Episode 59: Cracked Windshield
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Sahar Khoury: Hi. This is Sahar Khoury. I'm an Oakland based artist and I'm an *Ear Hustle* listener. The following episode of *Ear Hustle* contains language and content that may not be suitable for all. Listener discretion is advised.

[abstract industrial sounds as transition into next scene]

Ray Ford: One evening, I was going to Walmart. I left about 8:30… it was dark. Came out, got in my car, forgot to turn my lights on goin' down the streets, got pulled over by the police. Back in the day, I might've even ran from them or whatever. [chuckles] Now… I didn't panic. I knew that I had my license, my registration and insurance. I hadn't committed no crimes. I was a hundred percent legit. I knew I was good. This day in age, especially an older Black man, know better than to do anything stupid**.** You keep your hands on your steering wheel. No quick moves, no funny moves. Just be real respectful… 'Yes, sir. No, sir.'

[music comes in]

You don't want to do nothing stupid. If you look around, you can look at society today and you see that they killing us for no reason… just because they can. They put the

knee on your neck for ten minutes and… with their hands in their pocket, just chilling on your neck. With people telling you, 'You're killing him! He can't breathe! You can just hear… can't you hear him?!' Man's crying for his mama. Can't breathe. What can you do? Two other dudes sitting on his back. So I don't want to be that guy.

Earlonne Woods: Indeed. I don't want to be a martyr right now. I'm trying to live this life right now.

Ray: I did too much time in prison to be comin' out here and get killed by the police. All the battles we done fought in there behind them walls and to come out here and get killed like that. This is the waste of life. So, we gotta be smart about it.

[as narrator]

Nigel Poor: This episode is coming out the day after the one-year anniversary of the death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer.

Earlonne: I remember coming across that video just scrolling through social media. [Nigel affirms] And the crazy thing is – I didn't realize that he had died 'til the next day

Nigel: God, that idea of scrolling through social media and having videos like that just pop up, just… it's so complicated.

Earlonne: And it's a trip because I've seen so much of that shit. I don't like watching videos of cops abusing Black people. But once I realized he died… it kinda fucked me up. [music comes in] But I definitely wasn't gonna go back and watch it. I don't want to see someone die.

Nigel: [sighs] Earlonne, I feel you on that. Well for the anniversary of Floyd's death, we wanted to do something a little different on the show.

Earlonne: Today we're talking about cops: The first time we interacted with them and whether those relationships can change.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: And I'm Earlonne Woods and this is *Ear Hustle*, from PRX's Radiotopia.

[theme music comes in and fades out]

Nigel: At the top of the show, we were hearing from Ray Ford. He had been out of prison just over a year when he got pulled over for not having his lights on.

Ray: So they pulled me over. Police come to my car… license, registrations, insurance – I gave it to him. He went back to the squad car and ran my name, came back to the car. He says, 'Mr. Ford, are you on parole?'

I said, 'Yeah.'

He said, 'For what?'

I said, 'Murder.'

He said, 'Get out the car! Get out the car! Hands on your head! Hands on your head! Get your hands behind your back!'

[music comes in]

Earlonne: Getting pulled over as a Black man is one thing. Getting pulled over as a Black man on parole… *oh,* that's a *whole* 'nother situation.

Nigel: Oh yeah. If you are on parole, the rules are really different – police have the right to search you or your property at any time.

Earlonne: And if you… let's say… say something wrong, do something wrong, they see something wrong, you can go back to jail.

Nigel: So Ray knew this could go badly. But what happened next really surprised him.

[music fades out]

Ray: They sat me down at the bumper for about forty-five minutes and asked me questions about the yard… about the board… 'What prison were you in?', 'What are you doin'… how'd you get out? Why are you out?' They were hungry for information. They didn't even really care about me not turning my lights on when I turned the corner; they were more interested in how prison – how the board worked, how the yards work, how the Blacks got along with Hispanics, and how the Spanish got along with the whites. [chuckles]

They was intrigued. [continues chuckling] They was really intrigued with a man serving that much time in prison and coming home and driving down the street, minding his own business

[to Ray]

Earlonne: Without his lights on.

Ray: Yeah, well.

[music comes in]

He said, ‘You're the first person that I pulled over that's ever been on out on parole for murder.’

I said, ‘Well, you just keep pulling people over and you're going to find me more of us because they letting us out. We're doing our time. We're coming home and we're doing good things in the community.’

And once it was all over, they gave me back my information told me to leave. They didn't give me a ticket. Didn't give me nothing.

[music fades out]

Nigel: Both Earlonne and Yahya – what was your first encounter with a police officer?

Earlonne: Well, shit, if you say first encounter, you speaking as a kid. When you looked up to ‘em. When they were police and you probably wanted to be a police or a fireman. You know, I was in sports and especially as a juvenile, a young, young dude, our sponsors were the L.A. sheriffs. And there were certain detectives that used to be in our life a lot.

John “Yahya” Johnson: I remember we had beat cops. And they would walk around the block, and they would stop and talk to members of the community and everything.

[as narrator]

Nigel: That’s our producer John “Yahya” Johnson.

[music comes in]

Yahya: They would even give us like little plastic badges. And so we would run around like we were junior police and stuff. And then, slowly, that changed.

Earlonne: Once I hit a specific age, I was being put on that car–

Nigel: [crosstalk] Like how old?

Earlonne: [crosstalk] –regularly, I would say eleven. You know what I'm saying? Like regularly just putting… the police would see us hanging out and just put us on the car and just search us and all that. And we just kids.

[music fades out]

Yahya: I remember being like nine years old, and our beat cop changed. His energy was different. He walked different. And one day when I was walking to the store, he asked me to 'Come here.' And he pointed to his pocket, and he had some pens in his pocket.

He said, 'You like these pens?' And I was like, you know, I'm kind of confused why he would ask me why I like pens, right.

He said, 'Man, you can have one of them. Any which one of them you want. You can just grab it.' And I didn't know anything at nine years old about what was going on. He said, 'Come on, man. Come over here and get one of these pens.'

But it was something about his energy that I didn't like – and I ran. And it was years later that I was watching TV or something, and I saw an officer tell someone to reach for something. And when he reached forward, he pulled out his nightstick and bust his head open. So I don't know if that's what he was intending to do with me, but I got negative vibes when he asked me to reach for something that didn't belong to me.

[to Yahya]

Nigel: How old were you?

Yahya: I was nine. And from that point on, I didn't trust that beat cop.

Earlonne: Nigel, did you get pulled over by the police between the age of five and eighteen?

Nigel: Um… actually, I never told you guys that I was arrested by, uh, misidentification… and really beat up by the police when I was sixteen.

Earlonne: Hmm. [surprised and empathetic]

Nigel: Yeah.

Earlonne: And how did you feel?

Nigel: Uh… it was horrible. They told me they were going to rape me. They threw me in the back of an unidentified car, drove me around Boston. Wouldn't let me make a phone call. It was horrible. Yeah, that changed how I felt about the police. Yeah. And that made me think like, *Wow, they had no empathy.* They just really wanted to scare somebody.

Earlonne: That's a trip that you'd had to go through that. I mean, you would think the people that's there to serve and protect… didn't protect.

Nigel: No. They wanted to intimidate and scare... a kid. Well, I mean sixteen. I don't know if that's a kid.

Earlonne: That's a kid.

And did that change your perspective?

Nigel: Well, it definitely changed my perspective on people. And peoples' lack of empathy. Because when cops were dragging me down the street and I was screaming for help, people were just… cheering them on. And I mean, it was long time ago, but I remember there was this one guy I remember who tried to help out and do something. But everyone else was rooting for the cops, you know, not for me.

Earlonne: It's like you were the bad guy. [Nigel affirms] I remember the first time I had that feeling.

Nigel: Oh yeah? When was that?

Earlonne: It was when I was nine. And I know I've told this story on the show before… [Nigel affirms] but I got arrested for lifting up one of those train crossing signals.

Nigel: Ugh, I hate this story.

Earlonne: And the crazy part is that I was trying to help! [Nigel affirms] ‘Cause it was stuck and cars were trying to get by… but the cops picked me up and put me in the back of they car, and all I can remember was crying…

Nigel: This is what I keep coming back to – it’s lack of empathy. And it’s really scary.

Earlonne: And for me, like I said, that’s when things really changed with the cops. [Nigel affirms] There was no trust anymore. And I think that’s the case for a lot of people who grew up in communities like the one I grew up in.

Troy Talib Young: So growin’ up in Los Angeles… dealin’ with law enforcement, we was treated less than. We weren't treated as citizens. We was treated as we had no rights. No respect.

[abstract industrial sounds as transition into next scene]

[as narrator]

Earlonne: I knew Troy Talib Young when I was at San Quentin. And he’s been on the show before too.

Nigel: Troy was released from prison in February 2020. And he grew up in South Central L.A. Just like you did, E – right?

Earlonne: Yep. That’s right.

Talib: One of the things that put a distaste in my mouth for law enforcement… I was about seven years old. My mother and father was having an argument outside the car, police pulled up. They asked my mother if she wanted him to go to jail. She said, ‘No.’

The officer offered my mother the billy club and told her to beat my father. Seven-year-old kid, I'm witnessing all this. Of course, Moms didn't do it. So they handcuffed Pops, rough him up, throw him in the back of the car, take him to jail. He sit up in L.A. County jail for thirty days.

[music comes in]

Both of my parents had jobs. Honest people. Taxpayers. They never committed crimes in their lives. And yet they was treated like criminals. How am I as a child to have respect for someone who doesn't show respect?

As I became older, a youngster, a teenager, my dealings with law enforcement was never pleasant. Being pulled over, being put on the ground. Being beat by billy clubs. They make you interlace your fingers, cross your legs, beat your elbows. So, there was no love. [music fades out] I've never seen growing up in Los Angeles, a L.A. police officer do anything productive or positive in my community. I'm not saying it wasn't done. I just… I never saw it.

2019, I was in San Quentin. There was a police forum.

[clip from 2019 police forum comes in]

Moderator: [over mic, speaking to crowd] I appreciate you guys. This is going to be a great forum. How's everyone doing? So today, we're going to do a little bit different because I have Tony, my photographer…

[clip fades into background]

Nigel: E, you were out by then. So you and I didn't go to that event together. But I remember hearing about the barbershop forum.

Earlonne: Right. This one took place on the tenth anniversary of when BART transit police in Oakland killed Oscar Grant while he was lying face down on the train platform… and that killing really mobilized people in the community against police violence.

Nigel: And so the purpose of the event at San Quentin was to try and bridge the gap between police and the community. [Earlonne affirms] And one thing for sure at San Quentin, you know that they host a lot of these events where they bring people together who are on opposite sides of something and try to conduct a civil conversation about super difficult topics.

Earlonne: Indeed. Flagship of rehabilitation.

Talib: What touched my heart was the chief of police at that time, I think it was Kilpatrick?

[as narrator]

Earlonne: Taliib is talking about former Oakland Police Chief Anne Kirkpatrick

[clip from 2019 police forum continues]

Anne Kirkpatrick: [over mic, speaking to crowd] Well, first of all, it's my great honor to be here and to say hello to each and every single one of you.

[clip fades into background]

Talib: She got up and she spoke at this forum.

[clip continues]

Kirkpatrick: And I'm going to do something that you probably have very seldom ever seen… but, Jack?

[as narrator]

Nigel: Jack is Jack Bryson. He was at the event in San Quentin that day. And Jack's two sons were close friends with Oscar Grant. And they were with him on the night he died.

Earlonne: And that was hella fucked up for them to witness that. [Nigel affirms] And after the killing, Jack became a full-time activist, talking about police violence.

[clip continues]

Kirkpatrick: I want you to know, on behalf a police, I am sorry. And I asked for your forgiveness. [people in the audience react with shock, some say 'Wow'] So, we need to stand up, and say we are sorry. And we have a future and a hope together.

[clip fades out]

Talib: I was sitting in the audience… and she had apologized for all the harm that officers had done. I've never heard that. I've never heard *anyone* in law enforcement apologize for *anything*. So that touched my heart.

[clip comes back in]

Kirkpatrick: You are coming home. When you come home, you will have a police department, and as long as I'm your chief, I will be your chief, and you will be addressed with respect, your name. You will be given an opportunity for restoration and you will be welcomed home.

[crowd applauds, and clip fades into background]

Talib: That took away some of the sting that I was holding for years. I just viewed everyone who wore that uniform up until that time as being… *fuck you, you an asshole*. But that changed that day when the chief of police made that statement. You know that was a change for me. And I got up and I spoke.

[clip continues]

Moderator: Sir, say and spell your first and last name for me.

Talib: Troy Talib Young. Troy, T-R-O-Y. Young, Y-O-U-N-G.

Moderator: Talk to me, what do you want to discuss?

Talib: What the chief did, it impacted me. Actually, she just changed my life…

[to Earlonne and Nigel]

And I told her, I said, 'Look, I ain't never liked the police. But what you just said changed the way I perceive officers.'

[clip continues]

I need to know from y'all, how can *I* help *you* to change?

Moderator: Troy, thank you so much. [crowd applauds]

[music comes in] [as narrator]

Nigel: I know it's a little hard to hear, but what Talib did there right before the moderator thanked him, was really surprising– I mean, Earlonne, especially taking into consideration the way he grew up and his feelings about the police.

Earlonne: *And* being in prison. [Nigel affirms] And what Talib said was that when he got out, he wanted to work within the system to be a bridge between cops and people in the community.

Nigel: And when he was released from San Quentin, he reached out to the chief of police in the Bay Area to make that offer again.

[music fades out]

Talib: I offered to be assistance in each community to help deal with the problem of the gang issues that they have. I explained that I'm aware of that culture, I have knowledge of that culture, and I can be some assistance. I put myself out there to work with them. I did the same thing at the one we're talking about in Oakland. I offered to be willing to work… to help build these bridges to help create some love, some respect. I've yet to been called on. I've yet to… heard from anyone.

Earlonne: So basically, [music comes in] you're saying that you have the lived experience to help build a better and safer community,

Talib: Yes.

Earlonne: And you're just not being utilized.

Talib: And there's many of men of color who's not being utilized to help do this.

[as narrator]

Nigel: When we come back, we'll talk to a police officer, a friend of the show's, about what *he* saw in George Floyd's murder.

[music fades out]

[abstracted sounds of news coverage of the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder as transition]

[to Tom]

Nigel: Did you watch the George video, Tom? Did you watch it?

Tom: [in a deep, raspy voice] Yes, I did.

Nigel: What compelled you to watch it?

Tom: Uh, well… that's a good question. I'm not exactly sure. Uh…

[as narrator]

Nigel: This is Tom. Listeners may remember him from an episode we did a few seasons ago.

Earlonne: Yup. Season 5, story called “Tell Christy I Love Her”.

Nigel: For many years, Tom was a cop in Bakersfield, a town a couple hours north of Los Angeles.

Earlonne: Nowadays he works for a large law enforcement agency investigating alleged employee misconduct.

Nigel: So Tom has really seen all sides of policing.

Tom: Any video of police violence is a source of a great deal of ambivalence and conflict for me. I can see myself in the actions of Derek Chauvin. I've used force against… including deadly force… against individuals any number of times. And so, I always feel a connection when I see something like that happening. I guess one of the things that disturbed me about doing that job was I began to feel an ebbing of my humanity [Nigel affirms] to the point where violence became kind of routine and unremarkable. [Nigel affirms] And that, you know, that bothered me.

Nigel: There's many reasons why I wouldn't watch that video, but one of the strongest reasons was I just didn't want to hear him ask for his mother. [pauses] I don't see how you could ever get that out of your memory.

Tom: I have so many things in my memory like that. [music comes in] It’s another thing I worry about myself is how I can witness stuff like that and be so unaffected.

[to Earlonne]

Nigel: Man, E, listening that, I’d forgotten how raspy Tom’s voice is. It’s such a visceral thing listening to him.

Earlonne: Right. That voice is a big part of Tom's story. [Nigel affirms] In 1997, back when he was a beat cop, Tom was shot point blank in the neck by a suspect he was chasing.

Nigel: But really, that's just the beginning of Tom's story – and also the story of Jason, the young man who shot him.

Earlonne: Right.

Nigel: But for now, I'll just say that the shooting and its aftermath made Tom question everything he'd ever learned about being a police officer, and about his relationship to the Black community he worked in.

[music fades out]

Tom: I had assumed, really up to that point, that I wasn't a racist. That I was completely unbiased. And so, I thought, *Well, I need to look at myself.* What I had were these feelings or impressions, maybe I was a little less respectful with a young Black man when dealing with him than I would have been with a white suspect. Maybe I showed a little more paranoia or concern for my own safety… maybe I did act a little different.

[to Earlonne]

Nigel: E, I'm wondering, what was your reaction when you heard him say that?

Earlonne: *Hmm…* my reaction was: *OK, we haven't been crazy all this time.*

Nigel: Mmm, yeah. I really appreciate Tom's honesty. I always do. He told us that the problem wasn't just the biases *he* brought to the job; it was the requirements of the job itself.

Tom: When I got in my car and went out on patrol, I drove by a white affluent neighborhood that was part of my patrol beat. And I went straight to the minority – primarily Black community to do my work for the rest of the shift. The only time I would go back to that white, affluent community is if they called… if they had some problem, like a burglary report or a loud party. But I wouldn't spend my entire shift in that… or even a small part of it in that community. Because your performance in police work is based upon how active you are: How many people you arrest, how many people have citations? How many calls you clear?

I mean, that's how they figure out whether you're doing your job or not. I could drive around that affluent neighborhood all night and not see a single expired tag or one cracked windshield. Now, I could find all of those things in five minutes in the area, you know, the less affluent area. [music comes in]

Certainly, there is bias at work here. But it's not the bias of the individual officers. It's the bias of the society that fails to give the opportunities and economic abilities to those communities so that they can afford to live a life. Because why does somebody not pay their registration? It's because they'd rather eat then pay their tags on their car. Why do they let a cracked windshield go? Well, it's because, again, they need to live.

Yahya: I get what Tom is saying about impoverished communities of color, and people rather go eat food than pay for a tag on a car, or a broken windshield.

Earlonne: This is *Ear Hustle* producer John “Yahya” Johnson.

Yayha: But where is the empathy that comes in for those individuals who are of the cloth of law enforcement to show a little empathy, right? Why don't we extend a little latitude as opposed to compounding the problem? Because oftentimes it's traffic stops like that that result in such tragedies that we witnessed in George Floyd’s situation. [Nigel affirms]

Tom: [audibly inhales] What frustrates me is that if you had followed me around on my career with a camera and took a video of every use of force that I employed, I can guarantee you would find some that you took issue with. Some you might even be horrified by. But, you know, and I hate to keep coming back to this: We react to our training. [Nigel affirms] And in reference to the trial, it seemed to me that in many ways, the wrong person was sitting in the defendant's chair. [music comes in]

Yahya: He is a product of what conventional society believes to be appropriate policing. Now he may… he went overboard, but he didn't happen in a vacuum. We train our cops to be aggressive, to fear for their lives when they're out in the community. [Nigel affirms] To believe that they're the thin blue line between chaos and order. That they buy into that, like I did, should hardly be a surprise to everyone else. [music fades out]

Earlonne: And, you know, to address Yahya, nothing is gained by putting one man on trial. Where we need to gain is when they're being trained. They have to remember people's humanity. That that their job isn't a constant threat against their life.

[music comes in]

Nigel: So, Tom, if you were starting your career all over again – would you still go into police work?

Tom: Nigel, I've got a rule about my life and that is no regrets. The bad things and the good things both inform us and make us who we are. I wouldn't have empathy for the people I used to work with if I hadn't suffered the loss of humanity that that job entailed. I wouldn't understand it the way I do. I wouldn't fear it the way I do.

[music fades out]

[to Nigel]

Earlonne: Nyge. A year ago, when the George Floyd demonstrations were spreading all over the world, you and I got on the phone with New York inside San Quentin.

Nigel: Yeah and I remember asking both of you - whether you thought anything was going to change. And E, you sounded so optimistic.

[clip from Episode 44, “Nobody Comes Back” comes in]

Earlonne: [over the phone to New York] That was the straw that broke the camel's back, man. And I think it's gonna be some type of resolve from this, you know? There's going to be some type of resolve. You know what I mean? Right now, people are really championing African Americans. You know what I'm saying? Or Black people or Brown people. People are really out here protesting, especially up here, man.

Rahsaan “New York” Thomas: [over the phone] And that's a beautiful thing. I love – 'cause for the first time in my life, honestly, Earlonne, this is the first time I ever seen a whole world stand up. I really feel like my life matter right now.

Earlonne: No, definitely. No seriously. Like, man, I can go down there and walk on Lake Barrett and it's a whole different feel. It's almost a feel of former royalty as a king. I'm a king right now.

New York: I'm not expecting a dramatic change. We need something new in order to have a dramatic change and that's gonna take a while.

Earlonne: Bruh. I think it's finna be a dramatic change, bruh. I don't think – man, when you got people around the world, man, all on the same page, man, there's a problem. Something’s gonna get overturned.

[as narrator]

Nigel: A couple days ago, we called Rahsaan again, and we played that tape for him. And I pointed out something that had surprised me about that original conversation.

[to New York]

[over the phone] I would even say sometimes you have rose-colored glasses on, and Earlonne is the one who's usually cynical. [over the phone, New York laughs] But in that that tape, the roles are super reversed… I wonder what you think of that. [Earlonne laughs]

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: [over the phone] I think that I don't have Rose colored glasses. I just believe in the capacity of human beings for the positive and for the negative. And so, I think I see clearly. But as far as the Earlonne, man, I think that he just seen like the amount of people, the sea of people that care and he thought that was enough. And I just know it's not. Even with Derek Chauvin verdict being guilty and then been going to jail and that dangerous person is off the street, policing is this flawed concept where we solve everything with violence. And that creates more cycles of violence. And it really destroys people of color more than anyone else. At the end of the day, we look to solve harm with more harm after the harm. Instead of preventing harm from happening in the first place with love and investments.

Nigel: So what would you say to Earlonne?

New York: Earlonne, you were wrong, man! [everyone laughs]

Nigel: Earlonne, do you still feel like a king?

Earlonne: Oh, I definitely still feel like a king. But when I walked down the streets, I'm no longer on that parade float where everybody's cheering me on. I'm back in the crowd. I think it was just the euphoria of that type of moment, you know. And you would like that shit to last [Nigel affirms] and it didn't last because the next day probably a police killed someone, or… I don't know… or people just going about their lives.

Nigel: Do either of you think that what we do at your hustle actually makes a difference in these issues?

Earlonne: *Hellll* yeah. I do.

New York: Yeah, definitely. It's about seeing the value of human beings, and we definitely show the value of human beings… that human beings have value no matter what they did or where they at.

Nigel: Do you think that we should try to talk to more people who we would consider to be so completely different from what our values are like? Would there be value in talking to people like Derek Chauvin?

New York: I think definitely. I think you find where the commonality is and what you agree on, and then that's a place where we can agree to get change. We're going to change together. 'Cause you can't change anything by yourself or with one demographic of people.

Nigel: I really think that's the only way you're going to make a change is to have those conversations with people you don't agree with.

Earlonne: We don't have to agree with everybody, you know?

New York: And I think it helps to find out why we don't agree. And a lot of times when you find out why you don't agree, it's really not that far of a gap from what you do agree on.

Nigel: What question – both of you – what question would you ask him if you had the chance to sit across from him?

Earlonne: Oof.

New York: Yeah, man, I would ask him like, 'What did Black people ever do to *you*?' [chuckles] It might be a tough way to start the conversation off… but I'm just curious, like, 'What the Black people ever do to *you*?'

Nigel: What would you ask him?

Earlonne: I probably would ask him, uh… 'So I'm just curious, man, did you think that you were going to get away with that like, everybody else?' [Nigel affirms] You know, oppressing people like that – what did you get from that? Or what is the takeaway from that for you?' For him.

Nigel: You know how we have to start interviews by getting people comfortable? [Earlonne affirms] What would it be the question we would ask him to where to get him in the frame of mind to actually answer those harder questions?

New York: What did you eat for breakfast today? [Earlonne and Nigel laugh] *I had eggs too! My eggs were scrambled as well and they had cheese on 'em, just like you! I'm just like you!*

[music comes in]

Nigel: What is he going to learn in prison?

Earlonne: Shit…

New York: *Ooh,* that's deep because if you're in an environment where you're not forced to take accountability or inspired to take accountability, he might never do it. He might still be thinking he's innocent. He might not think he did anything wrong. I know. I did.

Nigel: Oh, totally. I was thinking how many guys have said that it took them quite a few years before they could see what they did in a different way. And he's probably not going to be any different.

Earlonne: I think at the end of the day, the realization that someone lost their life set in. [Nigel affirms] And you were the main cause of that. And it might not set in if you still on the force and you still getting paid by the force. But I think once you get put in that jail cell and you got twenty-four hours to think about that shit. I think it definitely changes.

New York: I know for me, man, for a long time, it took me a long time to take *full* accountability for the person I killed, and the person I shot. Because I felt like they had guns and they did this, and if they didn't do this, then I wouldn't have did that. And the law says this and all that jibber-jabber. It took really meeting a mother whose son was gunned down in the same way to really get me… to really make me see what I did. That's when it really hit me. And I think if he had to face George Floyd's family and just answer to them, or just see… or just hear them out, hear their pain… that's what gets through. That's what worked for me, for sure.

Nigel: So you guys both… would you agree that eventually he should be in a restorative justice circle and have the opportunity to participate in that?

Earlonne: Of course. He should go through all that. [crosstalk]

New York: [crosstalk] Definitely.

Earlonne: He should go through everything everybody else go through. It's not, you know, he made a bad decision in his life – he got to deal with that bad decision.

Nigel: You said to me that you didn't believe in long sentences for anyone, including him.

Earlonne: No, I don't. I don't because some of the time those sentences can be… *whew,* I got partners in jail right now with 714 years for robberies. So, sentences is harsh. So I think there should be a cap on it, of course.

Nigel: But regardless of how much time he gets, you both believe he could possibly change… given time?

New York: That's the hope. And one thing I will say too, actually, man, it's not even how much time you get… it's the quality of the time you give. [Nigel affirms] And so hopefully he's in an environment where they even have restorative justice or any kind of self-help groups. And hopefully he has a sentence that inspires him to take advantage of those opportunities to grow and to change. [Nigel affirms] And not sit around blamin' the victim or feelin' like a victim himself.

Nigel: I know we have to wrap this up, but I will say one thing: This conversation really makes me miss coming into San Quentin.

New York: [indistinguishable] Heard a couple of weeks, Nyge. I keep hearing that every couple of weeks. I got a great interview to do, but I'm not sure if they'll give me an interview. But if you walk over to that library with me, I'm sure we comin' back with him to do an interview.

Nigel: Okay. Alright. I've gotta get in touch with Sam ASAP.

New York: Alright, that's what's up. That's what's up.

Nigel: Great to talk to you, New York. It's *really* nice to spend a little time with you, even if it has to be on the phone.

New York: It's all good. Thank you for including me. I love it, I love it, I love it.

[music comes in]

Talib: *Ear Hustle* is produced by Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, John “Yahya” Johnson, and Bruce Wallace.

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Amy Standen edits the show, Shabnam Sigman is our digital producer. And Julie Shapiro is executive producer for Radiotopia.

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[music fades out]

Lieutenant Sam Robinson: Well, this is Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the public information officer at San Quentin State Prison. I was sitting there, and I was listening… I think someone that spoke about the first time that they had an interaction with the police. And so I started going through my memory catalog and trying to figure it out myself – said, OK, what were my interactions with police? I think that every Black man has a story, right? So initially, all of my interactions with police were really positive. I remember being in high school at a bus stop and seeing cops drive by and they would wave ‘cause I knew them! I had this ground level connection with them.

But I tell you, I might not have made it to corrections because I had a negative interaction with police. And I think I was nineteen and my brother would've been eleven or twelve. My brother and I had went over to the Oakland Coliseum. Oakland A’s before the season, they do a fan test where you're able to get your baseball cards signed, or whatever the case may be. We were walking across the pathway, and we saw these three or four, maybe five little kids. They ran up behind us – it was a mother and her son – ran up behind him, took his baseball cards and just ran off. And my brother and I saw it… and I was injured at the time, and so I couldn't chase the kids down and give those guys the cards back. But it was on my mind to do that, ‘cause it was just the right thing to do. Sure enough, I make it to my car, my brother and I get inside, and we pull out of parking lot, and I'm surrounded by police. I'm out in handcuffs on the ground, face down, the ground was wet. My brother and I are trying to explain it and they don't want to hear anything. And I remember the mother said, ‘Yeah, it was them. Those are the guys and took my son's baseball cards.’ And it was the kid who may have been ten or

eleven years old who looked and said, ‘No, those aren’t the guys. Those guys had a hat. And these guys don't have a hat.’ After that, they let us out the cuffs. We stood up. Nobody apologized. All that was said was that you could go. And I remember, man, just feeling like crap that here I was… furthest thing from my mind was doing something wrong to someone. And yet and still, here I am on the ground and there's some kid who ultimately says, ‘No, it's not them.’ That could have changed the course of my life. Certainly wouldn’t be Sam Robinson saying, ‘I approve this message.’ It could be… it would–

Earlonne: So you would be Earlonne Woods.

Lieutenant Robinson: Exactly. [both laugh]

Earlonne: Do you remember the day that the chief of police apologized to the community for the death of Oscar Grant?

Lieutenant Robinson: I do remember that. It was Ann Kirkpatrick, the former chief of police of Oakland. There’s some pretty hard guys in there who were broke down by that because they had never, ever been apologized to. And I think that goes back to what I just said. It's important. When you make a mistake, if you heal with people and you apologize to them. She definitely opened the door to a completely different dialogue that day.

Earlonne: Gotchu. Gotchu. Alright, man, lemme just ask – do you approve everything you just said?

Lieutenant Robinson: I don’t know now. [both laugh] I’ll tell you this, man. I spoke from my heart. [music comes in] And I will say that I approve my statement and this episode. [Earlonne laughs]

Talib: 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.

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Earlonne: I’m Earlonne Woods.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne and Nigel: [simultaneously] Thanks for listening.

End of Episode.