

Free minds Connect

Moving Forward

THIS MONTH'S THEME



FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB



IN THIS ISSUE...

**A Life of Pain:
Part I,
Page 9**

**New Column!
The Legal Pad,
page 5**

**Pay What You Can:
A New Trend in
Dining, page 6**

**Therapy Brings
Relief to a FM
Mom, page 5**

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WD, Nick, Carol**
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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 will appear on our writing Blog, and at a Write Night event!)

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**Next Issue's
Theme:**
"Family!"
(see back page for details!)

Hello Forward Thinking Free Minders!

This issue's theme of "Moving Forward" has me focusing on the road ahead and I'm happy to report I see exciting things on the horizon for Free Minds! From expanding Write Night across the country to taking our Reentry Workshop on the road to a BOP facility, Free Minds is truly forward thinking. You show us every day how you keep your focus forward; sharing news of learning a new trade, taking courses, mentoring your younger siblings or preparing for reentry. By planning for your future you are building a muscle that will give you strength for whatever lies ahead. As they say there's a reason the front windshield of a car is so much bigger than the rear view mirror. The future is much bigger than the past! *The Connect* is here to help broaden that wide outlook!



In this issue you'll be inspired by folks who embody the phrase "moving forward". Uplifters like Logan, who was inducted into gang life at the age of 12, and Free Minds mom CW, who makes sure she's emotionally strong to be there for her son. You'll find stories about web designers who push the limits of technology and visionaries who open "pay what you can" cafes. This trend is a testament to the goodness of the human spirit. A friend of mine is a massage therapist and she decided to let the customer decide what they wanted to pay even if it was nothing! Guess what? She makes more than her colleagues who set prices. Now that's forward thinking!

Yours in forward motion,
Tara

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

FREE MINDS HQ



September Job Readiness Apprenticeship

We welcomed eight new Apprentices home from prison to our Job Readiness and Life Skills Apprenticeship program on September 9th. They will learn tools to succeed such as interview skills, goal setting and real work-experience with local DC businesses. Remember to email, call or write us to reserve your spot if you are coming home in the next six months!

FM Travels to FCI Petersburg

For the first time ever we took our reentry program on the road traveling to FCI Petersburg's Medium and Low facilities to run a workshop for 160 inmates, some of whom were FM brothers! Seana, Marcus, Keela and Tara used role playing, poetry, action plans and Marcus' own personal story of incarceration and reentry success to inspire these men as they prepare to return home. We've already been invited back in November!

Free Minds Mailbag

We love getting letters from you guys! Here is what some of you said about the last issue, *Our City: DC*



"As I look at the pictures I get emotional because I miss being home. I have been away from Washington so long and all my family is there." –VM

"Reading the *Connect* for me is like being a kid in a candy store. You guys have so much exciting stuff going on and in the works and it creates a great feeling reading about the things you guys have going on. Like, for example, the 'Write Night Going National' thing-that's too cool." –KB

"I have to say to see the cover of the newsletter made me homesick but it just lets me know that I really appreciate the city and long to return." –QS

"I love the whole *Connect* Issue on DC! The pics was great ☺ Thank you guys for being in my corner as friends, but most of all as family!" –DM

"My cellie is also a FM member! We love the last issue of the *Connect* about our city. We sat up all night talking about home and how much we missed it. That was really helpful seeing all the pictures. Thank you for that!" –DW



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

By Kelli

Happy Autumn Little Brothers,

It's my favorite time of year and I'm feeling optimistic. Our mailbox has been flooded with submissions and the quality of your writing just keeps getting better. See for yourself as you read the poems and prose by your FM brothers in these pages. I love seeing the growing sense of community among the Free Minds Family. Guys who cheer on other guys for getting their GEDs. A letter from one of you excited that another on the outside got a job and applied for college. A member comes into the office and reads aloud a poem one of you behind bars just sent in and shouts "That joint is LIKE THAT!" (see how I learned my DC slang from you all?) But seriously, that's what it means to be in a community and these bonds we are building make each one of us stronger and better!

One of my favorite quotes is from Oliver Wendell Holmes, a Supreme Court Justice in the early 1900's. He said, "I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving: To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it - but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor." Over and over, despite your circumstances, you guys show us what direction you are moving—and it's FORWARD.

I hope you all like this issue, and I can't wait to see what you send for the next one... Stay strong, be kind to each other, and keep your minds free! Your friend, Kelli

MOVING FORWARD: FORGIVENESS LEADS TO FREEDOM

By Paulo, FM Friend

What's up, Free Minds brothers? My name is Paulo, and I'm currently working as an assistant pastor and missionary in DC. I was originally born in Brazil. Our parents gave me and my sisters up for adoption. After five years in an orphanage, we were adopted by an American couple, and moved to the US. Growing up in Maryland as a young black man, I had a lot of anger. I was mad at everybody: I was mad at my friends, I was mad at my parents, I was mad at my birth parents for giving me up, and I was mad at society.

I became an alcoholic, and I continued to walk around mad. Every time I tried to get sober, I couldn't. Then, one day my mentor in treatment told me I had to forgive everyone in my life who had ever hurt me. He reminded me that I did stuff to hurt them too. Eventually, I learned to stop seeing myself as a victim and was able to forgive. It's what helped me to get sober and to actually receive God in my life.

So when I first heard about Dylann Roof, the young white man who shot nine black people during a prayer service at Emanuel AME Church in June, I was numb. I kept thinking *United we stand, divided we fall*. A few days after the shooting, I was taking the 96 bus through Capitol Heights, and as we got closer to Southeast, I felt a strong bitterness from my people growing, and everyone I saw had this unforgiveness in their faces—they just seemed so angry and bitter.

Understandably, we are upset about racism. Justice is not being served equally, and there is a lot of discrimination. This violent act of terror, fresh in people's hearts and minds, makes us mad at a world that sees us as *less-than*. But we are not born to hate other races. We learn it. When I encounter racism, I want to figure out WHY they hate. It's not gonna help to get angry at the racist—I'm gonna respond with love. I'm gonna make that a teaching moment so they can know about their behavior. Even if they know it's wrong, perhaps now they'll go home and go think about it—I have started a plant and now it can grow.

(Continued on page 4)

JG'S WORDS OF WISDOM

By JG, FM Member

When I think of the idea of moving forward I think of the element of water. Water, when in its natural state, is always fluid, flowing, never stagnant. I think there's a lesson to be learned here, in the sense that we are supposed to be the same way, never stagnant. I think most of us have a habit of focusing so much time and energy on things that are out of our control or influence to the point where it paralyzes us, or even, makes us move backwards instead of forward. It's really a waste of time and energy to worry about these things, we'd be much better off just acknowledging what is, without becoming emotional about it. Observing without absorbing. Then keep it moving, because there is so much that we can change and/or influence as it pertains to us and our condition in life. When we focus on our goals and what we want, always looking at the glass as half full, we'll always remain in a state of forward motion. We just have to begin to practice identifying all the things we can't change, once we do this we won't give it any life whatsoever, then we can flow like water.





THE WRITE WAY

Moving (the Plot) Forward

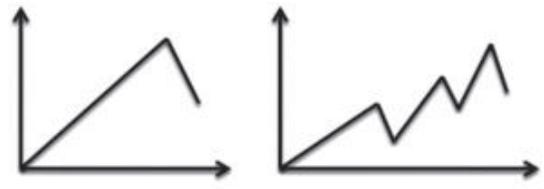
By Julia

When you're writing a short story or a novel, one of the most important things to think about is the plot: what happens, and in what order. For me, coming up with a good plot to drive the story forward and keep the reader hooked is one of the hardest parts of writing. There's a lot that goes into making a good plot good—fortunately, there are some guidelines to help us out along the way.

The plot generally follows a similar arc: the action should build throughout the story to a dramatic conflict (often called the climax of the story), and then the resolution. I think of the plot as having four stages:

- 1. Introduction:** Introduce the main characters, the setting, the situation, and the conflict. What is this story about? Who are the main characters?
- 2. Rising tension:** This is the most elastic part of the story, that can stretch to most of the book. The situation should be changing so it gets more tense, the stakes for the main character get higher, and the reader keeps turning the page to find out what's going to happen next!
- 3. Climax:** This is when everything crashes. The biggest, most dramatic moment in the story. In an action movie, this is the big fight scene at the end. In a love story, this is when the couple breaks up before getting back together in the end.
- 4. Resolution:** The aftermath. When the dust settles, this is usually a kind of quiet moment for the characters, where the reader has a chance to breathe, or to cry if it's a sad story! We get an idea of what the future will hold for the main character.

Imagine you're making a chart of your plot. Along the bottom, going from left to right, you have the passage of time in your story. On the left, going from the bottom to the top, you have the level of drama—how intense is each chapter or scene in the story. In the first chart, you have a plot where the **rising tension** increases steadily until it reaches the highest point, the climax, and then the resolution. In the second chart, you have a plot where the **rising tension** is more like a series of dramatic moments, each one bigger than the last, until you get to the climax and resolution. Try making a chart like this of your own book!



Writing Prompt: Aftermath Write about the moment after something big happened (this can be something that really happened, or something you made up).

God Willing, God Bless

By MA

In order to move forward
 I had to let go of the things holding me down
 I had to learn to swim
 In order for me not to drown
 I had to admit that I was lost
 In order for me to be found
 I had to stop stressing about the past
 In order for me to start living in the now
 In order to effect the future
 We must understand the pre-sent
 I am now moving forward with the gift of today
 That's why it's called the present
 Moving forward one day at a time

(FORGIVENESS Continued from page 3)

We all fail at perfection and justice. Even when we do get justice, we always want more. When we are angry, we look to other places to pour our bitterness. Unfortunately, when we don't forgive others, we can't be fixed by their punishment because our hearts are not in the right place. People don't want to get themselves fixed, they just want to fix others.

What happened in Charleston is horrific. But these injustices happen every day. It is those moments, when people look down on me, when they hurt me, when they degrade me, I remind myself to *forgive them, for know not what they do*. When the families of the victims in Charleston came forward to Dylann and said, "We forgive you, we love you," everybody was moved by that, and that was my confirmation. If your mind is set free; if your heart is set free, no matter how many chains someone puts on you, you still have that freedom.

I truly believe that the only way for our nation to heal is if each person gets healed of their own issues. Justice comes from the inside out, and forgiveness leads to freedom.



FAMILY TIES

The column where FM family and loved ones weigh in. This month, Seana sits down with Free Minds mom CW to discuss how she managed to move forward with her life, while maintaining a close relationship with her son who is serving a long sentence.

Do you think there is a difference between “Moving Forward” and “Moving On” when you have a child who is incarcerated? I see families, especially mothers, react one of two ways when their children are incarcerated. Some “Move On” and forget about their child. They go party and live their lives and consider their child to be on their own. Others, like myself, “Move Forward” with their lives and take their incarcerated child with them for the journey. I am his mother and I can’t just leave him. Family is all you have in situations like these and his father isn’t any help so it is even more important to be there for him. I am going to be there for my child no matter what.

How have you helped yourself and your other children move forward? I have three other children, all girls. They took it hard when he was sentenced because they were so close with him growing up. Our family has leaned on God, which has helped a lot. We believe He has the last say, not us, and know He’s going to bring my son home to us in His time not our time. I went to therapy which really helped me. I went to my primary care physician a few years ago and told him about everything that was going on in my life and said I was probably feeling depressed which was natural. She really helped me. Every time I left her office I felt so relieved and happier. My smile was bigger. I’ve always been a happy person but the therapy really helped. I would definitely recommend it to other moms out there.

What would you say to other moms and families going through similar situations? To pray and turn to their faith. Everyone believes in something. I felt relief putting the situation in God’s hands. I would recommend seeing a therapist, based on the positive experience I had. I was surprised by my son’s arrest. He was always a good kid and it was a lot to deal with on my own which is why church and therapy helped. It can be very stressful having an incarcerated child. I worry for his safety in there but try to stay positive when I talk to him and remember all the fun we used to have. He was always joking around and was yelling, “Ma, ma, ma, ma,” no matter how old he was. When I would say “What!” he would just smile, laugh and say “I love you.” He was always calling for me.

How do you stay connected with your son now? We write and email each other all the time and he calls when he can. I try to visit him as often as possible. I am afraid of planes and bridges so I worry he will be transferred somewhere far away which would make it more difficult to visit him. Right now, I take the bus to see him and get to spend eight hours visiting with him at a time.

Would anyone in your family like to write a piece for The Connect? Tell them to send it to Kelli at Free Minds, 2201 P Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037.

ASK HF: ADVICE FROM THE INSIDE

Dear H.F., I’m locked up, but I also have a brother that’s doing 70 years (life). Sometimes it’s hard communicating with my brother because I don’t know where his head is at. I know a lot of it is because the calls and letters are so thoroughly monitored so the conversation is always brief. How do I get through to my brother, who is now 36 and went in at the age of 16, and get him to open up to me? –KB

Dear KB,

I too, like your brother, came to prison at the age of 16, and I will be 35 next month. I once was bitter about a lot of my loved ones that failed to stay in touch with me because it appeared they were no longer concerned about my well-being.

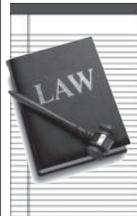
What I’ve learned over the years is that most guys in prison just want to know they are loved and have not been forgotten. A simple letter, a card, a postcard, a few pictures from Flikshop of how the neighborhood looks now and a view of the new baseball stadium, just something to remind us someone in the world is still thinking about us and wants us to see how the world is changing.

I believe love conquers all things, so whatever it is you desire to “get through” to your brother, begin from a foundation of loving him and allow every expression of love you attempt to originate from a sincere and genuine place. It does not have to be BIG things, often it is the “consistent” little things that build momentum to penetrate barriers we want to get through. Something as fluid and delicate as a simple drop of water in the same spot can cause corrosion that will break through the strongest steel.

Your FM Brother, HF

THE LEGAL PAD

by Janet, FM Friend and DC Attorney



Welcome to our new column which will look at legal issues that might have practical consequences for you or will teach you something about the legal system in the United States. Thank you FM friend Janet for taking the time out of your busy days in court to share your legal knowledge!

How many of you guys went through your legal experiences not sure about what your rights were or what the law says about certain situations? For instance, most of you know about your “right to remain silent,” but did you know that right is not written in the U.S. Constitution or Bill of Rights but actually comes from two Supreme Court cases not decided until the 1960s? *Escobedo v. Illinois*, 378 U.S. 478 (1964) and *Miranda v. Arizona*, 384 U.S. 436 (1966), established this important right. *Escobedo v. Illinois* ruled that criminal suspects have a right to counsel not just at trial but during police interrogations and *Miranda v. Arizona* held that once a person was placed in custody the police were required to advise them of their right to remain silent, of the fact that anything they said could be used against them, and of their right to an attorney.

Another thing you might not know is that after you have been sentenced, depending on what type of sentence you got, it may be possible to request that the judge reduce the time you have to serve.

(Continued on page 6)

PAYING IT FORWARD

By Melanie, FM Friend

What if I told you that you could walk into a restaurant and order anything off the menu, regardless of what you had in your wallet? Community cafes across the country are offering just that opportunity.

Here's the concept: You can volunteer to earn your meal by working (cooking, cleaning, washing dishes), pay the suggested price or less, or you can overpay. If you overpay, a future customer who can't afford the bill will get to eat for free. In 2003, Denise Cerreta opened the first of these pay-what-you-can cafes in Salt Lake City. To date, nearly 60 of the cafes have opened in the U.S. Many more are in the works, including one in the DC area. Generally, 80% of customers pay the suggested price or more, and the rest pay less or volunteer for meals.

"I think the community cafe is truly a hand up, not a handout," Cerreta said. She acknowledged that soup kitchens have a place in society, but people typically don't feel good about going there.

The bonus of this concept, she says, is that "everyone eats, but no one needs to know whether you volunteered, underpaid or overpaid. You can maintain your dignity and eat organic, healthy, local food."

The successful cafes not only address hunger, but also become important parts of their neighborhoods—whether it's a place to learn skills or hear live music. Some enlist culinary school students as volunteers, some teach cooking to seniors, some offer free used books. Eating or working there is a reminder that we're all in this world together; the cafes seem to provide a much-needed glue in the communities they call home.



Recently, I decided to work for my meal at the Healthy World Café in York, Pennsylvania. My shift began with the cafe manager running through an orientation about food safety. I put on a nametag and ball cap and started my first job: weighing 1 1/2 -ounce balls of dough and rolling them out for chapatis (a flatbread that's kind of like pita). A man I'd met that morning on the sidewalk — Tony, who I'd learned had been unemployed and homeless — came in and played the piano, which he does daily to earn his lunch.

Customers arrived, including a few in business suits, a judge and a group of shelter residents who cleaned trash off the block in exchange for their lunches. With beautiful piano music in the background and a constant flow of orders, the hours passed quickly. At the end of my 3-hour shift, I took off my nametag and ordered my earned meal at the counter. A few

other volunteers and I ate together — dishes of butternut squash and red lentil curry soup (with my chapati on the side), roasted radish salad and house-pickled vegetables.

After lunch, I called out "Bye!" to Tony at the piano.

Tony looked up from counting his tips, smiling. "Bye, sweetie," he said. Then I walked out the door, with a handful of new friends, music in my head and a satisfied belly and heart.

(THE LEGAL PAD Continued from page 5)

It is pretty unusual for a judge to do that so don't get your hopes up but no harm in trying, right? If you have a case where you didn't get a mandatory sentence or didn't take a plea where you agreed to the sentence in advance (a Rule 11(e)(1)(c) plea), then you can file what is referred to as a Rule 35 Motion to reduce your sentence. (Superior Court Rule of Criminal Procedure 35(b). You need to file this motion within 120 days (4 months) of when you were sentenced or when your appeal was handed down. If your sentence or appeal happened more than 120 days ago you can still file a motion but you need to include the *Smith* case which ruled that this time frame can be waived. *Smith v. United States*, 984 A.2d 196 (D.C. 2009).

In your motion to the Judge include all the activities and classes and programs that you have been involved in since you were locked up. Talk about how you spend your days (good and bad) and what it is like being locked up away from your family. Talk about what books you are reading that have helped you change your attitude, poems you have written, dreams for your future and concrete ideas about what you will do when you get released. **You should only file this motion if you took a plea and therefore did not appeal your case or if you have already lost your appeal. If your appeal hasn't been ruled on yet, wait to file the motion. Always see if you can get your lawyer to file this for you first before you do anything.**

QUOTE-I-VATOR

"The first step towards getting somewhere is to decide that you are not going to stay where you are." –Unknown

"If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. But whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward." –MLK

"There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind." –C.S. Lewis



BY FM MEMBERS AND FRIENDS



Washing My Hands

Poem and Drawing By CT, FM Friend

My belief in my ability
To be productive
Can't, don't, won't change
My past with others
In an attempt to cleanse
my heart
I've let things go
Trying to be different

I strive to think so
Releasing my heart from
a life
I've never questioned
On to the unknown
Full of them
And the key to it all-
I want better

Outta Sight Outta Mind

By JF, FM Member

Sitting here as my mind races a thousand miles
The last time I was almost free, I was in trial
My family was there and so was the judge
When I needed him the most, he was up and above
Now that I'm here and they are there
It seems to me that they don't really care
Time moved on, they did too
Where are all the people in the world

Sing Me A Song

By DH, FM Member

Sing me a song that's soft for my ears
A melodic one I can share with my peers
Harmonize with my heart and remove all my fears
Your tender words are like hands
So wipe away my tears
The tears of a boy who can't cry without shame
Or the tears of a man who can't live without pain
Sing me a lullabye so real I can touch it
Make it delicate and smooth
Be patient don't rush it
Bring it into existence
Like giving birth without pushing
It should happen cautiously
Like swimming without looking
Sing me a lyric followed by many more
That isn't filled with destruction and doesn't
talk about war
It never accompanies violence
Just truth, compassion and love
Can't even exist with hate
And sets my soul free as a dove

Just 'Cause

By DJ, FM Member

It was only a matter of time
Just 'cause
I'm in da house, so let me shine
Just 'cause
Dey say the strong survive
Just 'cause
The struggle dat da feds put me through
Just 'cause
Dis is my grind
My life or death dat I climb

Moving On

By QS, FM Friend

It was like a lifetime passed right through my fingers
What ifs plagued me like phantom hounds
Echoes of *coulda, woulda, shoulda* fly into emptiness
I'm haunted by the ghost of a distant stranger I once knew
So long ago, in my past
That distant stranger is me
My voice still calls to me loud and clear
Through the mist of time
But I ignore him, I must keep moving on
What is it about moving on that I'm afraid of?
Is it the fear of possibilities?
That I just might succeed?
Only God knows how tomorrow will unfold
As I move forward, all I can do is reminisce because
there's no rewinding my life
So I will continue on with a sense of purpose and humility
Towards a future so bright, it's almost blinding my sight
When I get there, if I get there, I will get there
I won't forget the undeniable courage it took to see the
future through
To move on





IN THE NEWS

By John, FM Friend

World News

The biggest news on the world stage in recent months is without a doubt the international agreement reached between Iran and several other world powers, including the United States.

Iran has been developing its capacity to use nuclear power for a long time. Its leaders have repeatedly stated that they want to use that power only as an energy source.

But many Western powers believe that Iran would like to join a very small and dangerous club: the countries with nuclear weapons. As Iran has developed its nuclear capacity, the United States and others have imposed painful sanctions that have crippled its economy.

The agreement puts in place a pledge from Iran not to develop nuclear weapons, and permits inspections to certify that pledge from outside parties like the United Nations. In exchange for that, the U.S. and others will roll back some of the harsh economic punishments and allow Iran's economy to improve.

While President Obama has signed onto the agreement, Congress has yet to fully approve American support for it. Several Congressional leaders have questioned the strength of the deal, saying that the world gave up too much to Iran without absolute assurance in return.

Whatever Congress decides will be a major decision in the history of international relations.

National

On the domestic front, President Obama recently became the first president to visit a federal prison while in office. He spent time at the El Reno Federal Penitentiary in Oklahoma in July.

Obama has joined a growing chorus of leaders in both political parties who would like to see serious reforms made to the nation's criminal justice system.

He recently called America's system "particularly skewed by race and by wealth, a source of inequity that has ripple effects on families and on communities and ultimately on our nation."

In the same month as his visit to El Reno, Obama granted clemency to 46 inmates, most of whom were incarcerated for non-violent offenses under mandatory minimum sentencing laws.

While Obama finishes the final years of his tenure in Washington, the race to see who will replace him has become somewhat of a free-for-all. Here is a look at where things stand with both parties.

Republicans: As of right now, the frontrunner for the Republican nomination is billionaire Donald Trump, who has appealed to voters that are tired of sending practiced politicians in Washington.

Trump's closest competitor, at the moment, is Dr. Ben Carson, a former neurosurgeon and author.

Here's the crazy thing: Trump hasn't even really decided he's a Republican! By the time you read this, he might have decided

to run an independent campaign and battle the winners of both parties. He certainly has enough money to do so if he wants.

Both Trump and Carson represent a shift in the Republican party that seems to reward new faces and not career politicians. Among the candidates trailing the two outsiders are several current or former governors, and U.S. Senators.

Democrats: The Democratic race to choose a successor to Obama is neater, but far more tightly contested than most expected. Hillary Clinton remains the favorite, despite being battered in the media for a scandal involving her use of private email servers in the transmission of classified information when she served as Secretary of State.

But Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont is trailing Clinton by only 3 percent in Iowa, the state that will host the first primary elections. Sanders has campaigned on a promise to support the middle class and attack income inequality in America.

He supports an increase in the federal minimum wage to \$15, and wants to roll back trade agreements with Mexico, China and others that he believes have cost millions of American jobs.

Sanders has also proposed a \$5.5 billion youth jobs program.

Sports

Well, we are still a few weeks from the opening snaps of the NFL season, and already the Redskins have a quarterback fiasco. The coaches and management spent all winter saying that Robert Griffin III would begin the year as their starter.

In his first preseason action, he was sacked several times and concussed on one play that sent him out of the game. And already, the coaches have reversed themselves and said that Kirk Cousins is their starter for the 2015 season.

If it's the end of the RG3 era in D.C., it is truly a sad and bizarre one. The Skins drafted Cousins several rounds after Griffin, confusing pretty much every journalist and talking head that covered the team. Cousins was expected to compete elsewhere for a starting job, not serve as a backup to another rookie.

In a strange way, this week's events validated the decision to take two guys. But it will probably haunt the team for at least a few more years that it traded multiple number one picks away to acquire Griffin.

In baseball, there is one month remaining in the 2015 season and the Washington Nationals are on death's door. They are six games behind the New York Mets for first place in the National League East, and they are several games out of the Wild Card race.

If they miss the playoffs, 2015 will still be forever known in Nats history as the year that Bryce Harper became "The Man." His numbers so far: 31 Home Runs, 139 Hits, and an astounding .458 On Base Percentage.

And if you're really searching hard for some good news in DMV sports: get ready for the Terps! The University of Maryland's basketball program is looking like it could contend for a national title. The squad brings star point guard Melo Trimble, forward Jake Layman, and welcomes 5-Star freshman center Diamond Stone.



REENTRY PROFILE: LIVING PROOF

By Logan, FM Friend

In this column we will bring you the success stories of returning citizens who have overcome the tremendous obstacles of reentry and inspire us with their courage and tenacity. Logan spent ten years in prison before coming home and changing his life (and the lives of others). He is also a master story-teller! Check out part one of Logan's story (Part two in our next Issue!).

I was born in 1975 in Portland, Oregon-- the first child of a 15 year-old mother and an 18 year-old father. Both were caught up in the street life (pushers, pimps, prostitutes and petty thieves). I was a product of the funky 70's: afros, blowout perms, bell bottom suits, butterfly collars and Cadillacs with the super fly headlights.

Because of my parents' age and lifestyle, I was raised by my mom's older sister. But my Auntie and her abusive boyfriend were both addicted to heroin and we were constantly moving. My fondest memory was when we stayed above a soul food diner right on the track where the prostitutes and pimps congregated day and night. My home looked like the opening scene to the movie "Menace to Society", loud music, and people drinking and smoking marijuana while passing around plates of cocaine. Those parties lasted all night. Each morning, I had to fend for myself, because everyone was asleep from partying. Breakfast came from the man who owned the restaurant below or from prostitutes who knew my situation. When my Auntie awoke late in the afternoon, she would take me with her while she hustled. Dinners were stolen from the super market. She would stuff my little pants with hotdogs and hers with chicken and steak. Then she would drive around and push me thru windows to open the door for her while she robbed the home of drugs and money.

One night after being abused by my Auntie's boyfriend, I awoke to my other Auntie picking me up outta the bed and whisking me off to my grandmother's house where she did her best to instill love and security in my life. But by then my young eyes had witnessed too much. Both of my parents and all of my uncles (except for one that had had been shot and became a paraplegic) were in the federal pen.

I shared the basement with my cousin who was in high school. He introduced me to my new passions: sports, breakdancing and hip hop. My dream was to become a running back for the Dallas Cowboys like Tony Dorsett, and buy my grandmother a big house. On the night that I should have been enjoying our win of the Pop Warner Championship with my teammates and our families, instead I was on the curb outside of a bullet riddled house where my best friend's uncle lived accepting a life time contract with one of the most notorious gangs on earth "The Crips." It wasn't a hard decision for a kid with no positive male figure in his life being raised by the realities of his environment.

Just like that I gave up what I loved for a life of pain. Yet the crazy thing about "gang culture" is that it will make you believe pain is love if you have never felt loved. I say that because every time that you retaliate and cause pain on your enemies, your associates in your gang love you more. It's a sick culture. From the age of 12, I talked like a Crip. I walked like a Crip. I dressed like a Crip. My motivation each day that I awoke was to do as Crips do. When I wasn't seeking out enemies to bring pain to, I was selling drugs to support my gang banging lifestyle.

To be continued...

Moving Forward

By WD, FM Friend

Whether your heart is golden, or frozen
It still beats, after all it's been through
And upon reevaluation
You see the condition of your heart more clearly
And begin to question the charisma of the organ that you
 have followed
And allowed to influence your decision making all these years
All the tears that were never seen
It seemed like reality would disappear
And you would wake up from a nightmare

Telling yourself that it was all a dream
A traumatic illusion that you must forget
But it was real
Without anyone, or anything you stand still
Moving forward at a turtle-speed pace
But you straight
Because you are not in a race
So you can move as slow as you want
But you can't afford to stop moving forward

Moving Forward

By TE, FM Member

Moving forward has not been the easiest thing for me to do. Nor should it be. If people only knew the half of what I done seen and been through at such young age, they would understand why. Being incarcerated has really helped me move forward from the lifestyle I once lived. I'm pretty sure that's why most of us young black men are incarcerated now--for not moving forward. When I first got incarcerated I still had a lot of hurt and anger built up inside. Once I finally got a chance to sit down and talk to professionals about what I been through, I realized moving forward is not a bad thing to do. I know you all wondering why I had to get locked up to realize that. Well, like most of us when I was on the streets I did not really sit down and talk to anyone. And now I am paying for it. I'm just glad that I will have a second chance in life to move forward. Moving forward feels so good. Not only does it feel good, it helps you see everything you can gain. It also makes you stronger. So if I can move forward, so can you!



REAL WORLD OF WORK

Free Minds interviews Nick, a Quality Assurance (QA) tester intern at a prominent video game developer and publisher. Six days a week, Nick studies and tests video games for bugs, and then provides feedback on gameplay issues. Nick is a millennial with a passion for web development, gaming, and music.

Free Minds: So, Nick, how did you decide to get into the tech industry?

Good question! It's funny, I was a criminal justice and political science major in college. Even then I kind of knew I wanted to do computer stuff. But the cool thing about the tech industry is none of them really care about your degree. [I guess] your degree gives you the skills they care about, which is what college is *supposed* to be about. I always liked playing games, building games, stuff like that, but I thought, 'I can't be the web development guy, because that's too nerdy!' But once you're 24, it doesn't really matter anymore.

What do you love about testing video games and designing websites?

There's always something to learn. There's really nothing else like it. Even though there's an overwhelming amount for you to learn in web development, you don't need to know all those things at first. When you're looking for jobs, [companies will be looking for] front end developers and back end developers. The front end developers decide what a website looks like, whereas back end developers are in charge of what stuff a website hosts, like information and databases. You can either fill a niche or try to learn it all but it's all fun. It's always changing. When you read a blog from 5 years ago, what they're talking about may or not be relevant today because it's such a dynamic industry, and I love that.

What things are less enjoyable?

Almost any technical job can be pretty tedious. But most of the time there's all sorts of great ways to get around the tedium (*note: this word means boredom, routine, monotony*). I'm pretty visionary—I see what I want to do, and then I do it. I love to program, I love diving into the code, but it can definitely be tedious when you're getting errors and trying to figure out why. It could be that you put a negative sign when you should have put a positive sign, or you forgot a semicolon somewhere in the code. At the same time, the field allows [for] a lot of experimentation.

What are some skills required to be successful?

What makes a great web-developer is your passion for it. It's probably one of the most unique industries [out there]. I'm sure a lot of people [think about getting] into it for the money, but you're not a web developer if you're in it for the money. Web developers get into it because they absolutely love creating websites, web apps... there are so many things to do with web design, like creating Facebook, or mint.com [*note: a website for managing one's personal budget*]. People go to a website and in 5 seconds they decide whether or not they want to stay on that website.... [My goal] is to design a website that grabs people.

REENTRY SPOTLIGHT

By Keela

What's up guys?! You know our goal is to get you started on a productive path as soon as you touch down so be proactive and look into some of these opportunities! And don't procrastinate because as they say "*procrastination is like a credit card: it's a lot of fun until you get the bill.*" As always, we're here to assist you with contacting any of these organizations.

CRST Expedited – A CDL company that offers hands-on training with no experience necessary to start! Training lasts 2-3 weeks and once you're done, you can be on the road traveling the country as a licensed truck driver! Sound too good to be true? Well, I thought the same thing until one your very own Free Minds brothers was hired there this past March! Yes, he has felonies on his record, but he is right at this very moment, traveling the country as a licensed CDL driver! I know, because I helped him with the process. He sends us pictures and videos of all the sights that he's seen while traveling to different states! **If you're interested, call 866-463-4515 for more information.** You do need a driver's license to drive for CRST, however, do not let this deter you because Free Minds can help you with this too.

Leadership Empowerment Advocacy Program – L.E.A.P., a program for fathers ages 18-24. L.E.A.P leaders have access to GED, computer classes, financial literacy and career exploration courses, social services, counseling, and advocacy support. Participate in workshops, trainings and conferences designed to support your growth, expand your horizons and cultivate your evolution to become powerful, confident men, prepared to lead your families and communities. **L.E.A.P: 2357 Angier Place SE, Washington DC 20020 or call 202-652-1569.** Until next time, keep your mind Free by reading lots of books and of course writing to us! We look forward to seeing you upon your return to the community!

REMINDER: If you will be coming home soon, let us know your release date so we can reserve a spot for you in our one-month paid apprenticeship program!

Coming home in the next 6 months? Write us a letter or give us a call at 202-758-0829 so we can help you plan for reentry!

What kind of personality would be successful in this industry?

You gotta have the willingness to be wrong. In web development, if you make a mistake, you fix it and learn from it. You learn a lot through errors, so it's hard to succeed if you're unwilling to make mistakes. It also doesn't work if you're inflexible, because the industry changes all the time. It's all about the passion!

***The nonprofit Byte Back provides IT training for free to DC residents! Ask Ms. Keela how to enroll when you come home if you are interested in a career in Information Technology.**



AROUND THE WORLD...

Moving Forward Takes a Different Direction: Another View from the Mountains of KENYA

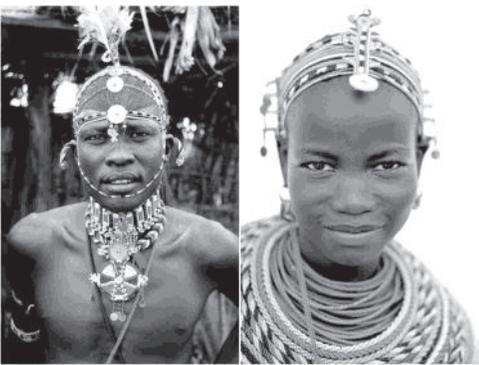
By Carol, FM Friend

Robert was herding goats and cows at the age of five. He and his brothers tended to livestock every day as members of the Samburu tribe living in northeast rural Kenya. Most days Robert took his role quite seriously; he was, after all, part of a tribe that subscribes to traditions and practices dating back to the 15th century! But Robert was also a young, energetic boy, who found it difficult to resist playing in the field or creating mischief with his friends. One day Robert ran off with friends to hunt for small animals without permission. When he returned home he was punished by his father and forced to wear a band of green beads around his neck—a symbol of naughty behavior and dishonorable character. When his behavior did not improve, he was sent off in disgrace to a boarding school hundreds of miles from his family and friends.

I met Robert, now 30, when my husband, our two sons (18-year-old twins) and I were visiting the Samburu National Reserve in North Kenya where he is a safari guide. “I was a scrawny kid who couldn’t read or write,” says Robert, who now speaks several languages. “I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to go to school. I took my studies very seriously. I knew if I got kicked out of school, I would have nowhere else to go.”

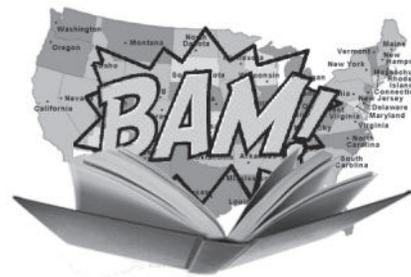
One evening our family traveled with Robert to a local village. Our jeep bumped down rutted dirt roads for nearly an hour to the settlement’s current location (the tribes are nomadic shepherds and relocate every 5-6 weeks in search of new pastures for their cattle). The settlement consisted of huts built in a rough circle with open space in the center for their cattle. The circle is surrounded by a fence made of twigs and thorn bushes that protects the people and their cattle from predators, namely buffalo and lions. Each hut, constructed by the women in the tribe, is built out of mud, sticks and cow dung. Cardboard remnants, discarded plastic, and old clothing often line the roof. Each hut houses one family; up to 15 people can live in a hut half the size of an average American parking space! One family welcomed us into their home. Together we sat listening to tales of tradition and learned many interesting facts about the Samburu people:

- Both men and women wear extremely bright colors. They adorn themselves with necklaces, bracelets and anklets.
- The Samburu people’s diet consists entirely of milk and cow blood! The blood is drawn by piercing the vein of a cow with a spear or knife. The wound is then resealed with hot ashes. (Meat is eaten only on special occasions and during ceremonies such as the birth of a child, circumcision and marriage).
- The Samburu pray to their God, Nkai, who they believe dwells in the mountains. They also believe in an evil spirit called Milika.
- Fighting is not allowed. When there are problems, individuals go to the elders of the village to settle disputes (elders occupy a very important place in the Samburu society and all the power rests with them).
- When a person between the ages of 5-60 dies, he/she is wrapped in cow skins and left in the wilderness to be eaten by animals.



My family and I were touched by the Samburu people—a people who are materially very poor, but emotionally and socially very rich. What really struck us was their sense of belonging--to a place and to each other. But we wondered how long these indigenous people could survive. Cattle numbers are declining due to climate changes and less rain. My boys wondered how they could resist the technology spreading over their land (we actually saw a few shepherds talking on cell phones)! I asked Robert if he thought change was inevitable. He said he hoped not. He said, “Access to many resources and conveniences often leaves one’s soul empty. We believe in community, brotherhood, altruism. We exist not for ourselves but for others. We don’t believe change always means growth nor does movement always mean forward.”

In our relentless search for success and happiness, is it possible we have alienated ourselves from our deepest human needs--connections to each other? The Samburu people still perhaps understand those connections better than most.

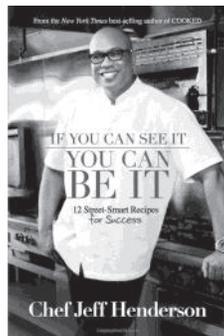


BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES UPDATE

By Julia

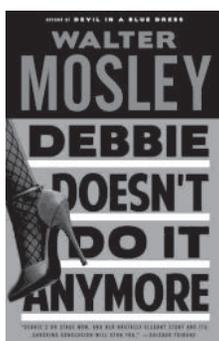
Hello wonderful Free Minds readers! Here are some of your reviews of *If You Can See It, You Can Be It: 12 Street-Smart Recipes for Success* by Chef Jeff Henderson:



“I like the title. It’s meaningful and has some powerful statements inside of it that is much encouragement. We are on lockdown right now so it gives me more to do with myself.” – RD

“This book really opened up my eyes about certain situations. It allowed me to get better in touch with myself. I’m learning more and more about how Chef Jeff Henderson really survived while being in jail. It also showed me that yeah I lived a rough life but at the end of the day I’m still living.” – LB

“It may be the best book by far!! Because as I was skimming through it I noticed it has stuff you can write down and see what’s your best character trait you possess. I like that! I want to get a composition book because I wanna write a lot of that stuff down to see what I get!” – DG



Our next BAM book is the novel *Debbie Doesn't Do It Anymore*, by Walter Mosley, author of novels such as *Devil in a Blue Dress*. Debbie Dare is a famous porn star, but one day she comes home to find her husband dead in a bathtub with another woman. Where will she go from here? You should receive this book soon if you haven't already!

As you read, think about the following questions:

- How does the author get inside the character’s head? Is she a likeable character? Do you feel empathy for Debbie?
- What choices or situations led Debbie to becoming a porn star? How did pornography affect her life?
- How does Debbie deal with her husband’s death? What impact does his cheating have on her? What would you do if you were in her situation?

We want your reviews!!! Send them to Free Minds: 2201 P Street NW, Washington, DC 20037.

WHAT THE YOUNG'UNS ARE READING

Your brothers at Book Club are reading *Return to Paradise*, by Simone Elkeles (the sequel to *Leaving Paradise*). The series tells the story of Caleb Becker, a high school senior who has just been released after serving a year in juvie for a drunk driving accident that left his classmate, Maggie Armstrong with a devastating leg injury. The thing is, Caleb wasn't driving the car! When he returns to his hometown of Paradise, all heck breaks loose. Not least because he and Maggie start to fall for each other! The guys have LOVED this series. Let us know if you'd like to check it out.



NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: Family

We tend to think of family as our biological mother, father, sisters and brothers. Maybe grandparents and cousins...Not everyone has close ties to the family we were born into. What about the family we choose? The people about whom we say: “He’s like a brother to me.” Whether related by blood or by experience, who is your family? Write about traits you got from your family members you like or don’t like. What kind of family are you creating now, or do you dream of creating? Send us your poems, reflections and artwork on FAMILY!!! **Use personal examples in your writing! Your stories matter! Dig deep and share with us!**

Until the next time, stay strong and keep your mind FREE!

