

Ear Hustle
"Fences"
November 2, 2022

Daniel: *There are three prisons in the state that are designed like one long-ass hallway. And along the hallway, there are just doors. So, there'll either be doors to medical, there'll be doors to the library, there'll be doors to the education area, or there'll be doors to the housing units.*

Nigel: *This is one long building?*

Daniel: *Just one long-ass hallway with many buildings attached to this hallway.*

Nigel: *What made the hallway stand out to you?*

Daniel: *It was just hella long.*

Nigel: *Like a city block long?*

Daniel: *Yeah, I believe it was a quarter mile. This was a long-ass hallway*

Nigel: *How wide was the hallway?*

Daniel: *Probably about maybe 15 feet wide. Sometimes, it might be one guy with a cane or a wheelchair. When he's walking, nobody can be in the hallway because he's PC, protective custody, and so the hallway has to be completely emptied. So, you might be at the very beginning of the hallway behind the gate and you'll be watching this guy walk for probably about 15 minutes because he's just walking extremely slow*

Nigel: *From one end to the other.*

Daniel: *From one end to the other down this long-ass hallway.*

Nigel: *How long would it take you to walk from one end of the hallway to the other?*

Daniel: *Like 10 minutes.*

Nigel: *Even as a young person, it took 10 minutes?*

Daniel: *Yeah, because it was a long-ass hallway.*

Nigel: Earlonne, have you ever seen a prison like that?

Earlonne: Actually, I have. I was in one, yeah.

Nigel: With a long-ass hallway?

Earlonne: Yeah. Soledad. That's where I was at 67 days before I went to San Quentin.

Nigel: Oh, was that enough days for it to make an impression on you?

Earlonne: My building was way on the other end, my unit. So, I had to walk all the way down the hallway to get to the yard, and they were all the way back.

Nigel: Gosh.

On the last episode of the show, we were talking about how people carve out private spaces in a place where you've got eyes on you all the time. Earlonne, I'm curious about those long-ass hallways that Daniel was talking about. And how those kinds of spaces shape the experience of being in prison.

Earlonne: Yep. Today, we're zooming out and we're looking at hallways, yards, stairways. You know the public spots where people hang out at. And how people adjust to those places.

Nigel: Or push back on them and turn them into something that they need. I'm Nigel Poor.

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

[Ear Hustle theme ends]

Earlonne: There are a lot of different kind of prison designs, but what they all have in common is this - they're built to control people, reduce violence, and increase surveillance.

Nigel: And there are two types of prison architecture that I've heard people mention so many times, the 180 versus the 270. Those are the prisons that I think you always see on TV, like the quintessential prison design where there's a guard tower looking over a whole bunch of tiers.

Earlonne: You mean like Oz?

Nigel: Exactly. It's like TV shorthand for big, scary, maximum-security prison. And you know they're going to have like barbed wire coming in and out of focus and--

Earlone: And you're going to hear that loud ass alarm buzz. [mimics alarm buzz]

Nigel: Mm-hmm. Ooh, yeah. What's a 180 design? Can you describe it?

Daniel: *So, a 180 design is-- it is going to be explanation after explanation, but it's like a 270 cut in half.*

[laughter]

Earlone: That's Daniel aka the Long-ass Hallway Dude.

Nigel: *What's a 270 then?*

Daniel: *So, a 270 design is like a horseshoe. So, you have five buildings kind of lined up in the shape of a U. And the yard is kind of in front of those buildings.*

Nigel: *Now, but what's special about this horseshoe shaped thing? What has it allowed the prison to do?*

Daniel: *Um, surveil.*

Nigel: *Did you get the sense you were always being watched?*

Tommy: *Definitely. Yeah.*

Nigel: This is Tommy, another guy we know at San Quentin.

And what did that do to you?

Tommy: *I think it kind of like desensitized me a little bit because for one, I'm somebody that doesn't really like all the attention on me.*

Earlone: I've been in those 180s and 270s like Daniel and Tommy were talking about. And you never forget the feeling of being in those places. My first time in prison was in a 270, and then when I went back for the second term, it was another 270 design and just seeing it, that shit depressed the fuck out of me. Seriously.

Nigel: Hmm. Did it seem like you were right back in the same place?

Earlone: Yeah, like I never left.

Nigel: Oh, God. I think that shows that the architecture is actually really successful. It's supposed to make you feel that way, like you're being contained and watched and that nothing's going to change.

Earlone: Yeah, it's depressing. The same shit, every day.

Tommy: *When I went there, it felt like you had to have a survival mentality, a survival mode when you got there.*

Nigel: Yeah.

Tommy: *Even from the way the COs handled you or treated you, it was as if they were operating fear based as well. So, when I see somebody always watching me or something like that, I don't really like that. So, it made me more aggressive.*

Tam: *To this day, I think of stairs from my first incident in prison. I was at Salinas Valley. It was about 2003, I'm new to prison, I'm younger. I was about like 23 at the time.*

Nigel: This is Tam. And this story is intriguing because it shows how a piece of architecture takes on new meaning after you've spent some time in prison.

Tam: *So, usually, all the races are locked down, except for the Asians because we don't get in as much. They need us as a buffer. They put us between everybody. So that--*

Nigel: For real, really?

Tam: *Yeah, really. Like, so for example, Blacks and Mexicans don't jive. They don't sit next to each other. Just put the Asians right there and now it's all good. Or for example, if the Mexicans want to smoke some weed, but they couldn't get none, but the Blacks had some. They can't sell it directly to them. But if you sell it to the Asian guy and the Asian guy sells it to the Mexican, it's clean, magically.*

Earlone: On this one day, the prison was on lockdown, so they were doing what's called "cell feeding," which means that porters, which are incarcerated individuals, they bring food trays to and from the cells.

Nigel: So, one of these porters is Asian and as he's passing a tray of food into a cell, a guy inside, a white dude, slices his arm.

Earlone: And now, the word goes out that a white guy has attacked the Asian. So, the Asians are automatically obligated to deal with it.

[background chatter]

Nigel: A little while later, a few guys are heading to the showers and because the prison is on lockdown, they're being escorted by guards.

Tam: *Each officer will wrap his arm like through your arm. So, if you're cuffed behind, he'll put his arm through your arm, so he'll hold you and escort you. And while in the other hand, he holds a baton, as we're walking, or you showered. So, you're wearing just barely your shoes and your boxers and maybe a towel and some soap, but you're handcuffed.*

As we're walking, I could see across the tier that one Asian guy was walking behind a white guy. As soon as he hit the stairs, he kicked him, and he starts rolling down the stairs. Everybody's trying to fight each other, but you're handcuffed. So, it looked like a really bad Kung Fu movie: Bunch of Asian guys trying to kick white guys because the white guys were in front of us, so they fell down the stairs. Because remember, you're cuffed, they have their arm through your arm, and they have a baton out. So, they're just swinging while everybody's slipping around trying to kick.

Nigel: *And you're in shower shoes?*

Tam: *You're wearing shoes that you can take off. I'm going to tell you, it wasn't a really good fight or anything. The first guy got injured. Everybody else was more injured by the officers trying to stop you. You really can't do anything in that situation.*

I still think about it today any time I walk upstairs, and I think it's traumatized me. I'm afraid to stand too close when somebody's behind me, when I'm walking down the stairs and being in San Quentin, these stairs are steeper than any stairs I've ever seen.

I always feel menacing. Like it's dark, there's no light, the stairs are slippery a little. They're dirty and it's so cramped. So, it makes me feel like even slightly claustrophobic.

Nigel: *Did you have any feelings about stairs before you came to prison?*

Tam: *No, they were just a place to get upstairs.*

I realized, "Man, okay, this is what prison like. They hurt you anywhere that they can." And coming here, it changed my perspective even more. I go, "Dang. It's so tight, like a dungeon here." That's a good explanation. The staircase feels like I'm walking up like a little dungeon tower or something.

Nigel: Oh, totally. And the colors in there, it's hard to differentiate the stairs. When I go there, I have to hold on and I don't want to hold onto the rail because I think it's probably really dirty. Do you have that same thought?

Tam: Yes. I don't touch the rails, but I put my arms out in case I fall. Strange. I look like a really weird rabbit when I'm walking like this.

Nigel: And are you worried somebody's going to push you or make--?

Tam: I'm always worried about that since that situation.

Nigel: What tier are you on?

Tam: I'm on the fifth.

Nigel: Oh, my God.

Tam: So, I'm on the same tier as Rahsaan. I'd feel like every time you go up, you run out of breath.

Nigel: Yeah.

Tam: It's like you climb a mountain or something.

Nigel: Definitely.

New York: If you walk two steps at a time, then you walk less steps. Half the steps, you cut the steps in half.

Nigel: Well, look how long his legs are.

Tam: You're a taller guy though, yeah.

Nigel: For his two steps are like one for--[crosstalk]

New York: All I hear is excuses right now.

Tam: Okay, yeah.

[laughter]

Nicole: *My name is Nicole Visor. I've been incarcerated for 24 years, 1 month.*

Nigel: *Have you noticed that there's no stairs here?*

Nicole: *There's stairs in the backyard.*

Nigel: *But not many, right?*

Nicole: *No, not many.*

Nigel: *In the last episode, we talked about how women at the California Institution for Women or CIW, the women's prison outside LA, well, how they don't have pockets. And guess what else they don't have?*

Nigel: *How many years have you been at CIW?*

Kathryn: *Oh, in January, it'll be 10.*

Nigel: *When did you notice that there were no stairs here?*

Kathryn: *Just this last year [chuckles]. It got brought up with a doctor asking me if I ran out of breath, I was out of breath going up the stairs. I first said, "No." And then, I went, "Wait a minute. We don't even have stairs where I'm at." They're just a couple steps.*

Nigel: *Yeah, did that strike you as odd at all? That it's been 10 years since you gone up a flight of stairs?*

Kathryn: *Yeah, it did because my mindset was all automatically to say, "No, it doesn't bother me," forgetting that we don't even have any. So, it's like, "Wow," my mind was already so adapted to this. And we're all one story.*

Earlone: *So, CIW is all flat.*

Nigel: *Mm-Hmm.*

Earlone: *And San Quentin is a totally different design. There are stairs everywhere inside and out.*

Nigel: *And hills too. So, there are a bunch of places where you can stand and get a sweeping view of the entire prison. It's not quite a bird's eye view but you know what I mean? It's kind of like that.*

Earlone: No, definitely.

[background chatter]

Tommy: *When you're walking down the stairs, going to yard, you can just stop and pause and look at a community.*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Earlone: Tommy is the guy we heard up above. Talking about that feeling of being watched all the time.

Tommy: *But it's like the Projects to me. You've got one building with five tiers. Thousand people feels like, all out at one time, you got to navigate traffic while you're walking through the building. It feels a little bit more freedom here.*

[background chatter]

Daniel: *I've been incarcerated now for about 12 years.*

Nigel: It's Daniel again.

Earlone: The Long-ass Hallway Dude.

Daniel: *I've been to five different prisons and been at San Quentin here for about one year, and don't like it.*

Nigel: *Why not? What don't you like about it?*

Daniel: *It's this whole non-designated yard thing.*

Nigel: Okay. Let's give a little context here. In some prisons, the prisons actually have a couple yards. One is for the general population and then one is for people who are considered sensitive needs. And that could include sex offenders, gang dropouts.

Earlone: Snitches, cops, famous people, shit like that.

Nigel: Yeah. Because all those groups might be targeted for one reason or another. But at San Quentin, there's no separation. Everyone's together on one yard.

Daniel: Yeah, it's something new to me. Being here, there's very little structure. Growing up, I've always understood that life has rules. And if you don't follow those rules, it can make it very hard on your life. And so, with no rules being here with the different factions of individuals, whether they're drug addicts, EOP, those are extended outpatients. Those are individuals who have psychological issues. You got guys who are child molesters, rapists, and they feel as if they can do whatever whenever, because nobody's kind of regulating the rules.

That makes it difficult for me to be social because I'm not really sure who I'm talking to. And I get uncomfortable when I don't know who I'm talking to because I don't know what type of individual you are. And when I don't know what type of individual you are, it kind of be deemed as a threat.

Nigel: Mm, interesting. So, the rules you're talking about, I believe, are sort of--

Daniel: Politics.

Nigel: Yes, the politics. So, they're not the rules of the prison. They're the rules of the guys.

Daniel: Yeah.

Nigel: So, this really bothers you?

Daniel: Yeah.

Nigel: Do you think the structure and the politics actually offered privacy?

Daniel: Yeah, I mean, to a certain extent, they allow for you to live decently.

Nigel: Can you describe what that decent life was?

Daniel: More structured, opposed to what they have here, which is not structured whatsoever. There is very little structure. So, there's very little decency. People just do as they please as if it's okay with no repercussions.

Nigel: You were saying you knew what to expect, so there were rules and so you knew what rules to follow. And if you followed those rules, you could expect certain things to happen. And if you didn't, then maybe that's when unpredictable things would happen.

Daniel: Order.

Nigel: Order. Maybe instead of decent, it gave life order. Whether it's a good order or not, in a place that's really unpredictable, that was something to count on.

Daniel: Absolutely.-There's a saying that we have in prison, "You know what you got coming." You know that you're going to be in a cell, you know that you're going to have this much laundry or that you're going to have sheets and a blanket. You know that you're going to have three meals a day. That is order. You know that you're going to be able to go to the yard at a certain time of day, that you're going to be able to go and use the phone at a certain time of day. That's that kind of order.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Daniel: When it comes to the opposite end of that lack of order, when we have these politics at certain places, and now you come to a non-designated yard and you no longer have these politics, then that order kind of goes out the door.

Nigel: It seems to me that that's a kind of architecture in a way. It creates a structure for you to live in. It's almost like it creates this house around you. You described it as living decently. So, it's those rules that are the walls somehow that gave you some privacy. Does that make sense to you to think in terms of architecture?

Daniel: Yeah.

Earlone: I know Daniel feels like there's no social structure at San Quentin. But I think a lot of guys would say there definitely is one.

Nigel: More about that after the break.

Are you on the yard a lot?

Tam: Not a lot, no.

Nigel: I feel like I've never seen you, but then I realize you haven't been here that long.

Tam: Well, if I am, San Quentin is like kind of segregated. So, you just have to look where the Asians are.

Earlone: Here's Tam. The guy that told that story about the fight on the stairs.

Nigel: I know we've been talking about physical architecture, stairs and so on. But what he's talking about is a kind of architecture too. A social architecture.

Nigel: *Where are the Asians on the yard? I don't even know where their area is.*

Tam: *Okay. Do you know where the Blacks are?*

Nigel: *Well, they're in a lot of places.*

Tam: *Okay, this sounds so racist. They're at the basketball court. They are.*

[laughter].

Nigel: *I know. It's true though.*

Tam: *Okay. So, it sounds hella racist, but it's serious. They have all the tables.*

Nigel: *And the benches.*

Tam: *Yeah. They're by the tables right by the basketball court. That's the Black area. And then, the middle section is where the officer sits. Right there, there's the gay table. Is that what it's called? The gay guys. Then, the guys who play Dungeons & Dragons.*

Nigel: *Yeah. The L7s.*

Tam: *Right next to the tennis court.*

Nigel: *Oh, so you're near the tennis court pass where the nerds are.*

Tam: *And then, Asians are past them.*

Tam: *I didn't call them nerds. I said, "The guys who played Dungeons & Dragons," I want to point that out. She said, "the nerds."*

[laughter]

Nigel: *Only because we've interviewed them and they identify as nerds. Wait, where are the white guys?*

Tam: *They're next to Asians, right behind Asians.*

Nigel: *Okay. But they don't have a court.*

New York: *They got the tennis court.*

[laughter]

Nigel: *Could you both introduce yourselves please?*

CJ: *My name is Randy Jackson aka CJ. Yeah.*

Will: *Well, my name is William Cartlidge. I'm better known as Will because that makes sense.*

CJ: *That do make sense.*

[laughter]

Nigel: *I was just trying to figure out where the C comes from, for CJ?*

CJ: *My middle name is-- oh, gosh, is all right, Clifford.*

Nigel: *Oh, okay.*

Will: *[laughs]*

CJ: *Yeah. That's my middle name.*

New York: *I'm laughing with you.*

Will: *I'm laughing at you.*

[laughter]

Will: *Wow. Wait, what year were you born?*

CJ: *1987.*

Will: *Okay. Your parents watched a lot of The Cosbys, huh?*

CJ: *Yeah. I don't know what they were thinking.*

Will: *Talk about a backfire. [laughs]*

CJ: Yeah.

Nigel: So, what should we know about you, Will?

Will: Wow. What would you like to know about me? Outside of what's sitting in front of you, for those of you who can't see, I'm stunning. High cheekbones, slanted eyes, full lips, all that genetic gold that people pay for. This is natural.

Nigel: He's a very nice-looking person, I have to say.

[laughter]

Nigel: Well, since Will described himself, do you want to describe your face?

CJ: Well, my face, I'm going to be honest with the people, I'm a dork. Yes.

Will: That kind of stuff's in though.

CJ: Yeah, it is kind of in.

Will: Yeah, he's serving you rugged, thin. Svelte's the word actually.

[laughter]

Nigel: New York, What's making you laugh so hard?

New York: These two are hilarious.

[laughter]

Nigel: We wanted to talk to CJ and Will about this one, very well known, almost legendary spot in San Quentin, the dugout.

New York: Now, you know the story's all about how the yard's construction or architect of prison affects how you do your time.

CJ: Yeah.

New York: How does the dugout factor in how you do your time?

Will: *It kind of doesn't. For me, specifically, I don't know about you, CJ, it's a non-issue. It's just another place to go. The belief or the assertion or whatnot is that, "Oh, that's where the gays go to fag off," or something like that, or do sexual things. And I'm sure that's happened there before but that's not what everyone goes over there for.*

Nigel: *I mean, I hear that all the time, honestly. How did that reputation get started?*

Will: *It's semi covered. It offers you from shade in the sun. And then in the evening, it's a little darker than most areas in the yard. And there's a tower above it that you can't really see directly. So, if you wanted to do something titillating or taboo, you can go there and probably get away with it, but that's just the stereotype that comes with sitting there. And so, it's kind of irritating.*

Nigel: *I've heard so many guys talk about the dugout, I mean, for years. And straight guys specifically, it's always straight dudes. They're frigging fascinated by it. And to me, it really speaks to the homophobia that you're constantly running into, or I'm constantly running into in prison. There's an obsession. An obsession with anything gay.*

Earlone: *Nah, it ain't that. It's just people love something to talk about.*

Nigel: *I don't know how to make this audible, and hopefully, you can see this Earlone. I'm rolling my eyes. [laughs] Sorry.*

CJ: *I've never done anything sexually in there nor have I seen anything sexually in there. But I know that that has been a place where I can go and have a real conversation with friends. There's been a couple conversations that we've had in there, and they've been serious conversations just about life and about getting my life together, what direction do I want to move in life and things like that. It's a really cool place to reflect. So, I've never really seen it as a sexual place, even though I've heard the rumors about it.*

Will: *I think that says more about the other people than it does kind of about us. Specific, when it comes to anything gay, it's like this super fear that people have. And I think that's strange to me. Dudes that I've come to know that are actually straight don't really care. They're comfortable with themselves. There's this assumption that, "Oh, you're gay. So, you must want me." Are you serious? It's offensive.*

New York: *But I'm going to say this too. When I want to talk to somebody, I walk laps. That's the usual San Quentin thing.*

Will: *That's an option.*

New York: *We walk laps. I've never had a place to go sit to go talk to somebody. And so, I'm jealous. You guys get to have sex in prison. You took the dugout. I mean, damn. Can I have something?*

[chuckles]

Will: *No. Wait, no, let me give--[crosstalk] We'll gloss over the whole "you guys" thing. No one took the dugout. If anything, you people, you people, you guys have ceded it because of your preconceived notions, whether they have some basis in reality or not, like, "Oh, that's where they do this. So, we're going to stay away." Well, you've limited yourself. Why do you want to live with limitations? You're already in prison. You already get locked up every day. They ring a bell and you go here and they tell you to [mimics buzz sound] you got to sit down and do this and that. So, why further limit yourself based off of things that don't matter?*

Nigel: *Are you saying anyone can go there?*

Will: *Anyone absolutely can. It's just that most people, for good or for bad, have the mind frame that our dear New York here has, like, "Oh, that's the gay area and that's where they do things. So, I'm not going to go over there." And that's more about not wanting someone else to think something of you.*

Nigel: *So, there's all this, to me, tedious, gossip and kind of titillation about what's happening at the dugout, but really what's going on in there is something that's universal. It's about having this place that's just private and where you can kick back and relax a little bit.*

What about the architecture of that place encourages? It sounds like emotional intimacy more than physical intimacy.

Will: *It's out in the open, but it is apart.*

Nigel: *So, what this place sounds like, it's a place out in a public space where you can get some sense of privacy, and privacy, it makes you feel safe, it makes you feel emotionally open, makes you feel connected to the people that are there. So, to me, what you're describing is a safe place to be, in a place that isn't always safe?*

Will: *You're absolutely right. Yeah.*

Earlone: *We're back at the California Institution for Women, CIW, outside of Los Angeles.*

Nigel: *It was a really hot day and there was almost no one outside. Except this one woman, singing.*

Pamela: *[in a singsong voice] He washed away all my fears and he made me whole.*

[PA system]

Nigel: In my memory, I see it like this muted, washed-out photograph. She's standing there, wearing this kind of grayish prison mumu. She's holding this Bible really close to her heart. And she's standing in this desolate open space with her eyes closed.

Pamela: *He changed my life complete. And now I sit, I sit at His feet.*

Nigel: It's just like singing to nobody.

Earlonne: Yeah, and at first, we weren't sure she knew we were there. But every now and again, she'd open her eyes and kind of acknowledge us a little bit.

Nigel: Yeah. It was kind of awkward because she had created this sphere for herself, this private space that she was stepping in and out of. And so are we.

Pamela: Well, my name is Ms. Pamela Yvette Blunt. I am a gospel singer. I've been down since 7/7/96.

Nigel: *So, yesterday when we saw you outside, what were you doing out there?*

Pamela: *I was praising the Lord. Every time I go out there, that's what I'm out there for trying to spread the word.*

Nigel: *When you were out there, singing the gospel, what does it feel like for you?*

Pamela: *[singing] Hallelujah. Give me that old-time religion. Talking about religion. Good religion like it used to be. Give me that old-time religion, Lord. Hallelujah's good enough for me.*

That's what it feels like.

Nigel: *That's what it looked like.*

Pamela: *Hallelujah.*

Nigel: Other than Pamela and a few other women sitting around picnic benches, it was like, where the heck is everyone?

Earlonne: Yeah, because at San Quentin, if you want to find people, you just go to the yard. It's packed.

Nigel: Totally.

Earlonne: But this was a new place for us, we had to look around and search a bit.

Nigel: CIW is laid out a little bit like a community college, like a bunch of one-story buildings connected by paths.

Earlonne: We headed to an area off to the side of the prison that had some brownish-beige trailer buildings.

[background conversations]

Earlonne: You walk in and there's this narrow hallway and then they had offices on the outside if I can remember it correctly.

Nigel: Yeah, exactly. Inside one of the rooms was a group of women. They were part of a creative writing group called Poetic Justice.

Teacher: *I have hope.*

Group: *I have hope.*

Teacher: *I have the power to change my world.*

Group: *I have the power to change my world.*

Earlonne: Yeah, and they were doing this affirmation-type thing.

Teacher: *I have a voice.*

Group: *I have a voice.*

Teacher: *I have hope.*

Group: *I have hope.*

Teacher: *I have the power to change my voice.*

Group: *I have the power to change my world and voice.*

[laughter]

Earlonne: A few doors down, we found another group of women getting some exercise in.

Physical Trainer: *Nine, eight. Use your chairs.*

Nigel: There were about six of them, maybe in their late 60s, early 70s. A couple of them had walkers but they were all watching this video with this pretty hunky guy doing leg lifts.

Physical Trainer: *Good work. Five, four, three, almost there. Two.*

Nigel: This is the Senior Center.

Physical Trainer: *All right. It's time, let's switch to the other side.*

Earlonne: There were bookshelves with books and carpet on the floor. There was nothing about it that looked like prison.

Nigel: And there were plants, and I think they were real.

Earlonne: And they had about ten of these little funny bikes.

Nigel: Not really bikes. They were actually just pedals, like one under each chair. So, we sat down and started talking with a woman named Christine.

Nigel: *What are we doing right now?*

Christine: *We are having a conversation and we're using these things. I think on TV, they're called QVs or something like that. Anyway, pedaling.*

Nigel: I don't know what they're called and I saw them for the first time about a week ago and I was laughing, because it didn't seem like a good workout, but I'm wrong. I'm wrong. It's actually a workout.

Christine: *Yes.*

Earlonne: *They're called FitDesk Under Desk Ellipticals.*

Nigel: Yeah. So, it's like we're riding a bike, but our butts are not moving. It's like a workout from your knee down.

Christine: You can read, you can have a conversation or whatever and you can be moving in some way so that you don't get rid of those things that you get blood clots in your legs.

Nigel: Good circulation. Do you ever get out of breath doing it?

Christine: I walk a lot of the day, so I have pretty good breath. But I'm getting a little out of breath right now since I'm talking at the same time.

Nigel: What does the center mean to you? What does this space represent to you?

Candace: Well, right now, it means a really cool place to sit when it's so frigging hot outside. [laughs]

Nigel: This is Candace.

Candace: And that's not a small thing here. But I enjoy coming in. I'm one of those people, I don't like a lot of activities. So, I go and do the puzzles or I bring my book. I come in here and read. We can look at magazines. We can look at a movie. Thursday is movie day. We have the privilege to do what we want to do. So, I think that's one of the things that makes it so nice. We don't have to do something, but we could do whatever we want.

Nigel: Are there things about how the prison is designed that make it difficult for a senior?

Candace: Older people?

Christine: Well, it's all designed for people because old people didn't used to be in prison.

Earlone: Here's Christine again.

Christine: The oldest people were maybe 60 something, maybe, and that was really old. And now it's 90. So, yeah, everything is designed for young people. The showers, the halls are really narrow. The doors open up, and you have to really be careful about not getting hit. Everybody moves at a fast pace and you're moving at a slow pace. It's not designed for old people.

Nigel: And what about hearing, as your hearing starts to go?

Christine: I have a friend who's deaf and she has a hard time. Although ADA tries to help her out, but, yeah, they make announcements and she doesn't hear them. Hopefully, someone will

come and tell her. No, prison, I'll say just one more time, it's not designed for old people. It's not an old people's home at all. We're all in here. And they don't really like adapting to us but they have to, and we don't really like it either, but we're here. So, we do the best we can.

Nigel: It was moving to see women making space to experience some freedom or comfort. And I admire the way that people can sometimes will into existence the thing that they need.

Earlonne: Yeah, but there's only so much you can do. At the end of the day, it is prison.

Candace: *I went to grief group for months and months and months because I was grieving my freedom. And I got to the point where it's just like a death. That was a death to me. So, I had to really adjust my mental capabilities to live like that and not be totally crawling like a worm on the ground because I'm not going to be here forever.*

Nigel: *I've never heard about a grief group, but that makes a lot of sense to me.*

Candace: *I think anybody that first comes to person should take grief group because you are at a loss. You lose your freedom, you lose your family connection right there. Maybe children, maybe a husband. It is a grief. It's a process.*

Nigel: When Candace mentioned this idea of grief, of course, she's talking about grieving the loss of family and grieving freedom.

Earlonne: Right.

Nigel: But I think there's also another kind of grief. We've been talking about the physical spaces, the hallway, the stairs, and the yards. I imagine that they're also a reminder of that loss. It's a kind of grief for the associations and connections that you had with the outside world, that those spaces remind you of.

Earlonne: Mm-hmm.

Kathryn: *Sometimes in the rec field, yeah, it's called the rec field, recreation field. But when I'm way out and on the track, I don't know, I feel like sadness comes over me a lot.*

Nigel: *Why? Why do you think?*

Kathryn: *I'm so close to the gate. There's a chain link fence right there and the free world's right on the other side. I start thinking more about wanting to be free out there and return.*

Earlonne: Thanks, Kathryn. Can't wait to see you on the other side of that fence.

Nigel: Special thanks to the women at Poetic Justice, and to Lieutenant Newborg, Acting Chief Deputy Warden Lewis, Warden Core, and TV specialist, Mr. Mumm at CIW.

Earlone: This episode was produced by me, Earlonne Woods, Nigel Poor, Neroli Price, Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, Tony Tafoya, and Bruce Wallace, with help from Rhashiyd Zinnamon.

Nigel: It was sound designed and engineered by Earlonne Woods, with help from Fernando Arruda.

Earlone: It features music by Antwan Williams, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Lace and Abdul, and David Jassy.

Nigel: Amy Standen edits our show. Shabnam Sigman is our managing producer, and Bruce Wallace is our executive producer.

Earlone: Thanks to Warden Ron Broomfield. And as you know, every episode has to be approved by this cat here.

Lieutenant Sam Robinson: This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson at San Quentin State Prison. And I tell you, this is another episode that was really, really thought-provoking to me. Something that I never thought of. I think most of our listeners. when do you ever think that when's the last time that you've taken steps, because you've walked up some steps? I mean, just thinking about the facilities and how different the experience inside can be from outside, the things that you just take for granted. So, with that, I will say that I approve this episode.

Nigel: This episode was made possible by The Just Trust, working to amplify voices, vision, and power of communities that are transforming the justice system.

Earlone: Don't forget to sign up for our newsletter, The Lowdown, where you can learn more about each episode and find out what the Ear Hustle team is up to. Subscribe at earhustlesq.com/newsletter.

Nigel: That's also where you can find our merch. Mugs, sweatshirts, lots of good stuff.

Earlone: This season, our episode illustrations are coming from guys who are part of the San Quentin Arts Program. Any merch you buy on our website, 25% of the proceeds go to support that program.

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

Earlone: Some of the best podcasts around. Hear more at *radiotopia.fm*.

Nigel: And when we're not in San Quentin, we record at KQED studios in San Francisco.

Earlone: I'm Earlone Woods

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlone and Nigel: Thanks for listening.

CJ: My middle name is Deshawn. Very ethnic sounding.

Will: I would definitely go with Deshawn.

CJ: Really?

Will: Any day of the week. Yes.

CJ: I think William sounds very like white bread. People are like, "Oh, he sounds responsible." And then, I pop up like, "Hi. How about that credit card?"

[laughter]

End of Episode

[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]