

Ear Hustle
Episode 100: Bunkies
December 20, 2023

Lt. Sam Robinson: I get to be me? [laughs] Hello, Ear Hustle World. This is retired Lt. Sam Robinson, the former public information officer at San Quentin State Prison. I have the honor on this 100th Episode, who would have thought several years ago we'd get to 100? Who would have thought we would have done a podcast, if you'd ask me. But here I am. Nigel and Earlonne, thank you for giving me this honor to do this listening alert today. And so, this is something different than I've done in the past. Hopefully, I'm just as good as at the intro as I was at the outro. Here we go. The following episode of Ear Hustle contains language that may not be suitable for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

[Ear Hustle Intro]

Stephanie: *Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome Latham B. Welcome, welcome, welcome to our big family, and then it goes on to.*

Stephanie/Amy: *Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome, Latham B. Welcome, welcome, welcome, to our family.*

Stephanie: *We don't do drugs. We don't drink. We don't pee in the shower. Welcome, welcome, welcome.*

Stephanie/Amy: *Welcome Latham B.*

[intro music]

Earlonne: Nyge, Nyge, Nyge, can you believe that this is our 100th Episode?

Nigel: Amazing, right? As I like to say, it's a C note.

Earlonne: 100.

Nigel: 100, my friend.

Earlonne: Started when I was inside. Now, I'm outside.

Nigel: Yep. Aren't you so glad we're on this adventure together?

Earlonne: Hell, yeah, I'm glad we on this adventure together. It's been an enjoyable, enjoyable journey. I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor, and this is Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia.

Earlonne: Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Boom.

Nigel: So, to celebrate our hundredth, we are revisiting our very first episode, Cellies. Remember that one, Earlonne?

Earlonne: Yes, I do.

Nigel: *Earlonne, this is our first episode, so it's probably a good time to tell everybody what ear hustling means.*

Earlonne: *Ear hustling is prison slang for eavesdropping, listening in to something that may not be your business. And today, we're going to hear about cellies.*

Nigel: *It's a big deal in prison who your cellmate is. Isn't it?*

Earlonne: *Huge.*

Nigel, we sound good.

Nigel: You think so?

Earlonne: I think we was on point, listening to that.

Nigel: [laughs] All right, all right.

Earlonne: So, yes, we are revisiting that episode, but this time with a twist. It's the women's prison edition.

Nigel: All the stories in this 100th episode come from the California Institution for Women.

Earlonne: And that means we're not talking about cellies anymore. We're going to have to change that language up just a bit.

Nigel: *Why do you think women are bunkies and men are cellies?*

Woman: *I think it's just the culture. Because when men write us, they usually say cellie. We're just saying roommate or bunkie.*

Nigel: *When you hear the word cellie, what does it make you think about?*

Woman: *Men's prison. Absolutely.*

Nigel: *Before we go further, do you call someone your cellie or bunkie?*

Woman: *I call them my bunkie.*

Nigel: *Bunkie. Okay.*

Woman: *So, here I think it tends to be bunkie. We refer to each other as bunkies.*

Nigel: *Bunkies. We should call this episode Bunkies.*

Earlonne: *That's what I was just gonna say.*

Nigel. *Yeah. Bunkies.*

Earlonne: So, listeners probably know that the California Institution for Women--

Nigel: Or CIW, as it's called.

Earlonne: Yep. CIW is the women's prison near LA where we've been spending a lot of time lately.

Nigel: *Nice to meet y'all. Nice to meet you y'all, nice to meet y'all. Hey, nice to meet to meet you, nice to meet-- [crosstalk]*

Earlone: They're starting to get to know us, huh?

CIW Women: *I like all your podcasts. All my little friends know this, "They're like, listen to me."*

Nigel: We're still learning the ropes, but it is getting easier to find people who want to sit down and talk with us.

CIW Women: *Thank you so much [unintelligible [00:05:30] All right, y'all. That's Ear Hustle, the podcast. Oh, yeah, sometimes they go interview people here and say--*

Earlone: So, on a recent visit, we spent a couple of days talking to people at CIW about bunkies, and it gave us a chance to revisit a debate that's as old as Ear Hustle itself.

Nigel: All right, Earlone, you know me well enough to know I'm never going to let this go. [Earlone laughs] It is the question that hangs over both of our heads, is looking for a cellie or bunkie like dating?

Earlone: Still thinking that way, huh, Nyge?

Nigel: Yeah, I'm pondering it.

Okay. This is an ongoing conversation Earlone and I--

Earlone: *Ongoing debate.*

Nigel: *Debate. Okay. I think that trying to find a bunkie or cellie is comparable to dating without the sex part because you're trying to find someone you're compatible with. He hates when I say that. What do you think?*

Stephanie: *I actually agree.*

Earlone: I think that long pause in there is you doing a little victory dance, Nigel.

Nigel: [laughs] Really? Is that what you think? I suppose it's possible.

Earlone: Not so fast, though.

Stephanie: *I actually think of it more of like a job. Like you're interviewing. You have a set of criteria that you're looking for. It starts off as sort of a professional relationship. And then develops into a friendship. If that works out in the long term.*

Earlone: *Thanks for denouncing that.*

Nigel: *I said it's like dating. [laughs] We'll never agree on this.*

Earlone: *No, no, no, we never agree on this one.*

Nigel: *Do you think that trying to find someone to live with is a little bit like dating?*

Stephanie: *Why not?*

Earlonne: Thank you, thank you.

Stephanie: It's going to get weird. Yeah

Speaker: Okay. No, because there are some roommates that do date and I think-- no, no.

Earlonne: Hey, I'm appreciating the answers.

Nigel: Right. I'm still going to say it's like dating. It's still like dating?

Stephanie: It's not like dating.

Amy: Yeah, it's not. Some roommates don't even share food and stuff. You just share the space. Yeah. You don't have to.

Earlonne: I think you lost this one, Nyge.

[laughter]

Stephanie: My name is Stephanie. I've been incarcerated since June of 2009.

Amy: Hi, my name is Amy. I've been here in this institution for about eight years.

Earlonne: When Amy first arrived at the California Institution for Women. Stephanie was one of the first people she met.

Amy: Somebody told me, "You look like you want to be in a good program." I said, "Well, yes, because I want to go home." So, she said, "Why don't you talk to that one?" And they just pointed to her. So, I went up to her and I said, "Hey, I'm new here." And she was very welcoming. She just came from shopping, and she had ice cream. And I didn't have a spoon with me. And she used that lid to scoop up some ice cream and gave it to me so that I could have some.

Nigel: Wow.

Stephanie: [crosstalk] And we've been friends ever since.

Nigel: What was it about her that made you think, "This is somebody I want to be friends with?"

Stephanie: I think it must have just been her aura that she was nice, smile, friendly.

Earlonne: How many arguments?

Stephanie: Zero. We don't-

Earlonne: Zero?

Stephanie: No, we don't argue. Of course, we're not in the same room.

Earlonne: Yep. Amy and Stephanie aren't bunkies, which is surprising.

Nigel: Yes. Just because you get along with someone doesn't mean you're compatible to live together.

Stephanie: *I don't think she would ever live with me.*

Nigel: *I've seen where she lives. It's incredibly organized.*

Stephanie: *And you haven't seen where I live.*

Amy: *I will never live with her.*

Nigel: *Can you describe about herself?*

Stephanie: *Please don't.*

Amy: *I don't want to lose the friendship.*

Stephanie: *I'm basically a clean slob, and I claim it.*

Earlonne: *You proud?*

Stephanie: *I am proud that I'm a clean slob. And it works to my advantage. That's all I'm going to say.*

Nigel: *I feel like you'd be such interesting roommates if you did actually live together.*

Stephanie: *No.*

Nigel: *It couldn't happen.*

Stephanie: *Mm-mm.*

Earlonne: *They're preserving their friendship.*

Nigel: *So, Amy and Stephanie aren't bunkies, but together they work on a project at the prison that, Earlonne, I have to say, is pretty charming.*

Earlonne: *Yep. They're the Welcoming Committee.*

Nigel: *So, what is this Welcoming Committee?*

Stephanie: *August of 2019, a female inmate moved in, and nobody knew her. And within four days, she committed suicide in the room in our unit. I just really felt bad that nobody knew who she was. God put it on my heart to start the Unity Committee. It just came to me because I keep track of everybody who comes in, with the date they moved in, their name. Every time somebody comes into the unit, we welcome them. Then we have a tour committee that gives a tour of the unit, tells them about some of the rules that the officers want to enforce. We have a birthday board, and then after we welcome them, we were giving out gift bags with some snacks, some candy and little soap, some drink, just something to go back and say, "Hey thanks for being a part of our unit."*

Nigel: *So, I have to break in here and ask you, Earlonne, is this what happens when a new guy shows up at a men's prison?*

Earlonne: *That they get a welcoming committee?*

Nigel: *Yeah. With a little gift bag and cute little things inside of it.*

Earlone: Huh. [chuckles] In the men's prison, it's more according to either your race or your gang. The guys in your race or your gang, they pull you in, and it is expected of those cats to bring you some type of care package which may have toothpaste, deodorant, soap, some food, something like that. So, they're trying to hook you up while at the same time observing who you are, how you get down.

Nigel: Oh, are they observing you because they want to figure out your birthday to get it on that birthday board?

Earlone: Hell no.

Stephanie: *Lately, we came up with a little different twist. We have a little song that the girls sing and don't ask me to sing because I'm really a good singer.*

Nigel: *Oh, come on.*

Earlone: *Yeah, come on, you cannot bring that up and not give at least one lyric.*

Stephanie: *Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome Latham B. Welcome, welcome, welcome to our big family. And then it goes on to--*

Stephanie/Amy: *Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome Latham B-*

Nigel: *Earlone, we know this one. Shall we join?*

Stephanie/Amy: *Welcome, welcome, welcome-*

Earlone: *Shall we?*

Stephanie/Amy: *-to our family. We-*

Nigel/Earlone: *Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome Latham B.*

Earlone: *This is Latham B*

Unison: *Welcome, welcome, welcome--*

Nigel: *To our big family.*

Stephanie/Amy: *Welcome Latham B*

Earlone: *Welcome to our community.*

Nigel: *Oh, okay. We've got some different words.*

Earlone: *I said community.*

Nigel: *That's fine.*

Earlone: *Yeah. I didn't remix they shit, damn.*

Nigel: *You got to make it your own.*

Stephanie: *We don't do drugs. We don't drink. We don't pee in the shower. Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome-*

Stephanie/Amy: Welcome Latham B.

Earlonne: Is peeing in the shower an issue?

Stephanie: There are issues, yes, besides urinating.

Amy: Beside urine, yes. It was just announcement made in our unit last week about please don't do a number two in the shower. I know, I know. I had to say it.

Nigel: Does that happen?

Stephanie: Apparently so.

Earlonne: Outside of a toddler who does a deuce in the shower?

Nigel: Someone that's mentally ill, that's not a normal thing to do. I mean, peeing is okay, but-- ugh.

Earlonne: People are going to be like, "What, you pee in the shower?" Everybody pee in the shower.

Nigel: So, since Stephanie's part of the Welcoming Committee, I thought it'd be interesting to try a little role play.

I just arrived. Can you tell me what would happen as you're welcoming me?

Stephanie: I would come to your room and I'd say, "Hi, I'm Stephanie."

Nigel: Nigel Poor.

Stephanie: Okay, Nigel.

Earlonne: Her nickname is Splenda.

Stephanie: Splenda? [Nigel laughs] Okay, so you'd like to go by Nigel or you'd like to go by Splenda?

Nigel: Let's go by Nigel.

Stephanie: Nigel. Okay. Thank you. And will you be in our unit for a while? Will you be here for a while? Okay. Would you be interested in telling me your birthday month?

Nigel: June.

Stephanie: June. Okay. So, next year in June, we'll put your name up on the birthday board, and then maybe somebody will see it and then want to give you a little snack. So, then I'll write down the day you moved in. So, today is the 21 August. Do you have any questions right now that I can answer for you?

Nigel: Could you give me a little preview of some of the do's and don'ts because I'm so new.

Stephanie: Okay.

Nigel: Don't know anything.

Stephanie: Yes, some of the officers really- How you dress outside your room. Some of them don't even want you just wearing boxers inside the room. And they'll announce it. "Hey, when we have count, don't have boxers on, make sure you're fully dressed, appropriately dressed." Some of them don't even like if you have a tank top and you go outside with your tank top on that they can see your bra. So, it's best to just be pretty much fully clothed. If you're a golden girl, but you don't look like you're over 60. Is it 50? How old do you--?

Nigel: 50.

Stephanie: 50? You don't look like you're old.

Nigel: I'm a golden girl.

Stephanie: Oh, you're a golden girl. Okay, so then you can wear your muumuu even outside the unit if it's really hot. But you look younger.

Nigel: Do I have to wear a bra with a muumuu?

Stephanie: Yeah, you probably should, because I think it is a rule that you're supposed to wear your bra and some unfortunately don't. If the officers see you and don't want to see all that, they'll let you know and they could write you up. So, we don't want you to have any write ups.

Nigel: What about some of the rules with the other ladies in the unit?

Amy: Just make sure you're minding your own business. If you have any issues, do not go to the officer right away. Go to somebody who knows how things are done, or go to the IAC, Inmate Advisory Council. Do not go straight to the officer.

Nigel: Okay. Could I come to one of you two. I mean, you seem--

Amy: Yeah, we can help you. We can help you.

Nigel: It seems pretty much the number one rule of bunkies is do not give a CO any reason to come to your room.

Earlonne: You better not bring the police because everybody got something going on. Even if it's something as small as an extra pillow, extra mattress.

Nigel: Yeah. Or a piece of clothing that's not strictly prison issue.

Earlonne: Right. The one thing you don't want is somebody's stuff to get taken because of something you did.

Nigel: So, that's a big one. But there's a lot of smaller things too that can drive a bunkie nuts.

Desiree: This is Desiree. And my pet peeve is because I'm on the lower bunk. It's somebody on the top bunk brushing stuff off the top of their bed that could fall onto my bed.

Jazmine: Hi, my name is Jazmine and my pet peeve for a bunkie is when they fart and they just think like, "Oh, since I'm on the bottom, she can't smell it," and I'll be up there like death. [laughs]

Desiree: Clean up after yourself. I don't want to be picking up your hair. And don't walk in the cell with your shoes on because I like to a clean floor. I hate dirty socks. It sounds dumb, but I hate dirty socks.

Jazmine: I like to step off my bed with my shoes off. I don't want to have to, "Oh, you got to put on your chancas or your little slippers and all that." I like to step on a clean floor.

Desiree: My pet peeve is being woken up out of a good sleep. Don't do it. Let me sleep.

Nigel: One of my personal pet peeves is seeing people cut their nails, and they just let them go. What is the correct protocol when you're living in a small space when you cut your nails?

Desiree: My roommates usually they do it over the toilet or in the shower or somewhere where they can be disposed of properly. But when my younger years, I hate to admit this, but I've gotten in fights over it because it's just gross. Especially if they go flying.

Nigel: Do with a clipper, they just go flying in the eye with your--.

Desiree: Yeah. [laughs] [crosstalk] Pinch the clipper on the sides. If you hold the clipper on the sides, the nail stays right inside, and you could just put it in. I have a bowl that I use as a trash can at the end of my bed.

Earlonne: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. Don't tell me I'm this year's old and I'm finding out there's a way, a proper way to use fingernails.

Desiree: Yeah. So that your nails don't go flying all over other people's beds. That is so gross.

Nigel: Also, like, something, I feel like it's a little private, no one wants to see another person cut their nails.

Desiree: I can deal-- because we do everything else in front of each other.

Nigel: Okay, okay.

Desiree: But just don't let them land on my bed.

Nigel: Earlonne, I have to say that the cells at CIW are much nicer than the ones at San Quentin.

Earlonne: Oh, no, definitely. They're a little bit bigger.

Nigel: Yep. And they have windows outside.

Earlonne: The prisons that were built, I guess I want to say, in that era had windows that open.

Nigel: Yeah, yes, yes.

Earlonne: You know what I am saying, most prisons don't have that at all.

Nigel: I will tell you this, the first time I saw a cell at San Quentin, I remember it so clearly, I almost passed out. I could not believe how horrible it was, how inhumane it was. When I saw the cell at CIW, I was like, "Okay, I don't want to live here, but I could do it. I could do it."

Earlonne: No, no. Definitely, they're a lot bigger. Give you a lot more space. When I have saw the cell at San Quentin on the news, I was like, "Oh, hell no. I can't live in that little ass, tiny ass coffin."

Nigel: Yeah, and they're dark too. They're so dark.

Earlonne: *Hello, hello. How you doing?*

Nigel: *We're walking down the hallway. The fans are so loud here. We're walking to Jessica's room.*

Earlonne: So, while we were at CIW, we met a woman named Jessica who agreed to let us check out the room she shares with her bunkie.

Jessica: *This is it at its finest. Not totally tidy though.*

Nigel: *Okay. It's pretty tidy.*

Nigel: Jessica's room, it was well organized, it was clean. I guess if I were pushed to have to pick a bunkie quickly and if Jessica would have me, I mean, she seemed like a good candidate.

And she's got, like, a cute little doily. I don't know what that is, a cover, light cover. Very old fashioned. She's got a lot of books, and she does have a dream catcher above her bed.

Jessica: *And I have my tortillas under here.*

Nigel: *What?*

Jessica: *I have an obsession with tortillas. Yes.*

Nigel: *Do you sleep on them?*

Jessica: *No, they're just hidden, so nobody steals them.*

Nigel: *Those are major tortillas. Those are 18 inches across.*

Earlonne: *What do you think about the clothespins? How are they used?*

Nigel: *So, she's using the clothespins, it looks to hold up some antenna. Oh. She painted them white to match the wall, so she obviously cares about decoration. It's very clean. We do well as bunkies. Even though, I'm way older than you, I wouldn't be a pain.*

Nigel: So, on the surface, Jessica seemed she'd be a great bunkie. But I do wonder if it's a good idea to commit so quickly.

Earlonne: Nah, it's not because you're only seeing what you're seeing in that moment. You know what I'm saying? I mean, everybody acts great on the first few dates, right?

Nigel: Wow. [crosstalk] You are just feeding me these lines. Oh, my God.

[laughter]

Nigel: Yeah. I mean, clearly, you want to know a little bit more about this person's history. Like, how many people have they been with in the past? And what happened with those relationships?

Jessica: Since I've been to CIW, I'm on number 15 for bunkies.

Earlonne: Okay.

Nigel: 15 in four years?

Jessica: Yes.

Earlonne: And is it because of you?

Jessica: Well, I like to think not, but it probably was a little bit of me through the years. Okay, roommate number one, still here. She was really intense, and it was my first prison experience. She kept saying that my sheet was stinky after two days, and she wanted to wash it in the trash can for me, so that just made me really uncomfortable. And roommate number two was the chip muncher. She would eat these chips for an hour every night. Number three, that one accused me of having a stinky locker after I moved in. But then she came back three days later, and she had found a piece of cheese and it was her. Four, that one was actually pretty cool. She would get the holy ghost every day. She'd start shrieking like a She-Devil. I was like, "Oh, wow, this is pretty cool. I've never seen this." She paroled.

Roommate number five, she is still here. I could tell stories, but I can't. Number six, she was very young. She was the one that blared the rap music all day. She was way too cool for me. Let's see, seven, that was an overnight stay. Number eight, she was awesome. Number nine, she was really cool, but I had this thing, I think it's called misophonia, where you can't handle little noises like smacking when you eat. And so, we were on COVID lockdown and I thought I was going to go crazy. So, I moved. 10,, she was nice. She moved out. I guess she didn't like me anymore. Number 11, she would collect these stupid little medicine cups.

So, one day I went to flush the toilet and I was like, "This thing is overflowing." It's a Saturday morning. Everybody's asleep. Well, next thing I know, our room is full of water. I am like, "What is going on?" I was like, all right, I'm getting to the bottom of this. So, I just put my hand down there and pulled out this medicine cup. Oh, my God, I was so mad. And I spent the next two hours squeegeeing water out of our room. What number am I on?

Nigel: 12.

Jessica: Oh, my God, Oh, that's the one that talked on the phone all day. And we were coworkers, that didn't work out. Never move in with coworkers. That is the cardinal rule. 13, She's still here, she was wonderful. And then my temper got the best of me, so I got kicked out of the unit. 14 was here, she is paroled. And she was wonderful. Best bunkie I've ever had.

Nigel: You've mentioned temper. What is this temper like and what makes it flare?

Jessica: It's pretty explosive, but I'm working on it.

Earlonne: Do you know the root problem of it?

Jessica: Probably anger.

Earlonne: From?

Jessica: *Just angry at myself.*

Earlonne: *For?*

Jessica: *Getting myself here, throwing away my life.*

Earlonne: Yeah, that anger sometimes probably get projected towards their cellies. You know what I'm saying? So, 15 cellies in four years. Yeah, it comes out definitely.

Nigel: Yeah. I mean, another reason why you want to know a little bit about somebody before you commit to living with them.

Okay, I have another question for you. So just imagine that Earlonne was a female. We're both females.

Okay. So, at this point, we were talking to a woman named Amber, trying to figure out who would be a better bunkie for her. Earlonne, you or me.

Earlonne: And we noted Amber is way into astrology.

Nigel: *What's your sign?*

Earlonne: *Leo.*

Nigel: *He's a Leo. Okay. No, wait, wait, wait a second.*

Earlonne: *I'm running this motherfucker.*

Nigel: *I'm either a Cancer or Gemini. I'm June 21.*

Amber: *Oh, that's cool. I get along with them.*

Nigel: *Okay. So, from meeting us in our signs, who do you think would be your better bunkie?*

Amber: *I'm a Leo's polarity, okay? I keep getting Leos. I have to actually do a clearing session on Leos because I keep attracting them and I do not get along with Leos. Leos have to make it all about them. They got to be the star of the show. They need all the service, everything. Got to be top of the chain. That's why he got this podcast. It's okay. They usually rise to the top like Meghan Markle. But let me tell you, I don't care what you got going. I'm going to ignore you.*

Earlonne: *Nigel.*

Nigel: *[laughs]*

Amber: *So, they can't stand somebody like that.*

Earlonne: *It's not going to work.*

Nigel: *[laughs]* Yep. You made this very clear in that first episode, Cellies.

Earlonne: *Yep. Let's play a little clip.*

Nigel: So, what's your biggest fear about finding a cellie?

Earlonne: I have several fears, but one of them is someone that talks too much, that's always talking. Every time you look around, he's talking, talking, talking through the TV shows, talking when you walk in, talking when you get up in the morning. I hate that shit.

Nigel: It bugged you back then, and it bugs you now. I mean, talking too much, it's a pet peeve for both of us.

What's your pet peeve?

Earlonne: She talked too fast.

Nigel: He does not like people who talk a lot.

Earlonne: See, we'll get along, but it'd be like she'd probably be talking and I'd be listening to the TV show.

Amber: And he'll-- yeah, zone out.

Earlonne: And I zone out, and I'll be like, yeah.

Amber: And guess what, I don't even care if folks do that.

Earlonne: You'll hear that. Yeah, every now and again, uh-huh, uh-huh.

Nigel: You really think you could drown that out with a TV?

Earlonne: You could try, but they'll keep talking and they'll keep talking. It might get louder and louder. [laughs]

Nigel: Oh, that would drive me crazy. Okay, so we've got more stories about challenging bunkies after the break.

Did you have a cellie?

Gladys: Yeah, I did, but she and I didn't talk.

Nigel: This is Gladys. We met her in a previous episode, Earlonne, the one we did about being a senior in prison at CIW?

Earlonne: Yep. I remember Gladys. We met her in the library.

Did y'all not talk because of disagreements, or did y'all not talk because it was like--

Gladys: She was young and, yeah, we didn't agree on anything.

Earlonne: Does it become hostile?

Gladys: Not for me. For her, it probably did. She would do stuff, wait for me to be asleep and start crunching noodles, bang her cup on the bunk above me, go flush the toilet. You know when you were a kid and you did something wrong, and sometimes you would do it just to aggravate your parents?

Nigel: Yeah.

Gladys: *That's what it was. But I'm not your mother.*

Nigel: *When you're older in prison, do you think that younger people are trying to make you a mother figure or an auntie?*

Gladys: *Some of them, yeah, some of them are like, I've had them come and tell me, "Oh, could you be my--" "No, I already have family."*

Nigel: *And you're very clear?*

Gladys: *I don't come to prison to have family.*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Gladys: *No, no. I mean, I could be very friendly with you, but we're not family. Family ties are very, very dear to me. And not everybody, even some of my family, is not my family.*

Shannon: *There was this one lady. She's gone now. I guess I could talk about her.*

Earlonne: This here is Shannon.

Nigel: So, the story she's telling us now is about this one notorious bunkie, someone we actually heard about from several people at CIW, a bunkie named Money.

Shannon: *And she didn't let her roommates come in the room with their shoes on. They were not allowed to use the bathroom in the room or the sink. They had to brush their teeth out in a dayroom bathroom. If they came in again, they had to take off their shoes and be very, very quiet. They couldn't stay in the room. They even had to pay her for the locker they're assigned locker. Yeah.*

Nigel: *Could she go to the bathroom in there?*

Shannon: *Oh, yeah. It was her room, so she could do whatever she wanted in there.*

Amber: *I had a room that I didn't used to like, and she was super worried about cleaning, but she made me really, really dislike her.*

Nigel: Here's Amber again. She has a somewhat creative way of getting back at a bad bunkie. And, Earlonne, I gotta tell you, I actually did this exact thing with a bad roommate one time. And if he's listening, he's going to know now.

Earlonne: You got some dirty secrets coming out here, Nyge.

Amber: *I'd bring sugar sprinkled on the floor. Dirt sprinkled on the floor. Like when people are bullies, I would do little passive aggressive crap like that.*

Nigel: *Did she ever find out you were doing it?*

Amber: No.

Denise: This girl comes knocking at my door and says, "Hi, I'm your new cellie."

Earlonne: This is Denise. She had her own story to tell us about a bad bunkie.

Denise: Well, she's a boy, aggressive, and I'm a menopausal woman, so this for sure is not going to work out. But I remember one day I came in and I was all excited. My mom told me off the wall. She's all, "You know Denise, I was doing some research, and we have a little bit of Jewish blood in us from Damascus or something." I had told my bunkie about that. Anyway, I was cleaning, and when I was cleaning, on top of the lockers, I saw swastika signs. She engraved swastika signs up there. After I told her that I had some Jewish blood in me.

Nigel: When you saw those swastikas, what was your first reaction? Were you incredulous?

Denise: I was frightened. I was frightened. I mean, is she going to slash me while I'm sleeping? I mean, what's going to go on? I tried to be cordial and if they have any needs to help them, but at the same time, throughout all of these years, I think I've only had three bunkies that have not stolen from me.

Nigel: How many cellies do you think you've had in the time you've been inside?

Denise: Dear God, I don't know. [laughs]

Nigel: Dozens and dozens.

Denise: Yeah.

Nigel: And what about now?

Denise: Right now, I have no bunkie.

Earlonne: Is that the best way to live?

Denise: That is absolutely the best way to live.

Nigel: Everyone wants to be solo.

Earlonne: Hell yeah. But sooner or later, someone will be assigned to that cell.

Nigel: So, we asked Denise, when she gets a new bunkie, how would she welcome them to her room?

Denise: Hi, my name is Denise. Here's your locker. I have a hammock underneath the bed to where you can put your shoes.

Earlonne: Ask her, do she have rules on her wall.

Nigel: Okay, yeah. Do you have rules printed on the wall that I should pay attention to?

Denise: No, there's just some easy rules. Just pick up after yourself, do what you have to do, go where you have to go, and don't bring the cops in.

Nigel: Okay.

Denise: Simple Simon.

Nigel: Any rules about the windows? Can they be open or closed?

Denise: The windows are open.

Nigel: Okay.

Denise: Windows are open.

Nigel: Always?

Denise: No, not when it gets super cold, then I'll close them.

Nigel: So, we can negotiate.

Denise: No, no. I'm going to be ruler of the windows.

Nigel: Earlonne, that's a big no for me.

Earlonne: She sounded like a cell captain.

Nigel: I know that wouldn't work for either of us.

Earlonne: Hell no.

Krista: Can I give a shout out to the birdman of San Quentin one of your podcasts.

Earlonne: This story has nothing to do with bunkies, Nyge.

Nigel: It's a classic non-sequitur, right?

Krista: So, somebody gives me the baby pigeon, and I was like, this is a really big bird for me to take care of, right?

Earlonne: CIW, got some fast talkers. This is Krista.

Krista: But it's okay. I'm going to take care of it. I [unintelligible [00:33:44] here, but he was the dumbest bird I ever raised, so I changed his name to Bubba. Okay, the poor bird. I had that bird. Oh, my God, I was hand feeding him. I had his little spot under my bed. He has a little nest under there. And I'd be putting my makeup on, and I'd be out, "Come on. Come on, Bubz come out, come out. I'm going to get my toes, get my toes." And he'd be poking at my toes. We put him up on the upper bunk, and I had this little like stuffed chicken toy, his finger puppet, and we're like, "Bubz, you got to protect the nest. You got to fight. It's home invasion. You got to be able to--" from the hawks and all the other birds that are attacked. It was so hilarious. But RIP Bubz died. He died of a broken heart without me. I just wanted to give a shout out to the birdman. I understand the love of a pigeon.

Nigel: Earlonne, I don't think I'd want to bunk with any of these people.

Earlonne: Me either. I understand.

[laughter]

Nigel: But there was this one woman we kept hearing about, and everyone seemed to agree that she was absolutely the best bunkie.

Earlonne: Yep. They were like, "If you have to have one bunkie in here, it's Barbara." Barbara is a golden girl. Before she came to prison, she was a nurse. She got a W number, meaning she's been here for a long time. Everybody else got two digits.

Can you tell us who you are, how long you've been incarcerated?

Barbara: *I have been incarcerated for 26 years.*

Earlone: *And what is your sentence?*

Barbara: *My sentence is life without parole.*

Earlone: *And your current cellie, now.*

Nigel: *Barbara cellie, is Amber.*

Earlone: *What? Amber?*

Nigel: *[laughs] Yep. Amber, who is not a fan of Leos and talks a lot.*

Nigel: *Why are you and Barbara so compatible?*

Amber: *We've known each other 17 years and we're both really calm. I'm an Aquarius, and she is a Taurus. I always ask people when I first meet them, what's their sign? My sign, I'm an Aquarius. I'm February 18, right on the Pisces cusp. So, I'm very kickback. I'm very mellow. Taurus are very agreeable too. The only difference is she's very calm and I have ADHD.*

Nigel: *Does she talk a lot?*

Amber: *We talk, but she doesn't talk like I talk. No--*

Nigel: *That's what I was wondering. [laughs]*

Amber: *I drive everybody mad.*

Earlone: *Amber talks a lot.*

Barbara: *Yeah. it's the ADHD, but hey, I really sit back and think on people's strength, she's going to be a comedian and I'm going to be the manager.*

[laughter]

Nigel: *I mean, she's delightful, but she does talk a lot. So, what do you do?*

Barbara: *She is ADHD.*

Nigel: *I know.*

Barbara: *I just do the hand, like, quiet, bring the volume down. She goes, bring it down, bring it down. See, my secret weapon is coffee with a lot of sugar in it. Then I'll give her a honey bun, sugar her off the game and she crashes. I am not lying.*

Earlone: *You just gave her the game.*

Barbara: *No, she knows.*

Earlone: *Oh.*

Barbara: *She knows.*

Earlonne: *She knows when a honey bun comes.*

Nigel: *Do you do that because you're a nurse?*

Barbara: *Probably so. [laughs]*

Nigel: *Because that's the same effect as giving--*

Earlonne: *Melatonin?*

Nigel: *No.*

Barbara: *No.*

Nigel: *No, giving someone Adderall.*

Earlonne: *Mm-mm.*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Earlonne: *Yes.*

Barbara: *Very smart.*

Nigel: *Yes. Do you think that you make a good bunkie?*

Barbara: *I would not have thought because I'm a solitude like person. But it works. It works. You know in my morning time when I'm just really quiet, when I wake up and refocus in my day, she don't bother me. She's a good girl. She really is. It's actually working.*

Sherri: *My name is Sherri, and I've been locked up 33 years, and I've been at the California Institution for Women since 2009.*

Earlonne: *Sherri's bunkie is named Tera.*

Tera: *I've been locked up for 31 years. I've been down since 1994.*

Nigel: *So how long have you been in bunkie?*

Tera: *12 years.*

Sherri: *We met each other at a time when we were both basically rock bottom. I had just transferred from the men's institution. I came from Vacaville. I was the first in California history to be classified from male to female while in custody. When I arrived, it just trans females weren't as accepted. I couldn't seem to get a start here. It was very difficult and I felt alone and I was depressed. I just felt ostracized, so I reacted horribly.*

Earlonne: *Sherri was sent to ad seg, which is Administrative Segregation. That's where she met Tera. They were in separate cells, so they couldn't see each other, but they started talking through the air vents.*

Nigel: Then when they got out of ad seg and were sent back to the housing unit, they became bunkies.

Sherri: *Ever since then, our friendship has basically blossomed. I can rely on her. I trust her. I know she's always going to be there no matter what. And that matters.*

Tera: *She's got the biggest heart anybody in here. She'll act like she doesn't, but she will. The end of the day, she will get up and help anybody. Even if it's staff that needs help, she will get up and help. She's a good person.*

Sherri: *I think we complement each other. There's things that I'm good at and able to do for her and there's things that she's good at and she's able to do for me.*

Nigel: *Like, what are some of those things?*

Sherri: *Well, she can cook. Me, I'm good with paperwork, so I handle any 602s or anything that needs to be done. And trying to get us up out of here. She makes a mean lasagna.*

Tera: *I can make anything pretty much. And that's my favorite thing to do, is cook, clean all that stuff, laundry.*

Nigel: *Why are those your favorite things?*

Tera: *I don't know. I grew up doing that. I grew up doing it for my family.*

Sherri: *I don't have to worry about it. So, it's pretty much on automatic for me. And that makes me happy.*

Nigel: *And if you have one pet peeve about her.*

Tera: *Oh, God. I'd have to say, always waiting for me to come home. She will not get down and feed herself. She'll wait hours till I get home and say, "Can you get me something to eat?" [laughs]*

Sherri: *I mean, I'm programmed. I'm institutionalized.*

[laughter]

Tera: *There's so much food in the house to eat. You can't get down and cook? It's okay.*

Sherri: *Why do it when it's going to be taken care of for me? [laughs] Pet peeve, she has to have the last word. [Tera laughs] You can try to put in the last word, but at the end of the day, she is going to have the last word.*

Nigel: *You sound like people who have lived together a long time. [laughs]*

Nigel: Sherri might be getting out soon and I was really wondering if Tera was worried about it. I mean, she's going to be left alone in there.

Nigel: *What will it be like for one of you, if the other leaves?*

Tera: *Awesome.*

Nigel: *Really, won't be lonely?*

Sherri: Well, I'm still going to be there for her. I'll be able to do more for her out there than I'm able to do in here. In here, there's only so much you can do. Your hands are basically tied. But when I get out there, I can fight for her freedom.

Nigel: And you won't be lonely, though?

Sherri: Well, I'm going to miss her. It's going to be hard I'm used to having her there. It's going to take some getting used to.

Nigel: Yeah. Does it worry either of you?

Tera: No, not at all. Not at all.

Sherri: That's her. Me, yeah, I'm worried about it. I don't want to leave here, and that's a concern of mine. But I know that she's at a point in her life where she's stable enough and sober enough. So, I'm confident that when I leave her, it's only a matter of time before she follows me out of here.

Tera: Back then, when I first met her, my rock bottom was I was on drugs. And because of her, I'm not on it today. I've been clean off heroin for almost six years now, but today, I don't even want nothing, so I'm good. I think that's what she's worried about. But drugs will never be a part of my life again.

Nigel: What would the process be of trying to find another bunkie? Because it is like--

Tera: I'm not worried about it. I mean, if I get a bunkie, I get a bunkie. To me, it's not even my room. It's a stateroom. So as long as I get a good bunkie, that's all that matters.

Nigel: As we've been listening to these people at CIW talk about what makes a good bunkie and the relationships that are formed in women's prison cells, it's been reminding me of our first Ear Hustle episode and how you talked about your cellie way back then. A guy named Black.

Earlonne: I mean, Black's a good dude. You know, he was the ideal cellie.

Nigel: I think it's more significant than he was a good dude. Earlonne, so, let's play a little clip from that episode.

Earlonne: If I was to describe Mr. Cloeman over here, I would say he's a well-disciplined person and a great thinker. I know many times, I always come to him and be like, "Hey, man. I need your help on this." [Black grunts] And he got his little white board in the cell. [Black laughs] He'll bust out the little Sharpie marker, little dry marker, and he'll just get to going, you know. He'll get to whatever issues I'm having a problem with. And then, the brother's well versed too, especially when it comes to self-help groups and smart brother men, and that's what I get any, any cool, hella cool, I mean, shit. I don't know what I going do when he leaves. To find a brother of your caliber, man, it's going to be hard. I already know that.

Nigel: It seems to me, Earlonne, what you and Black had was like, I don't know, you somehow found a really nice way to be bunkies. It wasn't like you were best friends, but you found a way to support each other, see the best in each other, and also let each of you live your own lives. And I think that's what you want to find in a bunkie or a cellie.

Earlonne: Yeah, I mean, it's a specific relationship. I don't know if that exists outside of prison. That cell is so small, you pretty much go into the bathroom in front of each other. Plus, you got these lockdowns where you can't leave the cell sometime for days.

Nigel: Days, weeks, and sometimes months, right?

Earlonne: Yeah, or even years. True that.

Nigel: So, do you think we'd be good cellies? Like, if I were a dude, but I was still just like me, do you think we'd be compatible?

Earlonne: I do think we'll be compatible. I know your ways, I think you know my ways. I can count on you. I probably couldn't count on your cooking as much, but because you like to eat stuff that I don't.

[laughter]

Nigel: Yeah, but I wouldn't have all those options in prison.

[laughter]

Earlonne: But everything else, I appreciate your loyalty. I wouldn't have to worry about you stealing shit or doing some foul because you're a standup person. So, we could definitely be some cool bunkies.

Nigel: The other thing is, I think neither of us like to talk a lot, so that's a plus. And also, I trust you. I trust your judgment, and I feel safe with you.

Earlonne: That's what's up. I think that's a good start, see?

Nigel: Yeah, no doubt.

100, Earlonne, 100. Yep.

Earlonne: Think we got another hundred in us?

Nigel: Please. You know we do.

[laughter]

Earlonne: Just now scratching the surface, huh?

Nigel: Exactly.

Earlonne: Ear Hustle is produced by me, Earlonne Woods, Nigel Poor, Amy Standen, Bruce Wallace, and Rahsaan "New York" Thomas. Shabnam Sigman is the managing producer. The producing team inside San Quentin includes Steve Brooks, Derrell Sadiq Davis, Tony de Trinidad, and Tam Nguyen. The inside managing producer is Tony Tafoya. This episode was sound, designed and engineered by me, Earlonne Woods, and includes music from Antwan Williams, David Jassy, Derrell Sadiq Davis, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Fernando Arruda, and myself.

Nigel: Thanks to acting Warden Smith and Lt. Berry at San Quentin and acting Warden Hill at the California Institution for Women for their support of the show.

Earlonne: Thanks also to this guy here.

Lt. William Newborg: Well, I'm Lieutenant William Newborg, happy to be a part of the Ear Hustle podcast group. As you guys come through CIW, proud thing to be part of your 100th episode. What an accomplishment. Congratulations and good luck. See you guys around 200 if I'm not retired by then and I approve this 100th episode. Congratulations.

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

Earlonne: For more information about this episode, check out the show notes on Ear Hustle's website, earhustlesq.com. You can also find out more about the show on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram [@earhustlesq](https://www.instagram.com/earhustlesq).

Nigel: And if you want more Ear Hustle, subscribe to Ear Hustle Plus.

Earlonne: We've got bonus episodes and live chats where we get to chop it up with the listeners about the show.

Nigel: We've been doing that for every episode and it's a lot of fun. And this week we've got something really special for subscribers.

Earlonne: You know on this episode, our 100th was a callback to our first episode, Cellies.

Nigel: Yep. So recently you and I sat down with our executive producer Bruce Wallace, turned on the mics and listened back to our first episode. Honestly, Earlonne, it was the first time I'd heard it in years.

Earlonne: Subscribers can hear a special version of that episode with our commentary, our memories, celebration, laughs, regrets, all that shit.

Nigel: Yeah, it was kind of like we were ear hustling Ear Hustle.

Earlonne: Something like that.

Nigel: If you're Ear Hustle Plus subscriber, it's in your feed now. If you're not a subscriber yet, sign up at earhustlesq.com/plus.

Earlonne: And while you're at it leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. That's a big help to the show, and we truly appreciate it.

Nigel: Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a network of independent, creator owned, listener supported podcasts.

Earlonne: Discover audio with vision at Radiotopia.fm

Nigel: And, Earlonne, we are taking a break because this is the final Episode of Season 12.

Earlonne: After that live tour, I'm ready to take a vacay, Nyge, even though you and I know we got new episodes to work on.

Nigel: Exactly. But after that live tour, which was amazing and fun, I think we all need a little break. But we will be back in March with-

Earlonne: Season 13.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlone: I'm Earlone Woods.

Unison: Thanks for listening.

Gavin Newsom: Well, hey, everybody, it's Governor Gavin Newsom, and I want to add my voice to the voice of so many others in congratulating Ear Hustle for having reached its 100th episode, sharing hundreds, if not thousands, of stories from those behind the walls of California's correctional facilities and breaking through the myths and stigmas of incarceration.

Congratulations on this remarkable achievement, and thank you to Earlone and Nigel and the Ear Hustle crew and the staff of CDCR for creating and supporting this innovative podcast.

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End of Episode