



Episode 3: Looking Out
First aired July 12, 2017

Nigel [00:00:00.20]: Hear that?

Earlonne [00:00:01.24]: Hear what?

Nigel [00:00:02.24]: It's finally quiet in here! [silence]

Earlonne [00:00:05.28]: OK, let's do it. You're now tuned in to San Quentin's 'Ear Hustle' from Radiotopia.

Listener Alert [00:00:11.27]: The following podcast contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners.

Female [00:00:17.22]: [pleasant, jazzy music] Support for 'Ear Hustle' comes from Bombas. 4 years ago, two guys quit their jobs to make a difference in the world with socks. They learned socks are the most requested items at homeless shelters and realized there was a gap in the market for a better sock. They spent two years thinking about every single detail to engineer the perfect sock and Bombas was born. For every pair Bombas sells, they donate a pair to those in need. That's over 2 million pairs of socks so far. Bombas offers a money-back guarantee and 20% off your first order. To support 'Ear Hustle' and order your new favorite socks,

go to Bombas.com/hustle. That's Bombas.com/hustle. [light musical beat] 'Ear Hustle' is supported by MailChimp. MailChimp is the world's largest marketing automation platform. 15 million customers from small e-commerce shops to big online retailers use MailChimp to reach customers and grow their business. There's always a way to do better. MailChimp reports show you how well you're connecting with your audience, what they're clicking on, and what they're not. They even give you customized tips for improvement, and you can check in from anywhere with their mobile dashboard. Get started free at MailChimp.com. MailChimp, build your brand, sell more stuff.

Rauch [00:01:38.12]: [melancholy music] I love animals, so yeah. Since I've been in prison, I've had black widows, tarantulas, a lot of grasshoppers, beetles, snakes, slugs, crickets.

Earlone [00:01:49.06]: At San Quentin, inmates aren't allowed to have pets, but some guys get creative, like Rauch here.

Rauch [00:01:55.21]: Gophers, rabbits. I had 4 swallows, a toad, preying mantis, 21 snails, frog, a red breasted finch whose arm broke, pigeons. I had a desert vole that was partially paralyzed. Teddy bear hamster, just really lazy with an attitude. A centipede and it was wolf. It was a bad little monster. I had two fish that had babies twice. I had a tarantula broke out one time, and my cellie said, "Yo spider got out."

Theme music [00:02:22.19]

Earlone [00:02:28.04]: I'm Earlone Woods.

Nigel [00:02:30.03]: Earlone is serving a 31 year to life sentence for attempted second-degree robbery, and he's the co-host and co-producer of 'Ear Hustle'.

Earlonne [00:02:38.16]: And that's Nigel Poor. She's a visual artist and works with incarcerated men here at San Quentin, and she's the co-producer and my co-host, and together we're going to take you inside.

Nigel [00:02:51.15]: [cars driving] I've been coming to San Quentin as a volunteer for about 6 years now, and when I get here, my routine is always the same. I park my car. [car door closing] I go through a few checkpoints and gates, and once I'm inside the prison, I check in with a few of the correctional officers that I know, and then I make my way down to the media lab. [keys jangling] And, to get to the media lab, I have to pass through the yard. [men talking, keys jangling] When I walk down into the yard, the first thing that I notice is that there's hundreds of guys hanging out in different areas. There's some guys playing basketball. There's other guys playing tennis. There's guys hanging out in small groups, [calm music] maybe talking and playing dominoes, and it's a really strangely friendly atmosphere. In some ways, it seems more like a village because everyone you walk by is really friendly. They make eye contact. They ask how you're doing. They say hello, and I'm wondering, do you have the same experience?

Earlonne [00:03:43.22]: Yeah. This is pretty much a very friendly environment. I mean, from the volunteers, to the prisoners, to the staff, individuals know how to communicate with each other, and I think, by them being able to express themselves and make this place like a cool place, but I really think San Quentin is the perfect soil for rehabilitation for real though. I mean, you have people coming in here saying that they feel safer in here than they do in society.

Nigel [00:04:06.18]: Hmm. Yeah, I've heard that actually. Well, one of the things I've noticed is that there are all these different areas, and so, Earlonne, I've just discovered this new area called Hippy Row.

Earlonne [00:04:16.02]: Right, right, right.

Nigel [00:04:17.15]: And there's nothing distinctive about it. It's just a paved part of the yard, but it's called Hippy Row because that's where you're going to find Rauch, and the funny thing about him is that he's always sitting on the ground without shoes.

Earlonne [00:04:32.02]: [laughs] When I see Rauch, he be sitting Indian style drawing something and, in the process of him drawing, he be having these extra pencils in between his toes, like his reds, his blues, his greens, and he'll have them there and they're like pencil holders.

Nigel [00:04:44.18]: Yeah, it's like his desk organizer.

Earlonne [00:04:45.28]: Indeed.

Nigel [00:04:46.27]: So, how would you describe him?

Earlonne [00:04:48.22]: To me, I think Rauch look like the original Jesus Christ, [high, melodic music] you know. [laughs] I mean, he got the dreadlocks. He look like he's from the earth and, if he could, he'd probably just be wearing a leaf, and he got this one little thing that he do. He'll just start sniffing on his dreadlocks.

Nigel [00:05:07.26]: [whispering] I know. I've seen him do that. He grabs his hair and he pulls it in front of his nose and just sniffs.

Earlonne [00:05:12.25]: Why you whisperin'?

Nigel [00:05:14.14]: 'Cause I feel like I'm talking about him behind his back. [laughs] [groaning melody] He knows he does it. Right?

Earlonne [00:05:19.26]: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Nigel [00:05:20.22]: It's not like he's going to hear this and go, "Oh, my god! I sniff my hair?"

Earlonne [00:05:23.26]: No. Hey. He'll catch his self. You'll just be looking at him like, "Uh huh."

Rauch [00:05:28.24]: [record scratch] FYI, I do smell on my dreads. I put different oil on each one of them. They smell good. They smell like I just came out the dirt, hanging out with roots and stuff.

Earlonne [00:05:40.02]: [record scratch] [energetic melody] But, you know what though? When people from the outside look at Rauch, they be like, "Oh, dude weird. Man, I ain't talking to dude." But Rauch is a cool dude.

Rauch [00:05:50.08]: My name is Ronnel Draper, but I go by Rauch. My relationship with people is pretty strained. I don't trust them. From early on, they have been a source of pain for me.

Nigel [00:06:02.23]: So, Rauch is about 40 years old, and he's a pretty shy guy.

Earlonne [00:06:06.01]: Until you know him.

Rauch [00:06:10.04]: [water dripping] When I was a child, before I was removed from the care of my mom's custody, she tried to drown me a couple times in the tub. [sad, thoughtful music] And then, she stopped and she left the bathroom, and she was crying. I knew she was unhappy or sad at something I did. I wanted to actually comfort her, but I didn't know how to do it. I don't remember her face and I haven't seen her since.

Nigel [00:06:40.00]: Rauch said he was 6 or 7 years old before he had his first real connection with a person.

Rauch [00:06:45.16]: [soft, bright music] That was with Sister Maria. She had something about her that I really enjoyed being around. She seemed to care in a different way than I was used to people caring because, up until that point, I had been into different homes, hospitals, and now was in an orphanage.

Earlone [00:07:04.15]: Rauch was in the St. Vincent Orphanage in South Philly. It was when he was there that he had his first memorable encounter with the animal kingdom.

Rauch [00:07:16.12]: [birds squawking] I remember one time when I was at the orphanage, I wasn't there long, and Sister Maria took me and several other kids to Atlantic City Beach and Boardwalk. The day was overcast and we were the only people out there, but it was a trillion birds out there. It was a lot of birds, seagulls, and I got a clam. And she said, "Go and give it to them."

Female [00:07:38.20]: Ronnel, you can feed the birds. Feed the birds. It's okay. Feed the birds.

Rauch [00:07:43.09]: [heavy, strumming music] But I was scared of them because they were aggressive. Super aggressive. When they seen that clam, like a thousand of them came and said, "Yeah. We need that." And it was, it was, it was frightening. It was frightening. So, I threw it and ran behind her. She was my protection.

Nigel [00:08:09.01]: Rauch didn't stay afraid of birds or any other animals. At 10 years old, he left the orphanage and he moved into a group home in Philadelphia where they didn't seem to mind his love of animals.

Rauch [00:08:21.26]: [children playing and talking] I used to bring home everything: lizards, snakes, kittens from down the street and bringing

pigeons home, dogs. It was, it was bad because they know where to come after a while, and I'd come home from school and there would be a bunch of cats or dogs. The pigeon didn't last long because I think the cat ate it. But, I didn't know too much then. I wanted all the animals to be my companion and friend. I do not call animals pets. I call them critters. I hang out with these guys or girls. They're friends. I don't own them.

Nigel [00:09:00.07]: Rauch actually spells his name R-O-A-C-H. No. Wait a minute. That's how you spell roach, right?

Earlonne [00:09:06.14]: That's how you spell roach, yeah.

Nigel [00:09:07.25]: OK. Rauch spells his name R-A-U-C-H.

Earlonne [00:09:12.06]: Is his name Rauch because of the critter? Or was he just?

Nigel [00:09:14.28]: OK. I was talking to him one time off mic and the thing about his name is, when he was a teenager, he was homeless, and he lived in different people's homes in the rafters, like secretly in people's houses and he felt like a roach. He was hiding behind the scenes and his friends knew that he was there, but the parents wouldn't necessarily know that he was. And that's how he got his name. But he changed the spelling of his name because people thought it was insulting to call him a roach.

Earlonne [00:09:43.22]: Damn. That's cold.

Nigel [00:09:45.15]: Yep.

Earlonne [00:09:45.26]: Everybody don't grow up the same.

Rauch [00:09:48.06]: I got into crime for survival and I was hurtin', and I thought it was a way to get back at people. This was the way to make them

feel the pain that I felt. Then, it slowly became just a part of what I did. I'm incarcerated for second-degree murder. We got in a fight with someone and I ended up killing him.

Nigel [00:10:09.29]: This is probably a good time for us to say that we are not investigative journalists.

Earlonne [00:10:14.08]: No, we're not.

Nigel [00:10:15.12]: We invite people to tell us their stories, and there's really only so much fact checking we can do.

Earlonne [00:10:20.18]: Right, but what we do know is that Rauch got a sentence of 15 years to life sentence, and the other thing we know about Rauch is that, when he got to prison, he managed to make animals a big part of his life.

Rauch [00:10:32.26]: [high music] I like animals because I can communicate with them better than I can people. The first critter I had in prison was a moth, and I only had it for a day because I had a cellie who came back and killed it when I went to the yard and left it on the floor. Sometimes, I believe I can see or understand or know what an animal is thinking, how it's feeling when it's depressed, when it's unhappy, even when I watch it on TV. [tuba music] I had a frog once who was not cool. Everywhere I moved in the cell, it would move somewhere to watch me. He constantly would keep his eye on me. I'd move over here and get out of view, he would come up and look at me. I think he was letting me know that, "You know what? You go to sleep, I'm gonna pee on you, dude." So, I ended up letting it go. [buzzing] I used to have a pet black widow and I used to feel it insects. I'd be out, be out in the yard being pimped by a spider, and then I'd come in with bugs, bees, crickets, and I put them in a container and nature take its course. The bees would run around up in there, fly around in there for not long, and then they'd get caught in the

web, and there she is, spray them with the webbing, and then wrap 'em up, and then eat 'em. It was action. It was theater, comedy. It was really good, better than watching TV. You never know what was gonna happen. You never know how she was gonna do what she was gonna do. [mystery music] One time, I had 4 swallows at once and they end up dying. That year, I think I lost maybe 10. Along the building, they would always fall down and people would come get me. "Hey. Got some more. Got some more. Caught some more." So, I had to smuggle them into the building. And then, they would look really strong. They even look like they were doing well, but I would leave and come back and then one would be down, two would be down. I found out that they end up dying because they needed to be touched and to feel a connection with some other, with the parent. So, when I have to take care of another baby swallow, oh, it will happen again, I will keep it in my shirt pocket on my person so it can hear my heartbeat and my voice and feel connected or nurture. I take care of animals because they teach me what I can't learn from people. It's unconditional affection or appreciation. Unconditional love is, "Here. No, it's yours. No, no. Nothing. It's all you."

Nigel [00:13:35.22]: Having pets in prison is considered contraband, but it seems to me that some of the correctional officers ignore the tiny critters that Rauch keeps, but there's this one group called The Squad. I've had some interaction with them and they're pretty intimidating.

Earlonne [00:13:50.13]: Hell yeah. We call them the Jump Out Boys, The Alphabets, The Black Patches.

Nigel [00:13:55.07]: The alphabet?

Earlonne [00:13:57.09]: [laughs] Yeah. It's like the ATF, the FBI. They the ISU, which is Investigative Services Unit, but when they do come, they come for business. They're not just bothering you to bother you. They come in because somebody sent them to you.

Nigel [00:14:10.12]: One time, I did have an experience with them, and I will say that, before they actually show up, something changes in the air. It's like everyone has this sixth sense about it and then, all of a sudden, the door opens and you see these guys come in you're like, "That's why the temperature changed in the room."

Rauch [00:14:29.05]: [menacing music] One time, The Squad came to the cell and they were searching for contraband, but they found the desert vole instead and they said long as I was taking care of it that they weren't going to trip on me keeping it. It was cool.

Earlone [00:14:44.20]: This time for Rauch, the squad wasn't tripping, but sometime prison officials aren't so accommodating.

Rauch [00:14:51.16]: I recently have lost 21 snails. They threw it in the trash. So, it depends on the officer. Some don't mind. Others see it as a health violation. Now, if I'm in a cell and a mouse wanders in there and says, you know, "I'm going to hang out here." It's cool. I'd be willing to take care of it, hang out with it, chill with it. I wouldn't chase him out. I let 'em stay as long as they wanted and be my friend. [chipper music]

Nigel [00:15:30.13]: I know you're not really supposed to have pets in prison, but Rauch found kind of a way around it. In reality, you really can't have regular pets like dogs and cats and, what, bunny rabbits.

Earlone [00:15:43.03]: Um, nah. You can't. You can't have pets in prison, but there are some special projects in San Quentin where guys do train service animals.

Nigel [00:15:50.27]: I definitely hear stories about animals in prison.

Earlone [00:15:54.26]: Like what?

Nigel [00:15:55.02]: Do you hear guys talk about? OK. So. One time, this guy told me that he was in, let's say it was High Desert.

Earlonne [00:16:03.16]: Uh huh.

Nigel [00:16:04.14]: In the middle of nowhere and he was there for 10 years, and he hadn't really seen much nature, and he hadn't heard any animals, and then, one day, he heard a dog barking and he was so overwhelmed by it.

Earlonne [00:16:16.10]: Bullshit.

Nigel [00:16:16.25]: [laughs] Why do you say bullshit? Come on. This is such a sensitive story. Why is that bullshit?

Earlonne [00:16:22.23]: In his 10 years in High Desert, High Desert is a state prison, he never heard a dog?

Nigel [00:16:28.06]: Nope, he never heard a dog. He kind of even forgot that such things existed.

Earlonne [00:16:34.11]: Well, first off, I'm thinking of, you know, I can watch TV and see dogs, different sized dogs from a Chihuahua all the way up. Second, ISU, which is the squad we've been talking about, they have dogs, so their dogs is gonna walk through the institution, through the buildings and they gonna bark. [disappointing tuba note]

Nigel: [00:15:09] Where's your sense of romance?

Nigel [00:16:56.05]: All right. Getting back to Rauch's story. He has such a powerful urge to take care of critters, to nurture really, and we all have that urge one way or another, whether it's having kids or taking care of pets,

maybe it's even working with young people, and we wanted to find out what other guys inside do to nurture.

Earlone [00:17:16.10]: Except most guys aren't going to call it nurturing. They're gonna say "looking out". We went around with our microphone for some yard talk on the subject.

Male [00:17:25.07]: [singing, tapping on table] It ain't worth it. No, it ain't worth it. Tell me. Was it worth it? One thing's for certain. This game is so confusing, but a young nigga's still learning.

Yark Talk [00:17:34.00]: Um, well, you know, my friends in here, you know, like, they come in. You feel me? Like, sometimes they may need like some hygiene or some food and, you know, it feels good to be able to actually help out my peoples.

Male [00:17:44.28]: [singing, tapping on table] I did came a long way. Staying in my own lane.

Yard Talk [00:17:49.17]: Um, I kind of see it kind of difficult, because there's not really too many things to nurture.

Yard Talk [00:17:54.17]: Uh, when I used to have more free time, I, I've kept lizards. That's how I, um, you know, satisfied that need. You know, like, taking care of something. That give you a little satisfaction.

Male [00:18:07.00]: [singing, tapping on table] Is it worth it? Think of how the game is so wrong and there's new shit. I swear is getting old. It ain't working. It ain't working. No, it ain't working.

Nigel [00:18:13.17]: How'd you feed it?

Yard Talk [00:18:14.20]: Come on. Catch flies. Like, spent hours every day,

you know, catch flies. Especially in the winter, there's no flies around, you know? You just, it was a hassle to catch flies, but catching flies is kind of like, um, meditation too. You know, you're in your own zone and, you, you know, with all these buzzing around, you're focusing on one fly and trying to, how to approach it to catch it. No. It's kind of like, it's really, um, soothing.

Male [00:18:39.29]: [singing, tapping on table] Think about my niggas in the grave. Be at peace. At least you in a better place, man. Think about my young niggas. Gone. I wish heaven had a phone. Forever, forever I'm keeping their name alive. Yeah, the real niggas die but only the strong survivin'.

Yard Talk [00:18:57.01]: Now, I was feeding the geese and, and like helping them with the have babies and stuff. I was just checking on them, you know, pretending like I'm helping them and giving them advice and feeding them every now and-

Nigel [00:19:07.10]: What kind of advice?

Yard Talk [00:19:09.18]: Where they should teach them how to, where to learn to fly and all that stuff and should go over there and hide from people and all that. I, I enjoyed the parents raising their children, corny as that is, you know. Getting nurturing vicariously. It felt good to be able to see that, because been away from that kind of stuff for so long, so.

Male [00:19:31.01]: [singing, tapping on table] Think of when I'm sittin' in the cell, I ain't never been to heaven, but I know I been to hell, man. Think of how it all went wrong. We was all gettin' money but jealousy fucked it off, man. What happened to keepin' the circle strong?

Earlone [00:19:43.11]: The guy singing there is Jovan Mills, known on the yard as Scoob Stacks. He just happened to be beating on the table and

singing while we were out recording our Yard Talk.

Male [00:19:53.09]: [singing, tapping on table] I know I made up on love, but- [stops singing] I don't want to get too explicit. I don't want to get too explicit. I don't want to be disrespectful toward you. That's why.

Nigel [00:20:00.14]: So, taking care of friends, lizards, geese. E, what's your workaround? What do you look out for?

Earlonne [00:20:08.08]: Uh, for me, it's my god kids, you know. I like to nurture them from here like through letters, through phone calls, uh, that's my nurturing is just to stay in contact with them and try my best to raise them from here.

Nigel [00:20:23.01]: So, do they actually come to you for advice?

Earlonne [00:20:25.28]: If I end up calling my goddaughter, she be like, "Man, I've been waiting on you to call me." And, ooh, we just go there. You know, because I always be like, "Hey, you know we only got 15 minutes for this, right?"

Nigel [00:20:36.03]: That is definitely a story for another podcast, yeah, the 15-minute phone call. Well, I know in prison there is a lot of deprivation, so it's really cool that you can keep the connection so strong with them.

Earlonne [00:20:45.26]: That's very important to me, you know.

Nigel [00:20:48.07]: Well, I know we're talking about deprivation, but there are two things that can never be taken away from you in prison and that's your fantasies and your memories. So, I've got a question for you. Since we've been talking about animals, I'm curious. If you could be an animal, what would you be? [tapping beat]

Earlonne [00:21:06.13]: Uh, beluga whale.

Nigel [00:21:08.07]: [laughs] What? What? Wow.

Earlonne [00:21:10.18]: There's no rhyme or reason for it, but it just sounded cool, but we did go to the yard and ask some guys what type of animals would they be.

Yard Talk [00:21:21.11] If I could be any animal, I'd be a penguin. They're super cute in tuxedos, and they're like the coolest animals ever, and they slap box like crazy too.

Yard Talk [00:21:30.04]: I would want to be a panther. The reason why is I like the sleekness of the animal.

Yard Talk [00:21:35.15]: Dog, because I know that someone would adopt me.

Yard Talk [00:21:38.19]: Galapagos turtle, because they live to be over 150 years old.

Yard Talk [00:21:43.19]: Lion, because it's king.

Yard Talk [00:21:44.27]: Marmot, because they're misunderstood. Everybody thinks they're weasels and they're not, they're marmots.

Yard Talk [00:21:50.02]: I want to be a water buffalo because it's diligent and because it says very little.

Yard Talk [00:21:56.01]: It would be a eagle because they can fly, so that means I would always be free. I would always be safe.

Yard Talk [00:22:04.02]: Tiger 'cause tigers love their independence.

Yard Talk [00:22:07.21]: A jellyfish because it has no natural enemies.

Nigel [00:22:13.15]: I asked Rauch what kind of animal he'd want to be and his answer is pure Rauch. [laughs]

Earlonne [00:22:19.19]: I want to hear that.

Rauch [00:22:21.08]: If I could be an animal, any animal, it would be a wish dragon that would only appear when a kid needed it because my experience with imaginary friends, they were needed. So, the thing about being a dragon is they eat meat and I couldn't do that. So, I'd have to be a vegetarian dragon, a thin vegetarian dragon, because I would spend a lot of time looking for food. That's a lot of carrots. That's a lot of apples, oranges. That's just a lot of vegetables. Who's going to grow those vegetables for giant dragon? Unless I'm a baby, a tiny dragon. Then, I just a little slice of cheese. I didn't think about that.

Earlonne [00:23:06.09]: [otherworldly music] Thanks to Ronnel Draper, aka Rauch, for telling his story and keeping the critters fed. Our sound designer is my fellow prisoner Antwan Williams.

Nigel [00:23:16.03]: Pat Mesiti Miller is our outside production advisor. Our story editor is Curtis Fox and our executive editor from Radiotopia is Julie Shapiro.

Earlonne [00:23:26.00]: We also want to thank Warden Ron Davis, and every episode has to be approved by this guy here:

Sam Robinson [00:23:31.18]: Hi. I'm Lieutenant Sam Robinson at San Quentin State Prison. You know, I've heard a lot of stories inside this prison and there have been some that I've really, really liked, there have been

some that have been OK, and then there's pets in prison, which is on the opposite end, and I approve this story.

Nigel [00:23:50.00]: The opposite end?

Earlonne [00:23:51.07]: Uh, sound like he didn't like this one.

Nigel [00:23:53.09]: Nope.

Earlonne [00:23:54.15]: Maybe he will like the next one. [outro music] Next time on 'Ear Hustle', what's it like to spend years in the Security Housing Unit, aka the SHU.

Armando [00:24:06.00]: Being in the SHU for so long, it will affect you in many ways. You know, from not being able to finish a sentence to forgetting what you're talking about during the sentence.

Nigel [00:24:21.11]: 'Ear Hustle' is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Radiotopia is made possible with support from the Knight Foundation. Hear more at Radiotopia.fm.

Earlonne [00:24:34.12]: Big thanks to those of you who have sent us postcards with questions for us about prison life. We hope to put together a mini episode of 'Ear Hustle' to answer as many as we can, so keep the postcards coming from around the world.

Nigel [00:24:45.13]: Yeah. We've gotten them from England, Scotland, Australia, Canada.

Earlonne [00:24:48.27]: Oo-wee.

Nigel [00:24:49.13]: Yeah. Keep them coming. You can find the address on our website, earhustlesq.com, where you can also sign up for our

newsletter. I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlone [00:24:58.07]: And I'm Earlone Woods. Thanks for ear hustling with us.

Radiotopia outro [00:25:06.26]: Radiotopia from PRX.

Female [00:25:14.25]: Thanks for listening and thanks to Adzerk for providing their ad serving platform to Radiotopia.