

Ear Hustle
Is Your Name Alfredo?
March 30, 2022

Nigel: I'm-- and my job title.

Dave: I am Lieutenant Dave Harwood, California Correctional Center.

Nigel: The following episode of Ear Hustle-

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Nigel: -contains language-

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Nigel: -that may not be appropriate-

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Nigel: -for all listeners.

Dave: -for all listeners.

Nigel: Discretion is advised.

Dave: Discretion is advised.

[somber music]

Sam: *So, we've entered into our dining hall. Our dining hall is vacant, and it's the perfect time to walk in and to show you the wonders of the dining hall.*

Nigel: Wonders? Um, wonders, it's not really a word I associate with the San Quentin dining hall.

Earlonne: Well, I mean, in a way, you wonder what's going on with that food.

Nigel: [laughs] Okay. I suppose there's actually one really wonderful thing about the dining hall, and it's these huge murals. It's actually a set of murals that covers, I don't know, hundreds of feet of wall space in there.

Earlonne: Definitely. I've worked in that kitchen for eight days. I used to always go over there and just look at it, and just trip off what was on there. I mean, guys go in there and eat and they really just focus in on it, and there's so much look at on that wall.

Speaker: *You can look at that for hours, and you just keep noticing things.*

Speaker: *It looks like it's during the World War II.*

Speaker: *From what I understand, it's a work of art that's already been sold and going to some museum.*

Speaker: *It's not a lot of black people in there.*

Speaker: *There's a big airplane, like a two-seater type of airplane.*

Speaker: *There's a couple of soldiers back there.*

Speaker: *A lady with one hand over her eye.*

Speaker: *Did you see the snake?*

Speaker: *Huh? Did you what?*

Speaker: *The snake.*

Nigel: *Have you ever seen a mural like this anyplace else?*

Speaker: *No, I've never seen anything this pretty.*

Nigel: Everyone who looks at that mural can find a story they can connect with. I mean, that mural is like stories built upon stories. So, you look at something and you think you see what's happening. And then, you realize that there's all these other stories happening within it. So, it's like a history lesson, a newsreel. But what I love about it is it's like really looking into someone's mind and trying to understand their imagination and the way they see the world.

Earlonne: But the crazy thing is-

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: -for a while, very little was known about the guy who made it, who actually drew it. It was pretty much a San Quentin mystery.

Nigel: Yes. I'm Nigel Poor.

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

[Ear Hustle theme]

Nigel: I remember this day when we went to see the mural. It was on one of Lieutenant Sam Robinson's tours, and it was back in 2018 when you were still in prison. And obviously, you had seen it before. But for me, it was my first time, and I was amazed.

Earlonne: You were just a deer in headlights.

Nigel: Absolutely. It's like one man's complete vision of the history of California. There's so much going on there.

Earlonne: I remember seeing women welding. Women helping during the war, that's what it looked like.

Nigel: Exactly, the war effort. Yeah. And then, there's the classic cable car. Ooh, do you remember the one that had the jury, it was the first women's jury?

Earlonne: I've also seen-- they got the Golden Gate Bridge on there.

Nigel: The fire after the 1906 earthquake.

Earlonne: I've seen a little story there with the meat, where they were slinging the meat for \$1 a pound.

Nigel: [chuckles] That was expensive back then.

Earlonne: But, Nyge, there's this one part of the mural that everyone talks about.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Sam: *If we look at the mural number three, right in the middle of the mural, there's a lady right in the middle of the mural, with her hands that are set up over here, and she's looking at us, correct?*

Earlonne: So, Sam is pointing to this lady.

Nigel: Yeah. She looks like she's from the silent film era. She has a headdress on and her hands are up on her forehead and she's just like looking very intense.

Earlonne: The Gatsby era. Then, you also got a classic San Francisco cable car and an old World War II plane.

Sam: *Come follow me to the opposite of mural.*

Nigel: He led us all the way down the room to the other side of the mural.

Sam: *All right. So, what do you see?*

Speaker: *She's looking right at us.*

[laughter]

Sam: *It didn't change. There's nothing different. We just walked 100 feet? [laughs]*

Nigel: *You're right. She's totally looking at us.*

Sam: *If you look at that plane, what happened to the plane? The entire plane is rotated. Let's look across away. The lady is still looking at you.*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Sam: *The old-fashioned car and cable car, all rotated and they're still coming at you.*

Nigel: The fact that those objects and the woman's eyes follow you, has made people think that the mural itself is actually haunted.

Earlonne: You have that, and you have a gang of myths about the place.

Nigel: Yeah.

Earlonne: When people think that the walls are going to the Smithsonian.

Nigel: And there's a portrait of the guy who was the warden at the time in drag.

Earlonne: And, Nyge.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: This whole mural is painted in one color, just brown. And that became a whole another myth on whether it was coffee or blood.

Nigel: Exactly. I know there's a lot of legends about the mural. But personally, when I look at artwork, I start to really wonder about the artist. Who was this guy, and what was going on in his head when he made it?

Earlonne: But for a long time, all anyone knew about the artist was his name, Alfredo Santos, because Santos left San Quentin in 1955. And after that, he pretty much vamoosed, disappeared.

Nigel: Until Paul and Lori Sutton tracked him down.

Lori: *My name is Lori Sutton, and I'm a part time documentary filmmaker and public relations person and a prison enthusiast.*

Nigel: *[chuckles] Prison enthusiast.*

Lori: *[laughs]*

Paul: *I'm Paul Sutton. I'm a retired professor of criminal justice and corrections at San Diego State University, and spent 33 years of my life taking about 3000 students on weeklong prison tours all over the state of California.*

Nigel: *I guess now I understand what prison enthusiast is.*

Lori: *[laughs] Right.*

Nigel: Anytime somebody takes a tour of San Quentin, this mural is one of the stops, is a staple of the tour. It is actually seen by thousands of people every year. Not just the guys that are incarcerated, but everybody that comes in for a tour.

Earlonne: And it was on one of these tours that a student of Paul's got really excited about the mural.

Nigel: So much so that she actually mentioned it to her hairdresser.

Lori: *This student was just talking about, "Hey, I just got back from prison. We went to San Quentin and there are these beautiful murals." And then, the hairdresser says, "Oh, I know who painted those murals."*

Earlonne: Paul and Lori started digging around, and eventually found one of Santos' children who was living in San Diego. That son connected them to Alfredo Santos himself.

Nigel: Santos was living in Mexico, but he agreed to take a bus up to meet Paul and Lori in San Diego.

Lori: *Paul says, "Get out of the car and go find Alfredo." I said, "I've never seen this man. I don't know who I'm looking for." He says, "Just look for a little old man."*

Nigel: *Oh.*

Lori: *Sure enough, I walked up to this little old man, he was wearing blue jeans and an old tan kind of members only-ish jacket, some dirty tennis shoes. Just had a little goatee and little balding head, and he had a baseball hat on. And I said, "Is your name Alfredo?" He says, "Yes, it is." And that was the beginning.*

Nigel: Santos was in his 80s, He was pretty broke and not in great health.

Earlone: But the three of them got to be pretty tight. Lori and Paul asked Santos if they could film him for a documentary.

Nigel: And this is the part that really piques my interest, Earlone. Those San Quentin murals, the very thing that had gotten Lori and Paul interested in him to begin with, Santos himself had almost no interest in talking about them.

Lori: He didn't exactly roll his eyes, but he would kind of pause, sigh a little bit, then answer whatever question we had asked. And then he would change the subject back to whatever he was doing at different times in his life, because there's a certain connotation, "Oh, you did time. This is who you must be." And he didn't want to deal with that. For him, it was like, "Well, that was a dark four years in my life. And I'm much more than that."

Nigel: Okay, so Earlone, let's give a little context here, okay?

Earlone: Mm-hmm.

Nigel: Because the story of the murals is not just a story about Alfredo Santos.

Earlone: Nah. This actually gives us into the history of the institution of San Quentin itself.

Nigel: And this is an era of San Quentin that I find particularly interesting.

Earlone: Alfredo Santos landed in San Quentin in 1951, the era of Warden Duffy, your boy, Nyge.

Nigel: Yes, Warden Duffy. We talked about him in an episode called "This Place" about the history of San Quentin. And Duffy was a really progressive warden. He brought a lot of programs to San Quentin.

Earlone: He established the first San Quentin newspaper.

Nigel: Yep. And we owe him a debt, Earlone. He was the guy who established radio inside the prison.

Earlone: And here we are today, Ear Hustle.

Nigel: Yes.

Earlone: In 1950, Duffy had another idea for how to improve things at the prison.

Nigel: And it had to do with the dining hall.

Sam: It was one dining hall of about 1500 folks. And, of course, that's pretty unmanageable, right? [laughs]

Earlone: Duffy's idea was to split the dining hall into four different areas.

Nigel: Yeah. I imagine he thought that would make it calmer, easier to control. But by splitting it up, they ended up with all these blank walls.

Sam: *And so, the warden offered to dress up our walls, and he put out a contest to our inmates to muralize one wall in our dining hall.*

Earlonne: And that's where Alfredo Santos enters the story.

Nigel: Santos grew up in Mexico and Southern California. When he was in his early 20s, he got caught up in trafficking, getting people illegally across the border, and also some drugs.

Earlonne: What?

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: Santos knew, eventually, he was going to get busted and do some time, but he had a plan.

Alfredo: *So, I already had made up my mind. If I ever get thrown in jail, I'm going to study art.*

Nigel: This is Santos himself from a recording that Lori and Paul Sutton made for their documentary.

Alfredo: *I already talked to people that came out of prison. "Hey, man. Do they let you paint over there in San Quentin?" "Oh, yeah. You can paint." And this is what I did.*

Paul: *He said, "Well, they gave me six years. I was going to have to do four in San Quentin. And I decided I was going to use that time to become the best artist in the world.*

Nigel: Santos was sentenced to four years. And I know it's a little weird to say, but it was actually good timing for him, because the San Quentin administration under Duffy was letting more arts into the prison.

Earlonne: And another thing about Santos, he had the single-cell status shit, had one all to himself.

Lori: *And actually, he said that only about half of the cells were filled at the time. So, he got to take another cell for his painting supplies.*

Nigel: *His studio.*

Lori: *His studio.*

Paul: *You know how the star of Shawshank is doing everybody's taxes?*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Paul: Well, Alfredo was doing portraits of the kids and of the guards and the doctors. And so, everybody loved him.

Nigel: Yeah.

Paul: He was a star.

Earlone: One day, Alfredo was flipping through to San Quentin newspaper, and what did he see?

Nigel: He saw an ad for the dining hall mural contest. Santos submits an entry. And what do you think happens, Earlone?

Earlone: Probably got the gig.

Nigel: Yep, he got the gig and it turned out to be a pretty sweet one.

Earlone: They had him paint at night when the dining hall was empty. So, he'd come in and just paint for hours. Had two assistants wheeling his scaffolding around, hung out with the guards.

Nigel: And he got to take all of these books out of the library. All of these history books of California, study them, and those became the basis of the incredible mural that he did.

Earlone: And he was eating pretty well too.

Alfredo: We used to have a night cook there. [chuckles] I got fat. I gained about 20 pounds doing that mural.

Lori: The first wall took him a month, second wall took him three months, third wall five months, because he figured out, he said, "I wanted to stretch this out."

Nigel: Yeah.

Paul: Stretch it out.

Lori: He figured out that he could stretch out painting over the remaining time that he had left to serve.

Nigel: Did he have a plan for the mural? Or, did it just unfold as he was working? Were there sketches?

Lori: No sketches.

Nigel: He was just riffing every night?

Lori: Every night.

Earlonne: Is that unusual, to not sketch it out?

Nigel: At that scale, it's astounding, that he was just-- yeah.

Earlonne: Freehand.

Nigel: Isn't just freehand. The concept was unfolding as he was working. Somehow, he was able to hold all of it in his mind.

Earlonne: Lori and Paul interviewed some of the correction officers who was there at the time watching Santos work.

Lori: He's just sitting there very, very silent. And then, all of a sudden, he'd start moving, and he's coming up with something in his brain-

Paul: Sporadically.

Lori: -and then it comes out of his hand.

[somber music]

Nigel: This feels like the perfect time to bring up some of those myths and legends that we talked about at the top of the show, and I'd love to do a little myth busting here.

Earlonne: Hmm, like?

Nigel: Do you want to join me on that one?

Earlonne: Sure. Like the one where Santos drew a picture of Warden Duffy dressed in drag?

Nigel: Yeah.

Earlonne: Do you think it was true?

Nigel: No.

Lori: Not in drag. No.

Paul: He loved Duffy. He said if it weren't for Duffy and kind of the character of San Quentin, he never could have done what he did. He thought the world of Duffy.

Earlonne: But I know there's got to be some CO that he didn't think that highly of.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: And of course, he got to make them look bad, make them look something.

Nigel: He's going to take the chance to editorialize, right?

Earlonne: Of course.

Nigel: We ran that one by Lieutenant Sam Robinson.

Sam: There was an officer that, supposedly during the time, the folklorist says, he was a bully, and no one really liked them. There's an image in one of the murals where there are men going through a medical line to go into the military. And sure enough, the one guy in that line, who is wincing as he's getting a shot is this officer that nobody liked. [laughs]

Nigel: Here's another mural mystery. Why is it only painted in one color?

Sam: We had a lot of problems during that time with people escaping the place. And so, we didn't want to give them anything that he could utilize to dye his clothing or someone else's and walk out the prison. And so that's why we only gave him one color, which was red.

Earlonne: And then, there's that creepy way the eyes on the mural seem to follow you wherever you go. People say that's because it's hunted. You want to take that one, Nyge?

Nigel: Yes, I would love to say that ghosts live in that mural. But it really is just something artists call "three-point perspective." It's a way of using lines to create depth and perspective and proportion.

Earlonne: This guy has skills. After spending all those months putting it all together, they didn't even let Santos sign his name on the shit. That's cold.

Nigel: I know, but what do you expect? It's friggin' prison, man. But Santos was clever. And he found ways of leaving traces of himself up there on the mural anyway.

Lori: He put his mother in there. He put his father in there. He also put a little family store with the name 'Santos' across it. He was trying to sneak his personal touch into things here and there.

[upbeat music]

Earlonne: Santos was released from prison in 1955, when he was in his late 20s.

Nigel: He was still a young guy, and he was full of artistic ambition. I believe, Earlonne, his first job was working as a caricaturist at Disney.

Earlonne: Hey, he took the hustle to the street.

Nigel: Yeah. When we come back from the break, why was Santos so reluctant to talk about those amazing murals?

Earlone: We will find out.

[upbeat music]

Earlone: Where we left off, Alfredo Santos was fresh out of prison and trying to make it as an artist. First, at Disneyland.

Nigel: And then, to San Diego, where he saved enough money to open up a studio.

Earlone: But then, Santos got caught up in the drug game again.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlone: Got busted and went on the run in Mexico.

Nigel: And even though he was living as a fugitive, in Mexico, Santos felt like he really came into his own as an artist. He opened up a studio in Guadalajara, and then in Mexico City.

Earlone: Eventually, he decided it was safe to come back to the States.

Nigel: Santos really wanted to go to New York. Like a lot of artists, he thought he would find success there.

Earlone: That plan didn't quite work out. But Santos got wind of another spot. A little town called Fleischmanns, a couple hours north.

Nigel: *We wanted to talk to you about Alfredo Santos.*

Gloria: *Yes.*

Earlone: This is Gloria Mulloy. She and her husband John, used to run a small art gallery in Fleischmanns, New York.

Nigel: Fleischmanns is this tiny town in the Catskill Mountains. And if you're from the East Coast, you would totally recognize it. Population around 500, one main street, beautiful old buildings, a little decrepit, but fascinating. It's about an hour from Woodstock, and it's got this sort of art vibe to it.

Gloria: *We moved to Fleischmanns, and we decided to open an art gallery. Someone who owned a motel across the way came running over. And he told me he had six Santos pieces, and would I like to sell them? So, my husband and I looked at each other and we had never heard of Alfredo Santos.*

Earlone: Gloria and John started asking around about this artist who had been well known in Fleischmanns back in the 60s. They found out he had owned a building there.

Nigel: And this building was a gallery, and apparently a very popular hangout spot.

Gloria: *He lived in Fleischmanns way back in the 60s when Fleischmanns had a little more action than it does right now. [chuckles] It was the place to be. He had a big studio there. And he was very prolific, and he sang for his supper. He did things quickly and people gave him favors and money and whatnot.*

Earlone: Gloria realized she actually met Santos.

Nigel: Yes. Back when she was in her early 20s, she had been a camp counselor in this nearby town, and she used to go to Fleischmanns with a friend to hang out.

Can you tell us about meeting him?

Gloria: *Well, he was a womanizer. A famous womanizer. He had a big following.*

Nigel: *Why were people so drawn to him? Why were all these women and other people drawn to him?*

Gloria: *Well, he was sort of gregarious. Good looking at the time, I would say, and--*

Paul: *Talented. He was very talented.*

Gloria: *Talented and talkative.*

Lori: *He had all these groupie girls who would come by his art studio in Fleischmanns. He was living pretty large.*

Earlone: This again is Lori and Paul Sutton, who interviewed Santos later in his life and are making a documentary about him.

Lori: *That said, the locals didn't really like how friendly he was getting with the girls. And so, he kind of got run out of town, because they thought he was trying to put the moves on all these young, impressionable girls. And so, as is the case with Alfredo so often, he picked up and left.*

[pensive music]

Nigel: By the time Gloria and John opened their gallery in Fleischmanns, Santos had long since moved back to the West Coast.

Earlone: But a lot of people in town still had Santos' artwork.

Nigel: Mm-hmm. So, Gloria and John collected a bunch of his pieces and held an Alfredo Santos retrospective at their gallery in 2007.

Earlonne: And they still have a lot of his paintings and sculptures hanging in their house.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

John: *Can I show other pictures here?*

Nigel: *Yeah, sure.*

John: *Can they see this? How are they going to see?*

Nigel: *I think you have to-*

Earlonne: *Turn the phone around.*

Nigel: *-turn the phone around.*

[crosstalk]

Earlonne: *Just hit the button on there.*

Nigel: *Yeah, I can see them.*

John: *Here's the birds.*

Earlonne: *Oh, are they carved or is that drawn?*

John: *No. He would collect pieces of bark in trees. He'd go to the local sawmill and get pieces of logs and he would just hammer these together, almost chaotically. But on this particular one, there might be 100 birds on there.*

Nigel: So, yes, his work is painting but a lot of is three dimensional, like sculpture on a canvas surface in a way. There are paintings, there are portraits, landscapes, and they are completely different than the San Quentin mural. It's almost like a different artist made these. And I've got to say, hmm, they're not my cup of tea.

Earlonne: I don't know, I like the wood sculptures. They're different. It was just different.

Nigel: Yeah, I mean, they are different for sure. But here's the thing, Earlonne. This is the work that Santos was really proud of. I think he was really fixated on this idea, which is not uncommon for a lot of mural artists. It's this thought that art only comes from the subconscious. And the murals at San Quentin, I'm guessing, he thought were too tethered to reality.

Paul: *He did not think those walls represented anything close to his ability.*

Earlonne: Here's Paul Sutton again.

Paul: *He talked about the murals being very commercial. In his words, "Anybody could copy it. And if you can copy it, it's not art. You might think I'm going to paint a bowl, but if you think of a bowl as your painting, it's just copying the idea." He said, "You just throw it up on the canvas. And if you let your imagination work, you come out with perfect art." That's what he didn't like about the murals, is they weren't abstract.*

Nigel: *I couldn't really disagree. I think that piece inside San Quentin is a masterpiece, and I don't see it as commercial at all. I mean, maybe he said he would do it to please other people but it's an astounding piece of work, just the layering, the complexity, the fact that from what I understood, he didn't have sketches. He just started working and adding and adding. That's genius.*

Lori: *I agree.*

Nigel: *I looked at some of his later work, and I'm still trying to understand why he dismisses that work which, to my mind, is the best work I saw of his.*

Lori: *You know what? I have to agree with you. I think Alfredo wanted to compete on a level with your Diego Riveras, and he fully believed that he was of that caliber. And so, it was just always out of his reach. I mean, he had people telling him how much they love the walls and his other artwork. But it was kind of like, he needed it on a grander scale to confirm that he was what he thought he was.*

Paul: *He wanted to be known as the best in the world. The best there ever was. And I think to his dying day, to the extent that he was conscious enough to still want that, he wanted more recognition. He told us, "I want to be on TV. I want the newspapers to interview me." No matter what kind of coverage he got, it was never quite going to be enough for him.*

Nigel: *Yeah. I think it's so interesting that the art inside San Quentin achieves what most artists want, which is to have it seen by so many people and be appreciated by so many people, even though it's in a place where you don't get accolades. But when you talk to people inside the prison, their reaction to seeing it is very-- they're very honored, and they see so much in it, and they deeply appreciate it.*

Lori: *I am totally in line with you on that, because I had the same thoughts. But Alfredo's thing was always about, he wanted everybody to know how great he was.*

Paul: *His greatest fear was not to be remembered, not to be respected for the great art that he did after San Quentin.*

Nigel: Earlonne, I have to say, I find this kind of irritating because he actually achieved what all artists dream about, which is to have their work be considered and live on into the future. And that's what his

murals at San Quentin do. They're extraordinary. They're seen by thousands of people every year, and people still talk about them.

Do you want to look at the mural over there?

Speaker: *Yeah, a lot.*

Nigel: *What do you think about? What do you see?*

Speaker: *Well, I think about God's creation, and I think about how good Jesus is.*

Nigel: *Do you see yourself in any of the illustrations up there?*

Speaker: *Well, the fisherman because I'm supposed to be a fisher of men. The lady, because I have strong female tendencies [chuckles] that I have to keep under control.*

Nigel: *What does that mean?*

Speaker: *It means I'm ex-gay.*

Nigel: *You're what-gay?*

Speaker: *Ex-gay.*

Nigel: *What is ex-- Oh, you're not--*

Speaker: *Ex-homosexual.*

Nigel: *Oh, wow. Why are you ex?*

Speaker: *Because I won't practice it.*

Nigel: *I'm sorry. That's got to be hard. Sorry.*

Speaker: *Well, it's easy if you love God more than you love evil.*

Nigel: *What do you think's happening with that guy? There's a helicopter there with a guy dangling from it.*

Speaker: *That reminds me being in the military. I used to jump out of airplanes. So, that reminds me-- probably a rescue.*

Nigel: *Do you have other associations when you look at this?*

Speaker: *Makes me think about water, and how our water resources are being depleted.*

Earlonne: *Have you ever seen a black person up there?*

Speaker: *That's the first thing I looked for when I walked in.*

Earlonne: *Okay.*

Speaker: *So, it's a black officer down there with two other officers. There's a couple of soldiers back there. One of them was dark skinned.*

Nigel: *And why does that part interest you?*

Speaker: *My grandfather was in World War I, I didn't get to see him personally in his suit, so.*

Nigel: *So, it's like a personal connection.*

Speaker: *Yeah.*

Earlonne: *In 2003, Santos came back to San Quentin for kind of a victory lap.*

Nigel: *The San Quentin administration invited him to come back and see the murals for the first time in almost 50 years.*

Vernell: *It was a lot of excitement by the inmate population about the opportunity to see the guy that painted these murals. So, he had a lot of folks that wanted to see him on the upper yard. Lots of people were walking along with us wanting to see and talk and listen to what's going on.*

Earlonne: *Vernell Crittenden was the Public Information Officer at San Quentin back then.*

Nigel: *Kind of the Sam Robinson of this day.*

Earlonne: *Pretty much.*

Vernell: *His family was all just kind of-- Ah, God, I don't know how many, but I'm going to say maybe about four or five girls, and they were like granddaughters and nieces. I just remember looking at them, they were just eyes as big as half dollars.*

Earlonne: *Do you remember what Santos felt like? Like really going back into San Quentin?*

Vernell: *Oh, yeah, he went to himself. For him, yeah, it was moving for him to go into the prison again. You could see in him, as he was looking, his expression on his face. Even though the cameras and people were asking him questions about it, I saw a man that was really deep in reflection about that part of his life.*

One point, he was walking through the dining hall, and then he stopped. He's just staring up and the media was probably as far away as that chair, about five or six feet from him. And he just standing there staring up at this portion of the mural. And that's when I came away with those kinds of things that, you know what? Even though he had all this going on with his family and the media, and people around, he was almost into his own space.

John: All right. This camera can record.

Gloria: Oh, record voices?

John: I'm filming.

Gloria: We went to visit him in the nursing home in San Diego in 2000-- in about '15, John, would you say?

John: Yes.

Gloria: He was very ill.

We don't want to tax you too much.

John: Absolutely.

Gloria: He was there in his bedclothes, and we brought him a fancy shirt and like a beret.

Want to put it on for one portrait.

Gloria: [chuckles] He was in his bed. And John convinced him to do a drawing.

John: Now, Alfredo, I have a request. Could you please draw something for all your friends in Fleischmanns? Maybe we can take it back.

Nigel: When Santos responds, his voice is really soft. You can barely hear it at all.

Alfredo: Oh, that's [unintelligible [00:32:03]].

John: That's all right.

Earlonne: But when he picks up that pen and starts to draw, oh, yeah, he's still got the flowing. He knew what he was doing.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Gloria: Do you remember what Fleischmanns looked like?

John: We don't expect much in Fleischmanns.

Gloria: And you can see how fast he conjured up a whole scene. It was very simple.

Gloria: That's them?

Alfredo: Yeah.

John: All right.

[somber music]

Nigel: In the video, the camera is positioned behind him looking over his shoulders. It's really touching. You see these very old hands. One hand is holding a pen, and he's got this notebook in front of him, and he's just drawing. He's just without hesitation putting all these marks down on the paper. It's pretty moving.

Earlone: Yeah. I mean, you can picture those hands moving across the blank wall at the San Quentin dining hall, you know?

Nigel: Yeah.

Earlone: Maybe a little quicker. You know what I'm saying?

Nigel: [laughs]

Earlone: But he was definitely making it up as he went along.

Nigel: Yeah. I mean, those are the hands of an artist who knows exactly what he wants to do.

Earlone: And when he's done, he's done.

John: All right.

Gloria: [unintelligible [00:32:42] Do you want to draw another one?

[somber music]

Rene: My name is Rene Santos. My father was Alfredo [unintelligible [00:33:51] Santos. Ear Hustle would like to thank Bruce Fowler, Vincent Turner, Anthony Carvalho, Shenti, Joe Garcia, Daniel Stanley Saito, Ronell Draper, Derek Barbosa, Daniel Chavez, Jr., Officer Carter, Officer Damien, and Officer Lopez for talking to them for this episode.

Ear Hustle is produced by Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, John “Yahya” Johnson, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Bruce Wallace, and Tony Tafoya.

It was sound designed and engineered by Antwan Williams, with music by Antwan, David Jassy, and Rhashiyd Zinnamon.

Additional sound design and engineering by Terence Bernardo. Amy Standen edits the show. Shabnam Sigman is the digital producer, and Julie Shapiro is the executive producer for Radiotopia.

We'd also like to thank Warden Ron Broomfield. And as you know, every episode of Ear Hustle has to be approved by this guy here.

[music fades away]

New York: They asked me to get this approval, but I don't even know what episode is for.

Sam: This is for the Alfredo Santos.

New York: Alfredo Santos? Who the fuck is that?

Sam: You haven't heard it?

New York: I haven't heard it.

Sam: Oh, wow.

New York: It is a weird season where everybody paroled, and COVID keeps locking the prison down--

Sam: Yeah. [laughs]

New York: -episodes out there without me. [laughs]

Sam: So, it's about the muralist, the dining hall muralist.

New York: Oh, okay. Okay, all right.

Sam: This past weekend, the prison won an award from the Art Deco Society of the state of California for the murals in the dining hall. Santos wanted to be remembered. Santos wants to be remembered for his art. He wants to be remembered for leaving beauty here in his world. He wanted to be remembered. And this past weekend, they remembered Alfredo Santos for his work. His unique work here inside the walls of San Quentin. I signed up, I'm an employee at San Quentin. I can go in and look at the beautiful murals all the time. There are people who earn their way in prison, so they get to look at it as well.

[laughter]

Sam: But for everyone else in society, they don't get opportunity to do that. But the Art Deco Society of California, however, they discovered it, they found it. We brought them in, and they remembered Alfredo Santos. And so, it's an honor. With that, I will say that I'm Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin State Prison, and I do approve this episode.

New York: Thank you.

Sam: All right.

New York: Cool.

[upbeat music]

Nigel: Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. Radiotopia is a collection of independent listener-supported podcasts.

Earlonne: Some of the best podcasts around. Hear more at *Radiotopia.fm*.

Nigel: And please don't forget about our newsletter. It's delivered to your inbox after each episode. And in this one, ooh, you've got to check it out.

Earlonne: It is packed with photos of these murals we've been talking about.

Nigel: Ah, they're so amazing. You really need to see all the details. So, you can sign up for that at earhustlesq.com/newsletter. I'm Nigel Poor.

Sam: And I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel and Earlonne: Thanks for listening.

Rene: *There's a quote my father always used to say to me. "Art is not just something pretty to hang on your wall. Instead, art should provoke you. Make you think art is a revolution."*

End of Episode