July/August 2025
Vol. 14, Issue 3

free minds Connect

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

FROM TEEN IN PRISON TO FLIKSHOP SCHOOL OF BUSINESS CEO — PAGE 10

BAKING WITH LOVE: HUMBERTO'S FAMILY BUSINESS / HORNEAR CON AMOR: EL NEGOCIO FAMILIAR DE HUMBERTO — PAGE 15

EMBARK ON A WILD PLACES TOUR OF ARIZONA — PAGE 34

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: BETTER TOGETHER

Dear Entrepreneurial Free Minds Members,
Greetings from FM HQ where your Free Minds team is always sending you positive energy and is in full beehive mode, sparking nonstop creative ideas to enhance your learning journeys.

Bees have been on my mind a lot lately in thinking about this issue on entrepreneurship, as to me they are the ultimate example of entrepreneurial spirit. They are constantly creating, innovating, and persisting in the face of challenges, and they produce very beneficial products. They turn their vision into action!

Bees produce honey that people have used in healing for centuries. They have this incredibly efficient and unique way of flying where they flap their wings and rotate them at the same time. I read that a third of the world's food production depends on bees for pollination. Now that's a large impact for a small critter! Fun fact: I also like to call our Prison Book Club space in our office "The Bee Hive" as they are always busy bees capturing that spirit of productivity and creativity (not to be confused with the BeyHive, although I am a big fan of Beyonce too. She is a true entrepreneur who actually keeps bees on her property and gives the honey to her kids who have allergies).

This issue is also the bee's knees, an expression meaning an outstandingly good person or thing. Inside you will find an amazing toolkit for all you need to sharpen your entrepreneurial spirit. Whether or not you are interested in business, everyone can practice these entrepreneurial qualities of innovation, creativity, and courage to face challenges head on and overcome them.

You will read about Free Minds member Humberto who took on the daunting task of taking over his father's bakery after he died. Humberto had to do a crash course on running a business, and found the benefits went far beyond just economics. He now feels truly embraced as an integral part of his community. Humberto shares, *"The neighbors, friends and family all knew that I had been deported. So I was looked at differently. Now they see a working man. They see me interact with my community daily. I am now respected. And that feels so good to me."* (page 15)

You'll hear from Free Minds member Joel who drops some real talk about the severe impact of incarceration on families and how his reentry plan needed some revisions when directly faced with this. Reflecting on the family impact of parents or mentors being incarcerated, Joel says, *"it was that bridge that got removed in my generation that messed up my family and my relationship."* Instead of letting these obstacles stop him, Joel has maintained a strong relationship with his daughter and persists in his dreams of running his own personal training business (page 6).

In the "Real World Of Work" on page 25, FM member Immanuel describes his excitement about entering a line of work that he is good at, his goals of entering the electrical field and obtaining a union job, and his dream of working for himself. Immanuel, like Joel, also has his own fitness company. He stresses the importance of having lots of patience in anything one endeavors to accomplish – good advice for all of us to keep in mind!

Have a "Conversation with Jordan" on page 39 and hear about his journey to understanding how entrepreneurship could play a role in his life. He writes, *"I started college in 2019, and only knew the explicit definition of being an entrepreneur at the time. Aspiring to be a 'businessman' growing up, with no idea exactly how that looked for me, I went into college unaware and lost."* Jordan shares how his perspective on entrepreneurship has evolved since then, especially as he works on starting a new podcast and a clothing line. Jordan shares the gem that *"never giving up on the vision you see for yourself is very important."* Wise words!

And of course, no *Connect* issue would be complete without poetry. In his poem "Goals," on page 9, MM encompasses encompasses the spirit of resilience and dedication displayed from our members in this and every issue:

My spirit fights hard on a daily basis
because through these words by [author] Mariame Kaba...
"Hope is a discipline."
Encouraging all the wounded men in spirit to fight hard
so that we won't be counted amongst the broken
Freedom is indivisible, where one is chained and one is in bondage,
all are chained and in bondage.
So my goal is to free us all, because "Hope is a discipline."

Thank you MM and every one of our contributors for sharing your wisdom and inspiration with all of us.

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: Empathy & Compassion

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.

Free minds Connect

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We are ALWAYS looking for new contributors. Write or draw something for our next issue and send it to us! (Pieces not published in the *Connect* may appear on our Writing Blog and at a Write Night Event!)

Please write us when you are transferred so we have your up-to-date address as soon as possible!

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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

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If you know of other Free Minds members that we've lost who are not on this list, please let us know so we can include them in our memorial.

FREE MINDS HQ

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

By Sofia

Free Minds Staff Invited to FCI Allenwood and FCC Hazelton's Reentry Job Fair

Free Minds staff was recently invited to attend job fairs at USP and FCI Hazelton in West Virginia, where we had the opportunity to provide resume and job interview assistance at the camp, medium and high security men's facility. As a part of the facilities' annual job fair, Free Minds staff assisted people incarcerated at those facilities with preparing their resumes, getting ready for job interviews, and conducting mock interviews. It was great meeting with the men and women at each of these facilities and helping them prepare for reentry. We were so impressed with how prepared everyone was, it was great to see how they were already on the road to reentry success! Earlier in the summer, the Mayor's Office for Returning Citizens' Affairs (MORCA) also invited Free Minds, in addition to other DC community reentry partners, to a reentry information session at FCI Allenwood in Pennsylvania. Free Minds and the other organizations and government agencies shared information about their respective services and programming with the participants and answered questions about reentry. We are deeply grateful to all of the participants from each facility for their time and energy.

Opioid Awareness Training for Free Minds Staff

This past June, Us Helping Us, a non-profit organization that works to achieve health equity for underserved and marginalized populations in the greater Washington, DC area, hosted an opioid awareness training for Free Minds staff members. The organization, which shares an office building with Free Minds, hosted an interactive training where staff learned how to identify and support someone having an overdose. A large part of the training was dedicated to understanding how to use Narcan (a name brand for the drug naloxone) which can be used to reverse an opioid overdose. Free Minds staff walked away with practical skills and accurate knowledge on how to know the signs if someone is overdosing and how to help.

Rebecca, Davon, and Jordan Travel to Baltimore for Annie E. Casey Community of Learning (COL) Convening

The Free Minds team traveled to Baltimore this past July to represent Free Minds at the Emerging Adults Community of Learning conference. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and partners work towards developing a brighter future for children and families. Their annual mid-summer convening brings together the foundation's staff, partners, and emerging adults (adults 18-25 years old) to collaborate, learn, and reflect on their work. The Free Minds team had the opportunity to network with others at the conference and attend workshops and presentations where they shared ways that Free Minds is working to empower and engage emerging adults and learn new strategies on how to do so from others. One of the ways Free Minds supports our emerging adults is by having a dedicated space at the Build Up (our Reentry Book Club that meets online every week) for members under the age of 32.

FREE MINDS MAILBAG

We love getting mail from our Free Minds family. Here are some of your thoughts on the January/February/March 2025* Connect *The Future.

AHA: The Future issue was special since we all think about our futures and prepare for them in many ways, so hearing other stories and pieces are always eye opening. I know as I get closer to my IRAA motion going to court with a hearing to come, I prepare daily for my future knowing I can get out sooner any day. So this issue and our next issue on Goals, I take steps towards daily. The DC photos always take me back home, seeing new sites that were not there when I was home over 23 years ago. Then it opens me up to what I know I will see in the future and be able to visit so I write it down as places I'd like to go. The city has always had a lot of places to see so I can't wait to explore them.

KB: I am just showing my appreciation to the book club for sending me the books, crossword puzzles, poems, history books, and the Free Minds *Connect* issues. All these things help me do this time and it helps me stay sound minded... I really like the *Connect* issues because they are keeping me updated on the way the city looks, how it is turning into something from a dark place into something beautiful (Al-Hamdullah). But (Inshallah) I will get a chance to see it myself firsthand thanks again Free Minds Book Club, good job.

SK: Love the *Connect* theme The Future. I'm envisioning my future daily as soon I will finally be released to freedom or some sort of new freedom. It won't be 100%, but much better than being confined to a correctional institution. 😀

JY: I want to thank everyone at Free Minds for being here for me in my time of need and for always keeping me updated on what's going on with the outside world and with other members of the Free Minds family..

QUOTE-I-VATOR

Mae Jemison

"Never let yourself be limited by the imaginations of others." – Mae Jemison, American Engineer

"Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going." – Jim Rohn, American Entrepreneur, Author, and Motivational Speaker

"Whatever you do, be different. If you're different, you will stand out." – Anita Roddick, British Businesswoman and Founder of The Body Shop

"All humans are entrepreneurs, not because they should start companies, but because the will to create is encoded in human DNA, and creation is the essence of entrepreneurship." – Reid Hoffman, American Internet Entrepreneur, Venture Capitalist, and Founder of LinkedIn

"To be successful, you have to have your heart in your business and your business in your heart." – Thomas J. Watson, American Businessman and Former CEO of IBM

"To build a successful business, you must start small and dream big. In the journey of entrepreneurship, tenacity of purpose is supreme." – Aliko Dangote, Nigerian Businessman

"Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you." – Oprah Winfrey, American Host and Television Producer

"I believe in destiny, but I also believe that you can't sit back and let destiny happen. A lot of times, an opportunity might fall into your lap but you have to be ready for that opportunity. You can't sit there waiting on it. A lot of times you are going to have to get out there and make it happen." – Spike Lee, American Film Director

FAMILY TIES: INTERVIEW WITH JOEL

Interview by Jeffrey

When I think about goals, I think about taking risks and sacrifice. The willingness to put yourself out there and commit to something bigger than yourself. I was happy to be able to sit down with FM member Joel, who returned home in December 2024. In our conversation, he shared about reconnecting with his family, the lessons he's learned about flexibility and resilience, and how entrepreneurship has become a powerful way for him to create change and inspire others.

Jeffrey: Hi Joel, I appreciate you doing this interview with me. And welcome home. Can you tell me how long you've been home now?

Joel: I was released December 22, 2024 so it'll be one year in December.

Jeffrey: Who does your family consist of, and what role do they play in your life today?

Joel: My family consists primarily of my daughter, and then I have my older family. I have one aunt left, and I have some cousins.

Jeffrey: While you were incarcerated, were you able to stay connected to your family?

Joel: Good question. When I came to prison, I was married. I had a wife and a daughter, so keeping those connections were probably the most important. My daughter was definitely top of that list, so a lot of my resources were allocated to keeping that relationship tight. Before I went to prison, the streets had consumed a lot of my life, so I wasn't very family oriented. But you realize this in your own family; the age you are dictates the impact that you are expected to have on your family. And a lot of the time when those people who are at the age where they're required to be impactful aren't there, the family kind of just goes their own way. So it was that bridge that got removed in my generation that messed up my family and my relationship.

Jeffrey: So now that you're back home, what's it like to rebuild those connections?

Joel: I haven't really, to be honest, and that's something that, once again, I'm not really proud of, but I've just kept the door open. That's kind of been my policy. I'm just taking my time with it. Last Easter my oldest aunt reached out to me. She called my house phone and to this day, she still does. So just things like that, I just keep it open. I haven't really been putting a lot of time and energy into it only because my brain works like a computer; I only have so much bandwidth at any given time, and right now, I don't really have a lot of bandwidth to untangle a lot of those complicated things. You know people feel guilty when you go to prison and they don't support you, especially in the Black community. I've been locked up with people from other communities and their family would be like, "Oh you did this? Well now you're cut off," right? It's because they might hold the family bigger than the individual. But with us, we don't really look at going to jail like, "oh you shamed the family." I think we kind of understand the system plays different parts, and in it, we have a little more grace given. But back to your original question, so my daughter, who's my primary family right? We've been close her entire life. We were already very close before I came to prison, and we've been even closer since then, so that's kind of been the primary thing.

Jeffrey: That's great to hear! So with your daughter were there any challenges to keeping that relationship tight once you got out?

Joel: When you're incarcerated, you are creating these goals or dreams or mental pictures. You create this narrative in your mind as to how things are going to be when you get released. And that's what you hold on to, to get through it. You're like man, I can't wait until the day I get released. Guys can tell you all the way down to what meal they are going to eat, what outfit they want, what shoes they want. You got this whole thing created in your mind. But usually the people that you want included in that also have a narrative in their mind of how they want your release to be and your transition to be, and even your life to be. And that's beautiful in one sense, that someone's thinking of you in that way, someone's actually keeping you in their thoughts. So the fact that someone's sitting back and they're saying when my dad comes home we're gonna do this, or someone's saying when my husband, my baby's father, my whatever, I can't wait to do this. Your version and their version very rarely are even in the same ballpark. I've learned that the things that I envisioned, and how I wanted things to be, were very different than how others envisioned it. And when I saw that, I had to quickly pivot and transition and say, I'm just going to be open to

whatever, and that's been the biggest thing for me, just getting rid of expectations, getting rid of that narrative in your mind of the perfect day out.

In prison, everything is very structured. It's the same every day. It's Groundhog Day. You know exactly what's going to happen in prison. The thing people hate most in prison is adjustments, change, flexibility on every level. If you're a flexible man in prison, they call you a sucker. The best thing to be in jail is rigid. But when you come into society, that's literally your biggest weakness. When you get out here, if you're rigid, you're called stubborn, right? So with any of your relationships, that's the biggest thing to keep in mind. I remember when I got out, my daughter, I'm thinking I'm gonna see her at least every weekend, right? That's just a realistic concept in my mind. But I hadn't thought about the fact that she also plays in the soccer league, and she has a job. So when I'm asking her, "Hey, what about Sunday?" She's saying, "Hey Dad, I gotta work on Sunday." So of course I can say, "Well look I just give you the money," but it's not about that. It's about how she already had a thing going. So yeah, my Sunday in my mind may work for me, but I never once considered that maybe her free day is Tuesday or something like that.

Jeffrey: You've kind of touched on this a bit but the theme of this month's Connect is all about entrepreneurship, and the way I see it, entrepreneurship is all about putting yourself out there, taking risks, and facing challenges head on. So I just wanted to ask you what are your thoughts on entrepreneurship and how do you use entrepreneurship in your life?

Joel: Since I came home, I've really been focused on building something meaningful. While I was in prison, I earned my degree in business, and I kept going with that after I got out through Georgetown's entrepreneurship program, the Pivot Program. That experience opened up a whole new world for me, and now I work with an organization that promotes something called ESE, Entrepreneurial Service Enterprise. ESE is this bridge between nonprofit and for-profit models. It's a space where business and impact come together, and that's something I'm deeply passionate about.

Entrepreneurship, to me, is the one opportunity that nobody has to give you. In underserved communities, where people are often overlooked, underrepresented, or just not treated fairly, entrepreneurship becomes a powerful tool. It's a way to take back control, to create your own lane. You don't have to wait for permission. Look at someone like Jeff Bezos (founder of Amazon). Whether you love or hate his story, there's something there about taking an idea and building it out with relentless drive. Regret comes when you don't take those shots, when you don't try to leverage your connections and do something new. That's what I'm about now: Leveraging what I've learned and who I've met to build something bigger than me. Entrepreneurship is all about that. It's about risk, vision, curiosity. I'm constantly learning, constantly trying to stay ahead. I'm not a huge baseball guy, but I live by that Jackie Robinson quote: *"A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives."* That's my measure of success now, how I can use what I've been through and what I've built to make a real difference in someone else's life.

Jeffrey: Wow, that's really powerful. And for my last question, is there anything else you'd like to say?

Joel: I'll just give you a very quick thing that I've learned. Being in prison for 20 years, I didn't get to see new faces every day, like it just didn't happen. I didn't see new faces. In prison, you're housed with 150 guys in a unit made for 100, and maybe over a year, six of those guys might shift in and out and some new guys come in. In jail, you get these long spans of no emotional activity, and then you get these quick spikes. All week you're getting no emotional relationship with anyone right? You're keeping yourself very on purpose, because once again, what did I say? You have to be firm, rigid and being emotionless is another part of that. So now (if you're in a place where you can get visits) once a week I get to go see my daughter for like six hours, and I get to hug her and kiss her and take pictures with her and eat with her and laugh with her and be human for like six hours, and then I don't get to do it again for another week. So now you get released and I can call her, FaceTime her. But just the fact that she can call me now, she loves to do it, and sometimes it emotionally drains me, because I'm not used to doing it constantly. But then I sit back and I realize that this is what I prayed for. That's the good part about it. Whenever I'm going through anything hard emotionally I'm always like man, this is what I was sitting in that bunk begging for. Like, let me have all these problems, let me get out there and be dealing with all this.

Jeffrey: It's been a pleasure hearing you speak, you're a really wise man, I loved hearing your story.

Joel: No man, *thank you* for wanting to interview me, I appreciate you giving me this opportunity.

MEMBERS *CONNECT*: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Goals By AHA

I learned how to take coping skills and strategies from groups such as NRDAP (Drug program), resolve trauma workshops, and critical thinking to use and apply to situations in my life going forward that I did not possess before. Using these skills to avoid issues and problems that may come my way have aided me in overall growth, and helped me stay focused on preparing for my future release, building a foundation on how to stay free and live a productive life.

I notice how ambitious and determined I am to get towards that, which benefits me. Albeit a class, program, or etc. helping me prepare for my release, it all reflects on the path I want to take and continue to as I move forward in life.

One personal value that stands out is working hard at what I set out to do. When it comes to consistency and the willingness to learn and use it to reach a particular goal, determination and ambition are values that go along with it that I possess; always putting them to use to build what I want.

A Life Lesson By WR

The one life lesson I learned is to not trust the people you call friends. I've learned just because people say they like you doesn't mean anything. "Actions speak louder than words." I truly believe that now. The skill I learned from this lesson is that Allah gave you "two ears and one mouth" for a reason, to listen more and talk less. Now when I'm around family, work, and etc., I just let people do all the talking and learn all about them from them. It has made me become a better person and to never trust people who don't really have your back.

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 address is 1816 12th Street NW, Washington, DC 20009.

POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Goals
by MM
My goal is to be free and help free others.
Forced into solitary confinement,
the ones forced into such confinements
are forced to search for solitude in mind, body, and soul!
Because this form of solitude isn't voluntary,
unlike a nature hike,
one in such confinement must search hard,
deep within mind, body and soul
to obtain serenity of the mind

The brisk cold of the winter air on the outside
Mixed with the warm heat in the confinement of this cell
creates tremendous condensation in the window pane.
The pain of oppressed souls incarcerated could be the
reason behind these shed tears on the window pane.
After this plight, would I be wounded in mind, body & soul?

My spirit fights hard on a daily basis
because through these words by Mariame Kaba, delivered
to me by Sofia, "Hope is a discipline."
Encouraging all the wounded men in spirit to fight hard
so that we won't be counted amongst the broken
Freedom is indivisible, where one is chained and one is in
bondage,
all are chained and in bondage.
So my goal is to free us all, because "Hope is a discipline."

My New Chapter
By AHA
My name is AHA
In the future I seek to be a published author
I want to write a book, but I need to choose a genre
I need to come up with more ideas, but I want to create
something new
I never can write enough
And I wish I could stick to a specific storyline and achieve more
I always use my experiences, but don't base it on them enough
I want more freedom in my life and less restrictive settings
I need more encouragement in my life and less setbacks
that can slow progress
I am strong because I am resilient and patient
What I love most is how I adapt to my environment
The biggest obstacle to getting my needs met is to not
procrastinate
I can move through/past this obstacle by completing tasks
I will try to balance my wants and needs by focusing on what
is important first.

My Life Business Plan
by WR
The problem is I have no skills that I want.
I need to find the best program that can fix me.
But not having my own place holds me back.
I want to open my own candy sugar free store soon.
But with no good credit or money I'm at first base.
I dream about opening that store so much, I can taste it.
I will find a solution, I will find a good job by the year 2026.
I will make friends who really love me for me and not what
I have.
I will try things like being more open to people.
I will find support from My God (Allah).
I will find the solution, I will overcome obstacles because I
am very strong and wise.
I will feel confident because I really believe in myself always.
I will be a better person each day I'm on this earth,
because it (Allah) will keep me going.
I will feel peace because I'm free now.
I will find the solution in all that I do in life.

My Life Business Plan
by RL
The problem is I don't have a plan.
I need to get focused,
but I have bills to pay.
I want to travel the world
But I'm still on papers.
I dream about Mecca.
I will find a solution and I will find a job by staying
determined.
I will make friends who have the same interests as me.
I will try things like sailing.
I will find support from like-minded people.
I will find the solution, I will overcome obstacles because life
goes in stages.
I will feel confident because I believe.
I will be better, there is no other choices
because people must strive for success.
I will feel peace because I'm at peace.
I will find the solution.

Flikshop postcards sent to members at the DC jail complex.

PAYING IT FORWARD: THE FLIKSHOP SCHOOL OF BUSINESS *By Rebecca*

Entrepreneur, justice reform advocate, and engaging public speaker are just a few ways to describe Flikshop founder and CEO Marcus. With the launch of the Flikshop School of Business in 2016, Marcus was able to add teacher to his resume. Drawing from his lived experience and lessons learned, Marcus has crafted a curriculum that teaches scholars the principles of entrepreneurship as well as workforce readiness skills. I had the pleasure of speaking with Marcus to learn more.

How would you describe the Flikshop School of Business to someone you just met?

I started a company after I came home from prison, after serving eight years when I was a 15-year-old kid for stealing a car from a person. It was one of the hardest things of my life, not just the journey of going through prison, which was definitely the hardest, but one of the other things that was super challenging was trying to figure out how to be able to get back on my feet when I got back out of prison. And I wanted to try to figure out how to be able to gain an opportunity for real employment. I got a job at a paint store, and I turned that into an opportunity to start a painting contracting company. The success of that company led me to accidentally create Flikshop, a business that allows people to send pictures [to loved ones who are incarcerated]. As a result of the success of all these companies, I ended up in the pages of magazines and on the news. And people wanted to be able to highlight the work because the big question was how in the world did you actually go from living in a prison cell as a 15-year-old kid to being able to launch a venture-backed startup? It's been a long journey of lived experience that allowed me to turn my charisma and my curiosity and my ability to communicate effectively into businesses that could scale. And I wondered, what if I helped support other people that were coming out of these cells? Because if people had access and social capital, then they could also come home and win. And that's when we started to ideate around what would eventually become the Flikshop School of Business.

What sort of training do students receive in the Flikshop School of Business?

We like to think of ourselves as the organization that can help our scholars go from zero to one. Our curriculum centers around tech and entrepreneurship because that's my lived experience. I leverage storytelling to connect principles and strategies back to some of our own scholars, their entrepreneurial ideas. Or even some of them that may

not be as entrepreneurial but want to be great leaders in the companies where they're going to be working. We call them the intrapreneurs. If you go get a job at Chipotle Mexican Grill after going through the Flikshop School of Business, you're going to be the CEO of guacamole.

Can you share a few examples of businesses that graduates from the Flikshop School of Business have successfully launched?
In our most recent cohort, cohort 109, there were two folks who launched companies. One of them was Curtis. He was an incredible scholar, and he continued to want to figure out how to take the business, Freedom Bridge, out into the world. He went on to publish a book called *Start, Grow, Thrive Workbook: Release Preparation Portfolio* to help returning citizens successfully reintegrate into society after incarceration. (Editor's Note: If you would like to receive a copy of this book, write to us at Free Minds and we'll send you a copy!) And then my homie, Kay, is crushing it in the eyelash game. She's opened up her own lash shop and she's doing amazing. I'm excited to bring her back as a visiting scholar to cohort 110 to speak to the other scholars, let them know what the possibilities are.

What would you say are the most important qualities for an entrepreneur to have?
Have a strong character, be very thoughtful about how you're building your character, how you're leading with your brand, have strong communication skills, and you have to find a team of people that are aligned with your vision or the mission of your idea.

What is a common challenge that entrepreneurs face?
You say you're capable of being patient, but very few of us are. We want the success yesterday. We see the success. It's so in reach. We see the outcome. We can picture it in our brain. We can begin to even manifest the possibility of it happening by getting one step closer, especially when you get in classes or programs like ours. You get a wealth of information, you start to build and sell all of this social capital, and you start to get access to ideas or people that you've never had access to in the past. And while all of that's incredible, it really continues to feed your impatience. And you're like, yo, I'm there. Why isn't it breaking through for me right now? Because it seems as though for somebody like a Curtis or a Kay it's breaking through for them. And I think, as a result, you miss out on the opportunity to continue to learn how to be great and how you can continue to sustain your own joy through life. And you burn out. And once you burn out, you're like, yo, I'm good. Why am I still doing this? This doesn't make sense.

What advice would you give to someone who is seeking to start their own business?
Jump out the window and build your parachute on the way down. I think that too many of us get stuck into analysis paralysis. We wait and we wait and we wait and we want to build the perfect thing. We force ourselves to commit to gaining this sense of perfection, and we miss out on opportunities to do, to execute. So stop. Jump out the window and build your parachute on the way down. The reality of it is you're going to go splat. You're thinking that you can mitigate from going splat. You're going to go splat. Your parachute isn't going to open. I just want to be very clear with you. It's not. It's just not. And then guess what you're going to do? Because you say you're an entrepreneur, you're going to get up, you're going to pick it up and you're going to run back up to the top of the building all over again. You're going to jump out the window all over again. And guess what? It's very likely that you're going to hit splat again. Then because you're an entrepreneur, you're going to get up, you're going to run up that building like a maniac and jump out the window. And one day, one of those times, you're going to soar. But the only way for you to ever have the experience is to continue to figure out how to jump out the window and build a parachute on the way down.

If people want to learn more about the Flikshop School of Business, whether they're interested in applying for the program or interested in supporting you guys, what's the best way for them to do that?
For potential applicants, visit us at the website www.flikshop.com/fsb and register on the waitlist to be able to join one of the next cohorts. If you want to be able to support the Flikshop School of Business in meaningful ways, then we would direct you to www.perspectivespartnership.org. Perspectives Partnership is the organization that we launched to be able to figure out how we can collaborate with amazing leaders around the country and build partnerships that allow us to really support meaningful programs like the Flikshop School of Business.

TECH TALK: GOOGLE SUITE EXPLANATION

By Emily

For this month's Tech Column, we are taking a closer look at Google Suite. You may know Google as a search engine where you can look things up online. Google also has a wide variety of online tools that are completely free to use! When you come home, all you will need is to create an account and have an internet connection, whether that be on a laptop or a phone. Here are some of the most commonly used Google features:

Gmail

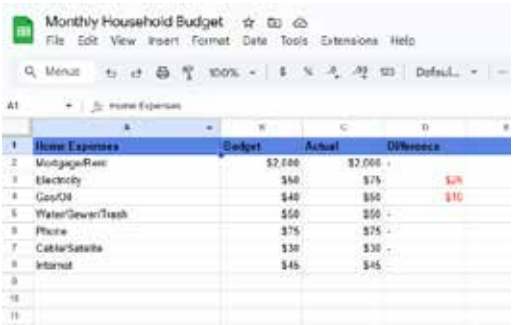
Gmail is Google's free email service. When you create an account, you will gain access to email and all of the other Google Suite features that are covered in this article. There is more in-depth information about email in the *Liberation Volume 13, Issue 4 Connect*.

Google Docs

Google Docs functions as a free, web-based version of Microsoft Word. When you open up Google Docs, you will get something that looks like a blank page on your screen. From there, you can use it as a virtual piece of paper. I know many Free Minds members use Google Docs to work on their writing. After you start typing, there are many different formatting options. You can make the type larger or smaller, bold or italic, and any color/font that you would like. One great thing about it is that your work will save automatically. Like all of the programs in Google Suite, you do need to be connected to the internet for it to work.

Google Sheets

Google Sheets is similar to Microsoft Excel. When you open Google Sheets, you will get a blank spreadsheet. From there, you can format it however you wish. Many people use Sheets to track their expenses or make their budget. One of the great things about Sheets is that you can insert a simple formula to make the sheet do the work for you. For example, if you create a column and put each expense in each row, you can put a formula at the bottom that will total it for you. There are many other cool features in Sheets. If you want to see a future tech column dedicated to Sheets, let us know!



A sample budget in Google Sheets

Google Slides

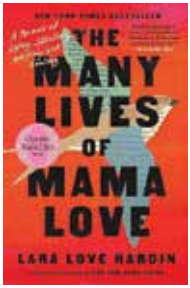
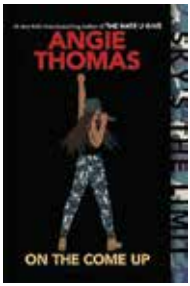
Google Slides is the Google version of Powerpoint. Google Slides is great for making presentations. If I had a new business idea, for example, I might create a "deck" or "slides" (both words mean presentation) to pitch the idea to potential clients or investors. The same customization features from Google Docs are available in Google Slides including changing the size, color, and font of the text. You can also insert pictures or graphics, either from your own phone or computer, or from the internet.

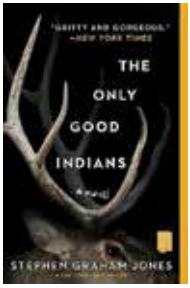
Google Drive

Google Drive is the home where all of your documents, spreadsheets, and presentations will live. When people talk about "Google Drive" they are talking about the online storage where you can access your documents. All of the things you make in Google Suite will be saved in your Drive. There are many ways to organize your Drive. You can create folders to stay organized. There is also a search bar where you can type in key words in order to find a document that you created.

BAM BOOK BALLOT

Alright Free Minds readers, get your voting pencils ready because it is time to choose the next Books Across the Miles book! Please write to us with your top 3 choices from the list below.

1		***The Many Lives of Mama Love: A Memoir of Lying, Stealing, Writing, and Healing*** *by Lara Love Hardin [Memoir]* Soccer mom Lara Love Hardin's world turns upside down when the police come knocking on her million-dollar home. Caught stealing her neighbors' credit cards to fund her heroin addiction, Lara is convicted of thirty-two felonies. In jail, she discovers power structures that are completely different to everything she knows. As she begins to climb the social ladder, she acquires the nickname "Mama Love," bringing love and healing to the residents of the jail. When she is released, she reinvents herself as a prominent ghostwriter (a person who is hired to write for an individual, who receives the credit for writing). The shadows of her past follow her as she learns how to forgive herself and others, navigate life on probation, and prove to herself that she is more good than bad.
2		***On the Come Up*** *by Angie Thomas [Young Adult]* Sixteen-year-old Bri wants to be one of the greatest rappers of all time. As the daughter of an underground hip hop legend who died right before he hit big, Bri's got massive shoes to fill. But it's hard to get your come up when you're labeled a hoodlum at school, and your fridge at home is empty after your mom loses her job. So Bri pours her anger and frustration into her first song, which goes viral for all the wrong reasons. Bri soon finds herself at the center of a controversy, portrayed by the media as more menace than MC. But with an eviction notice staring her family down, Bri is determined to make it. Even if it means becoming the very thing the public has made her out to be.
3		***Deaf Republic: A Lyric Essay*** *by Ilya Kaminsky [Poetry]* This collection of poems opens up in a time of political unrest. When soldiers breaking up a protest kill a deaf boy, Petya, the gunshot becomes the last thing the citizens hear – they all have gone deaf, and their dissent becomes coordinated by sign language. The story follows the private lives of townspeople encircled by public violence: a newly married couple, Alfonso and Sonya, expecting a child; the brash Momma Galya, instigating the insurgency from her puppet theater; and Galya's girls, heroically teaching signing by day and by night luring soldiers one by one to their deaths behind the curtain. At once a love story, an elegy, and an urgent plea, Ilya Kaminsky's long-awaited *Deaf Republic* confronts our time's vicious atrocities and our collective silence in the face of them.

4		***Home Fire*** *by Kamila Shamsie [Fiction]* After years of watching out for her younger siblings in the wake of their mother's death, Isma has accepted an invitation from a mentor in America that allows her to resume her life-long dream. But she can't stop worrying about Aneeka, her beautiful, headstrong sister back in London, or their brother, Parvaiz, who's disappeared in pursuit of his own dream, to prove himself to the dark legacy of the jihadist father he never knew. When he resurfaces half a globe away, Isma's worst fears are confirmed. Then Eamonn enters the sisters' lives. Son of a powerful political figure, he has his own birthright to live up to–or defy. Suddenly, two families' fates are inextricably, devastatingly entwined, in this searing novel that asks: What sacrifices will we make in the name of love?
5		***They Called Me a Lioness: A Palestinian Girl's Fight for Freedom*** *by Ahed Tamimi and Dena Takruri [Memoir]* Palestinian activist Ahed Tamimi grew up participating in nonviolent demonstrations against the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Her resistance reached a global stage in 2017, when, at sixteen years old, she was filmed slapping an Israeli soldier who refused to leave her front yard. The video went viral, and Tamimi was arrested. But this is not just a story of activism or imprisonment. It is the human-scale story of an occupation that has riveted the world and shaped global politics, from a girl who grew up in the middle of it . Tamimi's father was born in 1967, the year that Israel began its occupation of the West Bank and he grew up immersed in the resistance movement. One of Tamimi's earliest memories is visiting him in prison, poking her toddler fingers through the fence to touch his hand. She herself would spend her seventeenth birthday behind bars. In her memoir, Tamimi sheds light on the humanity not just in occupied Palestine, but also in the unsung lives of people struggling for freedom around the world.
6		***The Only Good Indians*** *by Stephen Graham Jones [Horror]* *The Only Good Indians* follows the lives of four Native American men and their families, all haunted by a disturbing, deadly event that took place in their youth. Years later, they find themselves tracked by an entity bent on revenge, totally helpless as the culture and traditions they left behind catch up to them in a violent and vengeful way.

First Choice _____

Second Choice _____

Third Choice _____

REENTRY PROFILE: HUMBERTO'S STORY

By Carlos

Reentry can sometimes be a challenge when we are trying to restart in freedom. Sometimes things can be easy and yet there are other times that reentry comes with difficulties and unexpected things. In this article, we profile one of our brothers, Humberto. He was deported back to his birth country, Guatemala, after serving two and a half years in prison. He has been home now for 4 years. I had the privilege to sit with him and speak with him about his reentry experience.

Carlos: Humberto, tell us first how you met Free Minds?

Humberto: When I was being housed at the Correctional Treatment Facility in DC back in 2019, the Free Minds family would come through and share books and encourage us to write. They made us feel like we were a part of something bigger than a book club. I thought that they would not keep in touch since I was being sent to North Carolina. Ms. Kelli wrote to me when I got there and it made me feel as if I was not alone.

Carlos: You were deported back to Guatemala in 2021, tell us a little about that experience?

Humberto: When I arrived in Guatemala, I asked a friend of mine for a job. I worked on a farm, taking care of cattle for the first two months. The funny thing is that I was attacked by one of the cows and it made me question what I was doing there. I did not know anything about cattle. So I went to my father who was a baker. He had his own bakery since I was little, but I never wanted to learn. I did not like the kitchen. So my father began to teach me everything. I learned all of his recipes, it took me about three months to learn the job. I did not have any experience with baking, so everything was new to me. My father then began to pay about $10 dollars a day and that's how I started to work in the bakery.

Carlos: How did you end up with your father's business?

Humberto: My father passed away in October 2023. At that moment I was having problems with my brother. Things got bad between us. One day he broke all of my car windows. My mother kicked me out because she felt that I was causing the issues. I was homeless. At the time, my mother did not want to give me the business. When this happened, my father was still alive and so he was able to talk to my mother. I did other work in between, but it was not what I wanted to do. It helped me have a roof over my head, but I wanted to continue with my father's business. After my father passed, my mother said that I can take the things from my father's bakery (my father baked from home). As soon as she said that I could take the things I needed, I partnered up with a friend of mine. We rented a small place here where I live and slowly began to put it all together. I borrowed money to get everything done. I was determined to continue with my dad's business. Now it has been two years and the bakery is doing well.

Carlos: Congratulations! This month's theme is Entrepreneurship. Tell me what motivated you so much to take on the business?

Humberto: My father was Christian, and from what he taught when I was young, I remember the story of the Prodigal Son in the Bible. My father always told me to work with him. I was out doing other things because I wanted to. So I wanted to return home and be next to my father. When he passed, I did not want to just throw away what he taught me, so I was motivated by him. Today it reminds me of him and I wish he could see me now. Before he passed, I also asked him to forgive me for everything I did wrong as a son. All he asked for is that I forgive my brother also.

Carlos: Where do you see yourself in 5 years with your business?

Humberto: My plan is to become a distributor. To provide my bread to other restaurants, coffeeshops and other small businesses. Maybe even have a franchise that's recognized in my country as one of the best.

Carlos: At Free Minds, we focus on education, reading and writing. How has education helped you in your successes as well as when you were in?

Humberto: While I was in, reading helped to get away from prison, while writing was a way for me to vent and express certain emotions. In freedom, it has helped me to be successful. Reading and learning about the laws in my country. Applying things that I have read in my own ways. It has helped me grow and have a better vision that I can make come true.

Carlos: How has your business helped you connect with your community?

Humberto: I'm no longer looked at as a delinquent. The neighbors, friends and family all knew that I had been deported. So I was looked at differently. Now they see a working man. They see me interact with my community daily. I am now respected. And that feels so good to me.

Carlos: Did you ever imagine working as a baker of your own business when you were in?

Humberto: No! My only thought then was to come back to the United States. When I was incarcerated, I did not know how I was going to survive Guatemala so my only thought was to come back. Now I have no reason to leave.

Carlos: I can definitely relate. You mentioned that you had issues with your mother and your brother. How is your relationship with them today?

Humberto: When I had that big fight with my brother, I had asked my mother if she loved me less than my other siblings. She said that she did love me less. That killed me inside, I wanted to harm myself. I was not expecting to hear that from her. I was hurt. After my dad's passing, I asked her again. She told me that it was not true. That she only said it because she feared me. She thought that I went to the United States and became this cold hearted criminal and she felt that I was aggressive. But with time she said, she began to see me for who I was, who I really had grown to be. I have a beautiful relationship with my mom and my siblings.

Carlos: Do you have any advice for those that are reading that would like to start their own business?

Humberto: Follow your dreams. Chase ideas. Dedicate your time to it, it is the best investment you can give yourself. Do not fear failure. When failure comes, it's just another way for you to learn there is a lesson within.

Carlos: Humberto, thank you so much and congratulations again! It is not an easy thing to have your own business in our countries. You have done it amazingly, please keep doing what you are doing and much success in your entrepreneurship.

Left: A variety of Humberto's breads and pastries / Una variedad de los panes y pasteles de Humberto
Top:The inside of Humberto's bakery / El interior de la panaderia de Humberto

PERFIL DE REINSERCIÓN
LA HISTORIA DE HUMBERTO

Por Carlos

La reinserción en la sociedad a veces puede ser un desafío cuando intentamos retomar la libertad. A veces las cosas son fáciles, pero otras veces conllevan dificultades y pruebas del camino.. En este artículo, presentamos el perfil de uno de nuestros hermanos, Humberto. Fue deportado a su país natal, Guatemala, tras cumplir dos años y medio de prisión. Lleva cuatro años en casa. Tuve el privilegio de conversar con él sobre su experiencia de reinserción.

Carlos: Humberto, cuéntanos primero ¿cómo conociste Mentes Libres?

Humberto: Cuando estaba alojado en CFT en Washington D. C., Sra Kelli y la familia de Mentes Libres venían a compartir libros y a animarnos a escribir también en 2019. Nos hicieron sentir parte de algo más grande que un club de lectura. Pensé que no se mantendrían en contacto cuando me enviaron a Carolina del Norte. La Sra. Kelli me llamó cuando llegué allí y me hizo sentir que no estaba solo.

Carlos: Fuiste deportado de regreso a Guatemala en el 2021, ¿cuéntanos un poco de esa experiencia?

Humberto: Cuando llegué a Guatemala, le pedí trabajo a un amigo. Trabajé en una granja cuidando ganado durante los primeros dos meses. Lo curioso es que una de las vacas me atacó y me hizo cuestionar qué hacía allí. No sabía nada de ganado. Así que fui con mi padre, que era panadero. Tenía su propia panadería desde pequeño, pero nunca quise aprender. No me gustaba la cocina. Así que mi padre empezó a enseñarme todo. Aprendí todas sus recetas; me llevó unos tres meses aprender el oficio. No tenía experiencia en repostería, así que todo era nuevo para mí. Mi padre empezó a pagarme unos 10 dólares al día y así fue como empecé a trabajar en la panadería.

Carlos: ¿Cómo llegaste a ocupar el negocio de tu padre?

Humberto: Mi padre falleció en octubre de 2023. En ese momento, tenía problemas con mi hermano. La situación se complicó. Un día, rompió todas las ventanas de mi auto. Mi madre me echó de casa porque creía que yo causaba problemas. Me quedé sin hogar. Contacté a mi amiga Kelli y me ayudó a unirme al programa semanal "Build Up". Gracias a eso, pude conseguir algunas cosas necesarias, arreglar mi auto y mudarme a una habitación pequeña. En ese momento, mi madre no quería ceder el negocio. Cuando esto sucedió, mi padre aún vivía, así que pudo hablar con ella. Hice otros trabajos entre medias, pero no era lo que quería. Me ayudaba a tener un techo, pero quería continuar con el negocio de mi padre. Cuando la condición de mi padre empeoró y tuvo que ser hospitalizado, mi madre me llamó para que le ayudara, ya que él pesaba demasiado. Fui a ayudarla y ese mismo día falleció. A la mañana siguiente, cuando llevé a mi madre a casa, me dijo que podía llevarme las cosas de la panadería de mi padre (mi padre horneaba en casa). En cuanto me dijo que podía llevarme lo que necesitaba, me asocié con una amiga. Alquilamos un pequeño local aquí donde vivo y poco a poco empezamos a organizarlo todo. Pedí dinero prestado para terminarlo todo. Estaba decidido a seguir con el negocio de mi padre. Ya han pasado dos años y la panadería va bien

Carlos: ¡Felicidades! El tema de este mes es Emprendimiento. Cuéntame qué te motivó tanto a emprender.

Humberto: Mi padre era cristiano. Por lo que me enseñó de joven, recuerdo la historia del Hijo Pródigo en la Biblia. Mi padre siempre me decía que trabajara con él. Yo estaba haciendo otras cosas porque quería. Así que quería volver a casa y estar junto a mi padre. Cuando falleció, no quise simplemente desechar lo que me enseñó, así que me motivó. Hoy me recuerda a él y desearía que pudiera verme ahora. Antes de que falleciera, también le pedí perdón por todo lo que hice mal como hijo. Lo único que pidió fue que perdonara también a mi hermano.

Carlos: ¿Dónde te ves en 5 años con tu negocio?

Humberto: Mi plan es convertirme en distribuidor. Llevar mi pan a otros restaurantes, cafeterías y otros pequeños negocios. Quizás incluso tener una franquicia reconocida en mi país como una de las mejores.

Carlos: En Free Minds, nos centramos en la educación, la lectura y la escritura. ¿Cómo te ha ayudado la educación en tus éxitos, así como durante tu etapa en la universidad?

Humberto: Mientras estuve en prisión, leer me ayudó a escapar de la cárcel, mientras que escribir fue una forma de desahogarme y expresar ciertas emociones. En libertad, me ha ayudado a tener éxito. Leer y aprender sobre las leyes de mi país. Aplicar lo leído a mi manera. Me ha ayudado a crecer y a tener una mejor visión de lo que puedo hacer realidad.

Carlos: ¿Cómo te ha ayudado tu negocio a conectar con tu comunidad?

Humberto: Ya no me ven como un delincuente. Mis vecinos, amigos y familiares sabían que me habían deportado. Así que me veían de otra manera. Ahora ven a un hombre trabajador. Me ven interactuar con mi comunidad a diario. Ahora soy respetado. Y eso me hace sentir muy bien.

Carlos: ¿Alguna vez te imaginaste trabajando como panadero en tu propio negocio cuando estabas privado de libertad?

Humberto: ¡No! Mi único pensamiento entonces era regresar a Estados Unidos. Cuando estuve preso, no sabía cómo iba a sobrevivir en Guatemala, así que mi único pensamiento era regresar. Ahora no tengo motivos para irme.

Carlos: Me identifico totalmente. Mencionaste que tuviste problemas con tu madre y tu hermano. ¿Cómo es tu relación con ellos hoy?

Humberto: Cuando tuve esa gran pelea con mi hermano, le pregunté a mi madre si me quería menos que a mis otros hermanos. Me dijo que sí. Eso me destrozó por dentro; quise quitarme la vida. No esperaba oír eso de ella; me dolió. Esa fue la razón principal por la que me fui de casa. Tras la muerte de mi padre, le volví a preguntar. Me dijo que no era cierto. Que solo lo decía porque me tenía miedo. Pensaba que me había ido a Estados Unidos y me había convertido en un criminal despiadado, y que me consideraba agresivo. Pero con el tiempo, me empezó a ver tal como era, como realmente me había convertido. Tengo una hermosa relación con mi madre y mis hermanos.

Carlos: ¿Tienes algún consejo para aquellos que están leyendo y les gustaría iniciar su propio negocio?

Humberto: Sigue tus sueños. Persigue tus ideas. Dedícale tiempo; es la mejor inversión que puedes hacer. No le temas al fracaso. Cuando el fracaso llega, es solo otra forma de aprender que hay una lección dentro.

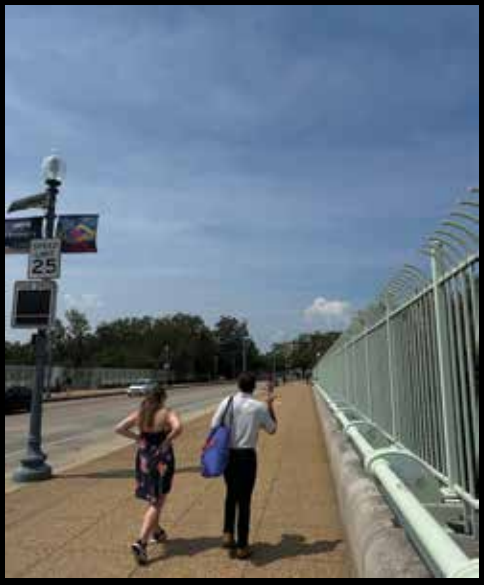
Carlos: Humberto, ¡muchas gracias y felicidades de nuevo! No es fácil tener un emprendimiento propio en nuestros países. Lo has hecho de maravilla. Sigue así y mucho éxito en tu emprendimiento!

DC PHOTOS *By Maya*

As requested by our readers

Howard University's football field located in Northwest, DC

A back-to-school display at Bell Multicultural High School in NW DC



The sidewalk on Duke Ellington Memorial Bridge located in Woodley Park

DC recently changed a lot of its bus routes. Here is one of the new bus routes on U & 14th Street NW (C53 comparable to the old 90/92 routes)

DC PHOTOS *By Maya*

As requested by our readers

Smithsonian National Zoological Park

The beginning phase of the multi-stage demolition of the RFK stadium that started in January of this year and is projected to be completed in 18-22 months

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

REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

Hey family, greetings to you and I hope that you are having a hope-filled summer. Even though we are already in the month of August as I write this, there is still time to take advantage of these beautiful sunny days! The summer always brings out my creative side, although I must admit, this summer I have been loafing if you will, so hopefully this month's theme will put some fire under my feet.

Entrepreneurship is a big word and when we hear it, it can cause a lot of anxiety. To some the spirit of entrepreneurship comes naturally, however for the rest of us, an entrepreneurial mindset can be developed with strong enough motivation. I have had so many ideas over the years, some I delved into, others I let remain ideas, but I now have a strong burning passion for one particular entrepreneurial venture that I plan to implement very soon (stay tuned). I thought that it would be great to find some good advice on the matter that could help you as well as myself to give us the intel that we need to be successful entrepreneurs so here goes!

Develop the right mind-set: This is key, this is where it all begins, or ends before it begins. You have to know that you can do it. You know that old saying, "if you believe it you can achieve it?" It may sound extremely uncool but it's also extremely true. Take time to think about all of your gifts and talents, all the things that you have already been able to accomplish and overcome, and let that be the fuel to drive you to your dreams!

Be proactive: Don't wait around, go after it; don't wait for opportunities to fall into your lap, get on your feet and pursue, pursue, pursue.

Stay consistent and persistent: Remember, this is your dream; nobody else is gonna make it happen. It's also a journey with a ton of challenges so perseverance is key, but know that every day that you wake up is another day for you to press towards your goals and dreams. Just living life takes perseverance in and of itself so you may as well use some of that perseverance to your advantage in bringing your passion to life.

Please believe in yourself: YOU CAN DO IT! There are roughly 582 million entrepreneurs in the world and if they did it, so can we. What makes them so much smarter or special than us? I heard a very wise and successful business owner say that the only difference between a successful business owner and the unsuccessful one is that the successful one does not give up; they go through the same challenges as all business owners but they just simply refuse to quit.

Learn from others: This is so key because we can avoid so many pitfalls and unnecessary roadblocks by observing, studying and taking heed to those that have gone before us. Thank goodness that we are in the information age because a lot of successful people do not mind sharing their experience or giving advice on their journey. They tell the good, the bad, and the ugly, and it is very beneficial as well as easily accessible via the web. And of course, as we here at Free Minds would suggest, read some books on the matter!

Execute: Like Nike, just do it!

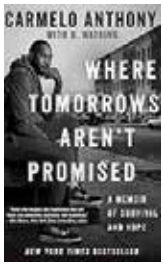
And what better way to tie this all up than with a very helpful and relevant resource for aspiring entrepreneurs in DC:

Department of Small and Local Business Development
441 14th Street NW
Washington DC 20001
202-724-3900
https://dslbd.dc.gov/page/aspire-entrepreneurship

From their website: DSLBD operates annual programming grants and provides direct support to returning citizen-led small businesses and entrepreneurs. Aspire to Entrepreneurship started in 2016 at the request of Mayor Bowser as a pilot incubator program, and has grown to be an annual grant process to build the entrepreneurship ecosystem supporting justice-involved residents who are pursuing wealth-building through small business creation and growth. Residents re-entering from incarceration face unique challenges to employment; launching your own business can be empowering and liberating! If you are a justice-involved resident with a business idea or currently operating a business, we also provide direct services, whether or not you participate in WeAspire cohort. We offer one-on-one resource navigation for Aspire to help support you in all aspects of your business.

Until we *Connect* again!
– Ms. Keela

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
with Neely



I am so excited to introduce our next BAM book to you all: *Where Tomorrow's Aren't Promised: A Memoir of Survival and Hope*. In his memoir, former professional basketball player Carmelo Anthony shares his journey from growing up in the Brooklyn projects to becoming a champion on the world stage. Navigating an education system that ignored and criticized him while also dealing with the untimely deaths of loved ones, Carmelo struggled to survive emotionally and physically. With the guidance of family and mentors in both the streets and on the court, he found the endurance to pursue his dreams. Thank you to everyone who voted for this selection, we are so eager to hear your thoughts. Here are a few questions to get you started!

1. In the introduction to the book, Carmelo describes Draft Night at Madison Square Garden. He writes that the NBA was never his dream because he didn't allow himself to get lost in a dream that could easily be snatched away. Can you relate? What is a dream you were/are afraid to dream?

2. What image does Carmelo have of his father Curly? Was there anyone that you knew only from other peoples' stories growing up? How do you think your impressions might have been different if you'd experienced them in person?

3. How did Carmelo's mom make up for the family's lack of money? What places did she expose her kids to and share with them? What were some of the most important/impactful places that you saw or visited as a child?

4. Explain how Carmelo felt about his name. How do you feel about your own name?

5. In Chapter 18, Carmelo describes how growing up, everyone came to expect death, and yet he says he never talked about pain, and that everyone was just expected to figure it out on their own. He writes, "*We lived in darkness as a community," and that, "healing wasn't an option*." Why do you think pain is so often dealt with in isolation this way? What is the result?

Remember to vote for our next book in the book ballot on pages 13-14!

First Choice _____

Second Choice _____

Third Choice _____

Name _____ **Date** _____

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: COMPASSION & EMPATHY (VOLUME 14, ISSUE 4)

Hey family! Here are some writing prompts to help you get started on submissions for our next issue on **Empathy & Compassion**. We also want to give you a heads up for the issue after that. Volume 14, Issue 5 will be exploring the theme of **Passions**.

(1)

Use this writing prompt to generate a stronger sense of self-compassion. Write a self-gratitude letter to yourself. What work have you done, how have you grown, what qualities about yourself do you appreciate?

(2)

Can you recall a time where you got into a disagreement with someone? What do you think they were feeling at that moment? What were they going through at that time in their life? Try writing a poem from their perspective; put yourself in their shoes.

(3)

Are there certain practices that help you feel more compassionate? This can include meditation, practicing hobbies, taking care of yourself through sleep and exercise, and having meaningful interactions with others. Describe these practices. How do they feel in your body?

(4)

Are there certain characters in books, movies, or television that you really connect with? Describe the character(s). Why do you connect with them? What is humanizing or relatable about them?

(5)

Imagine you are giving a tour of the "garden" of your life. What kinds of plants (areas of your life) are present? What is "blooming" for you right now? What needs extra care and patience? Now compare this to your ideal future garden. How can you practice both patience and discipline with yourself in order to get there?

THE REAL WORLD OF WORK: IMMANUEL'S STORY

Interview by Kaylee

When I found out that I was interviewing Immanuel for this part of the column, I thought that it would be perfect because I was so excited to hear about his new job as a field technician*, especially because he is doing so much (I can't keep up!!).

**A field technician working with manholes in Washington, D.C. is a skilled laborer responsible for the installation, maintenance, inspection, and repair of underground utility systems. These systems can include water, sewer, stormwater, telecommunications, and electrical networks.*

Tell me about how you were able to step into the role as a field technician.
I haven't really had any experience in this specific field, so it's really my first time doing this kind of work, but because I took vocational training and did HVAC and electrical work, they said they wanted to hire me anyways because I had all those skills, but I am definitely learning as I go on how to understand numbers, how computers work, but the more I work, the more I learn something new.

Would you say that you like the work that you are doing?
Yes, it is definitely something that I like. I'm catching on pretty quick. I enjoy the work and enjoy learning new things and new information, which is going to help me go further in this kind of work, and I will be able to utilize my skills.

What would you say your end goal is with the kind of work you are doing right now?
My end goal is to try and get an apprenticeship in the electrical field so I can become a journeyman in the electrical field, and I want to be able to get into a union, and not only do I want to be able to get into a union, but I want to be able to start my own company behind me. This job is really just a way for me to be able to take those steps to be able to take the classes, pay for the classes, and meet my ultimate goal, and my job is the first step in being able to do that.

What does a workday with Immanuel look like?
I wake up at about 4:30am to be at work at 6:15am so that I am early. Then I wait for my crew, and leave the shop at about 7am, fill the company truck up with some gas, get a quick breakfast somewhere, and then we go right into the field. Because we mainly work in the DC metropolitan area, we are usually driving around DC surveying some of the manholes because that is our job. We send a robot down into the manholes, and we do surveys; we see the conditions of the pipelines and things like that, so we always start off with that. We usually get 4-5 done before we come back into the shop, because we are off by 2:30, so we try to always get 1,000 ft per day, which is about 4-5 manholes a day. Some days it's funny because people get mad at us for shutting down the roads to get to the manholes, and it usually causes traffic. After we get to the shop, we upload all our data, and we go home, and that concludes my day at work.

Are there any side projects that you are currently working on?
I have my own fitness company that I started up when I came out, which is based on all kinds of well-being physically, mentally, or spiritually. I am using this as a way to promote positive vibes, brand myself, and interact with people. I also have sidework that I do on weekends or certain nights so that I don't spend money, and it allows me to save. I also like doing security because I am able to talk to people and help them.

Field Technicians in action on Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue in SE, DC

You've only been home for about 4 months and you have accomplished all these wonderful things like getting your license, and having 3 jobs., What advice would you give a member who is preparing for reentry?
My first advice is to have an end goal. When you have an end goal, you have something to focus on, and by having that focus, you can align everything that needs to be done in order to reach that goal. I had a set of goals prior to me coming home, so I knew what had to be done. Two weeks into being home I got my license, and then I started to talk to people because I knew that the people I talked to would help me get employed, and I advise that everyone be social; it is very important to build connections and resources because you are going to need them. My last piece of advice is to have patience. Not everything is going to fall into your hands the second you want it to; it is okay to hear a couple no's, but with consistency comes a yes.

JUST LAW: THE FIRST STEP ACT OF 2018

By Tim

On December 21, 2018, President Donald Trump signed the First Step Act (FSA) into law. This law aims to make the federal criminal justice system fairer and more effective. It focuses on helping incarcerated individuals improve themselves and reducing the chances that they will commit crimes again after they are released.

Benefits of the First Step Act
The First Step Act offers several important benefits for federal prisoners*:

1. **Reducing Repeat Offenses**: The law requires the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to create a system to assess each prisoner's risk of committing another crime. This system helps place prisoners in programs that can help them avoid reoffending and successfully reintegrate into society.
1. **Good Time Credits**: The FSA changes the rules for earning good time credits. Now, prisoners can earn up to 54 days of good time credit for each year of their sentence, rather than for each year they serve. This means that a prisoner with a 10-year sentence could reduce their sentence by up to 540 days through good behavior. In other words, you can get about 18 months maximum reduced.
1. **Earned Time Credits**: In addition to good time credits, prisoners can earn extra time credits by participating in programs that reduce the risk of reoffending and other productive activities. For every 30 days of successful participation, **prisoners can earn up to 10 days of time credits**. Those in low or minimum risk categories can earn **an additional 5 days**. These credits can be used to transfer to pre-release custody, such as home confinement or a residential reentry center (a halfway house).

**Please note that DC Code Offenders, although they may be housed in federal institutions, are not eligible for good time credit under the First Step Act. (Source: Corrections Information Council)*

Exceptions to Good Time Reductions
While the FSA provides opportunities for sentence reductions, there are exceptions for certain offenses. Prisoners convicted of violent crimes, terrorism, espionage, human trafficking, sex offenses, and high-level drug offenses are generally not eligible for earned time credits. Specifically, individuals convicted under 18 U.S.C. § 922(g) (possession of a firearm by a prohibited person) and 18 U.S.C. § 924(c) (use of a firearm during a crime of violence or drug trafficking) are excluded from earning these credits. These exceptions ensure that individuals convicted of serious and dangerous offenses do not benefit from early release provisions. This is very important in negotiating a plea. You and your lawyer should know that you can't get the extra good time reductions with the gun count(s). The exception is that you will still earn the 54 days per year.

Conflicts and Legal Challenges
The implementation of the FSA has faced legal challenges. For example, in the case of *United States v. Brown*, the petitioner sought resentencing based on the non-retroactive changes in the law introduced by the FSA. The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against the petitioner, highlighting a conflict among various circuits regarding whether non-retroactive changes in law can be considered "extraordinary and compelling reasons" for sentence reduction. This ongoing legal debate underscores the complexities involved in applying the FSA's provisions uniformly across the federal system.

Comparison to the Old Federal Sentencing System
Before the FSA, federal prisoners had to serve at least 85% of their sentences, with limited opportunities for early release through good behavior. The FSA's introduction of increased good time credits and earned time credits represents a significant shift towards incentivizing rehabilitation and reducing the federal prison population. By allowing prisoners to earn early release through participation in educational and vocational programs, the FSA promotes personal development and aims to reduce recidivism and enhance public safety.

Section 404(b) of the First Step Act
Section 404(b) of the First Step Act of 2018 is a crucial provision that allows for the retroactive application of the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010. This section provides statutory authorization for sentencing courts to modify previously imposed terms of imprisonment for certain offenses.

Key Provisions of Section 404(b)
1. **Retroactive Application**: Section 404(b) explicitly allows courts to impose a reduced sentence as if sections 2 and 3 of the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 were in effect at the time the covered offense was committed. This means that individuals who were sentenced for crack cocaine offenses before the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 can now benefit from the reduced sentencing guidelines that were established by that Act.
2. **Judicial Discretion**: The section grants sentencing courts the discretion to consider motions for reduced sentences under the new guidelines. Courts can take into account various factors, including the nature of the offense, the defendant's conduct while incarcerated, and other relevant considerations.
3. **Eligibility**: Not all individuals are eligible for sentence reductions under Section 404(b). The provision applies to those who were sentenced for a covered offense which generally refers to crack cocaine offenses that were subject to the statutory penalties modified by the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010.

Legal Challenges and Interpretations
The implementation of Section 404(b) has led to various legal challenges and interpretations. For instance, in the case of *United States v. Chambers*, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals held that the First Step Act does not constrain courts from recognizing Guidelines errors. The court explained that First Step Act motions fall under 18 U.S.C. § 3582(c)(1)(B), a distinct exception to finality, and that Section 404(b) expressly allows a court to impose a reduced sentence to give retroactive effect to sections 2 and 3 of the Fair Sentencing Act. This ruling underscores the flexibility and judicial discretion provided by Section 404(b).

In summary, Section 404(b) of the First Step Act is a transformative provision that allows for the retroactive application of more lenient sentencing guidelines for certain crack cocaine offenses. It provides courts with the discretion to reduce sentences, thereby offering a second chance to individuals who were sentenced under the harsher pre-2010 guidelines.

The Significance of Hewitt v. United States
The recent Supreme Court case, *Hewitt v. United States*, decided on June 26, 2025, holds significant implications for the application of the First Step Act (FSA) of 2018, particularly regarding the sentencing of first-time offenders under 18 U.S.C. § 924(c).

Background
In 2009, Hewitt and two others were convicted of multiple counts of bank robbery and conspiracy, along with corresponding § 924(c) offenses for using a firearm during a crime of violence. Each received a mandatory 5-year sentence for the first § 924(c) count and 25-year mandatory sentences for each additional count, resulting in sentences exceeding 325 years. After successfully challenging some convictions, the Fifth Circuit vacated their sentences, and they were resentenced to between 285 and 305 years. Following the enactment of the FSA, which reduced mandatory minimum penalties for first-time § 924(c) offenders, the District Court vacated more convictions and resentenced them under the pre-Act scheme, resulting in sentences of 130 years or more.

Key Holding
The Supreme Court's decision in *Hewitt v. United States* clarified that the FSA's more lenient penalties apply to defendants whose previous sentences have been vacated and who need to be resentenced following the Act's enactment. Specifically, the Court held that a sentence "has not been imposed" for purposes of § 403(b) of the FSA if the sentence has not been vacated. This means that first-time § 924(c) offenders who appear for sentencing after the FSA's enactment date, including those whose previous § 924(c) sentences have been vacated, are subject to the Act's revised penalties.

Impact and Implications
The ruling in Hewitt v. United States has several significant implications:
1. **Retroactive Application**: The decision ensures that the FSA's more lenient penalties are applied retroactively to first-time § 924(c) offenders whose sentences have been vacated and who are being resentenced. This aligns with the FSA's goal of reducing excessive mandatory minimum sentences and promoting fairness in sentencing.
2. **Judicial Discretion**: The ruling reinforces the discretion of sentencing courts to apply the FSA's revised penalties during resentencing, providing an opportunity for reduced sentences for eligible offenders.
3. **Consistency in Sentencing**: By clarifying the application of the FSA's penalties, the decision promotes consistency in sentencing for first-time § 924(c) offenders, ensuring that they benefit from the Act's reforms regardless of the timing of their resentencing.
4. **Legal Precedent**: The case sets a legal precedent for how the FSA's provisions should be interpreted and applied in similar cases, guiding lower courts in their sentencing decisions.

In conclusion, the Supreme Court's decision in Hewitt v. United States is a landmark ruling that underscores the importance of the First Step Act's reforms.

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

THE WRITE WAY: SETTING A PROFESSIONAL TONE IN YOUR WRITING

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

By Isaiah

How do I set a professional tone in my writing? This question frequently arises in the early stages of writing emails, letters, and business documents. Individuals often wonder what tone, language, and phrases are most suitable for their writing to a company, a boss, a co-worker, a customer, or an employee. Just think of the professional tone as a style of communication that can help convey respect, formality, and clarity to whomever you're writing to. As daunting as it may seem, setting a professional tone in your writing is easy as one-two-three!

Before we explore how to set a professional tone in your writing, let's first understand what "tone" is. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines tone as the style or manner of expression in writing. Tone conveys the author's attitude or feeling towards a particular subject matter or audience. In conversations between people, individuals can change the meaning of words using inflection or gestures. Similarly, the author can change the meaning of their writing based on the words they choose and the placement of those words.

Your goal is to ensure your writing is effective and utilizes the appropriate tone. If the tone makes the content confusing, unclear, or offensive, the intended audience will not be able to understand or react to your writing accurately. Fortunately, there are core features that can help set the professional tone in your writing. First, assess the proper tone. Second, remember the key tone elements. Lastly, understand the correct way to convey negative messaging.

Assessing the proper tone in your writing requires understanding the document's purpose and its intended audience. Understanding the purpose of the document involves asking yourself, "Why am I writing this document, and what is the goal I want to achieve?" Knowing why you are writing the document helps you execute a clear message to the intended reader. Next, understanding the audience is asking yourself, "Who is the intended recipient and how do I want them to respond?" It is imperative to know whether you are sending this document to a boss or a co-worker. Tailoring the document's contents to the reader allows them to comprehend the writing more effectively.

Let's give a scenario! You are in the process of writing a job acceptance letter. First, you will assess why you are writing this document, which is to accept the job after you have received an offer. Then, you will evaluate who you are writing this document to, which is the employer's hiring manager.

Your professional tone should be confident, courteous, sincere, positive, and comprehensible. Since this is a professional message, you'll want to make sure you are making a great impression with proper grammar and punctuation. Let us know if you'd like a book about this! There are also tools on computers now that can help with this. Additionally, your professional tone should not include slang or discriminatory words. For example, instead of having doubtful and discriminatory language, you will have confident and respectful language. Another example, instead of saying chairman, you can say chairperson to establish neutrality. When setting the professional tone, include these key elements. These elements amplify the messaging of the document to the reader

.

Job Acceptance Letter Short Example:

*Dear **[Hiring Manager Full Name]**,*

*It is with great pleasure that I accept your offer to join **[Employer Name]** as a **[Position Title]**. Thank you for offering me this exciting opportunity.*

*I am available to complete any remaining paperwork before my start date. I look forward to working with you and the **[Employer Name]** team. As discussed, I will report to work on **[date]**. In the meantime, feel free to call me at **[your phone number]** or email me at **[your email]**.*

Best regards,
[Your Name]

Understanding the correct way to convey negative messaging will also pay dividends! Unfortunately, you will encounter problems and issues at work, school, or in other places. It is vital to maintain a professional tone in your writing, even if it's about a negative experience or concern you have.

When detailing an issue, your professional tone should not include threatening, explicit, and disrespectful language. If you include these types of language, it will derail the messaging and delay both parties from coming to a solution. Setting the professional tone in your writing is easy! However, if you still find issues with this topic, practice writing emails, letters, and documents to yourself, family, or friends. As the saying goes, "practice makes perfect!"

Disagreement or Concern Short Example:

*Dear **[Payroll/HR Department Contact Full Name]**,*

*I am writing to follow up on my salary for the [**Pay Period, e.g., pay period ending September 15th**]. I have not yet received my payment for this period. Could you please look into this matter and let me know when I can expect the payment? If there's been a delay or issue, please let me know what steps are needed to resolve it.*

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Best regards,
[Your Name]

Remember, setting the professional tone includes the elements of knowing why you are writing this document and who you intend to write it for. Plus, it's confident and sincere, refraining from disrespectful and discriminatory language. Lastly, it ensures the reader will understand your writing and correctly respond to it.

SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLISHED AUTHOR

Many of our Free Minds members have published books and we'd like to celebrate their accomplishments! If you have published a book, please send us the title and a short description that we can print in an upcoming issue of the Connect. *All books must be available in paperback on Amazon.com. Free Minds will not list books that include explicit sexual material, gratuitous violence, or discrimination against any group of people based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, or disability.*

How to Accomplish Anything in the World by Darius T. Jones

Description provided by the author: *In this thing called "life," you live and you learn. When it comes to learning, no person on earth learns the same way or at the same pace. As a child, you depend on the people in your life to lead and guide you in the right direction. As you grow up and start to branch out on your own and explore the world, you will begin to gain firsthand knowledge through your personal experiences and dealings with people from all walks of life. These experiences will only add to your knowledge, understanding and help you to make better independent choices for your life. "How to Accomplish Anything in The World" is a book designed to be another resource to help you make those choices, get clear direction and accomplish your goals in life.*

IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

DEEP DIVE: THE "BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL"
In July, President Donald Trump signed what became known as the "Big Beautiful Bill" into law. It includes a laundry list of things that are sure to have a significant impact on American society, which we will break down shortly. First, a description of how the process on Capitol Hill works and why it now guarantees we will continue to see these single pieces of legislation with massive consequences.

When it comes to federal legislation, both chambers of Congress (the House and the Senate) need to agree on a final, uniform version of a bill before it becomes a law. Then, it is up to the president to sign it (making it official), or veto it.

The House, which has up to 435 members, only needs a simple majority of its members to vote yes in order for a bill to pass. So, for example, if something gets 218 yes votes and 217 no votes, it passes.

Not the case in the Senate, where a group of the 100 elected Senators can conduct what's known as a filibuster, a move that blocks a bill from moving to the point where members can vote on it. And in order for a bill to be "filibuster-proof," it must be able to get 60 votes. It has been more than a decade since either party had that size majority in the Senate. But there is an exception called a "reconciliation bill," which only requires a simple majority of Senators to pass it (so 51 votes, or 50 if the vice president intends to vote with supporters of the bill). A reconciliation bill can only focus on the issue of bringing federal taxing and spending in line with Congressional budget resolutions; there is a Senate official called a parliamentarian who judges whether the various pieces of the bill are relevant.

The Big Beautiful Bill was a reconciliation bill, and made significant changes to the amount of taxes collected by the federal government and the amount of money spent by it. Here are some of the biggest changes...

Income Taxes
In President Trump's first term, Congress passed across-the-board cuts on the federal income tax rate. This is one of the primary ways in which the federal government collects revenue to spend on everything from the military to Social Security and health care.

But those lower tax rates were set to end in December. Which meant that unless Congress and the president took action, everyone's taxes were going up in 2026. Instead, the Big Beautiful Bill made those income tax cuts permanent, and even added a few new tax cuts like the one on money people make from tips at jobs at restaurants and other service establishments. These new tax cuts under the Big Beautiful Bill will generally benefit high-income households and corporations the most, while middle-income taxpayers see smaller gains, and some low-income families may even see a tax increase.

This comes at a tremendous cost to how much the government brings in: about $4.5 trillion over the next 10 years.

Social Safety Net
There are two big parts of the social safety net that are impacted by the Big Beautiful Bill. One is Medicaid, which is the main way low-income people in America can obtain health insurance.

The other is Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which is more commonly referred to as food stamps even though it is mostly provided using electronic debit cards. People who are eligible for SNAP receive an electronic benefits card and get money transferred to it every month that can be used to buy food and some other essentials at approved stores.

There are a bunch of complicated changes to Medicaid aimed at making the program more expensive for states and less expensive for the federal government. But the big change that both programs have in common is new work requirements for certain groups of people, meaning that in order to access Medicaid or SNAP, they will need to prove that they have been working, volunteering, or seeking job training in the past six months. These changes are expected to save the federal government about $1.2 trillion over the next 10 years.

Immigration Spending
The Trump administration has prioritized immigration enforcement with goals of deporting millions of undocumented immigrants living in the United States during his second term. The bill includes $170 billion to help pay for the border wall started during Trump's first term, and for more immigration judges and enforcement agents. The bill makes U.S Immigration and Customs and Enforcement (ICE), an agency first established in 2002 under then-President George W. Bush, the largest federal law enforcement agency in the country.

Military Modernization
The bill includes $150 billion in new spending on national defense, which includes a large expansion of America's naval fleet and construction of a "Golden Dome," the missile defense shield that Trump wants to install across the country.

All reasonable estimates of these provisions are that it will increase the size of the federal debt, which is already north of $37 trillion and rising every day. The amount of cuts to spending on Medicaid and other things does not come close to offsetting the cost of making the income taxcuts permanent.

The president's position is that lower taxes for some, increased immigration detention and deportation, and a modernized military could spur a stronger economy that will make America more prosperous, and that in turn will lead to more revenue for the federal government. It remains to be seen what impact this will have on the people, both now and for years to come.

LOCAL
Section 740 of the D.C. Home Rule Act enables the president of the United States to take control of the Metropolitan Police Department in an emergency situation. In August, President Trump did exactly that, citing a "crime emergency" in the city.

This has involved the deployment of about 2,000 National Guard Troops who are stationed in tourist zones and also assist with logistics and administration for the local department. Other federal enforcement agencies–including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Agency, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement–have stepped up their presence on the ground in Washington, D.C., even conducting checkpoints throughout the city.

This is the first time that the police takeover clause of the Home Rule Act has been invoked. Critics have questioned the basis of this action: while crime certainly spiked in Washington in the years following the COVID-19 epidemic, violent crime rates in the city are

IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

well below the levels experienced in the city during the 1990s and early 2000s.

This action has prompted regular protests from many D.C. residents. While Mayor Muriel Bowser acknowledged that the federal presence had coincided with a sharp drop in carjackings and violent crimes, she decried that erosion of community trust caused by, in particular, immigration agents and other federal troops roaming the city with masks and heavy automatic weapons.

Trump has said that he intends to take similar action in Chicago in the coming months, though it is questionable whether he has the same ability to commandeer control of law enforcement in a state as he does in Washington, D.C.

WORLD

Could the Ukraine War be close to an end? The conflict, instigated three years ago by Russia, continues to rage with some of the most vicious Russian attacks having come this summer. But diplomatic efforts to bring the war to a resolution have also ramped up.

Source: kremlin.ru https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin

President Trump hosted Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska to discuss Russia's view of a deal. Putin rejected the idea of a ceasefire, insisting that a permanent settlement to the war be established. He is seeking land concessions from Ukraine that would bring parts of the country's western territory – along with Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014 – under Russian control.

Shortly after their summit, President Trump hosted several European heads of state, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to discuss an end to the war. There has been no appetite for land concessions from Ukraine and its supporters thus far, and calls for a security guarantee involving international troops in Ukraine emanated from the meeting. Russia rejected the idea of a foreign military presence in Ukraine that did not include its own troops.

These high-level talks did not immediately move the needle on bringing this war to an end. But they did constitute a step towards negotiations that at some point, must involved Presidents Putin and Zelensky and their delegations meeting in person.

SPORTS (AS OF AUGUST 2025)

The WNBA playoffs will get underway in September, capping off a season in which the league has drawn record viewers and revenue. At the league's all-star game this summer, players used the televised event to push for increased salary scales for the league, wearing t-shirts that read "Pay Us What You Owe Us."

As the regular season winds down, there are four teams that look like title contenders: the Atlanta Dream and defending champion New York Liberty in the East; in the West, the Minnesota Lynx who have only lost seven games all season and the Las Vegas Aces, winners of 10 straight as we went to print.

Last year's rookie phenom, Caitlin Clark, has been hampered by injuries most of the season. Could her Indiana Fever make a cinderella run if she returns healthy? Meanwhile, this year's lock to win rookie of the year, Paige Bueckers, has fans of the Dallas Wings hopeful about their future.

Meanwhile the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) has passed the halfway mark in the season and the likely playoff contenders are beginning to emerge. While nothing is certain yet, the Kansas City Current is running away with the top seed, but DC's own Washington Spirit has overcome a series of injuries and a mid-season coaching change to maintain a strong position in the top 4. With superstar Trinity Rodman returning from injury, the Spirit will hope to continue building into the latter half of the season and secure a spot in the playoffs.

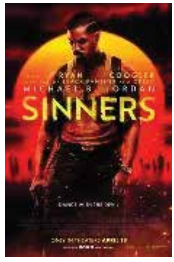
By the time you read this, the NFL regular season will likely be underway, starting with a September 4 opener between the Philadelphia Eagles and Dallas Cowboys. It is a massive, massive season for the Washington Commanders as rookie sensation Jayden Daniels looks to cement himself as an elite quarterback in the league. The Commanders shored up their suspect defense from last year with some off-season acquisitions, trades and draft picks, and appear poised to entrust the running back role to Jacory Croskey-Merritt. One big question mark as the team preps for its opening weekend tilt with the New York Giants: top wideout Terry McLaurin is asking the team to either trade him or pay him about $34 million per season on a new contract.

Commanders Quarterback Jayden Daniels

ENTERTAINMENT

As usual, the summer box office has been dominated by kids movies like Minecraft and Lilo & Stitch, along with superhero franchise films like Superman and Fantastic Four.

But "Sinners," an early summer hit, drawing nearly $280 million, has also emerged as acandidate to win a slate of awards at the Golden Globes and Oscars next year.



Sinners Movie Poster

Writer and director Ryan Coogler teams up again with Michael B. Jordan for this film that weaves a tale of the Jim Crow South, Black American music across the decades, and vampires. Coogler and Jordan have worked together on such hits as Black Panther, Fruitvale Station, and the Creed trilogy.

In Sinners, set in the 1930s, Jordan plays two characters: the Smoke/Stack twins, who've returned to Mississippi after a spell in Chicago to start their own juke joint. The entire film almost entirely takes place during opening night and the morning after.

CONVERSACIÓNES DE MENTES LIBRES
FREE MINDS CONVERSATIONS

Por/By Carlos

Saludos mi gente. Espero que se encuentren bien al leer esta edición de la revista "Connect". Deseo que los encuentre con la mejor salud, física al igual que mental. Que sea donde estén, que siempre tengan sus mentes libres. Para los que me conocen, me llamo Carlos. Después de 25 años, fui deportado a mi país natal. Y aquí estoy con ustedes. El tema de esta edición de "Connect" es Emprendimiento. Que es un término usado para describir el proceso de comenzar o levantar un negocio nuevo.

En verdad, no tengo mucha experiencia en levantar un negocio propio. Al darme cuenta del tema de este mes, no sabia que compartir. En mi opinión, creo que todos hemos tenido una idea para levantar un negocio, pero para ejecutarlo, creo que se requiere conocimiento/ educación de muchas cosas. También uno tiene que tener disciplina.

Al ser deportado a mi país natal, Honduras, he podido ver cómo la gente sobrevive en este país que está tan lleno de pobreza. Para que sepan, el costo mensual para sobrevivir es entre $600/700 dólares. ¡Pero el saldo mínimo normal aquí es de $400/500 dólares! Aquí la gente no tiene para sobrevivir mensualmente porque el salario es menos que lo que cuesta vivir de mes a mes. Admiro mucho a la gente que, con lo poco que ganan, invierten para poder llenar ese espacio económico.

Donde yo vivía primero, era un apartamento en Tegucigalpa, la Capital de Honduras. Me hice amigo de uno de los guardias de seguridad que vivía bajo las mismas condiciones que la mayoría del pueblo Hondureno. El me contó que no le alcanzaba con su sueldo y necesitaba hacer otras cosas. El plan de él era invertir un poco de su pago y abrir una tiendita (pulpería, como la llaman aquí). El guardó un poco de su sueldo por tres meses. Al final de los tres meses, tenía suficiente para poder empezar. Fue a PriceSmart (como el Costco de America Latina, una tienda/almacén mayorista en Estados Unidos) para comprar algunos artículos. Dijo que sería una mejor compra por su dinero si compraba el artículo que necesitaba por mayor que ir a otro lugar. Tenía una lista pequeña, pero sus compras principales eran refrescos y papas fritas de diferentes tipos. Había otros artículos también, pero el resto eran como artículos iniciales que no quería gastar su dinero en algo que no se vendería o que tardaría demasiado en venderse. Esto tenía sentido para mí porque el dinero que invertiría en estos artículos simplemente se quedaría ahí. Le dio a cada artículo un precio individual y comenzó la venta de estos artículos. Al final de dos semanas, compartió, vendió la mayoría de sus productos y necesitaba reabastecerse. Vi lo feliz que esto lo hizo. Su mayor preocupación era que, como había muchos negocios similares, no vendería tan rápido como planeaba y poder obtener sus ganancias.

Viví en ese apartamento durante un año y medio. Durante ese tiempo, vi cómo su pequeña tienda de refrescos se convirtió en una tienda con muchas variedades. A medida que su tienda crecía, empezó a comprar otros artículos que eran comunes. Fijó todos sus precios en un rango más asequible. Esto fue clave, dijo él, ya que competía con otros negocios. Entendía las dificultades y la pobreza lo suficiente como para ser empático con lo que la gente tiene que sacrificar. Y este concepto fue lo que atrajo mucha más clientela. Añadió todo tipo de cosas, como pasteles, dulces y medicina. Su mayor decisión fue incorporar a su tía al negocio. Su tía quería vender comida ya preparada. Esto también es común en este país. La gente siempre buscaba los mejores precios y los mejores alimentos. Ella tenía talento en la cocina, así que aceptaron vender los alimentos y ella atendería la tienda mientras él iba a su trabajo de seguridad. Pudo trabajar y vender sin preocuparse.

Antes de irme, me contó lo difícil que fue al principio. Que literalmente tuvo que dejar de lado otros gastos para tener dinero y poder invertirlo. Tuvo que tener mucha disciplina. Todavía estoy en contacto con él. Su tienda ha crecido mucho y le va muy bien. Me alegro mucho escuchar que triunfó en su negocio. No es fácil, pero aprendí por medio de él que si es posible. Hay mucha gente así en todo el mundo, no solo aquí en Honduras. Ejemplos de empresarios que empezaron de nada para poder sobrepasar la pobreza están en todas partes. ¡Mi respeto por ellos! Y usted, ¿tiene una historia que nos pueda compartir con nosotros? ¿Qué piensas sobre el emprendimiento? ¡Compone un poema que hable de ser empresario y úsalo para darte inspiración y cumplir tus metas!

Greetings, my people. I hope this edition of Connect magazine finds you well. I hope it finds you in the best of health, both physically and mentally. Wherever you are, may you always have a Free Mind. For those who may not know me, my name is Carlos. After 25 years, I was deported to my native country. And here I am with you. The theme of this issue of Connect is Entrepreneurship, which is a term used to describe the process of starting or building a new business.

Honestly, I don't have much experience starting my own business. When I realized this month's topic, I didn't know what to share. In my opinion, I think we've all had an idea for starting a business, but to execute it, I believe it requires knowledge/education in many things. You also have to have discipline.

After being deported to my home country, Honduras, I've seen how people survive in this country, which is so rife with poverty. Just so you know, the monthly cost of living is between $600 and $700. But the normal minimum wage here is between $400 and $500! Here, people don't have enough to survive monthly because their salary is less than what it costs to live from month to month. I greatly admire the people who, with the little they earn, invest to fill that financial gap.

Where I lived first, was an apartment in Tegucigalpa, which is the capital of Honduras. I befriended one of the security guards who lived under the same conditions as most Hondurans. He told me his salary wasn't enough and he needed to do other things. His plan was to invest a little of his pay and open a small store (a pulpería, as they call it here). He saved a little of his salary for three months. At the end of the three months, he had enough to get started. He went to PriceSmart (Latin America's version of Costco – a wholesale warehouse store in the US) to buy a few items. He said it would be a better value for his money if he bought the items he needed in bulk rather than going somewhere else. He had a small list, but his main purchases were soda and chips of different kinds. There were other items as well, but the rest were starter items; he didn't want to spend his money on something that wouldn't sell or would take too long to sell. This made sense to me because the money he would invest in these items would just sit there. He gave each item an individual price and began selling them. At the end of two weeks, he shared, he'd sold most of his products and needed to restock. I saw how happy this made him. His biggest concern was that, since there were so many similar businesses, he wouldn't sell as quickly as he'd planned and be able to make a profit.

I lived in that apartment for a year and a half. During that time, I saw how his small soda shop grew into a store with a wide variety of products. As his store grew, he began purchasing other common items. He set all his prices at a more affordable price. This was key, he said, as he was competing with other businesses. He understood hardship and poverty enough to be empathetic to what people had to sacrifice. And this concept was what attracted many more customers. He added all kinds of things, such as cakes, sweets, and medicine. His biggest decision was to bring his aunt into the business. His aunt wanted to sell prepared food. This is also common in this country. People were always looking for the best prices and the best food. She was talented in the kitchen, so they agreed to sell the food, and she would run the store while he went to his security detail. He was able to work and sell without worry.

Before I left, he told me how difficult it was at first. That he literally had to put aside other expenses to have money to invest. He had to be very disciplined. I'm still in touch with him. His store has grown a lot and is doing very well. I'm so happy to hear he's succeeded in his business. It's not easy, but I learned from him that it is possible. There are many people like that all over the world, not just here in Honduras. Examples of entrepreneurs who started from nothing to overcome poverty are everywhere. My respect for them! And you, do you have a story you can share with us? What are your thoughts on Entrepreneurship? Create a poem about being an entrepreneur and use it to inspire you to accomplish your goals!

MEDITATION: TAKING ON SOMETHING THAT MATTERS *By Kelli*

When we hear the word "entrepreneur," many of us picture someone starting a business from the ground up. There's a kind of legend around entrepreneurs, the idea that they're unique people who follow their passion against the odds.

I think of someone Tara and I met back in the early 2000s. His name is Warren. He was studying to become a lawyer when he realized he'd much rather be baking cakes. Soon after earning his law degree, Warren quit practicing law and opened a bakery on U Street NW called CakeLove. (Fun fact: Free Minds held our very first community reading of members' poems at Warren's then-restaurant, Love Café at 15th and U Street NW in 2005. The restaurant was closed when Warren moved on to pursue a wholesale bakery venture, but I still smile every time I pass that corner!)

Warren followed his passion, and it paid off. He's written and published four major cookbooks, hosted a cooking show called Sugar Rush on the Food Network and launched a successful new product called Cake in a Jar. But it all started with a spark. A feeling. A moment of clarity. He didn't stop there. He took that spark and shaped it into a plan. He took it on.

Interestingly, the word *entrepreneur* comes from the French word *entreprendre*, which means "to undertake" or "to take on." So here's something to consider: you don't have to start a business to be an entrepreneur. Any one of us who decides to take on something new, like learning a language, writing a book, deepening an art practice, or simply working on ourselves, can tap into that same spirit.

This issue's meditation is about doing just that. Whatever you're taking on, let this be your first step: an inner commitment to begin. A moment to listen, center yourself, and prepare for the path ahead.

As always, you can have someone read the meditation aloud to you, or you can read it to yourself a few times and then put the page down. Use your memory and attention to reflect on the theme as you sit with it. However you do it, I wish you peace, clarity, and strength as you prepare to take on something new that matters to you.

We'd love to hear how this meditation works for you. Please write to us and share your experience.

Take a slow, deep breath in... and let it out.
Again, breathe in through your nose... and exhale gently.

Let your body begin to settle.
Feel the points where you're connected to the floor, the bed, or the chair.
Let your shoulders drop. Let your hands rest.

For this moment, there's nowhere else you need to be.
Nothing you need to solve.

Just your breath. Just your presence.

Now, in your mind, begin to picture a space. Your own quiet, private workshop.
A place where your unique ideas come to life.
It might be a garage, a studio, a kitchen, or even just a corner of light in a wide, open room.
Make it yours. It is only for you.

In this space, you are free. You are the creator. The builder.

There's a table with tools, not physical ones, but tools life has already given you.
Maybe it's patience. Maybe it's hustle.
Maybe it's the way you listen, or how you see possibilities others miss.
Maybe it's the strength that helped you survive hard times.

Look around this workshop and notice what's there.
Shelves lined with lessons you've learned.
Materials shaped from your past experiences.
And right in the center, a blank space, waiting for your next idea.

What do you want to build?

Maybe it's a business you've dreamed of, or a skill you want to master.
Maybe it's a message you want to share, or a service that helps others.
Let that idea form clearly. You don't need all the answers. Just the beginning. Just the spark.

Feel your hands at work – measuring, shaping, adjusting.
You know how to build slowly. Thoughtfully. One step at a time.

You are capable. You are creative.
You are worthy of the space to grow.
You are already building, even now.

If your surroundings are noisy or busy, remember this: the space within you stays quiet and yours.

Take one more deep breath in... and out.

Begin to return to the room around you.
Wiggle your fingers, your toes. Feel the ground beneath you again.

Carry this vision with you: the workshop inside you.
Always open. Always waiting.

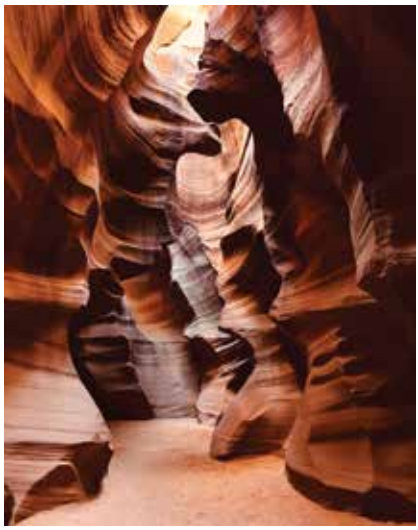
Repeat silently:
No matter where I am right now, I can build something new. I carry the tools within me.

When you're ready, open your eyes.

AROUND THE WORLD: KELLI'S WILD PLACES TOUR – ARIZONA EDITION!

View of the Grand Canyon from the South Rim.

This year, I set out on a simple mission: to see as many of the Earth's wild and beautiful places as possible. I've started a "Wild Places Tour" bucket list. Some spots are part of the National Park System, which includes 63 sites across the United States. Others are said to be just as breathtaking but less well known. I'm already off to a strong start in 2025!



Inside Antelope Canyon

But first, a little background. The idea of national parks in the U.S. began in the late 1800s as a way to protect the country's most awe-inspiring landscapes for everyone, not just wealthy people. At the time, land was being damaged by mining, logging, and development, and people began to realize we could lose these wonders forever. Thanks to advocates like John Muir, a passionate nature lover, and President Theodore Roosevelt, the government began setting aside land to be preserved. That is how the National Park System was born, creating places where the public could experience nature's power and beauty for generations to come. To me, this is such a noble mission! It reminds us that wildness has value not because it can be bought or sold, but because it restores something in our human spirit.

And that brings me to our first stop: Arizona. I'd never been there before, but in March, my husband Rich and I flew in and set up a home base in Sedona, a small desert town surrounded by towering red rock cliffs, winding canyons, and pockets of high desert forest. There were many moments where the landscape felt almost like being on another planet! This was especially true at sunrise and sunset when the rocks glowed with deep oranges and fiery reds.

Sedona itself offers many memorable hikes, but it's also a perfect jumping-off point for exploring the region's most unforgettable sights. On our first day, we headed straight for the Granddaddy of Wild Places: Grand Canyon National Park.

Even if you've never been there, you have surely seen photos. If you've ever watched reruns of the ancient TV show, The Brady Bunch, you might remember the epic three-parter where Bobby and Cindy run off and get lost in the Grand Canyon. (They were always doing dumb stuff like that!) Long before it became a national park, the Grand Canyon was, and still is, sacred to many Native American nations, including the Havasupai, Hopi, Navajo, Hualapai, and Zuni. These communities see the canyon not as a tourist destination but as a living, spiritual landscape

filled with meaning, memory, and ancestral stories.

I expected to be impressed, but I was utterly unprepared to be so overwhelmed by its vastness and beauty. Stretching over 277 miles long and plunging more than a mile deep in places, the Grand Canyon is one of the largest and most impressive canyons in the world. Standing there at the edge, I felt tiny and insignificant, surrounded by endless cliffs, colorful rock layers, and a view that stretched as far as the eye could see. It was a spiritual experience, reminding me of the Earth's power and timelessness.

But I didn't want to just admire it from the rim. I wanted to say I had been "in" the Grand Canyon. So we set off on a long hike down into the canyon. I love hiking and do it often, but this trail was... um... different. It was so steep and narrow, I had to watch every step carefully, stopping when I wanted to take in the view. It was dizzying! But it was so gorgeous, I couldn't help but keep going. The canyon's rock walls are a mix of reds, oranges, pinks, and browns, carved over millions of years by the Colorado River's waters. It looks like an eternal sunset, changing with every shift of light. While we didn't see any donkeys, they are often the preferred mode of travel, carrying people and their camping gear to the canyon's bottom. We did see plenty of "donkey-do" and signs warning that if you meet a mule, you should "hug" the inside of the trail to keep from falling – yikes!

On the way back up, my legs got more than a lil' wobbly and my heart was pounding because of the steep climb. My friendly greetings on the way down ("Good morning!" "Hey, how are you all doing?") gave way to huffing, puffing and lots of nods instead of words! But we made it! After plenty of cold water at the top (and maybe a few tasty fish tacos in Flagstaff, Arizona), we headed back to Sedona to rest up for two more remarkable destinations, neither of them national parks but definitely must-see wonders.

First, Antelope Canyon, a breathtaking slot canyon on Navajo land in northern Arizona. Known for its narrow, twisting passageways and smooth, wave-like sandstone walls, Antelope Canyon glows in vibrant reds and oranges. Flash floods carved this natural marvel over thousands of years, creating walls sometimes over 100 feet tall. At certain times, sunlight beams pierce through the narrow openings, illuminating the swirling rock like a living painting. This delicate and sacred place can only be visited by guided tours led by Navajo Nation members. There is a long and very strict list of rules for visitors meant to keep the place pristine. You can't even bring a regular sized backpack in for fear you might carry in food and leave trash behind, dirtying the canyon.

Our guide Tammy was wonderful. She knew the canyon like family and showed us the perfect spots where sunlight created "angel wings" made of light on the canyon walls. Of course, lots of the people on our tour had to stop to pose for and post Instagram "angel" photos of themselves. I asked Tammy about the canyon's traditional uses, and she explained that Navajo people have long used it for spiritual reflection and connection to their ancestors. I couldn't help wondering how they feel about the canyon becoming a social media hotspot!

Our last stop was Horseshoe Bend, just a short drive from Antelope Canyon. After parking, we followed other visitors walking in a line across a flat plain. I couldn't figure out what in the world we were all going to see! We stopped at a railing where we looked down and

This is all we could see as we approached Horseshoe Bend across the flat landscape.

And here's what we saw when we reached the edge of the cliff… You would need to blow up this photo substantially to be able to see the tiny yellow and blue kayaks in the water!

gasped. Wayyyy down below, was a river looping in a near-perfect horseshoe shape around a towering red rock formation. Deep green water winds between steep sandstone walls that contrast sharply with the blue desert sky. When I spotted a tiny yellow and tiny blue kayak below the size of dust motes, I realized just how deep the canyon was. The rock in the center rose like a silent island, while the walls dropped straight down. It felt like I was looking into the heart of the Earth itself. It is one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen.

We settled near the edge and stayed for nearly two hours, just taking in the view. The quiet was breathtaking. If I had shouted "Hey, you in the kayaks!" I'm sure someone would have called back, "Hey, you little speck up there!" Instead, we listened to the wind and the soft voices of others at the top, awed by the scene.

Above us, peregrine falcons and red-tailed hawks circled, swooping and soaring as if performing a majestic airshow just for us.

I know this little travelogue barely scratches the surface of Arizona's wild places. But I hope it sparks your curiosity and inspires you to start a list for your very own Wild Places Tour. There is so much more out there, just waiting to be discovered!

SPINNING THE TRACK WITH THE ADVICE MAN

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

Dear Advice Man,

I know you're not a lawyer, and I'm not looking for legal advice. What I really want to know is, how do you tell if you're making the right decision?

Here's what's going on. I've got a lawyer, but I'm not sure he's really looking out for me. When I bring up stuff I think helps my case, he just shuts it down. Honestly, sometimes it feels like he's working for the other side. I just want someone who's going to fight for me, because this is my life we're talking about.

At the same time, if I fire him, I've got to start all over with someone new. And who knows if that person will be any better? I've been stuck in this back-and-forth for weeks. This happens to me a lot. I get stuck when I have to make a big decision. I go over it again and again in my head, and I never feel sure.

So what I'm asking is, when you have to make a really important decision, how do you do it? How do you know you're doing the right thing? I just want to feel peace with whatever I choose instead of constantly second guessing myself.

Thanks for your time.
Sincerely,
SC

Salutations SC, welcome first time Free Minds Connect readers, and to all the long time readers, greetings!

Man! I am glad SC jumped out there with his thought-provoking questions. In the past, I've always looked back and seen the young me; that uncomfortable, confused and discouraged me. Today, I see these pivotal youth and adult exchanges and think about "who do the youth really have" scenarios, and see the youth seeming very discouraged or mistrusting to go to mentors for advice to make important decisions in their lives. Back when I was tackling immaturity, hurt, fears, and anger; there weren't too many places I could find trusted and sincere folk for good advice. Well I am thankful for this platform and the brave souls who have the courage to speak up for themselves and others.

Decision-making skills are something we have to always keep on the forefront of our minds and actively work on improving.

In other words, our worldly wisdom sometimes just isn't enough; if you're a person of faith, you may find guidance from your religion. Facts & Data *gives us a record by which we create wisdom; and* Healthy Peers *– they are our sound counsel who we seek out when we are unsure. Nevertheless, we have to get wise, stop caving in to our emotions, and use what we have. I'm talking about when we have to make a lifetime decision or choice, and make sure it's made at the best* **rational and reasonable** *state. To be real about life, it is sometimes difficult and unyielding, and the key is how we will things in our lives and how we handle each portion. The current and future decisions we make will determine the ripple effects that vibrate through us, our family, and our community.*

If we fail to analyze and process issues surrounding our decisions, we fail to make any wise decisions. That information has to be data and facts (not assumptions) to evaluate the decision. Decision-making skills have to become a positive habit we use. I took some critical thinking skills classes. These things can help when we need to make split second decisions and deep rational analysis on our most important decisions. Above all, we have to start doing the processing of information way before we get ourselves jammed into tight spots. And still I sympathize, because I know we are all human. I've recognized from my youth that I wasn't properly taught how to not be immature or how to not have an immature reaction when I need to make wise decisions. A word to the wise is don't let bad habits carry over into our adulthood. I no longer want us to let our conditions and circumstances cloud our decision-making skills. Processing data and facts is key to our desired outcomes.

For example, when my daughters meet a young suitor, because we sometimes have a lot going on, I may have to give them advice on how to do their homework,or research on someone. I do this to try and save us from heartbreak or harm from the decision to bring someone into our fold that has a lot of baggage. The

*next step is to replay your communication skills or delivery to see if it's abrasive (*Editor's Note: Check out the Write Way on page 28 for some things to look for in your professional communications)*. Sometimes we have to ask others to help us understand our misunderstandings. But before it comes to that, seek out understanding from some source that's trusted within family, advocacy groups, or the wise men right there where you are. Don't let the government, courts, or attorney separate you from your lifelines of people who have your best interest at heart. I know just what you mean by it feels like your attorney is working for the other side.*

Nevertheless, SC if you are on point, then preserve your rights on record by starting an electronic and hardcopy paper trail of how you expressed your concerns. If your lawyer doesn't come around, write their boss or judge on your case providing your paper trail. Another avenue is writing the Lawyer's Bar Association for clarification and notification. And if all that fails and you feel strongly about the relief you seek, file a "pro se" motion or letter to the court on your own behalf showing your belief from fact, but with the assistance of a respected jailhouse lawyer. True I'm no lawyer, but at times in our particular case we all need to be for our own sake. Sometimes it seems no one is going to help us or come and get us. So I commend you on being diligent with your case.

Guys my hope is that I pointed us all in the right direction when it comes to any decision-making in the future and to be alert to be open to rational analysis of issues; to seek education and research, data and facts; as well as seek out healthy counsel to make our best decisions. I hope we all got something out of this message. A few other brothers have this to share:

Dear SC,
The one thing that I advise you to do in life, and specifically in this situation, is to trust your gut. Write down the reasons that you feel that your lawyer is not working in your best interest and you can express that to the judge the next time you go to court. It takes personal confidence to make difficult decisions and not everyone possesses that ability. Separate yourself from those that can't, and make your decision and live with the results. Always trust your gut! EW

I'm blessed to have shared this response with you all.

Sincerely,
TS

Note: Tim (who wrote the "Just Law" column) also wanted to weigh in. Note that this does not constitute legal advice.

With any interaction with your attorney:

1. ***Document every communication****: If it's on the phone, follow up with a written recap on Corrlinks and also mail of what was discussed during the telephone conversation.* "Per our conversation on ____ date (important to put date and do it as soon as possible) it was agreed that you would be... and that I have already sent you the documents that you requested," *etc.*

   Print out hard copy of corrlinks emails from the law library and retain them.

2. ***If the attorney is avoiding contact****, write to them on corrlinks and print out a copy and mail it to the attorney.* "I was expecting that you would update me in a timely manner but I have not heard from you since (date) for months. Because of the prolonged gap in your communication with me, I am writing for you to update me with the current status of where we stand/strategy on how we proceed."

   Add specific information you are waiting for and end with asking for the attorney to update you in a certain time frame. Be sure to add specific details. "Please assure me that you are still working in my best interest providing me with the effective assistance of counsel."

   If the attorney doesn't respond, give it some time and then write a follow up to your letter with the date stating, "I still haven't heard from you and I am troubled by this."

   If you still get no response, you can try to find activity on the case from the Docket Sheet. Ask friends and family members on the outside to call and attempt to obtain this information.

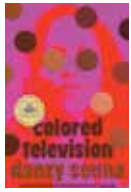
WHAT WE'RE READING

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."

- **Sofia: *Between Two Kingdoms: A Memoir of a Life Interrupted* by Suleika Jaouad**
  In this book, Jaouad details her experience battling leukemia at the age of 22. The most unique part of Jaouad's story is how she writes about her challenges in reentering what she calls "the kingdom" of not being sick anymore and the mental and physical challenges of returning to "normal." She embarks on an inspiring cross country road trip to become in tune with herself again and meet the diverse strangers that wrote to her while she was in the hospital and blogging her journey.

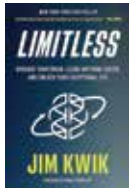
- **Julia: *Colored Television* by Danzy Senna**
  I recently read the novel *Colored Television* by Danzy Senna, which was a wild, somewhat satirical story about a fiction writer who has spent the past decade working on a book which is supposed to be her masterpiece. But when her hopes for her book fall through, she starts down the difficult road of trying to break into the television industry instead... but she does so by telling a lie or two or three. Meanwhile, she's dealing with marital struggles and trying to find a good home (that they can afford) for their family. It may not sound like it from my description, but the book was full of twists and turns and I could not put it down!



- **Free Minds Reentry Book Club "The Build Up": *Hustle Harder, Hustler Smarter* by Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson**
  50 Cent combines his street smarts and hard-learned corporate knowledge to help readers achieve their own success in his book, *Hustle Harder, Hustle Smarter*. In doing so, he helps the reader learn to flow with the changes that disrupt their own lives. The book inspired members in our weekly reentry book club called "The Build Up" to engage in a meaningful discussion with each other on topics including the importance of stepping outside of one's comfort zone in order to grow and transform into what one really wants to be, and the power and resilience that comes when people work together as a team.

- **Geoff: *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz**
  I was surprised at the breadth of American history covered in the slim *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment*. In this cultural history, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz persuasively ties American firearm culture through initial conquest, slave suppression, anti-reconstruction, and westward expansion using white supremacy as the through line. Firearms are a quintessentially American industry and ownership serves as both a privilege and obligation for whites, indicating their participation in the American project. I felt it got bogged down critiquing other academic works late in the book and wish that space had gone to an early personal story about building an arsenal.

- **Tara: *Limitless: Upgrade Your Brain, Learn Anything Faster, and Unlock Your Exceptional Life* by Jim Kwik**
  This book is about how we can understand our brains better to learn faster and easier. Learning is a subject I'm constantly fascinated about – how people learn in different ways. The author had a traumatic brain injury as a child and was told all his life he had "a broken brain." He then went on a journey to figure out how to learn and is now sharing it with others.



- **Emily: *The God of the Woods* by Liz Moore**
  I recently finished *The God of the Woods* by Liz Moore. This book is about a summer camp in Upstate New York and follows two timelines – one in the 1960's where a young boy disappears from his family's estate, and one in the 1970's where his sister, born after his disappearance, also vanishes. I found this book to be a little slow, but I did enjoy getting to read the perspectives of the various cast of characters that included a camp counselor, a camper, the mother of the children that disappeared, and the detective on the case, among others. If you choose to read it, let us know if you saw the ending coming!

CONVERSATION WITH JORDAN

Entrepreneurship, in its finest hour, is a broadened term that can describe multiple things. To me, entrepreneurship means turning nothing into something, and having the ability to be a risk-taker in the process of trying to do just that. Some of the most successful entrepreneurs (in terms of financial success) are the likes of Warren Buffet, Jeff Bezos, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg, but how successful one is or isn't doesn't determine their ability to be an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship starts with a creative idea, and the discipline and drive to keep that idea going. Entrepreneurship is shown in many forms; from the average guy hustling waters on a hot summer day to the young guy in his neighborhood, too young for a job but very ambitious. Both examples are relatable to my past, but for the past 7 years of my life, entrepreneurship has had a more holistic effect on my life.

I started college in 2019, and only knew the explicit definition of being an entrepreneur at the time. Aspiring to be a 'businessman' growing up, with no idea exactly how that looked for me, I went into college unaware and lost. Professors explain entrepreneurship in a way that makes you anxious and uncertain about what you want to do. This made me question myself for a small period of time, but since completing college, my perspective on entrepreneurship has evolved quite a bit.

Part of the doubt associated with entrepreneurship is the risk and sacrifice that comes with it. You may have to sacrifice your habits, spending, family, friends, and leisure time just to even feel like progress is being made. For me, finding the time to do so without cutting off everyone and everything has been one of my biggest obstacles. Never giving up on the vision you see for yourself is very important as well. Being able to adapt to circumstances and still achieve is what some of the most successful entrepreneurs have done at least once in their lifetime. Evolving with entrepreneurship, and adjusting my ideas to align with that evolution has helped me find new success in the way I see entrepreneurship. I recently started working on a podcast, which was not a goal of mine if you'd had asked me 5 years ago, but I've evolved my mind to think beyond just selling a clothing brand, or a product.

Podcasts have become extremely popular, and for good reason. A podcast can serve many purposes; some are serviceable, knowledgeable, comedic, or even a combination of such, which is what I aim to accomplish with my own podcast. One of the most successful ones that I listen to consistently is *"Million Dollaz Worth of Game"* by Wallo267 Peeples. By starting a podcast on top of my clothing line, I wanted to get the full experience of entrepreneurship from multiple sides of the spectrum.

Today, I am continuing to establish both my podcast and clothing line, leaving the ability to expand as I go. I am surrounded by many entrepreneurs, many of whom wouldn't even describe themselves as such. From authors to artists, advocates, clothing designers, entrepreneurship doesn't hold a literal definition in my world; as long as you are taking the necessary steps to build something that you've created, you are already one of the biggest entrepreneurs that I know.

CELEBRATING MEMBERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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

- ★ AW, AG, DA, EC, NW and TM graduated from high school at the Maya Angelou Academy at the Correctional Treatment Facility this summer.
- ★ CD was awarded the Incarcerated Father of the Year Award.
- ★ DB, JS, JG, KT, LW, AW, RB, SM, TM and YL passed their road tests and got their driver's license.
- ★ MH received his Maryland Electrical State Board Certificate.
- ★ SM graduated from the Flikshop School of Business.
- ★ WM earned his GED.

Please share your accomplishments with us to be featured!

DC CULTURE: LOTUS AND WATERLILY FESTIVAL AT KENILWORTH AQUATIC GARDENS

By Sofia

A peaceful oasis buzzing with dragonflies, still waterways, and adorned in pink and white lotuses and water lilies exists right here in DC's very own backyard. Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens is a National Park Service site located in Northeast DC right near the Maryland state border and nestled near the banks of the Anacostia River. This unique park is free to visitors and boasts a diverse array of wildlife, including the rare and famous water lilies and lotuses.

The water lilies and lotuses typically begin to bloom at Kenilworth in June and peak bloom is usually in mid to late July with the season continuing into mid-August. To celebrate peak bloom, there is an annual Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens' Lotus and Water Lily Festival. This year, the festival was held July 18-20. The weekend before the festival, I had the opportunity to go to the gardens myself and as I wound my way through the marsh, I was awestruck by the beauty of the lotuses and water lilies, some of which had begun to bloom. Enjoy the images included with this article to take in my full view of the gardens!

Although I didn't attend the festival myself, the event brought large crowds of people in from the DMV (DC, Maryland, and Virginia metropolitan area) and beyond. The theme for this year was "Interconnected Web of Life", wanting to highlight the connections between aquatic plants, animals, the environment, and the community. Even just from walking through the gardens myself, this interconnectedness cannot go unnoticed, from witnessing how dragonflies landed and zipped through the lotuses to tadpoles swimming through the marsh and families finding solace in the peaceful environment.

The first day of the festival was the most relaxed, with mindfulness exercises like children' s yoga and crafts in the morning. The evening also had a guided outdoor journaling session, and a forest bathing* event where participants walked through the gardens with a guide and learned how to observe nature intentionally to understand the therapeutic benefits of forest bathing. An outdoor jazz performance by the Washington Conservatory Jazz Players concluded the first evening of the event. The second day of the festival was focused on "celebrating global traditions and creativity inspired by nature" and showcased a diverse mix of cultural performances, with heritage dances from the cultures of Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, China, Sri Lanka, and Korea and later an Ethiopian dance lesson. In the afternoon there was a flamenco dance and musical experience. The day also included a vibrant fashion show. The second evening ended with an Afro-latin dance session, a Rumba musical performance from Sol y Rumba, and another forest bathing experience. (Source: National Park Service)

The third and final day of the annual festival was "a day for healing, harmony, and hands-on inspiration" and featured hands-on programming. The morning began with an acrylic painting near the lotus pond where participants could paint their surroundings. The day continued with a West African drumming performance, tranquil live guitar music, and two yoga sessions. (Source: National Park Service)

The festival is a testament to how nature intertwines with the surrounding community, influencing the local culture and beyond. What are some other topics or events you'd like to see covered in future DC Culture installments? Write to us and let us know, we'd love to hear from you!

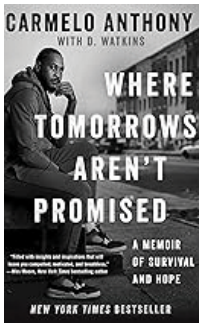
**Forest bathing, also known as shinrin-yoku in Japanese, is a practice that involves immersing oneself in the forest environment and connecting with nature through the senses. It encourages individuals to slow down, appreciate their surroundings, and engage with the sights, sounds, smells, and textures of the forest.*

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club

With Neely, Written by Meg, former intern

As we shared in our last issue of the *Connect*, our current BAM book is *Where Tomorrow's Aren't Promised: A Memoir of Survival and Hope* by Carmelo Anthony. In his memoir, former professional basketball player Carmelo Anthony shares his journey from growing up in the Brooklyn projects to becoming a champion on the world stage. Navigating an education system that ignored and criticized him while also dealing with the untimely deaths of loved ones, Carmelo struggled to survive emotionally and physically. With the guidance of family and mentors in both the streets and on the court, he found the endurance to pursue his dreams.

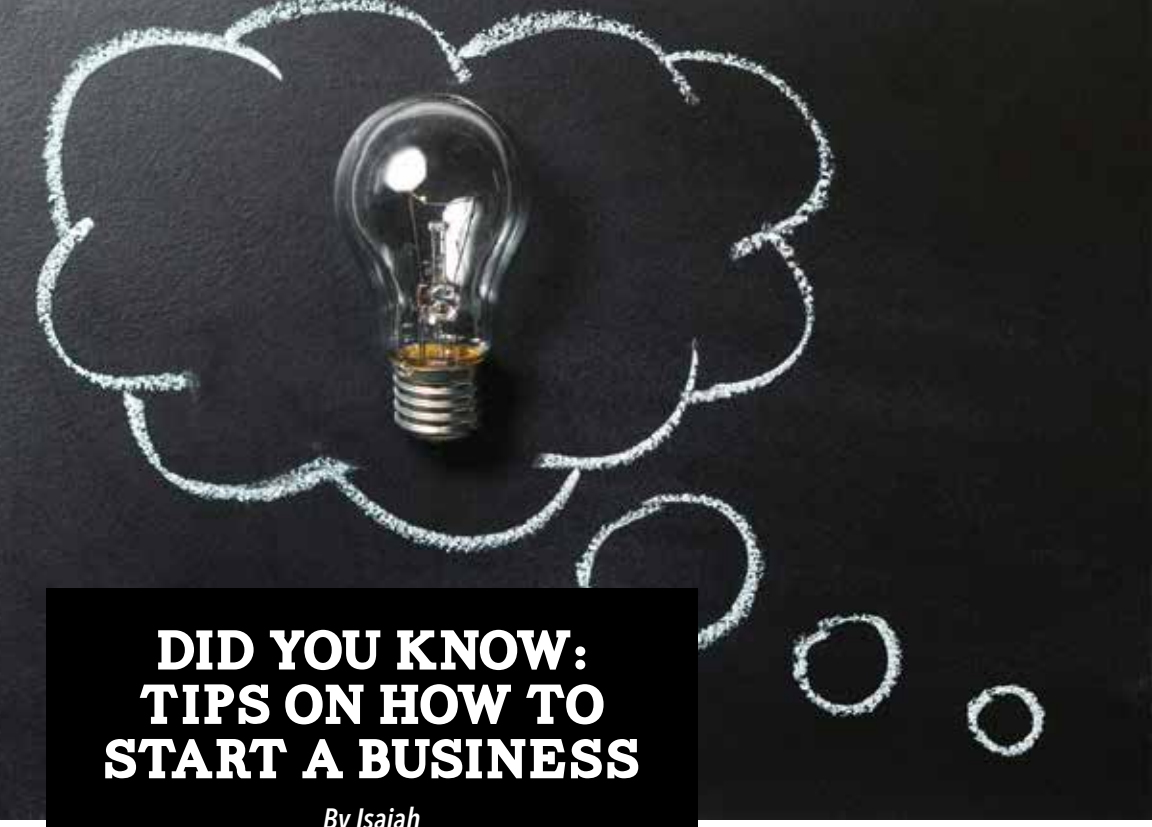


To celebrate our current selection, we are sharing a little throwback to the time Carmelo Anthony visited with Free Minds members! On August 5, 2022, Anthony visited with Free Minds members at DC's Youth Services Center. He opened the session with a discussion of *Where Tomorrows Aren't Promised*. Anthony then took part in a Q&A led by our very own Kelli. Anthony discussed his journey with books and his own experiences with writing, and the young men in attendance asked questions about previous challenges and Anthony's evolution as a person since. He told those around him about the patterns of self-deprecating thought that had followed him throughout his career, making him question his worth as a player and person. In high school, he remembered incidents of what he now recognizes as racism, as he was criticized and ultimately made to transfer schools because he wore his hair in braids.

Throughout all of these experiences, he emphasized the therapeutic effects of writing, and its role in allowing him to express the thoughts he believed to be too inappropriate or inconvenient to tell. Anthony also spoke about his philanthropic efforts to expand schools and build recreation homes, drawing attention to the books written by those incarcerated and the lack of promotion and outreach they get. The environment was friendly, and the focus on healing and uplifting voices helped Free Minds members feel comfortable sharing their own perspectives and experiences.

Members were invited to share their own poetry, and even though they were shy at first, Anthony's genuine encouragement helped them come out of their shells. As many of you know, it can feel vulnerable to share your own writing, and he was incredibly supportive of each of the young men in attendance. He listened with eager ears as the individuals shared their stories, and his compassion helped them build their confidence. He even signed members' poetry, expressing gratitude for their willingness to share. The sense of community he helped to foster in that environment is sure to be remembered by everyone for years to come.

Read more about Anthony's story in our current BAM book, *Where Tomorrow's Aren't Promised: A Memoir of Survival and Hope.* Be sure to check out the discussion questions we have shared with you on page 21 of this issue, and write back to us with your thoughts. We are so eager to hear your reflections!



DID YOU KNOW: TIPS ON HOW TO START A BUSINESS

By Isaiah

Are you an aspiring business owner? Or, are you someone who just wants to give your unsolicited advice about the business startup process? Well, look no further – this article is for you! This section will give you seven steps on how to start a small business, whether you want to start your own business or just have an understanding of the process.

STEP 1. CONDUCT MARKET RESEARCH

Before seeking funds or community support, you should conduct background research on the existing businesses and potential customers in your local area. Understanding what potential customers want to see and what businesses are currently doing in the region will guide you on how your business can serve them and offer better services than the existing businesses. Conducting a SWOT Analysis between your potential business and other businesses is imperative! Assessing the **strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT)** of your idea will be beneficial. During this process, you will discover your competitive advantage, which is simply how your services are better than those of other businesses in a particular service. Additionally, you will uncover how diverse businesses can attract and retain their customers with their services. The time it takes to do market research can vary by person, but this first step is crucial in ensuring your future business can have longevity. Once you figure out how your service is unique, move to the next step!

STEP 2. WRITE YOUR BUSINESS PLAN

If you want to hire individuals or influence people to invest in your company, **YOU** need a business plan. This living document outlines the company's description, objectives, short and long-term goals, mission statement, operational procedures, marketing and sales strategy, leadership team, target demographic, financial projections, and other important information about the company. The business plan showcases the structure of your company and how it operates. This plan is vital for potential investor meetings, company information sessions, and for completing RFIs (Request for Information) and RFPs (Request for Proposal).

STEP 3. FUND YOUR BUSINESS

Now that you have completed your market analysis and business plan, it's time to look into how to fund your company. Unfortunately, money does not grow on trees, so you have to explore various funding options! Don't worry! There are many ways for you to fund your business. You can consider self-funding, investors, loans, grants, and donations as forms of funding for your company. Having a detailed business plan will help you determine the amount of money needed to start and sustain your business operations.

STEP 4. PICK YOUR BUSINESS LOCATION

Where do you want to be? You have to decide whether your

business will be online, in-person, or both. Your in-person business can be in a truck, home, car, rented office space, or a newly built building. But that decision is yours to make! Keep in mind that any choice you make can affect your revenue, legal status, and other areas.

STEP 5. CHOOSE A BUSINESS STRUCTURE

Next on the agenda is picking a business structure! Do you want your business to be a **sole proprietorship, partnership, limited liability company (LLC), corporation, or cooperative**? When choosing a business structure, select the one that best benefits your company. Please note that the structure you choose will impact how much you pay in taxes, your business registration requirements, and personal liability.

STEP 6. CHOOSE YOUR BUSINESS NAME AND REGISTER YOUR BUSINESS

This portion is creative! Now it is time to select the name of your company. The name is the first thing people see, so it's crucial to make a good impression! Make sure your business name is not currently being used or already registered in a database. Using an existing business name will lead to legal troubles! After creating your name, it is time to register your company. You can register your company with local, state, and federal governmental agencies. This process will protect you from outsiders committing copyright infringement and other legal matters. Most importantly, it establishes your company's legitimacy.

STEP 7. APPLY FOR LICENSES AND PERMITS

Applying for licenses and permits will keep your company in compliance with the current laws. Take into account that the licenses and permits you apply for depend on your circumstances (e.g., state laws, industry certifications, and local laws). Ensure your company applies for and renews its licenses and permits before they expire.

In addition to these steps, ensure your company gets business insurance, federal and state tax identification numbers, and opens a business bank account. Wherever you are in your business journey, the hope is that these steps make the process easier. **Never** be afraid to ask for help or research on your own to figure out which option best suits you and your company's needs.

Good luck! We are rooting for you in all your business endeavors and hope to see your dream become a reality!!

DC PHOTOS *By Maya*

As requested by our readers

Distant views of the Old Post Office Pavillion and the US Capitol on Pennsylvania Ave in downtown DC

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

FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB & WRITING WORKSHOP
1816 12th Street NW
Washington, DC 20009

NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: EMPATHY & COMPASSION

By Julia

In 2017, an author, frustrated by a political debate, posted on social media the phrase, "I don't know how to explain to you why you should care about other people." Later that year, that quote went a bit viral–shared by many people. I myself have come back to this quote many times over the past few years. I can't help thinking that this idea – that we should care about other people, even if they're strangers, even if they have nothing in common with us, even if they live on the other side of the world – is more necessary every day. To me, ***empathy*** and ***compassion*** are at the heart of this idea, and they are essential to our work at Free Minds. Empathy is the capacity to understand and feel what someone else is feeling; compassion refers to caring about someone else's pain and the desire to make that pain go away. Fun fact: did you know that reading fiction (stories that are imagined) can make us more empathetic?

For this next issue, we want to focus on these qualities of empathy and compassion, both for ourselves and for other people. You can write about a time when you felt empathy for someone else, or responded with compassion to something that someone else was going through. Or try writing about a time when this may have been difficult; you could write a poem about a time when you were in conflict with someone else, and try imagining their perspective to understand what they might have been going through. What can we all do to practice empathy and compassion in our daily lives?

Until then, take care and KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!

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