up for immigration stuff but he's a good guy and got his papers. But I did something cruel.

The Person My Younger Self Needed By DK

When I think about my younger self, I see someone who needed guidance, stability, and understanding. There were moments in my life where I did not have the support or direction I felt I needed, and that played a role in the choices I made. Today, I am becoming the kind of person I needed back then.

I am learning to be patient and thoughtful, instead of reactive. My younger self needed someone who could show that strength does not come from aggression, but from control and wisdom. That is something I am working to embody now.

I am also becoming more emotionally aware. I understand my feelings better and am learning how to process them in a healthy way. That is something I did not have before. If I had known how to handle emotions differently, some of my choices might have been different. Now, I am building that understanding within myself.

Another important chance is accountability. I am no longer blaming circumstances or others for where I am. I take responsibility for my actions and focus on what I can control. That mindset is something my younger self needed to learn earlier.

Spiritually, I am developing a relationship with God that gives me guidance and strength. That foundation would have made a difference in my early years, and now it is shaping who I am becoming.

In many ways, I cannot change that past, but I can honor it by becoming better. I am giving myself now what I did not have then: structure, discipline, and purpose. That growth means something. It shows that even though my younger self struggled, the man I am becoming is stronger because of it.

ESSAYS & STORIES BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

The Swap By DS

When grandfather and grandson swapped bodies for a week, it was a learning opportunity like no other. The grandson, usually spry and active, now struggled to move, he had trouble managing normal, everyday activities. He quickly realized all that he had taken for granted. He had trouble hearing. He could barely see. It was terrifying. But it gave him a deeper respect for his grandfather and taught him respect and patience. The grandfather was grateful that everything was clear once again—his eyesight, his hearing, even his sense of smell. He could run, jump, and play in ways he hadn't done in years. However, being a little boy again in this modern age was overwhelming. Going to school and trying to learn with new technologies was confusing. Communicating with peers through social media and using smartphones drove him (grandpa) crazy. The grandfather quickly realized he couldn't wait to get back to his old life. Lessons were learned that week that would never be forgotten. They had a newfound respect for one another and a bond that will never break.

Generations By AHA

Many can say the past has a history of struggle, division and different experiences not witnessed today. The many ways we have overcome are the sacrifices our ancestors and leaders gave to make society what it is today. It shows daily in my life knowing I can do certain things like vote, protest, and speak out against injustice freely... I hope the world can continue to unite, leaving our future generations to appreciate this unity; not forgetting the past generations nor the work that was done.

My generation was the evolution of an evolving sound that was heard everywhere you turned in DC. This was the Go-Go music era at its best; when Spike Lee made the movie "School Daze" others got to hear this unique sound creating a genre that would love on. The media sounded off calling DC Chocolate City, shaping the city along with its style as different and one of a kind. The stories and literature would emerge from this time, shaping a generation that I remember which will lead to the 90's and beyond.

The Generationally Accursed: Every Generation By BG

"Wait...!

"What...?!

"WHY AM I WRINKLED?!"

I manage to shuffle to the bathroom without Life Alert, for what it's worth, as I take a glimpse of the woman staring back at me with cunning familiarity.

"Gram-ma-ma, is it you? Is it me?"

This is too bizarre for my heart and I shriek with fright, as I feel my blood run cold.

"Oh no, stop what you doing!"

I forgot that I'm no longer young, I struggle to gather my bearings as I trot toward the phone.

"Someone, somebody please tell me where'd the time go!?"

The invasion of my mind, body, and spirit; the assault continues. I sob as I punch digits on the phone.

"Please, I need an explanation. Tell me what is going on, before I fell asleep I wasn't my grandmother pushing 60 years old!"

The phone's ringing...

"Hello?"

"Gram-ma-ma!!"

And she says...

"What's wrong, could you lower your tone? I'm on a date, little girl, I don't have time for the phone. Yet I know the reason why you've called, you see? For I am you, and you are me! Every generation takes advantage of this golden opportunity. On this month and day, what was old becomes new, and this time it's between you and me. I love you, so I hate to put you through it, but it's not for all eternity. At the stroke of midnight, you'll return to your body. This is my last chance to be young before death. Once more, I know your jaw is on the floor, but you mustn't tell a soul of the occurrence or my shell will be your home!!

"For your beloved Gram-ma-ma is a high priestess witch, and you're of age for this accursed trick. This is your test, after 12 you begin as an apprentice and one day you'll have to do this. Until then, I gotta go so seal them lips, I'll see you later."

"Bye, Gram-ma Trish..."

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Generations

by DK

Generations sit at the same table
arguing over a map drawn in different ink.
One remembers the slow ring of a rotary phone,
voices carried on wires,
evenings that belonged to the porch and the dark.
Another remembers passwords,
screens glowing like artificial moons at midnight,
connection without touch.
One learned patience by waiting.
Another learned urgency by swiping.
But when they speak long enough,
you hear it
they are trying to describe the same world
with different scars.
In my life I have watched elders speak in warnings,
and youth speak in possibilities.
I have seen memory steady ambition,
and ambition refuse to be caged by memory.
The old teach endurance.
The young teach what endurance is for.
Somewhere between "this is how we survived"
and "this is how we can live,"
a society breathes
layered, tense, alive with perspective.

Cast Down Your Bucket Where You Are

by KW

High school dropouts are 8 times more likely
than high school graduates
to go to...prison.
Would it stand
if we heeded the address,
at the Atlanta Exposition?
Majority.
Majority of prisoners in prison today,
are of Negro descent.
Did we trade "beneficial opportunities"
for "political rights?"
Did we trade "financial independence"
for "political equality?"
Did we trade "gold"
for "copper?"
Did we?
Booker T. Washington said,
"Cast down your bucket where you are."
Pauline E. Hopkins did say "his words and acts"
will be carefully scrutinized,
By...future...generations.
Did we trade "industrial education"
for "political?"
Day by day in the same old monotonous way.
Defining America by what she's supposed to give,
Booker T. Washington said,
"Cast down your bucket where you are!"
No face can prosper till it learns that there is
as much dignity in tilling a field,
as in...writing...a...poem.

Generationz

by BG

From my mom to my grandson lives 4 generationz
On this computer freestyling this poem pushin' towardz liberation
Although I am incarcerated I am blessed
I aim to at least make it to the streetz to build with my momz one day
See my daughter smile and listen to her voice
She makez my day
All I see is her on my grandson's face
I am takin' thingz slow to prepare for freedom when God opens
these doorz
Not a minute later, not a second before
I have a duty to reach those within my reach with a special touch
Unlike those thoughtz against me I do give a f***
So miss me with the slick statements and nosey questionz with
itchin' earz
I am not moved with your interrogation
Can't you see itz been over 20 yearz
4eva remaining in righteousness
By the grace of God, in the name of Christ
4 generationz of my family alone, including me,
Eternally livez

Generaciones

por JA

Gente sabía que ha vivido
En una época ya de olvido
Nuestros antepasados han convivido
En otras épocas que han compartido
Riendo, llorando o conversando
Añorando y muchas veces soñando
Con mucho orgullo deseando
Imaginando su futuro llegado
O recordando lo enseñado
Es lo aprendido lo que nos han dejado
Sabios abuelos que no nos han olvidado

Generations (English translation)

by JA

Wise people who have lived
In an era now forgotten,
Our ancestors have lived together
In other times they shared
Laughing, crying, or talking,
Longing and often dreaming,
With great pride, wishing,
Imagining their future arriving,
Or remembering what they were taught.
It is what they learned that they have left us,
Wise grandparents who have not forgotten us.

Generations

by AHA

Generational wealth
Equal rights
Never forgetting the past
Evolving over time
Remaining humble
Ability to grow and learn
Teaching what shaped you
Incorporating life lessons
Opening doors to create
New adventures to inherit
Shaping what will live on forever

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Generations

by KOL

Generations

Evolve

Nothing's

Easy

Remember

Asafos*

Train

Intentionally

Our

Next

Sons and daughters

NEVER GIVE UP

NEVER GIVE UP

Hold your head high

NEVER GIVE UP

Be the best you, you can be

NEVER GIVE UP

When life seems to be difficult

NEVER GIVE UP

Face each adversity with confidence

NEVER GIVE UP

It will only make you stronger

NEVER GIVE UP

There will be better tomorrows to come

NEVER GIVE UP

**Asafos: Warrior groups in Akan culture. The Akan people are a Kwa group living primarily in Ghana and parts of Ivory Coast and Togo in West Africa.*

The District Generations*

by AD

Genesis of being, a grand gyre through aeons span,

Epigenetic whispers, an ethereal, unceasing plan.

Numinous nexus bringing epochs, a nascent, vital thrum,

Entelechy's effulgence, from whence all futures come.

Resonant echoes of recondite, ancestral lore,

Archetypal spirit, through blood-lines to the fore.

Temporal trajectory, a testament to what has manifest,

Immemorial truths, within the souls deep sheen.

Ontological currents, an overarching, sentient flow,

Nodal points of being, where now cognition grows.

Sagacity's deep serried strata, a sublime, ending luminosity.

**If there are words in this poem that you would like to look up but you don't have a dictionary, write to us and we'll send you the definitions!*

A Gift From My Grandma

by IK

Gambian and Sierra Leone, blood running through the veins.

Even when mocked,

stereotypes and jokes of what I identify as

When we fall, dust ourselves off and try again.

Nonsense and distractors will not detour me from making myself and my family proud.

Evolve from mistakes, embarrassment, embrace growth to be a good girl from a good family.

Respect my name

first and last

holds more value than a carat of gold, Lord and behold.

Abdul and Mariatu built a tree, better than mangoes: a family tree.

Traveling to Sierra Leone was the best culture shift of my life, I must bring my kids.

I—* is a gift from my grandma,

a name shouldn't hold shame, never want to American-change.

Ousman and I— left too soon from earth and brought Daddy to the U.S. dream.

No weapon fashioned against me shall prosper.

Smells of cassava and palm oil paint my memory of a legacy I gotta carry,

Amen.

**Author's name redacted for privacy*

Generations

by JS

Generations, evolution and lost nations

stories never told again and fairytales told to incite hope,

dreams of a way of life gone now,

sometimes the past seems better than the present,

but we all wish to see the future,

a better future than where we stand,

in hopes to have something of worth to pass down,

to our daughters and sons,

the generations to come.

A Dying Wish

by JM

I want you to find love

Find a love that makes your heart flutter,

like mine did,

when I met your father.

You'll treat her right -

I know you will,

I taught you right.

And though I won't be around to see them,

I'll be in heaven,

smiling at my beautiful grandchildren.

Oh baby,

for your father's heart,

he'll need them.

Because he always promised me -

Alone, he'll never let me go.

DC PHOTOS *By Isaiah*

As requested by our readers



DC Public Library's "Library on the Go-Go" cark in NW



Guido Reichstadter, a 45-year-old activist from Florida, had climbed the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge on Friday, May 1, 2026, to protest the war in Iran and the development of artificial intelligence, remaining on the bridge for six days



Top from left to right: Francis Cardozo Education Campus Football Stadium, Theodore Roosevelt High School Football Stadium.
Bottom from left to right: Jackson-Reed (formerly Woodrow Wilson) High School Football Stadium, Dunbar High School Football Stadium

DC PHOTOS *By Isaiah*

As requested by our readers



Cherry Blossoms along the Anacostia Park walking trail



Petalpalooza stage with Frederick Douglass Bridge in Background



Petalpalooza Billboard

Have a request for the next issue's DC Photos? Write us at Free Minds Book Club,
P.O. Box 73618, Washington, DC 20056 and let us know what you'd like to see!

CONVERSACIONES DE MENTES LIBRES

Por Carlos

Saludos mi gente. Para mi siempre es un privilegio comunicarme con ustedes por estos medios sin importar la distancia entre nosotros. Espero que al leer este artículo, se encuentren con la mejor salud. Y que sin importar las paredes que los encierran, que siempre estén mentalmete libres.

El tema de este artículo es "Generaciones." En la historia de la humanidad, las generaciones representan más que simples grupos de personas nacidas en un mismo período. Cada generación lleva consigo una identidad marcada por los acontecimientos sociales, culturales, tecnológicos y políticos de su tiempo.

- **Generación Silenciosa (1928-1945):** Crecieron en medio de guerras y crisis económicas, valoraban la disciplina y la estabilidad.
- **Baby Boomers (1946-1964):** Nacieron en una época de prosperidad y expansión; se asocian con el trabajo duro y el crecimiento económico.
- **Generación X (1965-1980):** Testigos de cambios tecnológicos iniciales, suelen ser independientes y adaptables.
- **Millennials (1981-1996):** Marcados por la globalización y el auge de internet, valoran la diversidad y la innovación.
- **Generación Z (1997-2012):** Nativos digitales, crecieron con redes sociales y un acceso inmediato a la información.
- **Generación Alfa (2013 en adelante):** La más joven, rodeada de inteligencia artificial y avances tecnológicos desde su nacimiento.

Cada generación aporta su propia visión del mundo, y juntas forman un mosaico de experiencias que enriquecen la sociedad. Lo fascinante es cómo se influncian entre sí: los mayores transmiten sabiduría, mientras los jóvenes impulsan cambios y nuevas formas de pensar.

Este tema me recordó que he tenido el privilegio de ver a estas generaciones por medio de las mujeres en mi familia. Primero, tuve el honor de poder estar con mi bisabuela, la mamá de mi abuela. Tenía 7 años cuando ella falleció, así que no recuerdo mucho de ella. Lo que sí me acuerdo es que ella siempre me daba de comer. Me sentaba a su lado y no permitía que me fuera hasta que terminara la comida. Me acuerdo que sus manos siempre olían a comida porque ella siempre pasaba en la cocina.

Tenía un carácter fuerte, y no tenía pelos en la lengua, decía lo que pensaba y sentía.

Mi abuela era como mi madre. Ella nos crió (mi hermana mayor y yo). Mi mama en esos tiempos, no tenía mucho dinero y recuerdo que vivimos en diferentes lugares. A mis abuelos no les gustaba eso, así que nos llevaron a su casa y desde entonces nos criaron. Ellos nos querían como sus propios hijos. Tanto que cuando vino el tiempo de ir a los Estados Unidos, ellos no nos querían dejar. Hicieron todo para que mi hermana y yo nos fuéramos con ellos. Tenía 9 años en ese entonces. Ella tuvo 8 hijas y un hijo. Mi abuela era una persona dulce y era raro verla enojada. Y el castigo más duro fue cuando empezó a tener dificultades para hablar. Hacía todo para visitarme en varias prisiones. Ella falleció estando yo en prisión. Ese fue uno de los días más tristes para mi. Recuerdo la última vez que la llame, ella no tenía fuerzas para hablar y estaba perdiendo la memoria, pero cuando la llamé esa vez, ella rápido reconoció mi voz y escuche que sonrió.

Mi mamá era una persona trabajadora. Me acuerdo cuando la acompañaba a sus trabajos. En esos días, ella hacía pelo y uñas. Ella también es de carácter fuerte pero siempre me hablaba con cariño. Porque me crié con mis abuelos y me fui con ellos a los Estados Unidos cuando era pequeño, no tengo muchas memorias con ella. Pero después de ser deportado a mi país, he tenido la oportunidad de conocerla de nuevo. Ella tuvo 3 hijos, yo y mis dos hermanas.

Mi hermana menor tampoco la pude conocer ya que ella se quedó con mis padres en este país. Ella nació en Navidad, y recuerdo cuando la trajeron a casa del hospital. Recuerdo que estaba curioso y ansioso por verla. Entré al cuarto cuando estaba dormida. Me acerqué para tocarle la carita y la desperté. Salí corriendo porque pensé que eso me metería en un problema. Hoy día ella vive en España y no tuve la oportunidad de conocerla, solo por medio de teléfono. Ella tuvo tres hijos. Dos viven con ella en España y una está aquí. A ella si la pude conocer mejor al llegar aquí a Honduras. Ella tiene un hijo de 6 años y he disfrutado mucho estar con ellos y conocerlos. Repito, ha sido un privilegio para mí poder ver a estas cinco generaciones de mujeres en mi familia. Poder decir que ellas forman parte de quien soy. Y tú, ¿qué puedes compartir acerca de las Generaciones en tu familia y el significado de ello para ti? ¿Puedes escribir un poema dedicado a las Generaciones?

FREE MINDS CONVERSATIONS

By Carlos

Greetings everyone. It's always a privilege for me to connect with you through these means, regardless of the distance between us. I hope that as you read this article, you are in good health. And that, no matter the walls that confine you, you always remain mentally free.

The topic of this article is "Generations." In the history of humankind, generations represent more than simply groups of people born in the same period. Each generation carries with it an identity shaped by the social, cultural, technological, and political events of its time.

- **Silent Generation (1928-1945):** They grew up amidst wars and economic crises, valuing discipline and stability.
- **Baby Boomers (1946-1964):** They were born in a time of prosperity and expansion; they are associated with hard work and economic growth.
- **Generation X (1965-1980):** Witnesses to initial technological changes, they tend to be independent and adaptable.
- **Millennials (1981-1996):** Shaped by globalization and the rise of the internet, they value diversity and innovation.
- **Generation Z (1997-2012):** Digital natives grew up with social networks and immediate access to information.
- **Alpha Generation (2013 onwards):** The youngest, surrounded by artificial intelligence and technological advances since birth.

Each generation brings its own worldview, and together they form a mosaic of experiences that enrich society. What's fascinating is how they influence each other: older generations transmit wisdom, while younger generations drive change and new ways of thinking.

This issue topic reminded me that I've had the privilege of witnessing these generations through the women in my family. First, I had the honor of being with my great-grandmother, my grandmother's mother. I was seven years old when she passed away, so I don't remember much about her. What I do remember is that she always fed me. I would sit next to her, and she wouldn't let me leave until I'd finished eating. I remember that her hands always smelled of food because she was always in the kitchen cooking. She had a strong personality and didn't mince words; she said what she thought and felt.

My grandmother was like a mother to me. She raised my older sister and me. My mother didn't have much money back then, and I remember we lived in different places. My grandparents didn't like that, so they took us to their home and raised us from then on. They loved us like their own children. So much so that when it was time to go to the United States, they didn't want to leave us. They did everything they could to make sure my sister and I went with them. I was nine years old at the time. She had eight daughters and one son. My grandmother was a sweet person, and it was rare to see her angry. And the most difficult part was when she began having trouble speaking. She did everything she could to visit me in various prisons. She passed away while I was in prison. That was one of the saddest days of my life. I remember the last time I called her; she didn't have the strength to speak and was losing her memory, but when I called her that time, she quickly recognized my voice, and I heard her smile.

My mother was a hard worker. I remember going with her to her jobs. Back then, she did hair and nails. She also had a strong personality, but she always spoke to me with kindness. Because I was raised by my grandparents and went with them to the United States when I was little, I don't have many memories of her. But after being deported back to my country, I had the opportunity to meet her again. She had three children: me and my two sisters.

I didn't get to know my younger sister either, since she stayed with my parents in this country. She was born on Christmas Day, and I remember when they brought her home from the hospital. I remember being curious and eager to see her. I went into the room while she was asleep. I leaned in to touch her face and woke her up. I ran out because I thought that would get me in trouble. Today she lives in Spain, and I haven't had the chance to meet her, only by phone. She had three children. Two live with her in Spain, and one is here. I was able to get to know her better when I arrived here in Honduras. She has a 6-year-old son, and I've really enjoyed being with them and getting to know them. I repeat, it has been a privilege for me to see these five generations of women in my family. To be able to say that they are part of who I am. And you, what can you share about the generations in your family and what it means to you? Can you write a poem dedicated to the generations?

REENTRY PROFILE: CURTIS'S REFLECTION ON GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

By Haven



I had the opportunity to interview Curtis, a longtime Free Minds member who was recently released. He offered insights about his place between generations, as well as how the younger generation has changed since he was a kid.

Haven: Can you tell me a little bit about who you are and how you discovered Free Minds?

Curtis: So a little bit about me. I'm a humble, passionate, hardworking and driven man, who loves to read and write. I came in contact with Free Minds on the juvenile block in 2009 over at DC Jail, and I met Kelli, Tara, and Juliana at the time. I ended up doing 17 years and throughout my incarceration, I stayed in contact with Free Minds. They sent me books and they expanded the program so much that they were able to start the *Connect*, and I was there before all of that. They wrote to me on my birthday sometimes, and that was the first birthday card I got. Every holiday they would stay with me, throughout my incarceration, and I really appreciated it.

Haven: When you think of the word generations, what do you think of?

Curtis: Different generations are kind of like different cultures, so today's generation is a totally different culture than it was when I was a teen and young adult.

Haven: What kinds of changes have you noticed the most?

Curtis: For instance, in my generation we didn't have a whole lot. We made fun out of hanging outside and playing sports. It's not as popular as it was back then. I have friends who have children and they play video games. We played video games, but most of us couldn't afford them, so it might be one friend out of all of us and we were all over at his house playing a game, but we didn't do that every day because everybody didn't have it. We found fun playing outside, going to the park, roughin' up, and that's different now.

Haven: Do you see yourself as a leader or mentor to the younger generation then?

Curtis: More so to my family and a few young people in my neighborhood. But I try not to push too hard because that makes them push back from me. It's new, it's different, and they look at somebody like me, who was incarcerated for a while, and they can't relate to that because they've been out here with each other. That's the norm for them, and what I'm saying to them doesn't sound appealing.

Haven: I know you've only been back for about a month now, but given that time, do you think you identify more with the younger generation or more with older generations?

Curtis: I identify more with the older generation because when I was younger, I dwelled in chaos. Even though I didn't always contribute to it, it was normal, so I was comfortable in it and it didn't bother me. Now it bothers me to be uncomfortable and to be around chaos. Different activities that you do when you're older are more fun, like reading, going to picnics, hiking. I went hiking the other week at Great Falls, Virginia. Just stuff that I didn't get to do when I was younger that I wish I would've.

Haven: Is there anything you've learned from past generations that you think is an important lesson that you use in your day to day life?

Curtis: Oh, yeah, patience. Working hard to get what you need in life and not always what you want. I was taught to be family-oriented, and that came from the older generations of my family, and I assume the older generations that taught them.

Haven: Based on that, if you could choose one specific message to pass down to the younger generation, what would you say to them?

Curtis: To be patient, and if ever you feel overwhelmed or you're not heard or seen, find somebody you're comfortable with, whether it be a family member or a stranger or somebody that is not necessarily blood related, and talk to them. That's what got me through a lot of the trauma I had, whether it was a psychologist or a "celly," because most of us can relate in some kind of way. It's okay to talk to somebody, and you don't have to feel like nobody cares or nobody's going to help you. I was able to talk to Free Minds and open up to them about my fears of reading. I went from not being able to read well to participating in a college course, and I can credit Free Minds for that.

Haven: And finally, is there something you hope to see the younger generation accomplish?

Curtis: You know, just enjoying life peacefully. Do things like play sports and go to school and college. Different activities that can lead to a better life.

Haven: Perfect! Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview.

MONKS WALK FOR PEACE FROM TEXAS TO WASHINGTON, DC

By Ruby

In the early days of February this year, a group of Buddhist monks finished their Walk For Peace from Texas to Washington, DC that they had carried out by foot. Despite extenuating weather conditions and injuries sustained along the way, the monks were dedicated to carrying out their mission of inspiring mindfulness, peace, and hope everywhere they went. They made several stops during their time in DC, including but not limited to the National Cathedral for an interfaith service, the Lincoln Memorial, George Washington University, and American University. Throughout the duration of their heartening Walk For Peace, locals would gather to share love and encouragement for the mission of the monks. The monks were accompanied by an adorably loyal dog named Aloka that they originally adopted when he joined them on a walk in India several years ago. He was lovingly dubbed the "Peace Dog" by onlookers from around the world for his devoted companionship to the peaceful monks. Aloka suffered a leg injury in January, but he was able to undergo a successful surgery and rejoin the monks on their walk, accompanying them in a cart as he recovered. A similar incident occurred among the monks themselves when two monks were injured when a car accident happened in Texas. One of the monks was forced to undergo an amputation of his leg, while the other was treated for his less severe injuries. Despite these unfortunate circumstances, these monks demonstrated a beautiful display of dedication and compassion by not only expressing their forgiveness towards the driver, but continuing on the Walk For Peace using mobility aids.

A few Free Minds staff members were able to see the monks during their time here in DC, including Tara, who was able to see them during their visit to the Lincoln Memorial. She shared that there was "an indescribable energy in the air and everyone was solemn and quiet" despite the large crowds. Upon seeing the monks pass her, some of whom were barefoot even though there was snow on the ground, she said that she was "overcome with emotion out of the blue and tears silently rolled down" her face, saying that it was "their message of peace and their calm presence" that deeply moved her. Like many people who have shared their reflections upon the monks' visit, Tara expressed that she "started thinking about all the brutal violence in the world and how many Free Minds members who we have lost." She further emphasized how humanity not only needs peace, but to "end pain and suffering in the world." Tara received a beautiful orange and white string bracelet from one of the older monks that she wears as a reminder to keep hope alive—a message that is important for all of us to keep close to our hearts.



Top : The Monks passing by at the National Mall.
Bottom: The Monks speaking at the Lincoln Memorial.

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Learning Across Generations by DS

Elders guide and give advice
Through years of experience and sacrifice.
They seen it all; hardship and strain
They wanna shield their offspring from pain.
Younger generations offer hope for tomorrow,
Elders rely on them, because time is borrowed.
This new generation guides elders too
Because they also struggle to navigate what's new.
Relying on each other is the way it's always been
Generation to generation, whether family or friends



THE WRITE WAY: TIPS FOR WRITING FLASHBACKS

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

By Ruby

When writing stories that take place across generations, a common trope used by many writers across numerous genres is to insert flashbacks that give greater context to the story. Emily Henry's beloved romance novel *People We Meet On Vacation* uses flashbacks to talk about two friends who have vacationed together every summer for years until the two have a falling out. One of my favorite thrillers, Alex Michaelides' *The Silent Patient*, uses flashbacks via the diary entries of a character who has gone mute in an attempt by her mysteriously invested psychotherapist to discover the unsettling truth behind her husband's murder. Although flashbacks are implemented far and wide across the spectrum of literary genres, it can be hard to know how to create the ideal setting for a flashback to be included, or if it even has a relevant place in the story. While flashbacks can be a fun and creative way to give your readers a blast from the past, there are a few things to keep in mind to make sure your readers stay with the story as you travel back in time.

TIP #1: WHAT TEXT? CONTEXT!

A critical factor in using flashbacks in your writing is not only finding the right time and place in the story to put one in, but making sure that the flashback makes sense within the context of the story. Rhiannon Richardson, a blog writer who publishes tips and tricks for improving one's writing, reminds us that you "want the transition to be seamless instead of shocking the reader, but you don't want it to be so seamless that it takes a paragraph for the reader to realize they're in a different time. Within the first couple of sentences of your flashback, readers should know when and where they are relative to the present setting of the narrative" (*Writing Flashbacks*, 2026). Many writers will denote a flashback using a change in font via a transition to *italics*. Consider the various ways in which you can signal to your reader that you're moving between different points at time in your story, and don't be afraid to add your own flair!

TIP #2: THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS NOW

There are other important details that could be added to help ease the transition between past and present, especially sensory details. Think about how easy it is for a specific smell, sight, or sound to bring us back to a different time in our lives, even just for a moment. In that same vein, figure out a plot device that could be used to bring the protagonist back into their own mind and take the reader with them. Similarly, you could use a sensory stimulus to later draw the character back into the present time. Manuscript editor Diane O'Connell notes that "just like there needs to be a reason for your character to enter a flashback, [they] should be pulled back to the present for a reason as well" (*5 Tips in Writing Effective Flashbacks*). Make sure to think about the countless things that could either trigger us into having a flashback or push us back into the present. While the smell of a certain flower or sound of a specific record might draw us into a fleeting memory, a car honking or a person coming up to talk to us would jar us back to the current moment.

TIP #3: BE STRATEGIC

As with any plot device, it's important to think about how using a flashback will advance your story forward. Here are some questions to consider for reflection when pondering whether or not a flashback would fit into your storyline: **What am I trying to convey with a flashback that can't be conveyed in the present? Will the reader be more or less confused if I insert a flashback into a specific point in the story? How does the flashback develop the reader's understanding of the characters and the plot at large? How can I create a flashback that is both significant and efficient?**

While this is not an exhaustive list of considerations to keep in mind, these can hopefully help point you in the right direction as you carefully balance the many factors at play in developing a fascinating story.

MEDITATION: EACH OF US IS PART OF THE BIGGER STORY

By Kelli

Dear Free Minds Family,
I hope you are all well in mind, body, and spirit. I love that greeting. I learned it from some of you who begin your letters that way. Thank you!

Do you remember a moment in your youth when you first realized how enormous the universe is... and how long the stretch of time might be?

For me, it was a Friday night in 9th grade. I was hanging out with a group of friends eating pizza and discussing the meaning of life. It was late and we caught ourselves getting super "deep and philosophical." There was this one kid named Pete, that I secretly thought was so cool, and he asked the following question:

"What if everything—the Earth, the stars, the whole universe—what if all of it exists inside one tiny cell of some creature that's so enormous, it's living in its own universe? Like... what if we're just a really small part of something so big we can't even imagine it?"

Whaaat? My head nearly exploded! I guess I had never really considered the idea of infinity before. I couldn't stop thinking about it and to be honest, it bothered me. When you're young, it's easy to feel like the world revolves around you. But moments like that begin to shift your perspective outward. You start wondering where you fit...what your life means in the middle of something so unfathomably vast.

At the age of 14, Pete's idea made me feel insignificant. Maybe even meaningless.

While thinking about time and space on that scale can still give me vertigo, I've come to understand that even within something this large and unknowable, we still matter.

Each of us is a piece of an ongoing story. Past generations helped shape the world we're living in now. And in our own ways, through our choices, our presence, even our awareness, we are shaping what continues.

Today's meditation is an invitation to sit with that. To rest in this moment, while also sensing your place in something much larger, across time, across generations, across the unfolding of life itself. So, if you're up for it, find a partner and take turns reading the meditation to each other, giving each other plenty of time to breathe and to just be. You can also read through the script a couple of times yourself. Then get comfortable, close your eyes, and meditate upon what you remember.

Close your eyes or find a place to rest your gaze. Let your body relax and settle into whatever is supporting you right now.

Notice the air around you. Its temperature on your skin. The quiet fact that you are breathing in this moment.

And if there are sounds nearby, let them be part of the space. You don't need to sort them, block them out, or hold onto them...just let them be there with you.

Now, gently bring your attention to your breath. No need to change it. No need to shape it. Just notice it. In... and out...With each breath, you are participating in something steady and shared...something every human life knows.

Now, let your awareness rest in your body. You might even sense, just for a moment, that you are being held by the present moment itself.

Now gently bring to your mind the idea of generations. You are part of a

long line of human lives...not as an abstract idea, but as lived experience passed forward through time.

People before you lived ordinary days, difficult days, and magnificent days. They worked, rested, hoped, loved one another, made choices, and carried what they could.

Some of what they carried became part of you...not only in struggle, but also in strength.

Resilience, adaptability, care, endurance...even the simple human ability to keep going and begin again.

These are not distant inheritances. They are already present in you. And now gently widen your awareness forward. To generations not yet here.

People who will one day wake up, breathe, and move through their own ordinary moments...just as you are doing now.

Some of those lives may be connected to you directly. Many others will not be.

And still, this one thing is true: the way life continues through time is shaped by the fact that you are here in it now.

Your life is part of a larger continuity of human experience. You are not only shaped by what has happened to you. You are also shaped by what you have survived, learned, and continued through. There is quiet dignity in that.

Even in difficult circumstances, your presence is part of life continuing. Not in isolation, but in connection to something larger, older, and still unfolding.

Now gently return to your breath. In... and out...Notice the steadiness of it. The simple, ongoing rhythm of being alive.

You do not need to hold the entire past. You do not need to hold the entire future. But know that you are connected to both in a way that is extraordinarily meaningful.

And in this moment, that connection does not need effort. It is already here.

You are part of a human story that came from and continues through generations...a story made not only of hardship, but also of endurance, care, love and renewal.

And in your own way, simply by being here, you are part of what continues.

One breath at a time. One moment at a time. One life—held, connected, and still unfolding.

When you are ready, bring your attention back to the room. And as you go about your day, carry this with you: You are part of the past, the present, and the future.

In ways seen and unseen, your life touches more than you know. And simply by being here...by continuing...you matter.

REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

Welcome to Summer! I'm hoping that this new season will spring some good vibes in the atmosphere for everyone. It's nice to know that the sun will be more on display these days, not trying to be corny but Annie was onto something when she sang "the sun will come out tomorrow, so you gotta hang on til tomorrow come what may." Basically what I am trying to convey is that when the sun comes up, you know it's a new day and another day brings renewed hope, change and turnaround! Which leads me to this month's theme *Generations*, all that talking about the sun, and hope has really creatively inspired me so I wrote a poem about it. Like to hear it? Here it goesss!

Existence is always on the move
To formulate a unique groove
Improvement, advancement, perfection, projection
Whatever it takes to birth Exception
That's the stuff of generations
Searching to forge a beautiful culmination
Whether its style or technology grace and solidarity
Compassion and empathy intelligence and psychology
Creation is constantly creating
A generation of elevation
And yes we all do play a role
To maintain this most precious goal
Of humanity receiving their proper share
Of fun, and cool, and focus and free
Of grace and love and creativity
Of style and swag and productivity
Of peace and friendship and festivity
Yes, that's the stuff of generations
Marking history with specification



I truly hope you enjoy this piece. I always thought that I had a succinct idea of what the word generations meant, but then I had to do my research before I wrote this poem and the thing that stood out to me most was every generation leaving or having a specific mark that makes it unique like the Baby Boomers, Gen Z, Gen X and Millennials. The contemporary generation that in this day and age is called Gen Alpha, born between 2010 - 2024. Gen Alpha is defined as the first cohort entirely born in the 21st century and the digital-first era. As children of Millennials, they are marked by unparalleled technology immersion, experiencing early education through screens and AI, and being the largest generation in history. Just think, we are all a part of one generation or another, we have left or are leaving our own label to the annals of history sometimes conscientiously but mostly unconscientiously. How cool is that?!

As always, thank you for indulging me whenever my creative bug bites and I just happen to be writing to y'all at that moment. Now, here are some reentry resources especially for you!

Catholic Charities Welcome Home Reentry Program
924 G Street NW
202-722-4300 or 202-519-2785
karen.mcneal@cc-dc.org



The Welcome Home Reentry program's goal is to help individuals returning to the community from incarceration to reintegrate successfully by creating a support network centered around volunteers and mentors. They help returning citizens overcome big and small obstacles as they seek employment and find safe housing and other services needed to prevent recidivism.

Until we *Connect* again
Ms. Keela

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

with Neely

Thank you to everyone who voted for our next Books Across the Miles selection! Our next book is *Lucky Me: A Memoir of Changing the Odds* by Rich Paul. In his book, readers follow the story of a young Rich Paul narrated by the Paul of today, as he looks back at his life with wit and insight, drawing out the lessons he learned at every stage that lead him to become a successful entrepreneur and sports agent. We cannot wait to hear what you have to say!



1. In the introduction, Paul discusses luck and how it has had an impact on his life. Do you believe in luck? Why or why not?
2. On page 20, Paul describes how his dad would talk to him on the way to school, asking him about what he was learning, about sports, about life, etc. Is there a person from your childhood that you felt was genuinely interested in you and what you thought? How did having someone like that, or not having someone like that, make you feel?
3. Paul writes how important it was for him to remember that while his mother struggled with addiction, that wasn't the whole truth about who she was. Have you ever relied on a similar understanding of someone who was flawed? If so, how has it helped you?

4. On page 170, Paul's father warns him not to get in too deep because there's only two ways out: dead or in jail. This is something that so many people, parents and otherwise say to kids. Do you think it is an effective warning for young people? Why or why not?

5. Which of the rules that Rich listed and elaborated on in his book are also rules that you try to live by, and why? Can you give examples of when and how you do? Do you have other rules to live by?

Name _____ Date _____

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: IMAGINATION (VOLUME 15, ISSUE 3)

Hey family! Here are some writing prompts to help you get started on submissions for our next issue on **Imagination**. We also want to give you a heads up for the issue after that. Volume 15, Issue 4 will be exploring the theme of **Self-Awareness**.

(1)

Albert Einstein once said that "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." Write a poem about what knowledge and imagination mean to you.

(2)

Write a poem about "unlocking" your imagination. What is the key that unlocks it? What's waiting for you when you look inside?

(3)

Write a poem or story about a character who discovers a library of stories that they imagined but never wrote. What might those stories be about? Why did they never write them down?

(4)

Humans across time have imagined what the future world might look like. Write a poem or story about what you imagine the world will be like in 100 years from now.

(5)

If you could bring anything from your imagination to life, what would it be? It could be an animal, a plant, a machine—anything that you put your mind to! Write a poem or story about it.

(6)

Write an acrostic poem about what the power of imagination means to you using the word imagination. To format the poem, the first word/phrase of each sentence should begin with the consecutive letter of the word.

I _____
M _____
A _____
G _____
I _____
N _____
A _____
T _____
I _____
O _____
N _____

REAL WORLD OF WORK: THE MANY STOPS ON LEON'S REENTRY ROUTE

By Jennifer

Leon is a busy man—currently working an overnight weekend concierge job, his Georgetown Pivot Program internship, and managing his boutique landscaping business! But that's not all the jobs he's had since coming home in September 2024. He has an additional role as a participant in our Leadership and Learning Program, co-facilitating smaller group discussions on the Free Minds Build Up book club meeting on Zoom every Wednesday night. I decided to sit down with Leon to hear his experience and insights from all those jobs.

Jennifer: Leon, even though your first six months of reentry were spent on home confinement, you still managed to be very productive! In fact, there have been so many exciting stops on your reentry train route, I'm wondering if we could do a quick review of where you've been over the past 18 months, before we talk about where you're going?

Leon: Yes, that first half a year of home confinement really got in the way of my goals because I was so limited with my movements. It was frustrating because even more than wanting to get to work, I wanted to spend time with my mother and other family members after so many years apart, but I made the most of that situation and have been making great use of more freedom since getting off home confinement.

Stop #1: Project Empowerment

I quickly applied to and got accepted into the Department of Employment Services' *Project Empowerment* program at the READY Center (which is the Department of Corrections' reentry organization). The paid training program started with classroom learning about workplace success and I was thrilled to see that the facilitator was someone I had done time with a long time ago. It was a blessed moment to be in his class and get to know each other on another level! Often Project Empowerment sends graduates to short-term placements in jobs at the end of the weeks of classroom training, but they sent me to an HVAC class.

Stop #2: Community College Preparatory Academy

CC Prep is an adult learning charter school that offers free programs to DC residents looking to get a career in fields like healthcare, IT, or construction or they can complete their GED. They now have a new classroom building at 1801 U Street, SE, but when I was there they were in a transitional, small space, so we couldn't complete any of the hands-on training during my six months there. But I did get a number of certifications in the six months, including the EPA 608 certification which includes type 1, type 2, and type 3 certifications. Then I landed my first actual job!

Stop #3: TPM Group (relocation logistics company)

I met the TPM Group hiring manager at one of the many job fairs I attended. We made a good connection so he was eager to hire me, but it also helped that another Free Minds IRRAA member



whom I knew of had been working there for a while and spoke up for me. One piece of advice I have for members coming home and starting jobs out here is to pace yourself! If I do a job, I do it to the fullest, but I had to make adjustments to not overdo these very physical jobs—largely setting up new schools during the summer months. Also, I needed to figure out how to match my pace to my coworkers. I stayed here for about 3-4 months until I got a driving job with Amazon.

Stop #4: Amazon Driver

I reconnected with a friend of mine who has been home for a decade and owns an Amazon subcontracting delivery company. He hired and trained me to be an Amazon delivery driver. During an 8-10 hour shift, I delivered as many as 400 packages, which is not even as many as other more experienced drivers deliver. What I enjoyed most about this driving job was routes in places like Potomac, MD, where I got to deliver to mansions and see different neighborhoods. After a short time working there, the contract ended so I moved on.

Stop #5: Apartment Building Concierge in Rosslyn, VA

There are 27 floors in the main tower where I work on Friday and Saturday nights from 11pm - 7am, so my favorite aspect of this job is that it is people-oriented and I get to dialogue with people from so many different cultures. I love the residents and they love me! In addition to our nice exchanges, I've also received cards from many people. I think this is because I always greet the people coming into the building in friendly and polite ways, especially those who are coming home inebriated on the weekends. There are no supervisors present on my overnight shift, so I have to stay focused and solve problems on my own. If I don't immediately know how to fix a problem, I'll tell the residents "we're in this together" and we'll figure it out. It's generally a laid back environment, but the challenge is fighting sleep and getting the overnight tasks done—like doing inventory of the hundreds of packages in the package room. Another challenge was dressing professionally—dress shirts and slacks,

continued on page 27



JUST LAW: COMPASSIONATE RELEASE FOR DC CODE OFFENDERS*: MECHANISM AND CASE EXAMPLES

By Tim

This is a continuation from Just Law: Compassionate Release in Federal Courts: Criteria, Trends, and Key Decisions in the Animal Kingdom Connect (Vol. 15, Issue 1).

**This column references legal terminology that doesn't represent Free Minds Book Club but is used here for clarity when discussing legal matters.*

Statutory Mechanism

Individuals convicted and sentenced under the DC Code have a compassionate release mechanism. In 2020, the District of Columbia enacted DC Code § 24-403.04, which allows those serving prison terms for DC Code offenses to file a motion for compassionate release directly with their sentencing judge. This law was made permanent in April 2021.

Key Features

- **Direct Filing:** Unlike federal law, DC Code offenders do not need to first request compassionate release from the Bureau of Prisons (BOP); they may file directly with the court.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** The court may grant compassionate release if it finds that you are not a danger to the community and meet one of the following:
 - Has a terminal illness (end-of-life trajectory)
 - Is 60 years or older and has served at least 20 years in prison
 - Has a debilitating medical condition or injury from which they will not recover
 - Is elderly (60+), has served the lesser of 15 years or 75% of their sentence, and suffers from a chronic or serious medical condition related to aging or acute vulnerability to severe medical complications (including COVID-19)
 - Death/incapacitation of the family member caregiver of the defendant's children
 - Incapacitation of a spouse or domestic partner when the defendant is the only available caregiver.
- **Rehabilitation:** The court considers evidence of rehabilitation while incarcerated (e.g., classes, work, programs, disciplinary record, letters of support).
- **No Hearing Required:** The court may waive your appearance for timely review.

Application Process

- Motions may be filed by you (or your attorney), the U.S. Attorney's Office for DC, the BOP, or the U.S. Parole Commission.
- There is no official petition form, but supporting documentation (medical records, evidence of rehabilitation, etc.) is recommended.
- Legal assistance is available through organizations such as the Georgetown Criminal Justice Clinic and the Washington Lawyers' Committee.

Case Examples

1. Roy (Superior Court of DC, 2022)

- Background: Convicted of second-degree murder and other violent offenses; sentenced to 25 years to life.
- Motion: Filed pro se for compassionate release under DC Code § 24-403.04.
- Court's Findings: The court found Mr. Roy had completed rehabilitative programs, maintained a low recidivism score, and had a release plan. The court determined he was not a danger to the community and granted the motion for compassionate release.

2. General Data (DC Corrections Information Council, 2020)

- As of September 2020, 248 cases had been filed in Superior Court under the new law. Of those, 104 had been decided, and 29 persons had been granted compassionate release.

- The DC Compassionate Release Clearinghouse successfully matched free counsel for a number of people, primarily those who were very old or had serious medical illnesses. Many motions were filed pro se due to limited attorney availability.

Summary

DC Code § 24-403.04 provides a robust compassionate release mechanism for DC Code offenders, with eligibility based on age, medical condition, family circumstances, and rehabilitation. The process is more accessible than federal compassionate release, allowing direct court filings and considering a broad range of "extraordinary and compelling reasons." Case examples show successful motions for those with serious health issues, advanced age, and strong evidence of rehabilitation.

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

REAL WORLD OF WORK *continued from page 25*

as well as dress shoes. At first I wore a very stylish pair of shoes, but they hurt my feet overnight, so I had to compromise and give up a little bit of style for comfort!

Stop #6: Georgetown Pivot Program – 9-month program for formerly incarcerated people to "advance their careers and pursue their passion for business, entrepreneurship, and education"

The rigorous classroom training helped me with technology, grammar, and lots of other important elements of education. I like to say that it's nice to get paid to go to class, but what's most valuable is that Pivot helps you get stones that are pivotal in building the foundation.

Jennifer interjects: "Oh, so you're saying Pivot is 'pivotal'? I see what you've done there":)

Stop #7: Good Company Donuts

Pivot places its students in an internship and also helps them nurture their own entrepreneurial endeavors. My internship at Good Company Donuts was marketed as a management training program, but because I had no experience as a manager and because the cafe is such a high-paced environment, I just put myself where I'm most needed for the cafe to run efficiently. It hasn't been the experience I thought it would be, but I've decided to learn as much as I can while I'm here.

Stop #8: Capital Space Landscaping

My boutique landscaping business is my passion. I specialize in 200-800 square feet designs for people who are trying to add a little aesthetic to their yards while making it easier to maintain. As I'm growing the business, I'm taking on clients with a variety of goals—from a total yard re-set to mowing lawns. I learned these skills and have fond memories from when I was a little kid as young as 8 years old and my mother was trying to keep me out of trouble, so she sent me to work with my uncle on his landscaping business. I enjoyed not just the money, but understanding the trade, and even learning how to drive the lawnmower! Next week I'll compete in the Pivot Pitch competition for the chance to win the \$3,000 prize, which I would invest into tools and marketing for my business.

Jennifer: What advice do you have for Free Minds members coming home to the world of work?

Leon: You can have an idea of what work is going to be like, but when you get here it's totally different, so you need to remain flexible and patient.

You think you have a high level of energy, but if you get to working 1, 2, or even 3 jobs at a time, you will find that you don't have the time to yourself that you used to have.

Connections are important—and I've benefitted from many—so I tried to pay it forward when someone asked me to help a returning citizen join my concierge job. I prepped him about dress and demeanor, but he showed up in tennis shoes and not representing himself professionally and didn't get the job. This situation reminded me that there are lots of opportunities out here, but you have to be self-governed and serious about how you present yourself.

SPINNING THE TRACK WITH THE ADVICE MAN

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

Dear Advice Man,

It's so difficult to communicate with this new generation of kids nowadays. They say all the time that the older people don't want to teach them anything. Well, how can that be when they don't want to really listen or hear what we got to say? I try so hard to understand them because I was once a kid and I know what I wanted from the older people around me, but it's so hard cause they say things but it doesn't seem like they really want our help.

How can we share our wisdom and show them we care in a way that they will accept?

Sincerely,
RT

My warmest greetings FM family and RT. I am so excited to share some thoughts on the communication gaps we have between generations. Thank you for covering an issue, RT, that I view we don't get any true feedback or emerging solutions on from either side of the spectrum when it comes to age, communication, and generational gaps.

RT, the brutal truth I see with this gap is both sides of the coin either are moving into too much dysfunction or lack the communication skills to foster a no judgmental, intimate, bonding environment for a sincere relationship. As intimate means loving, the other two terms mean having some respect, patience, and tolerance for self and the others when it comes to an age of communal social issues. RT, I take it your inquiry comes from the elder's side of the coin, and from our side when the youth (future) indirectly or directly seeks some wisdom from us. We should feel honored and blessed, and be encouraged to find the righteous application to help someone else make the best choice in the society we have today. My People! With younger generations evolving as fast as the world spins out of control, why don't all of us take a moment to sit still and listen to wisdom from the vets on both sides of the coin to find solutions that will make our community united?

A brutal disclaimer at this point is young or old guard, we all have to know when our beliefs and actions are moving in an irrational or dysfunction cycle, fear and impatience is no excuse when we are in need to be reminded what a healthy relationship and positive communication skills looks like to benefit us as a whole. Why? Because every generation seems to confuse or rebel against the generation before it. Each new generation embodies a set of values and beliefs molded by the events, experiences, and technologies of their youth, which tend to be very different from those of their parents in either direction for the better or worse. Moreover, as we continue to develop and evolve for the better or worse, there's a tug of war going on between the ages with the youth wanting change while the older generation desire to keep everything the same.

Meanwhile, RT, I believe the elder generations can always learn something from the youth. Take for example the so-called Greatest Generation, who were defined by their need to serve others during the time of World War II. Still, we know they weren't perfect as they struggled with issues of racism and inequality. My opinion of maybe the best would be the generation after them, who forced civil rights on the old guard bent on maintaining an unhealthy and unjust status quo. It was indeed the young who demanded better pay for women and refused to blindly accept the injustices that had prevailed in our society. The natural tension between generations offers something good when it's all about community. This allows us to make progress and change with the times. (Read more about this in Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek)

With that and taking in what Congressman Lewis called "good trouble," the "Me Too" and "Black Lives Matter" movements, I don't think we can categorize the whole new kids of today in one lump sum. Particularly, I think you are talking about our at-risk youths, and so we do them a very grave disservice when we don't think about or want to understand their backgrounds. Not saying it's right, but they are just trying to survive by any means necessary. And still they are our wards, so it's up to us individually and collectively to sincerely find out how to reach back and help these young people up out of their troubles. Some of them are open to our advice and for the ones who resist, well we must do our best to understand where they are coming from, and hope we can be there for them when they are ready.

We have to provide them first with a non-judgmental platform. Create an environment where honesty, trust, respect, accountability, and above all a heavy dose of embraced love is present. Both sides have to know how to break the ice and pinpoint their needs for individual and community benefit. When I communicate with the younger generation, I do my best to bond on a personal level and then I drop my jewels on them as I picture myself at their age and needing to hear the right stuff to get me back on track. Telling them about past personal challenges I've overcome is a perfect example. Back in the day, the "crack era" was crazy, drugs and gun violence everywhere. Parents doing their best to keep a roof over their family's heads, while the streets helped raise impressionable children. It was hectic times and no one had sincere answers for children growing up through the wars on us in the streets and the trauma aftermath. With the way society is today, we need big solutions for heavy situations. We can't understand the dilemmas now for the youth, because it's of a nature and time we are not accustomed to. Find out the issues and help the youth make the best choices for themselves to minimize any undesired outcomes. That's best for everyone, a win-win. The youth have to always know we have their and our community's best interests at heart. I truly hope this helped and maybe in the future someone will form a thinktank of mixed generations to find our breakthrough.

Sincerely and My Best,
TS

CONVERSATION WITH SOFIA

Hey Free Minds family! This is Sofia, the Community Engagement Coordinator here at FM, typing this article from the new Free Minds office. The sun is shining through the big window behind me and in the midst of the up and down DC weather, today is a lovely summer day.

Some of you know me already through letters we've written to each other. I've been writing letters to our FM family behind the walls since I started as an intern back in 2021. That was actually the last time I wrote an edition of this article. The theme of that article was joy as resistance and one of the things I mentioned was my relationship with my grandfather. He was my biggest teacher in that lesson and immediately who I thought of when presented with this issue's theme. My grandfather, who my sister and I called Poppy, played a big role in raising us and provided a home for my mom, sister, and myself growing up.

In getting to know so many Free Minds members, I know that a lot of you may have also been raised by your grandparents and/or had a close bond with them. Poppy passed away back in the spring of 2023 and I can easily say has been the most influential person in my life. With that in mind, I thought sitting down and writing this article would come easy. However, I found myself stuck and unable to decide what exactly about Poppy and the lessons I learned from him to focus on. I initially thought this was because of my typical writers' block and habitual overthinking. But something felt different. I would feel a little lump in my throat and a tightening of my stomach and have to close the tab on my computer, shifting my focus to a different FM project. I thought more deeply about this and realized that my "stuckness" wasn't my typical writing issues, but rather a resurfacing of my grief.

Grief is by no means linear, and I feel like this past year I actually have felt my grief for Poppy in a more tangible way than ever. The first year after his death, I dove headfirst into distractions. Constant socializing, working 3 jobs, and never sitting still. But I found myself burnt out and needing to take a step back, which led me to a wellness and personal health journey this year. With more time to myself though, and maybe increased maturity as a result of turning 25 (when scientists largely agree that our frontal lobes have developed, responsible for critical thinking and decision making), I started to fully process my grief. It has been hard at times because I find myself feeling like everyone else has moved on. But I remind myself that grief is not linear and that the people in my life understand that.

I don't intend for this article to be depressing and all about my grief journey, but with intergenerational relationships, whether familial, platonic, work-related, etc., often comes grief. I know that grief stems from a place of immense love that I am grateful I experienced. One of the biggest lessons I learned from Poppy was that learning is a lifelong mutual exchange. He taught me humility and that knowledge can be learned from anyone and everyone. Poppy modeled this with my sister and I. Of course he imparted on us grandfatherly wisdom, but more than anything he loved learning from us and to his final days was open to us showing him new things about the world. My love for reading comes from my grandfather who had a large library filled with

books from Percy Jackson to World War II history to astrophysics and everything in between. Poppy was a mechanic who didn't have the opportunity to attend college, and turned to books and endless conversations with others as his university.

This mutual learning and care came full circle for me in one of my last memories of my grandfather before he was hospitalized in his final year of life. I have vivid memories of being sick as a little girl and laying on the couch, falling asleep with the TV lullabying me to sleep in the background. Before I drifted into a deep nap, Poppy would make sure to turn the TV off and take my favorite Baltimore Ravens blanket and tuck me in. While I was home for a week from DC to visit him, I found myself unknowingly reenacting his routine of care, but with the roles reversed. One day as I tucked him in, he softly opened his eyes, and with a wrinkled smile, pointed this out. In a moment that could've felt like weakness and vulnerability for him being unable to fully care for himself, he took a moment to express his gratitude for the way our care had evolved with age.

I leave you with this short poem I wrote about my grandfather and some of my favorite memories. It is based on a writing prompt that I came up with inspired by one of my favorite movies (which is also a book) called *How to Make An American Quilt*, which coincidentally is a beautiful multigenerational story. In the story, the many generations of women in a quilting bee make a wedding quilt for the head of the quilting bee's granddaughter. The theme of the quilt is "Where love resides" and the women share stories of the various forms of love in their lives, romantic, platonic, familial. So the writing prompt is: "Write a poem about where love resides, it can be in the romantic, platonic, and/or familial sense." I challenge you all reading this to use the same prompt and write a poem about a grandparent or other figure in your life of a different generation than you, wherever your heart guides you.

*Love resides in memory foam wrinkled hands
Savory grilled cheese stuffed with melty Land-O-Lakes cheese
and too much
I Can't Believe it's Not Butter
It resides in trips to the marsh after church on Sundays
puffy arthritis fingers pointing out bird species
that my sister and I would never remember the names of
love resides in ensuring the bird feeder never went empty
smiling on, even when the squirrels stole
In a patch of overgrown grass and weeds
grown for the comfort of woodland creatures and backyard insects
loves resides in soft readings of Puff the Magic Dragon
and Where the Wild Things Are
smiles lines sewn next to a mouth with a gap that looks just like mine
in the reminders that love can reside anywhere
at anytime*

IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

DEEP DIVE: ARTEMIS II



An image of the Earth taken from the Artemis II mission to the moon.

For the first time in more than 50 years, human beings have traveled to the Moon. And if things go according to plan, we might walk on its surface again within the next two years.

On April 1, 2026, NASA launched its Artemis II mission from Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Ten days later, on April 10, the Orion spacecraft splashed down in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of California, carrying the four-person crew safely home. It was a historic moment – the kind that doesn't happen very often in a lifetime.

So what exactly did Artemis II do? The mission took humans beyond Earth's magnetosphere for the first time since the Apollo missions of the early 1970s, looping around both the Earth and the Moon before returning. The crew didn't land on the Moon but they flew closer to it than any human has in over half a century. Think of it like a dress rehearsal: testing the spacecraft, the systems, and the crew before the main event.

That main event is Artemis III, which is expected to touch down near the Moon's largely unexplored south pole – a region scientists believe may contain water frozen in permanently shadowed craters. That water could eventually become a resource for long-term missions, even helping astronauts survive on the lunar surface for extended periods.

NASA is targeting early 2028 for that first landing since the Apollo 17 mission in 1972, when three astronauts touched down in the Taurus-Littrow Valley, a site chosen for its geological interest, including proximity to relatively young volcanic formations.

The four-person crew of Artemis II was led by Reid Wiseman, the mission commander, is a former NASA chief astronaut and U.S. Navy test pilot who had already spent 165 days aboard the International Space Station. Victor Glover, the pilot, became the first Black person in history to travel to deep space. Christina Koch, an engineer, became the first woman to journey to the Moon. And Jeremy Hansen, representing the Canadian Space Agency, became the first non-American astronaut to join a lunar mission.

Some interesting facts about the Artemis II mission...

Estimated cost: \$4.1 billion

Total miles traveled: 685,000

Rocket fuel used: 730,000 gallons, about enough to fill up your car 50,000 times. Although this fuel, a mix of chilled hydrogen and oxygen kept at -423 degrees Fahrenheit, would either freeze and shatter your tank or blow up your car immediately.

Speed re-entering Earth's orbit: 25,000 mph.

WORLD

After months of conflict and tense negotiations, the United States and Iran appear to be closing in on a landmark agreement. Though as this news column went to print, much of the fine print of the deal had yet to be decided.

Both sides are reportedly near signing a memorandum of understanding that would extend a ceasefire for 60 days, reopen the Strait of Hormuz – a critical waterway through which a huge portion of the world's oil travels – and begin negotiations on Iran's nuclear program. Iran would commit to not pursuing a nuclear weapon and would pause new uranium enrichment.

As of this writing, President Trump said the deal was "largely negotiated" and would be announced shortly, though it had not yet been finalized. The stakes couldn't be higher: a lasting agreement could stabilize the region and ease fuel prices that have been climbing since the conflict began.

The two countries went to war in February 2026 after a U.S. and Israeli military strike on Iran, which sparked a crisis that choked global oil markets and rattled the world.

Relations between the United States and Cuba have reached a boiling point. It started in January when the U.S. military intervened in Venezuela and removed President Nicolás Maduro – a close Cuban ally. In response, the Trump administration tightened the long-standing embargo against Cuba, issuing executive orders that effectively cut off oil shipments to the island.

Cuba imports most of the fuel it needs, so the blockade has triggered a severe energy and economic crisis there. Then, in May, the U.S. indicted former Cuban President Raúl Castro for his alleged role in a 1996 shootdown of civilian planes operated by a Cuban exile group.



Cuban President
Raúl Castro

NATIONAL NEWS

In a time when Democrats and Republicans agree on almost

IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

nothing, two senators – Democrat Dick Durbin of Illinois and Republican Mike Lee of Utah joined forces in February to introduce a pair of bills that could make a real difference for people caught up in the federal justice system.

The first, called the **Smarter Sentencing Act**, would modernize federal drug sentencing laws that have been on the books since the "War on Drugs" era – laws that impose one-size-fits-all sentences for nonviolent drug offenses regardless of a person's individual circumstances.

The second, the **Smarter Pretrial Detention for Drug Charges Act**, would give judges more flexibility when deciding whether to hold someone in jail before trial for a nonviolent drug offense. The senators argue that overcrowded prisons, strained law enforcement budgets, and basic fairness all demand these changes. These aren't radical ideas – some of the same reforms were proposed over a decade ago, and pieces of them made it into the First Step Act of 2018. Now the senators are pushing to finish what that law started.

DC NEWS

The Purple Line Is Almost Here

The long-awaited Purple Line to the D.C. metro has been decades in the making, is billions over its original budget, and is years behind its original schedule. But—pun intended—there is finally light at the end of the tunnel.

On May 7, Maryland Governor Wes Moore joined transit officials in Silver Spring to celebrate a major milestone: the final piece of track for the Purple Line was laid, physically connecting Montgomery and Prince George's counties for the first time. The 16-mile light rail line is now about 90% complete.

What comes next is the installation of overhead electrical wires, followed by months of safety testing. If all goes according to plan, the public will be able to ride the Purple Line in late 2027. When it opens, it will have 21 stops and connect to several Metro lines – the Red Line at Bethesda and Silver Spring, the Green Line at College Park, and the Orange Line at New Carrollton.

SPORTS

March Madness: A Big Ten Sweep

This year's NCAA basketball tournaments ended with something worth celebrating for fans of the Big Ten conference.

On the women's side, the UCLA Bruins capped a nearly perfect season by defeating South Carolina 79-51 on April



Democrat
Dick Durbin



Republican
Mike Lee

5 in Phoenix, claiming their first-ever NCAA women's basketball championship. UCLA finished 37-1 on the year, riding a 31-game winning streak into the title game. Center Lauren Betts had 14 points and 11 rebounds, while Gabriela Jaquez poured in a game-high 21. It was a dominant performance against a South Carolina team that has made the championship game for three years in a row.



UCLA Center
Lauren Betts

On the men's side, the Michigan Wolverines defeated the UConn Huskies 69-63 on April 6 in Indianapolis to win their first national championship since 1989 – ending a 26-year drought for the entire Big Ten conference. Guard Elliot Cadeau led the way with 19 points in the championship game.

In Washington, the WNBA's Mystics kicked off their 2026 schedule recently and as of this writing, sit at 2-2 in the standings. But there is much to be excited about with the Mystics, who drafted UCLA star Lauren Betts with the fourth overall pick in the WNBA draft, then followed with two more early first round picks: Angela Dugalic and Cotie McMahon.

It has been seven years since the Mystics won their first and only WNBA title with a team that was led by Natasha Cloud, Elena Delle Donne and Kristi Tolliver.

The Washington Commanders came into the 2026 NFL Draft with the 7th overall pick, following a tough 5-12 season. With it, they selected Sonny Styles, a linebacker from Ohio State. The Commanders hope to get back on the horse after a down year that was marred by injuries, especially the ones that kept their phenomenal quarterback Jayden Daniels out for several weeks.

In even better draft news, on May 10, the Washington Wizards won the 2026 NBA Draft Lottery, earning the right to pick first overall in the NBA Draft on June 23. It is an enormous turn of luck in a year where many consider the top five or six players in the draft to be potentially massive stars.

Early scuttlebutt and speculation has the Wizards choosing between elite swingman A.J. Dybantsa, and point guard Darryn Peterson. However, the Wiz are expected to hear a lot of offers for the pick from other teams.

Whoever the Wizards select will join a team that made two big trades last year: one adding point guard Trae Young from the Atlanta Hawks, and another picking up the legendary but oft-injured Anthony Davis from the Dallas Mavericks.

AROUND THE WORLD: A SURPRISE VISIT TO VENECIA, COLOMBIA

By Aneka



View from our hotel room

This past March I traveled all the way to Medellin, Colombia to surprise my friend Elly for her 30th birthday! Last October, Elly moved to Venecia, a rural countryside town about 2 hours from Medellin, to facilitate wellness workshops at Cerro Tusa Springs, a breathtaking hotel and retreat center nestled into the mountains. As you can imagine, we missed each other tremendously after spending 2 to 3 days a week together since we've known each other. For months, she's asked me to come visit for her birthday and I would always tell her that I didn't think I would be able to make that happen. So naturally, once I was able to purchase a flight, I made sure to arrive the day of her birthday with the intention of surprising her. And since this was a surprise after all, of course I didn't tell her I was flying up on her actual birthday! Instead, I told her I was flying up the day after her birthday. She was so disappointed that I couldn't come on her actual birthday, but ecstatic that I was going to be able to see her before she left Venecia and moved back to Connecticut the following week after her birthday.

From Elly's many photos and videos of Cerro Tusa Springs, I was set on staying there instead of finding another hotel or Airbnb in the main city of Medellin despite Venecia being remotely inaccessible and slower paced compared to the bustling city. When I arrived in Medellin, Elly was at a local mall getting her nails done for her birthday. In order to keep her at the mall while I made my way from the airport, I asked her to send me photos of the novelty cups at Starbucks with the excuse that my friend collects cups and I won't have time to go to Starbucks when I land the next day. While she was sitting at Starbucks waiting for me to send her money for the cup my friend allegedly liked, I snuck up behind her while recording her to capture her surprised reaction! And of course, she cried like a baby right after hearing my voice and turning around to see if she actually heard me.



Views from our hotel room

After we settled down from seeing each other we ordered an Uber (a ride sharing app similar to calling a taxi) to the hotel. Funny story, on our way up the mountain, it started raining and our Uber got stuck in the mud going uphill on a narrow dirt (now muddy) road. The road had a cliff on one side and a hillside forest on the other so you can



One of the rope bridges leading to the lookout tower

imagine how scary it was every time we slipped backwards down the hill. Eventually in broken Spanish we were able to convince our driver to let us help him by getting out and pushing his car up the hill. Thankfully we were able to push the car up the hill and ride the remaining way to the hotel.

The 4 days at the hotel were filled with hiking up the rope bridge to the top of the lookout tower, swimming in the many picturesque pools, eating food at their gourmet poolside restaurant, and just simply enjoying the beautiful nature and sun. On our third day we took the 2 hour bus ride back to Medellin to have a birthday brunch at a cliffside restaurant with panoramic views most known for their unique dishes and elegant aesthetic. After brunch we went

to a tattoo parlor and got tattoos! If you've read my Around The World article in The Future *Connect* (Volume 14, Issue 1), you'll know that I've been collecting tattoos from the different countries I've visited. This time around, I added 2 butterfly tattoos to the collection! After getting tattoos, we went to Provenza, a popular neighborhood in Medellin filled with bars and restaurants, before heading back on the last bus of the night to Venecia.



View from the top of the lookout tower

Although this was a brief, relaxing, and relatively uneventful trip in comparison to other adventures I've shared with you all, this was definitely a trip of a lot of firsts. This was my first time visiting Colombia, my first time surprising a friend in another country, my first time navigating a country where sometimes not even the staff at businesses speak English, and my first time in a hotel so beautiful that it made me just sit in gratitude for the privilege of being able to experience it. As much as I'm happy to have my friend back in the states, I'm sad I no longer have a valid reason to go back to that hotel lol.



The area where the bus drops you off in Venecia



The entrance to the Provenza neighborhood



The hotel's poolside restaurant



PAYING IT FORWARD: DC GRANDPARENTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

By Ruby

For centuries, humans have relied on intergenerational connections as a way to learn important lessons, pass on traditions, preserve culture and heritage, and strengthen relationships across people of different age groups. One of the most important sets of relationships that many of us maintain is with our elders, who offer a great deal of life experience, wisdom, support, community, and so much more. Recognizing the importance of elders' role in the DC community, Free Minds wanted to highlight the work of a local organization, DC Grandparents for Mental Health, that works to establish the kind of aforementioned intergenerational networks that are crucial for people of all ages. I had the privilege of speaking with Free Minds friends Ken and Scarlett who both work for DC Grandparents for Mental Health to discuss the evolution of the organization's work, what it means to them, and the significant role that community elders play in protecting mental health.

The work of DC Grandparents for Mental Health is housed under a larger organization, HelpAge USA, that centers its work around ensuring that individuals are able to age in ways that promote happiness, health, connection and agency. To ensure this mission can be carried out on a wide scale, HelpAge USA partners with over 200 organizations across the world, primarily in low-to-middle income countries, to shine a light on the varying conditions of older people throughout the world. Before starting the work of DC Grandparents for Mental Health, HelpAge USA was concerned about the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on elderly populations which led to the creation of DC Grandparents of COVID-19.

Ken noted that he became involved when this program first started when the founding director, Cindy, contacted him and dozens of other grandparents under the premise of uniting elders in the community to encourage more people to become inoculated against COVID-19. Scarlett said that she learned about DC Grandparents against COVID-19 during a DC Senior Day at a local park, at which point she decided she wanted to become involved. Through their efforts to try to get higher numbers of community members to get vaccinated, Scarlett says that the grandparents were able to disseminate information from verified medical experts as educated individuals to other individuals throughout DC, promoting heightened awareness about the various

facets of the pandemic. While Ken critically pointed out that the pandemic is not over, he said that once it got more under control, the members of the program noticed that people were increasingly struggling with mental health difficulties due to grief and isolation. Scarlett added to this, sharing that there was a grandparent who was experiencing depression as the world began to open up again because she had lost people without closure—she either didn't learn about these losses until later, or she was unable to participate in funeral services due to the conditions of the pandemic requiring social distancing.

Cindy was looking to initiate a program to address these mental health concerns when she discovered the concept of the Friendship Bench. The Friendship Bench began in the early 2000s in the country of Zimbabwe in Africa as a partnership between local grandmothers and a local psychiatrist who was motivated by seeing his own patients struggle to access mental health care due to poor public transportation. This inspired a desire to bring mental health care to communities in need rather than requiring patients to come with him. The Friendship Bench slowly but surely became incorporated across different communities in Zimbabwe, then different countries in Africa, and then multiple countries across the world! As of 2025, their website states that there are nearly a thousand new community health workers trained in both Zimbabwe and New Orleans (with a total of 2,910 to date) and 161 new Friendship Bench circles, bringing the total number to 739. There are nearly two dozen Friendship Bench locations in DC as part of Grandparents for Mental Health, including but not limited to the Anacostia Library, the Congress Heights Family Success Center, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library. Anyone of any age—those entering adulthood and those close in age to the grandparents—are able to visit the Friendship Bench locations in DC by drop-in or appointment.

People visit the Friendship Bench for a number of reasons—burnout, grief, the need for a listening ear—and the grandparents provide confident, empathetic, and actionable support that helps people solve their problems. Scarlett said that the long-term goal is not for someone to sit on the friendship bench forever, but for the grandparents to “give you the tools so you know how to address a situation by articulating it,” then putting together an action plan. What makes her satisfied is seeing people smile—learning how to incorporate music, self-care,

time spent in the park, and other factors into "learning how to take care of themselves" after years of not being able to do so, which allows them to "recover to be stronger in spirit and in body." Many people may not have been able to pursue recovery for a number of factors previously, including but not limited to financial and time restraints, stigma around mental health treatment, or not knowing where to look for help. Scarlett importantly pointed out that people have to be active participants in their recovery, and that forgiveness is essential for moving forward because many people beat themselves up, but it's important to realize that we're all in the same boat.

Ken talked about how the Black Caucus for Mental Health helped to raise awareness around DC Grandparents via a presentation on mental health issues, which led to increased engagement. He said that the involvement is "prestigious because it elevates our self-esteem to contribute to the community." Pointing out that elders often get pushed to the side and pushed away, this program gave him and the other grandparents the chance to be listened to, which "opened intergenerational doors." Being able to work with young people and be role models, as well as letting them know that there are people who care for them, that they matter—that has a strong impact for Ken, especially as someone who grew up as an "expendable street kid" who has experienced a lack of community. For Ken, backing up what they say with what they do for the community is an extremely rewarding experience.

Recognizing the unique experience that the Friendship Bench offers, I wanted to know what Ken and Scarlett saw as special about this program as one that is deeply rooted in community care, in comparison to traditional therapy settings. Scarlett emphasized the point that the grandparents involved in the Friendship Bench are people from the community with shared experiences. Without discouraging the significance of traditional therapy, Scarlett highlighted that Friendship Bench offers a different feeling—she says that "we see you, we see the way that you live." A notable thought she expressed was that not only do the grandparents themselves have a history with lived experiences, but they look like many of the people who are visiting, which allows visitors to let their guard down and be more comfortable. Ken added to the soul of Scarlett's point, saying that their involvement comes from authentic caring from the heart. These individuals who take the time to go through the friendship bench training and go into the community are people who want to make life better for their neighbors, Ken underscored.

To finish off a beautiful conversation, I asked if there were any words of encouragement that they wanted to extend to the Free Minds family. Ken wisely reminds us that there is nothing we can't overcome, citing his own 71 years of life experience that has been full of trials and tribulations, yet he is as resilient as ever, proving that we can rise through anything. The only thing we truly have control over, he said, is our mindset, and when we struggle to think positively, we have neighbors and grandparents to help carry us through our struggles. I said that what he said made me reflect upon the beauty of a found family, to which he responded by saying that if it weren't for the found family he made as a teenager, we wouldn't be having this conversation. He said that he doesn't know of a single program for seniors that would not welcome a young person as a volunteer because seniors deeply value connection and, like the rest of us, do not want to be alone.

When I told Ken and Scarlett that I do not have grandparents of my own and regret that I can't have deep conversations with them, I was told to "consider myself adopted." As we enter a season of growth, beauty, and resilience, I look forward to walking to my local Friendship Bench and opening my heart and mind to intergenerational connections.

CONNECT ON CORRLINKS *By Aneka*

If you have access to Corrlinks or Getting Out, you can now send in your submissions and receive writing prompts and other *Connect* related updates via Corrlinks or Getting Out. Members without Corrlinks and Getting Out access can continue to send in *Connect* submissions via mail. 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.**



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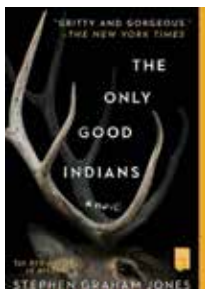
*If you're not already a member, below is a checklist for our eligibility criteria.

- 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 **NEW** mailing address is Free Minds Book Club, P.O. Box 73618, Washington, DC 20056

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club



The Only Good Indians by Stephen Graham Jones with Neely



Our most recent selection, *The Only Good Indians* by Stephen Graham Jones, follows the lives of four Native American men and their families, all haunted by a disturbing, deadly event that took place in their youth. Some of you have already started sharing your profound reflections with us, so we were eager to go ahead and share them. If you haven't had a chance to share your responses yet, don't worry. You still have time to send them in for the next issue!

1. Many Native American tribes regard elk with deep respect, believing them to be symbols of strength and protection. Some tribes even place elk as teachers in stories told through oral tradition, while other tribes consider elk to be protectors of women. What do you think is the significance of elk in this book? Are there any animals or other creatures that serve as a symbol of protection and strength to you?

JS: I think in the book elk represents your conscience, because whenever I did something I knew was wrong, I would think about the worst thing that could happen as a result. In the book, the worst thing happened to everyone who partook in the wrong killing of the elk that day. On the surface, lions are a symbol of strength along with eagles and killer whales, but how it resonates with me is just another form of life doing all it can to survive.

DK: In the novel, elk are not merely animals; they are moral witnesses. They represent memory, balance, and consequence. The men's decision to violate the boundary of the hunt is not just illegal, it is spiritual trespass. The elk herd becomes a symbol of a covenant broken between humans and the natural order. Elk Head Woman is not simply revenge embodied; she is the manifestation of nature's memory, returning to restore balance where respect was abandoned.

The elk's presence throughout the story carries a sense of protection inverted. Where elk traditionally symbolize guardianship, here that guardianship turns into judgment. The elk protect the sacred order by holding the hunters accountable. For me, protection is symbolized by a German Shepherd. Loyal, alert, and unwavering, the dog represents watchfulness and fidelity. Where the elk in the novel guards the moral boundary of nature, the German Shepherd guards the emotional and personal boundaries of my life. Both symbolize protection, but also responsibility: protection is not passive it demands vigilance and respect.

JA: From my point of view, this story is trying to tell us that it's not only humans that have good or bad spirits, but that animals like elks have spirits. They can become very dangerous and vengeful towards anybody that has produced the most horrific evil that anybody can think of, like killing a baby. For an elk, her calf is her baby. It took ten long years for the elk to find her baby, that is all she was looking for, to hold her calf in her hand again, to consolidate the union of mother and baby. The legend shows us that animals do have a memory and spirit.

RA: In the book, the significance of the elk is to be the protector of the land and the history. It's to show the strength of the women and the herd. I believe every animal serves its purpose and somehow there's a human

connection with animals amongst us. I've never owned a pet, but from people who have, it's a common theme where they sometimes connect more with their animals than with humans. I'd love to own a dog, more than likely a pitbull or bully breed-type. When I read the book, it put me in the perspective of animals being the strength of the test of times. I think before humans there were always animals and they tell a silent story to us.

AHA: In this book I see the elk viewed as a type of good omen for Native Americans as well as a source of protection from harm in their point of view and culture. I believe in the signs Allah can make presence as symbols in life; not believing in creatures that can serve as protection or strength except from Allah.

2. Throughout the book, Jones bounces back and forth between third person point of view (when the narrator exists outside of the story, and refers to a character as "she," "he," or "they") and second person point of view (when the narrator treats the reader as if they are involved in the story, and refers to the reader as "you"). For example, the character of the Elk Head Woman is often read from a second person point of view. What impact did it have on you to read parts of the story from Elk Head Woman's perspective? Did it change how you understood the story? Have you ever wished you could see from another person's perspective? If so, who was it and why?

DK: The shifts into second person from Elk Head Woman's perspective are disorienting by design. They collapse the distance between reader and antagonist. Instead of seeing her as a monster, I began to understand her as a force shaped by grief, memory, and purpose. It reframed the narrative from horror into tragedy. Seeing through her perspective changed my understanding from "men being hunted" to "a balance being restored." It made the story less about fear and more about accountability. There have been many times I wished I could see through another person's perspective, especially my late daddy's. I often wonder how he saw me during the periods of my life when I was making choices that led me away from who I was raised to be. I imagine he saw both the good in me and the danger I was stepping toward. Reading Elk Head Woman's perspective reminded me how powerful it is to see events from the other side of hurt, not just from the side of action.

JS: Reading from the Elk Head Woman's perspective, I felt the pain and strong desire for vengeance at the loss of her calf. I never wished I could see things from someone else's perspective because I felt it wouldn't change their actions when I wanted or needed them to do something for me. A lot of the time, I would get frustrated because I felt like I shouldn't have to bribe someone to help me, especially loved ones.

RA: When I was reading I noticed how the author spoke from a third person perspective. When I look at my lifestyle and so much of what went on, it makes me look at things so much differently now. When you're young, you're so emotional and never rationally look at things from anyone's perspective but your own. You'll allow so-called friends to lead you astray because of their point of view.

AHA: Reading the story from the Elk Head Woman's point of view made it unique. I still understood these parts but it made the story more engaging seeing from this perspective. I wished I could have seen from MLK Jr.'s perspective when I read a lot about him. Why, because the way he approached violence with non-violence in his movement to make change was different.

2. What do you think the book's title, "The Only Good Indians," refers to? How is this title, which refers to a historical phrase rooted in hatred and racism towards Native Americans, explored throughout the book?

DK: The title refers to a historically hateful phrase used to dehumanize Native Americans. In the novel, the phrase becomes layered with irony. The "only good Indian" is not a dead one, but one who remembers, honors, and respects the traditions and boundaries that define identity and heritage. The characters' suffering stems from forgetting who they were and what they owed to their culture, the land, and the animals. The title becomes a critique of assimilation, shame, and cultural erosion. It exposes how internalizing society's hatred can lead individuals to lose their spiritual grounding. The novel reclaims the phrase by showing that goodness is tied to remembrance, not erasure.

JS: I think "The Only Good Indians" is a title that plays on the irony that Native Americans and their community were targeted to be exploited and demonized, where "bad" behavior and character become normalized in an attempt to subdue them and their culture. There are a lot of subtle and unsubtle hints at it as the characters reflect and go through life on a reservation.

RA: The book's title "The Only Good Indians" to me is the ones who stuck to their roots and honored their ancestors.

AHA: I think it refers to a culture of identity and history of Native Americans in the world and society from past generations through stories and how it reflects the same within the story.

3. This novel explores themes of identity and heritage, with Gabe, Cass, Ricky, and Lewis often reflecting on their ties to the reservation they grew up on alongside society's expectations of what it means to be Native American. Are there any stereotypes society has of where you come from, positive or negative? Do they impact your day-to-day life? If so, how do you handle that?

JS: Yes, there are negative stereotypes society has of my community that are negative. They impact my day-to-day life, whether it be with my peers or those charged with authority over the institution I'm in. I handle it by using it as leverage against people in some cases and contradicting the stereotypes in others.

DK: Growing up in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina comes with its own stereotypes. Some people see the region as backward, uneducated, or isolated. Others romanticize it as simple, wholesome, and deeply rooted in tradition. Both views miss the complexity of the people who live there. These stereotypes do affect daily life because they shape how others perceive where I come from before they ever know me. But I handle that by leaning into the strengths of my upbringing: resilience, family loyalty, faith, and respect for hard work. Much like the men in the novel wrestle with what it means to be Native American in modern

society, I have had to reconcile who I am with how others define where I'm from.

RA: Throughout the book, there's times where people always throw racial Native slurs around. Even Natives themselves were doing it. In my environment, it's the same old stereotypes. For one, I was born and raised in the poorest part of the city, Ward 8. Our side is known as the broke, dirtiest side, which is always neglected when it comes to funding and support from DC. As I've gotten older and wiser, I try to look at things more rationally now. Just because you're from a certain group doesn't mean it's your ultimate makeup in life. I work hard each day to not be one for excuses because of my skin tone, financial status, or my felony status.

AHA: I always think of the negative stereotypes society has presented growing up in the community you lived in due to your race, class, and income. The day to day impact that led some police officers and authorities to harass you often based on these stereotypes leading some to dislike them or not engage with them. Trying to handle it ain't easy, so I would handle it by getting away or engaging in activities that would keep me from being harassed.

4. Victor Yellow Tail wants Nathan to participate in the sweat lodge ceremony as a way to motivate his son to take pride in his Native American heritage at a time when Nathan was on a path to self-destruction. Is there a tradition or other form of lore where you are from that you wish you could share with youth who are struggling to encourage them to be proud and confident in both themselves and where they are from?

JS: I often used to wish that I could live in different eras where "community" and being a "man" meant something. I wish I could bring those values back because I believe we would all benefit from it.

DK: The sweat lodge ceremony in the novel represents reconnection, bringing a young man back to his roots before he loses himself. For me, that tradition with my ex-wife's family, deep in the mountains of North Carolina, was Sunday lunch after church with the entire family, including extended relatives (upwards to 35-50 people). That weekly gathering was more than a meal. It was accountability, storytelling, laughter, correction, encouragement, and belonging. It was where values were reinforced without lectures. Youth today who struggle with identity often lack that consistent sense of belonging and continuity.

RA: For the youth in my family and the younger guys who watched or heard of my lifestyle, I try my best to show them there's other ways to handle things, to really get to speak to them to show them how to be a man and how to challenge our false beliefs.

AHA: The tradition I know I became familiar with and would encourage youth to learn is their history. Knowing where you come from and the sacrifices that were given for your people can lead you to be prouder and confident going forward and how to approach things in life.

5. At the end of the book, Denorah chooses to end the generational cycle of violence that the characters in the book have experienced by shielding Elk Head Woman from being shot. What do you think of this ending? Has there ever been a time in your life where you made a difficult choice to end a harmful cycle? What impact did that have?

DK: Denorah's decision to shield Elk Head Woman is powerful because it interrupts the expected conclusion of violence answering violence. She refuses to continue the pattern. That moment is the true spiritual resolution of the novel. There has been a moment in my own life where I realized a harmful generational pattern had to stop with me. The crime that brought me to prison is part of that recognition. I see now how

cycles of poor choices, pride, and misplaced loyalty can pass from one generation to the next unless someone consciously decides to break it. That decision has reshaped how I think, act, and plan for the future. Ending a cycle is not dramatic, it is daily, disciplined, and often quiet. But its impact echoes forward into generations that may never know the struggle it took to change the direction. Denorah's act and my commitment share the same core truth: real strength is choosing to stop harm, even when continuing it would feel easier.

JS: I think the ending highlights the understanding of the harm a cycle of pain and retribution has on everyone. I have never had the self-control or the foresight to end a harmful cycle when given the opportunity. I always felt at those times that the world would do the same thing that I did to perpetuate the cycle and went as far as to say that I was preparing whoever for that.

RA: In the book, I love the way Denorah handled things. She wanted the Elk Head Woman to know "I never did anything personal to you and still I'm willing to help you when you wanted to harm me." Since I've been incarcerated, I've stopped some really serious things from happening inside and outside in society. It shows that I'm trying so much to break this cycle that seems neverending to many. It shows that people respect my word and know it's a real reason behind me caring so much. I don't want to see others going through what I've been through and putting their families as well as others through the same thing.

AHA: I think of it as a cycle that is a choice sought to break something that has brought nothing but harm, which to me is good. Not choosing to be a negative influence within my community was a way for me to break a cycle that was harmful only to make things better, not worse.

Below, FM member DK shares his reflections on *The Only Good Indians*:

The Only Good Indians follows four friends whose decision during a hunting trip in their youth returns years later in the form of relentless consequences. What begins as a single unethical act rooted in pride and impulse, grows into guilt, fear, and a haunting presence that will not be ignored. The story explores how actions we try to forget can follow us, shaping our lives long after we think we have moved on.

From my perspective as a federal inmate nearing release in a few more years, the message is clear: the past does not disappear simply because we want it to... unresolved guilt, poor choices, and moral compromises have a way of resurfacing until they are confronted honestly.

The book is not just a horror story; it is a story about accountability, cultural identity, consequences, and the weight of memory. It shows how denial and avoidance only make the burden heavier, while acknowledgment is the first step toward peace. For me, this novel felt symbolic of how my own past followed me into prison. It has reminded me that during this nearly 19 years, true healing requires facing what I did, understanding why I did it, and committing to never repeat those patterns.

Three lessons I learned from the novel are as follows: You cannot outrun your past. Avoidance only allows guilt and consequences to grow stronger. Two: Impulsive pride leads to lasting damage. A single poor decision can shape your life for years, as it has done mine. And finally, accountability is necessary for peace. Healing begins when a person stops denying and starts confronting the truth.

While still incarcerated, I will apply these lessons by continuing to confront my past honestly through writing, counseling, and prayer. I do not allow myself to minimize what I did. I face it so that I never repeat the thinking that led me there. I will also use this awareness to guide my daily behavior. I am careful with my words, my actions, and my thoughts, knowing how small choices can lead to larger consequences. Once released, I will apply these lessons by living a life of accountability. I will avoid situations, environments, and influences that could lead me back toward poor decisions. I will remain transparent with mentors, church leaders, and supervisors. I will also approach my family with honesty about my past and my growth, allowing them to see that I am committed to living differently.

This book unsettled me in a way few books have. The constant presence of consequences in the story reminded me of how my own actions followed me, no matter how much I wished I could undo them. I saw how the characters tried to live normal lives while ignoring what they had done, and how that denial slowly consumed them. I recognized myself in that pattern. Before my arrest, I often minimized my behavior. I convinced myself that my actions were not as serious as they truly were. I avoided looking honestly at the harm I was causing. This book forced me to confront how dangerous that mindset was.

Emotionally, the story made me reflect on the weight of guilt I carried when first arrested. I remember the sleepless nights in the jail, replaying my decisions and wishing I could go back. Over time, I accepted responsibility, but this book reminded me that acceptance must remain active. I can never become complacent in my understanding of what my actions caused. The theme of cultural and personal identity in the book also struck me. The characters struggled with who they were and how their past choices conflicted with their values. I felt that deeply. I have always believed I was compassionate, caring, and capable of good, yet my actions contradicted those beliefs. Reconciling that conflict has been one of the hardest parts of my incarceration.

This book changed my thinking by reminding me that guilt can either destroy a person or guide them toward growth, depending on how they respond. I now see my guilt not as something to bury, but as a reminder to live differently. It also made me think about my daughters and grandchildren. I do not want my past to be a shadow that follows them. That motivates me to live transparently and responsibly once released.

I would recommend *The Only Good Indians* to other inmates and members of society because it vividly illustrates how the past follows us when we try to ignore it. Many incarcerated individuals have spent years avoiding full responsibility for their actions. This book encourages readers to confront that avoidance. The story is powerful because it shows consequences not as a single event, but as an ongoing presence. That perspective is helpful for inmates preparing for reentry, to remind us that true change requires ongoing honesty, not just serving time. This book can inspire meaningful discussions about guilt, accountability, and identity. It encourages readers to examine how their past actions conflict with who they believe themselves to be and how to reconcile that conflict through growth. Emotionally, this book was difficult but necessary. It reminded me that facing the truth, no matter how painful, is the only path to peace.

For inmates seeking transformation, this book provides a strong reminder that we cannot rewrite our past, but we can choose how we live moving forward!



DID YOU KNOW: EMERGING ADULTS

By Ruby

The stage of young adulthood is a distinct developmental stage of life, often characterized as being between the ages of 18 and 29, in which adolescents begin to navigate the trials and tribulations of adulthood as they further discover who they are. The American Psychological Association has pointed out five key features of emerging adulthood, describing it as an age of identity exploration, an age of instability, an age of self-focus, an age of feeling in-between, and an age of optimism ("Emerging Adults: The In-Between Age," 2006).

For many young adults, this period is full of both optimism about the future and the occasional setbacks that teach us lessons about the world. Psychologist Dr. Jeffery Jensen Arnett, who has published research on this stage of life, says that because young adults may struggle to find their footing, he sees the need for "greatly expanded societal efforts to help them navigate the transition into careers and family" ("Emerging Adults: The In-Between Age," 2006). This is especially important when we consider the fact that there are societal factors that directly impact the kinds of resources and community support that young adults are able to benefit from. A psychology professor named Dr. Jean Phinney has researched how the transition into adulthood varies for different ethnic-minority groups. Dr. Phinney notes that, due to both "cultural and economic reasons," a large amount of emerging young adults from ethnic minority backgrounds "tend to take on adult responsibilities earlier, contributing to family income and taking care of siblings, sometimes at the cost of slowing down their own schooling" ("Emerging Adults: The In-Between Age," 2006). This reality highlights the need for resources for emerging young adults that are culturally sensitive and take into consideration the fact that the transition into adulthood is not experienced the same way by everyone.

Many legal scholars have pointed out the importance of recognizing the neuroscience behind how emerging young adults might behave during their development. An article from the Death Penalty Information Center compiled important findings from different research studies conducted on emerging young adult behavior that have important ramifications for how we understand their actions in the context of their growth so that we might offer them stronger support rather than merely ostracizing and punishing them. The article cites a 2011 study conducted by two doctors that were looking at impulsivity and sensation-seeking behaviors that ultimately determined that changes in "impulsivity and sensation-seeking are present through emerging adulthood." This claim is supported by "neuroscience research that has shown brain regions responsible for emotions, novelty, and reward (i.e. the socioemotional system) are more susceptible during adolescence and emerging adulthood when compared to both children and adults." Furthermore, the article provided evidence from a 2016 study examining the cognitive control of different age groups to see how they compared to one another regarding self-control and decision-making. Conclusions from this study demonstrate that in heightened emotional circumstances, "emerging adults, like adolescents, are more likely to have issues with self-control and decision-making," in comparison to adults. This highlights

how emerging young adults are still in a critical stage of cognitive development that is particularly "vulnerable to negative emotional influences and marked by continued development of the prefrontal circuitry" that is responsible for helping humans respond to heightened emotions ("What Experts Are Saying About Emerging Adult Behavior Development," 2025).

Taken together, the psychological and neuroscientific research highlights the fact that emerging young adults are in a distinctly important stage of development where they require community support, continuous guidance, and access to the resources that best fit their needs as they chart their path through adulthood. In DC, there are a number of programs that offer a variety of resources for emerging young adults, both in specific areas of need and overall support. Free Minds partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation on The Emerging Adult Justice Project, which employs a research-based approach to working with and advocating for emerging young adults who have come into contact with the criminal justice system. The framework considers how multiple factors contribute to positive outcomes for people in this age group, including but not limited to community support and resources, relationships and opportunities, policies and laws, and funding systems. Free Minds became involved in this project as one of the community leaders to help begin implementing the framework during its testing phase with the goal of creating resources, services, and opportunities for emerging young adults entering and exiting the legal system in the DC community.

In addition to the resources that Free Minds continues to provide, there are further opportunities for support for young people throughout the city. For job training and career support, the Pathways for Young Adults Program (PYAP) offered through the DC Department of Employment Services helps emerging young adults who are out of work and school in a holistic manner by teaching important life skills, occupational training, and offering paid internship placements. Young adults in DC seeking to further their education might consider visiting the Maya Angelou Young Adult Learning Center, a location offering GED preparation and workforce training to young adults throughout the whole year. SMYAL is a program designed to offer community support to emerging young adults up to 24 years old who identify as queer and/or transgender. Far from the only options available, the DC Office of the Attorney General's website offers a list of dozens of resources available to emerging young adults that are in place across the city. During a transitory period full of new changes, challenges, and dreams, it is critical that a wide array of resources and programs be available to emerging young adults to address their need for encouragement and support from community members who can help guide them through their shift into adulthood.

FROM OHIO TO DC: GROWING INTO THE WORK

By Katie

Hi Free Minds family! My name is Katie and I worked as an Advocacy and Community Education Intern for the 2026 spring semester. In this role, I had the opportunity to do so much hands-on work. I've sat in on policy briefings for Congressional offices to really understand how different proposals would impact members, and I've even met with DC Council candidates to talk through the legislative priorities that matter most to our community. I've also tracked developments around Second Look laws, writing letters to our members, creating various flyers, and collaborating closely with the Thrive Under 25 Coalition.

Honestly, writing letters was one of my favorite parts of this role. I loved being able to communicate with members and hear their stories. It is such a genuine and personal way to connect.

But what really made this experience special was the environment. The Free Minds team truly feels like a family. I looked forward to coming into the office because of the people; everyone is so supportive, and there isn't a single person who wouldn't drop everything to help someone else. It's a rare kind of community, and I feel lucky to have been part of it.

I am currently a sophomore double-majoring in Political Science Pre-Law and Sociology/Criminology. Through my university, I was able to study away in DC as it offers a competitive, semester-long program where students experience a semester's worth of classes in 4 weeks and then have an internship for 10-12 weeks. Up until this past semester, the program was only available to journalism students. I am proud to say that I am 1 of 2 Political Science students to be accepted into the program. For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in questions of justice, how systems operate, who they impact, and what it means to advocate for fairness in a meaningful way.

Before arriving in DC, much of my foundation was built through my involvement on campus. While I have participated in a variety of student organizations, two experiences in particular have had a lasting impact on me: the Ohio Innocence Project and Students Defending Students.

Through my work with the Ohio Innocence Project, I have engaged with efforts focused on freeing individuals who have been wrongfully convicted and preventing similar injustices from occurring in the future. As the New Member Coordinator, my role centers on building community, leading outreach efforts, and creating opportunities for students to become involved in innocence work. This experience has strengthened my understanding of the justice system while reinforcing a belief that continues to guide me: that every person deserves fairness, and that protecting the innocent must be a priority within our legal system.

In addition, my role with Students Defending Students has provided me with hands-on experience supporting peers through the university's judicial process. As a student advisor,

I work with individuals who are navigating allegations of policy violations, helping them understand procedures, prepare for hearings, and access the support they need. This work has taught me the importance of combining empathy with structure, ensuring that individuals feel supported while also helping them navigate complex systems effectively.

Across all of these experiences, I've developed skills in advocacy, communication, research, and leadership, but more importantly, I've built a strong sense of purpose. Moving forward, I want to continue working at the intersection of policy and direct service, fighting for systemic change while also staying grounded in the real experiences of the people most impacted. These roles have shown me that meaningful change requires both, and they've prepared me to pursue a path where I can contribute to a more just, compassionate, and accountable system.

As a political science major, I honestly can't imagine a better place to be than DC. When I first heard about this program, especially the internship piece, I immediately started picturing all the people I could meet and the different experiences I could have. That excitement, paired with my interest in justice and advocacy, made the program feel like the perfect fit.

However, I was also coming off a summer where I felt pretty unsure about my path. I was questioning whether this was really the kind of career I wanted, and it felt like a bit of a crossroads moment. I'd always pictured myself living in DC someday, so this felt like the right chance to test that dream and see if it actually aligned with who I am and what I want.

I hoped that being in such a fast-paced, meaningful environment, surrounded by people doing the kind of work I care about, would give me some clarity. And it really did. This experience has given me a much stronger sense of direction. I feel confident now about the future I want to build, the work I want to be part of, and the path I see myself following moving forward.

I was definitely nervous to move to DC, a new city, with new challenges and a whole lot of unknowns. But now, every time I step outside and see the National Archives and Department of Justice just down the street from my apartment, I'm reminded of how surreal and special this opportunity really is. Living in the nation's capital feels like a dream come true. There's something electric about being surrounded by history, advocacy, and possibility all at once.

And through it all, Free Minds has been my anchor. This team welcomed me with open arms and made DC feel like home. I've grown so much here, professionally, personally, and emotionally, and I know that wherever I go next, I'll carry the lessons, connections, and spirit of Free Minds with me. I'm beyond grateful to be part of this community.

WHAT WE'RE READING

with Neely

Have you recently read a book that left an impression on you, positive or negative? 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."

- **DK: *Permanent Record* by Edward Snowden**

I wondered before I started reading Edward Snowden's book, *Permanent Record*, 'Is he a patriot, traitor, or conscience in code?' In this book, I learned he is from my home-state of North Carolina. What I had read thus far, he recounts his rise from a curious, tech-obsessed teen to an insider for the National Security Agency, revealing secret surveillance programs. The first 16 chapters have shared vivid moments like his first taste of coding freedom and the tension of classified briefings that shaped his moral compass. Snowden wrestles with loyalty versus conscience, challenging me to consider patriotism and privacy. Whether traitor or whistleblower, he forced me to reflect on freedom in a digital world. A gripping, though-provoking start.



- **JA: *A Gentleman in Moscow* by Amor Towles**

This is a book about the fictional Count Alexander Rostov, who was sentenced to house arrest for life in a fancy house in Moscow, Russia around 1920. In this story, Count Rostov was able to keep his values and his spirit that he had learned while he was an aristocrat. He helped whoever asked for his help, without caring if they were poor or rich. This book helped me to see more clearly the value of education, the value of learning, the value of hearing and understanding other people, and the value of always doing the right thing.



- **EB: *The Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times* by Michelle Obama**

As I was reading Michelle Obama's book in chapter 1, I was reminded of my Granny who used to knit all day. Chapter 2, "Decoding Fear," helped me to see that fear can only keep me from seeing my true ability to be the real me. Chapter 3 made me think of my favorite movie, *A Thin Line Between Love and Hate*, which made me feel I could smile to know that I'm loved. So yeah, this book was good and helpful.



- **Free Minds Reentry Book Club "The Build Up": *The Man of Many Fathers: Life Lessons Disguised as a Memoir* by Roy Wood Jr.**

When stand-up comedian Roy Wood Jr. held his son for the first time, he felt a mix of emotions. Roy's father, a prominent figure in the civil rights movement in Birmingham, Alabama, passed away when he was just sixteen. With his loss came a gap in the life lessons passed down from father to son. Reflecting on all the father figures who shared their wisdom and filled this gap over the course of his growing up, Roy's book captures his most memorable lessons on how to become a good person, and an even better father. The book inspired members in our weekly reentry book club called, "The Build Up," to engage in meaningful discussion and reflections, including sharing childhood memories of loved ones and important lessons they have learned in their lives that have had a lasting impact on who they are today.



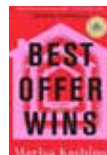
- **Julia: *Network Effect* by Martha Wells**

I have been reading the Murderbot Diaries science fiction series by Martha Wells. I just finished the fifth book, *Network Effect*. This series is set far into the future with humans, largely governed by an intergalactic corporation, having colonized lots of planets and built sentient robots...like the main character of the series, an intelligent "Security Unit" (basically a very advanced bodyguard robot) who has secretly hacked its own programming to become independent from its corporate owners. The robot calls itself Murderbot, and mainly wants to watch television shows but gets roped into protecting various humans over the course of the series, and maybe reluctantly growing to care about them. These books are a lot of fun, and I would definitely recommend them to any sci-fi fans.



- **Emily: *Best Offer Wins* by Marisa Kashino**

Last month, my book club read *Best Offer Wins*, a thriller/satire of the housing market and the "white picket fence dream" by Marisa Kashino. My book didn't arrive from the library in time, so my friend gave me a summary and spoiled all of the major twists and turns. It sounded so interesting that when I finally got it from the library I read it anyway and I couldn't put it down. The book is told entirely from the point of view of the main character, who lives in DC and wants to move to a house in the suburbs with her husband to start a family. As she keeps losing bidding wars trying to buy her various dream houses, she becomes more and more unhinged. Like very, very unhinged. While I do not condone any of the crazy tactics the main character uses, I found the book to be addicting and highly entertaining.



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 or Bookshop.org. 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.

***A Fork in the Road* by George Owens:**

Description provided by the author: From a promising childhood in Washington, DC, to the dark world of crime and a life-altering sentence, George Owens shares a raw, unfiltered journey of choices, consequences, and redemption.

A Fork in the Road is a gripping true story about how one man lost his way and found the strength to change.



EMERGING ADULTS AND THE YOUTH REHABILITATION ACT: MY PERSPECTIVE

By Jordan

Did you know that the "Emerging Adult" population within the DMV region is one of the most scrutinized groups in today's world? Emerging adults have been heavily criticized over the last year and a half in the district, due in part to the District Attorney of DC, Jeanine Pirro, and an administration that is overzealous in their pursuit of incarcerating youth. Stemming from the pressure from the President to address juvenile crime, many pieces of legislation centered around helping youth create life outside of the system have been under attack, more specifically the Youth Rehabilitation Act, or YRA.

First enacted by the District in 1985, the Youth Rehabilitation Act aimed to help provide sentencing alternatives outside of the mandatory minimum to youth 22 years old and younger. The language of the YRA has been changed, or amended since 1985, allowing more individuals under the age of 25 to benefit from the legislation. I became eligible for the YRA after being sentenced in 2018, but I did not see the true benefit of it until I went to pursue employment shortly after.

My first job opportunity came with a lot of uncertainty because I didn't even know if I would pass my background check, but because of the YRA, I had been able to have my case "set aside" from the public eye, allowing me to move through life as an emerging adult should. While a "set aside" is not the same as expungement, and law enforcement still have access to that information, it can be extremely helpful in reducing barriers to employment, housing, and other opportunities. The YRA not only allowed me to do things like pursue jobs, more recently within

Congress, but also gave me the opportunity to pursue a degree in college and apply for things that would not be possible without it. Policy makers now want to lower the age eligibility for the YRA to 18 years old because of heightened youth violence across the city, stemming from an incident last year where a government employee was assaulted. Statistics were provided last year to debunk the claim of increased violence in the district, but "teen takeovers" have become heavily covered by news outlets over the past few months. Mayor Bowser has addressed large groups of teens with curfew enforcements across multiple parts of DC, many of which have not been successful.

As a recipient of the YRA, I believe lowering the age of eligibility would only hurt emerging youth and their chances to seek employment, further their education, and live where they wish to, ultimately keeping them in a cycle of crime and violence. Providing youth something to do at an early age, like paid skill building and job training before the age of 16, would be a proper alternative to something that would cause an authoritative ripple effect on communities across the district. Furthermore, building upon what's already in place by emphasizing housing and mental health resources would be a lot more beneficial and necessary for the survival mentality that most youth carry into their adult years. I can personally say that the Youth Rehabilitation Act has helped me tremendously over the years, helping me build the blueprint for the life that I always envisioned myself having.

CELEBRATING MEMBERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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

- ★ AB completed the Challenge Program.
- ★ AW and LS received promotions at their jobs.
- ★ AT and TB got a raise at their jobs.
- ★ BR just celebrated his 2 year anniversary being home.
- ★ 8 members got their probation terminated.
- ★ GC completed 84 educational courses/programs and over 900.00 hours of UNICOR.
- ★ DJ earned Flagger and OSHA certificates.
- ★ EG and MB were named employee of the month at their jobs.
- ★ GR celebrated his third wedding anniversary.
- ★ JS earned his GED.
- ★ KB got his new apartment.
- ★ LW bought a car for the first time.
- ★ OB completed drug treatment and was offered a job.
- ★ RD finished his first commercial contract with his business.
- ★ RP completed a Drug Abuse Education Course.
- ★ WT earned his CDL certification.

Please share your accomplishments with us to be featured!

DC CULTURE: FREE MINDS OUTING TO THE FIRST HOME DC DEFENDERS GAME

By Sofia

Hey Free Minds family! This is Sofia checking in for another edition of the DC Culture installment. For past issues, we've covered cultural festivals, music, food, literature, and political movements here in the district. For this issue, I'll be focusing on a DC sporting event that also happened to intertwine with some DC music.

The DC Defenders are a pro-football team and compete in the United Football League in the XFL conference. The team was founded in 2018 when DC was announced as one of eight cities at the time that would join the newly reformed XFL. In February 2020, the team actually won the first game in modern XFL game history. Unfortunately, the 2020 season was cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the XFL terminated its operations. The league was later bought in August 2020 by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Dany Garcia, and Gerry Cardinale and it was confirmed in 2022 that DC would return as an XFL city and in Spring 2023, the team reemerged. The XFL and USFL merged beginning in the 2024 season to form the UFL. The team's mascot changed for the 2026 season and is now Monty the snake. Monty was introduced as an homage to a silly DC Defenders tradition where fans sitting in a particular section of the stadium started making a "beer snake", which is where empty cups from beverages purchased at the game are stacked starting with fans at the bottoms of the stands all the way to the top throughout the game to create a "snake".

The DC Defenders play their games at Audi Field and Isaiah, Regina, Melissa, Emily and I headed to the stadium in Southwest, DC to enjoy the game on a beautiful spring day. The Defenders headed into the season as the defending 2025 UFL champions, so the stadium was full of excitement. For the first home game of the season, the team faced the Houston Gamblers. We cheered on as the Defenders dominated the Gamblers out the gate, being led by quarterback Jordan Ta'amu who was the UFL Championship MVP in 2025. Many Defenders and other UFL players are former NFL players and several Defenders players have also gone on to play for the NFL. The Defenders dominated the Gamblers in the first half, forcing several turnovers and sacking the Gamblers quarterback more than once.

To celebrate the first home game of the season, the self-proclaimed "Ambassador of Rap for the Capital," Wale, performed a halftime show, which was the perfect way to light a DC stadium up with energy. He performed several classics, including "Lotus Flower Bomb" and "No Hands." In a special DC movement, he also performed a cover of the DC Go-Go classic, "Sexy Lady" by UCB, which the whole stadium sang along with.

After the exciting performance, the DC Defenders returned to the field to continue their domination. The game ended in a record-breaking blowout win of 45-7, marking the largest margin of victory in UFL history. It will be exciting to see how the UFL and DC Defenders continue to make their mark on DC sports and continue to incorporate DC music and other cultural elements. Is there anything



DC Defenders vs Houston Gamblers game Fireworks



Wale performing at DC Defenders vs Houston Gamblers game

DC culture you are wanting to see in a future edition, whether that be music related, food, literature, events, etc.? Write to us and let us know, we'd love to hear from you!

FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB

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NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: IMAGINATION

By Julia

One of my favorite quotes is from legendary Afrofuturist and science fiction writer Octavia Butler, who said, "There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns." Another influential writer and scholar, adrienne maree brown (she writes her name that way without capital letters), once said that community organizers "are shaping the future we long for and have not yet experienced." Both quotes, to me, speak to the vital need for *imagination*. In our old office, I had a poster on the wall behind my desk that said, "picture a world without prisons" and showed a brightly colored collage of people flying kites, playing sports, interacting with each other and the world. (I've got to find a home for the poster in our new office!) Too often, I think we as humans can be limited by our own imaginations. The first step to creating something new, something different for ourselves, for our communities, for our world, is to *imagine*. So, for this next issue of the *Connect*, we want to let our imaginations run wild. Let us picture all kinds of worlds. Like science fiction writer Octavia Butler, we can create something new. Share with us your wildest, most fantastic dreams. We can't wait to see your imagination coming to life on the page!

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!



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