Female [00:00:00.00]: The following podcast contains language and descriptions of graphic violence that may not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised. [overlapping conversations]

Earlonne [00:00:10.10]: He's been gone 42 years.

Nigel [00:00:11.19]: When you going?

Male [00:00:12.15]: I'm going home after 42 years of prison! I'm a free man!

Male [00:00:16.25]: Free man!

Male [00:00:19.10]: Yes! I'm going to my grandbaby's. Then, we going to Disneyland.

Nigel [00:00:23.09]: Disneyland. [both laugh] [intro music]

Earlonne [00:00:28.04]: 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 [00:00:38.04]: I'm Nigel Poor, a visual artist who volunteers at the prison.

Earlonne [00:00:42.00]: And together, we're gonna take you inside. On this episode, we're talking to guys on their way out. [rising, bright music]

Nigel [00:01:04.17]: Earlonne, let's start with a clip from season one. It's from the episode we did on the Security Housing Unit.

Earlonne [00:01:10.05]: The SHU. That's where they send you when you're fucking up in prison.

Nigel [00:01:14.15]: And it's incredibly isolating. Some guys spent so long in the SHU, they just couldn't take it anymore.

Gus [00:01:21.10]: One thing about the hunger strike is that after about six days of not eating, you can taste what's on the inside of your system that you never tasted in your mouth before. That was a weird sensation that had me wondering that's the only thing I'm gonna survive on is what juices or liquids that's in my stomach that I'm tasting in my mouth.

Earlonne [00:01:44.08]: Gus Lamumba Edwards spent eight and a half years in the SHU at Pelican Bay State Prison, and in season one, he told us about a hunger strike there.

Gus [00:01:52.17]: A lot of us lived on one cup of water each day, and I do mean one 8-ounce cup of water.

Nigel [00:02:01.19]: That hunger strike led to big changes for how California uses the SHU, but that's not what we're talking about today.

Earlonne [00:02:08.03]: Nope. What we're talking about it getting out. Gus Lamumba Edwards got paroled. He's out of here.
Nigel [00:02:13.09]: Yes. [soft, electronic notes] But, before he left, we got him to come down to the media lab for an exit interview. Have you ever had an exit interview?

Earlonne [00:02:20.05]: Nigel, before we started working on this episode, I had never heard of an exit interview.

Nigel [00:02:25.03]: Ok. Well, here's what it says on Wikipedia. An exit interview is a survey conducted with an individual who is separating from an organization or a relationship. Most commonly, this occurs between an employee and an organization.

Earlonne [00:02:37.28]: Most definitely I've never sat down for an exit interview.

Nigel [00:02:40.26]: Ok. Well, here's the idea, Earlonne. When an employee quits, the organization wants to know why and they want to know what they can do better. And since the employees are leaving, theoretically, they can be more candid, because basically, at that point, they don't have anything to lose.

Earlonne [00:02:55.27]: The 'Ear Hustle' exit interview is a little different. We're not looking to improve the organization. We want to find out how prison has changed guys like Gus who's been "employed" here for a long time.

Nigel [00:03:07.29]: A long, long time.

Gus [00:03:10.04]: 40+ years. 40 years and about nine months.

Earlonne [00:03:15.11]: What was the last car that was out when you was out?
Gus [00:03:17.24]: I had a '77 Nova Slash A 77 Coupe DeVille. [laughs]

Nigel [00:03:24.18]: What music were you listening to?

Gus [00:03:25.25]: I was listening to The Parliaments, The Temptations, The Dramatics. Um, and of course, I would listen to them on, not a CD player, but an 8-track. [tinkling music]

Nigel [00:03:37.03]: Man. That was a long time ago. I bet a lot of people listening have never even seen an 8-track player.

Earlonne [00:03:42.28]: My dad had one when I was a kid.

Nigel [00:03:45.01]: I wonder if any of the old-timers in here have an 8-track.

Earlonne [00:03:47.16]: I have yet to see an 8-track in prison.

Nigel [00:03:50.22]: Right. Because you'd have to have the player too.

Earlonne [00:03:52.07]: Right. But they had them back in the day, but I have yet to see one on my whole tour.

Nigel [00:03:56.14]: Ok. Well, here's another clip, and this one comes from season two, episode one.

Earlonne [00:04:01.24]: That was the episode about first experiences in prison.

Chayne [00:04:06.09]: I'm walking into reception and it's so loud. People are yelling and screaming. And this one guy's like, "Hey! That's him!" And I'm like, "What the fuck?" Like, no way. Does someone like know me? And
then they're like, "That's that motherfucker that killed Ray Ray!" [musical interlude]

Nigel [00:04:21.07]: Chayne Hampton was not the motherfucker who killed Ray Ray. [laughs]

Earlonne [00:04:24.20]: No, he wasn't.

Nigel [00:04:26.07]: But, he was in for burglary and he recently finished serving a three-year sentence.

Earlonne [00:04:31.01]: We did an exit interview with Chayne just a few days before he left, and we learned that, before coming to prison, he'd had frequent scrapes with the law. He told us about the first time he knew he was really in trouble.

Chayne [00:04:43.26]: I remember my first time coming to jail and they like handed me like the oranges. I'm like, "Oh, no. There must be a mistake." [laughs] "I don't actually sleep here. I just come in and then you guys cut me loose, officer." [laughs]

Nigel [00:04:59.05]: We're gonna hear more from Chayne and from Gus, but here's one more piece of tape from someone who's out now, and he was actually also in season two, episode one.

Earlonne [00:05:07.03]: The lucky episode. We should call it that.

Nigel [00:05:09.20]: Yeah, yeah.

Earlonne [00:05:10.23]: Two of the five guys featured are now out.

Michael [00:05:12.25]: It had been five years since I seen her but seven years since I'd touched her. [light piano notes]
Earlonne [00:05:18.01]: Mike Thompson was talking about his mom visiting him in prison for the first time.

Nigel [00:05:24.19]: Do you remember how she smelled?

Michael [00:05:25.08]: Uh, I do. She smelled like lavender. She smelled like lavender.

Earlonne [00:05:31.09]: Mike spent 30 years in prison for kidnapping. When he talked with us, he was in chill mode because he only had 22 hours left to go on his sentence.

Nigel [00:05:40.07]: We asked him about the best memory he would take with him from prison, but E, he didn't seem really into that question.

Earlonne [00:05:46.03]: Nah. He was ready to bounce. [makes sound effect for fast movement]

Michael [00:05:49.05]: The best memory I would take with me from prison is my date.

Earlonne [00:05:53.28]: He means his official release date.

Michael [00:05:57.01]: There's a, there's a quote that, uh, T.I. says, "You can only remember two days when you come to prison, day you came to jail and day you got out." That resonates with me, because everything in between, the good, bad, and the ugly, I'm kind of hittin' the delete button. [melancholy music]

Nigel [00:06:17.05]: Understandable, right?

Earlonne [00:06:18.03]: Right.
Nigel [00:06:19.07]: But, how do you delete 30 years of your life?

Earlonne [00:06:22.21]: I don't think it's deleting 30 years of your life.

Nigel [00:06:24.29]: All right.

Earlonne [00:06:25.12]: I think it's 30 years of the bullshit that you went through, and Mike went through a lot.

Nigel [00:06:31.10]: Yeah, he did. No question. And we're gonna hear more about that later. But, Earlonne, I don't know about you. I feel like this place is really clearing out.

Earlonne [00:06:38.23]: Yeah. There's a lot of movement these days. A life sentence used to mean you're here for life, but that's clearly changing.

Nigel [00:06:45.24]: Mmhmm. Yeah. There's definitely been a lot of political, legal, and procedural changes, and some of the guys are getting out way sooner than they expected.

Earlonne [00:06:53.03]: Yes, they are.

Nigel [00:06:53.23]: Well, at least in California.

Earlonne [00:06:55.23]: And guys here in prison are spending a lot of time thinking about what it's going to be like when and if they get out.

Nigel [00:07:01.08]: Well, they have to.

Earlonne [00:07:03.18]: They have to. I mean, they have to have a plan. State requires that. If you want a parole, you have to be able to demonstrate that you're rehabilitated and you have an exit plan.
Nigel [00:07:12.23]: Right, like a place to live. You have to show support and a way of getting a job.

Earlonne [00:07:16.16]: Yeah. It's a lot. It's a lot to get together.

Nigel [00:07:18.28]: Ok. Well, let's bring in one more guy that sat down for an exit interview. And this is the first time we interviewed him.

Choy [00:07:26.08]: My name is Anouthinh Pangthong, but I go by Choy. I've been in prison, matter of fact, 22 years today. So, yeah, I was, I was arrested April 2nd of 1996.

Earlonne [00:07:41.09]: Choy did time at a number of California prisons before ending up here in San Quentin. We asked him what was the worst prison experience he's going to take with him.

Nigel [00:07:50.02]: It turned out to be not one experience, but something that happened again and again in all of the prisons he was in.

Choy [00:07:57.24]: I would say this, like this, this, this act is very dehumanizing, very degrading. What I'm talking about is stripping out in front of somebody. I'll have to get butthole naked in front of another man and he has to be.... He's just inspecting my body. You know, I have to lift up my parts and, you know, bend at the waist and spread, right. Where I work at right now, every day we're stripping out. Yeah, I think, for me, that will be one experience that like... I would, I would just leave here. I would bury it. [echoing locking and loudspeaker noises]

Earlonne [00:08:40.20]: Can you tell us what brought you to prison?

Choy [00:08:44.26]: So, when I was 15, on March 18, 1996, I shot a man point-blank in the head while attempting to, um, rob him of his car. I was
tried as an adult at 15 years old, and I received a 25 years to life sentence.

Nigel [00:09:08.11]: Do you think that was a fair sentence to get?

Choy [00:09:13.24]: That's a real tough question. You know, um, I have this opportunity to be with my family again and here it is, you know, a family is shattered. A family doesn't have a son, right. And, and I caused that. Yes, I look forward to getting out of here, but at the same time, you know, a man's life is, is, you know, is lost.

Earlonne [00:09:48.18]: So, to even get to that point of taking a life, like what was your mindset then that made you even consider that?

Choy [00:09:55.02]: Mmhmm. You know what though, really, I didn't care about myself. If I didn't care about myself, how can I care about others? So, um, six months, um, prior to me murdering committing this crime, my best friend was shot and killed in gang violence. He was shot in the head on my driveway. I remember vividly kneeling beside him and holding his hand and just urging him to keep breathing. Half of his cranium was gone and I could see, I really see, you know, his brains and his eyes were just so, it was just glazed. He had this glazed look and, you know, his chest was heaving up and down, and here I am feeling so helpless and powerless at that moment that I couldn't help my friend. You know, and so, for the next six months, I, I was just living in this shame and guilt. Yeah. I was just powerless.

Earlonne [00:11:16.27]: So, how did you feel after you did someone the same way that someone did your friend?

Choy [00:11:28.02]: To be honest, I didn't, I didn't have any feeling at all. You know, um, I was really numb. It wasn't, it wasn't until very later on in life that I really felt some type of remorse. You know. This is, this is how cold I was, right. My first years in prison, I blamed the victim for me being
incarcerated. I went up to him and I demanded the car keys and he didn't give me the car keys. He spun around. He turned his back on me and I fired. Right and I fired point blank at his head. And I was telling myself and I was telling others, like, if he had only given me his keys, he would have been alive, and I would not be in prison. That was where my mind state was at. You know, like no regard for human life at all. [distorted notes]

Gus [00:12:40.00]: When I shot my victim, I didn't have to do that. I could have overpowered everyone in that store by myself, but when she jumped in front of me and was screaming, that scared the hell out of me. That's when I fired that gun, and that's in my brain almost every day also.

Nigel [00:13:03.23]: Earlonne, these guys aren't leaving prison thinking they got away with something.

Earlonne [00:13:07.14]: Right.

Nigel [00:13:07.14]: Gus and Choy carry some really heavy burdens.

Earlonne [00:13:11.18]: They do. And those burdens got heavier over time.

Gus [00:13:15.20]: I'm not the same person I was then, but as I did come to prison, I got even of a worse of a man. It got worse and worse for me, which means I committed more crimes after I got to prison.

Earlonne [00:13:29.21]: Gus came to prison in 1978. That was back in the day when race riots was a way of life, even here in San Quentin.

Gus [00:13:37.02]: Every time you come up out of your cell, we had to wrap hardcover books around our waists just to go to the yard, just in case somethin' happened, that knife is not going to penetrate into your body just as easily, so they were training me and others to learn the anatomy of the body, learn self-defense, so in times of melees, you would know how to
defend yourself, you would know how to attack. So, when you're thinking about survivin', you're almost like a trained soldier, so to speak, that has to do what you must do on command and the command is, as soon as you come out your cell, it's gonna be a riot tonight. You gotta do or die. That made me more and more.... The more you got involved in the riots and stabbing people, the more you wanted to get into it, especially when you're knowin' you're gettin' away with it. Because when they throw gas canisters and it's thick with cloud, and when the smoke's clear and there ain't no holes in you, you can't wait for the next time to do it again, because you know you're good at what you're doing. [distorted notes get louder and wavy]

Nigel [00:14:41.09]: That kind of violence is part of prison politics.

Earlonne [00:14:43.27]: And those are the unwritten rules amongst prisoners. Violating 'em can have dire consequences.

Nigel [00:14:50.06]: And Mike knows a lot about that.

Michael [00:14:52.22]: I ain't gonna say I loved it, but it was an opportunity to kind of weed out, you know, the strong and the weak, and I have a sense of ego, pride, whatever, like, I'm not gonna be viewed as weak. And so I wanted to be viewed as the dude who participated, the dude who wasn't just a follower, dude who kind of pushed the line, what have you. And so, when it came to prison stuff and gangster kind of stuff, I, I kind of, I was all in.

Earlonne [00:15:18.29]: So what is prison politics?

Michael [00:15:20.09]: So, prison politics are miserable dudes, in my opinion, they're bored, and they done read three books, and now they think they're Machiavelli. It's no different than the street. You know. Prison politics and street politics. It's just gangster shit. [distorted, rolling music]
Gus [00:15:39.09]: It, it sometimes it hurts to even think of it because I've been through everything that you can imagine experiencing in prison. And most of that was brutal, violent. Seeing a person murdered my first three weeks in prison. And when I seen this man get murdered in front of me during a riot, I heard the man's last words, and I, to this day, I can't even get those last words out of my mind. And that's when I knew it was a wakeup call for me to survive the most harshest conditions in California, which was racial riots throughout that area in the seventies. So, believe me, um, it's been rough. Sometimes I hate even thinking about it, you know, sometimes I've had nightmares about it many times. Wakin' up in the middle of the night cryin' on my pillow.

Nigel [00:16:33.24]: You said that you remembered the last words that guy said before he died.

Gus [00:16:37.09]: Yes. Yes.

Nigel [00:16:38.17]: What, what were they? What did he say?

Gus [00:16:40.14]: Um, his last words was, "Somebody help me, please." And, just the image of how he died was, he was stabbed by a guy with some 20 inch arms, big, bulky, muscle-bound guy, and he stabbed him so hard, he flew up in the air and he left the knife in him, and he's just layin' there on the floor with, and this was a butcher knife that was stolen out of one of these dining rooms back in those days, and I'm just hearing him layin' there with his eyes open. Just said, "Please, somebody help me." Those were his last words. And there was just nothing I could do because we're in the middle of a melee and I had to fight for my life as well, but that's the memory that's, to this day, I just can't get rid of. [strobing melancholy notes]

Michael [00:17:44.03]: So, I have seven to life, so I've been goin' to board
since '93, five years after I came to jail. So, no one was gettin' out. I mean, the governor at the time said, on the record, "If you commit x amount of crime, you should do the rest of your life in prison." So, everybody was just, "Hey, we're here." And that, that was the mantra in prison. "Don't worry about the streets. The streets don't exist. You're here. This is where you're gonna be. Make it work." That was my mindset for 20 years. And then, just being, like gettin' older and evolving and kind of maturing and seeing who you were for so many years of your life and kind of trying to make that hard choice. Do I want to be that dude when I'm 60? And, after about 21 years, I basically said, you know, I don't wanna keep being the dude who kidnapped Alvin Freeman. [haunting music]

Gus [00:18:42.26]: It got old gettin' locked up. It got old gettin' handcuffs slapped on you and gettin' thrown in a cell. All of that got old and it took me almost 38 years to get to San Quentin. And when I got to San Quentin, it was a whole different environment, a whole different feel, and they had something to offer that other prisons didn't, and those were self-help programs.

Earlonne [00:19:11.00]: We've said this before and we'll say it again.

Nigel [00:19:13.02]: Yep.

Earlonne [00:19:13.13]: In recent years, San Quentin has become a prison that prisoners in California want to transfer to.

Nigel [00:19:19.18]: San Quentin is not in the boonies. It's in the Bay Area and that means that a lot of volunteers come in.

Earlonne [00:19:25.10]: Like you.

Nigel [00:19:25.21]: Yep, like me. And because there's so many volunteers, there's a large array of therapeutic programs that guys can take part in.
Gus [00:19:33.04]: I really wanted to get through these programs to see if I was still dangerous, because, in the back of my mind and my heart, I knew I was, but sittin' in these groups with individuals who walked in my shoes, who've done decades in prison also, I'm watchin' these men cry, shed tears, get emotional explainin' their stories of what they've been through and what it feels like to try to transition into a new man. And I didn't agree about seeing men cry in front of me until about a month went by and I had to tell my stories and I was in tears, [low, bright music] because I knew we all had something in common. We all felt that, if we don't transition to a new man and really understand what it is to eradicate that criminal thought and behavior, we're probably gonna all die in prison.

Earlonne [00:20:37.22]: So, Gus and Mike have both spent decades behind bars, and they've changed a lot over the years. Let's go back to Chayne who spent only three years in prison.

Nigel [00:20:46.00]: We got him to talk about how prison changed him in a relatively short period of time.

Chayne [00:20:51.10]: Yeah, I was trying to do what I was doing on the streets in here and, uh, it wasn't workin' for me. It was, uh, I've never been able to get clean or get off drugs for my whole life, right, and uh, I remember being in west block with all these lifers. Five tiers high of just junkies and dope fiends that just like will never get out of prison just doing what they had to do every day to get that one morphine pill or like whatever. You know and it was just like, I was using, and this, there's nothing fun about this environment, like this is, this is terrible right here. And, uh, but that still didn't make it click. I like went down to H unit and I was still usin' and then, um, I got into a fight with this dude over some numbers, you know what I mean, and um-

Nigel [00:21:31.12]: Chayne got into a fight over drug payments.
Earlonne [00:21:33.25]: And Chayne wasn't gonna pay twice, so he started punching windmill style and that didn't work so well.

Nigel [00:21:40.20]: [laughs] Nope, but it did get him to realize that things had to change.

Chayne [00:21:44.09]: And bein' like 150 pounds shooting up dope is not, you know, you're not able to protect yourself, you know. Dangerous things happen. And then, after that, I was like, "Dude." I surrounded myself with a bunch of people that weren't using because I didn't want to get.... I was sick of doing it. You know. I'm in an environment where like you need to kind of have your head on your shoulders and you need to be able to protect yourself. I've been doing drugs since I was like 13 and then I started shootin' dope when I was like 26. And I'm 33 now. I just was like I can't. I'm burnt.

Earlonne [00:22:15.21]: So this is the longest?

Chayne [00:22:16.08]: Longest time, I mean the longest time I've ever chosen not to get high, like I've been to jail before, and I'd be there for like three months and we just didn't have any dope, right, but here there's tons of, you know, there's tons of dope. All day long you get high and I just, uh, and I have money for it, but I just choose not to. I just I'm not. There's no part of me that wants to do it.

Nigel [00:22:38.08]: What are you gonna miss?

Chayne [00:22:39.20]: When I leave, I'm gonna miss my friends. When I leave, I'm gonna miss, uh, to be honest with you, like the structure, how every day is more or less the same, like there's a lot of comfort that comes in, in you know, just every day knowing what to expect. Even though you don't know, like, sure someone could like stab you, but more or less, every
day is the same. You know, you go to work. You.... Same thing for dinner. Like, I don't want to have a bunch of choices. That makes me nervous, I guess. Like getting out and first day like, "What do you want to do?" And it's like, "I don't have an answer to that question!" [laughs] "I don't know. Nothing?" I don't want to seem like a wet blanket, but yeah. [echoing locking noises]

Earlonne [00:23:17.20]: So, so what's your thinking, man? Like, today you walk out to R&R and put your parole clothes on.

Michael [00:23:24.17]: So, my thinking is like, uh, so, I've been to a lot of prisons since I've been incarcerated, like almost 20, so, it's just another transfer. You know, without sounding too coy or whatever. It's just, I'm leaving this prison, and I'm going to a new environment, and I'm used to adapting to like environments where I don't know anyone, so just, I'm here and tomorrow I'm somewhere else, and I'm gonna make it work. So, I don't have any expectations of how it should be. I just want it to be peaceful and, you know, uh, hot food on every corner, as they say on the commercials, and, uh, I'm takin' it one day at a time. I ain't really trippin'. [echoing walking sounds]

Earlonne [00:24:11.05]: How do you feel leavin' prison?

Chayne [00:24:13.01]: I feel, I feel like I accomplished like a lot. I feel like I'm in a better headspace than I've ever been. Um, I've nervous though, because I've never been sober, and so it's like, not only am I leaving prison, but I'm also leaving prison sober, so... I never.... On the streets, it was hard for me to ever like get clean because I didn't know what gettin' clean looked like. I like lived in a tent, you know. I would break into cars. Like, how do you, where do you go from there? You know, you're just, I would just be sittin' there. It was, it was bad. I would say, "I'm not gonna use", but every day by noon, I'd be so sick that I only knew, of course, I'd get high. And I was hurtin' people and stealin' property. And um,
perpetuating the cycle, and so, now, being here and not using for so long, I'm able to see what life can be like not using.

Nigel [00:25:01.29]: Did, did you think you were gonna die in prison?

Gus [00:25:04.07]: Yes. Yes. I think I was gonna die in prison because I lost hope on ever gettin' out until that last day or until this last parole board hearing. That was, um, that was an experience that I'll never forget for the rest of my life. I mean, even though I had to go in there.... I had to sit through four and a half hours. They dissected my whole life from the age of six to the present day. And when they finally told me that, "You are no longer a threat to public safety." It was, my whole body felt something. [quiet, bright music] The minute they told me that, my whole body got light. Real light, you know, and, um, at the end of the hearing, I got up to shake the commissioner's hands. I had to look on the ground to see if my foot was still planted on the ground, because I thought I was walkin' on air. And the commissioner said, "You feel light, huh?" I said, "Yes." "Yeah. We get that sometimes."

Nigel [00:26:19.23]: Like we said, when Gus was last a free man, it was a different world. Different cars. Different music.

Earlonne [00:26:26.10]: And different clothes.

Gus [00:26:27.25]: Bell Bottoms. High boy collared t-shirts. Um, what we used to call elevator shoes. [laughs]

Nigel [00:26:33.24]: Hey. It looked good.

Earlonne [00:26:35.00]: What was your, what was your waist size?

Gus [00:26:37.05]: My waist size was 29. I was a little, slim, bony guy. Well, slim.
Nigel [00:26:40.20]: What is it, what is it now? 30?

Gus [00:26:42.25]: 40.

Nigel [00:26:43.21]: No it's not!

Gus [00:26:44.24]: 38. It's 38.

Nigel [00:26:46.03]: You're still slender as heck.

Gus [00:26:47.03]: For real. It's 38. I had to measure myself for the dress out.

Earlonne [00:26:50.19]: What is a dress out?

Gus [00:26:51.10]: A dress out is your clothes that you have to order from your loved ones on the streets to have sent up here that you want to wear home, because I sure didn't... I don't want to wear nothin' home that's state underwear. No state socks. No state tennis shoes. No state nothin'. Everything I want has to come from the streets that I'm gonna be wearin' up out of here. And it's gotta look good.

Nigel [00:27:10.13]: Oh, so what, what is your, what is your outfit gonna be for your dress outfit?

Gus [00:27:13.23]: Well, I told them I wanted a burgundy shirt, gray pants, and a nice pair of shoes. And a nice coat.

Earlonne [00:27:20.05]: So, what are your thoughts, man? The first thing you wanna do when you step out of, uh, San Quentin?

Gus [00:27:24.23]: The first thing I want to do after they, uh, take me to eat
an omelet, something I haven't had in a long time, a nice juicy omelet, you know. But the second thing I want to do is go visit my mother and father's gravesite. And just have a few words with them and apologize for ruining my life at an early age. Second thing I want to do is only God knows. Just take me to a high top mountain and just let me look around the Bay Area, you know. I want to get a beautiful sight on what I'm gonna be faced with out there. [harmonious, trilling notes]

Nigel [00:28:01.27]: You know, E, there's a lot he's going to be faced with out there.

Earlonne [00:28:05.10]: Yeah. He's no longer sequestered.

Nigel [00:28:07.11]: That's right. But, there's one thing I know they're all looking forward to.

Earlonne [00:28:11.06]: What?

Nigel [00:28:11.26]: Women. [laughs]

Earlonne [00:28:13.08]: Hell yeah! What we have in here is an all-male institution. Dudes. Dudes. And more dudes. And most of us been thinkin' about you know what for you know how long.

Nigel [00:28:27.28]: [laughs] A long time, I'm sure. Well, they may not have been getting any in here, but most of these guys that we talked to already had girlfriends and partners waiting for them to come out.

So, what kind of romance is waiting for you out there?

Chayne [00:28:41.12]: Oh, my girlfriend. So, I'm really, I'm really excited to see her. When she picks me up, I'm just gonna like curl up in a ball in the back seat. You know like how you do with dogs when you take them on like
long trips, you put a blanket over them so they think it's nighttime? And I'll just like go to sleep and then I'll wake up and I'll be free. She can just like let me out of the back. [laughs] And like, I'll just like, I'll just run around until I tire myself out.

Choy [00:29:01.10]: I am 37 years old. I am Laotian from Southeast Asia.

Earlonne [00:29:08.15]: Choy was still single when he was getting ready to leave. We wanted to help him out. So, we asked him to start thinking about what his datin' profile might say.

Choy [00:29:17.06]: I'm really outgoing and I love to have fun. And I'm very, very, very caring and passionate about life. And, you know, what I do with my free time, I love to dance. And I love the arts and theatre and do Shakespeare-

Earlonne [00:29:33.18]: Remember, Choy was a juvenile when he came to prison. His experience with the opposite sex has been, shall we say, limited.

Nigel [00:29:42.04]: Yes.

Choy [00:29:43.18]: So, my last relationship, you know, with, with women was when I was 15. Right, so now, getting out there, you know, I'm, I'm gonna be with grown women.

Earlonne [00:29:55.13]: How old are you now?

Choy [00:29:56.15]: I'm 37. Right, and so that's gonna be like, "Dang, man." It's like, ok, it's going to get real real quick. [laughs]

Nigel [00:30:05.24]: I know. What do you imagine?
Choy [00:30:06.21]: It's like jumping into the deep end. I imagine like it's going to be like riding a bike. It's all gonna come back. Right? You know, so-

Nigel [00:30:13.22]: Wait, but you weren't riding a real bike at 15.

Choy [00:30:14.24]: No. I was riding a tricycle. I had a big wheel. [laughs] It was a big wheel, so you know what, I don't, I can't, I can't even imagine, so like, in terms of relationship wise, um, yes, I'm more mature, you know, mentally. And just knowin', just the respect level that I've gained, you know, uh, um-

Nigel [00:30:39.01]: All right. So, if you're willing to go there, what do you think it's gonna be like to be with a woman for the first time? What are you nervous about?

Choy [00:30:44.14]: Oh my gosh. So, the one thing that I would be most nervous about being with a woman after like 22 years is, like, I'm just gonna be completely honest, right, like, the stamina time, like I'll be tryin' to work out and run and all that just to keep, so I could keep stamina, but yeah. That's the thing that I'm more, I'm more, you know, that'd be embarrassing. I, I, I hit the finish line prematurely, yeah.

Earlonne [00:31:15.02]: Before Choy even gets to that finish line, he's probably gonna have to go on a date.

Nigel [00:31:20.15]: And dating is something he has had zero experience with. And so, naturally, he's nervous about it.

Earlonne [00:31:25.23]: Yeah.

Choy [00:31:26.17]: Ok. I'm gonna put out a disclaimer. Like, look, I've been in prison for x amount of years, so I hope you don't have any
expectations. Yeah. I say that jokingly, but at the same time, it's like almost, like, I just, I just might have to do that.

Earlonne [00:31:41.28]: Do not put out a disclaimer.

Nigel [00:31:44.00]: Put out a disclaimer. [Choy laughs]

Earlonne [00:31:45.07]: Because once she finds out. No, no, listen. Once she finds out you ain't been on the market in 22 years, she's gonna snatch you up. It's over. That, that's it.

Choy [00:31:55.26]: Nah. Ok, ok. Tell me, tell me more about that, would you? Tell me more about that. What you mean I'm gonna get snatched up?

Earlonne [00:32:00.01]: Well, because, I mean, you're fresh meat. You ain't been-

Choy [00:32:02.18]: Yeah.

Earlonne [00:32:02.18]: You ain't been bruised. You ain't been abused.

Choy [00:32:06.26]: I'm ripe. [dripping beat] [all laugh]

Nigel [00:32:12.28]: You know, Earlonne, I think you are setting him up for a big-

Earlonne [00:32:14.25]: Nah. Nah. He gonna be good, like he said the tricycle to big wheel. He gonna get back on the bike.

Nigel [00:32:19.24]: He was never on a bike!

Earlonne [00:32:21.21]: He can imagine. [Nigel laughs] He's been imagining it for years. He watched the Spanish channels.
Nigel [00:32:27.25]: Well, I'm sure all of that is true. Ok, but what do you think in general? Do you think these guys are gonna make it out there? I mean, I hate to even ask this. Do you think we're gonna see any of them back in here?

Earlonne [00:32:38.12]: Hell no! I'll say this, from my experience.

Nigel [00:32:44.07]: Yeah.

Earlonne [00:32:44.07]: Guys that do over, whether it's 10 years or 15 years, they ain't comin' back to prison. I think that's that mark where individuals like, "Damn. I done f**ked off a chunk of my life to this bullshit." And I think it takes time for you to realize, one, you can't get none of that time back.

Nigel [00:33:02.13]: Right.

Earlonne [00:33:02.13]: Two, you don't know when your real exit plan is on this earth. So-

Nigel [00:33:08.12]: Good point.

Earlonne [00:33:08.12]: You lookin' at it like, "Shit. I ain't got too much time to do this sh*t no more." And you've grown up.

Nigel [00:33:13.19]: Yeah. Yeah. I hear you and I really want to believe that you're right. But, what do you think are some of the most difficult challenges they are gonna face out there?

Earlonne [00:33:23.28]: If they don't have housing, housing. Uh, employment. Because a lot of times you're supposed to get a job before you get out. You know-
Nigel [00:33:31.09]: Impossible!

Earlonne [00:33:31.09]: It's impossible, but you may know somebody that knows somebody that says, "Ah, I'll give him a shot." So, I think that is going to be tough for guys.

Nigel [00:33:39.06]: There's definitely going to be challenges but fingers crossed.

Earlonne [00:33:41.02]: No fingers crossed. These guys are gonna survive. They gonna make it.

Nigel [00:33:45.29]: I feel that way too.

Earlonne [00:33:47.02]: Look. I know these guys are gonna make it because as long as I've been here, I've only seen like two people with life sentences come back. And one because he was feeding his nose.

Nigel [00:33:59.23]: Oh.

Earlonne [00:34:00.02]: He had a drug problem, but he could have left prison with a drug problem.

Nigel [00:34:02.15]: Yep. Yeah.

Earlonne [00:34:03.13]: You know what I'm sayin'. And then the other guy, I think he had an argument with his, uh, with his spouse, and he came back for that.

Nigel [00:34:09.15]: Ok.

Earlonne [00:34:09.15]: But for the most part, dudes out there doin' good.
Nigel [00:34:16.12]: Thanks to Choy, Chayne, Mike, and Gus for sitting down with us for their 'Ear Hustle' exit interview. They're all out of prison now and we really do wish them the best.

Earlonne [00:34:25.19]: Indubitably.

When we come back, we have count time. That's when we play a little extra tape we really want you to hear.

Nigel [00:34:37.12]: I love this one.

Earlonne [00:34:38.15]: This one was fun. [Nigel laughs]

Count time[00:34:52.15]: Count time! Count time! [names called] [phone ringing]

Male [00:35:04.20]: Re:store Justice. This is Anouthinh speaking.

Earlonne [00:35:08.01]: Hey, Choy. This is, uh, Earlonne and-

Nigel [00:35:11.07]: Hey, it's Nigel.

Choy [00:35:12.25]: Hey! What's up?

Nigel [00:35:15.10]: How you doin'?

Choy [00:35:16.22]: Oh. I am doing really well actually.

Earlonne [00:35:20.20]: Yeah. He is doing really well. He's got a great job at a non-profit called Re:store Justice.
Nigel [00:35:26.16]: And he got a place to live. It's in kind of a rough area of San Francisco called the Tenderloin, but still, he got a place to live.

Earlonne [00:35:32.19]: Right.

Nigel [00:35:33.09]: But we needed to catch up on the really important stuff.

Earlonne [00:35:36.05]: Yes we did. And luckily, there's one phone here in the media lab that and we got special permission to call Choy so we can ask him about his first date.

Nigel [00:35:45.16]: Yes. He met a woman in the mall. They went to dinner at a Chinese restaurant and she told him some of her darkest secrets and, well, I don't know. [laughs]

Earlonne [00:35:56.18]: Hey.

Choy [00:35:58.26]: I was like, "Ok." She's telling me all these things. You know, when I got to talk about my issues, my past, I mean, what.... Cause I told her about the type of work that I do and she seemed interested and really wanted, like how did I get, you know, into my line of work. So, I told her, you know, "Well, I'm actually affected by the criminal justice system. So." And I told her, you know, about, you know, committing murder. You know, uh, being in prison for 22 years, since I was 15. And, you know, her face just like dropped. Her eyes just got wide and shocked. And I'm like, "Dang. I don't think she was ready for all that."

Nigel [00:36:46.17]: Well, I mean, on a first date, that's a lot to take in, Choy.

Choy [00:36:49.20]: I know! I, I totally understand. It, it, I think it was a combination. I think it was that and-
Nigel [00:36:57.09]: So, how did the night end after that conversation?

Choy [00:36:59.15]: Oh, so, we walked, and I walked her to the bus station. And, you know, gave her the hug, and you know, she went on her way. I went my way.

Earlonne [00:37:13.25]: A hug? No kiss?

Choy [00:37:16.21]: Dude. After I told her what I did, bro, that really like cut the night short. [bumping music]

Nigel [00:37:26.04]: Oh man. [laughs] There's got to be a moral in there somewhere.

Earlonne [00:37:30.06]: [laughs] Yeah. Like, don't talk about your crime until, I don't know, the second date. Second base? Um-

Nigel [00:37:37.07]: Second base?! [both laugh] Let's go with second date.

Earlonne [00:37:40.21]: All right. I'm just sayin'. It's like, I don't know, we try our best to put our past somewhat behind us. But at the same time, we do owe people to let them know this is where we come from.

Nigel [00:37:51.25]: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Earlonne [00:37:52.27]: When do you do that?

Nigel [00:37:54.04]: I don't know. I mean, we're all about disclosure and I really applaud that, but in this situation, it's tough.

Earlonne [00:37:59.23]: It is tough. But, with practice, which should be fun, and a few more dates, which should be more fun-
Nigel [00:38:06.08]: Yes. Yes.

Earlonne [00:38:07.09]: I think Choy's gonna figure it out.

Nigel [00:38:09.16]: Yes. He will. [bells ringing] [rolling music]

Earlonne [00:38:15.00]: Well, that's it for this episode. And that's it for season two.

Nigel [00:38:18.10]: No! No!

Earlonne [00:38:19.26]: [laughs] We're gonna take a short break, but don't worry. We'll be back in September with season three.

Nigel [00:38:27.06]: Hell yeah we're gonna be back, because we have a ton more stories to tell.

Earlonne [00:38:30.15]: In the meantime, we want to hear from you. So, send us your questions about prison life and you can also send us some ideas because we might end up doing one of those stories. So, send it by kite or postcard or email us through our website, earhustlesq.com. Just look for the contact page.

Nigel [00:38:46.00]: 'Ear Hustle' is produced by myself, Nigel Poor, and Earlonne Woods with help from outside producer Pat Mesiti-Miller who comes in to work with the sound design team. This episode was scored with music by Antwan Williams and David Jassy.

Earlonne [00:38:58.29]: Why you sound so sad?

Nigel [00:39:00.08]: Cause I hate that the season's over. [both laugh] I mean, I got to tell you. I'm exhausted and I need a break, but I'm not ready for season two to be over.
Earlonne [00:39:08.29]: All the time. All right. All right.

Nigel [00:39:09.19]: I'm not.

Earlonne [00:39:12.08]: Curtis Fox is our story editor and Julie Shapiro is our executive producer for Radiotopia. We want to thank Warden Ron Davis and, as you know, every episode has to be approved by this guy here:

Lt. Sam Robinson [00:39:23.14]: We have made it through two seasons of 'Ear Hustle'. I think I've aged a little bit and.... [laughs] Man, um, but it's, it's amazing just how this thing has resonated with people, right. Uh, just recently, I think one of the most interesting letters I got was from a guy who introduced himself as a 55-year-old white male, conservative, NRA member, and essentially all the stereotypes of people who wouldn't be interested in listening to the perspective of people inside the prison. And he thanked the administration here at San Quentin for allowing the space to exist. And so, hopefully, we had a voice in helping some people to see some things more broadly than what they had in the past. So, so long. Goodbye until season three. And I do approve this story. [outro music]

Nigel [00:40:25.20]: So, between seasons, make sure you keep up with us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at earhustlesq. We'll be posting all kinds of photographs of people from our stories and just other images that have to do with 'Ear Hustle' because, you know, Earlonne, I'm actually a photographer. [laughs]

Earlonne [00:40:40.21]: That's what you are. That's how you got here to this prison.

Nigel [00:40:43.20]: That's right, so keep an eye out for those. That's how we're gonna stay connected over these next couple months.
Earlonne [00:40:50.02]: And be sure to go to our website, earhustlesq.com where you can sign up for our newsletter.

Nigel [00:40:55.05]: And you can also get yourself an 'Ear Hustle' t-shirt. Yeah!

Earlonne [00:41:00.09]: And, I want to say thanks to all the listeners for listening and sharing and commenting.

Nigel [00:41:07.14]: Amazing. We've gotten so many beautiful and thoughtful emails and, it, it's been incredible.

Earlonne [00:41:14.15]: We sure do appreciate you.

Nigel [00:41:18.11]: 'Ear Hustle' is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Hear more at Radiotopia.fm. I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne [00:41:28.09]: And I'm Earlonne Woods. Thank you for listening.

Choy [00:41:32.27]: Is there, is there a man equivalent to kegels? I don't, I don't know.