



Episode 12: Firsts
First aired March 14, 2018

Listener Alert [00:00:00.22]: The following podcast contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners.

Shane [00:00:05.29]: So, I come here to San Quentin and, uh, it's like the most intimidating place in the world. Right? You get to prison and it's like. It's...It's scary. It's like, you know, you've only seen it in movies. And, like, 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!" And then someone else goes, "Oh, he killed Ray Ray? Hey, that motherfucker's here! He killed Ray Ray!" I'm like, "I don't know who Ray Ray is! Who's Ray Ray?" [laughs] Like, and so, so I'm like walking to my cell, and I'm like, "Oh, this can't get any worse."

Earlonne [00:00:41.50]: This was Shane's first day in San Quentin.

Nigel [00:00:43.28]: And he doesn't know it yet but, when it comes to cell assignments, the prison usually assigns people according to race. So, like, black guys with black guys. Latinos with Latinos. Asians with Asians.

Earlonne [00:00:54.21]: Shane's a white guy, and he remembers every detail, even the name of the correctional officer who brought him to his cell.

Shane [00:01:00.29]: I remember Tarvard. That was the cop's name. He like puts his key in the...and he's like, "Ah, how much you want to bet your cellie's white?" [laughs] I'm like, "Dear god." [laughs] And then, standing there in front of the door, like, I hadn't even seen him because the light was off there, is my cellie. He's like six feet tall, like just wide and like, the light in there, it strobes, like it was broken. So, like, I would catch like glimpses of him. Like [makes clicking noises]. And he just like, he has a beard that goes down to like his belly and he's got like his, where he's from like tattooed on his stomach, and like wizards and dragons and all like the classic like white boy tattoos. You know what I mean? [laughs] And like Raiders from back like when they were like in LA. You know what I mean? Like super like old school like. It's like his fifth turn and he's got like all of like four teeth in his mouth. And we can only wear our boxers, so he's like just in his white shorts and his sandals. I was like, "So, uh, are you in here by yourself?" He's like, "Yeah. Killed my last cellie." I was like, "Oh my god." [laughs] So, so awful. And then he's like, "No, no. I'm just kidding. Come here!" And he like picks me up and like puts me on my rack. And he's like, "You like burritos?" And like, he makes me all this food. And the bottom line was like really he was just like some older gentleman that, um, just, uh, hadn't had a cellie in like four months. And, like, he was just so excited to have company. And he's like all, "Look at all this stuff I got!" And he's showing me all these magazines. Like, "Isn't she hot?" And like, "Oh, yeah. I got these." It turns out we both really like that movie 'Stepbrothers', so we always like sit there and go...

[intro music]

Earlonne [00:02:28.09]: You're now tuned into San Quentin's 'Ear Hustle' from PRX's Radiotopia. I'm Earlonne Woods. I'm incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison in California.

Nigel [00:02:38.07]: I'm Nigel Poor, a visual artist who volunteers at the prison.

Earlonne [00:02:42.04]: And, together, we're gonna take you inside. [intro music]

Nigel [00:02:56.00]: Today on the podcast, we're talking about firsts.

Earlonne [00:02:58.26]: Yeah, like the first day in San Quentin. The first visit with moms.

Nigel [00:03:02.29]: The first time out of prison on a medical visit. All kinds of firsts.

Earlonne [00:03:06.15]: Yep. And, speaking of firsts, this is the first episode of season two of 'Ear Hustle'.

Nigel [00:03:12.08]: So, if you're new to the show, thanks for joining us. And, if you listen to season one, welcome back, and really, thank you for hanging in while we were on break.

Earlonne [00:03:20.22]: Right.

Nigel [00:03:21.08]: Although, wait a minute. We weren't really on break. [laughs]

Earlonne [00:03:24.01]: Hell naw, we wasn't on break. We were plotting out season two, and we knew you were there because Nig told me all about all the comments on Instagram. I've read all the postcards. She told me about all the tweets, all the letters that's been coming in, and some cool artwork. We've been getting a lot.

Nigel [00:03:43.00]: We've been getting some really beautiful artwork. Thank you. And, it's amazing. It really lets us know that we've connected with people and that we're opening a dialogue, so we're so glad to be back.

Earlonne [00:03:52.17]: We are proud to be back. [electronic beat with bubbling sounds] Talk to anyone here from the guys on the main line to the volunteers and staff, and they all have a first story.

Nigel [00:04:09.18]: Yeah. That's true, and some of them are like Shane's story at the top about his first day at San Quentin.

Earlonne [00:04:14.14]: And some involve family visits. Visits from mom.

Nigel [00:04:17.19]: Michael Thompson's been in prison for 30 years. He remembers the first time he met his mom in the visiting room.

Michael [00:04:29.13]: So, I was in prison about seven years, and I felt like I was like throwed away. And, I had wrote a letter to my sister, and basically told everybody, um, "Cool on y'all. Y'all ain't came to see me. Nobody's trying to interact with me. And, so, about a week later, I called my sister, like, "Hey, did you get that letter I wrote you? Cause I'm done with you guys." And she's like, "Before you get all upset, hot and bothered, your mother's on the way out there right now." And I was like, "What? She's on the way out there?" And then I heard them call me over the microphone like, "Michael Thompson, visit." So, I was like, "Oh!" Shit. I don't care how mad I am, I'm coming to see my mama. I gotta go shave and this and that. I even had a mustache then because this was 24 years ago. And, uh, I went to the visit. My mother was sitting there and she's like, "I didn't think you was gonna come out." And we were sitting out there, talking, and I was explaining, and, uh, I was like, "Man, I'm out here by myself. It feels like y'all just like, "Ok, we'll see you when you get out." And she's like, "Nah. It's because of money. It's basically we're homeless. And, uh, you know, you left us too." I was like, "Man. Yeah. I didn't really look at it like that." So, we

really had a real good visit, got a lot of kind of skeletons snatched out the closet. It had been five years since I seen her, but seven years since I'd touched her.

Nigel [00:05:49.00]: What was it like when the first time you hugged your mom?

Michael [00:05:51.19]: It kind of made me feel, like, connected. [jazzy piano music] Right, like, it really brought me back to who I was before I came to jail as opposed to this person that I had become. I hadn't smiled in like five years. So, it was an awakening almost, like a recharging of my soul. All that anger and frustration and rage that I was feeling toward myself, my situation, it just like water under the bridge. Like, this my mom right here. The world is blocked out. I don't care anything about, but the time is going by like so fast. So, we were out there from maybe 9:30 to 3:00 and it seemed like five minutes. [bass beat and clapping added to piano]

Earlone [00:06:41.16]: The power of that hug. The healing power of touch.

Nigel [00:06:45.11]: Yeah, you know, I've heard that a lot. When guys are in here, a lot of them don't really have much, if any, physical contact.

Earlone [00:06:52.01]: And sometime we're in here for so long without touching or hugging anyone, we don't even know how to do that anymore. Basically, we, we out of practice, which brings us to another first. Adnan Khan has been in prison since 2003 and he told us about the first time he saw his mom after 10 years in prison.

Nigel [00:07:15.06]: The thing I wanted to talk to you about was your first visit with your mom.

Adnan [00:07:18.28]: Oh.

Nigel [00:07:19.08]: And, yeah. How did you prep?

Adnan [00:07:22.18]: So, um, let me get the emotional prep out of the way. I took a lot of deep breaths. I tried to like choreograph my hug, because I haven't hugged my mom in the long time, in the cell. But...

Nigel [00:07:35.02]: Wait, wait, so wait. How did you practice? How did you choreograph a hug?

Adnan [00:07:38.17]: So, I didn't know...

Earlonne [00:07:39.20]: Your cellie?

Adnan [00:07:39.25]: Because I haven't hugged someone in a long time. Maybe by then it was 13 years, right. So, I didn't know if my hand goes around her shoulder or her neck. I didn't know if it went diagonally like two 45 degree angles. And, then, I was like, "You know what, I'll let her lead". Like, this is your mom, right. This is my mom. And I don't know how to hug my mom. So, I was nervous about that type of stuff.

Nigel [00:08:03.05]: Did you actually practice hugging somebody else?

Adnan [00:08:05.03]: No.

Nigel [00:08:06.04]: Just so that like-

Adnan [00:08:06.17]: I wasn't. My cellie wasn't up for that. Nah. I did not. I just kind of like air hugged myself. [dripping bass beat] And, I didn't know exactly, like, "Uh, ok, what do you do? Up? Down? Is it sideways?" So, like, that was what I was nervous about.

Nigel [00:08:21.16]: He had a lot to be nervous about after 10 years. That's a long time, and this is a longer story. And like Adnan's feelings about his

mother, it's also complicated.

Earlone [00:08:31.15]: Yeah. A lot of guys in here have complicated relationships with their families. Some guys don't want to go see their families. Some families don't want to go visit the guys. Or, they just too far away. Or, they just simple moved on with their lives. Let's get back to Adnan's complicated relationship with his mother. The last time he seen his mom was in court when he was being sentenced.

Adnan [00:08:52.21]: My mom, so my mom is being called on the witness stand to speak on my behalf. And, inside, I'm feeling like this is useless. There's nothing you can say or do that's going to change anything. It's over. I'm getting sentenced. Why are you coming up here? You're embarrassing me. You're embarrassing yourself. Like, you don't get it. You never got it. Why don't you get it? She gets on the stand and she's telling the judge all this good things about me, that I'm a good kid. I'm a smart kid. I'm funny. I cook. I do this. I do that. Pleading, like literally pleading to the judge like, "Please, please." Like, "Be lenient on my son. Please be lenient." And, when she's saying this, when she's telling the judge this, all I felt was hurt. [melancholic music] I felt like going up there and just stopping her and holding her and telling her it would be ok. But I couldn't. So, I just sat there. She's in tears. And she looked at the district attorney. She looked at the victim's family. She looked at the judge. And, when she did look at me, I looked away. [dripping beat]

Nigel [00:10:17.12]: So, Adnan was sentenced to 25 years to life. And he was sent to a level four maximum security prison. When he came to prison, he didn't want to see his mom ever.

Earlone [00:10:28.09]: And five years into his sentence, he is surprised to hear, "Khan, you have a visitor." It was his mom and he refused to go see her.

Adnan [00:10:39.06]: You know, like, how dare you come and take my power of decision away from me? You haven't been there for me, and I'm gonna show you. You're going to come on my terms and my terms only.

Earlonne [00:10:49.14]: 10 years later, Adnan's feelings about his mom had softened and he finally agreed to a visit.

Nigel [00:10:54.29]: We're going to hear about that visit but, before we get there, let's hear about another first experience here at San Quentin. [jazzy beat]

Rassan [00:11:05.02]: My name is Rassan Thomas and, the first time I ran a marathon at San Quentin State Prison, I broke two records.

Nigel [00:11:11.13]: I couldn't believe it when I first started coming to San Quentin and there was a running club, uh, called the 1,000 Mile Club.

Earlonne [00:11:16.28]: Yeah.

Nigel [00:11:18.04]: And they have volunteer coaches that come in from the outside and there is an annual San Quentin marathon.

Earlonne [00:11:23.16]: 26.2 miles. Running around and around and around and around the yard. Just like Nascar, just circles.

Nigel [00:11:33.10]: I know, and it's not like it's a nice track, right?

Earlonne [00:11:35.12]: Nah. I mean it's... Half the track is asphalt. Then you go across what is the lower yard, which is the San Quentin Field of Dreams, which is the baseball diamond. Then, you go into this rocky dirt uneven part, right, where-

Nigel [00:11:49.19]: [laughs] Yeah.

Earlonne [00:11:50.17]: [laughs] It's like, watch where you're going. You might break an ankle.

Nigel [00:11:53.10]: It's more like an obstacle course. [laughs] And you know how there are all those geese out there.

Earlonne [00:11:57.19]: Yeah.

Nigel [00:11:57.20]: So, I mean, that's got to be another obstacle.

Earlonne [00:11:59.10]: And the geese is like, and the pigeons, in San Quentin is like, they like, man, they don't even get out the way.

Nigel [00:12:05.18]: No. They're lazy.

Earlonne [00:12:06.11]: They don't. Really, they don't get out the way. They just, you know, you just walk, run-

Nigel [00:12:09.18]: Some might even say they're rude.

Earlonne [00:12:11.04]: They're very rude. They're very rude.

Nigel [00:12:12.28]: And the other thing is you have to run past like those outside toilets like a hundred times.

Earlonne [00:12:17.25]: [laughs] That's actually 105 times to be exact, because that's how many laps equal to 26.2 miles, and I'm nowhere near there.

Nigel [00:12:26.24]: [laughs]

Rassan [00:12:30.03]: So, when I started the run, um, it felt pretty good, like driving on a highway at night with no traffic, like you're just flying and you're just flowing. And, I got to this point where I wasn't seeing the prison anymore. I was just seeing the next step in front of me, right. And I was in the zone. People were running past me though, I noticed. They got a guy in the club named Markel 'The Gazelle' Teller. He's fast. He lapped me twice before my first mile, so I knew it was going to be a long day for me. [laughs] But I still was in the zone. But, after a while, the running that felt like flying felt like pain. And so, I talked a lot of crap about how Sean 'Puffy' Combs ran the New York City Marathon and, if Puffy can do it from Mount Vernon, then me being from Brownsville, Brooklyn, ain't no way Puffy tougher than me. If he can run a marathon, I'mma run a marathon. And, so, I didn't realize what that meant until I got to mile 11. [laughs] And my body cramped up and I ended up doing a lot of half walking, half running, half walking, half running, but I got through. Towards the end though, when it was the toughest, like the last five miles, that point where you've gone further than you really can go but you're too close to quit, but it's still, there's five more miles, which is 20 more laps. And then, Jonathan True, one of my fellow club members, he had already completed his marathon, and he ran the last two miles with me. We've never had 13 people complete a marathon. And, so, by me completing that marathon, I made number 13 and set a club record. The second record I got, it took me 6 hours 15 minutes and 23 seconds, so I got the longest marathon time ever in San Quentin State Prison. [audio from day of race] I survived. I'm still alive. Lieutenant thought I couldn't do it.

Nigel [00:14:17.15]: Can you imagine running for more than six hours straight on that frickin' boring track?

Earlone [00:14:22.05]: Fuck naw. It ain't that serious to me. I mean, I run, but I'm not really into it like that. [Nigel laughs] But, what I also can't imagine is what it would be like seeing my mom after 10 years. [rising music]

Nigel [00:14:35.05]: Yeah. Yep. Yep. Let's go back to Adnan's story. His mother is about to visit and he's obsessing about every detail. [music rushes to conclusion]

Adnan [00:14:47.09]: The night before, I got some brand new pants, a nice button-up shirt. I washed it. I cleaned it. I had brand new boots. And, just to make sure I polish them one more time... I wait in line for the iron. And I want to be extra nice, extra crispy, extra creased up. My mom taught me how to always look good, look your best. And, having that in my head, I want to make sure that my pants and my shirt are ironed perfectly. [wavering music] I go back to my cell holding my shirt with my thumb and my forefinger. I don't want to wrinkle it at all, and I hang it up, and I put a plastic bag over it so there's no dust gets on it. I wake up in the morning. I make my shot of coffee. I play music. I do my normal routine. I clean the floor. While I'm drinking my coffee, I sit down, turn on the news. And about a half hour before my visit's about to come, I put my clothes on. I'm clean. Even once I have my clothes on, it was very strategic the way I sit down because I didn't want to wrinkle anything. So, I sit down very carefully. I don't want to lean in too much or lean back on too much because that causes or that creates a lot of creases. So, I sit put like a mannequin, just sit there on the edge of my bunk for about half an hour until they call me for a visit. "Khan! Cell 219! You have a visit." And then, like, my heart dropped. My door opens. It buzzes open. So, I walk to the visiting room. I don't know the procedures. I just know the outside door says visiting and, once you enter, I have no idea what the inside looks like. So, I get in, I'm confused. I'm looking around trying to read signs. So, there's a guy who was in front of me. I kind of followed him. And then, he put his ID in like a little, little slot, so I put my ID in there. I got my final patdown. The CO says, "Go ahead. Go through your door. Enjoy your visit." Definitely, my legs are shaking. My legs are weak. And, as soon as I came through the door, like about five feet in front of the door, there was my mom just standing there. [melancholic music]

Nigel [00:17:01.19]: Hey, Earlonne, isn't this something that happens to people when they've been in prison for a long time? They kind of forget how to be around outside people?

Earlonne [00:17:09.23]: Yeah. Man, you can see that here at San Quentin when like guys come from the maximum security prisons. I mean, in San Quentin, there are a lot of outside people coming inside the prison every day. And, some guys get spooked. They don't know the rules. They don't know how to interact. It's kind of weird for them.

Nigel [00:17:25.12]: But, even with all the outsiders in San Quentin, some guys still have trouble with social situations that outsiders wouldn't think twice about.

Earlonne [00:17:33.01]: You can see it when guys have to leave this prison to go outside for, I don't know, some kind of medical service that they can't get on the inside.

Nigel [00:17:39.26]: There's very few times when guys actually leave the prison during their time here. But, next, we're going to hear about one guy's trip outside the prison walls.

Jason [00:17:49.00]: My name is Jason Jones, and the first time in about 13 years I got in a car was when I went to get my wisdom teeth taken out. I went to San Francisco. They had me shackled in an orange suit and, as I'm looking at the scenery and I'm watching everybody drive, it's like tripping me out, because everybody's driving crazy. The cop literally hit the breaks a couple times. He was getting closer to cars and stuff like that, and I was just like going through these anxiety attacks in the back of the car and, um, when I finally got into the city, I didn't realize that it was gonna be so many people down there. I thought we was gonna go through the back or we can just sneak in through the back. [quick, anxious music] But, no, we parked

right on the street. Parallel parked into the curb and the dentist office was right between like a clothing store and a restaurant. And, right when I got out, there was people running and jogging, riding bikes, on their phones. Like, they see me but they didn't see me. And, like, it was completely shocking to me, because it was the first time in a long time I was around so many people that was just moving at a fast pace and it wasn't like no ride or nothing like that. I didn't know how to take it. I wasn't prepared for that. I was overwhelmed. So, like, I started like breathing heavy and the cop asked me if I was all right. I was like, "Nah. I'm not really all right." Then, he had to like tell everybody to stop before they escort me in because I was just like having an anxiety attack.

Nigel [00:19:09.27]: Were you shocked that that was your response?

Jason [00:19:12.00]: [music calms and becomes upbeat] I was very shocked because I thought that, you know, the interaction that I had in prison with outside people, that I was like more social. But, yeah, it showed me I have a lot more work to do, and I'm a lot more institutionalized than I thought I was.

Nigel [00:19:34.10]: You know, Earlonne, he's a young guy. And I guess I expected to hear that when he got a chance to get out there, he'd be totally ready to jump into the mix.

Earlonne [00:19:43.08]: I'll say this, the first time I went out, I was good.

Nigel [00:19:45.26]: Wait, when did you go out?

Earlonne [00:19:46.28]: Uh, I went out a couple of years ago for a shoulder x-ray, and we was in a party bus, so it was cool. It was like, you know, it was cool. It was open space. But, the second time I went, they took me in like a little van, and it was like a tuna can inside of a tuna can. It was like a can inside of a van.

Nigel [00:20:05.13]: What do you mean? You were like in a cage?

Earlonne [00:20:06.11]: I was in a cage, so it was kind of like claustrophobic. So, when we was going over the bridge, I couldn't think past, if this guy crashed, they not gonna save me in the back. There's too many keys to run. If he crash and go over the bridge and into the water, I mean it's, it's preservation of self I would assume, because it's a lot to get to me.

Nigel [00:20:27.09]: That's, you know what, you bring up a really good point, because I drive over that bridge every time I come here. I never think about what's gonna happen if my car goes off the bridge.

Earlonne [00:20:35.26]: See, you're not in a tuna can inside of a can.

Nigel [00:20:38.26]: No. No, I'm not.

Earlonne [00:20:39.27]: You know and handcuffed.

Nigel [00:20:41.16]: Yeah. No, no. That's a really good example.

Earlonne [00:20:44.14]: So, that's the only thing I thought about.

Nigel [00:20:46.09]: Oh, god. Ok. So, let's go back to Adnan. He just opened the door to the visiting room.

Earlonne [00:20:52.07]: Yeah and usually it's so chaotic you have to look for your visitor. It's like 'Where's Waldo?' [Earlonne and Nigel laugh] But for Adnan, after 10 years, his mom was right there on the other side of the door waiting. [chain sounds, talking]

Adnan [00:21:14.03]: [melancholic music] Her hair was done nice. She still

looked youthful. Her face was light skinned. All right? And that's something like, in my family, my mom was always like the lightest one, that light skin, so that's one of the first things that I noticed, that her face was bright. It stood out. Her skin stood out. And, and she just smiled. And, when she smiled, I came up to her, I kind of gave her a side hug, but she grabbed me with both arms. And, um, that hug was uncomfortable for me, because I felt her squeezing me more and she didn't want to kind of let go. And, I'm trying to pry her off of me but be respectful at the same time. So, I kind of hug her with one side of my body and one arm. And, when she tightens up a little bit, I kind of pull back and I'm trying to pry her off of me. And then, I'm like, "Come on. Let's go sit down. Let's go sit down." And there wasn't, there literally was not a seat available except for a kids section. So, we sit down in the kid section and it just felt very weird to me to watch little kids in the kids' section playing with toys with their mother. [children talking] And here I am, a grown man, 30 years old, with his mom. [droning music] We started off with a lot of small talk. "How you doing?" "How are you doing?" "Everything's good." "I'm up to this. I'm doing this." Kept looking at the clock. I know I have several hours to do. I just want this day to be over. I wish my sister was there or somebody else was here where I could divvy up my attention, but it was just me and my mom. So, I sit here with her and I'm having this conversation about stuff that doesn't mean anything when we both know that there's this huge elephant in the room that neither of us are addressing.

Nigel [00:23:00.28]: That elephant in the room. It's a big one. It's how Adnan grew up, and you could say it's what led to his incarceration.

Earlone [00:23:08.10]: Adnan had family problems from a very young age. Basically, his mom and dad divorced when he was eight. His stepdad didn't like him and, when he was 16, his mom left the state and Adnan to be with another man.

Nigel [00:23:20.25]: So, by 17, he was homeless and living on the streets of

Pittsburg, California or with friends who sometimes took him in.

Adnan [00:23:29.19]: So, one day, we're at a friend's house and we're smoking weed. We're getting high and watching '8 Mile', Eminem...

Nigel [00:23:37.21]: There were about four guys hanging out and one of them makes a suggestion.

Adnan [00:23:41.16]: He said, "Hey, look, man, uh, I have a friend and he's a square," meaning that he's not gonna hurt anybody, he doesn't carry weapons, he's not going to have a gun. [melancholic music with snapping beat] "Look, he has \$1,000 worth of marijuana. And, look, all you have to do is take it, get in the car, and drive off. There wasn't a thought. I was like, "Yeah."

Nigel [00:24:02.20]: Things didn't go as planned. The guy with the weed ended up getting killed by Adnan's partner. Adnan says his partner stabbed him to death.

Earlonne [00:24:11.09]: So, Adnan went from living on the streets to being a juvenile lifer serving 25 years to life for robbery/murder. [chains rattling, people talking]

Adnan [00:24:23.20]: So, I love ice cream. Ice cream is very rare in prison. You only get it once a month if you go to canteen. So, one thing I knew and I was confident about, I'm gonna go in there. I'm gonna have me a damn Snickers ice cream. I don't care how much my mom's crying or what the elephant is doing in the room. Matter of fact, the elephant wants an ice cream, he could get one too, but I'm gonna get me a Snickers ice cream. We bought soda, orange juice, and then, I mosied my way over to the ice cream machine and told my mom, "Hey, uh, I'll take one of these. Why not?" She puts in the \$2 and then pressed the number. [button and machine sounds] Beep. Beep. Whatever that was. E2. Whatever it was,

right? So, I'm waiting for it to come out. The little swirly thing that holds the ice cream in place inside the machine, I'm watching it go around and around. Then, it stops. I'm like, "Oh! It got stuck!" And, then, as soon as I said that, the ice cream pushes or something behind it pushes the little ice cream. It pushes over. It tumbles down. And, then, my mom tells me to grab the ice cream and I'm not sure about the rules, if I'm allowed to do it or not, so I told her, "I don't think I can grab it." And, she said, "Why not?" I felt bad or guilty because I didn't want her to know what type of rules I'm subjected to as a prisoner, like standing behind the yellow line, can't go over here, we can't touch. For her to see me in a situation like that, I felt even worse. So, anyways, so she grabs the ice cream. She buys another one. We sit down back in the kid section. So, here I am with my mommy eating a Snickers ice cream.

Nigel [00:25:58.13]: And how'd that feel?

Adnan [00:26:00.15]: So, the ice cream took a lot of weight off of my shoulders. I don't know if it's because I hadn't had Snickers ice cream in a long time or because it was something else to talk about. And, then, she kept looking at me like enjoying. Like, "Yeah, yeah. My son's enjoying. I sense that. My son's enjoying the ice cream." [light bass beat] Um, but it felt good. For the first time, I felt relaxed in the visit.

Nigel [00:26:30.09]: Hey, you know, Earlonne, earlier, we were talking about touch and how powerful and necessary it is for pretty much any kind of relationship, but there's also food.

Earlonne [00:26:40.15]: Right. Mmhmm.

Nigel [00:26:40.15]: And so much bonding in life happens over food. So many memories of happier times much have come back to Adnan with that ice cream.

Earlonne [00:26:47.22]: Yeah. Think about this, Nig. Food in prison, as everyone knows, isn't great. It's shit. Now, [laughs] there's not a lot of memories in prison food.

Nigel [00:26:58.07]: [laughs] Not good ones anyway.

Earlonne [00:26:59.05]: Right, so Adnan got this Snicker ice cream. We don't get ice cream often. We rarely get ice cream. The only time we can really get special food is when there's like food sales. It's kind of a fundraiser. We get like menus to order food off of, but it don't happen often. It happen like maybe twice a year.

Nigel [00:27:17.07]: Yeah and they raise money for different charitable organizations and guys who have money on their accounts, that's where they can spend some of it. So, ok, we have a food first story now from our very own Antwan Williams.

Earlonne [00:27:31.14]: Antwan loves Mickey D's and he hadn't had a Big Mac in the seven years he had been incarcerated. Then, they had a food sale with McDonald's on the menu. That doesn't happen often.

Antwan [00:27:42.29]: I ordered one Big Mac, one large fries. And when they, when they delivered the food, it gets here at 9:00, so around 8:50, I'm waiting. My shoes on. I got my little bag. I got my ID. I make sure that I don't have no problems. 9:00 the officers unlocking the tiers from the bottom to the top. I could hear people. "Hey, man. They running the food sale. Hey, man. They running the food sale. Hey, you going to the food sale? Hey, man, get me a spot in line." Like, you can hear everybody, all the chatter. They got to my tier. They opened that bar. It was almost like the Kentucky Derby the way people was shooting out them damn cells and I was one of them. I got to the lower yard and there had to be at least 200 guys in line. So, I set in line for almost two hours. And I'm thinking I'm going to receive this nice, warm bag, but the bag was ice cold. I didn't even give a

damn. I shot back up to west block, I set my ass right on that tier, had my feet dangling off the fifth tier like it was a romantic setting. [bright music] And I set there in such peace and tranquility and ate the coldest Big Mac I ever had in my life with fries. Oh! It was, it was like a piece of my past that I was able to have in a moment. And it was just, it wiped everything prison away like for those maybe 112 seconds it took me to scarf my burger and fries down. [laughs]

Nigel [00:29:28.01]: And how long did that relaxed feeling last?

Adnan [00:29:32.07]: That relaxed feeling didn't last too long because, soon after, my mom asked me a question about spirituality. And, she says that like she's struggling with her spirituality because I'm still in prison and why is this happening to me. Why is it difficult to make all five of her prayers? Why is it difficult for her to get up in the morning? Why is it difficult to make a prayer at night before she goes to sleep? And she's, she's actually asking questions, like, she wants a solution from me. [bright, quiet music] I found it difficult to give her an answer. And I felt horrible about that. There's an announcement that's made. There's about 30 minutes left for a visit. I get excited. I'm glad it's over. And, just to close out, she starts telling me how good she feels. She tells me, "I feel so happy. I feel so relieved." Like, "It's so good to see you. You look so, you look well. You look good. You look handsome." Right before she leaves, I give her the same kind of hug, the side hug with the one arm around her shoulder, her head. And, she reaches in, she grabs me, her full strength, both arms, squeezes me. She doesn't want to let go, and again, once again, just like the beginning, I'm trying to pry her off of me. And then, when she releases, she grabs my face and kisses me on my cheek. And I said, "All right, mom. All right. I'll see you later. I'll see you later." And, she walks away. As she's walking away, she keeps looking back at me. She goes through the glass door, she's still looking back at me. She stands in the line inside the glass door where they're getting processed out and she's still looking at me, waving, blowing me kisses, you know, that embarrassing stuff mothers do. And I'm like, "All

right. Leave, mom! Gosh! Geez. Stop looking at me." That's what I'm thinking inside. Squirming, I'm squirming. Like, "Leave me alone now. It's over. Please let it be over." And, then they call me. Once they call me, I wave goodbye a final time to her, and that was it. The visit ended. [guitar strumming music] It's been three years since that visit with my mom. And, today, my relationship with my mom is a lot better. She's really meeting me where I'm at. She's being patient with me. She's letting me do my time, but she does always want to see me.

Nigel [00:32:00.10]: So, but how do you really feel about it? Because that sounds like a very pat answer, like, "Ok, now it's better." But is it really?

Adnan [00:32:08.15]: It's better than it was. Uh, I tell myself it won't be perfectly back to normal until I get out, but I don't think that's the case either. I feel like, and I hate to say this, but I feel like I'm going to have this distance with my mom for a very long time whether I'm in prison or not. [drums added to music]

Nigel [00:32:38.02]: Thanks to Adnan for telling us that story. I know it was a difficult one because a lot of guys in here have complicated relationships with their families.

Earlonne [00:32:46.08]: Sure do. [music brightens, vocalizing begins] Now, before we go, we're going to hear just one more San Quentin first after this short break. Stay with us.

[bells ringing]

Male [00:33:16.01]: Count time, everybody! Count time!

Nigel [00:33:18.11]: Ok! It's count time, Earlonne.

Earlonne [00:33:19.28]: Yep. Every day, several times a day, every last

prisoner here in San Quentin has to be counted. It's just part of the daily life here.

Nigel [00:33:28.06]: For 'Ear Hustle', starting now in season two, count time is when we do one last thing before we call it quits.

Earlonne [00:33:34.19]: Yep.

Nigel [00:33:35.07]: It can be like little snippets of audio.

Earlonne [00:33:37.19]: Story fragments.

Nigel [00:33:38.27]: Recipes.

Earlonne [00:33:39.13]: Spoken words.

Nigel [00:33:40.15]: Outtakes. Or, the thing you always want...bloopers!

Earlonne [00:33:42.10]: Bloopers! [both laugh] I love bloopers. And this week, our count time is our first interview here in the media lab with a correctional officer.

Nigel [00:33:51.21]: Yeah. We were really excited about this one. COs are a big part of the San Quentin community and we want to get their voices and perspectives on the podcast, but there's been some reluctance there.

Earlonne [00:34:02.28]: Yeah. They walk a tough beat. Being a correctional officer is like being in a fraternity. They have their own rules and code of conduct, so in order to warm things up, we started at the top.

Nigel [00:34:14.00]: With Lieutenant Sam Robinson.

Earlonne [00:34:16.24]: I have a question for you. Can you tell us the first

time you were scared in prison?

Lt. Robinson [00:34:23.26]: Well, scared is a strong word, and I think, when you work in an environment like this, having fear is not to your benefit, and so, I wouldn't say scared is the correct word. Um, I would like to use threatened. [keys jangling] People recognize me in the prison because of my name. At one while, there were about 20 of my relatives who worked here at San Quentin. And, I remember, as a brand new cop, young African American officer, um, 21 years ago, I was only a couple of weeks on the job, and I was assigned to work in the adjustment center. And the adjustment center is the most secure housing unit we have at San Quentin State Prison. There at the time we housed, um, prison gang members. And there's this one individual I remember. I won't call him by his entire name. If you were to think of the epitome... If you were to draw a picture of an Aryan Brotherhood member, he would fit the mold. The guy had tattoos all over his body. He had worked out every day of his life, so very, very muscular. He was six to eight inches taller than I was. And, as I was walking the guy from the yard back to his cell, he struck up a conversation with me and said, "You're one of those Robinsons, huh?" I said, "Yeah, yeah. I'm one of those Robinsons." So, as I was securing him in his cell, the cell door closed and he was in restraints, and so he put his hands through the food port where we uncuff him and, as I took off his cuff, he turned around and stuck his one arm out, in accordance with protocol, and he looked at me, and he said, "Robinson," he said, "You know, I've been checking you out." He said, "You're a good little cop." He say, "However," he say, "You know, if I ever get out of these cuffs one day, I'm gonna kill you." And so, I immediately had to respond. I can't show any fear in an environment like this. You can't be scared, and so, my response was I looked the man in his eye. Of course, I was looking up at him. [laughs] I looked at his eyes and I said, "Billy, you got to bring some to get some." And, after that, took off his other cuff, closed the door, and I never had an issue with the guy. We had the most, I would say he had the most respectful relationship, um, that I've had inside the walls of the prison. Uh, he was very respectful, and I think I got

his respect just because I didn't back down to the challenge. I didn't cower down. There was no fear. I addressed him and the issue was over with.

Earlonne [00:36:59.10]: That's what's up. [bells chime, outro music] Thanks to Shane, Michael, Rassan, Antwan, and Jason for sharing their first stories with us.

Nigel [00:37:13.10]: Hey, E, how does it feel to be back?"

Earlonne [00:37:15.05]: Shit. It feels great. You know, to be back, hanging out with the listeners again. You know? And this is the first episode of our new season. We got a bunch of interesting, cool profound, thought-provoking... We got some great stories coming up for you.

Nigel [00:37:29.10]: I can't wait. Thanks to our sound production team. That includes Antwan Williams and David Jassy. This episode included original beats and music by Antwan Williams, David Jassy, Joshua Burton, and Dwight Cruiseman. Pat Mesiti-Miller is our outside production advisor and also leads our sound design team. Our story editor is Curtis Fox and our executive producer for Radiotopia is Julie Shapiro.

Earlonne [00:37:53.12]: We also want to thank Warden Ron Davis, and you know every episode has to be approved by this guy here.

Lt. Robinson [00:38:00.05]: I am Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the public information officer at San Quentin State Prison, and I approve this story.

Nigel [00:38:06.13]: Next time on 'Ear Hustle', another first. This is the first time we're going to be featuring a woman on the podcast.

Female [00:38:14.12]: As we continue this, that's how I will always refer to the individual, as my trafficker. I was 11 years old and there was an intention when he learned my route. He's a predator.

Earlone [00:38:31.10]: 'Ear Hustle' is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Hear more at Radiotopia.fm.

Nigel [00:38:40.06]: If you want to learn more about us, please go to our website: earhustlesq.com, where you can also sign up for our newsletter.

Earlone [00:38:47.26]: Yeah, sign up for that newsletter. Even though I can't do this from prison, because we're not allowed to have internet access, you can. You can follow us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook at earhustlesq.com. I'm Earlone Woods.

Nigel [00:39:02.10]: And I'm Nigel Poor. Thanks for listening. [outro music ends, female singing in background] Do you remember how she smelled?

Adnan [00:39:12.25]: Uh, I do. She smelled like lavender. She smelled like lavender.