Male [00:00:00.00]: The following podcast contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners. [distorted sounds of male voice and door closing]

Male [00:00:10.07]: Hey, if it's six in the morning and you're watching the old lady on the yoga, the old yoga lady- [overlapping laughter]

Male [00:00:15.17]: First of all, Priscilla is a master at what she does. [overlapping laughter, clapping]

Earlonne [00:00:21.13]: He said Priscilla.

Male [00:00:22.22]: Her name is Priscilla. [overlapping conversation and laughter] She wears.... She wears a very revealing leotard, like, I was just on PBS.

Male [00:00:32.02]: Why is this on PBS? [overlapping conversation and laughter, bright intro music]

Earlonne [00:00:35.22]: You're now tuned into San Quentin's 'Ear Hustle' from PRX's Radiotopia. I'm Earlonne Woods. I'm incarcerated here at San
Quentin State Prison in California.

Nigel [00:00:45.14]: I'm Nigel Poor, a visual artist who volunteers at the prison.

Earlonne [00:00:48.28]: And together, we're going to answer some of your questions. [Nigel laughs] [overlapping noises of conversation, voice on loudspeaker, intro music]

Nigel [00:01:18.07]: Back in 2017 when 'Ear Hustle' launched, we started asking listeners to send us kites, which is the prison word for written notes passed around inside. Basically, we just wanted postcards with your questions on them.

Earlonne [00:01:30.06]: And we received hundreds upon hundreds of 'em from all over the world, like Denmark, Brazil, Japan-

Nigel [00:01:38.03]: Scotland and Canada-

Earlonne [00:01:40.00]: New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden-

Nigel [00:01:42.16]: Qatar. [laughs]

Earlonne [00:01:43.19]: Italy.

Nigel [00:01:44.27]: And all over America. So, today on the podcast, we're going to answer some of those questions.

Earlonne [00:01:49.11]: Good thing you've been keeping 'em in a bag and all hooked up and shit. [Nigel laughs] Oops. Sorry, I mean archive.

Nigel [00:01:54.01]: That's right. Yeah. Bag, archive, whatever. The thing is, we get so many kites with questions on them.
Earlonne [00:01:58.12]: Not just with questions. We also get a ton of cool, supportive words and great artwork.

Nigel [00:02:03.04]: Yep. Some very cool handmade stuff, which I love.

Earlonne [00:02:06.20]: Also, I made mention of this Queen Elizabeth wearing a 'Ear Hustle' t-shirt.

Nigel [00:02:12.20]: Yes, you did.

Earlonne [00:02:13.20]: And, Queen Elizabeth actually wore the t-shirt. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel [00:02:18.00]: Well, at least in that photo she did. Oh, and in that beautiful drawing. It's great.

Earlonne [00:02:20.25]: Yeah. Yeah. We got her. And once Lieutenant Robinson clears them, Nig brings them all in.

Nigel [00:02:26.02]: Yep.

Earlonne [00:02:26.15]: And we read them all.

Nigel [00:02:27.16]: But we can't answer them all, and so that's why we have this Q&A episode.

Earlonne [00:02:31.01]: Indeed. And now, dig into that archive, Nig.

Nigel [00:02:34.15]: Ok. But first, E, have you been surprised by the one question we get the most?

Earlonne [00:02:38.21]: Very surprised, and I think everybody in San
Quentin gonna be surprised too.

Nigel [00:02:42.24]: Yep. And we thought it would be fun to go around and ask the guys-

Earlonne [00:02:46.00]: And volunteers.

Nigel [00:02:46.20]: Yep, and volunteers. If they could guess. [birds tweeting, footsteps, background conversation]

Earlonne [00:02:52.00]: What do you think the most common question we get from 'Ear Hustle' listeners is?

Male [00:02:57.08]: Maybe hope. Like, how do guys maintain hope?

Male [00:03:00.13]: Prison. Is prison really like what they show on tv?

Female [00:03:03.14]: Are there a lot of fights?

Male [00:03:05.11]: What are you in here for, maybe.

Female [00:03:07.01]: What your day looks like.

Female [00:03:08.21]: Um. Do you guys go outside?

Female [00:03:11.16]: How much freedom do you have?

Male [00:03:14.08]: Hmm. Probably prison life. I don't know. Gotta think about that one.

Male [00:03:18.02]: Are the guards mean?

Earlonne [00:03:19.28]: The common question?
Male [00:03:21.01]: How much sex do inmates have?

Male [00:03:22.18]: Wait a minute. Do you, you make up that shit or is that for real?

Female [00:03:25.13]: How do you fill your days?

Male [00:03:26.27]: What are they in for?

Male [00:03:28.07]: What kind of people there? Is it hard living?

Female [00:03:30.07]: Is it dangerous?

Male [00:03:31.28]: People still be gettin' stabbed in there?

Male [00:03:35.09]: I think that they want to know is 'Ear Hustle' real, like are the stories genuine.

Earlonne [00:03:43.26]: No one got it right. The number one question we get from listeners is about.... Drum roll.

Nigel [00:03:49.23]: [makes drum roll noise with tongue]

Earlonne [00:03:51.02]: Books. Is there a library. How do you get books? What books are popular in prison?

Nigel [00:03:56.13]: People want to know about books in prison.

Earlonne [00:03:59.05]: And, yes, there is a prison library.

Nigel [00:04:01.14]: What does it look like? I've never been there.
Earlonne [00:04:03.16]: It's kind of huge. It's like.... It's like a big waiting area with a gang of tables.

Nigel [00:04:07.21]: Like stacks of books you can walk through?

Earlonne [00:04:09.05]: Stacks of.... No, no. We can't walk through them, but the clerks in the library can because they have a desk there. So, we get to just go into the library and, uh, look through these little catalogs and see what books we want, and then just write it down, and then they go get the books.

Nigel [00:04:23.22]: Oh. Ok. And how many books can you take out at a time?

Earlonne [00:04:26.29]: Two.

Nigel [00:04:27.21]: What was the last book you took out?

Earlonne [00:04:29.20]: Actually, the last.... I can't remember the last book, but I just donated a book.

Nigel [00:04:33.18]: Oh, what'd you donate?

Earlonne [00:04:34.09]: I donated my, uh, Larry Davis, 'America's Conduct'.

Nigel [00:04:38.15]: Oh.

Earlonne [00:04:39.08]: Inner City Escort. I donated that to the library.

Nigel [00:04:41.12]: Oh, cool.

Earlonne [00:04:41.18]: 'Cause I know people probably want to read it.
Nigel [00:04:42.22]: So, guys can get books in the library but, if you have money, you can also order them or, I guess, people can send them in.

Earlonne [00:04:49.12]: Yeah. You can get them in the mail from places like Amazon and stuff like that. They can. They can send you books. Um, as long as it's an approved vendor.

Nigel [00:04:58.20]: Ok.

Earlonne [00:04:59.08]: People can get 'em.

Nigel [00:04:59.25]: Ok. Um, and is there a lot of sharing? Do books kind of make their way around the prison?

Earlonne [00:05:04.14]: Of course. Like, say for instance, if I ordered a, a great book and dude's be like, "Hey, let me get next on that." [Nigel laughs] You know what I'm sayin'? They hit you up, like, "Man, let me, let me get in line for that one." Yeah.

Nigel [00:05:14.15]: And then, you'll eventually get it back.

Earlonne [00:05:16.05]: Maybe.

Nigel [00:05:17.05]: And if you-

Earlonne [00:05:17.10]: I got a book that I lost in the TIC and another dude with it. [Nigel laughs] I'm like, "Man, that's my book." He like, "Nah. I got this from...." I'm like, "All right."

Nigel [00:05:24.07]: Did you put your name in it?

Earlonne [00:05:25.16]: Nah, I didn't.
Nigel [00:05:26.26]: You didn't have like, "This book belongs to...."

Earlonne [00:05:27.24]: No. I guarantee you there's a receipt in that book because the book cost me $24.

Nigel [00:05:31.20]: Woah.

Earlonne [00:05:32.22]: Yeah.

Nigel [00:05:33.05]: How many hours do you have to work to buy a $24 book?

Earlonne [00:05:35.29]: Probably over a month, if it was just for my prison salary.

Nigel [00:05:40.03]: Oh, my god.

Earlonne [00:05:40.23]: Because my prison salary is like 20 bucks, 21 bucks, maybe 24 bucks. I don't know. Something like that.

Nigel [00:05:45.17]: A month.

Earlonne [00:05:46.05]: A month.

Nigel [00:05:47.09]: Wow. Well, that's cool you spent it on a book.

Earlonne [00:05:49.29]: Yeah.

Nigel [00:05:51.03]: Well, let's get to an actual question. We got this gorgeous, handmade card from Jamie in Brooklyn, and Jamie asks, "Are there guys who read a lot in prison?"

Earlonne [00:06:00.04]: Yes there are, Jamie. And we got just the guy for
you. [distorted ruffling and metallic noises] So, Kevin, and since your incarceration, man, how many books have you read?

Kevin [00:06:12.29]: 371 since 1996 when I was arrested.

Earlonne [00:06:18.02]: And can you remember the first book you ever read in prison?

Kevin [00:06:21.00]: 'A Time to Kill' by John Grisham.

Earlonne [00:06:23.05]: And how you know that's the first book you read?

Kevin [00:06:25.10]: Uh, it's kind of like gettin' arrested for the first time. You don't forget those first experiences.

Earlonne [00:06:30.26]: I hear you keep a list of all the books you've read. And, how many you say it was?

Kevin [00:06:34.18]: 371.

Earlonne [00:06:36.16]: You mind readin' off a few of your list?

Kevin [00:06:38.19]: I started reading 'Soul on Ice' when I was a kid. I finished it when I was locked up. I read 'Native Son'. 'It Makes Me Want to Holler'. 'The Prince'. 'The Call of the Wild'. '1984'. 'For Whom the Bell Tolls'. Uh, Che Guevara's 'The Motorcycle Diaries'. 'Fast Food Nation'. Plato's 'Republic'. 'The Plague' by Albert Camus. Uh, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' by James Joyce.

Earlonne [00:07:04.18]: I'm just curious, man. Do you remember these books?

Kevin [00:07:08.07]: Yeah. I remember. I mean, I've taken notes. I keep
those in a binder. Let's see. What else. Uh, obviously, if you're in prison, you should read 'The New Jim Crow'. And, uh, I read, uh-

Earlonne [00:07:18.17]: Yeah. That's a cool book.

Kevin [00:07:20.01]: 'Heart of Darkness'. 'A Christmas Carol'. 'Fahrenheit 451'. 'Exile and the Kingdom' by Albert Camus. 'Cracked Bell'. 'Go Tell it on the Mountain'. 'Slaughterhouse Five'. 'The Warehouse Prison'. For me, reading has given me eclectic knowledge. I don't have access to the internet, so reading books is just a way to stay ahead of what it is I'm probably missing. 'Lolita'. 'Between the World and Me'. 'Invisible Man'. 'Daddy Cool'. 'Great Expectations'. I mean, every now and then, someone has, uh, passed an urban novel my way. And, if I don't have anything else to read, I'll read it, but, it doesn't really move me.

Earlonne [00:07:56.16]: Oh, you talkin' about them books that, uh, the first two pages, they done committed a double murder and they sittin' at TGIF just eatin'?

Kevin [00:08:04.18]: Right. [Earlonne laughs] I'm not really interested in books about who shot John, because everybody in prison has shot John. [distorted, water dropping music]

Nigel [00:08:14.12]: [Earlonne laughs] Everyone shot John?

Earlonne [00:08:16.17]: Ain't nobody shot John. [Nigel laughs] He just means that there's a lot of guys in here that have been violent or experienced violence and, for us, it's not so entertaining.

Nigel [00:08:25.28]: Yeah. No, I can see that. So, books are the number one question, but it's actually part of a more general question we often get about media.
Earlonne [00:08:33.23]: Yeah. People want to know how do guys get information about the outside world. What do we watch on tv? Do we have access to the internet?

Nigel [00:08:41.15]: Yeah, and can guys subscribe to newspapers and magazines? Which, actually, they can.

Earlonne [00:08:45.24]: Yeah, if they have money. They basically can get subscriptions, but when it comes to the media, it's like the 70's. I mean, we got TVs, but we don't have cable. You know.

Nigel [00:08:56.01]: How many stations do you get?

Earlonne [00:08:57.26]: We got about 40 something, maybe. 50 something.

Nigel [00:09:00.04]: [laughs] Oh, come on. That's way more than I get. [laughs]

Earlonne [00:09:03.26]: I mean, it be different kind of stuff that you would never watch.

Nigel [00:09:06.29]: Like what?

Earlonne [00:09:07.00]: You know, it might be Vietnamese stations, Spanish stations. I do watch Spanish stations.

Nigel [00:09:12.03]: Yeah.

Earlonne [00:09:13.06]: Very much so.

Nigel [00:09:13.19]: I wonder why.

Earlonne [00:09:14.23]: Uh, they have K-pop. They have, uh, you know,
Geographics. They got.... They got all kind of stuff.

Nigel [00:09:20.18]: Ok. Well, that's cool. So, they have something for everybody, basically.

Earlonne [00:09:22.07]: Yeah. Pretty much. Pretty much. Also, we can listen to radio, which is AM/FM, but not Satellite.

Nigel [00:09:29.02]: And, even though there isn't internet, guys can still hear 'Ear Hustle'.

Earlonne [00:09:32.26]: Uh, yeah. I mean, I work for the guy, Larry Snyder, who runs the closed circuit tv system, so of course I'm gonna tap in and put 'Ear Hustle' on there so people can hear it. So, yeah, they know who we are, Nig. That's why they be callin' you. "Hey, Nigel!"

Nigel [00:09:47.01]: [laughs] Nice, nice. Um, I also think that tv is a big part of life in here because I hear guys arguing and debating all the time about their favorite shows.

Earlonne [00:09:55.01]: Yeah, like these guys here, Shadeed, Adnan, Eddie, and Khalifa.

Nigel [00:10:00.01]: Mmhmm.

Male [00:10:00.22]: What's your go-to tv show?

Male [00:10:03.02]: So, my go-to is always the reruns of 'Big Bang Theory'.

Male [00:10:06.00]: Whack.

Male [00:10:06.26]: The writers are geniuses.
Male [00:10:08.02]: Oh, that's a funny-

Male [00:10:08.11]: 'Big Bang Theory' is not funny.

Male [00:10:10.03]: 'Big Bang Theory' is funny. It's funny, man.

Male [00:10:11.25]: Y'all are whack.

Male [00:10:10.13]: The writing is hilarious.

Male [00:10:12.24]: It's just played out. It's just played out.

Male [00:10:15.05]: No, it's not played out. Their humor is intelligent.

Male [00:10:18.06]: Their humor isn't smart. It's almost slapstick.

Male [00:10:21.12]: First of all, there are no nerds who do slapstick or physical comedy. Right? Nerds don't do physical comedy. Nerds are all cerebral. And, yes, I used that word. I could have said brain, mental, but we're talking about 'Big Bang Theory', so I used cerebral. You know why?

Male [00:10:34.06]: Is that? Are you-

Male [00:10:34.05]: 'Cause I've been watching that so much that I'm getting smart.

Male [00:10:36.15]: Look, are you auditioning for a part in 'Big Bang Theory' right now? [overlapping laughter] Is that what he's trying to do?

Male [00:10:40.24]: First of all, I am Raj Koothrappali's brother on the show. [laughs]

Male [00:10:44.04]: That's not good.
Male [00:10:46.02]: Hey, Raj's sister is beautiful.

Earlonne [00:10:46.23]: Khalifa, what's yours?

Khalifa [00:10:45.21]: Oh, 'This is Us'.

Male [00:10:48.19]: Tuesdays, yes. [overlapping conversation]

Male [00:10:50.07]: I was gettin' there! But, yep, he beat me to it.

Khalifa [00:10:52.03]: That's 'cause I was into 'Parenthood' before that and-

Earlonne [00:10:54.03]: Yeah. 'Parenthood' was good.

Khalifa [00:10:55.07]: I've been watchin' a lot of stuff that's makin' me cry-

Male [00:10:55.03]: 'Friday Night Lights'. Did you watch 'Friday Night Lights'?

Male [00:10:57.14]: Yeah!

Male [00:10:58.09]: Yes. Yes.

Male [00:10:58.23]: You're allowed to cry at that, though.

Male [00:11:00.02]: And we're the nerds. [laughter]

Male [00:11:01.18]: And we're the nerds, Eddie.

Male [00:11:03.09]: No, no. We are just evolved men, right now-

Male [00:11:05.09]: Thank you.
Male [00:11:05.21]: Who are in touch with their emotional intelligence.

Male [00:11:08.19]: Oh! Hoo! Blew it! I'm gonna drop, drop the cam on that one. Turn it off. Let's leave right now. [music]

Nigel [00:11:13.21]: Ok. I got a tv question for you.

Earlonne [00:11:15.12]: Ok.

Nigel [00:11:16.04]: What show from your childhood sticks with you?

Earlonne [00:11:18.26]: [laughs] Uh, I would have to say 'Different Strokes'.

Nigel [00:11:24.01]: Really? [laughs]

Earlonne [00:11:25.05]: I always remember that one.

Nigel [00:11:25.22]: What was that show? I can't remember.

Earlonne [00:11:27.07]: What you talkin' 'bout, Willis?

Nigel [00:11:28.18]: Oh! With, um- [laughs]

Earlonne [00:11:30.10]: With, yeah, Gary Coleman and Todd Bridges and Dana, I forgot her last name.

Nigel [00:11:34.25]: Oh, god, what happened to those people?

Earlonne [00:11:36.25]: Oh! Hey, hey. It's funny because, when I was 17-years-old, when I went to prison, um, I was in the county jail. Day I was going to court with Todd Bridges.
Nigel [00:11:46.04]: What?

Earlonne [00:11:46.24]: Yeah.

Nigel [00:11:47.01]: The brother? The one with.... The big, tall, skinny dude?

Earlonne [00:11:48.00]: Yeah, the brother, the tall one.

Nigel [00:11:50.01]: Oh, my god.

Earlonne [00:11:50.01]: So, he was, he was protective custody because he was a celebrity, and I was a juvenile, and I couldn't be with adults, so they had us like in the same little tank, but it was like a window between us.

Nigel [00:12:00.01]: Oh, my god.

Earlonne [00:12:01.05]: I asked him. I was like, "Hey, you Todd Bridges, huh?" [Nigel laughs] He was like, "Nah. Nah. People say I look like him." So, I'm like, "Ok. This motherfucker lying to me. I know it's him." [Nigel laughs] I've been watchin' this show all my, you know, know, my whole little life growin' up. You know what I'm sayin'? So, then, we was.... I was sittin' there. Then, all the sheriff deputies kept comin' like, "Hey, man. You fucked up, huh?" You know what I'm sayin'?

Nigel [00:12:21.06]: [laughs] Oh, god!

Earlonne [00:12:21.12]: So, when they left, I'm like, "Man!" He's like, "Man, I don't even want to be me right now."

Nigel [00:12:27.00]: Oh, god.

Earlonne [00:12:27.24]: You know what I'm sayin'? He was just like, "Man,
everybody's just-" And you could tell that he had extensive drug use at the time-

Nigel [00:12:33.10]: Oh, that's why he was in, you think?

Earlonne [00:12:34.22]: Yeah. It was almost like he was lookin' like he was homeless type. You know what I'm sayin'?

Nigel [00:12:37.18]: Oh, my god.

Earlonne [00:12:38.06]: And, so we sat there. We chopped it up for a quick minute. I had a Bible. And he was like, "Man, can I read the Bible?" And I opened the Bible. I had pictures in there. He was looking a the pictures like, "Oh, yeah." And I was just.... He was like, "Man, can you turn to this chapter?" And I'd put it up to the window.

Nigel [00:12:51.13]: Oh, you guys weren't in the same room?

Earlonne [00:12:52.17]: Nah. It was a window between us. It was like one of them visiting tanks where you can talk to the person through the window.

Nigel [00:12:55.23]: Oh, my god. Yeah. So you held the Bible up to the glass to let him read it?

Earlonne [00:12:59.14]: I held the Bible up. Let him read it, do his thing.

Nigel [00:13:02.03]: Oh, wow.

Earlonne [00:13:03.04]: But, he, he really turned his life around after that, though.

Nigel [00:13:05.28]: Oh, he got-
Earlonne [00:13:06.24]: Yeah. He got out, got better. I think he had to go do some time.

Nigel [00:13:09.04]: Wow.

Earlonne [00:13:10.06]: And when he got out, he got better, and I think, never looked back.

Nigel [00:13:14.13]: Well, not that many people have that kind of relationship with their favorite tv show.

Earlonne [00:13:17.25]: With a tv show, huh?

Nigel [00:13:19.16]: So, since you know it so well, can you sing the theme song for me? [laughs]

Earlonne [00:13:21.22]: Uh. [singing] Different strokes. [humming] You know you don't know the words. I know it's different strokes. It's somethin' like that.

Nigel [00:13:33.26]: Hey, well, that was pretty good, but let's play this tape because we asked a gang of guys that question. Let's see how they responded.

Male [00:13:40.10]: [whistling 'Different Strokes' theme]

Male [00:13:44.12]: I listened to 'Saved by the Bell'. Maybe it was reruns. 'It's all right because it's saved by the bell."

Male [00:13:50.11]: [singing] Brothers. We're happy and we're singing and we're colored.

Male [00:13:57.21]: [snapping and humming 'The Addams Family' theme]
Male [00:14:01.09]: 'The Beverly Hillbillies'. [overlapping "Oh, yeah."]

Male [00:14:05.27]: [singing] I'm gonna tell you story about a man named Jed, a poor mountaineer barely kept his family fed.

Male [00:14:11.26]: A poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed. Then, one day, he was shootin' at some food, and up through the ground came some- [overlapping conversation]

Male [00:14:18.17]: It was a rap song.

Male [00:14:21.00]: [singing] Born and raised in the playgrounds where I spent most of my days. Chillin' out, maxin' and relaxin' all cool, all shootin' some b-ball. I thought I was cool. And a couple of guys, they was up to no good, started makin' trouble in my neighborhood. Got in one little fight and my mom got scared. She said, "You're movin' with your aunt and uncle in Bel-Air." [laughter]

Nigel [00:14:40.28]: Ok. Here's another lesson from a listener that also involved entertainment. And this is from Allister in Northern England, who asks, "Are there any jugglers in San Quentin?" [Earlonne and Nigel laugh]

Earlonne [00:14:49.07]: What kind of jugglers? Nope. I've never seen a juggler, but we do have guys in here that walk around and entertain. [rising note, cards shuffling]

Nigel [00:15:02.12]: Hey, Card Man.

Card Man [00:15:03.02]: How you doin'?

Nigel [00:15:03.24]: I either call you Card Man or Double R, but what is your birth name?
Card Man [00:15:07.28]: Rodney.

Nigel [00:15:08.24]: Rodney.

Card Man [00:15:09.03]: Uh huh.

Nigel [00:15:09.25]: But what do you like to go by?


Nigel [00:15:13.03]: I can call you Card Man. How do people call you Card Man?

Card Man [00:15:15.19]: Uh, you. You gave me the nickname. Everybody else call me Magic.

Nigel [00:15:20.28]: Ok. So, he's got a deck of cards here, and I'm going to pull a card-

Card Man [00:15:25.02]: Show to them. You see it?

Nigel [00:15:26.16]: Yep. Do you see it, Earl?

Card Man [00:15:27.19]: Push it back in there.


Card Man [00:15:34.20]: Open your hand. Tell me when to stop. Say stop.

Nigel [00:15:37.16]: Stop!
Card Man [00:15:38.13]: Now, look at 'em. Don't let me see 'em. You see 'em? Can you remember 'em?

Nigel [00:15:43.14]: Uh, with Earlonne's help I can.

Earlonne [00:15:45.09]: Yeah.

Card Man [00:15:45.12]: All you got to do is just remember your shirt. The queen is a zero on your shirt. One, oh, seven. [Nigel laughs] You got one, oh, seven on your shirt. Public School 107.

Nigel [00:15:54.17]: Ok. I'm in a sweatshirt that says 'Brooklyn School Public 107'. You randomly shuffled the deck and then-

Card Man [00:16:01.29]: And you pulled 107.

Nigel [00:16:03.16]: I pulled out three cards.

Card Man [00:16:04.21]: The queen is for the zero, and the ace is for the one, and the seven is for the seven. 107. Public school.

Nigel [00:16:11.23]: But, seriously, how do you do this?

Card Man [00:16:12.25]: I make 'em up. I just made that up.

Nigel [00:16:14.17]: I know, but is it, is it distraction?

Card Man [00:16:16.22]: Nah.

Nigel [00:16:17.13]: It's magic.

Card Man [00:16:18.17]: I'm a master of deception. [laughter]
Nigel: Um, so, you have like three new decks of cards.

Card Man: And I'm gettin' ready to leave, so three of them goin' on the bus with me.

Nigel: Where you goin'?

Card Man: Pelican Bay.

Nigel: And why is that? Why are you going to Pelican Bay?

Card Man: I don't.... They just put me on the bus.

Nigel: So, you're gettin' transferred?

Card Man: Yeah.

Nigel: How long have you been at San Quentin?

Card Man: Four years.

Nigel: Do you like it here?

Card Man: No.

Nigel: So, are you, you don't care that you're leaving?


Nigel: Oh, oh. [Card Man laughs]

Card Man: I put a smile on her face.
Nigel [00:16:51.28]: Yeah. But why do you think you're getting transferred?

Card Man [00:16:55.18]: They just randomly pickin' people. That's all. [high notes]

Earlonne [00:17:00.16]: Yep. He's goin' to Pelican Bay. I was there back in '92, in the SHU.

Nigel [00:17:04.27]: Oh, right. God.

Earlonne [00:17:06.07]: It was during the, during the LA riots.

Nigel [00:17:08.21]: Oh, god. The Rodney King riots.

Earlonne [00:17:10.08]: Yeah. I wasn't alive during the Watts riot in '65. [Nigel laughs] And I just so happened to miss the '92 riots because I was incarcerated.

Nigel [00:17:18.06]: Oh, god.

Earlonne [00:17:19.09]: I know I'd've been lootin' too. [laughs]

Nigel [00:17:22.10]: I don't even know what to say to that. I've got to move on. [laughs] Ok, but, Pelican Bay is different now. They're turning what used to be the SHU, which is the security housing unit, into a level two, and Card Man, I guess, was just randomly picked to fill in space up there.

Earlonne [00:17:37.22]: Right.

Nigel [00:17:38.14]: Ok.

Earlonne [00:17:39.03]: So, our next question is from Mark in Washington: Will you ever interview prison staff or correctional officers?
Nigel [00:17:47.20]: Right. [both laugh] Well, this is something we really want to do. We say 'Ear Hustle' is about life inside and life inside includes staff, administration, and COs.

Earlonne [00:17:56.24]: But, it isn't easy to get them into the media lab to talk, especially COs, and I think I get why. But, if I say why, I might scare them off even more. [Nigel groans] [laughs] And we're going to keep trying.

Nigel [00:18:09.00]: I'm gonna say this. It isn't hard talking to them casually. When I come in, I see the same COs at the front gate, in the yard, at the education desk, and I always start my day chatting with Officer Reyes in education and end my day checking in with Officer Sanford and Steward. I, honestly, the day is just off for me if that doesn't happen.

Earlonne [00:18:27.16]: Yeah, but, so far, that hasn't translated into getting them down here on the mic.

Nigel [00:18:32.01]: But, we were able to get one COs to come down here and speak briefly with us, Officer Girard, and he's been working at San Quentin for about ten years. And, since this was our first CO interview, we had a lot of questions for him, and it was all Q and no A. [both laugh] [distorted drips, walkie-talkie noise, and handcuffs tightening]

Earlonne [00:18:52.18]: Do you have any funny stories? [Girard sighs]

Nigel [00:18:56.19]: Oh, yeah. What's the first time you laughed in, on your job?

Girard [00:18:59.27]: [laughs] I mean, I got to really think about this one.

Earlonne [00:19:03.12]: All right. We'll come back to that then.
Girard [00:19:04.16]: No, I guess, um.... [Nigel laughs]

Earlonne [00:19:06.14]: Did you think it was gonna be like the movies? [Girard laughs]

Nigel [00:19:10.25]: Um, where do you think there's more gossip, at a high school or in a prison?


Earlonne [00:19:19.10]: You know, what's the first time you seen two officers fightin' in the parking lot? [Girard laughs]

Nigel [00:19:23.03]: Does that happen?

Girard [00:19:24.27]: [all laugh] Stop it. Settin' me up, man.

Nigel [00:19:27.09]: Do you, do you remember what you did, uh, with the first, like the first day, at the end of your first shift? Like, what did it feel like, the end of your first shift when you walked out to the parking lot and got into your car? [silence] Hmm.

Earlonne [00:19:40.07]: So, do you feel, as an officer, you're more hipper now that you've been around so many different people and understand so many different slangs?


Earlonne [00:20:03.06]: We take fucked up stories.

Earlonne [00:20:04.21]: Ok. [laughs]

Girard [00:20:07.21]: 'Cause I could tell you some fucked up shit. [distorted drips, walkie-talkie noise, and handcuffs tightening]

Nigel [00:20:14.06]: That was a master class in how not to do an interview. [laughs] We really blew that one, Earlonne.

Earlonne [00:20:20.15]: Well, maybe we weren't asking the right questions. Really, Nig. "Where is there more gossip, high school or prison?"

Nigel [00:20:27.10]: Hey, I really want to know, because I think this place is a gossip mill, and I wanted to know if COs think the same thing. But, you actually did land on something, because we did get him to talk about it. [echoing beat]

Earlonne [00:20:40.09]: I got to ask this. [Girard and Earlonne laugh] Can you, uh, can you give us a play by play on the first inmate that ran on you?

Girard [00:20:50.28]: Usually, I find, with inmates who run in a, in a dorm setting, usually, it's because of drugs or cell phones. And, I, I guess I can understand the last stitch effort to try to get rid of the contraband. However, I'm not sure where they're planning on going, because [laughs] we have a lot of walls here and, uh, I'm not sure why they would run. I've seen guys do laps around the dorm, and there's one thing I'm not gonna do, is, uh, I'm not gonna chase 'em around the dorm. It's just not gonna happen. I do try to stay on 'em just long enough to know where they're ditching the contraband so that I can retrieve it. But, we've got guys, uh, who, one particular individual decided that he wanted to just, just run around the dorm four times for some reason. I don't know what he was trying to do or what he was getting at, but, uh, I guess it's instinctive. I asked him. I said, "Well, why did you run?" And he says, "I don't. I don't know. It's just, just
what I do. You know? It's what I've been doin' on the streets." And I said, "Ok. Well, you don't have any place to run, so I'm not sure why you're doing that here, but ok." [theme music]

Earlonne [00:22:09.15]: See? We got something out of him. It wasn't a total bust.

Nigel [00:22:13.05]: No, it wasn't, but I am officially putting it out there. We'd love to do some stories about people who work here. So, don't be shy. Get in touch. You know where to find us. [quick, locking noise]

Earlonne [00:23:14.09]: Next question from Tree & Leaf in Oklahoma. Trian Leaf, huh?

Nigel [00:23:17.27]: Yep. That's how they signed it. [both laugh]

Earlonne [00:23:20.13]: They write, "Yo. Tell us about visual arts in prison, tattoo culture, graffiti artists, et cetera."

Nigel [00:23:27.01]: And they sent the question on this really nice handmade card with graffiti on it. And, Earlonne, you're not supposed to have tattoos in prison, but clearly, guys do.

Earlonne [00:23:35.23]: Yeah. Got a couple myself.

Nigel [00:23:38.00]: Oh, really?

Earlonne [00:23:38.23]: But, to answer your question, Tree & Leaf, we brought a guy in named Brew. [door closes]

Nigel [00:23:46.12]: Do, do you do tattoos or just receive tattoos?

Brew [00:23:49.01]: I, um, have done most of mine, actually-
Nigel [00:23:51.20]: You have?

Brew [00:23:51.21]: My arms and legs. Wherever I can reach, I try to get.

Nigel [00:23:55.12]: How? How the heck do you do it? [Earlonne laughs]

Brew [00:23:57.18]: Well, I started out in some of the spots where you couldn't see too much to practice, and then, you get to portraits and things like that, like I did the old man in the sea here, which is more of a portrait style where you have to be more precise. You screw up and, you know, you got a crooked nose and....

Earlonne [00:24:14.21]: And, are you ambidextrous?

Brew [00:24:16.14]: Um, I am now. After doing that. Yeah. I'm left-handed-

Nigel [00:24:17.19]: You'd have to be. That, ok, that's crazy. The, the shark.

Brew [00:24:24.01]: Yeah. That was the hardest part. That was one of the first ones I did with my right hand, so.

Earlonne [00:24:29.11]: A damn good job. [laughs]

Nigel [00:24:30.22]: Yeah. I'm sort of speechless.

Brew [00:24:31.21]: Well, the tattoo guns we use are real detailed because you only have one needle virtually and it, it's very fine lines. And the ink, the ink, um, makin' your own ink. They do a test where you drop it into the toilet and if, if it spreads, it has a bound up. If it floats to the bottom and then slowly dissipates like a watercolor, you know, just melts into the water, then it's good ink. And the guns that we have to make and so temperamental and everyone makes them a thousand different ways.
Nigel [00:25:03.24]: Where was the hardest one for you to do yourself?

Brew [00:25:06.16]: Oh, the back of the leg. My, I was doin' the back of the leg, and you have to twist your.... For a couple of hours, I had my leg like this [Nigel groans] twisted, and I had to put a belt on it to pull it around how I was gonna get to it and, once it went numb, I, I kept workin' on it and it was fine because it went numb. And then, once I was done, I stopped and tried to stand up and, yeah, it, I had hurt somethin' in the knee. It was bad for about a year. It stretched somethin' out of, out of joint, but that was tough. The back of the arms were a little tough. I had to belt, put a belt on that and pull it around. The thing about tattooing, if you don't stretch the skin and make the canvas, like you say, flat, the needle won't penetrate too well. It'll be inconsistent, so, yeah, I take a belt and stretch the skin and get busy on it.

Earlonne [00:25:57.20]: So, which one hurt the most?

Brew [00:25:59.22]: Oh. That's easy. The side of this second finger here was, man, bright lights and got nauseous, the whole thing, but the good thing about tattooing yourself, once it gets too bad, you can let off a little bit. Where, if someone else is tattooing you, there's no tappin' out. You got to, um, you got to go through it.

Nigel [00:26:18.16]: What was the first one that you got in here?

Brew [00:26:20.20]: Oh, it was a chest piece. I have another old man in the sea with a marlin back behind that.

Nigel [00:26:25.26]: What's, so what's your connection with old man and the sea?

Brew [00:26:28.18]: Um, I had a fishing boat when I was out on the street
and, yeah, I have a big connection to that story, really hit me as a child. Yeah, that was, Hemmingway's got a couple really great stories that I like.

Earlonne [00:26:40.10]: So, after saying that, I'm starting to see it. I see sharks. I see rotors.

Nigel [00:26:43.12]: Yeah.

Brew [00:26:44.06]: Yeah.

Earlonne [00:26:44.17]: I see fish.

Brew [00:26:45.08]: Yeah. It's all sea life, pretty much the whole motif I try to stick with is sea life.

Nigel [00:26:51.01]: Yeah, I mean, I feel rude, but it's like seeing a canvas and not looking. [Brew laughs] I just kind of want to see everything that's there.

Brew [00:26:56.07]: Thank you. [Nigel laughs] Yeah. Yeah. I have an eel there. This is life a reef underneath here. Sea anemones.

Nigel [00:27:03.12]: Yeah. Man.

Ok. One last question, and this probably fits under the question about media that we get. So, Sara in Brooklyn wants to know, "How do guys listen to music inside?"

Earlonne [00:27:13.10]: Interesting. [techno music] Well, most of us can listen to the AM/FM radio if we got 'em. Some guys have MP3 players that come loaded with songs we purchased from a catalog.

Nigel [00:27:24.10]: Yeah.
Earlonne [00:27:24.10]: Some guys have CDs. And, you might find older guys with cassette tapes.

Nigel [00:27:30.07]: I have yet to see a cassette tape in here.

Earlonne [00:27:31.21]: I have cassette tapes still.

Nigel [00:27:33.21]: [laughs] You do?

Earlonne [00:27:34.02]: In the cell. Haven't listened to 'em in forever. I need to get rid of them.

Nigel [00:27:37.27]: Wait. Why do you gotta get rid of them? They're probably classics!

Earlonne [00:27:40.05]: Nah. They might be takin' up space. [both laugh]

Nigel [00:27:44.01]: Well, those are various ways guys can listen to music in here. [guitar music fades in as techno fades out] But, as 'Ear Hustle' listeners know, there's some really talented musicians inside San Quentin, and sometimes, you can just go out to the yard and hear guys doing their thing. [signing in Spanish]

Earlonne [00:27:59.24]: We got guys playing mariachi.

Nigel [00:28:01.18]: Mhmhm. [jazz music]

Earlonne [00:28:06.06]: Or, you might just catch someone out there blowing their horn. [guitar music]

Nigel [00:28:22.07]: And then Maserati E, who you've heard on several episodes.
Earlonne [00:28:25.22]: Not only on episodes. He recently appeared on the first Facebook live that CDCR did on the historic lower San Quentin yard.

Nigel [00:28:34.03]: That's right. It was a behind-the-scenes Facebook live with 'Ear Hustle' and it was truly amazing.

Earlonne [00:28:40.09]: Right.

Nigel [00:28:40.11]: And, actually, we should thank Ike and Ally and Chrissy from headquarters for making that happen.

Earlonne [00:28:45.21]: Good lookin' out. Y'all haven't sent a video yet. [Nigel laughs] But cool.

Nigel [00:28:49.19]: I can tell you. It was great. [laughs]

Earlonne [00:28:51.26]: If you want to check out the Facebook live, there's a link on our website.

Nigel [00:28:55.06]: Yep. And, until then, here's Maserati E playing 'Dying to Live'.

Maserati E [00:29:00.20]: [singing, some outdoor noises, birds squawking] Woah. There's too many things that I ain't did or had, that's why I need that, that, woah. I'm dying to live. When I come up, I won't come down. When I come up, I won't come down. When I come up, I won't come down. Woah. I'm dying to live. Been like that since I was 17. So much in the world that I ain't never seen. And it's a shame. I ain't ever even has a state ID. Woah. I need though, that's for sure. And I don't want to slow and be rich before I'm old, so I gotta blow with these grooves, all these moves that I bust on the low. I can't. Got broke. I'm gonna make my way. 'Cause in a way, I'm in my A. I pray. Yeah, it guides every steps I take, 'cause I can't move wrong. It
won't be too long before I'm too off, too strong. Who on the throne gonna have to move on. I knew all the obstacles that I overcame. It's all part of the plan. I done came a long way, but still got a long way to go. There's way too many things I never did I seen before. I don't how to feel, pay the bills to a home that I own on my own. Damn, I don't even know. How could it hit the road? Just take a real road trip. Ain't even been clubbin', wasn't old enough to go in. Technically, I'm alive, but don't even know what it feel like to live like, yeah, yeah. It's too many things I ain't did or had. Why I need that bad. Yeah. Woah. It's too many things that I ain't did or had. That's why I need that bad. Woah. I'm dying to live. When I come up, I won't come down. When I come up, I won't come down. When I come up, I won't come down. Woah. I'm dying to live. When I come up, I won't come down. When I come up, I won't come down. When I come up, I won't come down. Woah. [singing fades, clapping]

Nigel [00:30:59.24]: Well, those are all the questions we're going to answer this time. Thanks to everybody who helped out. [bird squawking] We'll do another Q&A episode next season, so please keep those kites coming.

Earlonne [00:31:08.21]: To find out how to send them, go to our website earhustlesq.com. [outro music]

Nigel [00:31:12.19]: And, while you're there, check out the gallery page to see some of the kites we've received.

Earlonne [00:31:16.24]: And remember, Nig love those handmade ones.

Nigel [00:31:19.22]: Mmhmm. I sure do, and I love to post them on Instagram, which you can follow at earhustlesq.

Earlonne [00:31:32.17]: 'Ear Hustle' is produced by myself, Earlonne Woods, and Nigel Poor, with help from outside producer Pat Mesiti-Miller who also works with the sound design team. This episode was scored with
music and sound design by David Jassy and Antwan Williams. Our story editor is Curtis Fox and our executive producer for Radiotopia is Julie Shapiro.

Nigel [00:31:49.27]: We also want to thank Warden Ron Davis, and, as you know, every episode has to be approved by this guy here:

Sam Robinson [00:31:56.05]: This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson, and I approve this Q&A episode.

Earlonne [00:32:00.14]: Next time on 'Ear Hustle'...

Nigel [00:32:02.09]: We're talking about a prison within the prison.

Earlonne [00:32:05.22]: What do you think the worst part of Death Row is?

Male [00:32:08.12]: It's a, I think it's, in some ways, the darkest place in California, because it's where we've put the people that people fear the most and just have so much hatred and anger toward, and we've thrown them away in this building. [outro music]

Earlonne [00:32:26.02]: 'Ear Hustle' is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Hear more at radiotopia.fm. I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel [00:32:35.17]: And I'm Nigel Poor. Thanks for listening.

Card Man [00:32:40.17]: You got to go through, what was it, what was it?

Nigel [00:32:42.02]: Nine of hearts.

Card Man [00:32:42.27]: Show it to me. We'll go through every card.
Nigel [00:32:46.07]: Mm-mm.

Card Man [00:32:46.27]: Where'd they go?

Nigel [00:32:47.19]: I dunno.

Card Man [00:32:49.03]: I'll try to make it come back.

Nigel [00:32:50.05]: All right. [cards flipping] [laughs] [Card Man makes whooshing noises] [both laugh]

Card Man [00:32:59.27]: See?

Nigel [00:33:00.17]: I could just watch you do this all day. [laughs] [outro music]

Earlonne [00:33:05.13]: Hey listeners, guess what? To help kick off season two, we have brand new 'Ear Hustle' t-shirts.

Nigel [00:33:11.11]: And they are awesome.

Earlonne [00:33:13.15]: Too bad I can't wear one inside.

Nigel [00:33:15.28]: I know. I'm really sorry about that, but if you on the outside want to, just go to our website, earhustlesq.com, and order one.

Earlonne [00:33:24.20]: Nig, wouldn't it be cool if you were walking down the street and you saw someone wearing one?

Nigel [00:33:28.03]: Oh, man. I would flip if I saw that, and you know what I would do?

Earlonne [00:33:31.00]: Hopefully, you'd take out your phone and take a
Nigel [00:33:32.26]: I would do that, and I'd probably be so excited, I'd turn the phone around and ask if I could do a selfie with them. And then, I would post that sucker on Instagram.

Earlonne [00:33:40.18]: Who would you like to see wearing one of our t-shirts?

Nigel [00:33:42.12]: People say I sound like her, and someone recently even said I look like her.

Earlonne [00:33:46.10]: You talking about that podcast famous host of 'Serial', Sarah Koenig?

Nigel [00:33:50.18]: Mmhmm.

Earlonne [00:33:51.10]: Is that who you talking about?

Nigel [00:33:51.22]: That's who I'm talking about. How about you?

Earlonne [00:33:53.26]: I would like to see the Queen of England-

Nigel [00:33:56.09]: What? [laughing]

Earlonne [00:33:56.26]: Sittin' all proper, drinkin' tea with a 'Ear Hustle' t-shirt on at the upcoming royal wedding.

Nigel [00:34:02.23]: That would be crazy.

Earlonne [00:34:03.27]: Or Rihanna. Or Beyonce. Or Dale. Or-

Nigel [00:34:06.12]: Ok. Ok. [laughs] That's enough. Well, if anyone out
there wants to be wearing an 'Ear Hustle' t-shirt, go to our website, earhustlesq.com, and get one.

Earlonne [00:34:15.20]: And thanks for helping us spread the 'Ear Hustle' love on the outside.

Radiotopia outro [00:34:24.18]: Radiotopia from PRX.

Female [00:34:32.21]: Thanks for listening and thanks to Adzerk for providing their ad serving platform to Radiotopia.