

Ear Hustle Season 1 Episode 8: Left Behind

Earlone [00:00:00.05]: This episode is dedicated to one of our fellow brothers Arnulfo Garcia who was executive editor of The San Quentin News, which is a prisoner-based newspaper. Arnulfo was a three-striker who got his sentence of 65 years to life overturned. We just learned that he lost his life along with his sister Yolanda in a tragic car accident on September 23, 2017, two months after he was released from San Quentin. [melancholy guitar strumming] This brother changed so many people lives to where I know that, in his name, a lot of change is gonna happen. Arnulfo was featured in Ear Hustle's episode 3 'Looking Out' when asked what type of animal would he be.

Arnulfo [00:00:43.27]: I would like to be a dog because I know that someone would adopt me.

Earlone [00:00:47.03]: Hey, wait. We gonna miss you, brother.

Male [00:00:50.22]: [singing, strumming louder] Until we meet again, I'll remember you, good friend, with deep fondness until then, and I'll hear you in the wind until we meet again.

Male [00:01:12.08]: We're a top of the line team. The raider, baby. Raider nation, baby.

Nigel [00:01:15.17]: It's so freaking hard to make it quiet in here. [laughs]

Earlone [00:01:18.15]: That is prison.

Male [00:01:19.19]: Hey, 12 and 4, bro. Talk about no 10 and 6.

Earlone [00:01:21.28]: You are now tuned into San Quentin's 'Ear Hustle' from PRX's Radiotopia.

Listener Alert [00:01:26.27]: The following podcast contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners.

Curtis [00:01:33.00]: You know, I just don't make no promises anymore. I, I, I'm here today. I'm making it today, you know? I'm making it through this hour, and that's kind of like where it's at for me.

Earlone [00:01:48.28]: [intro music] I'm Earlone Woods, a prisoner at San Quentin State Prison in California. I'm serving a 31-year to life sentence for being the getaway driver of an attempted second-degree robbery.

Nigel [00:01:59.28]: I'm Nigel Poor, a visual artist, and I've been volunteering at San Quentin since 2011.

Earlone [00:02:05.14]: And together, we're gonna take you inside.

Female [00:02:17.04]: Thanks to MailChimp for supporting 'Ear Hustle'. [upbeat music] MailChimp is the world's largest marketing automation platform. 15 million customers from small e-commerce shops to big online retailers use MailChimp to reach customers and grow their business. MailChimp gives you the marketing tools to be yourself on a bigger stage. Get started free at MailChimp.com. MailChimp, build your brand, sell more stuff.

Nigel [00:02:46.06]: [droning, melodic music] This episode starts some time ago. Election night. Tuesday, November 2nd, 2004. George W. Bush was running for his second term. John Kerry was his opponent, but no matter who they wanted to win, prisoners could not vote.

Earlone [00:03:00.20]: Nope, but a lot of guys in prison had been following the campaign on TV, and for some of those guys throughout the California Penal System, the presidential election was a sideshow. All we were thinking about was Prop 66.

Curtis [00:03:13.07]: Proposition 66. I remember watching the TV that night, and I was sitting in my prison cell, and I went to sleep knowing that we were way ahead, and I thought, "Tomorrow morning when I wake up, I'm gonna go home at some point."

Nigel [00:03:32.00]: The idea of Prop 66 was to reform the California three-strikes law. One reform was that if your third conviction was not for a violent or serious crime, under Prop 66, your sentence might be dramatically reduced.

Earlone [00:03:43.17]: Yeah. It was gonna be a huge change. Here's how Curtis got his third strike.

Curtis [00:03:49.17]: [piano notes] The crime I committed was I walked into a liquor store, I snatched two \$20 bills out of the cash register, no weapon. After I got caught for stealing the \$40, I pled guilty to burglary, robbery, and they gave me 50 years to life. Currently, I'm on my 23rd year. The first time I'm eligible for parole is 2044.

Earlone [00:04:11.25]: But on Wednesday, November 3rd, 2004, Curtis and other three-strikers woke up hopeful that Prop 66 had passed and they just might be getting out sooner than expected.

Curtis [00:04:23.01]: Then, when I turn on the news and I saw that Prop 66 had fallen, that it did not get passed, I along with a lot of other three-strikers, it was, you could cut the tension, uh, with a knife. It was a really sad, sad moment. I mean it was. It was devastating, and a lot of three-strikers were very at, um, at their wits' end, I would say.

Earlone [00:04:49.05]: This is life in prison. Things on the outside with the law, with our families, they happen beyond our control. Our hopes go up, our hopes go down, and when they're down, you gotta figure out how to carry on.

Nigel [00:05:02.04]: That's what we're talking about on this episode. Hope and hopelessness in the face of these really long sentences.

Earlone [00:05:08.18]: Some prisoners have every reason to hope because they may only have a few years left on their sentence, so they see light at the end of the tunnel, but for guys under the three-strikes law, hope is harder to come by. [yard noises]

Yard Talk [00:05:20.03]: They gave me Biblical time. I've- They thought people can live like Joseph and all them people lived in the Bible. We know that ain't a factor. What is it for a man? About 75? 70? What have you? So...

Nigel [00:05:30.27]: E and I went out to the yard to talk to some three-strikers about their sentences.

Yard Talk [00:05:35.10]: My name is Stacy Bullock, and I have 150 years to life.

Earlone [00:05:40.19]: So, how old will you be when you go to parole with 150 years?

Yard Talk [00:05:44.27]: Uh, something like 208 years. [laughs]

I have 425 to life, so I have to do at least 100 years before I'm eligible for parole.

I was sentenced to 1,010 years and 19 life terms for, uh, armed bank robbery.

My name is Fanon Figgers. I'm serving a sentence of 210 years to life. When I go to my first board appearance, I'll be approximately 250.

I won't go up for parole until... Jesus will come back first.

Nigel [00:06:23.16]: Earlone, Curtis said he'll be eligible for parole when he's served 50 years. So, compared to those guys in Yard Talk, dare we say he actually got a light sentence?

Earlone [00:06:34.21]: Yeah, he got a light sentence because if he gets up in, well, let's see, 2044, he'll only be 82. Meaning, he'll only be on crutches, a walker, a wheelchair, a cane. They're going easy on him. I mean, you know, but, as we know, Curtis don't feel that way.

Curtis [00:06:52.26]: I feel like somehow I have fallen into this type of, of loop, or hole, or whatever you want to call it, that I have been labeled the worst criminal in the history of the United States of America. I've never shot a gun. I never molested no kids, never raped nobody,

never put my hands on anybody. I mean, surely, they're going to see the error of their way of giving me 50 years to life.

Nigel [00:07:19.03]: Ok. When I hear a sentence like that for the kind of crime he committed, the first thing I think is that this guy is feeding me some bullshit. [Earlonne laughs] And, you know, we always say we aren't investigative journalists.

Earlonne [00:07:29.18]: Right.

Nigel [00:07:30.10]: We can't do much that much fact-checking on the stories that people tell us.

Earlonne [00:07:32.04]: Nope.

Nigel [00:07:32.28]: But, I found this so hard to believe that I actually asked Curtis, and I've never done this before for any story, if I could see his legal status summary.

Earlonne [00:07:41.24]: That's the sheet that lists your crimes and convictions and all that. Every prisoner has a copy.

Earlonne [00:07:47.08]: And, as far as we could tell what he told us is true. He got convicted for three robberies. None of them involved a weapon and none of them were violent.

Earlonne [00:07:56.17]: But, they were three felonies, three strikes, so the judge had to give him a long sentence. That's just the way it is. To understand how Curtis got three strikes and how he's been dealing with what seems to be a hopeless situation, we need to learn more about him.

Nigel [00:08:11.02]: [tinkling beat] Would you be able to just- So, can you describe yourself?

Curtis [00:08:14.25]: [laughs] Um, I'm 5'6", white, 137 pounds. No tattoos. Uh, I don't think I look like the typical convict. [laughs]

Nigel [00:08:33.24]: And what about you as a person?

Curtis [00:08:35.10]: My personality is that of, um, almost child-like, very playful. I've taken on some very adult responsibilities. However, I'm still very child-like.

Nigel [00:08:49.20]: He is so small and gentle, kind of like a little pixie, and honestly, E, I don't know how he makes it in prison.

Earlonne [00:08:58.00]: He's had a hard time and we're gonna hear about that, but hard times for Curtis began long before he got to prison.

Curtis [00:09:05.10]: Growing up, my family had a lot of issues. There was sexual abuse in our family, which I, you know, as a child, you don't know that sexual abuse is wrong. It's just what it is.

Nigel [00:09:15.19]: What it was was dysfunctional. When he was in high school, his parents got divorced and his mom left the house and not long after his dad took off and Curtis had to fend for himself. He moved around until he finished high school, living with cousins, an uncle, and finally with a friend.

Earlone [00:09:31.08]: Then, in 1980, Curtis wanted to reconnect.

Curtis [00:09:34.15]: I found my dad, and I wanted to like let him know that, "Hey, I don't hold anything against you. I just want my dad." I remember opening his office door. The expression on his face was not good. He was not welcoming or inviting. He was- He, he actually told me that, uh, he was remarried. They had a son, and they're moving to Alaska. And you are not welcome, Curtis.

Earlone [00:10:03.05]: Then, Curtis looked for his mom. He knew she lived somewhere in LA, and he got his sister to set up a meetin' in his sister's apartment.

Curtis [00:10:10.11]: I remember walking inside and seeing my mom sitting on the couch. Even though physically I was 18, 19 years old, inside I was a five-year-old little boy asking for mommy's approval and, um, not receiving it. I don't remember no hug. I don't remember no I love you's. Um, I remember very clearly her saying, "Curtis you're living in the past." [muted banging] It was almost like a switch went off. Um, I went from being this perfect Curtis to this Curtis of saying, "You know what? I don't care no more." [banging beat] I didn't even know who I was. I didn't know what I was. I knew I was not wanted. I knew as a child growing up my family nickname for me was 'ugly' and that, that's how I felt inside. I tried to destroy that Curtis. You know, I don't smoke weed. I don't drink. I just went straight to cocaine and medicated all through the 80s, which led me to stealing and next thing you know I'm sitting in prison with 50 years of life.

Nigel [00:11:27.09]: E, your story's very different, but you also got a long sentence under the three-strikes law.

Earlone [00:11:31.28]: Yep.

Nigel [00:11:32.00]: 31 years to life.

Earlone [00:11:33.17]: Right.

Nigel [00:11:34.07]: Do you remember what was going through your mind when you first heard your sentence?

Earlone [00:11:38.15]: WHAT THE?! That's what was going through my mind. You know, you start to think the worst thoughts. You know? Your mind get to thinking like, "Man, this system is racist. It's unjust." I didn't even know I was a three-strike candidate. You're thinking the system is against you. That's what you're thinking. Like, "Oh, they fucking me."

Nigel [00:11:54.20]: Yeah. I don't even know how you can take it in.

Earlone [00:11:57.02]: I tell you what. Let's go back to the yard and talk to some other three strikers about this. [yard noise] Do you remember, uh, what was going through your mind when you first learned of your sentence?

Yard Talk [00:12:05.17]: Praying. Hurting. Praying. I cried. I, I couldn't critically think. I couldn't process anything. I was just overwhelmed before a year and a half later.

At first, I was in denial. I was thinking, "No. There's no way they're going to give me a life sentence at 21." And when the judge slammed the, um, gavel the down and said, "I'm sentencing you to life in prison." And I was just like, "Wow." It just totally dumbfounded me.

I went blank.

Earlone [00:12:30.01]: Uh, do you remember what was going through your mind when they first sentenced you?

Yard Talk [00:12:33.05]: Life's over. It don't matter no more and I quit caring.

Earlone [00:12:37.28]: Life may be over, but here's what may be worse: you still have to keep on living it. And to live in this environment, you gotta have some hope that you're going to get through it. It's up to each prisoner to find their own reasons to keep going. [melancholy melody] Back to Curtis.

Curtis [00:12:51.28]: Well, you know, when I came to prison the goal I set for myself was not to make it out alive. That wasn't the goal. The goal was that I didn't lose myself in the process. And, um, I remember when I was going through my reception process at the Tehachapi Prison and the whites came to me and they wanted to put a knife in my hand and told me to go stab a child molester. And they said, "You know, you've got to do this. You got to prove yourself." You know, I didn't come in here stabbing child molesters. I didn't come in here being a gang banger or a thug. Um, I'm a stupid idiot that stole some money. I'm just not going to pick up a knife and go stab somebody, and I would rather die than lose my integrity.

Nigel [00:13:41.28]: I've heard this before from other guys here. The way to deal with an impossible situation like solitary confinement or 50 years to life, whatever it may be is to maintain your dignity.

Earlone [00:13:53.25]: And that's not so easy in a place like this, but Curtis did what he was supposed to do in prison. He got his shit together.

Curtis [00:14:00.14]: My daily activities in the prison was, you know, I'd go to work, um, play some sports, you know, live life, be very active in the church. You know, I was just living life. I- I was trying to make the best out of being in prison.

Nigel [00:14:17.27]: He got off drugs and he started taking his health, and his mental health, very seriously.

Curtis [00:14:23.10]: My mindset with the 50 years to life was: I want to show, uh, these cops, society that the sentence that you give a man does not dictate the behavior.

Earlone [00:14:34.04]: He was doing real good, but then, in his 13th year, it went all bad.

Curtis [00:14:42.28]: 2008 came and, uh, I was raped in prison, and- I, I, it, I- It took something out of me. I don't know. Maybe I had such a, um, fantasy about, you know, society's going to come along, and they're going to look at this, and it's, they're just going to correct all this. And then, when the rape happened, it was like, "Ain't nobody coming to rescue Curtis. Ain't, ain't no way of gettin' out of this, and this is what you have to live with for the rest of your life.

Nigel [00:15:24.22]: E, um, we should point out that rape is not as common in prison as people think and for something like that to happen at San Quentin... It was shocking, right?

Earlone [00:15:35.13]: Very shocking. I mean, I know during the course of the season I've been saying that that type of shit don't happen like that, but the truth is this did happen to Curtis. Curtis was raped and hopelessness took him over.

Curtis [00:15:49.14]: Um, I stopped all sports. I stopped really communicating with people. I went into a shell. I went into a, a massive like protect myself mode.

Nigel [00:16:01.25]: The rape and its aftermath was a low point for Curtis.

Earlone [00:16:05.24]: Yeah, the low points. We all have 'em. [yard noise]

Yard Talk [00:16:09.00]: The lowest point in my prison term is when I arrived at a level four and realized that I was in a war zone. How in the hell am I gonna do 30 years to life?

I think that first night that I found that I wouldn't be doing only five to six years, that I would instead be faced with a life sentence. I wouldn't see my family anymore. They were 2,000 miles away and how I had just messed up everything.

When I exhausted all my remedies, my appeals remedies. When I was fighting to have my case overturned, I felt like I had some good issues and that the court should have overturned them, but when they were exhausted and I didn't have no other way out, I felt very depressed.

My mom passed away. I lost it. I was, you know, I was seizing out and I was, I was having seizures in my sleep and everything. I was just, it was, it was a bad time in my life.

I think when I was sent to the level four institution at Lancaster and I realized I was finally in prison, and when I seen especially all the older people coming up to me. Guys are tatted, you know, tatted down from head to toe and they're staring at me. And so, I'm trying to make sure I'm not showing my fear or anything even though the fear was there.

When I was on a level four yard and we were just going through back to back lockdowns, I had to kind of like, uh, really, uh, turn into a shell and not pay attention to what was going on around me.

Nigel [00:17:34.09]: How long did that period last?

Yard Talk [00:17:36.10]: Um, that was a good about eight years.

For me, the lowest part in my time was actually, uh, not being able to go to my wife's funeral. There was a single car rollover and my boys were with her, and they broke both their legs, and she passed away, and it was terrible. She was my soul mate.

Earlone [00:17:59.12]: Back to Curtis again and his struggle.

Curtis [00:18:03.02]: Suicide from that point was a very easy step. It was almost like, uh, necessary. Um, I, um- I, I- Life for Curtis in prison is, um, is pretty hopeless. Um, I long for the day that it ends, one way or another.

Nigel [00:18:33.07]: 50 years to life, getting raped. I mean, it's easy to see why Curtis saw little reason for hope.

Earlone [00:18:40.15]: Right.

Nigel [00:18:41.12]: But something else happened in his life about this time and he calls it the miracle of the diaries.

Earlone [00:18:47.23]: After the break, we're going to hear about this miracle and how it has helped sustain him.

Female [00:18:56.10]: [pleasant music] Thanks for supporting 'Ear Hustle' by listening. If you or your company would like to take this a step further and sponsor the show, just drop a line to sponsor@radiotopia.fm, and thanks.

Nigel [00:19:15.08]: [rhythmic beat] Curtis was a drug addict. He robbed to get money to pay for drugs and after three convictions, he got 50 years to life under California three-strikes law, and that, of course, had a devastating effect on his family life.

Curtis [00:19:28.07]: My wife divorced me the same week I got the 50 years. We made an agreement. My pleading guilty. She was going to get the house. Uh, she got 100% care of our child and, um, and all the money we had in our savings account. And, in exchange, I was gonna be able to see my daughter for at least once a year no matter where I was. Well, next thing I know, our house was sold and she has vanished. Here I am on my 23rd year and I haven't seen my daughter yet.

Nigel [00:19:57.10]: His daughter was five when he went to prison. She's 28 now.

Earlone [00:20:01.09]: Once you're in prison, if your family wants you out of their lives, there's nothing you can do about it. You have no control.

Nigel [00:20:06.29]: Well, in Curtis's case, he did try to do something, and this is where hope comes back into the picture. First, he wrote some letters to his daughter.

Earlone [00:20:14.13]: But they came back stamped "return to sender". He didn't have anyone the outside to help find where she was at.

Nigel [00:20:20.09]: So, he did the only thing could think of.

Curtis [00:20:23.10]: You know, when I, when I first came in in 1995, I, uh, I started writing a diary, and I've never written a diary in my life. You know, and I remember a few of my cellmates are telling me that men call it journals. Um, ok, whatever, but, uh, it was for my daughter. I would write her letters in there.

Nigel [00:20:45.10]: Was it- Wait, in your mind, what's the difference between a journal and a diary?

Curtis [00:20:48.16]: Truthfully, a journal is like, it's very manly. A diary is very feminine and it's very personal.

Nigel [00:20:59.07]: Ok. This is a hard question. Can you give me a sentence, okay, two sentences, that say the same thing. One would be in a journal and one would be in a diary. I'm just curious how they would be crafted in a different way.

Curtis [00:21:12.01]: The journal would say, "Dearest, Christiana, this is your dad. I'm in prison. I miss you. Hope you remember me." A diary would say, "My dearest, darling Christiana, this is your daddy. I have never forgotten you. I want you to know that I'm the idiot that put myself here. It was not because of you, and that I love you, and I am so sorry. [hopeful music]

Earlone [00:21:49.01]: Curtis kept up that diary to his daughter for years.

Curtis [00:21:52.17]: I wanted her to know that her father really loved her and this was not a reflection of her at all. This was a reflection of the turmoil within her father and not her. I wanted to be very clear with that. There's a voice inside of me that questions what was it about my own mom and dad that they didn't want me. So, I carry that voice. What was it about me? And I didn't want my daughter Christiana to have that.

Earlone [00:22:23.18]: Curtis started his diaries in 1995 or 1996 with the hope that one day, somehow, some way, Christiana might get to read it.

Curtis [00:22:33.07]: I just kept writing and writing and writing and writing and, uh, through, um, another prisoner that I met, he offered me a pen pal two states away, and I thought, "Well, that's better than the one I got now." You know, I had nobody. So, I thought, "Ok, great."

Nigel [00:22:49.16]: It turned out to be two pen pals, a married couple.

Curtis [00:22:53.10]: After about a year of communicating with this couple, I had asked them if it'd be all right if I can, um, send my diaries to them that I had been writing because often these correctional officers are in our cells and they're tearing apart our cells, and, um, I didn't want to lose what I value is precious diaries for my daughter Christiana. So, um, so every few months, I would just send off my writings.

Earlone [00:23:21.00]: Curtis was closer with the wife in the pen pal couple. Letters had led to phone calls which led to prison visits. He said that over the years she became a kind of a mother figure to him. We didn't want to use her real name, so Curtis calls her J.

Curtis [00:23:36.05]: I been moved from prison to prison and years are unfolding, and you know, 98, 99, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003. I'm still writing them. She's still holding and collecting the diaries, and then it's either a 2007, eight, or nine that in the city where J is holding these diaries, uh, in the city newspaper, it has a copy of the graduating, uh, class from one of the local high schools, and in that list of graduating students was my daughter's name. [resounding beat]

Nigel [00:24:20.08]: That is a wild coincidence.

Earlone [00:24:22.13]: Yep. Curtis' penpal live in a different state and, after 10 years of corresponding with her, she discovers that his daughter lives right near her.

Nigel [00:24:32.02]: And this leads to the miracle of the diaries.

Earlone [00:24:35.13]: The miracle of the diaries.

Curtis [00:24:37.09]: J, on her own accord, went to school because she's a schoolteacher, asked any of the students in her class does anybody happen to know Christiana, and one little boy raised his hand and says, "I know Christiana. She works right down the street at the pizza place. And so, J went down to the pizza place and, um, asked if Christiana was here, and the lady at the counter pointed over there, and so, J walked in there and says, uh, "I'm not crazy, but I have a story to tell you." [swooshing breath, resounding beat] Uh. [laughs] I wish I had a list of different emotions. You know, I could look down the list and say, "Yeah. I felt that. I felt that. I felt sad, happy, joyous, confused, scared." I felt- It was like I was feeling all these feelings all at once, because I was looking at this, this- I thought I was going to be long dead before my daughter ever got to hear anything from me.

Earlone [00:25:56.22]: That's one crazy story.

Nigel [00:25:58.19]: I know. It's pretty unbelievable, so we actually did some fact-checking, and yes, it happened just like that. J found Curtis' daughter in a pizza parlor.

Earlone [00:26:07.10]: But she didn't give Christiana the diaries right away. Instead, she asked Christiana to write a letter to her father.

Curtis [00:26:13.18]: And she did. She wrote me a letter. "Dad, Curtis, or whatever." Uh. "I hope you know you have a daughter out here." [laughs] And I can't quote very much of the letter, but I do remember that.

Nigel [00:26:26.15]: Then J gave Christiana a big box with diaries of the first three years.

Curtis [00:26:30.28]: And then, when she's- The diaries. When she has stayed up all night reading these diaries as much as she could, she writes me, which I receive the second letter. Now, it's "Daddy," and she's drawing hearts, and "I love you's", and, um, it was quite different.

Earlone [00:26:49.04]: After not communicating for 13 years, Curtis and his daughter started exchanging letters.

Curtis [00:26:54.20]: "Dad, here's a letter. 100 things that you should know about your daughter." So, she wrote me a list of 100 things. Her top 100 things. And, when she got to the very bottom of the list, she says, "My number one thing that you should know is that, Daddy, I love you." Oh, my god. It just tore me up. I remember carrying that letter around with me for over a week. [laughs]

Nigel [00:27:19.05]: So, Earlone, from utter hopelessness to hope.

Earlone [00:27:23.16]: But, this is real life and not a fairytale story. Their communication lasted less than a year. [instrumental music]

Curtis [00:27:29.15]: I thought it was going to be happily ever after and that, um, she would come visit me here in prison and it, it didn't work that way. You know, there was a lot of healing that obviously need, needs to be done. I've caused a lot of pain, and, um, Christiana has, um, elected to, um, go live her life, and that's what she's doing, and sadly, I'm not a part of that right now.

Nigel [00:28:01.03]: They were last in touch about 10 years ago, but for Curtis, the miracle of the diaries continues to lift his spirits.

Curtis [00:28:08.14]: There is. There is a part, as far as my heart's concerned, that, um, knowing that the diaries had reached her hands, uh, it brought tremendous relief to my heart, um, because now she knows that I never forgot her.

Earlone [00:28:30.01]: It was a big deal for Curtis, but it may not be enough to keep him going. He's got another 27 years before he's up for parole.

Curtis [00:28:37.14]: You know, I just don't make no promises anymore. I, I, I- I'm here today. I'm making it today. You know? I'm making it through this hour, and that's kind of like where it's at for me. No promises.

Earlone [00:28:51.25]: Right.

Curtis [00:28:51.25]: It's just- It's just a tough road, tough, tough road.

Nigel [00:28:57.17]: You know, E, you've been in prison 20 years.

Earlone [00:29:00.22]: Mmhmm.

Nigel [00:29:00.27]: And you have another 11 to go. So, how do you keep going? What keeps your hopes up?

Earlone [00:29:07.13]: Well, um, I just keep getting up every morning. You know? Thankful that I have another day. Thankful that I'm alive, you know. Um, in my mindset, regardless of where I'm at, I'm going to live to the best of my ability. You know? Prison, I'm going to live to the best of my ability. Look, I'm on a podcast. [yard noise]

Earlone [00:29:30.21]: What, what give you hope in prison?

Yard Talk [00:29:33.14]: Hmm. Damn. Gettin' out. That's all I can hope for. Gettin' out.

What gives me hope is all the positive programs here in San Quentin. I was introduced to 1,000 Mile Club and I started running and that's, that's two years ago, and I've lost 60 pounds and I've run 3,000 miles since I've been here.

My faith in God is the greatest source of my hope today.

[singing] Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.

I think just the opportunity, you know, to be able to read, to write, you know, to be able to engage people, you know, who know something about life, you know, 50, 60, 70-year-old men, you know, who can actually teach me something. That gives me hope, because if they can make it to 75 and know something better, then that gives me the hope that, "You know what? I can reach that age too and know a lot more than them."

[Quentin Blue performing] I wash my hands in dirty water. I guess this is what I get. It's raining from a clear blue sky. Hasn't hit me yet. And yesterday is a memory like my dreams is dead and gone. I'm looking through these prison bars trying to carry on.

Earlone [00:31:26.08]: That's prisoner Richie Morris with Dwight Krizman and Charlie Spencer. Together, they are the band 'Quentin Blue'. This is their song, "Trying to Carry On".

Quentin Blue [00:31:37.22]: And yesterday just fades like a rose when summer's gone. I'm lookin' through these prison bars trying to carry on. [vocalizing]

Earlone [00:32:08.04]: Thanks to Curtis for telling us his story.

Nigel [00:32:10.24]: And thanks to all the guys who participated in Yard Talk. There are too many to mention here, but you can find them on our website: earhustlesq.com. Also, this episode was sound designed by Earlone Woods.

Earlone [00:32:23.01]: Yep.

Nigel [00:32:23.24]: With tracks from Antwan Williams, David Jassy, and Joshua Burton.

Earlone [00:32:29.08]: Pat Mesiti Miller is our outside production advisor. Our story editor is Curtis Fox, and our executive producer for Radiotopia is Julie Shapiro.

Nigel [00:32:38.03]: We also want to thank Warden Ron Davis and, as you know, every episode has to be approved by this guy here.

Sam Robinson [00:32:43.30]: I am Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the public information officer at San Quentin State Prison, and normally, right after I say my title and my name, I normally say that I approve this story. Um, but today, I believe it's important that I do something a little different. This past weekend, one of the people who was instrumental in the development of the media center here at San Quentin, Arnulfo Garcia, who was Editor-in-Chief of The San Quentin News, unfortunately, passed away in a tragic accident two months after, uh, his release from prison, and, um, I think I would be remiss, um, not acknowledging his contributions to this prison, to the community inside of San Quentin, and helping to build a foundation to allow voices of men inside the walls of this place to have a medium to get out, and so, on behalf of the men here at San Quentin, on behalf of the administration, I want to acknowledge Arnulfo Garcia, and now I can say, I approve this story. [outro music]

Earlone [00:34:02.07]: Next time on 'Ear Hustle'.

Male [00:34:04.14]: My cellie, T, was a guy who was a prolific runner and an exerciser, and he used to lift weights when we had weights, and he could easily lift, bench press 250, 300 pounds without a problem, and he went from that kind of physical specimen to a guy that had to have help getting out of bed, uh, just so he could use the restroom.

Nigel [00:34:28.10]: We talk about several men about the aging process and the difficulty of dealing with death in prison.

Earlone [00:34:34.20]: 'Ear Hustle' is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Radiotopia made possible with support from the Knight Foundation. Hear more at Radiotopia.fm. Thanks to those of you who have sent us postcards with questions and comments. Nigel was finally able to bring them in and read them all.

Nigel [00:34:55.18]: So, which one stood out to you?

Earlone [00:34:57.13]: I think, uh, off the top of my head, the one with the Stanford Law School, because they want to bring their future prosecutors and defense attorneys in to meet us. I think that was cool.

Nigel [00:35:08.19]: Speaking of people wanting to meet us, we actually had a very cool thing happen today. Sergeant Sino brought some people down from the Indiana Department of Corrections.

Earlone [00:35:16.25]: Yeah, their Commissioner.

Nigel [00:35:18.14]: And the deputy commissioner, James Passenger, and he's a super 'Ear Hustle' fan, and he said that he actually would be interested in trying to get 'Ear Hustle' aired inside their institutions.

Earlone [00:35:28.19]: Indiana Corrections. Yeah.

Nigel [00:35:30.13]: So, we would love to have that happen, so if there's any other listeners out there that are affiliated with correctional facilities, get in touch, because we'd love to share the show with you.

Earlone [00:35:39.20]: Indubitably.

Nigel [00:35:41.07]: And, if you're interested in seeing some of those postcards that Earlone talked about along with photographs of the guys who appear in our stories, check them out on our Instagram EarHustleSQ, and for more information about all things 'Ear Hustle', visit our website earhustlesq.com. I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlone [00:35:58.17]: And I'm Earlone Woods. Thanks for listening.

Radiotopia outro [00:36:07.04]: Radiotopia from PRX.

Female [00:36:15.01]: Thanks for listening and thanks to Adzerk for providing their ad serving platform to Radiotopia.