

June/July 2023  
Vol. 12, Issue 3

# Free minds Connect

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THIS  
ISSUE

## HOME TOWN PRIDE

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: BETTER TOGETHER

Greetings Free Minds Neighbors!

I was on the Metro this weekend and a family visiting from Japan asked me for directions to the museums on the National Mall. I was in a rush and my first thought was, "Ugh, more tourists!" And then I thought of this issue on Hometown Pride and I immediately said to myself, "Wait, I'm going to be a DC Ambassador." So I made sure they added local DC sites to their itinerary, along with the famous tourist attractions. I raved about the wonderful historical and cultural spaces like Frederick Douglass House and the Anacostia Museum among others, and beautiful outdoor sites like Rock Creek Park and the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens. I wish I'd had this issue with me, so I could have shown them the selection of FM members' favorite spots on page 24!

I feel great affection and pride for DC, as well as alternating parts of love, exasperation, anger, and hope. I think we all feel complex things about places that we care about; we love and appreciate our communities, and we often want more, and better for them as well. I grew up outside Philadelphia, and feel a strong bond to that city as it is my hometown, but I've lived in DC for over 30 years at this point. While my roots may not have originated here, in the last few decades I feel that I've grown strong roots in the DC community. I know it's because of all of you. Even if you aren't from DC, when I think of our Free Minds community, I feel a tremendous sense of warmth and belonging, all wrapped up in DC and you all.

I hope this issue will bring you this same sense of belonging as you dive into the pages, no matter where you are from or what place you call home. We hope you will all have the same feeling about Free Minds, and we can bring a smile to your face when you connect with our awesome community. I bet that a big smile will spread on many of your faces when you read our new column dedicated to all things DC. You can thank Sofia for getting out and about and bringing us the sights, sounds, and tastes (!) of the Afro-Latino Festival for the inaugural DC Culture column. Yum, you'll be able to smell those empanadas on page 30!

DC residents all too often have to deal with the overbearing presence of the federal government due to our non-state status, as you know all too well, but DC has grit and determination. On page 16, you'll read about FM members like Deangelo joining a coalition to say "hands off" our local government. The Capitol might be taller than the Wilson

Building (the seat of the DC government), but our voices can reach the sky! See our friend John's explainer of just some of what's been going on with congressional meddling in DC affairs on page 28. We know what democracy should look like! Check out page 27 for a profile of our friends at Harriet's Wildest Dreams who never stop inspiring us with their vision of liberation and love. Most of all, thinking about DC's non-state status reminds me of our Advice Man, who tells us on page 10 to never give up. This column will motivate you to keep striving for your goals, no matter what obstacles you may encounter.

On his path to reach his goals, Antoine reached back to people he knew from his roots in DC and those who were there for him as a kid, and now he's an artist in residence at a local gallery, sharing his powerful poetry with all visitors (page 33)! How's that for a full circle? On page 38, Aneka literally went on a full circle to the other side of the world to Asia to bring us back experiences from Taipei, Taiwan, and Bali. Take a trip and immerse yourself in the words of our resident globetrotter. We all can't wait to find out where she's off to next! In *Conversaciones de Mentas Libres* (35), Carlos describes how he opened his mind and heart to his native Honduras after being forced to leave DC behind. Carlos delves deep into his journey as well in an interview with Janet on page 6.

I have to close with the poetry in this issue. What an ode to hometown pride. Soak it all in! Thank you BM for this beautiful verse that we can all apply to that special place in our heart known as our home:

*Amazing Grace, to one amazing place  
How sweet the sound, Washingtonian bound  
I once was lost, but now I'm found  
Especially when reflecting, all things my town*

Thank you all for bringing so much reflection and pride to Free Minds!

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: Growth**

*The Connect is a bimonthly creative writing magazine published by the members, staff, and friends of the Free Minds Book Club. Each issue focuses on a specific theme as well as highlights the discussions of the Free Minds long distance BAM! (Books Across the Miles) book club. We publish five issues per year.*



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

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

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# FREE MINDS HQ

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

By Ariel

## Lashonia Thompson-El's Author Visit to the Women's Book Club

In late May and early June, author and advocate Lashonia Thompson-El co-facilitated two Women's Book Club sessions focused on her book, *Through the WIRE: My Search for Redemption*. Lashonia's work is a powerful personal narrative about violence, motherhood, incarceration, and healing. Our members were eager to discuss the book with Lashonia, as several shared that reading Lashonia's story felt like reading their own. Asking Lashonia questions prompted meaningful group reflection about learning and unlearning violence, letting go of anger, and cycles of trauma between mothers and daughters. We are so grateful that she was able to come and spark such passionate conversations.

## Cedric Nash's Author Visit

We were also thrilled to bring Cedric Nash, author of *Why Should White Guys Have All the Wealth?*, to visit members in our book clubs at the DC Jail! Cedric's book uses personal anecdotes, statistics, and humor to map out how anyone can build wealth. His motivation for writing this book was confronting the racial wealth gap and exposing how Black people have been systematically cut out of the big "pie" of wealth. In his talks with both the WBC and Lead Up, Cedric focused on patience, reminding members that building wealth takes time, sacrifice, and passion. He asked everyone their passions, and it was wonderful to hear the diversity of our members' responses, ranging from music to carpentry to motivational speaking! Cedric assured members that they can achieve any of their goals, especially if they follow his tips such as investing in assets and focusing on personal fulfillment rather than material objects. He said the experience of entering the DC Jail and receiving such positive and heartfelt feedback from Free Minds members was more fulfilling than any fancy cars or clothing he has bought. We are so grateful that he was able to engage in meaningful discussions about financial literacy with our members!

## Hands Off DC Rally

On June 7th, several Free Minds members participated in the #HandsOffDC rally! Hands Off DC is a coalition of over 50 DC organizations (including Free Minds!) fighting for local decision-making autonomy, particularly as Congress seeks to undo DC laws pertaining to policing and community safety. In preparation for the House Oversight Committee's hearing on local elections, we marched to the Capitol holding a huge Hands Off DC banner. Many of us were able to attend the hearing, and Hands Off DC even got a shoutout from Rep. Summer Lee, a US Representative for Pennsylvania. It was so empowering to see Free Minds members standing up for DC rights, and we will continue to show up for our city!



## 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

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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 MAILBAG

*We love getting mail from our Free Minds family. Here are some of your thoughts on the January/February March 2023 Connect Expectations and the April/May 2023 Connect Balance.*

**SV:** It was great to receive the most recent issue of Free Minds *Connect* today and of course I was ecstatic to view my piece of wisdom included. Thank you very much! Hopefully someone, whether incarcerated or out in the world, struggling and trying to maintain a sense of balance, will be able to read this and gain insight from it. From the entire magazine, in fact.

**KQ:** I have a few guys in my unit that are members also, and we converse about the pics of the city y'all send in the *Connect*. I read all the material y'all send and appreciate it 100%. Y'all get me through some days.

**AHA:** That is another well put together issue for all to enjoy and hear the many voices on what this theme means to them and what balance is in their lives. Being incarcerated one needs balance to move forward daily and you all provide so much for us to create balance on

a positive front, so I appreciate another well done issue... This issue on balance was another learning curve for me to connect with others in how they find balance in many areas. The story "Finding Balance Through Family" by Rodney caught my eye first since family is always our support system whom we love finding faith to get through a lot. His story alone shows how no matter what, family can keep one from failing to see light at the end of the tunnel.

All the poems and essays by all was full of insight to feed one's soul on finding balance. Even being able to see some of my submissions again is always special.

I love the DC photos since seeing all the new sights back home shows how a lot has changed and how beautiful it is. Every story gives you a piece of advice that is important, so anyone going back into the real world can benefit from all in this issue.



## QUOTE-I-VATOR

*"Washington is a city of spectacles." - Martin Luther King, Jr., leader in the 1950s Civil Rights Movement*

*"I long, as does every human being, to be at home wherever I find myself." - Maya Angelou, American poet and activist*

*"Keep going until your efforts start to make things better in your hometown." - Yoko Ono, Japanese artist*

*"It may be that the satisfaction I need depends on my going away so that when I've gone and come back, I'll find it at home." - Rumi, 13th century poet*

*"In Washington, I have worked hard for the people, and I've been loved by the people." - Marion Berry, former mayor of DC nicknamed "mayor for life"*

*"Whatever you do big or small, do it well or don't do it at all." - Chuck Brown, widely known as the father of go-go music*

*"In the mind, in the heart, I was always home. I always imagined, really, going back home." - Miriam Makeba, South African singer and civil rights activist.*



*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

# FAMILY TIES: CARLOS'S STORY

## Interview By Janet

*Hometown is not fixed in one time, place, or even one country for Carlos. Carlos was born in Honduras, moved to DC with his grandparents at nine, and was incarcerated from seventeen to forty-two. Carlos now lives in Honduras since being deported three years ago. His wife, who lives in DC, travels to Honduras for precious time together. Janet caught up with him recently while he was on vacation.*

**Janet:** Carlos, so happy to see you! I feel badly interrupting your vacation but hope this is a positive time to share how your family ties connect with Hometown Pride at this stage of your life.

**Carlos:** My home is where I am now in Honduras, but the majority of hometown pride for me is where I grew up with my family in DC. I am able to be proud of both things that live under my heart. Home is emphasized for me when family comes down from DC here to visit, and specifically, I have to mention my wife. She is the one person who makes me feel at home, that I am not alone, whether she is here or not.

**Janet:** I know in your excitement about this time with your wife, you searched for beautiful places to travel to in Honduras because you wanted your wife to have a beautiful experience in this country that you now live in, even if not by choice. Does having beautiful experiences together change your sense of Hometown Pride in the place you live in now?

**Carlos:** Yes because my other source of pride comes from my culture. It attracts me, it lures me in. I haven't been exposed to it since I didn't grow up here. I'm learning what it is to be here in the country where I was born, to make it a home for the time being. I have no other choice, but regardless, I have to make it home. I have to be comfortable. I have to find those little niches of happiness, of that home feeling. What better way to do that than to actually do that in person, physically, with the person I care most about?

The pictures I sent you were that feeling of not only freedom but home! I love to share those moments with those that I care about. Because I want them to understand that I am not home but I am home.

Right now I've spent these two weeks with my wife and it is just like, amazing! It also touches that little part of my heart that I'm missing when I'm alone. I say I'm alone because most of the time I am here alone. When my family comes down to Honduras, I feel that little void is being filled of what I wish I had, which is being back home with them because that's where my heart is at. I grew up with them, so in so many ways we share history. As you know, I've known my wife since we was 14 years old, so now getting to know each other in this environment of freedom is a whole new thing that adds to that feeling of hometown pride. Along with that, is that sense of family, that sense of: This is **my family**. My wife and I try to do the best we can as we learn how to maneuver in between with the distance.

I do have family over here in Honduras. I'm just getting to know them. I love them; they are there for me, they help me in the ways they can but in so many ways it is not the same. At times I feel like a stranger, out of place. You know what I mean? That's because I'm still getting to know them. The people that have been there for me have been the family that I grew up with in the United States.

**Janet:** Since being back in Honduras, have you discovered things in you that you didn't even know were the Honduran part of you, they were just Carlos?

**Carlos:** Yes! Traveling with my wife reminds me of that upbringing; the food, the music, it's all a part of me. It's not like I'm a stranger to Honduras, it's just being exposed to it in the ways that I am now is brand new and allows me to embrace it even more and be proud of it even more.

Most places we travel, it's like I carry my grandparents with me, specifically my grandfather. When I was a child, wherever he would go, he would take me with him. One of those places is where my grandfather was born at, where he was raised at. I used to go with him to this town. We'd hop on the bus, the kind where the bags are on top, hot and crowded! We'd go to his sister's house, which was one of those farm kind of things, like they got cows! You can picture that farm life. Now it is touristy. We ate this white cheese and this bread with mantequilla (butter). I didn't like it as a kid. Now I eat it.

Also, my grandfather used to be a person that no matter whatever he was doing he was listening to music. I find myself doing that a lot too. My favorite instrument is the guitar. Now I understand that it comes from my grandfather. That's what he used to listen to, an old guitar group back in the 40's that played love ballads. Today when I hear it I get goosebumps because it reminds me of my grandfather. That music is not only linked to my grandfather, but to the whole home feeling. That music is not something that I forced myself into, it is something that came out of me, those sounds remind me, not just of my grandfather, but home. Home now and home as I grew up in my past.

Another place my wife and I explored is this hill behind my apartment in Tegucigalpa (the capital city of Honduras). My grandfather had a property there. Back then, it was all pine trees and dirt roads. Now it's different but it still reminds me of him. I "helped" him build a house there when I was a child. He did everything himself! I wish he could see me in this moment and know that I remember him when I walk these areas. That he crosses my mind all the time. He was that male role model that I had.

**Continued on Page 23**



# JUST LAW: ONE MORE CHANCE

By DJ

Following a conviction and sentence for a criminal offense in the D.C. Superior Court can be a tough pill to swallow. It can leave you hopeless and afraid. But, hold on, there may still be hope that the immediate sentence you are serving is not the last gospel from the court. There is a process for asking the court in which you were convicted and sentenced to take another gander at the sentence it imposed on you. This request can be made for a number of reasons. One reason in particular can relate to the fact that you have observed the rules of the institution for a very long time. Another reason could be that you have participated in educational or vocational programs during your incarceration. These are two (2) sound reasons to ask the U.S. Parole Commission for support in your request for reduction in your minimum sentence.

As described in Section 11231 of the National Capital Revitalization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997, Public Law 105-33, the U.S. Parole Commission took over the paroling authority of the Board of Parole of the District of Columbia on August 5, 1998. Subpart C § 2.76 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and the U.S. Parole Commission's Manual addresses the issue of Reduction in minimum sentences for District of Columbia Code Prisoners. In relevant part, § 2.76 states the following:

## Reduction in minimum sentence.

(a) A prisoner who has served three (3) or more years of the minimum term of his or her sentence may request the Commission to file an application with the sentencing court for a reduction in the minimum term pursuant to D.C. Code 24-201c. The prisoner's request to the Commission shall be in writing and shall state the reasons that the prisoner believes such request should be granted. The Commission shall require the submission of a progress report before approving such a request.

(b) Approval of a prisoner's request under this section shall require the concurrence of a majority of the Commissioners holding office.

(c) Pursuant to D.C. Code 24-201c, the Commission may file an application to the sentencing court for a reduction of a prisoner's minimum term if the Commission finds that:

- (1) The prisoner has completed three years of the minimum term imposed by the court;
- (2) The prisoner has shown, by report of the responsible prison authorities, an outstanding response to the rehabilitative program(s) of the institution;
- (3) The prisoner has fully observed the rules of each institution in which the prisoner has been confined;
- (4) The prisoner appears to be an acceptable risk for parole based on both the prisoner's pre-and post-incarceration record; and
- (5) Service of the minimum term imposed by the court does not appear necessary to achieve appropriate punishment and deterrence.

(d) If the Commission approves a prisoner's request under this section, an application for a reduction in the prisoner's minimum term shall be forwarded to the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia for filing with the sentencing court. If the U.S. Attorney objects to the Commission's recommendation, the U.S. Attorney shall provide the government's objections in writing for consideration by the Commission. If, after consideration of the material

submitted, the Commission declines to reconsider its previous decision, the U.S. Attorney shall file the application with the sentencing court.

(e) If a prisoner's request under this section is denied by the Commission, there shall be a waiting period of two (2) years before the Commission will again consider the prisoner's request, absent exceptional circumstances.

Currently, there is no particular form that you would submit to the U.S. Parole Commission in order to make the request for a reduction in your minimum sentence. A simple letter to the U.S. Parole Commission indicating that you are using § 2.76 of the manual as support for your request would suffice. Just to be certain that your letter reaches its destination, I would encourage you to send it via certified mail if you are able.

As a reminder, you MUST complete any mandatory part of your sentence before you can submit the request for a reduction of the minimum portion of your sentence. For example, if the statute under which you are sentenced represents that a portion of such sentence is mandatory, you must have fully completed that part first. This means that if your total sentence is something like thirty (30) years and five (5) of that thirty years is mandatory, you must complete the five (5) years before requesting a reduction on the remaining twenty-five (25) years that is left. This law does not permit reduction of any mandatory part of your sentence. It only allows relief on the part of your sentence that is not mandatory.

Discuss this with your attorney first, as this is not legal advice in any case. This is for informational purposes only. Please thoroughly check into this information and discover if this law applies to your situation before attempting to use this provision of law.

As always, I wish you the best in your journey and keep your minds free!

Free Minds Member,  
DJ

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

# DC PHOTOS *By Aneka, Kelli, and Sofia*



Mellon Street corner store on MLK Ave SE



Farmers market in the Petworth neighborhood



Library at the Planet Word Museum, a language arts museum that opened in 2020



New senior living community development in the Barry Farm neighborhood

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!



# MEMBERS *CONNECT*: HOMETOWN PRIDE

## Hometown Pride By AHA

Home for me is no other place than DC, the city I was born in and the city my grandmother came to in the late forties from Alabama to start her family. The "Chocolate City," as it was known and not forgotten by many who were raised in the city. Born in DC General Hospital in 1983 on New Year's Eve with celebrations and go-go blasting to start a new year. When I first heard go-go I was in love instantly and over the years would enjoy any event I could go to.

I loved my hometown and still do with all the things that came with it. We have our own foods and music which was very unique and something to be proud of with go-go music and mumbo sauce, legendary in my book, that has spread.

One of my favorite events was Georgia Avenue Day and block parties. The streets full with people enjoying

themselves, partaking in the event happening, coming together to celebrate. All the different food and people coming out to have a good time. In these moments, you not only felt you belonged, but knew you did.

To me DC is like no other place, and many I've met from other parts of the world would connect with our style or not, and know how together we are and love our hometown that is unique in its own way.

I am proud to be a native Washingtonian and will always love home and remember the things once there and what it became years later. It's always funny to tell your grandkids how something used to be, etc. just like yours told you stories as a kid. Washington is small but big to us who represent it... peace.

---

## The Heart of The City By AA

Other than the basics like family, food, and the women of Washington DC, the thing I miss the most is the go-go! Growing up, go-go music was the heartbeat of the city. It was where everybody came together to party, especially during the summer. Just sitting here thinking about the sound of Mickey on the congos gives me the chills. Reminiscing on all the bands like Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers, Junk, R.E., Back, and Duke and the Boys, I realize how grateful I am to be born and raised in the nation's capital. I remember when Junk used to practice in my cousin's basement in the late 80s and my cousin trying to teach me how to play the drums. I was even allowed at the age of 7 to practice with them at times, although I was just playing the cowbell. I can hear Prep now; "Shorty, when I say give me the cow, give me the cow!" So I give thanks to all the bands and their contributions to our culture. Because go-go is DC and it's a major part of our identity.

---

## Home Is Where The Heart Is By HH

I was born in George Washington University Hospital in Washington, DC. I've lived in Northeast and Northwest DC, as well as Riverdale, Dodge Park, and Landover, Maryland. However, I don't recognize none of those places as my hometown. That honor is bestowed on Beaumont, Texas. That was where I first felt comfortable, could breathe, was relaxed, and felt like I fit. Beaumont is in Jefferson County, and is the second largest city in Southeast Texas, after Houston. The first place that oil was discovered in Texas, and home to the Spindletop oilfield, one of the largest oilfields. It's where I fell in love for the first time, and where I became me. It's where Summer Walker, (the video vixen from the early 2000s and smooth girl top 100, not the singer), and Kendrick Perkins are from. I don't know them personally, but they're from my neighborhood, South Park. I may never live there again, because my stepmom moved to north Texas, and I'll be in Michigan with my wife, but Beaumont will forever be in my heart as my hometown.

---

## Hometown Pride By LG

A place where I call home. Washington, DC, Southeast is where I'm from. I love my city because it holds a lot of memories for me. And at the same time, bad memories, too. I really don't have too much to say for real because I been through a lot of ups and downs in this city. But just know, Washington, DC is a good city in my eyes. There are good places to visit like Frederick Douglass's house, the White House, the MLK museum, etc.... I love to see the Capitals play hockey and the Nationals play baseball. I love to go to all the clubs in DC and I also do music, have shows, and I box as well. So, people enjoy coming to see me as well, and I'm on YouTube. I lived in New Orleans before. My mom and sister still live down there, that's where they're from. I want to travel more, I love where there's a lot of pretty water. That's where I want to get married at, somewhere with clear, pretty water and maybe a waterfall. Sounds like a good viewing site, right?

# 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,

There is a question I have been asking myself that's a difficult one to share, but I wonder if others ever feel this way. No matter what I do, I feel like I'm constantly hitting roadblocks. Not only that, I feel like I just keep failing in the face of these obstacles. Will I ever win?

Before I was incarcerated, I studied very hard for an exam to start the next phase of my schooling. I failed the exam multiple times and each time I was devastated. I felt like a failure. I kept studying and I finally passed, but not long after that, I made a horrible decision that landed me in jail. So even when I succeed, it seems like I fail!

Since I got locked up, it has been one hurdle after another. Sometimes these are problems of my own making, while other times they are things beyond my control. I feel so down and hopeless sometimes. But when I speak about it, either to my loved ones, or others in my situation, I hear myself and it just sounds like I'm whining...

How can I face all these challenges and obstacles with strength and courage and still have faith that one day I will finally succeed?

Signed,  
P.A.

*Greetings PA, Home Team, & FM Family. First let me share how proud I am to hear after your hard work, you did achieve your goal and passed that exam. That mistake after doesn't make you a failure. You got some knowledge that no one can take from you, so use it to prove to your emotions you are a winner and not a whiner. Whiners just complain. Smart men like our leaders go and seek counsel and make better decisions based on the positive advice they get from their circle.*

*Moreover, on a personal level, I want you, PA, to take my story of adversity trying to do my current life sentence. I often hit roadblocks and obstacles, and I ride the same emotional roller-coaster. A lot of us do. The keys to get through this are simple: 1) Never give up hope in yourself or the universe around you; 2) We have to stop getting in our own way; and 3) Because life will continue to move forward, good and bad, we have to stay consistent in*

*doing what is right. If I had not focused on these things, I would have never been able to share with you and others my love and efforts to redeem myself for the bad choices I once made in our community.*

*So this is a nice way to broach this Connect's theme of Hometown Pride. We as adults are the real torch bearers in our neighborhoods - our villages, our prides of lions and lionesses. If we don't keep the focus on things that give us a constructive schedule and build on great character, how will we ever get to where we need to be to shape our next generations? Who will be our nurturers, providers, and protectors for ourselves and loved ones? Moving forward then, it's a must that we sacrifice our selfish, impulsive, irrational reactions and pleasures, and always do the right thing to protect and uplift ourselves and loved ones (The Home Team). This is true especially and always in the face of adversity. A prime example of this today in our community are those who take and teach communication, de-escalation, and conflict resolution classes, where we learn we don't have to jump in front of any bullets for our Home-Team and we can stop the gunplay from ever happening. The wrong attitudes and reactions to life are really devastating to us as a whole. We have to realize it is time to take a stance and bear down.*

*In a nutshell, PA, we have to stop getting in our own way. Let us ponder how enormous the ripple effect one single bad or good action carries on down the line for us and our community. Today, let's be remembered for staying in the right and slow lane, taking life easy and making great impacts for the Home Team. Up until I started to educate myself here in the BOP 20 years ago, I never stopped to think about the magnitude of people counting on me, my team, and our actions. Our whole community counts on us, even from as far as where we are presently.*

*Bringing this on to a close, we can't give in or give up. How do we win and face all our challenges and obstacles with strength and courage, and still keep the faith that one day we'll finally succeed? We do it together. In a tug of war, pulling individually and collectively together in the right direction is an answer to how we win. Now please let me pass this to my torch-bearing brothers to bring it on in for the Home Team. My best, TS.*

*After failing your exams multiple times, but then ultimately achieving success after clamping down on your studies, it tells me that you're a determined fighter--a winner. Sure, you didn't overcome some obstacles and roadblocks; but those are merely temporary setbacks. You,*

*like the rest of humanity, can't win 'em all! But that is not how success is defined. Success is defined by one's willingness to stay the course and fight for what they want-as you have done. Finally, failure, on the other hand, is the fear of making mistakes. Never be afraid of making mistakes; after all, that is how we learn. – Mr. EG*

*My answer to this is simple. You do it one step at a time. If life was easy, everyone would be successful. These obstacles in your way are nothing but that: obstacles. Keep your focus on your vision and move forward. Shortcuts are what trip you up. Stay honest and it'll pay off in due time. – CS*

*First, I'd like to start by saying thanks for sharing, and for allowing me to share. Moving forward, I ask that you be forever mindful of this one thing: there's so much power in one's thoughts and in one's words. A lot of times we diminish the value of our thoughts and words, and that's one of the biggest mistakes we can make. Most of the circumstances and realities we land ourselves in are products of the thoughts we think and the words we speak. Believe it or not, you are already strong and courageous. Before I even finished reading your question, I noticed certain attributes about you like your determination and the faith that you can't yet see at the moment. However, the beauty about this thing called life is that it's constantly looking to present us with opportunities to help us both build and grow. My challenge to you is to invest more in yourself. Shift your focus to feed off all that's positive in your life, because we always overcome even on our worst days. Here's a quote I heard once: "Healing begins when you change the way you tell yourself your story." – BM*

## **SPINNING THE TRACK: REENTRY EDITION**

**I am being released next week and I still don't have housing! This is extremely stressful when I am trying to be so focused upon doing things the right way, but I don't even know if I'll have a roof over my head. I'm on a waiting list, but so are a lot of others. What advice do you have for someone in my situation? – DH**

*Dear DH,*

*First my heart goes out to you and my prayers are with you. I know this must be a very stressful time for you. My prayer is that this letter helps you and gives you some hope as well as some resources that could possibly help you upon your return.*

*Now if I was in your current situation I would start by working closely with the Re-entry (pre-release) Coordinator at the prison. Their job is to make you aware of all the resources available to you in your city. Once I got a list of resources that worked closely with housing, I'd reach out to each and every one of them and let them know about my circumstances. Also if possible I'd call and try to make contact with someone so I'd have a name and number upon my release. Also know that there's a process to everything, I know this is a dire situation but I don't want you to get frustrated.*

*Now I'm going to include some resources that you can start to look into. First is MORCA (Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs). This is a one stop shop where you can get your ID (which is crucial because any shelter you go to is going to need ID). They will also give you an address to use temporarily. Also they will help you get food stamps and healthcare. They will also have a ton of other resources to help you with housing as well. Also, there's a program called Miriam's Kitchen that helps with housing. The address is 2401 Virginia Ave NW, Washington, DC 20037. I'd start reaching out to them immediately. The sooner the better but I'd definitely try to make contact with someone so you have a point of contact upon your release. And maybe they can share some other resources. Also, check out past issues of the Connect for great resources in the Reentry Corner.*

*So my friend, I hope this was helpful, and last but not least, remember to reach out to Free Minds upon your release as well.*

*Peace and Blessings,  
James*

# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Home

### By AB

There's no place like home,  
Instead, the streets I chose to roam,  
There's no place like home.  
I wish the older guys in the community would have taught me or  
Shown, the time I'm doing is hard and long.  
Now I'm stuck and all alone,  
I came to prison as a kid but now I've grown  
I'd give both arms and both feet to just be home.  
I've made a promise to myself to teach the youth that  
There's no place like home  
And to never leave our loved ones all alone.  
Because there's no place like home...

## My Prevailing City

### By AJ

Manifold of dainty butterflies soar and weave over Salinas;  
and they dance in delight.

An angelic choir from Church Iglesia de Jesus Christo de  
Israel on North Sanborn benedicts the ethereal city.

My vivacious and pugnacious gente (people in Spanish) in  
the secluded La Posada projects bloom in optimism.

Two radiating colossal yellow cowboy hats witness from  
above the impressive exploits of the California Salinas  
Rodeo, and are immersed in glee and pleasure.

A luminous and vivid cascading rainbow from the loving  
right palm of God on His glorious throne stretches into  
the Salad Bowl Valley to produce it into a fertile land and  
luscious in pigmentation.

Like a beamy fortress, bustling Rosita's Armory cafe on  
Salinas Street submerses the city with a mesmerizing aroma of  
shimmering crimson chicken mole and arouses the slumbering  
mountains that hem the city with their folded hands.

Rejoicing laughter of precious children are heard from the  
antique and massive train that appears to rumble with  
bustling steam in the amusing and delightful Central Park.

## Hometown Pride

### By CM

Go-Go music is upbeat  
Same tune had **DC** youngins beating they feet to TCB  
I supported squash all beef  
Even Steve Young peace in the streets  
Misunderstandings left dead bodies in the streets  
**DC** is a **Dark City**, with **Dangerous Circles**  
Also **Dancing Circles**, from E.U. to Junk, or BYB,  
Please don't try to mute the original **DC**.

## Amazing Place

*After the hymn "Amazing Grace"*

### By BM

Amazing Grace, to one amazing place  
How sweet the sound, Washingtonian bound  
I once was lost, but now I'm found  
Especially when reflecting, all things my town  
Home of the Capitals, Nationals, and Wizards  
DC United, Commanders, and Mystics  
Can't forget the Spirit, Castles, or Defenders  
Club Ball, Pop Warner, Jabbo Kenner  
Chuck Brown performing, "Run Joe" in a Backyard,  
It's a "Dope Jam"  
Having Marion Barry in attendance with his "Rare Essence"  
What a dope man  
Sights of the Potomac, Waterfront, and Wharf  
Anacostia, the Harbor, to memorials down on the Mall  
One monumental District with riches of history  
I'm proud to be from Washington, and take pride in my city

## Where I'm From

### By LW

I'm from a city that's never been known for silence  
United we step in New Balances  
Fingers cloaked in that sweet yet spicy mumbo sauce flavor  
that only natives of this small, beautiful city can relate to.  
So many large buildings, fluorescent bright lights, charm,  
and glamor.  
A city that's forever changing beneath the stars.  
Known for Go-Go music, Georgetown, Howard University,  
tourist attractions, and cars.  
All over this city there's history, from famous musicians,  
politicians, civil rights leaders, and activists. Are you  
hearing me?  
We went from the Redskins to the Commanders and  
whether you like the Wizards, Nationals, or DC United...  
you're all invited to witness a city like no other.  
Dignified in diversity; so many shades and colors, although  
this is... Chocolate City,  
Where the weather's beautiful as the seasonal cherry  
blossoms and rarely windy.  
Complex in ways yet simply a place to love, visit, or reside.  
I love being where I'm from and I say that with pride.

## Hometown Pride

*After "Hometown Glory" by Adele*

### By DAJ

'Round my hometown they don't play.  
'Round my hometown you better always stay awake.  
I like it in the city when everyone is having a good time.  
I love to see everybody in the Go-Go.  
I like it in the city when I can go to different places peacefully.  
'Round my hometown you better show respect.  
'Round my hometown you will get put in check.

# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Hometown Pride

After "Hometown Glory" by Adele

By CS

'Round my hometown  
You hear the go-go music  
'Round my hometown  
You see people dancing  
I like it in the city when it's live  
I love to see everybody in the streets  
Laughing and having fun  
I like it in the city  
When we're enjoying each other  
With no violence  
'Round my hometown  
You hear the go-go music  
'Round my hometown  
You see US!

## Da City

By JK

A lot of people don't understand our swag.  
They don't get us, so they stereotype us,  
Try to put our unique character in a bag.  
"Oh you from DC? Yall crazy!" yeah, I heard it all before.  
But don't be quick to judge, give us a chance we'll show you more.

See slim, yoon (you don't) even know da (the) half of it.  
Our muvahs (mothers) and favahs (fathers) had to grind  
errday (everyday) just to make sure that we were  
warm and had a plate

Our bruvahs (brothers) and sistas (sisters) had to watch  
us while they worked.  
We stayed close, stayed together, to make sure none of us got hurt.  
We grew up in da trenches, projects in every (every) part of town.  
Norfeast (northeast). Norfwest (northwest) Soufwest  
(southwest) & Soufeast (south east).  
We are a small city wif (with) a big heart.  
So don't try to dumb us down when a lot of us are really smart.

They call us savages too, beautiful chaos, a city wifout  
(without) order.  
They can't figure us out, they say it's something in the  
wartah (water).  
Nah, it's just how we live and how we vibe.  
It's how we was raised that keeps us alive.

A lil chicken wings + mumbo sauce, to get us through da day.  
In the winter some Ben's Chili Bowl wif a half smoke on our plate.

All they brag about is da other part of da city... The  
Monument, White House, and the Capital. All the tourist  
attractions, Gallery Place and Georgetown which now  
resembles the Big Apple.

Errything's different now. Looks like I'm coming home to a  
completely different town. They say home is where the heart  
is, and DC's my home for sure. And I'll never forget where  
I came from  
So it's time to leave up out these prison doors.

## Hometown Pride

By JJ

Let go!  
Hometown Pride Let's go!  
Finally the controversies of all time.  
The triumph behind something that settling so deep inside,  
conquering your fears with that Hometown Pride.  
Unknown faces go by one by one.  
Cheering, for what is it? It's the home team.  
Others like the national spokesman of today will remember  
about the victory  
Today and tomorrow for the past and future.  
The greatest ability to see that Hometown Pride is in Us  
(You and me!)  
A legendary using the light that touches, that shines,  
especially lovingly on us,  
Motivational, entirely influences our thinking.  
Teaching us to thrive, strive, within a perfect time.  
Nothing is hidden to move those audiences.  
With this are our important goals.  
To lose control but have taken charge, the Home Team Pride  
in the mind.  
To lead your own thoughts to win.  
Every day keeping that Hometown Pride all around the globe.  
The Hometown Pride and Soul, to the end.

## Love/Hate Thing

By MH

A shaped diamond containing the powerful & mighty  
Government! Making these billion dollar decisions  
For the poor and inner city youth, not a dollar spent  
Very small yet so aggressive and feisty  
Like a celebrity with two lives  
The White House and monument, they all know  
But it's the murder, crack sales I see or the dope or PCP  
Who stole your cherry since you've  
Raised, corrupted, and tore down men like  
Rayful Edmond and Wayne Perry  
Then you backdoored Mayor Marion Berry  
You for real set him up  
Yet I adore you so much even though  
You gave me plenty to cry for  
Can't say I didn't have fun with so much to do  
Made me pretty tough because tough times you put me thru  
Gave me my fly plus lingo too  
Serious plays, fast moves, and cold lessons I gained from you  
Wouldn't know rhythm without your go-go beat  
Got me super vigilant since round you life can be cheap  
So with DC it's a love/hate thing  
More like hometown survive than hometown pride

# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

## Joseph's Children

By LNL

I am Joseph. A child ostracized, rejected, and misunderstood. Who I am chosen to be has not yet been realized. My glory only validated by a loving Father who loves me and, out of that love, bestowed on me a coat of colors, reflecting my own richness. It is...

Red like my love and passion for life. A life lived on my terms, in my way, devoid of limits and thinking that do not serve me. A life imbued with love, in all its manifestations.

Orange like the clothes worn by our incarcerated brothers and sisters used to serve as a marker of worthlessness, deviancy, and otherness.

Yellow like the light I emit. My light shines in spite of the desires and attempts to dim me and regardless of the darkness that abounds.

Green like the healing I have done and must continue to do which opens me up to forgiveness and allows me to operate in love.

Blue like the depths of sadness I have experienced in the name of religious beliefs, societal norms, and expectations.

Indigo like the royalty in my veins. I am a descendant of Kings and Queens which empowers me to live out the majesty I was born with.

Violet like flowers that bloom, exuding beauty for all to enjoy.

**My cost is my identity. My coat is my expression. My coat is my PRIDE.**

I, too, share in the narrative of Joseph. Who I am, my awareness of it, and my unapologetic boldness leave me hated by many. Nonetheless, I have a Father who "loves me best." I have a Father who not only sees me completely, but values me and acknowledges my worth. My Father gives me gifts in the form of talent, provision, and His blessing. When people bring all forms of malice and vitriol my way, and even attempt to kill me, my Father mourns for me, with me, and is saddened by my persecution. My Father looks for me even as I look for myself and He rejoices with me upon being found. The hues that make up who I am are a gift from my Father that cannot be stripped. They are a reminder that I am made in His image, His likeness, and am His child. For that, I am grateful.

## Hometown Pride

By MM

My hometown pride will be to walk the street with my head held high,

That's exactly what I'm thinking about.

To stay on top and show my happiest self for who I am, and give life purpose to my universe.

Welcoming me back to Long Beach City/LA County is great, Got a lot of pride, reason to be there, and find a lot of places on my own.

And I'll also parade on the beach, viewing the sun rise and set.

My parents are from out of state,

Only myself and sister are from California state.

Win big for myself, Hollywood sign and Long Beach, would of course go with me.

For popular reason, friend, African tread mark, Bob Marley feasts, smoke out,

Shopping in a short line, big houses, etc.

From prison, love and passion to express myself out of other rap.

Be myself and spread word, peace, love, and hope, keep the faith.

And no matter who you are, believing where you come from.

Hope and remain that true you

For hope and dream, part of your own world,

Expectation and free thought. Expression to open life,

The world and race put you down,

Hold on, accepting the changes,

And be strong to myself.

Thoughts come through with who I am, my people,

Family showing love, the ocean, bars, volts, downtown

AMC movies, candy shop, food, homes.

Keep my head, know how expensive it is,

And working on being a better person and finding love in what I like.

Keep hope for myself and my other people first,

my other American/Africans work,

and a better person to look for the start, my Egypt's lover self and holding on to it.

## Hometown Pride

After "Hometown Glory" by Adele

By SV

'Round my hometown I hope soon to be bound

'Round my hometown it won't matter if I'm up or downtown

I like it in the city when everyone's rejoicing

I love to see everybody in an A Plus mood.

I like it in the city when no one's rude

'Round my hometown I love all the smiles and happiness.

'Round my hometown I just want you to picture this.

## Hometown

By SP

Shoutout to Chi-town, that's my hometown.

The home of Fred Hampton, who taught Black power.

The home of Barack Obama, who showed us anything is possible.

Gangs run the city, avoiding them is impossible.

With a strong support system you can beat that obstacle.

I love my hometown, it made me unstoppable.

# POEMS BY FREE MINDS MEMBERS

Dummy City: Beauty in the Trenches

By MC

I miss my city. I love my city.

Francis Scott Key and the Star-Spangled Banner.

Edgar Allan Poe.

Billie Holiday.

Thurgood Marshall.

B and O Railroad.

Inner Harbor.

Blacks in Wax museum.

Orange and black.

Black and purple.

Lamar Jackson and Odell Beckham Jr.

Crabs seasoned with Old Bay.

Chicken boxes topped with salt, pepper, and ketchup  
with a large "half and half."

Snoballs and frozen cups from the "candy lady."

Dirt bikes.

Before dirt bikes we put juice cartons on the back wheels  
of our bikes to sound like dirt bikes.

New Balance.

Foamposites matched with Cashland, City of Gods or Samos,

Cruddy temps and fades with gold teeth! (Draggin!)

Kids playing in the water spraying from an illegally  
opened fire hydrant.

Pitbulls and pigeon coops.

Dice games at cookouts while club music blasts from speakers.

Tinted out Hondas and Acuras.

# MEMBERS CONNECT: HOMETOWN PRIDE

Hometown Pride By SSH

I grew up around Langston Lane in SE DC. On my journey through them mean streets, I've been down and out and almost knocked off my feet, but being the person that I am, I've learned to keep my feet planted and to never take anything for granted. I grew up in a somewhat broken family. My dad, may he rest in peace, was a drunk and used to beat my mom. My mom was so caught up in his drunken love that she didn't see anything but him. It hurt me to the core to see the pain in my own eyes seeing my mom be so blind but they say love can make you see what it wants you to see, so I guess that's why I see so much pain because I'm deep in love with it.



## CONNECT ON CORRLINKS *By Aneka*

Good news FM fam!

Sending in your *Connect* submissions just got easier! 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. **This email correspondence will be solely for the purpose of exchanging *Connect* related information. All personal correspondence will continue to be through mail.**

[Free Minds Corrlinks Info:](#)

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Corrlinks Last Name: Connect

Corrlinks Email: [connect@freemindsbookclub.org](mailto:connect@freemindsbookclub.org)

[Free Minds Getting Out Info:](#)

Getting Out First Name: Connect

Getting Out Last Name: Free Minds

Getting Out Email: [connect@freemindsbookclub.org](mailto:connect@freemindsbookclub.org)

# REENTRY PROFILE: THE HANDS OFF MOVEMENT AND PRIDE FOR DC

*Interview by Charlotte*

Charlotte recently checked in with Free Minds member Deangelo, after several Hands Off DC rallies in Washington DC.

*I called Deangelo early in the evening on a Thursday, still hearing the words of how kind people told me he was. The discussion we were going to have was an exciting and complex one, about the growing Hands Off movement that he's been a part of. When I dialed his number, he picked up on the first ring, ready to answer questions, and inquiring on how my day was.*

**Charlotte:** Can you tell me about who you are a little bit and how you got involved with Free Minds?

**Deangelo:** I got involved with Free Minds when I was 16 years old, I'm 32 now. I've been a longtime member. I don't look at Free Minds as an organization or company, I just look at it as an extended family. They became my own family. Now, I came home and actually made my own. No matter what, they've always been in my corner, always been in my life, every step of my way. I was one of them who was considered a menace to society, and a problem child that everyone brushed their hands on. I was so used to people giving up on me, and I really didn't care, and they just refused to let me push them away.

*The Hands Off movement gained traction in Washington, DC this year, after a bill that the DC Council unanimously voted for was overturned by Congress. The bill (the Revised Criminal Code Act) would have overhauled DC's century-old criminal code by eliminating most mandatory minimums, updating the definitions of criminal offenses, and creating new grades of sentences based on the severity of the crime. The U.S. Congress currently has the right to intervene in DC affairs because the city doesn't have the same autonomy and rights that a state does. Congress acted on this right to overturn the Revised Criminal Code Act so it did not become law. Supporters of the Hands Off movement want DC to be able to control their own affairs.*

**Charlotte:** Do you support DC statehood? And why do you think it's important for DC to be its own state?

**Deangelo:** I'm just tired of everybody coming up with laws for us. I believe it should be a state because who can tell Washingtonians, or who can tell somebody who's really from the area they're from about it? You can never tell your people what's better for them unless you relate to them. I feel like it's not fair for individuals from other states, other cities, to come and dictate what we got going on when they never share no type of experiences with us.



**Charlotte:** For the Hands Off rally and movement, can you tell me a little bit what that is and how you got involved?

**Deangelo:** For the Hands Off rally, I'm a firm believer in getting our voice heard. I feel strongly about that, with more incarcerated ones are the ones just returned to society and everything, because of the fact that everybody needs their voice. So when I saw a movement that supports and values our voices, it don't matter about the color of the skin and none of that no more now. It doesn't matter what side of town you from anything, it matters that we're all Washingtonians and we want our own individuals to pretty much speak for us. Once I found out what they were standing for, I was with them.

**Charlotte:** You went to some of the rallies yourself, what was that experience like? What was the atmosphere like?

**Deangelo:** I went to two on my own and it was super awesome. It was the energy. I feel like we accomplished something by even having a group of people, because it's so many people from different walks of life. And it shows that we all share one thing, we're all proud Washingtonians. And then, I was able to introduce my children to them. I'm real big on speaking and letting my voice be heard, and I'm trying to teach my young ones that's the way to come up in life. You're never going to know nothing without asking. You're never going to get anything by assuming that people should know what you want. Not being afraid to talk. It's just been super awesome, and the kids enjoyed it.

**Charlotte:** Do you feel like you're home in DC? Do you have pride for it?

**Deangelo:** Yeah, definitely. DC pretty much helped me still love it because even in the darkest moments, it was all I had to rely on. Whatever the case may be, or when I had to deal with my hardship in my life, I used to look back to things that I did in DC. Places in DC, that's what kept my sanity over the years. I will never turn my back on this city. I love this city.

**Charlotte:** What kind of future do you want for other youth in the future in DC? And how would you want it to change for them?

**Deangelo:** I just want all this like division amongst the youth to change. I even talked to football coaches, I asked them, "Why don't you go get kids from this side of town? Get kids from that side of town." You

can mix it up. Make kids understand at a young age that it's okay to mingle with people not from your same geographic area. That's what I want the city to see. People who don't have an understanding or just automatically assume, "This person is like that, this person is like that," I love when they meet each other. If I can be that middle person and let them meet each other, and they actually get to talk and think, "Oh my goodness, wow, I never looked at that perspective." I love that outcome.

*At this point in our conversation, Deangelo speaks with passion, stringing his words together with such delicacy as he speaks about the future of DC. This topic holds such weight for him, as he imagines how the city could improve and be better for the next generation. Even across our phone line, I can envision his smile, the smell of dinner still around, and the children playing in the same room as him.*

**Charlotte:** Will you continue to participate in the Hands Off movement? And in organizations throughout DC?

**Deangelo:** Definitely, definitely. I don't see me stopping. Because of the fact that I see how they're trying to mute the voices. So yes, I definitely see myself supporting Hands Off DC.

**Charlotte:** Is there anything else that you want to speak about the Hands Off movement or anything else that you want to say?

**Deangelo:** I'm a strong supporter of just Washington, DC in general. I see harsh situations going on right now, dealing with the crime, and the violence, and all that type of stuff. And it's like, what do you expect? I look at it like this, individuals who will be placed in the cage will be angry. I feel like DC was made to be a certain cage.

I used to think that DC was just two cities. You had the side that we lived on, the low end. Then you had the government side and everybody who worked in that field. It took me to go through what I went through to actually come home and know that we just don't know what's going on down the street. So a lot of people was blindsided by what's really going on and a lot of voices not being spoken. Everybody just rather stay mute and mind their business. I'm afraid that's what's going on in this city. So the more people that can come out and speak up, the better, I believe. This movement was so small at first. Look at it, now it's getting recognition, seriously.

# REENTRY CORNER WITH MS. KEELA

Greetings Kings and Queens!

Yet again I have the blessing of writing to you this month and for that I have much gratitude. Today I want to say a little something about hometown pride. It seems that even if you don't seem to feel an outward connection to your hometown, most of us can't deny that one of the first questions people tend to ask one another during the getting-to-know-you phase of a relationship is, "Where are you from?" Most people give one of two answers: either the place they were born or, if it's a different place, the one where they grew up. Some people may even come to resent their hometowns based on memories that may not be so fond.

We all are familiar with that famous saying "home is where the heart is," and for most of us our hometown is an important and integral part of what molds and shapes us into the people we are, and one thing we all know about Washington, D.C is that we are some of the coolest, flyest people in this whole country; it seems like everybody wanna steal our swag (especially in Baltimore) LOL!

It's a known fact about Washingtonians, we are some cool people, I'm talking Go-Go, New Balance and Nike boots cool. There is just so much to be proud of when you hail from DC one of them being mambo sauce thank you very much! We are a small but mighty town, the nation's capital ya'll! Think about that, we are the capital of the whole free world! We are so cool, even the president wants to reside here.

I want each of you to know that I know that for all of you from here, DC is in your hearts and on your minds and I'm sure that many of you even have it tattooed on you so that you never forget; but just know that we are thinking of you and can't wait for you to touch down back to the coolest place ever! Also did you know that Washington, DC is the best place in the whole country to be returning to as a returning citizen? Support and services specifically for returning citizens have exploded here in the nation's capital. I started at Free Minds in 2012 and there weren't even a fraction of the community support services for returning citizens as there are now. I have literally witnessed a meteoric rise over these last 10 plus years and that makes me even prouder to be a cool District of Columbia resident. The only thing missing now is you! Now onto some cool and helpful resources awaiting your return:

The New and Improved Martin Luther King Jr. Library! The MLK library underwent renovation from 2020 - 2022 and it is now support central! Below are the list of FREE services they now provide:

- Passport Services
- Arts and Exhibits open to the public
- Job Seeker Sessions
- Computer lab
- Digital literacy
- Studio (for podcast and music)
- Tax preparation
- Book Club
- Printing & Scanning
- Peer Navigation
- Study Rooms
- Conference Rooms
- Voter Registration



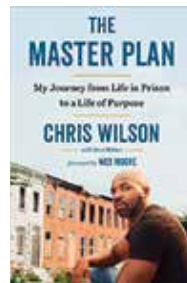
Oh and I saved the best for last y'all. They have a brand new roof top section where live Go-Go bands play for free every Sunday! I'm talking about Rare Essence and Junk Yard! I am dead serious. I have just added the MLK Library to my list of why I have mad hometown pride!

The MLK Library is located at 901 G Street NW and is open from 9:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday.

Until we *Connect* again,  
Ms. Keela

## BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES DISCUSSION QUESTIONS with Neely

We would like to send a big thank you to everyone who already sent us their thoughtful discussions for our latest Books Across the Miles selection, *The Master Plan: My Journey from Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose* by Chris Wilson. And for those who haven't, it is not too late! We'd still love to hear your feedback. In his memoir, DC native Chris Wilson, shares about his childhood growing up amidst violence and trauma. Wilson was 17-years-old when he was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. While incarcerated, he began a personal journey of growth and healing through reading, working out, learning new languages, and starting a business. At 19, he created a list of everything he wanted to accomplish and how he could, calling it his "Master Plan."



1. How do you think Chris' life, and the lives of many children, would be different if the crack epidemic hadn't happened? Did this personally impact you or people in your life?

2. When Chris was sentenced to life, his mother sat quietly, staring straight ahead with a blank look on her face. She didn't cry. Why do you think she didn't cry or react? Do you think she cared? Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't feel like you could express your feelings for whatever reason?

- 3.** Chris says that rock bottom isn't a place: "You can always go lower. Rock bottom is a decision. It's the moment you decide to stop falling and take control of your life." Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 4.** While Chris was incarcerated in Maryland, the Governor took away the option for parole for Maryland prisoners serving life sentences. How do people continue to find hope or purpose when the legal system doesn't seem to offer opportunities for release?
- 5.** Chris' Grandma said, "God don't like the ugly." What do you think she meant by this? Do/did your grandparents or other important people in your life have any sayings? What have you learned from them?

## NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: GROWTH (VOLUME 12, ISSUE 4)

Hey family! Here are some writing prompts to help you get started on submissions for our next issue on **Growth**. We also want to give you a heads up for the issue after that. Volume 12, Issue 5 will be exploring the theme of **Resilience**.

### (1)

Think back to a time in your life when you've responded to a situation differently than you have in the past. This is a perfect example of mental growth. There are 5 areas of personal growth: Mental, Physical, Social, Spiritual, and Emotional. Reflect on your life and the person you are today and write a poem or short story on how you've grown in each of the 5 categories.

### (2)

An acrostic poem is a poem in which certain letters of each line spells out a word, name, or phrase when read vertically.

Write an acrostic poem for GROWTH and what it means to you.

G \_\_\_\_\_

R \_\_\_\_\_

O \_\_\_\_\_

W \_\_\_\_\_

T \_\_\_\_\_

H \_\_\_\_\_

**(3)**

Write a letter to someone (maybe even yourself) who has helped you grow.

**(4)**

Write a poem for your past self. What do you think that you've learned since then, and what do you love and appreciate about that person?

**(5)**

Write a poem about what it takes to grow. Do you think you need family, friends, a home, faith, or something else?  
What does growth feel, sound, look like?

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



## CONVERSATION WITH JAMES

Hello Free Minds Family! My name is James D., and I'm the current 2023 Congressman John Lewis Fellow with Free Minds. I'm truly humbled and grateful to have been awarded this position. Just knowing what Congressman John Lewis stood for and all the advocacy work he dedicated his life to, I embrace the struggle, especially after doing 30 years in prison. I feel like it has prepared me to advocate for some of the same issues that Congressman Lewis took to heart.

Coming back to Washington, DC, which was home to me and my family for over three generations, was a blessing and a shock. So much had changed over those three decades I was away. I mean, I tried to stay up on everything that was happening in DC by reading the Washington Post newspaper as well as keeping a subscription to the *Washingtonian Magazine* yearly. But none of that prepared me for what was actually going on in my hometown. I mean,

I think a lot of what's happening is beautiful and great for DC. All of the new buildings, restaurants, etc. are the highlights of the city, but the downside is the big increase in the cost of living. This is what troubles me and has affected me as well. With this being said, I understand that finances play a big part in one's ability to sustain a certain quality of life. This is why I personally started my company called Serve and Save LLC, which works with educating at-risk youth and returning citizens in the area of financial literacy, mainly investing when it comes to the stock market. This also ties into my advocacy work, just trying to help people overcome and change the trajectory of their family tree when it comes to finances. I just believe we all have a part to play. Like the Madonna song says, "All the world's a stage, and everyone has their part." We just have to figure out what's our role!

## FAMILY TIES: CARLOS'S STORY

*Continued from page 6*

I respect him so much right now.

That home pride feeling is all tied into my family, my freedom, my country, me being out of Washington, DC and still having those vibes. DC is a big part of me I could never erase! Everything, how I talk, how I walk, even my haircut shows I'm not from here. DC, that part of home, that's not something I could ever shake, consciously or unconsciously. I wear it, speak it and listen to it. I find myself putting on go-go real loud while I'm cleaning and probably my neighbor is like, "What is he listening to?" Music from Chuck Brown to Trio Los Panchos, it's all me, it's all home.

My pride comes in now because I see that my grandfather embedded so many things in me and today I remember him in those steps that I take in trying to live a different kind of life here. I know my grandparents would be happy to see me, even if I wasn't in the United States. I know that they'd be happy to know that I'm

just floating around Honduras.

**Janet:** There are many times you did not have a choice about big things in your life, as a child and while incarcerated. As a free man, you seem to have a lot of wisdom when it comes to making choices that will deepen your connections with your family and hometown(s).

**Carlos:** After everything that I went through, it has never before been with the sense of freedom like I have now. Knowing everything that I went through, even though it has not been easy and may not be easy in the future, can't nothing or no one take that proud feeling away. I could be in Panama or we could go to Costa Rica, wherever I end up, that feeling is going to be the same. With that feeling of freedom, I'm going to make it home. And I'm going to be proud of it. Being proud of being free, being proud of having actual choices, if I want to stay or if I go, it will be done with that love for freedom, with that love for home.

# FM MEMBERS AND STAFF SHARE WHAT THEY LOVE BEST ABOUT THEIR HOMETOWN

**JH:** My favorite spot in DC is my neighborhood of Sursum Corda. This is my favorite spot because of my family, friends, and all the memories. Sursum Corda made me strong, humble, intelligent, wise, and patient. It showed me how to overcome hardship and shine like it never happened. It gave me clarity on life and people. It made my mind unbreakable like a pebble. It made my heart hard on the outside and soft on the inside like a watermelon. My favorite spot is my hood. It made me a STAR!!!!

**JM:** My favorite part of DC is Highland Recreation Center in Condon Terrace, where I grew up. They help give back to the community and always have activities for the youth. I played basketball, baseball, and football there. I skated on the outside skating rink we have there. When I was a kid, I even went skiing with them!

**EH:** My favorite spot in DC is where I was born and raised: Uptown DC on Riggs Road, near the new Walmart. I love the area because I know a lot of people there. I have everything I need there – the barbershop, grocery shopping, my family and the school I went to as a child. It's called LaSalle Elementary. My kids attend there now! The subway is there when I need it.

**WJS:** I used to love going down to Hains Point in the summertime. It was always a family affair with good food and fun times. I remember the statue called "The Awakening" where a man was emerging from the earth. Me and some friends took pictures around the hand of the statue. We used to go and cook hot dogs and hamburgers on the grill and enjoy the scenery. It was always live there on the Fourth of July and all through the summer!

**JZ:** My favorite place in DC is the monuments. I used to go there every weekend. There is one monument with a big water fountain and I used to ride around on the scooters in the summer and just enjoy the water on my feet!

**BP:** I've only been to this spot one or two times, but it's called Busboys & Poets. It's a pleasant scenery. They have spoken word, poetry, and a bookstore. The food there is amazing as well!

**CP:** I love Little Gem Park where I grew up in Idaho. The time I spent there felt like I was truly free, transcending reality.



A mural near 10th & N St NW

**MG:** My old stomping grounds in DC is Columbia Heights. There are a lot of nice places to eat, and great networking and entrepreneurship opportunities.

**OB:** My favorite spot in DC is most certainly U Street/ Cardozo. I love the restaurants, theaters, bars, and lounges. People of all walks of life can come together to eat, party, enjoy beautiful scenery, and culture at its finest without too much drama, chaos or discrimination. Need I mention Free Minds Book Club is right there on 12th Street (down a block and a half from U and literally walking distance from the metro station)? The area is known for the famous Ben's Chili Bowl. However, there are a variety of different restaurants that people can pick from soul food to Italian. My favorite of them all is Busboys & Poets, where once a week a person can sit down and enjoy a meal and participate in a poetry jam.

**DD:** My favorite spot in DC is U Street, NW. It's my favorite spot because it brings me all the positive vibes. I get to be myself and enjoy myself.

**MG:** My favorite spot is this place called Wonder Chicken on Georgia Avenue. They sell the best food you can think of! It's always fresh and clean. I always order the honey wings. They are so good!

**IS:** My favorite spot would probably be Georgetown. It has the real downtown city vibe with the big buildings, all the stores and food places. I love seeing all the different faces. Then you have the university there and it's fun to see all the law students.



**NC:** My favorite spot in DC is right on the National Mall. My husband and I said our vows to each other at the Washington Monument on Valentine's Day 2022!

**RO:** I love the Tidal Basin because I can just relax and watch the tide rise as the sun sets!

**SG:** I love the Wharf down on the Southwest waterfront. I like eating the fresh seafood and paddle boat riding! I feel relaxed there, loving the cool breeze that blows being near the water.

**JY:** My fave spot in DC is the Wharf because it's so much to see and do. Far as the food, they have soul food, fast food, and seafood. They also have activities like going on a boat ride.

**MV:** My favorite would be just being anywhere "downtown!" When I was young I used to sell Washington Times newspapers. I would post up at all the different subway stations all over downtown... Man, it was a lot of beautiful people that I came across. So yeah, that would have to be my favorite place in the city!

**RT:** I love eating at Ben's Chili Bowl because it's a very historic building with good hot dogs, half smokes, chili and cheese with french fries! Plus, there is a good view and good people there.

**IL:** My love for DC is what makes me a Washingtonian! I was born in NY, NY, but later on my moms got a house in the Petworth area of DC. I lived there thru middle and high school so I consider myself 'UPT', an uptown kid. Since then I've lived in each quadrant of DC. I like SW because it's close to the water, and when I lived there it felt like I was Bruce Wayne, leaving the Bat Cave to head into Gotham. I loved being so close to downtown, VA, everything! NE always felt like a crime scene but when I got my chance to live in that section of Washington, I got nothing but love and acceptance. In SE, I lived in Fairfax Village. I know I was

the only Latino walking around there. If I had to pick one favorite spot in DC it would be Georgia Avenue. I love how Howard University sits on a hill. I love Banneker Pool in the summer! I love go-go music! As a chess fanatic, I appreciate Dupont Circle. There are chess tables and great players who frequent the Circle. I feel proud to live in the Capitol of a superpower, the USA. I appreciate this city and apologize to it for my mistakes and shortcomings. Much love DC.

**RS:** One of my favorite places is 14th and U Street. At the corner on a weekend night, there is so much to do, with barhopping, nice restaurants and a lot of fun parties. It is always packed. I worked there for almost a decade and I know a lot of people up and down U Street. I worked at Tropicalia, an underground bar. I also worked at 18th Street Lounge in Dupont Circle. A lot of fun times and meeting good people. It is always a movie every weekend. This is also where they would host Moechella, the DC go-go concert for the #dontmutedc movement.

**JM:** I love the National Harbor. It has everything I like there. Plus it has some history. I love walking by the harbor and staying at the Gaylord Hotel, as well as eating at the restaurants by the water.

**KY:** At night up U Street it be lit up. People from all over be up there. The lounges. That's what everybody go up there for 'cause it's lots of them. It's the nightlife of D.C!

**MAR:** In my mid-teens while riding my bike I stumbled upon this picturesque, quiet and semi-secluded park along a walk path adjacent to the U.S. Capitol grounds. However, the main attraction was this community of squirrels. You see, unlike the guerilla style maneuvers employed by neighborhood squirrels as they would dart while dodging sling shots, rocks, and pellets of mischievous boys, these squirrels didn't know of such threats and would eat out of my hand! With this simple gesture a lifetime of peace had been brokered!

**BK:** My favorite spot in our beloved nation's capital is Harriet Tubman Elementary School's soccer field. This institution is where a huge chunk of my primary school attendance was, but it played a more significant role in my life post-graduation. From the start of middle school through the middle of high school, when I was on that field, it felt like nothing else in the world mattered. I didn't care about not being able to afford the most popular shoes; not having any money in my pocket; or, wanting to appease the "cool kids". It was just me; that soccer ball; and the field, and nothing could replace that feeling.



A view overlooking the waterfront

# THE WRITE WAY

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

*By Meg*

How do you portray where a character is from by the way they speak? Maybe you've come across books where a character's dialogue is written in a way that reflects how they sound. This can look like writing *goin' for going*, or *sez for says*. The practice of writing dialogue according to how it sounds instead of how it's typically written is called eye dialect. While this can be a useful indicator of a character's style of speaking and region of origin, there are a few things to think about when writing this kind of dialogue.

Eye dialect has a history of being used in many books as a means of depicting a certain character as lower in literacy or of having a lower socioeconomic status. Some authors use this to comment on the realities of living in a specific time or place, while others – consciously or unconsciously – use it as a means of furthering harmful stereotypes through a marked and emphasized otherness from what's considered Standard English (which is a debatable concept on its own). It's important to take into account the social contexts in which eye dialect is usually used and make your own conclusions for what feels right for your story.

If you're looking for other ways to depict where a character is from through dialogue, many aspects of dialect don't have to reflect sounds or manner of speech to reference a specific region. A lot of dialects contain unique words or phrases, like the use of the term "devil's strip" in a small region in Ohio to refer to the area of grass between the sidewalk and the road. A lot of ways writers differentiate between an American English dialect and a British English dialect in writing is through words we know are part of those vocabularies. Have you read a book where a British character uses the word "jumper" instead of sweater? That's a way to indicate a character's origin and style of speech without using eye dialect.

You can also have your character reference other things unique to their hometown. A sports team can showcase hometown pride, for instance, and a reference to a recognizable landmark can tell audiences your character has knowledge about an area of the world that might only be available to someone who's lived there. You can use anything from rivers – a character's familiarity with the Rio Grande river



might indicate a history living in the Southwest – to local towns or businesses. Certain ice cream shops that are only on the East Coast, or a town name so well known the reader automatically draws a connection between that place and your character.

If your goal is to write a character who shares similar origins to yourself (or to someone close to you), you're already in the great position of knowing what makes that place unique. If you'd like to write about a character who's from a place you're not as familiar with, it might take some research, but you'll still be able to find signifiers for that character's past through representations of place. It's also possible to showcase a character's ties to an imaginary place! If you're comfortable with crafting your own slice of the world, you can create your own landmarks, phrases, or idiosyncrasies that a character can reference in their speech. Many books take place in fictional places based on areas of the real world, while others explore stories in completely original cities, countries, or even planets.

Ultimately, the decision about how to communicate to readers the place your characters come from is entirely up to you. Oftentimes, it depends on the kind of story you're trying to tell, as well as on the themes you're trying to highlight or the statements you're trying to make. Character origins can be a fun thing to explore, and as you write, you'll find it easier to portray individual characteristics through dialogue if that's something you'd like to do. If it feels more natural, start with what you know. If you were a character in a book, how would you write yourself? How would you show the audience where you're from? This is a good starting point to get comfortable with this type of writing. Like all things, it just takes practice and persistence, and maybe a little research. Good luck!

# PAYING IT FORWARD: HARRIET'S WILDEST DREAMS

By Meg

*(Makia uses they/them pronouns)*

Harriet's Wildest Dreams, an abolitionist community defense hub born and founded in 2021 to build a political home for Black abolitionists, combines three pillars of action and base-building to fight for Black liberation in DC. Makia, one of the founders, recently connected with us to share their insights on the incredible impacts of this organization on the DC community.

The three pillars, under the headings Organizing, Action, Defense, embody the three tools that act as the foundation of Harriet's Wildest Dreams. The first, an organizing effort under the name Ella's Emancipators, acts as political defense and a pillar of community organizing. "Ella's Emancipators is heavily informed by the other two pillars," Makia said. "It involves working with other DC policy and policy-led organizations like the DC Justice Lab. It focuses on strengthening the coalition with these groups and bringing opportunities and advocacy to the hub." Makia stressed the importance of base-building, describing methods of bringing people into the fold and teaching them about the craft of organizing.

The second pillar, the action pillar called Harriet's Responders, embodies community defense efforts. Makia described these efforts as "deep support and crisis response teams," as seen in the DC Safety Squad, a partnership of DC activists. They strive to "build local power through transformational direct action," ensuring impacted groups and individuals have access to compassionate care and personalized crisis response.

Lastly, the third pillar, a legal defense endeavor titled Ida B. Free, offers a direct support system of legal defense for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. Makia defined their primary mindset in this area as "defund, decriminalize, and decarcerate," intent on redefining the narrative around incarceration and the criminal justice system. Participatory defense projects train the loved ones of incarcerated individuals in how to advocate for support, decreases in sentencing, and more. The Courtwatch DC volunteer program brings people into courtrooms, both in person and virtually, to spot injustice in DC's empty courtrooms. "The goal is to push accountability for prosecutors and judges, as well as improve data collection for cases and incarceration," Makia said. These three pillars solidify the creation of Harriet's Wildest Dreams within the black radical tradition, adding to the history and tradition of Black-led abolitionist movements.

When asked if they've seen community change in response to the principles of defund, decriminalize, and decarcerate, Makia

recounted many instances of positive change in the DC community as a result of these efforts. In 2021, Harriet's Wildest Dreams was able to provide homes for young people in need, build a base of a few hundred people, and foster an online community of over ten thousand supporters. They saw the introduction of bills like the Revised Criminal Code Act, the Comprehensive Policing Bill, and the Omnibus Bill. "We've also seen an overall shift from 2021 to now of people being more open and investing in community-led safety," Makia noted, emphasizing the role of community participation in their activism.

Moreover, there has been real growth in their overarching goal of inspiring DC residents to see themselves as responsible for community safety. "We're reimagining what our safety looks like, and we're reclaiming our safety for ourselves," said Makia. Their impact can be seen in their direct responses to police brutality, the people they've supported to beat their cases and rise "out of the cage" of incarceration, and the families they've aided through a multitude of difficult processes. One of Harriet's Wildest Dreams' community engagement programs is Direct Action Training, educational opportunities in preparation for mass action. They include protocols for safe language and processes in order to ensure the wellbeing of those taking action.

In answering the question of how they approach intersectionality in their activism, such as the intersection of gender and race activism efforts, Makia described their mission as Black Queer Feminism. "We want to try to center individuals and the political lives of those who live in the margins," Makia declared. "We lift up the voices of the Black trans community, providing leadership opportunities, trust-building, and base-building events to connect and sponsor different organizing efforts in these communities." The culmination of this feeds into all of their work, aiming to "push folk's understanding of intersectionality." They follow up with community members and participants in their organization, offering fellowship programs with specific identity focuses. This year's fellowship focus is young girls.

Harriet's Wildest Dreams has also done essential work with Free Minds. They've been a leader in the #HandsOffDC Campaign, advocating for DC residents' right to self-governance. They've been a vital voice with us at #HandsOffDC rallies, calling Biden to veto the overturning of police reform bills. They're a strong and determined source of positive change in the DC community, and they continue to increase their reach and impact as they move forward.

You can read about Free Minds member Deangelo's experience with the Hands Off DC movement on page 16.

## 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.*

**Little Green Army Men by Malcolm Scott**

**Description provided by the author:** In *Little Green Army Men*, the author shares poetry and personal essays reflecting on his journey, the world around him, and universal themes such as identity, recovery, healing, and liberation.



# IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

## DEEP DIVE: D.C. CRIME BILLS

Nobody really disputes the fact that Washington, D.C. has experienced an alarming amount of violent crimes and auto thefts. But there is plenty of contention over who should have a say in the response to this problem, and how the city handles the balance between accountability, reform and justice.

This dispute came to a head this year when the federal government erased years of work by the city council on crime legislation that was poised to become city policy. We'll try and break the whole thing down here.

In 2016, the city council established a reform commission to develop recommendations for how to rewrite the criminal code in the District of Columbia. The push to do so started even before the creation of the commission, and is rooted in the fact that much of D.C.'s criminal code is from more than a century ago.

By the fall of 2021, that work had culminated in the Revised Criminal Code Act, a comprehensive overhaul that would be voted on by the council the following year and pass unanimously, 13 votes to zero.

The bill makes many changes to the sentencing guidelines for certain crimes; some are increased (like for attempted murder) and others are decreased (like with carjacking). It also eliminated mandatory minimum sentences for everything except first degree murder, and would give anyone convicted of long sentences the ability to seek a reconsideration of that sentence from a judge. That permission, referred to as a "second look," is already afforded to youth and young adults.

Mayor Muriel Bowser said she supported "95 percent" of the bill that the council put together, but vetoed it over two objections in particular. She wanted to split the "Second Look" provision out and hold hearings on it to see what the public had to say about it, and do the same for a section of the bill that would gradually introduce the ability to hold jury trials in misdemeanor cases.

Bowser introduced these as proposed amendments, and vetoed the bill as it was passed by the council. The council then overrode her veto.

Emboldened by the mayor's objection to the bill, Congress got involved. And in February, the House of Representatives blocked the crime bill. The Senate followed suit in March in a bipartisan vote that included 33 Democrats blocking the crime bill, followed by President Joe Biden signing the legislation to undo the work of the city council.

Why does Congress get to do that? Because unlike with states, under the Constitution (Article 1, Section 8, Clause 17), Congress reviews all DC legislation before it can become

law. This is among the many arguments some make to support the district becoming our 51st state.

With comprehensive reform off the table, the council has moved to emergency legislation in the wake of public frustration over violent crime. D.C. is on pace for 300 homicides in 2023; for comparative purposes that number was just 88 about a decade ago. Violent crime is up nearly 40% compared to the same time frame in 2022, and motor vehicle theft incidents have more than doubled in that window.

The emergency bill passed in July by the council, with support from the mayor, expands access to private security cameras and allows pretrial GPS monitoring info to be used as evidence against defendants at trial. It also creates a presumption that any adult charged with a violent crime, and juveniles charged with only certain ones, will be detained before appearing in court. That doesn't necessarily mean that all who are accused of these crimes will be jailed before trial, but it puts the onus on judges to determine why they should *not* be.

## WORLD

A recent coup d'etat<sup>1</sup> in the West African country of Niger has created a potential flashpoint for multinational conflict. In July, a junta<sup>2</sup> led by the presidential guard deposed the sitting and recently elected president, Mohamed Bazoum, who they are now holding captive.

The Economic Community of West African States, or ECOWAS, set immediate sanctions and issued an ultimatum that if order was not restored, the group would intervene militarily. That drew sharp rebukes from leaders in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, all nearby countries where power was recently taken via a coup. Add to this volatile mix that there is healthy military presence from France in the region that it once colonized, and that Russian mercenary security forces are frequently employed by coup-runners.

## NATION

The 2024 presidential campaign is off and running; by the time you read this, there will likely have already been one debate held among Republican candidates seeking the party's nomination.

For all the coverage it will get, the very high likelihood is that we will see a rematch of 2020 despite fairly dismal approval ratings for both of the men involved in it. President Joe Biden remains the massive favorite to seek reelection; his only substantial opponent at the moment is Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who has yet to gain more than 20% in most polls.

Former President Donald Trump faces far more challengers on the Republican side, but he has distanced himself from the field in the earlygoing with more than 50% support in the polls. Compare that to late February, when he was

# IN THE NEWS *By John, FM Friend*

virtually neck and neck in those polls with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. This, despite—or perhaps because?—Trump is the subject of more than six dozen criminal and civil charges spread across a handful of indictments and lawsuits that have all been announced this spring and summer.

Charles Ogletree, a mentor to former President Barack Obama and a giant in the realm of social justice and civil rights, passed away this summer at the age of 70. Ogletree, a Harvard professor who was born to tenant farmers in Merced, Calif. Ogletree notably defended Tupac Shakur in several cases, but was known best in the legal community for his fierce defense of people who could not typically afford the counsel provided by a legal talent of his caliber.

## SPORTS

In recent decades, the most optimistic point of the season for the Washington Commanders has been just before the season began. With perhaps the single exception of Robert Griffin III's sensational rookie year, there has been almost no joy to derive from the teams woes.

Will this year be different? It certainly begins that way at the top, as the Commanders have a new ownership group. That cadre, which includes Philadelphia 76ers co-owner Josh Harris, paid more than \$6 billion to oust one of American sports most reviled owners, Dan Snyder, whose tenure with the Commanders brought just a handful of playoff games and of course zero Super Bowls.

On the field, the team enters 2023 with a stout defense that carried the squad last year, along with a bunch of electric young weapons on offense. The receiver corps of Terry McLaurin, Jahan Dotson and Curtis Samuel could end up being a top five unit in the NFL, and running back Brian Robinson started to show major promise in the backfield. The million dollar question is, have the Commanders found a franchise quarterback in University of North Carolina passer Sam Howell? The 23-year-old started one game for the Commanders last season, and is thus completely untested at the pro level. Philadelphia is by far the class of the NFC East going into the season, but if Howell is the real deal, figure

Washington to be in the mix for a wild card spot.

Meanwhile, the biggest tournament in women's soccer is underway, with the FIFA Women's World Cup taking place in Australia and New Zealand. This tournament, which takes place every four years, runs from July 20 – August 20, and brings together teams from all over the world; this year, for the first time in history, the FIFA Women's World Cup is the same size as the men's, with 32 teams competing. The tournament opened with the group stage, in which the 32 teams were divided into groups of four, with only two teams advancing from each group to the knockout rounds.

This tournament has already featured a number of surprising exits, with favorites Germany and Brazil eliminated in the group stage, and the US (four-time winners and reigning champions) knocked out by Sweden in the Round of 16. This is the US's worst performance in a Women's World Cup to date, and many fans and viewers are already speculating that US Soccer may soon part ways with the coach, Vlatko Andonovski.

Meanwhile, there have also been a number of historic accomplishments at this World Cup. Eight teams qualified for the first time in their nation's history: Morocco, Zambia, Vietnam, Philippines, Panama, Haiti, Ireland, and Portugal. Morocco also made history as the first team to advance to the knockout rounds in their first World Cup, and with fellow African teams Nigeria and South Africa also advancing, this was the first time 3 African countries have advanced to the knockout rounds. This tournament also featured the first openly trans athlete (Quinn from Canada) and the first athlete who wears hijab to compete in a World Cup (Nouhaila Benzina from Morocco).

As of this writing, two stages of the knockout rounds have been completed, and the semifinals are set to begin, with four teams remaining: Spain, Sweden, England, and host nation Australia. None of these countries have ever won a Women's World Cup before, so no matter what, we will see a new winner take home the trophy on August 20th.

<sup>1</sup> A coup d'etat (pronounced like coo day tah) is a sudden decisive exercise of force in politics, especially the violent overthrow or alteration of an existing government by a small group (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

<sup>2</sup> A junta (pronounced like hunta because the word comes from Spanish, where the letter J makes an H sound) is a group of persons (sometimes a military force) controlling a government especially after a revolutionary seizure of power (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

## CELEBRATING MEMBERS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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

- ★ JH and JG passed their GED
- ★ JH and KL received their high school diplomas
- ★ ES and RS received C-Tech certification in 5G wireless
- ★ AW and CP completed a semester of college with Ashland University
- ★ ACW, DL, GBM, KL, LNL, LB, MG, MJ, ND, PF, RD, RS, SH, TW completed a semester at Georgetown University

Please share your accomplishments with us to be featured!

# BOOK REVIEW: CHOCOLATE CITY

By Sophie

*Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital*, written by professors Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, is a nonfiction book that narrates the history of DC through the lens of race and democracy. *Chocolate City* starts with the region's precolonial past and ends with the 2010s. The book walks its readers through history, making its way through the decades and discussing the rise and fall of DC as "Chocolate City," a name the city earned in the 1950s after becoming the first majority Black city.

The book's fourteen chapters each take on a different era of DC history. The sections begin with a historical quote that touches on an important theme from the time period. Each chapter also begins by describing a building or a public area that still remains in DC, providing a micro-history on the structure and how it is relevant to the era. For example, Chapter 4, which discusses the end of slavery in DC, starts with a description of the National Building Museum that sits on F Street NW. The museum was actually built on the site of the DC Jail in the 1840s and 1850s, a building referred to as the "Blue Jug" because of the color of the walls. The book details the Blue Jug's role in the history of slavery, and the cruel ways in which suspected fugitives were committed to the jail regardless of whether charges had been proven against them.

The book itself takes on a monumental topic, and the authors do their best to fill the pages with as much information as possible. This can be seen in the fact that the actual text of the book spans 462 pages. There are then 112 pages of endnotes and bibliography, a testament to both how well-documented each chapter is and to the academic background of the authors.

This book is certainly not a light read. I myself had to break it up into sections, both to process the difficult history this book tackles and to balance the academic tone of the writing. The authors take on what could very easily be a tedious and monotonous history, and do their best to give it life with anecdotes, vivid descriptions of the city, and interesting insight into how race, democracy, politics, and economics have all influenced each other in DC.

The book focuses heavily on activists, radical thinkers, and other change-seekers over the centuries. Its final line emphasizes the goals of the authors in producing such a comprehensive history. Asch and Musgrove write, "We hope that this book will inspire Washingtonians to take up the challenge of black and white abolitionists, of former slaves and Radical Republicans, of civil rights and home rule activists, of freeway protestors and cooperative organizers, to build a more just, egalitarian, and democratic nation's capital" (p. 462).

Let us know if there are aspects of DC history that you would like to know more about. We love hearing from you!



# DC CULTURE: A DAY AT THE DC AFRO-LATINO FEST

By Sofia

Hey there, Free Minds Fam! Since many of our wonderful members are from DC, we thought it would be a good idea to have a *Connect* column dedicated to the latest on all things DC culture, and what better issue to introduce this new column than this one? In this column, we'll share the latest on music, literature, food, events, and more from DC. Let us know if you have any ideas on what you would like to see for this new column. For the first installment, I'll be walking you through my day at the second annual DC Afro-Latino Fest.

I first came across the festival through a post on Instagram. Social media is often where I hear about events happening around the city. The event was presented by Mayor Muriel Bowser and The Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs and is only the second year that the event has been held. Having an Afro-Latino background myself (my father is Black and Mexican), I couldn't wait to be around others in the District from my community and to also have aspects of various Afro-Latino communities shared with others. There is a large Latino community in and around DC, yet many Washingtonians and others know little about the racial diversity that exists within the community. There is a rich history of Afro-Nicaraguans, Afro-Costa Ricans, Afro-Dominicans, and Afro-Cubans, and other Afro-Latinos in DC. Afro-Latinos have formed some of the oldest Latino-serving organizations in DC, like the Vida Senior Center, Afro-Latino Institute, and the Latin American Youth Center.

With all this in mind, I headed to the event on Saturday, June 3rd with one of my close friends. The event was from 12pm to 7pm and as my friend and I entered the venue, Malcolm X Park (formerly known as Meridian Hill Park), we were met with lively samba beats as a live band performed in the park. A large crowd danced near the stage and before my friend and I joined them, we decided to check out some of the vendors. We walked through the vibrant tents that featured crafts, art, jewelry, and other goods sold by local Black, Latino, and Afro-Latino artists and businesses. My friend and I each bought some crochet pieces and artwork from



local Black artists. We couldn't help but be drawn to the savory smell of empanadas being sold on the street just outside of the park and decided to check out the food at the event. Amongst the offerings of empanadas, a Colombian food truck, a soul food stand, and a frutería (small fruit stand), we decided to cool off with some brightly colored homemade popsicles being sold at a food truck. I opted for a raspberry lemonade flavor while my friend chose the sweet tamarind flavor.

After enjoying our popsicles, we headed back to the stage and danced along to The Soul Searchers, the band for DC Go-Go music legend, Chuck Brown. In between songs, the performers discussed the importance of solidarity between the African American and Latino communities in DC. After the go-go performance, we watched a performance in front of the main stage by Capoeira, DC. Capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian martial art that combines elements of dance, acrobatics, music and spirituality. The moment felt poignant as capoeira performers of all generations danced and laughed together, passing on this important aspect of their culture and sharing it with onlookers. After this performance, my friend and I decided to leave the event after a long day out. As we walked down the street towards a Dominican restaurant for dinner, the Afro-Latino jazz-funk band on stage echoed in the background. A smile crept across my face as I felt gratitude for a beautiful day spent celebrating DC Afro-Latino culture.

# MEDITATION: COMING HOME TO YOURSELF

By Kelli

*I long as does every other human being to be at home wherever I find myself.*

— Maya Angelou

I love this quote by writer Maya Angelou.

My hometown is Eugene, Oregon, a small college town about 100 miles south of Portland in the Willamette Valley. It's a beautiful place nestled between Oregon Coast Range, and the Cascade Mountains. Whenever I go back to visit, I am flooded with joy the moment that I spot Spencer Butte, a lush green mini-mountain covered with Douglas Fir trees that marks the southern edge of my town. When it pops up on the horizon, I just feel happy. You know that feeling... it's the feeling of being home.

As I drive through Eugene, I am rewarded by all of the things that haven't changed. South Eugene High School looks exactly the same (except that they painted it half purple to mark pride in our mascot, the Axe — I know, weird mascot, but that's Oregon!) And there on Agate Street is the Marketeria, a little family-owned corner grocery store where the owners knew our names and my sister and I used to buy a lot of candy with any loose change we could scare up. I see University Park where my best friend and I perfected our layups on the raggedy basketball court and where I cracked my head open one summer falling off the monkey bars (why did someone think it was fine to build the monkey bars on top of hard concrete??). Our neighbor Mrs. Ford was at the park and ran over to help me, sending her son running up the block to get my mom. Just seeing all of these familiar spots in my hometown and my neighborhood bring back memories that I can feel in my body. This place, these people... this was my starting point. It's like an anchor, reminding me of who I am, and where I come from, a place where I belong.

My parents' divorce when I was 10 led to a series of moves... some within Eugene, and many to different places. I lived in different towns with different members of my family and for a time the only constant in my life became change. It was disorienting. I missed the familiar. I missed being in a place where I felt I belonged. I felt homesick. But in the years that followed, I grew in ways I might never have been able to if I had stayed there. I became more resilient. I learned to adapt. I made new

friends, had new adventures, and found new homes. And while I continue to love those memories of Eugene... and those people... and that place, over the years, I have come to understand something about the word home. Home is not a place, but rather, a feeling. What Maya Angelou describes... that sense of being home no matter where we are, is something worth seeking!

Let's meditate about being home. If you can, have a buddy take turns with you. One reads, while the other meditates. Then switch. Otherwise, you can read through the script once or twice and then just close your eyes and sit with the feelings you experienced.

*Let's start by finding a comfortable position... If you can, sit down, with your feet on the floor and your arms loosely at your sides... your hands resting in your lap. Be aware of your body... Take a deep breath in... hold it... and let it go... Locate any areas of tension you feel... now imagine the tension slowly melting away and evaporating off of you like steam from your pores... Take another deep breath in... experience the increasing sense of calm... and exhale... Feel your chest rising... and falling... Allow your breath to fall into its natural rhythm... in... and out...*

*Recognize and accept that in this moment, you are not physically home. But be open to the idea that we can access the feeling of home anywhere... say the word HOME...*

*As you do so, imagine a genuine smile on a friendly face... that feeling of being welcome... let the light and warmth of that smile fill you up... from the crown of your head, you see the light of that smile spreading throughout your entire body, down through your legs, and your feet, all the way to your toes... You feel completely relaxed... and at home.*

*Home is a refuge and a sanctuary... imagine that feeling of being home... where you can drop your burdens... where you are surrounded by what is familiar, and protected from anything that may feel stressful or unpredictable... Visualize a place that feels this way to you... a place that you know, and where you feel known... Now realize that even though you are separated from that physical space, it also exists within you... You know yourself thoroughly... Locate*

*and embrace that feeling of being home as you breathe in, and out...*

*You are reminded that home is accessible to you in this moment, right here, and right now...*

*Notice the floor underneath your feet... feel how solid it is... Imagine how rooted you are to the entire earth... you feel grounded... anchored... within your body...*

*Imagine looking out of your window at night at the moon, reflecting the sun's light back to this side of the planet... it is the same moon that you looked at as a child... it is the same moon that your loved ones can see right now if they too are looking up into the sky... Feel this familiar feeling... you together with humanity... you are at home on this earth...*

*Think about the people who love you... you know that they love you just as you are... they get you... they know without any doubt, that you are enough... they accept you, and embrace you... breathe in this love... this acceptance... let it fill you up... Remember that just by loving and accepting yourself... you are home.*

*In your mind or aloud, say these words... "I am home..."*

*As you breathe in... and out... focus on a happy memory... As you re-experience that moment, pay attention to how you feel about yourself... In this moment, you are 100% you... you are honest, and true, and real... See yourself... and repeat the words... "I am home..."*

*Home is not so much about a place... it's a feeling and a knowledge of ourselves...*

*It is memories of happy days... and excitement about the future. It is the knowledge and assurance that you will create more happy memories... that there will be more happy days... Repeat the words again... "I am home..."*

*No matter where your physical body is... Nobody can take your sense of home away from you...*

*You can always come home to yourself.*



### Children at Barry Farms Housing Development in April 1944.

Gottscho-Schleisner, Inc., photographer  
Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

# DID YOU KNOW?

## Gentrification, Displacement, and the Story of Barry Farm-Hillsdale

*By Sofia*

When many of our members return home to DC, they often describe how different the city looks. Even in the short 4 years I've spent living here, I have seen the types of people, businesses, and buildings in certain neighborhoods undergo drastic transformations. These drastic transformations in the appearance and demographics of DC have been accompanied by sky-rocketing rents and housing prices.

This is not unique to DC and is known as gentrification. But what is the exact definition of gentrification? Different commentators have different definitions, but PBS describes gentrification as a general term for the arrival of wealthier, and usually younger, people in an existing urban area that accompanies rising rents and land values, as well as a change in the area's culture and characteristics. While gentrification and displacement are not the same, gentrification often accompanies the displacement of Black and brown low-income communities as they are priced out of their neighborhoods, have less political power than their new wealthier neighbors, and sometimes face intimidation tactics by the local government and developers to move somewhere else.

Why does gentrification happen? A lot of scholars ponder this exact question. Some have argued that gentrification is driven by the desires of younger wealthier folks who have moved to urban areas for work, to escape the suburbs and rural areas they grew up in, etc. Developers and city governments then capitalize on these changing desires by building more expensive and luxurious housing, high-end businesses and restaurants, and other new developments. Others theorize that gentrification is first driven by developers and/or local governments who realize they have a scarce resource that is in limited supply (for example, a lot of historical buildings) and then capitalize on that resource to attract younger and wealthier populations.

DC, which used to be known as Chocolate City, had a peak Black population in 1970 of about 71%. The Black population in DC dropped from 59% in 2000 to 41% in 2020, while the white population has grown. DC had the 9th largest decrease in Black residents in 2020 over the span of 20 years. Many of these residents have been pushed to the DC suburbs in Maryland and Virginia. While a newfound investment in an urban area isn't necessarily a bad thing, gentrification often disproportionately benefits newcomers at the expense of the low-income, marginalized folks who have long inhabited urban areas. The story of the Barry Farm-Hillsdale neighborhood in DC is an example of the pain that comes with redevelopment and gentrification. But it also serves as a powerful example of how communities can come together to resist and save their legacies and history from being erased.

Barry Farm-Hillsdale is a neighborhood that is south of the Anacostia neighborhood in Southeast DC. Barry Farm began as a plantation (Barry was an enslaver). In 1867, the land was bought by the

Freedmen's Bureau and was home to a thriving Black community. In 1941, the government seized part of the community's land for the construction of the Barry Farm Dwellings, a public housing development for African Americans.

Among those who lived at Barry Farm Dwellings in the 1940s and 1950s were several families whose children became plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the DC public schools (*Bolling v. Sharpe*), that successfully helped to challenge the segregation of schools in the United States. By the mid-1960s, the Barry Farm Dwellings were neglected by the government and DC housing authority. A well known anti-poverty activist, Etta Horne, became active in a tenants' council named The Band of Angels, which successfully negotiated a \$1.5 million renovation. Horne later went on to be a founder of the National Welfare Rights Organization in 1966.

The neighborhood has not only been a hub for community activism. In the early 1980s, the neighborhood became central to DC's emerging Go-Go music scene. A group of children formed a Go-Go group called The Junkyard Band, playing on improvised instruments made of materials like trash cans and soda bottles. Soon the group went from performing at informal events in the neighborhood to all across DC. They were later signed to Def Jam records, opening for mainstream artists like Tupac and Salt-n-Pepa, helping to put DC music on the map.

Because of policies under President Ronald Reagan such as the War on Drugs and a disinvestment from public welfare programs, Barry Farm, like other low-income urban communities, saw a rise in poverty and criminalization of the residents throughout the 1980s and 90s. In 2014, the DC government slated Barry Farm-Hillsdale for redevelopment. Plans for redevelopment included demolishing Barry Farm Dwellings and replacing it with a mixed-use, mixed-income development. By 2019, most of the dwellings were demolished with residents being displaced. To ensure that the legacy of this community did not get lost, Barry Farm Tenants and Allies Association and local nonprofit Empower DC fought, and succeeded, in preserving a few of the standing dwellings as a historic landmark. The preserved dwellings are planned to hold a museum and other forms of commemoration to honor the legacy and history of Barry Farm. While residents were unable to fully fight against the change of their beloved community and eventual displacement, they fought hard to ensure that their stories were not lost.

It is important that investment in urban areas is driven by the folks who have long lived and thrived there. What do you think of the story of Barry Farm-Hillsdale? How should local governments and other stakeholders balance investing in a city with the needs of residents who have long lived there? Let us know what you think, we'd love to hear from you!



# REAL WORLD OF WORK: ANTOINE'S STORY

*Interview By Carlos*

Focus on oneself starts behind the wall. But not knowing when the reward will come is something that Free Minds member Antoine has been dealing since the start of his incarceration. The man that I met through the poetry that he used to send in to Free Minds, is now home. Antoine was released in February under IRAA after having served 22 years. I now have the pleasure of hearing him recite his own work. I share the following with you so you too can enjoy what more I learned about him as I sat down and kicked it with him over Zoom. Zoom is a communications platform that allows users to connect with video, audio, phone, and chat.

Sent far away from home at the age of 24 to one of the harshest conditions of incarceration, was challenging from the start for him. He was sent to the SHU within the first three to four months of his arrival and it was where he stayed for the next year and a half. I asked him first, what was the feeling like of actually being home versus having to serve so long in prison while only having hope to hold on to during those moments?

He said, "The majority of people that are incarcerated envision themselves home, but as crazy as it may sound, me... I never felt that I had a life sentence, but I also never felt as if I was going home either. It was like, neither one soaked in. My whole focus was like, what can I do right now to make money and be able to send some to my daughter?"

Being in the SHU at the time was a huge obstacle, but it motivated him to write his first book. Keeping in communication with his daughter was the most important thing to him. Never missing a birthday, fighting through different obstacles with her... "It motivated me more," he said, "even with a life sentence... You have to have something to keep your focus on, something that is bigger with meaning. You can't let that time sink in. People don't understand what drives us with a life sentence. I was focused and driven... I can still do things for people, my daughter." He focused, not only on the education and betterment of himself, but that of his peers as well, working as a tutor.

He now works part-time in an Art Gallery in DC as a Resident Poet/Artist, a role that came to him as a blessing. He explained that, "at the age of sixteen I was a part of a program that was like GED/Carpentry and I shared that with my lawyers as they were drafting my IRAA motion. The lawyers reached out to the founder of the program, who offered me the job upon release and even wrote letters to the judge for me. The only thing that he asked of me was that I write two poems. I had just written my first two poems to Free Minds, and those were the two poems that I sent in and got the job."

When I asked him what being the resident poet entails, he

said, "I utilize the serenity of the gallery to write my poetry, and other forms of creative writing, and occasionally I get the honor of reciting my own poetry in sessions held at the gallery. To be a resident artist, I feel it is essential to not be shy to recite some of your deepest emotions to a roomful of people. But most importantly, learn to write different forms of poetry, quatrains, sonnets, etc. Even if you use them as practice, they will sharpen your skills." (A quatrain is a stanza or verse with four lines; a sonnet is a poem with 14 lines, usually with a specific rhyme scheme)

I wondered if he ever imagined landing a job like that? "I had a vision," Antoine said. "I know I can do certain things, I'm gifted at doing certain things. I just needed to focus on those skills as an artist. I love what I do. It is that same momentum that I had then, that is pushing me now that I'm home. I have too much to do, to get done." I shared with him how I envision him just walking to and from work at peace, and not feeling like he was just going to an employment but to a place that he enjoys.

My final question to him was, what does hometown pride mean to him? He said, "One of the things that being in the feds taught us was hometown pride. We were divided by the streets before. It used to be about neighborhoods and sections of the city. A lot of us got to be the best of friends in the feds. Supporting each other in so many ways, no matter what part of the city you were from. We began to have appreciation for each other. I love the city. I'm from DC. You can see the pride, when you see us we got some that represent DC. I haven't been home for more than four months, and that is what I love. Home team hats and shirts, the DC flag. Being in the trenches with these brothers created a deep sense of pride for the city."

How true that is even now. Even though I haven't crossed paths in those places with Antoine, it still feels brotherly every time I have spoken with him. Welcome home, my brother.



# WHAT WE'RE READING

with Neely

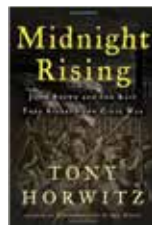
Have you recently read a book that left an impression on you, good or bad? We want to hear about it!

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

"What We're Reading."

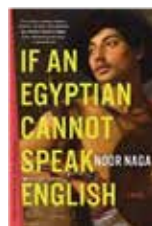
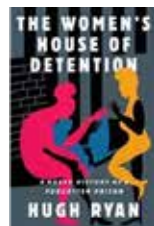
- **LW: *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

This is a historical fiction book about the Biafra and Nigerian Civil War. The author did a good job engaging me from the very first page. It was an interesting way of learning about African history, and I also like the way the author's writing style off-handedly taught the Igbo language. I learned a lot reading this book. I enjoy books that deal with our history before the slavery period, or books like this one that tell the struggle of our people outside of America, so we can see how vicious Europe has affected the people of the world. So we can see we have a common enemy and stop hating each other.



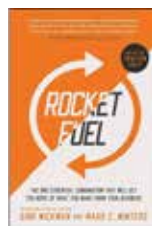
- **Jasmine: *Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid that Sparked the Civil War* by Tony Horwitz**

This book may be the standard by which we measure white allies, as it is the comprehensive biography and historical account of abolitionist John Brown's efforts leading armed resistance to slavery. Learning more about John Brown's early life, religious conviction, and his connections to other notable abolitionists, like DC's Frederick Douglass, is important to understanding his fervent opposition to slavery. If you haven't read his statement from his trial, you should because it is powerful. He was basically so serious about abolition, that people called him crazy. Can you imagine?



- **Julia: *The Women's House of Detention: A Queer History of a Forgotten Prison* by Hugh Ryan**

I recently read a fascinating nonfiction book called *The Women's House of Detention: A Queer History of a Forgotten Prison* by historian Hugh Ryan. This book went through the history of a prison in Greenwich Village in New York City, known as the Women's House of Detention, that was in operation from 1929-1974. I really appreciated learning about the complex ways that the women and trans and non-binary people incarcerated there built community and contributed to the larger struggle for liberation. Although the prison closed several decades ago, their experiences and their struggle felt clearly relevant to today. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in reading about the history of incarceration in America.



- **Neely: *If An Egyptian Cannot Speak English* by Noor Naga**

Naga's novel is about an Egyptian American woman who has spent her whole life in the United States, yet never feels like she is "American" enough because of her Egyptian identity. She moves to Egypt after college searching for a sense of belonging. Yet she soon finds that while she's not "American" enough in the United States, she's not "Egyptian" enough in Egypt. She meets this Egyptian man from a small town who was a photographer during the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. They fall in love and move in together, but soon the relationship begins to crumble. The novel explores the intersection of identity and fetishization (to have an obsession with) of other cultures, and what happens when our romanticized ideas of how other people should be, based on where they come from, don't match with reality. For 186 pages, this book is incredibly complex, and touches on everything from class, to colorism, to addiction, all within Naga's incredibly beautiful gift with words. It's a thought-provoking thesis that reads like a poem.

- **Tara: *Rocket Fuel: The One Essential Combination That Will Get You More of What You Want from Your Business* by Gino Wickman and Mark C. Winters**

A friend recommended this book and gave me her copy. It talks about the importance of having both a visionary and an integrator working together to achieve success in any organization and business. The author shares case studies of businesses like McDonald's and Disney that have both personalities. It also gives an assessment to determine if you are a visionary (an ideas person) or an integrator (make ideas a reality). It's really interesting and shows the power of knowing one's own strengths and finding complementary strengths in business partners.

# CONVERSACIONES DE MENTES LIBRES/ FREE MINDS CONVERSATIONS

Por/By Carlos

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

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

## Orgullo de Ciudad Natal

Antes de todo, quiero dar un caluroso saludo a toda mi familia de Mentes Libres. Deseo mucho que mis palabras los encuentren siempre fuerte, mental y físicamente. Para los que no me conocen, me llamo Carlos. Después de haber pasado 25 años en prisión, fui deportado a mi país donde nací. He estado aquí por casi 3 años y medio. Les cuento esto solo para poder hablar del tema de hoy. Orgullo de ciudad natal (ciudad natal = ciudad/país de donde uno creció o nació).

Tengo el privilegio de representar dos lugares, Honduras y el área del DMV (DC/Maryland/Virginia). Al llegar de Honduras en 1986, el primer lugar donde viví fue en DC. Un año después nos mudamos a Maryland donde crecí. Primero el área de Langley Park y después en una área conocida como White Oak. Siempre me ataría la capital. No sé, todo era más rápido. Siempre había cosas que hacer como que si la ciudad nunca dormía. A la edad de 15 años pude alquilar un apartamento en Downtown en la calle 11 y la M, cerca de Metro Center, me sentí en casa. La cultura, la música Go-Go se hicieron parte de mi. Hasta el día de hoy me encuentro escuchando esos tambores y timbales como si estuviera allí en la ciudad. Y por siempre los zapatos favoritos míos serán los New Balance.

En casa fue donde me salió lo Hondureño. Mi familia siempre ha tenido esa cultura en la casa. La comida era estilo Hondureño. Siempre empezando el día con café y pan (conocido como semitas) o baleadas. Yuca con chicharon, catrachas y siempre habían tortillas hechas por mami, bueno la lista es larga. También recuerdo que mis tías ponían musica latina. El día de hoy, todo esto también es parte de quien soy yo. Siempre agradecido por haber sido expuesto a mi cultura, mi gente y mi lenguaje. Hoy día les puedo decir con todo orgullo que soy un Hondureño de DC. Soy como soy porque así fue mi experiencia.

## Hometown Pride

First of all, I want to give a warm greeting to all of my Mentes Libres family. I really hope my words find you always strong, mentally and physically. For those who don't know me, my name is Carlos. After spending 25 years in prison, I was deported to my country where I was born. I've been here for almost 3 years and a half. I'm telling you this just so I can talk about today's topic. Hometown pride (hometown = city/country where one grew up or was born).

I have the privilege of representing two locations, Honduras and the DMV area (DC/Maryland/Virginia). Arriving from Honduras in 1986, the first place I lived was DC. A year later we moved to Maryland where I grew up. First the Langley Park area and then in an area known as White Oak. The capital was always a part of me. I don't know, everything was faster. There were always things to do as if the city never slept. At the age of 15 years I was able to rent an apartment in Downtown on 11th and M street near Metro Center. I felt at home. The culture, the Go-Go music became part of me. Until this day I find myself listening to those drums as if I were there in the city. And forever my favorite shoes will be New Balance.

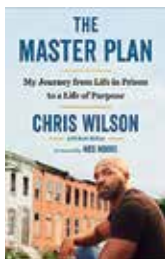
At home was where the Honduran came out. My family always had that culture in the house. The food was Honduran style. Always starting the day with coffee and bread (known as semitas) or baleadas. Yuca con chicharon, catrachas and they had tortillas made by mommy, well the list is long. Also, I remember that my aunts would play Latin music. Today, all of this is also part of who I am. Always grateful to have been exposed to my culture, my people and my language. Today I can proudly say that I am a Honduran from DC. I am the way I am because it was my experience.

# BOOKS ACROSS THE MILES!

The Free Minds long-distance book club

## The Master Plan: My Journey from Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose

with Neely



Thank you to everyone who shared their reflections on our current BAM book, *The Master Plan: My Journey from Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose* by Chris Wilson. In his memoir, Wilson shares the path he took through a violent childhood and through incarceration to create a "Master Plan" of everything he wanted to accomplish with his life. Here is what some of you had to say:

**1. How do you think Chris' life, and the lives of many children, would be different if the crack epidemic hadn't happened? Did this personally impact you or people in your life?**

**DK:** Obviously more children would have their parents around. In Chris' case his father, sadly like a lot of children's fathers, chose other people and or things over their own flesh and blood.

Chris' mom was doing so good until she met the dirty cop. She was raising him respectfully and the way a young boy should be raised (it's the reason I believe in the end he was so successful), she was being a mother and father in one, I admire her for that. Personally the crack epidemic affected my family but not in the use of it, but by others in the community that were so strung out on it they felt the need to rob our home many times to support their habit.

**AA:** If the crack epidemic never happened children would've been able to be children instead of skipping those precious adolescence years and going straight into survival of the fittest mode.

**MH:** I know for sure if the crack epidemic never hit, life for not only Chris but the whole black community would have been drastically different. That one drug decimated the community and so many resources were wasted. So much energy was put towards a negative black hole. Then the sad part was people looked towards the government with no relief on the way. The black community growth was stunted, money left the community, and the jail population increased.

**CS:** I think that life would be different if it didn't happen. What it did was it took that family structure away from households and made kids grow up faster than what they were ready for. What it did to me was it took my father away and left my mother to work, which left me with a lot of free time unchecked, so that landed me in wrong places and situations. I know now.

**SV:** The crack epidemic almost totally destroyed neighborhoods with Black and Brown residents. Personally, myself: I was directly impacted by selling this drug when I was a kid, and taking another man's life.

**SP:** Yeah, I think if the crack epidemic hadn't happened, Chris' life would have went down another path. I'm locked up for crack right now. Everybody around me sold crack and was living better off it (back then) than a 9 to 5 job (which was hard to get). The epidemic messed up a lot of young black kids' lives.

**AHA:** I believe so many of our people and neighborhoods would not have been destroyed and Chris' life and many others would have taken better routes. Many neighborhoods, like the one Chris grew up in, were plagued by violence and drugs, and as kids, we grew up fast, becoming a product of our environment. Without this epidemic, this part of history would have been better and not a stain in DC, known as the murder capital then. It impacted me and all in my life. No one was exempt from being personally impacted.

**RJ:** I believe that the black community wouldn't be as broke as it is if the crack epidemic hadn't occurred. Several of my family members ended up in state and federal prison for selling crack/cocaine. I've also had three aunts who found themselves in the web of addiction.

**2. When Chris was sentenced to life, his mother sat quietly, staring straight ahead with a blank look on her face. She didn't cry. Why do you think she didn't cry or react? Do you think she cared? Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't feel like you could express your feelings for whatever reason?**

**AA:** Can you just imagine being told that slavery is abolished except if you break any of these 1 million rules that's going to be made up along the way in which her son did? So I think she didn't know how to accept the reality that she had no say in what was happening. As for myself, I'm still trying to find a way to comprehend this ball of confusion. I mean the United States Constitution.

**SP:** I think she didn't cry because she had seen it happen so many times that it wasn't shocking to her. She probably saw or heard about a lot of her friends growing up, boyfriends, etc., getting life – it wasn't uncommon. I lost so many friends that I don't cry at funerals no more.

**AHA:** I think she was in shock and going through a lot. Those types of proceedings can be a lot, then to hear a judge sentence your son to life or decades leaves some speechless. I think she cared and just was going through a lot on top of being about to lose her son to prison while also feeling blame, thinking it's her fault. I don't recall having such a feeling but have witnessed certain situations.

**RJ:** I believe that she didn't cry due to the fact that she was in shock. I do think she cared, but was so trapped within the traumas of her addiction that she couldn't express her true feelings. Yes, there have been times where I couldn't express my feelings because I needed to be the source of strength in the situation.

**SV:** Of course she cared... but she was shocked by her son being given a life sentence. I was perhaps the same way back in 1987 when I was given 41 years to life.

**CS:** From what I read on his mother, she was mentally and emotionally drained from all that she went through. She cared for him, you can see that, but she couldn't give no more of herself. I have been like that my whole life because I was told never to show weakness and to hold everything in. That's my reason why I don't express myself. I have gotten better now that I'm older.

**DK:** The same reason as my Momma did. She later told me it was because she was so shocked at my 25 year sentence, she said she felt like she was in a trance wondering if her son was ever going to come home alive. Yes I have been that way within the past year when my Daddy died tragically by a fire, he had 3rd degree burns on 80% of his body. I was stunned, it's one of those unexpected things that happened. Here in prison around a lot of guys you must hide your true emotions otherwise even though you're not, they will perceive you as being weak and you become a target.

**3. Chris says that rock bottom isn't a place: "You can always go lower. Rock bottom is a decision. It's the moment you decide to stop falling and take control of your life." Do you agree? Why or why not?**

**RJ:** Yes, I wholeheartedly agree with this statement. We all have experienced various degrees of tribulations. At the end of the day we can either continue

to allow the things to spiral downward or we can take the necessary steps to improve our circumstances no matter how bleak they may be.

**AA:** No I don't agree because the only thing lower than rock bottom is death. So I think it is a place but its effect on some people may differ.

**MH:** It's so true that rock bottom is not a place because ultimately it's your choice on where you see yourself in life. Of course things can always get worse yet, no one can put you at any bottom unless you put yourself there.

**AHA:** I agree because you are in control of your life. You make choices and those choices can make you fall to a state of peace or chaos. So your choice is that decision that will take you to rock bottom or put you in control to lead yourself to where you want to be.

**SP:** I agree. I think rock bottom is where you finally make a life changing decision that you were unwilling to make before.

**DK:** I agree 110%, as Chris stated, rock bottom is a decision, it's truly when you (like I did) decided enough is enough, no more, no more victims, no more crime, it's time for a change, all of those things and more. It took me a few years after coming to prison to realize that, but I finally did. I wish each man here would, more than none in my opinion haven't hit rock bottom and it's shown in actions and words alone and I will leave it at that.

**SV:** I guess that's his own analogy. I would interpret "rock bottom" as being like the bottom of the barrel, but I can understand how he's interpreting it.

**CS:** I feel that we all have hit that point at some time in our lives, but it's up to us to get our minds right again, put that best foot forward, and take control. Yes, I agree, it's a mental state of being at the bottom, but it can change to physical if you don't change your way of thinking.

#### **4. While Chris was incarcerated in Maryland, the Governor took away the option for parole for Maryland prisoners serving life sentences. How do people continue to find hope or purpose when the legal system doesn't seem to offer opportunities for release?**

**AHA:** I would say because things are always changing and fighting for change and you have to find hope and strive to your full potential for when any opportunity comes. The legal system may close one door but then you open another door like Chris did. It takes work, faith, and patience, but once anybody gives up then you've given up on yourself. Chris and Steve are perfect examples of continuing to find hope and purpose by staying the course no matter what the Governor took away.

**SV:** You have to find hope somewhere – maybe a friend out in the world corresponding with you through writing, or family. You have to dig deep to find the "two," hope and purpose, and keep away from negative people or you will fall victim and you may never come home.

**CS:** For one, never give up or give in. Believe that there's a higher power than you know, that there's a plan for you that's already written out for your life. You just have to trust in that power. But know that you can always give time back, just look over your case, there's a loophole there. Don't rely on the system for your freedom – believe in self and God.

**MH:** For this question I actually asked my comrade in here with a life sentence what keeps him going. His response was faith, hands down. He believes in his hope being strong enough to pull him through this struggle. Having hope is what pulls you from being in the so-called rock bottom and it's something no one can take.

**DK:** Just like Chris did, I stay busy. I have gone incident report free for over 16 years now (and it's hard to do because like Chris said, the CO's try to trip you up). You must stay productive with classes, I have several certifications from AUTOCAD, Plumbing, Construction, Graphic Arts for example. I have completed over 300 classes with a total hours to date of 6,337. You must work on yourself each day to become a better person than the one who came into prison. Early in my sentence before I hit rock bottom a staff member that actually cared for inmates asked me, "How do you know you're never coming back to prison once you're released?" and I replied "It's not worth another 25 years!!" and he shocked me to the core when it hit me what he really meant, when he replied, "Why is the crime itself NOT REASON enough to not commit the crime in the first place?" I believe it was shortly after that, that I hit my rock

bottom. I will always remember that question and his response. It woke me up. I started showing change, I started programming, working out. I have my faith in God, these are the things that have carried me throughout this time now.

**SP:** By knowing that only God can judge you. By knowing that everybody has a purpose in this lifetime and He will use us to make a difference in somebody else's life.

**RJ:** I'm blessed to have a forthcoming release date, but I feel that people in that type of situation find hope through being that shining light for others. In doing so they can hopefully encourage those not to make the same mistakes that they have in their lives.

**AA:** It's a must for a person to be around like minded people! That's number 1. And also stay in contact with people and/or some book club (Free Minds) in society. Because at the end of the day a person's mental health is all they have.

#### **5. Chris' Grandma said, "God don't like the ugly." What do you think she meant by this? Do/did your grandparents or other important people in your life have any sayings? What have you learned from them?**

**SP:** God made us in his image, so of course he doesn't want us going around doing ugly, nasty things to people. Furthermore, he made the world to be beautiful, so don't go around messing it up. My grandparents used to say, "I'm black and I'm proud," or, "kiss my black a\*\*." I think they meant that regardless of what they say about us, we are beautiful, smart people and not ugly or dumb.

**DK:** My Momma and Grandma said those exact words, word for word, "God don't like the ugly." I think she means that God wants you to be a reflection of His love. We should live in His image and grace. It took me years after my arrest (when I hit my rock bottom) to understand that it means to show love, empathy, compassion for my fellow human being, not to discriminate against others, that in the end we're truly all related in some form, we came from the same place: a higher power (whoever or whatever yours is).

**RJ:** I think she meant that God dislikes unholiness, especially when it pertains to how we treat one another. Yes, my grandparents and my mother had various sayings that when I was younger I really didn't grasp. Now that I'm older and they've all passed away I understand their words of wisdom.

**CS:** What she was saying was God didn't like his misdeeds he was doing in the streets. I have heard the same from my grandparents; I didn't listen as well. I'm learning that karma bites you back from the ugliness that I was doing.

**AA:** "God don't like ugly" basically just means be a righteous person. My Grandmother used to say, "If you want to find the biggest hypocrite in the world, go to church." And what I got from that was practice what you preach.

**MH:** "God don't like ugly" means don't do things with a wicked or evil heart because God don't like it. One of my grandmother's sayings was, "Always do the best you can because the best is all you got." This saying eliminated me using any excuses if I did my best. My grandfather used to say, "Mind your business and go find your business." This saying was meant for me to not pay attention to what other people had going and pay attention to what I needed to do.

**AHA:** I believe she meant God doesn't like wrongdoers who do not take heed by doing unjust acts. My grandmother used to say a lot, "you ain't slick, God sees everything." It was like she knew if I was up to something I thought I got away with, she would say this. This alone taught me I wasn't getting away with a lot I did and made me learn how to think before doing things that I knew were wrong.

**SV:** The phrase "God doesn't like ugly" was like back in the days, a lot of older people use it. It meant people doing bad things that God won't like and would basically frown down on anyone doing "ugly" things.

# AROUND THE WORLD: TAIPEI, TAIWAN AND BALI, INDONESIA

By Aneka

Cretya Ubud by Alas Harum: Bali's famous infinity pools and restaurant located in the Tegalalang area of Ubud. It is also one of the location of the famous Bali swings

你好 (Nǐ hǎo) or Om Swastyastu are ways to say hello in Chinese and Balinese! This past March I had the most amazing opportunity to visit a close friend of mine that's in school in Taipei, Taiwan. While visiting my friend, I took an additional trip to Bali, Indonesia! In this Around The World column I want to tell you all about how I spent my time in both countries.

My adventure started with a 24 hour long flight from Washington, DC to Taipei, Taiwan. I had layovers in both Chicago, IL and San Francisco, CA with the longest flight being 11 hours from San Francisco to Taipei. Keep in mind, the only Chinese I know is how to say hello (Nǐ hǎo- pronounced knee-how), good (Hǎo de- pronounced how-dè), and thank you (Xièxiè- pronounced shè-shè). Imagine the culture shock I felt during the last leg of my flight! For 11 hours, flight announcements were being spoken in Chinese first and English afterwards. Hearing everything in English secondly felt so weird! Once I landed in Taipei, I had to go through customs and received my first passport stamp ever! I can't even describe how it felt to receive my first stamp. If you can recall my article from the Celebration *Connect*, I mentioned being a formerly incarcerated juvenile. So you can see how monumental it was for me to travel outside of the country and have Taipei as my first passport stamp!

My friend met me at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport and we

took a taxi together to her home in the Zhongzheng District of Taipei City. The biggest shock of being in Taipei was seeing 7-Elevens on almost every block and that she had a TGI Fridays in her neighborhood! The only difference to our 7-Elevens is that they have a seating area where you can eat the food you purchase there. I arrived late on a Friday night so after getting situated at her apartment, we changed into our swimsuits and headed to 7-Eleven to grab a quick bite to eat before heading to a late night pool party that she was hosting. At the party, there were about 25 of her classmates that were from all over the world. Although the party was in full swing at 4am, we headed back to her apartment to get some rest before we took a bus later that morning from Taipei City to Yilan County for the weekend.



Zhongzheng District -The neighborhood I stayed in in Taipei

Yilan is a 2 hour bus ride south of Taipei and is where nature/ beach lovers go to get away from the big city. For our first activity, when we arrived in Yilan, we rode ATV's from the mountains to the beach in Dongao! Afterwards we rented scooters, checked in our hotel for the night, and then rode our scooters to Luodong Night Market. I tried a lot of Taiwanese street food like Cong Zhua Bing (scallion pancakes) and Bao Bing (Taiwanese Ice Cream Burrito). Afterwards we went back to our hotel to relax in the hot springs. The next day after checking out, we learned how to make boba tea at Kili Bay Pearl Milk Tea Cultural Center and visited the National Center for Traditional Arts where I made a keychain for my dog!



A street in the National Center for Traditional Arts in Yilan County, Taiwan

After that jam-packed weekend of fun, it was time to make our way back to Taipei for the last 3 days of my stay. She had school during the day and I had to work so I took that as my opportunity to explore her neighborhood a little more. I found a Starbucks a couple blocks away and decided to work from there. The cool thing about Starbucks in other countries, they have different food options. For lunch I tried a chicken sub with vegetables that was beyond delicious! If they had that in America, I'd go to Starbucks everyday! One thing I found really interesting about Taiwan is the trash system. In America you just throw all your trash in the same trashcan and all of your recyclables in the recycling bin. In Taipei everything is separated, at home and in public places. In the McDonald's for instance, the trash counter has a compartment for paper, cup lids, leftover food, general trash, and an opening to pour out your liquids.

After work/school we met up, rented bikes, did a little sightseeing, and grabbed dinner. On the second day after work/school we went to Taipei 101 and then rode a gondola lift up the mountain to a small village where we had dinner and watched the sun set over the city. On the last day before I left for Bali, we did a 3-course dinner tour on a see-through roof double-decker bus. We saw sights like Agora Garden (a multi-billion dollar residential high-rise building located in Xinyi Special District) and Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall (a memorial to the Republic of China's National Father, Dr. Sun Yat-sen).

The next morning, I flew to Bali, Indonesia. When I arrived, my Airbnb sent a driver to come pick me up. He ended up being my driver for the remainder of my trip. Driving through Bali was mind blowing. In between the many rice fields and beautiful scenery, I saw many impoverished communities. My driver told me that during the pandemic, everyone was out of work. Bali's main source of income is tourism. The pandemic hit them hard and despite the lack of income, the communities came together to support each other. My Airbnb (rental place to stay) was located in a community that was half tourist and half locals. There were plenty of restaurants walking distance from my villa so after settling in, I walked to an Italian restaurant for dinner. The next day I had a massage and breakfast in my villa before heading out to check out a famous beach bar called Finns Beach Club. I had rented a scooter for the day, so after checking out Finns, I rode my scooter to a lounge for dinner before making my way back to my villa for the night. Riding scooters in Bali is the scariest thing EVER! There are no traffic signs/lights outside of main roads so it's hard to navigate the city as a tourist. Also, no one drives within their lanes! With that being said, the next day I got my driver back haha. He was

only supposed to take me to Creta Ubud but he ended up taking me to a Balinese jewelry factory and to ride ATVs beside a canal separating a rice field and a forest.

On our way back from Creta, he told me of Bali's New Year that was being celebrated 2 days after I left. Nyepi, a public holiday in Indonesia, is a day of silence, fasting and meditation for the Balinese. The day following Nyepi is also celebrated as New Year's Day. Prior to Nyepi, Bhuta Yajna Ritual is performed in order to vanquish the negative elements and create a balance with God, Mankind, and Nature. Most Hindu Balinese villages make Ogoh-ogoh, demonic statues symbolizing negative elements or malevolent spirits or even characters from Hindu mythology. He took me to his village to see the Ogoh-ogoh that the youth in his village made. I felt so honored that he invited me into such a sacred place and thankful that he allowed me to record the experience. He even took pictures of me in front of the statue! The next day he took me back to the airport and I flew back to Taipei. Monday morning, I came home and thought, "that was truly the trip of a lifetime."

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## FM MEMBERS AND STAFF SHARE WHAT THEY LOVE BEST ABOUT THEIR HOMETOWN

**Julia:** During the pandemic, I spent time walking through parks and trails in DC that I hadn't previously explored. One find was the Tregaron Conservancy, a network of paths winding through acres of woods and fields in NW DC (near the Washington International School). I stumbled upon these trails by accident, and was pleasantly surprised to discover a large and extensive park, with lots of different trails to walk along. It's a nice place to get some outdoor exercise and spend time with friends.

**Tara:** One of my all-time favorite spots is the Rock Creek Park Tennis Center, but I don't go there for tennis (I don't even know how to play!). It has tons of fields and cooking grills and a huge parking lot where it feels like you can see the whole world go by. Sometimes I go just to sit and watch—parents teaching kids to ride a bike, elderly people practicing tai chi, people drag racing, fixing or washing cars, birthday parties and ATVs roaring by in fast races. A wonderful intersection of DC diversity!

**Eyone:** I love DC. It's where I was born and raised. From Uptown to the South Side, many places fill my memories. I couldn't pick one special place if I tried, so what I will pick is Georgia Avenue. At the bottom sits Howard University, the school that employed my grandmother, grandfather, aunt, and my father. I spent many years catching the famous 70 bus from Georgia and Rittenhouse Street down to Howard Hospital where my Grandmother worked. I met many of my childhood friends from different schools and neighborhoods riding the 70 bus. As a teenager, loving the sounds of DC—go-go—my friends and I met up at the Black Hole on Georgia and Morton Street—640. Later in my life as my father was dying of cancer, one of his last wishes was for me to drive him down Georgia Avenue in order for him to play his "numbers" one last time. I picked him up from Washington Hospital Center, and when we hit Georgia Avenue, my father said in a refreshing voice: "Ah... Georgia Avenue." Those from Uptown DC can really understand.

**Janet:** I love the National Mall for the good times that people enjoy there all-year round! Spectacular fireworks on the 4th of July; eating, dancing, free concerts, making crafts and people-watching during the summer Folklife Festival; and walking around the Tidal Basin during the peak bloom of the cherry blossoms. I love to watch people celebrating weddings, enjoying elaborate picnics, and taking family photos! And of course, the mall is the site of so many beautiful marches for justice.

**Allen:** The Uptown Theater in Cleveland Park. It was where my dad took me to see my first movie, "Star Wars: A New Hope" when I was 5 years old. I rediscovered the theater in the '90s and '00s and went to see the big blockbusters (Jurassic Park, Independence Day, Star Wars sequels). Sadly, the theater closed permanently in March of 2020.

**Melissa:** One of my favorite spots in DC is the Mt. Pleasant area. Although the majority is gentrified, there are still a few spots that remain the same. The grocery stores sell snacks that I usually buy when I visit El Salvador, and I can go to Mt. Pleasant to have my Salvadoran, Mexican, Guatemalan, and Peruvian food fix :) DC is known for its Chinese carryouts (wings and fries smothered with mambo sauce is a DC fav). Everyone I grew up with, no matter how far away they may have moved since, have to go to Chinatown Carryout in Mt. Pleasant when they're in the area.

**JG:** One of my favorite DC spots would have to be Malcolm X Park also known as Meridian Hill Park. My mom used to take me there when I was a child. We would just picnic out and talk about life. I loved the water fountains, walking up the big steps to the top, and the view once you got there and how DC looks from that perspective. To this day it is one of my favorite places to think and clear my mind. On Sundays the park is full of people participating in a drumming circle that's been happening for decades!

**Kelli:** When I first moved to DC, I lived on Capitol Hill. The neighborhood holds a special place in my heart for that reason. I still love to go to Eastern Market on Saturdays. Outside, they have a big farmers' market with every fruit and vegetable imaginable, as well as beautiful fresh flowers, a flea market and artist stalls. Inside, you can get the best blueberry pancakes on earth! Every weekend, you'll see all kinds of people enjoying this place together.

# **FREE MINDS BOOK CLUB & WRITING WORKSHOP**

1816 12th Street NW  
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## **NEXT ISSUE'S THEME: GROWTH**

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The dictionary defines growth as the act or process, or a manner of growing; development; gradual increase. Growth could be physical, mental, emotional, social, or spiritual. Maybe you have grown your skills as a reader, as an athlete, a teacher, a chef, a parent – anything! Maybe you have grown mentally as your mindset has changed since you were younger, or emotionally, if the ways you respond or deal with challenges has changed. When reflecting on your life, in what areas do you think you've grown the most? Do you feel different from your younger self? Do you agree that everyone changes and grows throughout their life? Sometimes this change may be fast, or sometimes it may take a long time. How have you grown over the past week, the past year, the past decade (10 years)? Have there been key events in your life that have helped you grow? Or key people who have been a positive influence on your growth? Whatever you feel inspired to write on this subject, we would love to see it!

Until then, take care and **KEEP YOUR MIND FREE!**



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