

Welcome to Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop's January Virtual Write Night! Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to pieces from incarcerated poets. To respond to the poems, please use the comment option by clicking anywhere on the poem, then go to "Insert" at the top left of your screen, and click "Comment". A box will appear in which you can type your comments. We will transfer your comments to the poems before returning them to the author.

General tips for leaving feedback: Start your comment like a letter, addressing the author by their name and ending the comment with your first name or initials. This isn't a grammar class focusing on what the author could have done better, but rather the opportunity to hear and engage with the voices of poets impacted directly by mass incarceration. Responses should focus on the emotions and messages the poet is conveying with you. Is there a line or image that really stuck out to you? Did something about the poem bring back a memory or do you have a similar experience with what is being shared? Let the poet know!

If you experience any challenges or have questions, please call us at (309)-533-0395.

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Visitation Daughter Days

By Melvin G.

My visits with my daughter are bittersweet
During this time, I only have an hour
At the end it's always sour
The sweet part is discovering something new about her when I see her
I'm as happy as a kid waiting for a gift
The gift that keeps giving
Is her teaching me to enjoy the present moment
And every minute of that hour
Sour again, like a piece of candy
Bringing tears of bitter sweetness

The Void

By Cordé F.

My dad was arrested and incarcerated
From when I was about seven months old
To when I was seven years old
When he came home
He never made it his priority to be a father
He was never around consistently
He broke promises to me over and over again
He missed countless birthdays
And never even came to my games or science fairs
Parent-teacher conferences, nothing
When it comes to filling the void
I just needed a positive role model
Willing to be there for me
But I never got it
That motivates me to be 1000X better
When it comes to fathering my son
And not generate the same mistakes that he made with me

DC Jail

By Chris T.

Coming to DC Jail
My first week, I was sad
I realized I was by myself
I had no one to talk to or see
I had to get adapted to this environment
Then, a couple of weeks went by
I seen my parents
I was too happy and excited
What it felt like for me was in my face—excitement
But disappointment and sadness
'Cause I knew I wasn't leaving with them

I Choose To Write

By Lirim S.

I choose to leave lines of my poem
Pressing with graphite pencil I hold
Imprinted on layers of paper below,
In hope that you will read some day

For I fear my words won't be heard
Because you're nowhere close
for spoken words leaving my throat
will vanish like water ripples into unknown

Sometimes all is like visions of a dream
in distant past that my soul has seen
puzzled between curse or bless
only those who faced same will understand

Laying down eyes shut before sleep
in ether your face comes forth
to free me from this wandering place
into realm with other colors and unconditional love

Free Minds

By Anthony G.

I started out at Free Minds knowing
one day I would shine,
No matter how high the mountain I climb,
I will never become bigger than
Free Minds.

Free as a bird without mind control,
Free in mind, body, and heart,
Free as a water fountain in a
public park.

In the middle of the night without
light,
I saw my freedom become a shadow, turned into a dream bought by reality,
Freedom is a thought, a decision,
a choice.

Rest for sure, freedom is a right,
freedom is a process, freedom is a test,
At best freedom won't be won
before first freeing your mind.

Writing Towards Freedom

By Iroc B.

I am writing my way to Freedom
because I feel free when I write,
My words are so detailed when you read them
that you can feel the call for help in my life,

Everyday I am continuously writing
Intricate words and phrases in my mind I'm deriving
Each paragraph and page explodes with emotion strongly arriving
My character is anew, my old self slowly dying.

Writing doesn't solely help me escape reality
It helps me escape prison actually
Saving me from being a continual casualty
Generating energy for my life like a pack a batteries

Writing will conquer my sentence
To serve all my intelligent excerpts as a remembrance
Helping me make the necessary corrections
I am writing my way towards Freedom
It is an essence to my redemption.

Kingston

By Isis L.

The gift that I received
The blessing that made me grow
My Kingston
My pride and joy
The reason I choose to grow
My son, my heart, my pride and joy
My king, my love
The reason I live on

Dear Freedom

By William J.

Dear Freedom,
When we reunite in a couple months
I promise to not take you for granted
Because I know you can be taken away in any moment
I promise to value you
I promise to do the right thing
Righteous actions
You are like my best friend
I want to marry you
I wanna spend my life with you

I Am

By Kayla H.

I am a poet writing of my pain
I am a girl living a life of shame
I am your sister, hiding my depression
I am your sister, tryna make a good impression
I am a girl who doesn't have a clue
I am the girl sitting next to you
I am the girl without a care
I am your sister, asking you to be there

Home Birth

By Hanif “Lil’ Ahk” B.

A rush of emotions

Birth

My son is safe, but I’m not there

Nervous

I was scared of the unexpected

I felt like a pot of boiling water

I was hot

Like fire was building inside

I cooled down, when the ice arrived

I was hot, warm, cold

I was mad, sad, excited

Tried not to let it show

So Muhammad Ali showed me to fight it

In jail, it gets hot, warm, cold

The weather changes

As much as my court days

I just wanna go home

Freedom is Not Free

By Abraham L.

Fight against racism
Fight against neocolonialism
Fight against inequality
Fight against poverty
Fight against police brutality
Because freedom is not free

Colors

By Olivia P.

Take your eye and look around
See all the colors to be found
To take those colors one by one
Mold and shape them anew
Make a color creation only you can see
Till you're through
To paint is to create a world
Your brain has perceived
But through the color and expression
Is the joy that is received

W.O.W. (Women of War)

By Seth A.

Who says you are weak?
When you carried and kept them
Safe for 36 weeks

Don't listen to the liars
God chose Mary to birth the Messiah

The rulers conspire to kill
your sons and keep you
alive but why? Even though you
are living you will be dead inside
The next baby won't survive. —
Remember Moses' sister
Saved him from the river
Then Pharaoh's daughter
helped prepare the deliverer
By his wife he became a
Member of a New Nation

The truth is you have so much power
And more beauty than a Flower
When you decide to even the
score that will be the end of all wars.
Only by love.

The Void in My Heart

By Lorenzo G.

The void I was in
Was with my mother and other family
Because I felt like they never really loved me
It really felt like I was the outsider
It was to the point I fell back from my family
That put me in a place where I didn't have nobody
This void in my heart was full with all bullshit
To hide the hurt I was feeling
From pushing everyone away
Because I couldn't express the pain and anger that I had
So I used people and my girlfriends to fill the void of love
And sense of family support that I need
But every time I gave my love, my heart, my trust
It was broken...
After time went on
I learned that I need help and support from my family
Because it's nothing like the love from your own family

Rock Solid

By Marquis H.

Rock solid
Proof being these dents and scars
No illusion to my head being hard
Yet these walls are harder!
No changing that I'm a rebel
Neck steep in this struggle
Only seeking some peace
So my cause I had to alter
Stop bucking, follow the rules!
The biggest obstacle I know to be true
Something very different but kinda simple
To transform the battlefield
From violence and all things physical
To an arena of self discipline, all mental
Rock solid rebel, that's me
No longer losing good time
Just winning, staying shot-free!

One Day

By Delonté C.

One day, you will go home
One day, this will be behind you
One day, you will have to change for the better
One day, everybody will know how much you love them
But until then, keep hope alive
And continue to better yourself

Handful of Sand

By Christopher R.

Never had a purpose
But rather, the promise of it
Daydreams of purpose
Plans for purpose
Working towards purpose

I held my purpose in my hand once
It fell through my fingers like sand
Only to grab another handful
Another hand, full of sand
Again and again

I watch my past purposes
Gather on the floor
I ponder my next attempt
Can't help but wonder
Am I destined to hold sand evermore?

Dear Freedom

By Alijah H.

Dear Freedom,
I promise when I get you
I'm going to cherish you
I promise I'll never take you for granted
I'll never let nobody take you away from me again
I'll never jeopardize doing something to lose you again
I'll never let nobody put me in a situation
To lose my freedom
Dear Freedom
I miss and love you so much
And when I get you
I'll never lose you again

Bleeding Heart

By Rodrick B.

I'm bleeding internally,
stuck in a rut,
I'm hurting emotionally,
pain coursing through my gut,
Releasing the pain through writing,
Staying on a straight path,
devils I'm fighting,
So I write,
Writing tells my story in a way,
In life, sometimes no one listens to what you say,
To pick up this pen allows
an escape,
It is a better choice than exploding,
so open the safe which is your mind,
Keep your mental from imploding,
sit down and write
be sure to take your time,
Then you will be free,
This ink is my blood
and these words are my thoughts,
This rhythm and flow are my feelings,
and this page is my heart.

Untitled

By Travis F.

A new artist—you,
To have a breakthrough.
Don't let it break you—
The hardship and pain.

The future,
And the future only,
Cares for who loves you.

You have to have the charisma,
Be courageous,
Go through the phases.

You have to have that knack,
Abound in things you lack.
Extract from your soul,
Marinate it in your mind,
Hold it in your heart.

Then you will start
To see the light
In the midst of the dark.

May you embark on this journey—
The first step is the most significant.
Move with diligence.