



Episode 22: This Place
First Aired: October 10, 2018

Tim Hicks: [00:00:01] I'm Tim Hicks, staff writer at *San Quentin News*. The following episode of *Ear Hustle* contains explicit language and graphic descriptions of violence that may not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

[00:00:14] [Metal bars slamming, followed by footsteps and jangling keys]

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:00:23] Now as we walk down the ramp, to the left, adjacent the imposing walls of San Quentin—imposing 20 to 30 feet-high walls of San Quentin—opposite that is one of the oldest facilities we have on site here at this prison. It's this building here: this granite, gray building with this imposing gate in front of it. It's our dungeon. So everything you think about "dungeon": dark room, ball and chain, people hanging from walls and being tortured, took place in here from the inception all the way until 1943.

[00:00:57] [Theme music starts]

Earlonne Woods: [00:00:59] You're now tuned in to San Quentin's *Ear Hustle* from PRX's Radiotopia. I'm Earlonne Woods. I've been incarcerated for 21 years, and I'm currently housed here at San Quentin State Prison in California.

Nigel Poor: [00:01:12] I'm Nigel Poor, a visual artist, now podcaster. I've been working with the guys here at San Quentin for about seven years.

Earlonne Woods: [00:01:19] And together, we're going to take you on a tour.

Nigel Poor: [00:01:23] Something different.

Earlonne Woods: [00:01:24] Indeed. [Theme music continues]

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:01:34] We house over 4,000 people behind our walls. When you house people in a confined environment like we do here, things are subject to go askew. And that is prison. There are bad things that take place inside these walls. And I don't throw that out there to scare you, but I do want to make you aware of the type of environment that you're walking into. [Lt. Robinson continues, inaudibly, as Nigel and Earlonne's voices come in on top of his]

Nigel Poor: [00:01:50] That's Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer here at San Quentin. He's the guy that has to approve this podcast to make sure that nothing in it is going to affect the safety and security of the institution.

Earlonne Woods: [00:02:02] Lieutenant Robinson is also the guy who gives tours of the prison to outside groups.

Nigel Poor: [00:02:05] That's right.

Earlonne Woods: [00:02:06] And he's done it hundreds upon hundreds of times. He got this shit memorized.

Nigel Poor: [00:02:11] Oh, he does. [Laughs]

Earlonne Woods: [00:02:12] Down to a science.

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:02:13] So when we walk inside of San Quentin, it's not like you're at the zoo where the guys are on one side of the fence and we're on the opposite side. It's not like that. You're gonna be immersed within our population. And so there are a couple things you need to be aware of. What does it mean... what do you think it means when I say that we have no-hostage policy?

Nigel Poor: [00:02:29] A few weeks ago, Lieutenant Robinson gave *Ear Hustle* the tour and we got to see parts of the prison we'd never seen before.

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:02:36] It used to be this Victorian structure... [Continues inaudibly under dialogue]

Earlone Woods: [00:02:41] I've been all around this prison. All the ins, the outs, the nooks, the crannies, the cubby holes, and I thought I had seen it all. But I hadn't.

Nigel Poor: [00:02:48] Well, my friend, there's a lot to cover here.

Earlone Woods: [00:02:50] Yeah, 'cause San Quentin is hella old.

Nigel Poor: [00:02:53] Oh, parts are *really* old. Some of it was built back in the 1850s.

Earlone Woods: [00:02:57] And a lot of the history that Lieutenant Robinson likes to talk about? It was news to me.

Nigel Poor: [00:03:02] Oh, so much I'd never heard before.

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:03:06] ...Not only was it designed to house inmates, it was also designed to house the staff that works here at this prison. But initially... [Continues inaudibly under dialogue]

Earlone Woods: [00:03:10] Normally, we get guys inside to tell their stories.

Nigel Poor: [00:03:13] But this place itself does speak, and it's not always through words. I mean, there's a story everywhere you look.

Earlone Woods: [00:03:20] If you know how to look.

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:03:22] 'Cause there's no question in my mind that in the 165 years we've existed here, blood has been spilled just about every square inch of this place. Lives have been lost. And our staff and our inmates tell these stories about these images they see floating through our housing annex... [Continues inaudibly under dialogue]

Earlone Woods: [00:03:35] He was talking about ghosts there. Ghosts from San Quentin's past.

Nigel Poor: [00:03:41] On this episode of *Ear Hustle*, we're trying something different. We're going to listen to some of those ghosts.

[00:03:46] [Noirish music starts]

Lee Jasper, Reading, as Clinton T. Duffy: [00:03:50] I saw them not as strangers or criminals, or even numbers on a file cart, but as human beings whose virtues and faults I knew better than anyone else. Whose case histories I had studied for the parole board. Whose wives and mothers and children I had known from many a tearful visit over the years.

Earlonne Woods: [00:04:12] Those are the words of Clinton T. Duffy, from his book *The San Quentin Story*. He's an interesting character.

Nigel Poor: [00:04:19] Oh yeah, he really is. He grew up here. His father was a guard, and Duffy himself became the warden in the 1940s. His book was published in 1950.

Earlonne Woods: [00:04:29] Talk about family business!

Nigel Poor: [00:04:30] Mhm.

Earlonne Woods: [00:04:31] Warden Duffy was a reformer. Some of his ideas were far ahead of his time.

Lee Jasper, Reading: [00:04:38] I had known about the dungeon since childhood, for my father often talked to us about what he called "the shame of San Quentin." But I had never seen this dreaded subterranean hole until the day I was sent there to interview the occupants for a census report.

[00:04:55] [Distant footsteps and chatter]

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:05:05] So if we step inside, we have a series of 14 wells and any of the guys in blue that make it down here... [Becomes inaudible as it fades underneath unsettling music and Jasper's voice]

Lee Jasper, Reading: [00:05:15] The dungeon was a black tunnel about 50 feet long with seven small cells on each side. The ancient mass of rock and concrete had the musty odor of a tomb. No sunlight had touched its moldy walls for over 90 years, and the foul air had no place to go, for there were no windows and the cell doors were hand-forged iron.

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:05:41] [Fading up as Jasper's reading ends] ...six feet wide and maybe about 14 feet deep. Each of these wells... today it doesn't have it, but when we operate the dungeon, each of them had big solid doors in front of them. And so no matter what perspective you were in, you were securely locked away in the dark. In each room, we give three conveniences, which are three buckets: one with water, and two that were empty. Over the course of a minimum of three days, they'd have to navigate that in the dark amongst themselves. [Trails off under Jasper's reading]

Lee Jasper, Reading: [00:06:09] Each cell was nothing more than a niche cut into the stone, and the walls and floor were bare. There was no light, no bed, no ventilation, no toilet facilities, not even a bench. There were sometimes three or four men in one cell, and there was no place to sit except a triangular block of concrete in one corner.

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:06:33] After three days, we'd come over and we'd reassess a guy. If he'd learned his lesson, we didn't think he was a knucklehead anymore, anything like that, we'd let him back out in prison. If we still thought he was a knucklehead, then we kinda changed the dynamics. There are things that are embedded on top of the wells, we'd string guys up, leave them hanging for days on end, we'd beat them and torture them. There were actually instruments of torture designed here at San Quentin to curb the behavior of the people we locked away in these wells.

Lee Jasper, Reading: [00:06:54] Prisoners slept on the damp floor with one blanket, if they were lucky, and they got bread and water at the whim of the guards. I had to use a flashlight to take my notes, and for weeks afterward, I was haunted by the memory of the shrunken faces I saw in the dim light. [Strings come up underneath dialogue] The smell of the living dead. The drip-drip of moisture from the vaulted ceiling.

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:07:17] Well in 1943, Warden Clinton Duffy, who was the newly-appointed warden here at San Quentin, made the decision that torture wasn't necessarily the best way to go about things. So he had all the doors removed from the dungeon with the thought that it would've made it difficult for anyone to come along after him to reopen and utilize it for those purposes, and we haven't utilized it since. [Metal door slamming, keys turning in a lock]

Mesro Coles-EI: [00:07:51] Centralized in the frame is a blood spatter that looks like there's been things drug through it. Probably someone's body. And then there's this crudely-drawn chalk outline. It was drawn very poorly. Like they literally just outlined the body and then drug it out of the way and then took the picture.

[00:8:14] [Spacey synth music starts]

Earlonne Woods: [00:08:18] Lieutenant Robinson gives a great tour. But photos, Nige, are another window into the past. That's your lane.

Nigel Poor: [00:08:25] Yep, I'm a photographer. And about five years ago, I was in Lieutenant Robinson's office, and he pulled out this box full of hundreds and hundreds of 4x5 negatives, and that really caught my attention. Over the past several years I've been archiving them, and I started a project that actually predates this podcast: bringing these pictures into the prison to see what guys would make of them.

Mesro Coles-EI: [00:08:49] It looks like it might be on a stone floor. It looks like it's on a tier because I see part of a staircase...

Earlonne Woods: [00:08:55] That's Mesro. He's been on the podcast before talking about dungeons and dragons.

Mesro Coles-EI: [00:09:02] ...I don't know. Whoever's standing there has got shiny black shoes.

Nigel Poor: [00:09:06] It's hard to tell exactly what is going on in many of these photographs, but we do know the dates of most of them, and that they were taken by COs.

Earlonne Woods: [00:09:13] The photo Mesro is holding looks to be a murder scene. It was taken inside San Quentin in 1965.

Mesro Coles-EI: [00:09:20] And then, it's like the blood is like spattered. There's like this smear that's in the middle that makes me know that maybe the bulk of his body was probably drug through his own blood in order to get him out of the way. The fact that somebody took the trouble to trace this thing out and then turn around and add insult to injury, did it kind of terribly, right? Oh, it's just... it sticks in my craw a bit.

Nigel Poor: [00:09:46] These photos, they're just amazing. And because they're mysterious, they make you look even more closely for clues. When I asked the guys to look at them, I wanted the images to be prompts to help them access their own memories. The photo of blood inside a chalk outline brought up memories for Mesro.

Nigel Poor: [00:10:03] [Speaking to Mesro] Now, can you tell me a story based on looking at this image?

Mesro Coles-EI: [00:10:07] So, I used to hang out with this white guy named Shred. I never knew his real name, you know. And he was kind of like a skinhead variant I guess, I'm not really up on the gang things and the stuff with the Aryan brotherhoods and all that. But he had like a lot of Norse stuff tattooed on him and, you know, iron crosses and like that. Shred was hysterical. He was one of the funniest guys I've ever met. Like he had jokes all day long. And so despite what people would think about, you know, whatever, racism or policy or whatever that is, we always used to meet up with each other going to and from chow when we were in reception. And we'd always be cracking these jokes and talking crazy to people and just laughing, you know what I'm saying? He was a really cool guy. And one day, when we were coming back from dinner, he saw someone and he started screaming 'Hey! Hey!' and he like rushed this guy, pulled out a couple of box cutters and cut this guy to ribbons right in front of the cops and God and everybody. It was a very horrific thing to see someone get sliced up with a bunch of box cutters. His face was turned towards me with his dead eyes, right? They hadn't closed his eyes. And so in my eyes it felt like he looked at me like, "Why didn't you stop him from killing me?" And there was really nothing I could do, right? It was so sudden. I still have dreams about that sometimes.

Nigel Poor: [00:11:47] Were you supposed that your friend did that?

Mesro Coles-EI: [00:11:52] I was. Because, you know, even though we had spent a lot of time cracking jokes and stuff, we hadn't really... I didn't really know that that guy... I mean his name, "Shred," was kind of a giveaway, but some people take on names that don't really fit who they are or what they do. So I just thought... Personally I just thought it was a cool name. So I was like, "Okay, 'Shred,' that's a cool name." I didn't realize that his name was Shred because he shredded people.

[00:12:21] [Keys jangling, low buzzing, hollow synth music]

Lt. Robinson: [00:12:38] [Fading in] ... I'll tell you the reason why I stopped here. It always humbles me when I stop at the outdoor restroom facilities here in the prison. But I stop here for a reason: because there's a story I always stop and kind of hone people into. When I was a brand new cop and I worked on death row, I remember many days in the mornings, we served them meals inside their cells and if you're the second cop feeding breakfast in the morning, you would pour a beverage. And so whether the beverage was coffee that was hot, or tea, and every once in a while they'd get a juice, like an orange juice or a cranberry juice or whatever the case may be. And so whenever we served cold beverages—I remember it like it was yesterday—many of the guys in there have tumblers with lids on it. If they got a cold beverage and they hadn't consumed that beverage when you would come back to them to take them out to the yard—and when

you take them out to the yard you've gotta do this like full-body search inside their cells, all that, go through all their stuff—many times what I would witness is the guys would take their tumbler, if they hadn't drink their beverage entirely, they would put the lid on the tumbler, and they would walk it over, and they would drop it in the toilet. And as a new cop, the first time I saw it, it blew my mind. I just didn't understand what was going on, because you know, I'm the type of guy, you know, I'll clean my toilet, but never ever would I consume anything that comes out of my toilet, right? It's just not what you do. And so after I got a little more comfortable working in the environment, I remember I asked a guy, I said to him "Look, why are you putting your beverage in the toilet?" I say "That's just not what normal people do." And he said, "Robinson," he said, "look." He said, "If I leave my cup out here on the shelf," he said "when I come back, I come back four hours later to a warm beverage." He said, "If I put it in the toilet, that toilet water is cold, and it acts as a refrigerator. So when I come back, I come back to a cold beverage." And so the tight confinement, toilets as refrigerators, it just really really honed my mind into thinking that I didn't ever ever want to do anything in life where I put myself in a situation where I ended up being incarcerated in prison.

[00:14:52] [Noirish music]

Lee Jasper, Reading: [00:14:59] It seems to me that I had been acutely aware of San Quentin's condemned row like a sore that refuses to heal as far back as I can remember. It probably began in the little San Quentin schoolhouse, where an eccentric teacher named Miss Redmond took a sadistic pleasure in arousing her pupils to the horror of the gallows. [Ominous, airy music] On execution morning, she was pale and tremulous, and would usually make the grave announcement that a man was about to be hanged. "In the building right over there," she would hiss ominously, pointing to the brick furniture factory. "Just think of it, children, that poor man." It was never news to us, of course. Every San Quentin youngster knew the meaning of the deathly stillness that fell upon Prison Town on those gloomy Friday mornings. Those of us whose fathers were assigned to duty in our around the gallows building were especially disturbed, and even under ordinary conditions, we would've found it difficult to concentrate on our schoolwork. But Miss Redmond wasn't satisfied with that. Shortly before 10 o'clock, as the death march began, she would put down her book and say, "Oh children, that poor man has only 15 more minutes to live." [Hollow, rhythmic percussive noise] She had an old-fashioned pocket watch on her desk, and sometimes I can still hear it ticking away in that hushed room. "Now it's only 10 minutes," she would whisper. She had learned somewhere that it took between 10 and 15 minutes for a man to die on the rope, and she had it timed in her own mind until at last she could groan, "There. It's done. He's dying. Dying." [Somber, guitar-led music] And while a man was dying and a woman with a

twisted mind extracted a perverted pleasure from it, 15 or 20 small boys and girls were being scarred with psychological wounds that few of them ever forgot.

[Swirling synths]

John Robb: [00:17:22] My name is John Robb and my CDC number is C44202. I was here in '77, '78, '79.

Nigel Poor: [00:17:32] So tell me, what was your first memory of stepping inside San Quentin in 1977?

John Robb: [00:17:40] I'm at the end of the world. Life as I knew before was over. And I'm gonna die here

Nigel Poor: [00:17:50] And were you on the main line?

John Robb: [00:17:52] No, I was on the row. I was sentenced to death originally. I remember having to go to South Block Hospital and there was like eight guards that take you down in the elevator, and you can never get over that "dead man walking," 'cause they would scream that out. "Dead man walking," like right now they'll say "escort" where they used to say "dead man walking." And as I'm shackled with my leg chains and my waist chains and stuff, and I'm going to the hospital, they would say that.

Nigel Poor: [00:18:30] Who would yell that? "Dead man walking"?

John Robb: [00:18:32] The officers. Whatever one that was ahead to let the other people know that there was a dead man walking, stay out of the way.

Nigel Poor: [00:18:40] I didn't know that was real. I thought that was just in movies.

John Robb: [00:18:41] [Overlapping Nigel] Oh it was very real. I still hear it in my head. And that's the way you're treated: you're dead. [Papers shuffling] Well, I'm looking at a medical staff, probably a doctor. And there's an inmate that's holding a black cat close to his chest, and there's a doctor there with a stethoscope that's listening to the cat's heart. The cat's all wide-eyed and everything. Yeah, that's a strong memory for me right there. I raised a cat in the West Block. They allowed me to do that.

Nigel Poor: [00:19:23] How'd you get a cat?

John Robb: [00:19:25] I was in maintenance. I worked maintenance a lot. Under maintenance, there was a pit. I stepped down in it up to my chest and there's a pipe going through the ground. I kept hearing this screaming, like a little cat, little something. So I got in this hole and I reached in there, and there's a bunch of fur all torn up, but there's this little tiny baby cat that barely didn't even have its eyes open. And I stuck him in my pocket, I took him home, and I got a little barrel off a binky, to feed it—you know I cleaned it and I fed it powdered egg mix. Oh, he was hooked on that. I had to get up every so many hours, I'd go "Dude, what're you screaming for? You're waking up everybody!" And then I would feed him. And that just got to be a regular habit, because he was my buddy. I think that's pretty much why they let me have him, because he kept me mellow and I had something to go back to my cell.

[Footsteps, chatter, metal clink]

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:20:38] Alright, so as we step to the side of the building, I think the first thing your eyes are attracted to are the fronts of the cells. They're all darkened with this black mesh in front of it. Well that black mesh is there for a purpose. In the movies, in prisons, you'll see open bars where guys are able to reach out through the bars and grab or throw or whatever the case may be. And in 1985, the last murder of an employee here at San Quentin took place. Not with an inmate that was out walking around and stabbing the employee, but the inmate was actually inside of his cell. He was inside of his cell, he manufactured a spear inside of his cell, and as the employee walked past the cell, he lunged his spear through the cell bars and murdered the employee. So after that, we went on a building spree to protect our employees, and in front of all of our cell bars, we designed this wire-mesh front to prevent guys from spearing our staff from inside the cells. [Whooshing, urgent music]

Richard Richardson, aka Bonaru: [00:22:02] [Sound of photo paper bending] It looks like metal frames. A bunch of little metal square frames, and then inside these square frames are small pieces of glass, and there's one glass that looks like it has a hole in the middle where it looks like a rock has been broke, and you have a hand pointing to the hole inside of the glass.

Nigel Poor: [00:22:26] It's weird, right?

Bonaru: [00:22:28] Yeah, it's strange. [Both laugh]

Nigel Poor: [00:22:31] So why do you think that picture was taken?

Bonaru: [00:22:35] I don't—I don't know why it was taken. Actually, to be honest with you, if this is a prison, I do know why it was taken. Because people can take a piece of this glass and use it as a weapon, you know, so the picture was taken so that it would be identified that this particular glass is broke in this particular area.

Nigel Poor: [00:22:59] Oh God. How many weapons could be made out of that broken pane of glass?

Bonaru: [00:23:02] Oh, I'll say about 10. Maybe 20, depending on how small you cut the knives. So it reminds me of a story.

Nigel Poor: [00:23:14] Mhm.

Bonaru: [00:23:15] [Laughs] Right? So my first time in prison, I went through Tracy, which Tracy is a reception center, right? Everybody goes through the reception center. So I went through Tracy during a period where it was the summer time, it was very hot.

Nigel Poor: [00:23:29] Like how hot?

Bonaru: [00:23:31] Oh, Tracy gets at least—it gets over 100 degrees in that area, right? So there's no ventilation in these cells. You know, it's an old prison. Tracy's an old institution. So a lot of people, you know, break the windows just so they can get air, and not necessarily for a weapon.

Nigel Poor: [00:23:52] So do you almost feel like you can't breathe, it's so hot?

Bonaru: [00:23:55] Mm, yeah. It's really hot. It's very hot. People lay on their bunks with just their underwear on and they don't move.

Nigel Poor: [00:24:02] And so when you break a window, what changes in the cell?

Bonaru: [00:24:06] [Laughs] You can get some type of air. I wouldn't say much, but any air in that situation is good. So you can hear people yelling across to the other building when they hear somebody break a window, "Break another one, brother!" [Laughs] You hear that all day long: "Break another window, brother!" And everybody goes through knows that term: "Break a window, brother! Break another one, brother!" ["Brother" echoes, pillowy synths and a deep bass come up]

Lee Jasper, Reading: [00:24:43] If I knew why certain men, especially those who haven't much time to serve, will suddenly jeopardize their whole prison record and risk

an added five year penalty for a few hours or days of uneasy freedom, I would certainly do something about it. For want of a better name, we call this affliction “parolitis,” and occasionally an intelligent man recognizes the symptoms and begs us to keep a close watch on him until his parole day. But most of them do not understand their deeply-buried motives, and the remorse of a man who realizes he has double-crossed himself, not us, is a painful thing to see. [Music ends]

Norman Willhoite: [00:25:31] [Photo paper shuffling] I’m looking at a picture. It looks like a training photo for people that escaped. It’s probably the back of a truck. There’s a bunch of boxes of cans that are empty, they’re tomato cans, and inside these tomato cans is a cleared-out space where it looks like an inmate’s sitting to escape. And, uh... I’ve known a few people that escaped from here.

Nigel Poor: [00:25:54] You do?

Norman Willhoite: [00:25:55] Yes.

Nigel Poor: [00:25:56] Oh! Can you tell... ?

Norman Willhoite: [00:25:58] Well there was one dude named Red, I don’t know if I can use his real name because he ended up getting killed here. But Red escaped in a truck kinda like this, just like this, and when he escaped, he hit the bay, he hit the water too soon. And it was at night, ‘cause he got out, he got out of the truck and he was hanging out, and then it got dark and he hit the bay. Well, this is the Alaskan gulf water. This ain’t the Caribbean water. So he hit the bay and he started freezing and he got out and the tower that’s out in the back, the back entrance tower, the cop was asleep and Red leaned against the fence, and hypothermia was setting in, and he was shaking so bad that he rattled the fence enough that it woke the cop up, and that’s how he got caught. [Hip-hop music starts]

Earlonne Woods: [00:26:42] We’ll be right back after the break.

[Door closing, photo paper ruffling]

Gregg Sayers: [00:27:14] I see two people that are very in love. They’re deep in a kiss. This man has his hand around her shoulder, around the back of her neck, she’s holding his chin. Well, they’re kissing with their eyes closed.

Nigel Poor: [00:27:30] The kiss is really potent, isn’t it?

Gregg Sayers: [00:27:32] Yeah. Yeah, they seem like they're really deep in love.

Nigel Poor: [00:27:35] And like they don't care that someone's photographing them.

Gregg Sayers: [00:27:39] They're so relaxed. They're just into it, you know?

Nigel Poor: [00:27:45] So what does the picture make you think about?

Gregg Sayers: [00:27:48] It reminds me of a picture that I took with my first and only, so far my only love. The only girl I ever fell in love with. We were, I believe, 16. We were just crazy in love. The setting, the way they're kissing, the arm placement, the hand placement, everything's exactly the same. My hand was on my knee, her hand was on my chin, my arm was around her. Our eyes were closed. Our mouths were together. I just remember feeling so, so... it just felt so right. I felt so relaxed, I felt so in love, I felt like I just wanted to be lost in that moment right there forever.

Nigel Poor: [00:28:31] And what happened to that?

Gregg Sayers: [00:28:33] A few years later, I ended up getting in trouble. As an adult. And I went to jail and I ended up catching a 10 year prison sentence. Being that I'm gonna go away for 10 years, I couldn't just sit here and hold her down, so I told her to just move on. It wasn't for seven years until I actually reconnected with her on a prison payphone. When I called her, on the prison payphone here you only have 15 minutes. I remember thinking, "There's so much I want to say, but I can't say it all in 15 minutes. What am I gonna do?" And when I was talking to her on the phone, I was still in prison, but mentally, I was either 15 or 16 years old, and I was everywhere we were back then. I was hanging out at parks, meeting her friends and camping and renting out hotel rooms behind her mom's back and sneaking into her room. It really took me to a whole other place. The last thing that I heard her say on the phone was, "Take care, and be safe." And then the phone went dead, really. I got up and I look around, and I'm back in prison again, a bunch of crazy people around me yelling and screaming and doing what they do and I just, I wanted to go back to my cell and I just wanted to cry, really. But I held it in and I ended up just writing a song.

Gregg Sayers, Singing : [00:30:06] [Guitar music underneath] *I dream of you like it was yesterday/Lost in a moment forever/Your hazel eyes are like the stars in the sky/ And you're a summer sunrise on a lake/You in my arms left me frozen in time/Everything else went away/And right then, I know that it would always be you/And I wish that I could just stay/In that moment forever/In that moment forever.*

[Distant chatter, footsteps]

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:31:18] Alright folks, well this is where I get to get off the tour train with you, but hopefully during the time today we spent with each other, hopefully I was able to enrich your thoughts about what we do behind the walls of a place like this every day. Thank you guys. [Laughter, chatter]

Nigel Poor: [00:31:31] That was great. So what part of the prison do you like talking about the most when you do a tour?

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:31:38] I'll tell you this. I remember looking from a very very hard and difficult environment, looking out of the windows of the adjustment center, and seeing the volunteers come into the prison, and not understanding what that was about. Because the guys I was dealing with would kill you if you gave them the opportunity, or if you slipped up or made a mistake. And you'd see in the people who were moving around freely that these people were engaging with them differently. And I didn't understand it, I didn't internalize it that the guys outside were any different than the guys inside, that they were in a different place, just being in there and being in the adjustment center, I think I learned what prison potentially is about. And just because a day is difficult, just because a guy is giving you a hard time, just because you gotta go in and you have to be physical with a guy. It could be not that it's personal, but it's just the business of the day. It's not just a dislike for you. It's just what they have to do to get across a point. And I think that's where I truly learned to take a man where he is at that day or at that point in time, and take him for who he is then, 'cause 15 minutes from now, it can be something that's completely different. The next day, it can be completely different. And that can be for better or for worse.

[Warped music]

Nigel Poor: [00:33:21] Thanks to Lieutenant Sam Robinson for giving us that tour of San Quentin. There's so much he said that we couldn't squeeze into this episode, but maybe we'll hear more from that tour another time.

Earlonne Woods: [00:33:31] Thanks to Gregg Sayers for talking with us and singing that song.

Nigel Poor: [00:33:36] Thanks to Norman Willhoite for his escape story, and to Bonaru for looking at that picture of the broken window with me.

Earlonne Woods: [00:33:42] And thanks to John Robb and John's cat.

Nigel Poor: [00:33:45] That was so cute.

Earlonne Woods: [00:33:46] [Laughing] John, you lucky. 'Cause they don't allow cats in here. I've never seen one in San Quentin.

Nigel Poor: [00:33:51] Big thanks to Mesro for sharing his story about Shred.

Earlonne Woods: [00:33:55] Lee Jasper was the man behind that wonderful voice reading excerpts from Warden Duffy's book, *The San Quentin Story*. It's not in print anymore, but you can find old copies online.

Nigel Poor: [00:34:06] And speaking of Warden Duffy, Earlonne, I know he's been dead a long time, but we owe him a lot.

Earlonne Woods: [00:34:11] Real talk. Warden Duffy was ear hustling long before us. Check this out.

[Noirish synth music]

Lee Jasper, Reading: [00:34:19] I wanted to tell the people what we were doing, and I got the brash notion that if we had an all-inmate package show, to use the trade term, we might get it on the air. An inmate rounded up 30 men who were interested in choral work and started a glee club. We rehearsed the singers with the orchestra for two or three weeks, and then recorded a sample program. I put the platter in my briefcase and went to see the manager of one of the most powerful stations in San Francisco. I told him what I wanted and offered to play the record. "A bunch of cons on the air?!" he bel-lowed. "I should say not! You must want me to get fired." I went to another station a few blocks away. The manager there was polite and friendly, but he said he couldn't use our show even if we had Humphrey Bogart in the cast. I tried two more downtown stations, but they didn't want any part of San Quentin. By this time my ardor had cooled consid-erably, but I was willing to try one more: KFRC. Mainly because I had to pass the station on my way out Van Ness Avenue toward the Golden Gate Bridge. To my surprise, the manager, Bill Papps, listened to me eagerly and said he thought it was a unique and in-triguing idea. *San Quentin On the Air*, as our show was called, made its debut from the small mess hall in the prison on January 12th, 1942. I felt that with the magic of radio, we had penetrated the invisible wall. In a matter of weeks, *San Quentin On the Air* spread to more than 300 stations coast to coast, and the San Quentin Post Office staff floundered in a sea of some 4,000 fan letters a week.

[Urgent music]

Earlonne Woods: [00:36:17] 4,000 letters a week? Damn! We don't even get that many.

Nigel Poor: [00:36:20] Okay, no we don't, but we do get emails and we get comments on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, all of that stuff.

Earlonne Woods: [00:36:27] We appreciate that for sure.

Nigel Poor: [00:36:29] You can see images from the San Quentin archive, including the ones guys talked about in this episode, on our website earhustlesq.com. Just go to the gallery page.

Earlonne Woods: [00:36:40] And if you want to know more about the photo project Nige mentioned at the top of the show, and you happen to live in Milwaukee, check out our exhibit at the Milwaukee Art Museum. It's called *Nigel Poor and the Men of San Quentin*. It's up until March 2019.

Nigel Poor: [00:36:54] *Ear Hustle* is produced by myself, Nigel Poor.

Earlonne Woods: [00:36:57] And me, Earlonne Woods.

Nigel Poor: [00:36:59] With help from outside producer Pat Mesiti-Miller, who also comes in to work with our sound design team. This episode includes music from David Jassy and Antwan Williams.

Earlonne Woods: [00:37:09] Curtis Fox is our story editor, Erin Wade's our digital producer, and Julie Shapiro is our executive producer for Radiotopia. We wanna thank Warden Ron Davis, and as you know, every episode has to be approved by this guy here.

Nigel Poor: [00:37:24] Again?

Lt. Sam Robinson: [00:37:25] Yes, it is me again. This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin State Prison. It is easy for me—this is the first one that's truly easy for me to say, "I approve this episode."

Earlonne Woods: [00:37:38] Next time on *Ear Hustle*, it's our Catch a Kite Q&A episode.

Nigel Poor: [00:37:42] Where we answer questions from listeners, and this time, we really mean straight from the listeners.

Female Voice on Answering Machine: [00:37:48] I am a currently-incarcerated woman. My question for y'all is this: What is the one misconception about prisoners and/or prison that you wish the greater public did not hold? [Phone beep gives way to theme music]

Earlone Woods: [00:38:05] *Ear Hustle* is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Hear more at radiotopia.fm. This podcast was made possible with support from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, working to redesign the justice system by building power and opportunity for communities impacted by incarceration. I'm Earlone Woods.

Nigel Poor: [00:38:28] And I'm Nigel Poor. Thanks for listening.

Earlone Woods: [00:38:30] [In falsetto] Ear hustlin'!

[Theme music concludes]