



Episode 29: Kissing the Concrete
Air Date: July 3, 2019

Brendan Woods: [00:00] I'm Brendan Woods, public defender of Alameda County. This episode of *Ear Hustle* contains explicit language. Please be advised this may not be for every listener.

[Footsteps, a buzzing sound]

Tevin "Cutty" Fournette: [00:16] [Singing] *They told me I was limited, huh/Limited to reach my dreams/They told me I was limited/I couldn't ever find the things/And mama, please don't cry/Why?/'Cause I survived through the juggle, I'm a king/My eyes always on the prize, huh/I hit success despite the things that I've seen*

[Theme music starts]

Nigel Poor: [00:46] You're now tuned in to San Quentin's *Ear Hustle* from PRX's Radiotopia. I'm Nigel Poor, a visual artist, now podcaster. I've been working with the guys in San Quentin State Prison in California for about eight years.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: [01:00] And I'm Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, a resident of San Quentin serving a life sentence for second degree murder. And together, we're gonna take you inside...

Nigel: [01:09] And out. [Theme music continues] On this episode, we're talking about getting out.

New York: [01:19] Hitting the streets. Kissing the concrete.

Nigel: [01:21] What it's like to leave prison and start a new life.

New York: [01:23] Freedom! [Laughs]

[Plunky synth music starts]

Nigel: [01:35] So, New York.

New York: [01:36] What's up, Nige?

Nigel: [01:38] I'm guessing listeners are wondering: Where's our cohost?

New York: [01:41] I'm right here! I'm right in front of you, Nige. I am right in front of you.
[Nigel laughs]

Nigel: [01:43] Yes, yes you are. But I'm talking about the other cohost, that guy on the outside. Earlonne.

New York: [01:49] Oh yeah, Earlonne. Earlonne's gonna pop up a little bit later in the podcast, but right now, I have the mic.

Nigel: [01:55] Yes you do. And that's because we're inside San Quentin right now, and Earlonne is out on the street talking to guys about life post-incarceration. New York, you know something about that, because you've actually gotten out of prison before.

New York: [02:01] Yep, back in 1991.

Nigel: [02:08] And what were you concerned about back then?

New York: [02:10] Where would I work? Where would I live? Would the streets forgive me? Would I get my girl back?

Nigel: [02:17] Ugh, there's so much stuff.

New York: [02:18] Absolutely. And everybody going home faces all these same challenges; sometimes even more.

Nigel: [02:24] We recently talked with two guys who were getting to go home.

Tevin "Cutty" Fourtnette: [02:28] My name is Tevin Fourtnette, aka Cutty. Tuesday I'm getting released from the San Quentin State Prison after seven and a half years and uh, I'm looking forward to this. I'm tired. [Laughs] They done whooped me, they done whooped my 20s. I'm tired.

[Sounds of men playing basketball: ball bouncing, chatter, feet shuffling. The sounds continue under Nigel.]

Nigel: [02:45] Cutty is 28 years old. He's just finishing a sentence for robbery and home invasion. He's got long thin dreads, he's about 6'3", and he's known in San Quentin for his basketball skills.

New York: [02:57] Yeah, Cutty is raw. He's the starting forward for the San Quentin Warriors.

Nigel: [03:03] And does he have one of those basketball nicknames?

New York: [03:05] Yeah, they call him Swaggy Smooth 'cause he has a nice 12 foot jumper.

Nigel: [03:09] That is a fun name to say.

New York: [03:10] Swaggy Smooth.

Nigel: [03:11] And you know what else? I hear he's a pretty good rapper.

New York: [03:14] Yes he is.

Nigel: [03:15] We heard him at the top of the podcast.

Cutty: [03:18] [Rapping] *This life ain't what I thought it'd be/So I smoke to take all my pain away/So understand me when I say 'pardon me'/My cousins died from...*

[Cutty's rapping continues faintly under Nigel]

Nigel: [03:23] When we interviewed Cutty, he was really, I mean *really* excited about getting out.

Cutty: [03:30] Lately at night I've been just thinking about like, 'Next week, I'mma be home.' Like damn, I wanna sleep, but no, I gotta study this DMV book. Ah, I gotta go to sleep, but ah, I gotta plan out some more stuff I wanna do. I gotta keep adding to the bucket list. I gotta keep adding to the fragrances that I wanna wear. Everything. 'Cause now I'm free so it's like... [Laughing through the phrase] I get to do whatever I want to do.

[Soft synth music starts]

New York: [03:50] The first day, he had his whole script down pat.

Cutty: [03:53] Belgian waffles with whipped cream on top, sliced strawberries, and, uh, strawberry syrup. I need it. With a side of orange juice. I need that. I ain't had that since I was like 18.

New York: [04:07] And Cutty was not planning on eating those waffles alone.

Nigel: [04:10] No he wasn't. 'Cause Cutty got married when he was in prison.

Cutty: [04:14] This is my first time actually on the streets as a husband. This is actually my first time just going on a date, breakfast date or something. So it's gonna be, you know, I'm looking forward to that. I'm juiced about that.

New York: [04:28] Okay so the first day, waffles with his wife.

Cutty: [04:31] Second day, that's all business. That's when I go get my license, my social security card, I go register for school, I go register for the union. I got everything just set up. Now the third day, I really wanna hit the studio or something. That's what my goal is. [Shouting, basketball bouncing] I gotta go work out some. Gotta go hit the gym, I gotta go hoop.

Nigel: [04:52] So Cutty's got his first days on the outside all mapped out.

New York: [04:56] Absolutely. That's what guys in prison think about a lot.

Nigel: [04:59] No doubt.

New York: [05:01] Yeah, we wanna think about who we're gonna hang out with, who's gonna be meeting us out there. What we're gonna eat. What we're gonna wear. Everything.

Nigel: [05:07] Mmm, all that good stuff.

New York: [05:08] So Nige, me and co-producer Yahya went out to the yard to see what guys there said they were gonna do when they get out.

[Transition sound effect: clattering, distant chatter, abrupt cutoff]

Voice 1: [05:18] I wanna go parasailing.

Voice 2: [05:19] Oh, I would love to get my niece and we go to an amusement park.

Voice 3: [05:25] Hug my mom. Hug my dad. And probably bawl out crying for a little while. Just let it out.

Voice 4: [05:31] Get my wife over here from England. Massage her throat with my tongue. [Laughs]

Voice 5: [05:35] I'd take my girl and my grandkids up to a place called Yousaw and I'd go camping for a whole week. Hear the crickets chirping and the frogs croaking and—

Voice 6: [05:43] I wanna take all my boys, man, that I grew up with to the paintball range.

Voice 7: [05:46] Wet t-shirt contest. Dancing contest.

Voice 8: [05:49] I'm actually wanting to go see the symphony. [Small laugh] I've never experienced any classical music and I wanna go experience that.

Voice 9: [05:56] I really wanna go see the Point of No Return in Africa. The caves with the slaves right before they was put on a boat. Get a sense of what that was like.

Voice 10: [06:05] I wanna go to my mother and father's grave and take them flowers. Let them know that I'm out and I love them and I miss them.

[Transition sound: chatter increases, abruptly stops]

Nigel: [06:20] What are the three things that you're looking forward to the most after you get out?

Ronnie Young: [06:26] [Chuckle] Okay, three things I'm looking forward to.

New York: [06:27] This is Ronnie Young. We spoke to him right before he left the Q.

Ronnie: [06:32] Showering alone. [Laughs] And not standing in line for the shower, or going to brush your teeth and having to smell someone else on the toilet. Oh my God, that's so huge. [Laughs] Um, being able to open a refrigerator door. Grab a pickle or something to drink. Ice cream. And then I gotta have milk on ice cream. [Laughs]

Nigel: [07:06] What flavor?

Ronnie: [07:07] Oh God, it doesn't even matter to me. I just love ice cream.

[Low music continues]

Nigel: [07:16] So what're your concerns? When we asked you what's happening tomorrow, I could see your face get really excited, but I can also see a part of you that's wearing something heavy.

Ronnie: [07:28] [Takes a sharp inhale] Because I don't know what I'm gonna do.

Nigel: [07:38] When we spoke with Ronnie, he was finishing a three-year sentence, but this was his sixth time being locked up.

New York: [07:45] The longest Ronnie has ever stayed out of prison has been two years.

Nigel: [07:50] How old were you the first time you came to prison?

Ronnie: [07:52] 22?

Nigel: [07:55] And how old are you now?

Ronnie: [07:56] I'm 50.

Nigel: [07:58] So, I'm gonna just ask you a blatant question. Why do you keep coming back to prison?

Ronnie: [08:02] Drugs. Every time I get out of prison, I go right back to selling drugs and using drugs.

Nigel: [08:09] And what's your drug of choice?

Ronnie: [08:11] Methamphetamine.

Nigel: [08:13] So where are you with your addiction right now?

Ronnie: [08:16] [Voice quivering] I don't know.

Nigel: [08:19] Yeah.

Ronnie: [08:21] I wanna say it's behind me, but it's not. I mean, it's right in my face.

New York: [08:26] How long have you been clean?

Ronnie: [08:29] Oh, honestly? A couple months.

Nigel: [08:34] So clearly Ronnie was using inside.

New York: [08:38] The meth really had a hold on him.

Ronnie: [08:40] And I hate it. I hate, I hate crystal. I hate the people that comes along with the crystal. They're untrustworthy. [Small laugh] And it's crazy, 'cause those are the people I've surrounded myself with all my life. But I can't stand 'em. [Sigh] And I used to always think, 'Man, I'm not a bad person.' But in reality, I wouldn't want me running around my neighborhood. I've gotten out of prison and told people in my town, out of respect, 'Please don't sell none of that shit to my kid.' And then tell me, 'Oh yeah, don't worry, I won't.' And then I find out they still are. But I was doing the same thing. But I never stopped and thought of that until I got out of prison and saw my own son using,

and him on dialysis, so drugs were killing him. And then I said I would never sell drugs again. And then I got out last time and was living in my daughter's home and not working and feeling about that big, because my daughter's supporting. And instead of going out and getting a job, I started selling drugs again, and thought everything was good. But I just compounded things and made 'em a hundred times worse.

Nigel: [10:21] Ronnie's son and daughter are deceased. They both had a rare genetic disorder, cystinosis. And in the case of his son, drugs may have hastened his death.

New York: [10:32] Ronnie's mom lives in Alabama.

Nigel: [10:34] And he has a grandson, too. It's his daughter's son.

New York: [10:37] And after years of going back and forth to prison, his family dynamics are all messed up.

Ronnie: [10:43] I don't know where I'm gonna go. I mean, I may have to go check into a drug program because I literally have no place to go, and I don't know, because I've spent so much time in prison, you get out there and everything is, like, overwhelming.

[Sound of rushing water, distant birds chirping]

Earlonne Woods: [11:08] The prison is right there to my right. And I'm looking down at the water. A few seagulls in the water, flying around, it's coming up. And it got a little itty bitty wave that'll come up, watch this, you'll probably hear it. Like let's see, right... now, watch this. [Sound of wave cresting]

Nigel: [11:30] Oh, that sounded so nice. Hey, E.

Earlonne: [11:33] What up, Nige?

Nigel: [11:34] So you went to the gates of San Quentin to meet Ronnie and Cutty.

Jason: [11:36] [Distant] Okay, here he comes!

Earlonne: [11:37] Yep, and I was there waiting on Cutty along with his wife Lisa, and a former friend of San Quentin and a former friend of *Ear Hustle*, Jason Jones.

Nigel: [11:48] Yep, LB.

Earlonne: [11:49] Which is Cutty's partner.

Jason: [11:50] Here he comes!

[Lisa speaks inaudibly]

Jason: [11:52] I told you!

Earlonne: [11:53] Most guys come out with boxes, appliances, and all kind of shit. Not Cutty.

Cutty: [11:59] I travel light. I travel light.

[Sound of Lisa laughing]

Earlonne: [12:03] Lisa jumped into his arms. [Cutty laughs. Jason sounds joyful.] Jason gave him a big hug. And then he came and hollered at me.

Cutty: [12:11] What's up dog?

Earlonne: [12:12] What's up with you, sir?

Cutty: [12:14] Oh man, you look good.

Earlonne: [12:16] Hey man, out here just having fun.

Nigel: [12:18] You know I have to know what he was wearing.

Earlonne: [12:22] So Cutty had on a navy blue sweatsuit and some black Nike Air Max 95s. I wouldn't have knew that unless he told me. [To Cutty] What did that feel like when you put them on?

Cutty: [12:30] Oh man, I was back. I was back. And then all I can do is dust myself off.

Earlonne: [12:35] Ain't it a different feeling than the khaki prison shit?

Cutty: [12:38] Yeah! Them pajamas they give us in there? Yeah. For sure, for sure.

Earlonne: [12:43] The cotton was soft. Shoes felt good. Socks. How you feel right now, man?

Cutty: [12:50] I'm ecstatic. I can't even.

Earlonne: [12:53] That was kinda low, he's like [Drops voice several octaves] 'I'm ecstatic.'

Cutty: [12:55] [Laughter] I'm ecstatic. 'Cause I'm trying to control it! I feel like jumping and running down the... thing... right now! [Laughs]

Earlonne: [13:03] You gonna do some sprints? Gonna do sprints?

Cutty: [13:05] [Overlapping] I don't know. I'm telling you, I could run back and forth right now, but I'm just trying to control it.

Earlonne: [13:09] Alright man. [To Nigel] You know Nige? There was one more box he had to check.

Nigel: [13:13] What was that?

Earlonne: [13:14] He and his wife had to hurry up over to Oakland to check in with his parole officer by 10 a.m.

Nigel: [13:20] Man, so no waffles?

Earlonne: [13:22] No. Waffles. [Nigel makes a sympathetic whine] He had to meet his parole officers and sign his conditions of parole, so I caught up with him in the parking lot just as he was walking out.

Cutty: [13:31] Conditions is... victims, association in... [Fades out]

Earlonne: [13:36] I got him to read the conditions of his parole.

Nigel: [13:39] Wait, explain that.

Earlonne: [13:40] It's the things that he can do while he's on parole, and the things he can't do.

Cutty: [13:47] [Fades back up] ...letters, anything. And the third is the association with my crime partners.

Lisa: [13:49] That's it?

Cutty: [13:49] That's it.

Earlonne: [13:51] You know one thing that wasn't on his conditions of parole?

Nigel: [13:53] What's that?

Earlonne: [13:55] Fire. Dro. Trees. Edibles. Sativa.

[Spacey guitar music. Earlonne chuckles.]

Nigel: [13:58] Hmmmm. Mhm, mhm, mhm.

Earlonne: [14:01] Cutty's crime had nothing to do with drugs, so not smoking weed was not one of the conditions of his parole.

Nigel: [14:07] And also, it's perfectly legal in California.

Earlonne: [14:10] Well, it is. I mean I didn't see. All I seen was a rolled blunt a lighter and his car rolling out of the parking lot with Lisa at the wheel.

Nigel: [14:21] He must've been really ready for those waffles.

Earlonne: [14:24] Yep. After smoking up an appetite.

[Whoosing and a drum beat crescendo, then stop and fade out.]

Earlonne: [14:36] How you doing man?

Ronnie: [14:37] Good, you?

Earlonne: [14:37] I'm chilling man, I'm kicking back. How it feel?

Ronnie: [14:41] Wonderful.

Earlonne: [14:43] A few days later, I went back to San Quentin to meet Ronnie Young as he stepped off that white van. [To Ronnie] What are you noticing out here?

Ronnie: [14:50] No cops. [Earlonne laughs, Ronnie follows suit. A crow calls.]

Earlonne: [14:55] And a crow.

Ronnie: [14:56] Yeah. Freedom. [Laughing] Let's go swimming. Some water. They'd probably get mad though, huh? Think we were trying to escape or something.

Nigel: [15:10] Okay, he sounds a lot better than when we talked to him inside.

Earlonne: [15:14] Well, it's finally real when you step off that van. It's your first moments of freedom. And his friend Tammy was there to meet him, to take him back to Stockton where he's from. But first, we went to get something to eat. Then Ronnie wanted to go sell some flowers.

Nigel: [15:30] The roses. So in San Quentin, tons of guys do these really beautiful crafty projects. And Ronnie made these roses out of soap shavings, and they're actually really colorful and beautiful.

Earlonne: [15:44] And smell good.

Nigel: [15:45] And smell good! Because he either put perfume on them or he used... [Earlonne joins in] He used scented soap.

Earlonne: [15:50] Yeah, and someone in San Quentin had told him he could go to Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco and sell 'em.

[Ambient outdoor sounds]

Ronnie: [15:56] Excuse me! Buy your lady a rose?

Earlonne: [15:58] He was carrying a bunch of roses in a cardboard box and he was wearing the khakis, button-down shirt, and sweatshirt his friend Tammy had sent him to wear his first day out.

Nigel: [16:08] That sounds professional.

Earlonne: [16:09] And Nige, I gotta say, he looks like a certain fictional TV character who also has a history with methamphetamines.

Nigel: [16:18] Walter White from *Breaking Bad*.

Earlonne: [16:20] Yep.

Nigel: [16:21] And E, the resemblance is uncanny. And if you know the show, it's something you cannot help but notice about him.

Earlonne: [16:28] And he doesn't seem to mind either. I mean, he even got a big ass picture of Walter White pasted on a notebook that he carries around.

Nigel: [16:35] [Laughing] He does!

Ronnie: [16:35] [Sound comes from right channel] Excuse me, are you guys from here? [Sound migrates to left channel] How are you? Oh, that's it. You don't wanna talk, huh? Alright. [Both channels] I don't know what to say to these people. [Laughs] I'm getting nervous.

Earlonne: [16:45] After getting shot down at least six times, Ronnie approached a young couple. He was a little rusty.

Ronnie: [16:52] Excuse me, do you have a minute? Where you from, are you from here?

Male Voice: [16:56] No.

Ronnie: [16:56] Where you from?

Male Voice: [16:57] Mexico.

Ronnie: [16:58] Have you heard of San Quentin?

Male Voice: [17:00] San what?

Ronnie: [17:01] San Quentin, the state prison?

Male Voice: [17:03] No.

Ronnie: [17:04] No? So look, I... I make these out of soap, right? This right here is a... they run a newspaper inside the prison, and so I rolled up the newspapers and had made stems out of 'em. Are you interested in a rose for your lady?

[Female voice laughs]

Male Voice: [17:28] How much is a rose?

Ronnie: [17:33] 20 dollars.

Nigel: [17:34] What?! [Earlone laughs] 20 bucks?

Earlone: [17:37] Hey look, he was thinking he was selling 'em for too cheap.

Nigel: [17:40] Oh boy.

Earlone: [17:41] 'Cause he said, 'Hey man, it's too much work for just 20 bucks.'

Nigel: [17:44] I know, I hear that, but asking for 20 bucks on the street's a lot.

Ronnie: [17:48] Okay, thank you.

Both Voices: [17:48] Thank you.

Ronnie: [17:49] Have a good day.

Female Voice: [17:50] [Fading] Have a good day!

Earlone: [17:52] So let's talk about that. Your first deal of your freedom got you a 20 dollar bill.

Ronnie: [17:58] Yeah.

Earlone: [17:59] You made some couple happy.

Ronnie: [18:01] Right? Some couple from Mexico.

Earlone: [18:04] From Mexico.

Ronnie: [18:07] You guys wanna go?

Earlonne: [18:10] And that was it. One sale, and Ronnie was ready to move on.

[Car door shutting]

Ronnie: [18:18] Mom, this is my phone number, you can call me. I'm out of prison, so call me. Okay, bye. I love you, bye.

Earlonne: [18:28] We drove him to a hotel where he was gonna meet his friend Tammy, and he started thinking aloud about who in his past he wanted to reconnect with.

Ronnie: [18:38] I really wanna see the mother of my kids and my grandson. I haven't been with the mother of my kids in a long time, like since my daughter was born. And my daughter was 28 when she passed away.

Earlonne: [18:52] We dropped Ronnie in Richmond with Tammy, and she drove him to Stockton that same day.

[Phone ringing]

Voicemail: [19:01] Please leave your message for... [Continues faintly under Earlonne]

Earlonne: [19:03] And then I lost contact for two weeks. [Faintly] Hey, what's up Ronnie, this is Earlonne Woods. [To Nige, full voice] Finally, I got a text from him that said, 'I just wanna let you know that I apologize for the way I acted.'

Nigel: [19:18] So, what was he sorry for actually?

Earlonne: [19:21] Shit, he ghosted on us.

Nigel: [19:22] Huh, yeah.

Earlonne: [19:23] He stopped calling. Anyhow, I drove to Stockton to see him. I met him at the bus station. It was windy, so we sat in the car and talked, and we got right to it. [To Ronnie] So since the time we left you, what have you been going through?

Ronnie: [19:37] Uh... well, I've already been using. [Sound of traffic passing] Look, I'm at the bus station and some dude comes up and he's going, 'Hey Ronnie, hey Ronnie!' And I don't even know the dude, right?

Earlonne: [19:57] And he knew your name and shit?

Ronnie: [19:58] Yeah. 'Cause I used to sell him shit, right?

Earlonne: [20:00] Oh yeah, okay.

Ronnie: [20:01] And there it went. And yeah, I mean. Yeah. It was all bad

Earlonne: [20:09] Mmmm. Do it make you feel better?

Ronnie: [20:13] No, absolutely not. It makes me feel worse. As soon as I got high, I don't wanna be around nobody, 'cause I certainly don't want people knowing. You know what I mean?

Earlonne: [20:24] Right.

Ronnie: [20:25] Fuck, that's what's kept me in prison all my life, man, is drugs. I hate it, bro. I mean I'm sleeping on the streets. One night I slept— [Chuckles] Check this out. One night I went into the police department, to their lobby, curled my ass up on the floor, and went to sleep.

Earlonne: [20:50] It was the safest spot, huh?

Ronnie: [20:52] Right? [Laughs] Nobody gave me a—nobody bothered me. But at Target in Manteca, they got them big huge ass dumpsters, and that's where I slept the other night.

Earlonne: [21:09] Was it cold or something? And it was like man, that's the best spot?

Ronnie: [21:13] Well, I mean, 'cause there was a bunch of cardboard in there. You know what I mean? So it was the cleanest spot probably. I don't know, man. I don't understand why they don't just put me in a program, man. Put me in a program.

[Slow, sad synth music with a soft drum machine]

Nigel: [21:35] Earlonne, can you explain why Ronnie is not in a program? I mean, if anyone should be in a substance abuse program, it's Ronnie.

Earlonne: [21:44] So it's complicated. Ronnie is on probation and not parole.

Nigel: [21:47] Right.

Earlonne: [21:48] So most people that get out on parole, you have to have your plans lined up for what you're gonna do. Where you're gonna live. Where you're gonna work. If you have to go through drug treatments or alcohol treatment programs, you have to have them in place on the outside, 'cause you're gonna need that. It's all sort of things. But people on probation like Ronnie don't need the plans like that before they get out.

Nigel: [21:10] Okay, so Ronnie walked out of the gates with a lot less lined up.

Earlonne: [22:14] Exactly. Another thing is that parole is a state program.

Nigel: [22:18] Okay.

Earlonne: [22:19] But probation is run by the counties. Some counties will put a lot of effort behind getting folks connected with rehab and stuff like that, and for other counties, including the one Ronnie's in, that's less a priority.

Nigel: [22:33] But I heard the county actually offered him housing. So why didn't he take it? I mean, he had no place of his own.

Earlonne: [22:40] At the time, he told me that he didn't want to live around other addicts. That's a trigger for him. Sometimes he stays in a hotel room Tammy pays for, but he doesn't wanna break her bank, so he's been spending time on the streets. In any case, he wanted to go to Manteca, his hometown, about 20 minutes from Stockton. So I drove him and we continued to talk.

[Ambient traffic sounds from the inside of a car]

Earlonne: [23:03] What do you feel was one of the lowest points, being out here on the streets?

Ronnie: [23:08] Oh man, I don't know. Just walking and having no place to go. I mean nowhere to go. Unless I wanna get deep up in it again, you know? And I don't, bro.

Earlonne: [23:27] And as we were driving, we passed places he knows all too well.

Ronnie: [23:31] Right out here, French Camp Road, right? Homeboy, I was out here walking.

Earlonne: [23:37] Yeah?

Ronnie: [23:38] Look, I was in this orchard right here, right? But then over here, you got the cemetery, right? That's where my kids were cremated. But man, I was just walking around out here, bro. Nothing to do. Nowhere to go.

Earlonne: [24:00] He'd been out of prison two weeks and freedom was taking its toll. I mean he looked alright, but clearly he was hurting.

Nigel: [24:08] Yeah.

Earlonne: [24:09] At one point, he wanted to show me something.

Ronnie: [24:12] Look at this.

Earlonne: [24:14] And he took off his shoes.

Ronnie: [25:16] Look it.

Earlone: [24:17] And that's just from walking?

Ronnie: [24:18] Look it, they're purple.

Earlone: [24:20] And you're showing your feet, and that's just from walking.

Ronnie: [24:23] Yeah.

Earlone: [24:25] Mmm.

[Buzzing, keys clattering, doors slamming, chatter]

Nigel: [24:35] You know Earlone? Hearing that makes me think about something I asked Ronnie the day before he left San Quentin. [To Ronnie] I gotta ask you a really hard question, I'm sorry. Are you better off staying in prison than getting out?

Ronnie: [24:48] No.

Nigel: [24:50] Can you talk about that?

Ronnie: [24:52] We... I don't even like that. Uh...

Nigel: [24:58] And I'm not judging you, and I'm not at all saying that you should stay in prison. But in prison, you have food, you have a place to sleep, you have the possibility of programs. So that's why I'm asking you are you better off in prison where you have all these things, or is prison so horrible that it doesn't matter, I wanna be outside.

Ronnie: [25:21] Prison is horrible.

Nigel: [25:25] There's no part of you that would stay here?

Ronnie: [25:28] No, absolutely not.

Nigel: [25:29] Alright.

Ronnie: [25:31] [Voice breaks slightly] I hate it here.

[Loud chatter]

Nigel: [25:41] Earlone, what about Cutty? How's he doing?

Earlone: [25:44] Cutty is doing good. A few days after his release, his moms had a party for him. He'd been nervous the whole time about being around so many people, but as soon as that day came, he was getting his groove on.

[Distant muffled music, chatter]

Cutty: [25:58] I'm up, everybody's dancing. Aw man, it feels good. I'm just feeling the energy and the love. This feels good. I'm having fun. That's who I am.

Nigel: [26:07] Nice.

Earlonne: [26:08] He and his wife are cool. He's been reconnecting with his son playing basketball.

Nigel: [26:12] Aw, that's great.

Earlonne: [26:13] He's also got a job working in HVAC, and like he said he would back when he was in San Quentin, he managed to get into the studio and lay some tracks down.

[Fully-produced hip hop track]

Cutty: [26:22] [Rapping] *You hear me?/Huh/This shit forsaken to me/Devil been racing for me/Patience is a virtue, but they never had patience for me/Niggas wish you well/But that's not what they make it to be/Lost it if I bless them/Blessing they couldn't taken from thee/That shit's real life...*

[Song continues faintly under Nigel]

Nigel: [26:37] So E, we heard about the first few weeks of two very different guys just out of prison. And I know it's just two guys, but what do you think it says about life post-incarceration?

Earlonne: [26:48] Well, I think it's important to plan ahead. I mean some guys spend years planning for the day they get out. Like arranging jobs, place to live, programs to involve yourself in, and Cutty did all that. But Ronnie didn't have a plan. He didn't seem to think too far beyond going to Fisherman's Wharf and selling some flowers.

Nigel: [27:08] Yeah, he didn't have much support. He did have Tammy. But Cutty had his mother, his wife, his friends, and he also had ambition to get his life together. And I've gotta add one more important factor: Cutty is 27, Ronnie's in his 50s.

Earlonne: [27:21] Right. Cutty, he had a place to go. Ronnie didn't. And if you don't have a place to live, how are you gonna try to get a job?

Nigel: [27:29] I don't know, I don't know.

Earlonne: [27:31] I mean, if you're not in a treatment program, how are you gonna stay off drugs without any family support?

Nigel: [27:36] Well, we're gonna keep following Cutty and Ronnie and other men and women as they try to rebuild their lives post-prison.

[Theme music starts]

Earlonne: [27:48] Thanks to Cutty and Ronnie for taking the time to talk to us. *Ear Hustle* is produced by me, Earlonne Woods, Nigel Poor, John "Yahya" Johnson, Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, Bruce Wallace, and Pat Mesiti-Miller.

New York: [28:02] This episode was scored with music by Antwan Williams and David Jassy.

Earlonne: [28:07] Curtis Fox is our senior editor, Julie Shapiro is our executive producer for Radiotopia, Erin Wade is our digital producer.

Nigel: [28:15] We wanna thank Warden Ron Davis and, as you know, every episode has to be approved by this guy here.

Lt. Sam Robinson: [28:21] This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson at San Quentin State Prison, and although it's been several months since Earlonne has left San Quentin, it's nice to be able to hear his voice again and to have him still part of the process. So with that, since I still have oversight over him since he's a part of *Ear Hustle*, I will say I approve this episode.

Earlonne: [28:45] Next time on *Ear Hustle*, we're gonna be talking to formerly-incarcerated men and women about getting back into the game.

Nigel: [28:51] The highs and lows of dating and romance after prison.

Female Voice: [28:54] I never thought that I'd have a gift of having that kind of love in my life.

Male Voice: [28:58] And she called me a liar, a manipulator, a con, she said, because I wasn't upfront.

[Final theme starts]

Earlonne: [29:06] 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.

Nigel: [29:16] Check out our website earhustlesq.com where you can sign up for our newsletter, see pictures of people in our stories, and it's also a place to buy *Ear Hustle* t-shirts and mugs. Also, follow us on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @EarHustleSQ.

Earlonne: [29:30] And before we go, we have another Catch a Kite episode coming up where we answer listener questions.

Nigel: [29:36] And we're also looking for questions about life after prison. So on your phone, record a voice memo with your question.

Earlonne: [29:42] No longer than 30 seconds, and tell us your first name and where you're reaching out from.

Nigel: [29:48] And send it to info@earhustlesq.com

New York: [29:52] *Ear Hustle*'s a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Hear more at radiotopia.fm I'm Rahsaan "New York" Thomas.

Nigel: [30:03] I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: [30:04] And I'm Earlonne Woods. Thank you for listening.

[Music finishes]

Recorded Voice: [30:11] Hello, this is a prepaid collect call from—

Ronnie: [30:13] Ronnie Young.

Recorded Voice: [30:14] —an inmate at San Joaquin County Jail. This call is subject to recording and monitoring...

[Continues inaudibly under Earlonne]

Earlonne: [30:20] As we were finishing this episode, we got some news from Ronnie. We'll fill you in on that in a later episode.

END OF EPISODE.