



Episode 49: On Stage in Chicago
Air Date: November 11, 2020

Tyler Greene: [speaking to crowd] I'm going to conduct you and we're going to say, "From Chicago, this is Ear Hustle." Ready? So just follow my hand. It's going to be hilarious and messy and it's going to be awesome. Ready? On the count of three. Ready? From Chicago. This is Ear Hustle. Ready? [crowd responds in unison, "From Chicago, this is Ear Hustle!"] [music comes in] Damn! You're hired! [crowd laughs followed by clapping]

Nigel Poor: Hey E!

Earlonne Woods What's up Nyge?

Nigel: Well, we are recording this on the afternoon of Tuesday, November 10th. And it has been a hell of a couple weeks. How are you doing?

Earlonne: I'm still partying. Still partying. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: I understand that because there's so much to celebrate right now. But there is one specific bit of news that's especially relevant to us here at Ear Hustle.

Earlonne: Yes. The Hustle team was excited to celebrate the win of California's Prop 17.

Nigel: Okay, we in California know exactly what that is, but can you explain what it is please?

Earlonne: Prop 17 restores the right to vote to formerly incarcerated people who are still on parole. In fact, thanks to the new law, two of our team members on Ear Hustle can now vote – along with 50,000 other formerly incarcerated men and women in California who've done their time, paid their debt to society. They now take part in a democratic process. [music fades out]

Nigel: That is something to celebrate

Earlonne: Hell yeah, no more taxation without representation.

Nigel: So, given all the news of late and how wild the last couple weeks have been, it just seemed like a really good time to take a bit of a breather and to listen to an interview that you and I did back in November 2019.

Earlonne: That's when you and I were invited to Chicago by WBEZ for a live onstage conversation with Jenn White.

Nigel: I love her. I think this is actually the best onstage conversation you and I have ever done.

Earlonne: She's my new Oprah. [both laugh]

Nigel: Wow.

Earlonne: At the time she was with WBEZ [Nigel affirms]. Now, she's the host of the great national public radio show, 1A.

Nigel: And this event we did with her was actually pre-pandemic. So, we were all packed together into this gorgeous theater. And it just felt so cozy and special and everything was festive. The mood in the theater was amazing. And I was so proud to walk out on stage with you.

Earlonne: As I was with you, Nyge! All the time. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: Thank you, partner.

Earlonne: And even though this is a bit of an unusual episode for us, one thing hasn't changed.

Nigel: That's right. We both lightly cuss in this episode. [theme comes in]

Earlonne: Just a bit. Listeners, discretion is advised.

Nigel: Yes. I'm Nigel Poor

Earlonne: And I'm Earlonne Woods. And this is Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia.
[theme fades out]

Earlonne: The event kicked off with a clip from one of our earliest episodes.

Nigel: Episode 3. It's called "Looking Out."

Earlonne: And it stars a good friend of ours from inside San Quentin: Ronell Draper, aka Rauch.

[clip from "Looking Out" begins]

Nigel: So, how would you describe him?

Earlonne: To me, I think Rauch look like the original Jesus Christ, [music comes in] you know. [both laugh] I mean, he got the dreadlocks. He look like he's from the earth and, if he could, he'd probably just be wearing a leaf, and he got this one little thing that he do. He'll just start sniffing on his dreadlocks.

Nigel: [whispering] I know. I've seen him do that. He grabs his hair and he pulls it in front of his nose and just sniffs.

Earlonne: Why you whisperin'?

Nigel: 'Cause I feel like I'm talking about him behind his back. [both laughs] [music comes in] He knows he does it. Right?

Earlonne: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Nigel: It's not like he's going to hear this and go, "Oh, my god! I sniff my hair?"

Earlonne: No. Hey. He'll catch his self. You'll just be looking at him like, "Uhhh"

Rauch: [record scratch] FYI, I do smell on my dreads. I put different oil on each one of them. They smell good. They smell like I just came out the dirt, hanging out with roots and stuff.

Earlonne: [record scratch] But, you know what though? When people from the outside look at Rauch, they be like, "Oh, dude weird. Man, I ain't talking to dude." But Rauch is a cool dude. [music fades out]

Rauch: My name is Ronell Draper, but I go by Rauch. My relationship with people is pretty strained. I don't trust them. From early on, they have been a source of pain for me.

Nigel: So, Rauch is about forty years old, and he's a pretty shy guy.

Earlonne: Until you know him.

Rauch: [water dripping] When I was a child, before I was removed from the care of my mom's custody, she tried to drown me a couple times in the tub. [music comes in] And then, she stopped and she left the bathroom, and she was crying. I knew she was unhappy or sad at something I did. I wanted to actually comfort her, but I didn't know how to do it. I don't remember her face and I haven't seen her since. [clip fades out]

[crowd erupts with applause]

Earlonne: [over mic] Hello, Chicago. How y'all doing?

[to Nigel] They love you, Nyge.

Nigel: [over mic] Oh my god! I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: I'm Earlonne Woods [crowd claps and cheers]

Nigel: Well, I was going to say how much I love Chicago at the end, but my God, what a welcome! Holy Moses. Thank you!

Earlonne: And you are?

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor. Sorry. I was so-- [crowd continues to clap and cheer] so distracted!

Earlonne: [00:04:58] Indeed. So, in 2016, we started producing stories about life inside San Quentin State Prison. Stories like the one you just heard about Rauch.

Nigel: And that audio is a really good example of what an Ear Hustle story sounds like. Earlonne and I work as the co-hosts escorting the listener into and around the intricacies of life inside. Our stories are character-driven and as you heard in that clip, we combine very— we combined varying emotions, often using joy and laughter to underscore stories that can be really difficult and painful.

Earlonne: And those that share their stories, they open themselves up to being vulnerable. And that's something that we don't take for granted, just like we don't take for granted where we record those stories.

Nigel: And as you can imagine, producing a podcast inside a prison is really difficult. There's all kinds of challenges. Sometimes there's a lockdown and we don't even know when we're going to be able to go back to work. So, meeting deadlines can be... difficult? Yes. [both chuckling]

Earlonne: Definitely. Definitely. And anything can trigger a lockdown, like too many cases of the flu, or officer claiming to have found a bullet. [Nigel laughs] Or a fistfight or simply the weather.

Nigel: Yep. But sometimes there's really wonderful surprises that actually change the kinds of stories we can tell.

Nigel and Earlonne: [simultaneously] Like?

Nigel: Yes?

Earlonne: Like?

Nigel: Yes, sir?

Earlonne: In 2018, the Honorable Governor of California, Jerry Brown commuted my life sentence. [crowd erupts in cheers and applause.] Thank you. [applause continues] Good lookin' out, Governor Brown. [Nigel laughs] So, I was able to walk out of prison twenty-one years later, employed.

Nigel: Amazing, right? [applause continues] And, what was the job that you got?

Earlonne: Oh, shit. This one? [Nigel and crowd laugh]

Nigel: So, now Earlonne and I are bonafide outside colleagues, which is—

Earlonne: Which is great.

Nigel: Pretty wonderful.

Earlonne: And we also, now, we produce stories about life— should I say also produce stories about life, about post-incarceration.

[clip from Episode 33: “Life Shows Up” begins]

Chaves Stills: My name is Chaves Stills. I clean up the Tenderloin area, San Francisco. Picking up trash. [Cars driving by on street] I went to prison in 1988. Murdered someone. April 28th, 1988. First degree murder. And I got out March 28, 2019. [Car whizzing by on street] My whole life, I robbed people, I sold drugs, I did everything against work. I didn't think I'd ever get out of prison. Now, I told myself while I was in prison that if I ever get out of prison, I'd shovel shit if I have to. You know, I ain't gonna go back to doing crime. That's, that's far gone. So, if you got some shit you need me to clean up, call me. [Laughs] And I'll take the job.

[music comes in]

[as narrator]

Earlonne: Recently, I spent an afternoon on a job with Chaves Stills. He actually lives in the same transitional house as Tracy in the Tenderloin. He's got a job cleaning up the neighborhood there.

Chaves: The Tenderloin is probably one of the roughest neighborhoods in San Francisco because of the homelessness. I'm not from here, but this is where I'm from now. So 'til I leave, this is my home: The Tenderloin area.

[clip fades out]

Earlonne: So, now that I'm out of prison, we're broadening the type of stories that we tell. We're also trying to tell stories—continue to, about life outside of prison. *And* we trying to bring more women involved *and*...

Nigel: Yes. And to get into other prisons

Earlonne: We're definitely trying get to other prisons, which is kind of hard, but we're getting there.

Nigel: Yeah, we're working on that. So, one of the challenges now that we can work in this larger landscape is to figure out how to maintain the singularity and the intimacy of the kinds of stories that we tell. So, I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: And I'm Earlonne Woods. And we're about to take you, along with Jenn White, inside the making of the Ear Hustle podcast. [crowd claps]

Nigel: Yes. [giggles] But before we get to that, I just wanted to thank everybody for coming out tonight. It's really wonderful. And I love Chicago. I've been here many times. It is really one of my favorite cities. The architecture, walking around here. But Earlonne, this is your first time. So, I'm wondering—

Earlonne: –Definitely

Nigel: What do you think?

Earlonne: It's cold as fuck out hear. [Nigel and crowd laugh]

Nigel: And it's not even winter yet!

Earlonne: I'm not dressed for it.

Nigel: Oh my God. No kidding.

Earlonne: I see why y'all wear wool suits.

Nigel: Itchy, itchy. What about the food? What do you think about the food?

Earlonne: It's been okay. I've been looking for the stacked pizza.

Nigel: Okay. He wants the deep-dish pizza, but I've been telling him that he has to try Chicago hot dog. [crowd affirms]

Earlonne: Okay. I'm with it. [crowd laughs]

Nigel: Because I'm going to try to explain to him what one is and because I'm not from Chicago, if I mess up, somebody is going to have to jump in and tell me if I missed any of the ingredients. This is my understanding. Okay. It is a roll that has poppy seeds on it. [crowd affirms] Yes, it is a beef– Vienna beef frank. [crowd affirms] Now, here's where it starts to get interesting. Well, yellow mustard, that's pretty standard. Sweet green relish that's very bright. [crowd affirms] Yep. Pickle spears, maybe one or two. A sport pepper, which I'm not even sure what that is. [crowd laughs] Tomatoes. And then this is the coup d'état: celery salt. [Jenn says "onions" quietly in the background] [crowd claps] Is that right? Sounds good, right?

Earlone: Missing the ketchup.

Nigel: No! No! [crowd claps and boos] That's going to be the only thing you're going to get booed at tonight. No ketchup on a hot dog here. So, anyway, with that, let's take our seats and start the conversation. [crowd claps]

Jenn White: Good evening, Chicago. Let's hear it one more time for Earlone and Nigel! [crowd claps] I love our events because Chicago audiences. Y'all, we know how to do it. When we say welcome somebody, we're all like, "Yes!" The full Chicago Welcome. And I just appreciate that so much. So, yes. Alright. When I listened to the podcast, the first thing that I think about is like, *what did they think about each other when they first met?* [crowd laughs] [Nigel laughs] Like, first impressions. Who wants to go first?

Earlone: Women. [Jenn laughs]

Nigel: Sorry. *That guy never talks. That is one of the quietest guys around*– because there's a lot of bravado in prison. And in guys like to talk a lot and sometimes they talk too much. But Earlone was always really quiet. And I could tell he was also really observant. And he didn't have that beard, though. I was going to say "the beard" but that came later. [laughs] Anyway, that was my first impression: *here's a quiet man who's really good at observing what's going on.*

Jenn: When did you start to get a sense of the levels underneath that quietness?

Nigel: The levels of Earlone? [laughs] Well, before we started working on the podcast, we were working on a radio project together. And Earlone was always the person I could go to when there were technical things that I couldn't quite figure out.

But more importantly, he was the person that I could talk to when there were emotional– emotionally difficult things happening in the prison. And he was always very

levelheaded. And so, we started talking— that was like in 2013, and we started talking and, from there I realized this is a person I would really like to work with. Yeah.

Jenn: Earlonne? First impressions of Nigel?

Earlonne: So... [crowd laughs] Nigel was, I mean, you know, volunteers that come inside of prison, I respect them for coming in and trying to help the people inside. And Nigel was a professor there. So, when she came into the media center, I used to see her, greet her like, "What's up?" But far as my perspective, I'll just say that I always look at volunteers to be on the front line of public safety. So, I give them that respect. But her, she was just cool. She was coming in and handling her business. We was doing, I think photo projects and all kinds of other stuff. But she was cool. [Nigel laughs]

Jenn: So, I want to hear the origin story of the podcast and NA when, you know— not just when you made it, but when you realized you had something really special.

Nigel: Yeah. Yeah. So, as I said, we were working on this radio program for public radio station in San Francisco, KALW. And it was for a show called Cross Currents. And it was really wonderful doing it, but it had a prescribed agenda, I guess? You know, it was a news program. And after working on it for a while, I was getting a little bit tired of it and I wanted to do something more from the perspective of an artist, something that I would find personally more challenging. And so, I started talking with Earlonne about doing a podcast. And at the same time, there were some personnel issues happening in the media lab. And I was actually getting kind of frustrated and I told Earlonne that I was actually thinking of not volunteering anymore.

Earlonne: Which was sad. [Nigel laughs] [crowd laughs]

Nigel: And what did you do?

Earlonne: And when she told me that, understanding how the prison runs with volunteers and people in the area, I told her, "Nah, hold on, hold on. Just give me ninety days and I'll knock all this bullshit out and..." [crowd laughs]

Nigel: Yep. And so that's what happened. In those ninety days, we decided we would do a podcast and Earlonne and Antwan, who was also work— started the podcast with us, didn't know what a podcast was. So, I got permission to bring some podcasts in and we listened to it and I remember Earlonne said, "Oh, this shit's easy." [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs] "You just talk." [Nigel laughs]

Jenn: Wait a second. Wait a second.

Nigel: I know, I know.

Jenn: As somebody who's done a few podcasts...

Nigel: Yeah. That shit ain't easy.

Jenn: Was it easy, Earlonne?

Earlonne: So, Glynn Washington made it sound easy. [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs] But it was far from that, you know. [Nigel affirms] It was like for forty-five minutes and we had like six hours of tape and we had to break it down... [Nigel affirms]

Nigel: ...Editing, writing

Earlonne: And I was like, "How we gonna do this shit?"

Nigel: No, it's challenging. So, our original idea was just, we were going to do a podcast to play inside the prison only. And then I happened to hear about— Radiotopia, from PRX— [crowd claps] Yes— was putting on what they called a "Podquest." And they were looking for a new show to help produce. And I got permission from the prison to apply and we applied for it. And you're better with numbers. So, you should tell this part.

Earlonne: Oh, so when we applied, it was 1,537 other contestants in 53 different countries. And we were in the top ten. [crowd claps]

Nigel: Yeah.

Earlonne: *And* we found out we was in the top ten with our fellow producers, The Stoop

Nigel: Yes. Yes.

Earlonne: And after that we made it to the top four and then, we ended up winning it. So... [crowd claps]

Nigel: Yep. We ended up winning.

Earlonne: Indeed. Here we are.

Nigel: There's two things I always say about that. The first is, once we found out we won, I was like, "Shit, [Jenn laughs] we got to figure out how to make a podcast now." And number two, if you listened to the podcast, you hear Lieutenant Robinson who has to okay all of our stories. And when I told him we won I think he had the same reaction. And he said to me, "I only let you enter because I thought there was no way you'd ever win." [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs] And then from there, no, I mean, I didn't— I thought what we were doing was going to be special, but I didn't know how it would be received. And so, very quickly once we launched, we got so much response from listeners and it really started to grow and it was amazing, but I didn't see that coming. It's been a real joy.

Jenn: Well, I think we have a clip of that [Nigel affirms] Podquest entry. Let's listen to that.

[clip begins]

[sound collage of various speakers begins, including Earlonne and Nigel] I'm an ear hustler. Man, that's crazy. What's that story? I must know what they're talking about. Did you hear what the hell he just said? You can get a whole lot of information just by ear hustling. Hey, can I ask you a question? [music comes in]

Earlonne: [as narrator] You are now tuned in to San Quentin's Ear Hustle. When you think about San Quentin, what comes to mind? Maximum security? Death row? Scary guys all tatted up? Johnny Cash? I'm Earlonne Woods. In 1999, I was convicted of being the getaway driver of an attempted second-degree robbery. [tires screeching] I was sentenced to thirty-one years to life and I've been incarcerated for eighteen years. I'm the co-producer and co-host of Ear Hustle.

Antwan Williams: My name is Antwan Williams and I've been incarcerated since 2006 for armed robbery with a gun enhancement. [sound of gun being loaded] And I'm the co-producer and sound designer for Ear Hustle.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor. And since 2011, I've been volunteering inside the prison. I'm the co-host and co-producer of Ear Hustle. In 2013, we started producing radio stories about life inside. Now, we're turning our attention to longer form storytelling.

Earlonne: Our mission is to bring you the hidden stories of life inside told from the perspective of those who live it. Forget the stereotypes, the "Scared Straight", the Hollywood stories, and the mass media bullshit. We're laying it out, bringing it to you straight.

Antwan: Yeah. Prison can be tough, but it's also many other things. So, what kind of stories can you expect to hear from us?

[various speakers share] Cooking in the cell. Falling in love in prison. Coping with death. Condoms in prison. What it's like facing a death sentence. First day of prison. Being a father. Financial literacy. Juvenile life. Higher education. Jailhouse lawyers

Earlonne: Ear Hustle. We're going to take you inside. [clips ends]

[crowd claps]

Nigel: Yeah, that was our promo.

Earlonne: We never talked about them condoms in prison either. [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs]

Nigel: No, we never did. There's still time. There's still time.

Jenn: Earlonne, when you realized you all have won the contest and that you were going to be the voice of this podcast— one of the voices of this podcast, I mean, what was that like for you?

Earlonne: Honestly, I don't know. I never even really tripped off of it until later. Like, when all the groups start coming in. So, San Quentin do these tours. And, these tours used to come, they used to pass us up all the time. And then the tour starts centering on us. [crowd laughs] So then it was like, *oh, okay*. And I was the one— I'm always like "Antwan, go on, talk to 'em" [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs] And Antwan loved that; he'll get there and talk. But it was cool because in one sense, we didn't know how it was going outside of what Nigel used to tell us. And then she used to bring the numbers in and show us, you know, how many downloads was happening. But at the same time, I still wasn't like looking at it as, *this is international*. [Nigel affirms].

Nigel: You know, I think a good thing to add in case it's not obvious, inside prison, there's no internet, right. You can't really use the phone freely. So, there wasn't really any way for them, except what I brought in, to see the reviews, to hear all the comments. And I tried to keep, everyone is up to date as possible. But I think part of him saying that is, it was really hard to know because when you're in prison, you're so sequestered.

Earlonne: But what was our goal, Nigel?

Nigel: What'd you say?

Earlonne: What was our goal with the podcast?

Nigel: Was just play inside prisons.

Earlonne: It was just to be inside San Quentin. [Nigel affirms]

Nigel: And with the goal to try to get into other prisons, if possible.

Jenn: Did the decision to have the podcast be for a broader audience, did that change the approach to what you were producing at all?

Nigel: You know, I would say no. The idea was always to have an inside and outside person telling the stories. And— no one has ever asked us that before. [Jenn laughs] [crowd laughs] It's interesting. Do you think? No, I don't think it changed it—

Earlonne: 'Cause I think we were mainly still catering to the prison. It was just for the prison.

Nigel: Right, but did it change when we realized we were playing outside?

Earlonne: No?

Nigel: It happened so fast that we won the Podquest that we hadn't fully developed the idea of what it would be like if we just did it inside. Yeah.

Jenn: Yeah. Yeah. So, I would imagine, and you alluded to this in your opening, that there are some challenges that go along with producing a podcast.

Nigel: Oh my God.

Jenn: I mean, like, just from a— just talking about noise, like I can be in a studio that is— they swear to me it's soundproof and [Nigel affirms] I can still hear voices. And I'm like, "Who was outside the door?" What is that like?

Nigel: It's crazy. I mean, it is so— it can be very stressful. It's very noisy. Not so long ago, one of the guys saw a picture of me when we started working on the podcast, which was only four and a half years ago. And he's like, "You look so much younger." [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs] And Earlonne was thinner. So, we—

Earlonne: Damn! [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs]

Nigel: So, it's been stressful. I've got much more gray. But the noise is mind-blowing. So, it's cement. There's hard surfaces. So, I think we can actually give you a little sample of what it's like in there, sound wise.

[clip begins]

[loud chatter among San Quentin residents] [In the background, Earlonne says, "Alright, we need quiet in here. We're about to record.]

[montage of Nigel and Earlonne commenting on noise]

Nigel: It's so freaking hard to make it quiet in here.

Earlonne: It is prison.

Nigel: We gotta turn that fan off now. [quietly, "Do you think it's quiet enough?"]

Earlonne: It's finna get hot. [quietly, "Nope, never is."]

Nigel: It's never freaking quite enough in here, man. [quietly, "Alright, we're recording."]

Earlonne: Hey. Hey, can we get about ten minutes? So, we can get this line out?

San Quentin resident: No problem, man.

Earlonne: Hey, good looking out, brother.

Nigel: Thank you. [quietly, "Hear that?"]

Earlonne: Hear what?

Nigel: It's finally quiet in here!

Earlonne: Okay. Let's do it.

[clip ends]

[everyone laughs]

Jenn: So, talk a little bit about that negotiation.

Earlonne: Well, I would say that we didn't want it just like, just like, nothing, just be in like a sterile room or nothing. But at the same time, you have people next door that was like yelling and all that. And we was able to convince individuals to keep it down a little bit. [crowd laughs]

Nigel: Kind of. We decided to take those things that don't work and just make them part of the podcast. So, the sound of the prison is actually a character in the podcast. And you hear it all the time. And people who have listened to it a lot, may know Lonnie. He is never freaking quiet. [crowd laughs] So, we just decided, it's like, we got Lonnie'd. [Jenn laughs] It doesn't matter what we're doing. He will walk through and not really pay attention.

Earlonne: [imitating Lonnie] *Oh, my bad.*

Nigel: Yeah, my bad. And the media lab where we work is incredibly active. We're not the only project down there. There's a radio project. There's a video project. There's a newspaper. So, we have to negotiate with them. So, it's a challenge. Now, now that we're working on the outside, we have a studio at Reveal. And when we first started recording in there, it freaked me out. It was too good. Do you know what I mean? [Jenn affirms] Like, it was so professional. All of a sudden, I was like, "I don't know about this. I kind of miss the prison." [crowd laughs] I mean, you know, working—

Jenn: Yeah. Yeah. I get it. I mean. [laughs] I do! I really do, I get it. But I wonder about some of the other challenges you face. Because I would assume that when you're working in a studio, that's a very controlled environment, right? [Nigel affirms] If the mic light is, on the on-air light is on, people know not to come in. You have the equipment you need. You don't have to do a ton of guesswork.

Nigel: Right.

Jenn: So, what were some of those other just technical challenges you had to work around?

Nigel: Well, there's no internet. So, when you need to get information, I've got to wait and get that at home. As we said, there's lockdowns. There's some people that work in the prison that don't particularly care about the project. So, we're not their priority. So, they might not unlock things that we need. For a while, if we had to print something out, like a script, sometimes it would take like an hour to find a printer that would work. So, everything is much slower. You just have to have patience. I always tell people working in prison, you have to have the three P's, which are patients, politeness, and persistence. And without those three things, you're never going to make it. So, you really have to practice that. But it's hard, as you know, when you have deadlines. We're really lucky that Radiotopia and PRX has been so supportive and they really understand. But, that took a while to realize that we're working in a very— in a unique environment that's always going to be challenging.

Jenn: What kinds of creative workarounds have you all found? Have you had to get a little, a little too tricky with stuff to make it work?

Earlonne: So, I know when we first started trying to interview people, a lot of people didn't want to be involved. Especially guys that's been locked up over thirty, forty years. You know, they would have a code where they didn't trust the media. And somehow, we became the media. And after, I think we started airing our stories inside, [Nigel affirms] people were getting at us, telling us their life stories. So, it was tricky in the beginning, but I think it worked out.

Jenn: I mean, that's really interesting though, that because you had a microphone and recording devices, that suddenly you became the media. And it wasn't as if they didn't know you are Earlonne or you Nigel. You'd been working there for a while. [Nigel affirms] I mean, just unpack that a little bit more?

Nigel: Yeah. Well, it's really about I guess for anyone who's doing an interview, creating trust and making a safe space to interview people. And letting them know that we weren't there to do "got you" stories. We were very clear about what we were going to talk about and what we weren't going to talk about. So, as much as we had to get people comfortable to open up, we also had to be very clear with people: we are not doing stories about why you're here and if you shouldn't be here. And we're not muckrakers. We are here to talk about everyday life. And so, we had to set expectations. And we always told people that, and we still do, during the interview, if you can just be as open as possible. And at the end of the interview, we'll discuss if there's things that we can't use. Because we do have to be very conscientious of, you know, people going up for parole, there's life or death consequences to things that you

say that get out there. There's things with gangs that are really serious. And so, it was really for me, it was about building trust. And then as stories came out, more and more people could hear that we were doing what I would say is the right thing, which isn't giving people a pass. I mean, sometimes we push people really hard. But we weren't trying to screw people over. And the media can do real damage to people in prison without really understanding what they're doing. And I always remember that I can leave. I can do these stories and I can leave, but the men that we work with can't. And so, that has to be the primary directive. Like, how do you be responsible for the lives in there while telling good stories?

Jenn: Earlonne, did you ever bump up against any issues with that where you're working with somebody, they tell a story, and then maybe upon reflection, they're little uncomfortable about what they said?

Earlonne: Pretty much. I mean, sometime individuals will be like, "Man, I don't know about that." And it all depends on like, sometime you can be a little too open. And, again, like she said, you have guys that probably have been incarcerated twenty, thirty years, that's going in front of a parole board and the question is, did something he say bring in new evidence into something else? Or whatever the case may be. So— but I think individuals respected us to where we would actually bring a cat in and let them hear his story. And let him hear it and I think the closest we got was I think, "Dirty Water", where one of the guys, the guy that was in it was like, "Man, I don't know about that."

Nigel: And that was a story about sex trafficking.

Earlonne: Sex trafficking. Yes. And, I had him listen to it and I was telling him, I was like, "Man, I think you being open and you being honest. That's what people respect. You have accountability for whatever it is you was into." So, I used to definitely talk to the individuals and they knew I wasn't out to play them or play them for a story or whatever the case may be.

Nigel: Well, I think that brings up a good point. There was how we got people to come into the media lab to talk to us, and then there was what Earlonne did out on the yard and in the housing units to get people to talk to us. And I think he was always having conversations with people that I wasn't privy to about what would happen when you came in and how you could trust us. And there was a lot of work behind the scenes to get people to trust us. And sometimes there's just really difficult questions we have to ask people that aren't easy for anybody. But without those hard questions, you just don't get an honest story.

Earlonne: And I'll say, prison is like a— sometimes it's a violent place. I wasn't above someone attacking me based on the story. I wasn't above that. But I think individuals knew I had their best interest in heart. [music comes in]

[as narrator]

Nigel: Okay. We got to take a quick break here. [Earlonne affirms] And when we get back, we're going to talk about the one person that Ear Hustle listeners are always asking about.

Earlonne: Velvet Voice. [Nigel laughs] The true star of the show that can take any one of our spots at any given time, and get on the mic: Lieutenant Sam Robinson.

Nigel: Exactly. And we're going to talk about stories we decided not to tell on Ear Hustle.

Earlonne: *Really?* [Nigel affirms] So stay tuned. [music fades out]

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Jenn: I want to talk about another relationship and that's the relationship between the podcast and the prison. And, in listening, you have that bit at the end where the Lieutenant has to approve [Nigel affirms] the podcast. How did you negotiate that relationship? And how difficult was it to maintain the editorial integrity [Nigel affirms] of what you were doing [Nigel affirms] and also adhere to the rules they were putting on you.

Nigel: Yeah. Well, as far as developing that relationship with the prison administration, I'm going to go back to the three P's. I started volunteering in the prison in 2011. And we started working on the podcast in 2015. I spent a lot of time trying to get to know the administration, having them get to know me. In some ways it was harder to gain their trust than the guys inside. And obviously prisons are about control and they're very careful about what comes in and out of the prison. But Lieutenant Robinson, who's the public information officer there, really is an extraordinary person. He cares so much about the men inside. And although, he's a company man, he believes in prisons too, he's super supportive. And once we gained his trust that changed everything. Without him I don't think we could do the podcast. Now, as you brought up, he does OK the stories at the end and he always— he's never told us we can't do a story. And he always says that what he's listening for is protecting the safety and security of the institution. And I do believe that. But I won't say that we don't self-censor. I know there are stories

we can't do. And it's just not worth it. I mean, one, I said earlier, we're not muckraking journalists. We're not necessarily trying to tear the system down. We're trying to do it a slightly sneakier way. [crowd laughs] So, for me, it's getting the stories out there are more important than some of the stories that I have fantasies about doing.

Jenn: But the— no, ahead.

Earlone: And I'll say this, I know, say, we self-censor. So, being that I was living in and I spent a total of my life, twenty-seven years in prison, I understand what's acceptable, what's not, what's going too far. I understand all that. So, I'm definitely not going to put something in there where I know it jeopardizes someone or even us.

Jenn: Well, and it seems like it, it really takes the combination of the two of you to make this work. Because you have a different set of understanding and skills and different relationships to the people you're working with. Do you think this could have worked if it was two people on the outside trying to start this thing up?

Nigel: Yeah, no. No, I think although the podcast is not about me and Earlone, our relationship and what we bring to the podcast is really important. I mean, we, for whatever reason, are great colleagues. I mean, I just happened to find someone who's like my perfect creative partner. And I hope Earlone feels the same way.

Earlone: Of course. [crowd laughs] [Nigel laughs] [Jenn laughs]

Nigel: And when you find that person, you damn well want to work with them and figure out how to make it work. So, I think it's important that there's an outside voice and an inside voice. It's not everyone's cup of tea. But it's our cup of tea, right? And the way we relate to each other, the insights Earlone can bring, the questions that I can bring, I think are, you know, it's a nice combination. So no, I don't think it could work any other way. Different podcasts could be made, but not the way we make it.

Earlone: I would say just quickly, I think, like she just said, Nigel was the outside escort for society, and I was the inside escort for the guys, pretty much. [Nigel affirms] We didn't tell the story. We just escorted him through. [Jenn affirms]

Nigel: Yeah. Yeah.

Jenn: Well, a major transition happened for you, Earlone and for the podcast when you were released.

Nigel: Indeed. [crowd claps]

Jenn: And I'm curious what that change meant for the podcast, for what you were producing, how it changed the way you thought about this process. Earlone, go first.

Earlone: Nigel freaked out. [everyone laughs]

Nigel: I did.

Earlone: It was like, so it was like a year in the making because I end up— I filed a commutation and it took about a year before that it all just came about, came to happen. But I think we were thinking more about like, how we was going— how it was going to go on, who was going to be the next person - the next co-host and me, I was thinking about, *oooh, I'm finna get outta here.* [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs]

Nigel: I'm sure you had other things on your mind. [laughs]

Earlone: I mean, I loved everything, but I was like, *yeah, I'm thinking about the future.* And one thing I did know that was PRX and Radiotopia was gonna hire me. So, that was like, *cool* 'cause that's one of the things that you definitely need getting out of prison is employment. That's like the main thing. [crowd claps] Indeed.

Nigel: And obviously lets us tell different stories about re-entry. And I think there's a really nice example of that—

Earlone: And I think of this clip is, uh, a guy Ronnie Young. He got out, and he didn't have all the resources necessary because he instead of getting out on parole, he had a drug case. So, he got out on probation. And he— all he wanted was to like get in a program or something.

[clip from “Kissing the Concrete” begins]

Earlone: So, since the time we left you, what have you been going through?

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

Earlone: And he knew your name and shit?

Ronnie: Yeah. 'Cause I used to sell him shit, right?

Earlone: Oh yeah, okay.

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

Earlone: Mmmm. Do it make you feel better?

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

Earlonne: Right.

Ronnie: Fuck, that's what's kept me in prison all my life, man, is drugs. I hate it, bro

[clip ends]

Jenn: So Earlonne, you came out and you were able to go straight into employment unlike the clip we just heard. And I wonder whether or not it changed your relationship to the podcast. Whether being a producer outside was fundamentally different?

Earlonne: Well, I haven't took a vacation yet. [Jenn laughs] [crowd laughs] Where you at, Julie?

Nigel: Join the club.

Earlonne: Hi, Julie. [laughter continues] So, being employed full-time, it's been— it's what you dream about when you in prison. It's like one of the goals, like, how can I find employment? Like, righteous employment. Not just mediocre employment, just righteous employment that to take care of me, and my family, or whatever the case may be. But being a producer on the podcast is lovely. Like I said, it's eleven months I've been home. And I'm gonna go back to this one again— Julie? [everyone laughs] No, but I'm about to take a vacation, so I'm about to really enjoy it. [crowd claps]

Jenn: Nigel, did— I mean having your producing partner [Nigel affirms] like there— how did it change it for you?

Nigel: It changed— I'll be completely honest about it, it changed it in wonderful ways. I mean, we get to travel together. I said I've been to Chicago quite a few times, and it's always been for podcast related things. And when Earlonne was inside, I always came by myself.

Earlonne: I came too! [pauses] I was on video.

Nigel: Oh, on video, yes! [Jenn laughs] He always came on video. He did come on video. But now, I can call him anytime. He can stop by when he wants and we can just hang out. It's wonderful. And it was funny when he got out, the moment he got out, we were sitting in the car, driving away from the prison and it was like, we'd always been sitting outside the prison, driving away. I thought it might take a little bit of time to get used to that shift, but no, it was just, it was very natural. Now, I will admit that it was very hard for me when he left. I mean, I miss him inside. That doesn't mean I want him to be in prison, but our relationship—

Earlonne: Alright. Clear that up. [crowd laughs] [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: It started there and there's a new co-host and there's new guys that I really care about and love working with; but Earlonne and I started this together. And so, our relationship was co-creators and colleagues. Now, the guys that I'm working with, I feel like it's more I'm teaching them how to do this. So, it's a different kind of relationship. So, I mourn the loss of that. And I embrace the change.

Earlonne: But--

Nigel: So, I guess both of those things can--

Earlonne: But she say she don't see me that much no more.

Nigel: I know because now I'm inside more without you.

Earlonne: Talk to me.

Nigel: Yeah. I do talk to you on the phone. But I do, you know, it's-- there's definitely a change. But there's so many exciting things in the future for us that there's just a lot to obviously be very, very happy about.

Jenn: Well, one thing that's clear about-- especially, Earlonne, before you were released, I kept hearing these moments when you served as a gut check for the podcast where Nigel would say, "Well, this person told me this thing" and you'd be like, "That didn't happen." [crowd laughs] And what occurred to me was that, you know, in the same way as we talk about ruin porn - people sort of dropping into neighborhoods that have been devastated by deindustrialization, and like taking pictures and being like, *oh, look at this empty building*, and then leaving - that there's the same danger of doing that in prison, of creating this sort of like, *oh, look at the things that happen inside*. But you don't have that tone. And I think a lot of it had to do with you. And I wonder if that was a conscious part of your relationship or is it something that just sort of happened.

Nigel: [inaudible]

Earlonne: No, I think-- so, I may say certain things and it could be a lot of things in society that I was naive to, and it can be a lot of things in prison Nigel was naive to, so I think we pretty much assisted each other in that. Like, if someone come in and like you just said, if they saying something and I'd be like, *it's not-- no*. You know, and so-- and sometime I could be wrong! But if it didn't sound like that, I was cool. So, I think when I left and we brought in other people, I knew the people that we were bringing in. And I knew when it got to the end, I knew that they would be this pretty much, same as me. So, one probably wouldn't have been the same as me. So, we brought in two. [Nigel affirms] [crowd laughs]

Nigel: Yeah. And it is still not the same.

Earlonne: But they good though. I know that they got her, you know what I'm saying? They going to respect the program. They not going to try to get big-headed with it and try to manipulate other stuff. They going to be serious about their work.

Nigel: So, yeah. And I don't know if this really answers your question, but one of the things that we don't try to do, one of the things we do in there, is to create a very professional atmosphere. So, we treat each other as colleagues. I'm not going in there to help guys. I'm going in there to work. I'm not their volunteer, I'm their colleague. And so, when you treat someone as a colleague, you have a much more equal relationship. Of course, it can't be equal because I can always leave. But we do something that sounds so simple but has created a real bond with everyone in there. And that is that we all eat lunch together. We take a lunch break and we stop and I have my food, they prepare their food. And I note how that creates a really lovely comradery. Something as simple as that, something that everyone on the outside takes for granted that you're going to stop and eat lunch with people you care about. It doesn't happen all the time in prison. So, I'm just always looking for small ways to make it more like it would be on the outside. And for example, when Earlonne— we knew Earlonne was leaving and we had to find someone to replace him, we did a real job search. We actually advertised for the position in the prison. We said what we were looking for. We put ads up, people had to submit a resume, a letter of intent. They had to talk about an episode of Ear Hustle that they cared about. We had thirty applicants, we interviewed ten people, and then we got it down to I think, five. And we did another round of interviews. And then, we had three finalists and they had to come down and do a story pitch, they had to do narration with me, and then we made the hire. But one of the reasons to do that was again to do what would happen on the outside. So, even the guys that didn't get the job at least had the experience of what it's like to actually apply and put a resume together. So, I was actually really proud of that process. And it was difficult. So, we ended up hiring two people because we couldn't make the final decision. [Jenn laughs] [crowd laughs]

Jenn: And as Earlonne said, it took two—

Nigel: Yes, exactly.

Jenn: —to make up for him.

Earlonne: And I gave them hell.

Nigel: Yes, you did. I think New York is still afraid of you. [crowd laughs]

Jenn: We're gonna play a longer clip, but first I just want to remind everybody that we're taking questions at the end. So, as you're listening to the conversation, get that good question in your head, so you can ask it. We'll have about fifteen minutes at the end.

Nigel: Should I set this up just a little?

Jenn: Sure. Yeah, go ahead.

Nigel: So, this is a story we did call "The Big No No" and it's about what happens when you fall in love with someone in prison. And we're interviewing a guy named Erin about a volunteer that he fell in love with in the prison.

[clip from "The Big No No" begins]

Nigel: Really appreciate you doing this story, and you speak so beautifully. But there's something I have to talk to you about...

Erin: Okay.

Nigel: And it's going to be a little bit hard.

Erin: Okay.

Nigel: So, I'm just going to be very blunt with you. Is that okay?

Erin: Sure.

Nigel: Okay. So, we do stories about life inside prison. We don't really do stories about people's crimes at all. And so, I found out what you're in prison for... I was hoping I could talk to you a little bit about it.

Erin: [pauses] Um. [laughs]

Nigel: How do we tell stories and leave out that part?

Erin: Yeah. Uh... I don't know. [Nigel affirms] I don't know. I mean. I try to be, like, open and honest about my past and the things that I've done, including what I've done to get to prison. I don't know, I think the scope of the number of people that could possibly listen to this...I'm just really nervous about that.

Nigel: Yeah.

Erin: Yeah, I don't know.

Nigel: While you're thinking, can I tell you some of the things that are just going through my mind about it, and it might help you?

Erin: Absolutely.

Nigel: So, one of the things is that I really believe that people change. Like, I take you as the man you are in front of me, and I listened very carefully to how you talked about your relationship and how much you thought about it, and how painful and joyous the whole experience was for you. And so, when people listen to the story, that's what I want them to take away: that here's this person who's in a difficult situation, they've actually met this person, they fell in love just like anyone else would, it didn't work out unfortunately. You end thinking, like, *here's this guy who's very self-actualized*. And then what worries me is like, so people will leave with this very... *I love this guy*.

Erin: [cutting in] Skewed view of things.

Nigel: [overlapping] Yeah. Not skewed—not skewed. But then someone will research you and be like, *did they just feed me a bunch of bullshit?* But if we could just talk about it and just come to some understanding about what's our responsibility, what's your responsibility. So, I kind of feel like I'm trying to partner with you here. How do we present this?

Erin: Ah fuck. [laughs] You guys are killing me. Here you guys are. Poking and prodding.

Nigel: Then let me ask you this: do you feel like we're being unfair trying to make you do this?

Erin: [overlapping] No, I don't feel you're being unfair at all. And I don't ultimately know what my hesitancy is. So, on December 7, 1994, I murdered my ex-girlfriend. The mother of my now twenty-five-year-old daughter. [Long silence]

Nigel: So how... Like, when I see you, and I talk to you, it's so hard for me to imagine.

Erin: Yeah. Um. Not for me. I'm not that same person, and it's sort of... like I know what I did, I know what I felt back then, and I know what it's taken to get to where I am now. Hearing you say that, right? Like, you don't know what it's been like, and me sitting here today is a different person, and you didn't know that person back then. That's one of the reasons I think why, with the exception of today for some reason, I've never... once I started... once I figured out that I didn't want to be that person

anymore, that was the moment I decided to be honest with myself and other people about all the things I've done. Including killing my ex-girlfriend.

Nigel: So, when you met your wife. Did you have to talk with her about why you... like, how does that conversation happen?

Erin: Yeah. So, [chuckles] she was... yes. We did talk about it. And she knows everything. She knows all the details, and we talked about it at length, and yeah. She needed to process a lot of stuff around that, right? And she had a lot of questions. And it wasn't a pleasant conversation. I didn't expect it to be. So yeah.

Nigel: And do you think she was ever afraid of you?

Erin: No. No.

Earlonne: Now, you spoke about your daughter. Where are y'all at today? How is that today? Is it better, do you have a relationship at all?

Erin: Um, yeah. We have a good relationship. She's amazing. [crinkling paper, Erin sniffs] Somehow she has found it in her heart to forgive me, and I don't feel I deserve it, and I don't feel worthy. [sniffs] And I'm very much looking forward to actually being a father for her, if only late. And hopefully repair some of the damage that I've done to her life. At least some. Yeah.

[clip ends]

Jenn: So, I've had difficult interviews; but when I listened to that, those six minutes of audio, [hesitates] I could hear this tight rope you both were walking, right? Because we talked a little about— a bit about the trust you're building with these men you're interviewing. But then you're also in the back of your head having to hold this trust you have with the listener. What was the lead up to that conversation like?

Nigel: Well, okay. I have to say we were basically done with the story. And a couple of days before, Earlonne said, "Do you know what his crime is?" I was like, "Fuck, please don't tell me." And he told me what it was. And I was like, "We can't—" we started this conversation by saying we don't do stories about people's crimes – but I was like, "We cannot put that story out without talking about it because it's important. It's about love, it's about relationships." And so, we discussed what we had to do. And we also talked with our editor, Curtis Fox, and we all agreed, we had to bring him back, and just ask him about it. And I don't remember how much we talked about it, but I know you said I had to do it.

Earlone: Oh, of course, of course. [crowd laughs] Anything like that, I sick Nigel on them. [Nigel laughs] [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs]

Jenn: But I have to say though, at the end of the clip, when you come in and you ask him, "What is your relationship like with your daughter?" It felt to me like that question had to come from you. Because you understand how difficult it is to maintain relationships.

Earlone: Right. Right. It's hard.

Jenn: Talk about that.

Earlone: So, I think in prison, especially when you have a life sentence, or just in prison, period, it's hard to communicate with people outside of letters and fifteen-minute phone calls. So, you know, this season we did a story. What was the name of the story, Nigel?

Nigel: Respect–

Nigel and Earlone: [simultaneously] "Respect the Paper."

Earlone: We did a story called "Respect the Paper" where guys talk about communicating and how hard it is to communicate. But it's a lot that go– you might go on like a ten month lock down and never even be able to use the phone. And so, your communications is letters. And how many people write letters these days? You know, even your family members, everybody texts and emails. So, it's hard to keep a relationship. But some individuals do get visits. Some individuals keep it going. But it is hard.

Nigel: Oh, I think that's such an interesting question. Again, that's a question no one's ever asked us about that story and it really does have a tonal shift when you start talking about the daughter. Because you almost forget that he had a daughter. [Jenn affirms]

Jenn: Walking that tight rope, I mean, that trust question really comes up again. And... I wonder how you... [sighs] you're asking a lot of somebody. How do you work yourself up [chuckles] to asking someone to trust you with that? [Nigel affirms]

Nigel: Well, I knew Erin for a while, but I think you can hear in the clip, I'm really nervous and uncomfortable. [Jenn affirms] And I went in as vulnerable as I could be letting him know that this is going to be hard and that I want, as I said– I literally said to him, "I want to partner with you on this and let's figure out how we can do it together." I wasn't judging him. I didn't have any accusations about it. I just really wanted to ask him. And I know I'm asking a lot. But this project requires a lot from everybody to do it

right. And that's just as given, I think that it's going to be potentially difficult. And then it's rewarding for everyone involved. I mean, we talked to him after. It's not like we do the story and then we just kind of disappear from people's lives because everything's happening— I think that's something that's really different. Because we're doing inside the prison, I still see these people every time I go in. So, I'm not going into a neighborhood and leaving, I have ongoing relationships with the guys. And even when they leave, I do. But that was just one of the hardest interviews. And— but I learned so much from it about how to do an interview. So, it also ended up being one of the best ones. And I think it was good for Erin too. We talked to many times after and he felt good about it. And if someone can tell me they feel good about that, then I'm okay with it, even though I'm asking a lot.

Earlone: You should have seen Nigel face when I told her that though. [Jenn affirms] [soft laughter in the crowd]

Jenn: I mean, you made a choice there too. You made a choice. You didn't have to tell Nigel. Why did you think it was important to tell her?

Earlone: 'Cause I think Nigel was like, *ah, this is a beautiful story. We done it!* [crowd laughs] *It's a love story about how a guy in a volunteer fell in love, and you know, lived happy ever after.*

Nigel: What are you saying? They got divorced. It's not— that was the thing. It wasn't just a beautiful story. They were in love, but the marriage didn't work.

Earlone: How about today?

Nigel: Well, they got back together, but that was later. [crowd laughs] [Jenn laughs] After he got out. But at the end of the story is they got divorced while they were in prison. And so, it wasn't just a fairy tale. It was about the rigors of, you know, how difficult it is to keep a marriage together, even when you're in love with somebody, in prison. So, yes, they did get back together. But that was way later.

Earlone: You should have seen her face. She was just like—

Jenn: But this is one of those times though, like when I said you serving as that gut check.

Earlone: Right. Well, I knew that was something that probably would've come out.

Nigel: Yeah. Exactly. It would have come out.

Earlone: You know it would have definitely come out. So, me telling her, it was like, *you know what he in jail for, right?*

Nigel: No.

Earlonne: And she was like— when I told her, *you know, he murdered his kid's mom*, she was just like— [gasps, imitating Nigel's reaction]

Nigel: Yeah, this is, this is—

Earlonne: How can we tell this story [Nigel affirms] without telling that side of it, which was the right thing to do.

Nigel: And it's also protecting him. Like, I also said in the interview, people look in— you can find out information about anybody in prison, and our listeners look into it. How would our listeners feel if they looked that up and found out? I mean, I think people then wouldn't trust us. And so again, the whole project is what's really important is trust all around with the men, with me and Earlonne, with the other people we work with, and also with the listeners. Like, I respect our listeners and I want them to respect us. So, that would to me— if I wasn't listener, I would be really let down by that. And then I would start questioning everybody.

Jenn: You said you learned a lot through that process. [Nigel affirms] What did you learn?

Nigel: I learned that it is okay to be scared when you're talking to people. It's okay for them to see that you're scared. It's okay to not know exactly where an interview is going to go and trust that you're going to meander through the muck and the fog and get to somewhere important. And you don't have to have control with what you're doing. I guess it's like embracing the unknown. And also realizing that people are strong, and they can take hard questions and you can take hearing hard answers back. I didn't like hearing that he murdered a woman. I mean violence against women is really hard to take. But I also could hear that and it didn't change how I felt about him. Like, I really could take him as the man he was in front of me. So, it tested that for me. I say that all the time, but is it true? And it was true, at least in that situation.

Earlonne: But I'll say the one thing I did learn from that story: this is one of those stories where we could have jeopardized his freedom. Because he opened up and told us something that the board of prison terms never knew, far as he fell in love with a volunteer. And that could have been something that could have got him denied at parole. So, that was one of those things of like, *okay, okay*.

Nigel: Yeah. [sighs]

Jenn: So, how did you all end up having to—

Nigel: We didn't know that at the time. [Jenn acknowledges]

Earlonne: Wasn't even thinking like that. [Nigel affirms] So, then we was looking at it later. Once he was found suitable, I think the story came out. That's when we released the story and it just so happened to happen at those times. He was found suitable, and then the story came out, and then it was like, *hmm?*

Jenn: Wow. [quietly]

Nigel: *Really? Guys are falling in love with volunteers?* Yeah. It became an administrative issue, [Earlonne affirms]. But he was gone by then.

Jenn: Wow.

Nigel: Thank God.

Jenn: Well, I, want to know more broadly how you both hope the podcast helps us think and talk about incarceration differently.

Earlonne: I think Governor Brown said it best, which is, you know, by now y'all should know Governor Brown is like my roll dog. [crowd laughs] We partners. But I think he said, anytime you're able to lift that veil of secrecy and let the world see what's going on, it's a good thing. [crowd claps] And, thank you and I can't quote him without quoting Lieutenant Robinson. His whole thing is that taxpayers pay for prisons, so they should know exactly what goes on inside the prisons. [crowd claps] I think that what we've been able to do is basically just humanize people. 'Cause a lot of people— it's a lot of stories behind why people end up like that. [crowd claps]

Jenn: What about for you, Nigel?

Nigel: Well, I would say that I'm very interested in people and why they do things and how they find meaning. And...I think we need more compassion in general in the world and that compassion isn't built through statistics and kind of black and white and news stories. Compassion is built through being able to see yourself in someone else's experience in a genuine way. And just to be...not narcissistic— I'm not saying that's a narcissistic intent. It's finding connection. And so, I think when you can tell robust stories that are complicated and you can see people as three-dimensional human beings with experience that you can relate to, it opens your heart, and you feel differently. Now, unfortunately, I think a lot of the media is full of stories undertold so poorly about who's in prison and why. They want to scare you. They want you to think of people as others, untouchable. And so, we're trying in the way we can which is through storytelling. And for me as an artist, doing it from the mindset of an artist. I think that's the way to change people's minds. So that's, I mean, that's my goal. [crowd claps]

Jenn: What kind of response have you heard back? I mean, both positive and I was talking to on the show today to Sister Helen Prejean. You all know her from *Dead Man*

Walking. And we were talking about the tension between redemption and what people think of as being justice. And she said, the problem is that we think of those as two separate things. And I'm curious whether you've gotten, you know, I know you've got a lot of positive feedback, but have you gotten pushback too?

Nigel: Surprisingly little. I mean, I expected we were going to get a lot of negative pushback, especially from victims' rights groups when we started this. And I always want to make it clear that I care very much about victims and we want to do more stories about that. But we've heard from people who are survivors of terrible crimes. We've heard from judges and lawyers and cops and all sorts of people that you wouldn't think would care about the podcast. And they do. And they've talked about how it's changed their mind and broadened their perspective, so... [crowd claps] Yeah. It's kind of amazing. Really a handful of people who haven't been happy with what we're doing, but it's so small, it's hardly worth mentioning, just because it's so small— it's it still shocks me. I'm still waiting for negative reactions.

Earlone: I think it opened my mind up. Like, I started— so when I was serving the life sentence, I started receiving like a lot of letters from junior high schools, high schools, colleges, students that were now using our episodes as a part of their curriculum. And like I said, they do tours around the prison, like different schools come in or legislators and then they'll stop, and the kids will come in and they've heard episodes and they'll start questioning us about it and talking about how it opened their minds up to something different than they've been hearing.

Nigel: Yeah. Another thing that's really wonderful, and this talks to the response from listeners, is that a lot of the men in the story get letters from people and become pen pals. And there's actually a person in the... a couple in the audience here who's become really close with one of the guys that was in our story. And I love that. I mean, that's a kind of change when there's an individual connection that's made through a story and then a relationship develops through letter writing and sharing photographs. That's an old-fashioned way of having a relationship, but it creates a really deep bond. And I always look at that. Those personal relationships that develop through stories as a sign that we're doing something right. And I mean, right before we came on tonight, a man came up to me and handed me a note that he had written about *Ear Hustle*. And I'm just going to read a tiny bit of it, but he— it says, *Ear Hustle...*

Earlone: Read the whole thing.

Nigel: Should I read the whole thing? [crowd affirms] Yeah. Okay. It says, *Ear Hustle, beautifully brutal, painfully sweet, raw, real, and deep. Inside the walls, inside the men, grit and grace, tears and laughter, life and death, captive freedom. Light into darkness, hope shines from the inside out. Thanks for letting us in.* [crowd claps] Um, so...

Jenn: I can see that that makes you emotional.

Nigel: Yeah, it really moves me that someone cares enough to write that and you know, hand it to someone—

Earlonne: Who wrote it?

Nigel: I don't know if I should say his name.

Earlonne: Say his name. Say his name. Give it to him [crowd claps]

Nigel: Does he want his name said? I don't know.

Earlonne: Give it to him.

Nigel: He doesn't care?

Jenn: Yeah, he stood up for it. [Jenn laughs] [crowd claps]

Nigel: Oh, okay. His name is Eddie Pettit.

Earlonne: Hey, that's a nice shirt.

Nigel: And he has a great Ear Hustle tee-shirt on.

Earlonne: Everybody got Ear— [Nigel affirms] thank you. [crowd laughs]

Nigel: But that's an exact sample of— we get lots of letters and people put their hearts into it. And when two hearts speak like that it's pretty beautiful.

Jenn: Before we go to Q & A, I want you to talk about the new members of the Ear Hustle team, Rahsaan Thomas [Nigel affirms] and producer, John Johnson. Tell us about them.

Nigel: Yes. So, Rahsaan "New York" Thomas is the new co-host and you've heard him this season. He has big shoes to fill. [Nigel laughs] [Jenn laughs]

Earlonne: He doing good.

Nigel: He's doing very well.

Earlonne: He's doing great. [crowd claps]

Nigel: He's doing very well.

Earlonne: That's my boy.

Nigel: And John "Yahya" Johnson. [Earlone says, "son" and Nigel affirms] And John Yahya Johnson we've brought on as a producer and he's also really wonderful. And then we've brought on another new guy to help, Antwan Williams, who we need to mention. [crowd claps] Yes. Sound designer, just recently got out of prison...last week?

Earlone: Last week.

Nigel: Last week. [crowd claps] Yeah. And so, we're in the process of bringing new guys on. So, Rhashiyd Zinnamon. Did I say it right, Pat?

Earlone: Exactly.

Nigel: Pat Mesiti-Miller's over there who works with our sound design team. And I want to say that the sound of the podcast is really important. And that sound is created not just through voices, but through the music, which is all composed and performed by men inside. And also, the sound collages that Antwan was making, recording the different sounds of the prison and turning it into music. And Pat's been working with the guys inside tirelessly to help them understand their lives through sound and music. And it's a really important part of it. So, Antwan is, you know, of course, again, we're glad Antwan's out, it is a loss. But now Pat is going to be working really hard to train new guys to keep the sound of Ear Hustle fresh and interesting and sonically challenging, I would say.

Jenn: And your vision for Ear Hustle's future?

Nigel: [to Earlone] What's the vision?

Earlone: Ooh. Continue to do it, go into different prisons. [Nigel says, "different prisons simultaneously] And, the main thing is bring more women voices involved [Nigel affirms] because you know, women are incarcerated going through the struggle too. [Nigel affirms]

Nigel: Yes, and they don't get much of a voice. And I think also just do more challenging stories. You brought up the word "redemption" which is actually a word I'm not very fond of because it, to me, suggests that the only stories worth telling are ones that have this twist where all of a sudden, we can see somebody in a positive light. And it disregards, I think, how complicated people are. You can be more than one thing. And so, I would like to tell stories that are going to challenge the listener more. That there might not always be an end where you feel good about what's happening. I think those stories are important too. [crowd claps]

Jenn: Alright. Now it's your turn. If you have questions for Earlone and Nigel, you can come right down front. We have a microphone right here. And I think we have one up

top in the balcony as well. So, make your way, and we'll start taking questions. Starting up top! Simon, is that mic working up there? [long pause]

Earlonne: Lovely shirt. [crowd laughs]

Jenn: Alright. Simon, let's start up at your mic.

Micah: Uh, hi! I'm Micah. I'm a student here. And really, really excited to be able to see you guys speak. My question is, there are a lot of moments of really surprising vulnerability to me in the podcast. Like, in "Looking Out" when you guys ask, "What animal would you want to be?" in the yard, and people are like, *I want to fly, like maybe a dragon.* And then someone whose name I'm forgetting says like, *I would want to be a dog so that someone would take me home with them.*

Nigel: Arnulfo

Earlonne: He's resting in peace now.

Micah: Yeah, um.

Earlonne: Sad.

Micah: And I wanted to ask for you guys, as people asking questions, how does it feel? And how do you react and process those really surprising moments of heaviness and vulnerability that people share with you?

Earlonne: First. What type of animal would you be? [crowd laughs] [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: It's such a hard question.

Micah: Yeah, oh man.

Nigel: I'm so glad no one asked me that.

Micah: Ah...some kind of bird that lives with a lot of other birds. [laughs] [crowd laughs]

Jenn: So, how do you deal with those moments of vulnerability?

Nigel: I mean, to me life is at its best when you're surprised and challenged by a conversation. So, I take them as a gift that you can always learn something different. You can always learn to interact with people in a different way. But if you're asking also, is it hard to live with some of the painful stories that we hear? Is that part of your question?

Micah: Yeah, absolutely. [laughs]

Nigel: Yeah. So, you know, prison is— can be a very hard place. And sometimes I hear things that are beyond the pale. And Earlonne probably has a different answer to this. I feel that if I fall apart, I'm hearing things, then I'm making it about me. And so, I just listen. And I don't know how I process it. I process it by making as beautiful a story as I can to honor the conversation. But I don't find it depressing. I find it hopeful doing these stories. Yeah.

Earlonne: I think most people that have served time, a lot of time in prison, they become accountable for what they've done. They open up and be vulnerable. They tell the story like it is. I think individuals don't try to sugar coat it. Don't try to do none of that. I think they just basically express themselves. That's what I think.

Nigel: [to Earlonne] Do you ever get— did you ever get depressed by any of the stories that we heard?

Earlonne: Ooh. Did I ever get depressed? Um, I would probably say, and it was a story that I had heard about, but actually hearing the person say it, I would say "Misguided Loyalties" with Tommy Shakur Ross, who was a gang member, and he killed a rival gang member. And within a week, the rival gang gang gang came back and killed his family. So, that was one of those, you know, having him...he had, he was incarcerated, he's still incarcerated. That's like thirty-one years for the crime that he committed. And he's been living with that for thirty-one years. [Nigel affirms] His mother and his brother being executed based on his actions. [Nigel affirms]

Jenn: Let's go down here.

Audience member: I don't think so much as have a question as a statement. I taught Creative Writing at the Soledad Penn for four years.

Earlonne: Indeed.

Audience member: And I actually found out about Ear Hustle from the guys I was teaching. And so when I found out about this and got tickets, I wrote to some of the guys and said, "Hey man, I'm going to Ear Hustle because of you guys." So, it's a kind of shout out if this ever gets [Nigel says, "Nice"] on the radio to D there. But, also just to express for them their gratitude of Ear Hustle being out there and it's an opportunity as I found too of just how much gratitude they have for getting their voices out here. And, I used to tell them, I teach writing elsewhere and I would read some of their papers to my students, and they were just so grateful to have their voices out there and to be seen and heard. So, from [Nigel says, "That's great."] one person inside [Earlonne says, "Thank you" followed by "Appreciate it] volunteered to you guys. [Nigel says, "Thank you" followed by " That's beautiful"] [crowd claps].

Jenn: So, we have probably, maybe, roughly ten people and we've got about ten, fifteen minutes left. So, let's get through as many questions as we can.

Audience member: Alright. Lightning round. Okay. So, you mentioned that you self-censor on which topics— you know which stories you can't tell. Could each of you give an example without giving away too much—

Earlonne: Sure.

Audience member: — of a type of story that you can't tell for reasons of—

Earlonne: Wouldn't tell about how drugs is introduced into prisons. Wouldn't tell about how weapons is introduced into prisons. [light laughter] Wouldn't tell about cell phones is introduced into prison. [crowd laughs] [Nigel laughs] Stuff like that. Clear, far away from that. [Nigel affirms] You don't have to. The media would do that.

Nigel: Yeah, probably stories about gangs in prison. Wouldn't do.

Audience member: I guess, is there— what is the one that's the most, like, that you think should be told that can't tell because, you know? 'Cause some of them sound procedural, obviously, like sneaking in stuff, but... [Nigel affirms]

Nigel: I want to tell about the underground economy, which is a little bit what Earlonne is talking about, but just, the underground economy of prison.

Audience member: Thanks.

Earlonne: We want to keep Ear Hustle safe. [crowd laughs]

Nigel: We want to keep you employed.

Jenn: Yeah, that too. [crowd laughs]

Earlonne: Definitely.

Audience member: Hi. Wow. Thank you for coming to Chicago. I want to also say that my friend from Oak Park was the Karen Kitto that the last episode wrote the thing that you guys played in "Catch a Kite."

Nigel: Oh, wow

Audience member: So, we were really proud of her 'cause you guys played it and everything. [Nigel says, "Nice, nice" quietly] But, so, my question is that in many times throughout the four seasons, you've asked people to open up very— and talk about very traumatic experiences on the show. And not to compare you in any way, shape, or form to like a Maury Povich or that kind of thing, but my memory goes back to when those

shows where they have those exposés. And they're like, "Oh, you're the dad of this kid!" And then, this is like twenty years ago, and the guy went home, and he couldn't handle it because he didn't have the support, emotional support afterwards. So, for the people who have to deal with the emotional opening up and everything, either the victims or the people incarcerated, do you guys provide any support or because it's very heavy and traumatic [Nigel affirms] and deep stuff that they have to deal with and— [Nigel affirms]

Nigel: Well, we talk with guys a lot after stories come out. I think one of the things that helps, I mentioned this earlier, was that most guys get letters from people after they're in stories. And so, they feel very heard. And as the woman said earlier, being heard is really powerful. It's a powerful kind of medicine. So, I have not had anyone come back to me and feel devastated by what came out. I mean, I'm not a therapist, [audience member affirms] you know, neither is Earlonne. I guess what I would lend is listening. But I haven't felt that we've damaged anyone through the stories.

Audience member: Right. [Nigel affirms] Okay.

Nigel: Yeah. But thanks for the question.

Audience member: Thank you.

Jenn: Up top? Simon, up top?

Audience member: Earlonne, it's clear what the positive things you've experienced in your life because of the podcast, you know, your job, and everything that you've gotten, but when you were living inside prison, did you ever experience anything negative because of the podcast?

Earlonne: Nah, not at all. I mean, it might've been negative stares from correctional guards. [crowd laughs] But that was probably it. But for the most part, everybody respected it. They were happy. Like, if I walk in prison, how am I received now? [Nigel affirms]

Nigel: *Earlonne! Earlonne!* Well, when I walk, I mean, he doesn't come in that much, but when I go in, everybody wants to know what's going on with Earlonne. *What's going on with the Earlonne?* [crowd laughs] And I think he represents for a lot of guys something that's so successful that they really admire him. I will say that Earlonne when he was inside was really respected by guys. And I don't think anyone would have fucked with him. [laughs] So, I mean, I picked the right partner in many ways.

Earlonne: Indeed

Nigel: Or we picked each other. [crowd laughs]

Audience member: Thank you.

Steven: Hi, my name is Steven.

Earlonne: Nice shirt.

Steven: Thank you very much.

Nigel: It's a classic.

Steven: I want to talk about in the first episode of the season, you talked about prison politics. But I heard in other episodes, you talked about the board game group, the D & D group that they had their own group and everyone kind of respects that. So, I was wondering why—

Earlonne: Which is actually illegal in prison. We didn't know that at the time. [crosstalk]

Nigel: [crosstalk] We didn't know that 'til after we did the story.

Steven: Oh!

Earlonne: Which is sad because the D & D game brings all races together.

Steven: Exactly.

Earlonne: And it's illegal. Imagine that.

Steven: Well, I guess my question would be, people have already squashed politics in the D & D group and things like that. Why hasn't there been like a group of regular incarcerated people, just group together and just squash the politics. 'Cause I know it's been like from the 70s, 80s, people would stick to themselves. But it seemed like it's possible obviously. So, why then people just join together and done it?

Nigel: Yeah. That's a good question.

Earlonne: So, I think my answer to that is, I think when San Quentin was built in 1852, it was a very segregated country. And when it desegregated, prisons never desegregated. So, a lot of individuals stay in their own groups. And then you have gang violence. Gangs pretty much control prisons, in a sense. So, you have some gangs, you may have the Mexican guys that ain't with peace. Or the white guys or the black guys that's not with the peace. So, you have just a small group that are like the Dungeons and Dragon guys, they're non-affiliates or whatever the case may be. And I wouldn't say that— I don't want to say, like, they don't have as much power, but gangs is like entrenched in prisons. It's everywhere. So, that's probably one of the issues.

Steven: And have people, sorry, one more question, like in music— [Earlonne says, "Sure"] sorry. But, like the music bands, have they started trying to mix there as well? Or is it—

Earlonne: Yeah!

Nigel: Oh yeah, in music there's much mixing.

Earlonne: I would say San Quentin is a different type of prison. It is very open. It's the one prison where you're gonna see all races getting along or playing basketball together. Like, if you're on a little higher security, you won't see that. Because individuals are more trying to stay safe. So, if you get fouled too hard from a different race on a game, you might end up being a fight. And it might— it's just a game. But people don't look at it like that. You know, people pride is on the line. So, it's a lot. It's a lot to that.

Steven: Alright, thank you.

Jenn: Let's go up top.

Earlonne: Thank you.

Audience member: This has been awesome. Thank you so much for coming. My question is around how you get inspiration for your topics. Something so unique to Ear Hustle I think is that every episode is a completely new story. And I just would like some background on how you determine what episode is next. And yeah. I mean, where you got your inspiration.

Nigel: Yeah. Well, we do story pitch sessions, and we sit down with the whiteboard and write all our ideas down. And we push each other to try to go deeper into stories. Over a season, we really think about the arc over the season in which stories should come when. So, in some ways there's a theme to the season, as well as themes to the stories. I personally like to look at the little things, like the smaller stories that can stand in for something larger. So, I think it's always just— it's like any creative process, whether you're a painter or a sculptor, or a musician, just trying to find a new way to do something so you don't repeat yourself. And then to always do stories that people aren't going to expect. So, I think it's like any creative process. You just have to push yourself and edit and then have conversations with all the people you work with. And everyone that works on Ear Hustle brings ideas, stories to be considered. It's not just me and Earlonne.

Jenn: Okay. It looks like we have seven people with questions, and we have about seven minutes left. So, if we move quickly through all of them. Okay, go ahead.

Audience member: Hi, Earlonne.

Earlonne: Nice mug.

Audience member: Hi Nigel. Yeah, I know. I just got it.

Nigel: Oh, thank you. Yeah. They're really nice.

Audience member: Yeah. I want to thank you guys for coming into Chicago. I really appreciate how you guys tell stories. And my question is if there was anybody who you could interview, who would it be? And what question would you want to ask them?

Earlonne: Anybody in the world or in the world or—

Audience member: Anybody in the world.

Nigel: I don't have a good answer at all.

Earlonne: Trump. [crowd claps] [crowd goes "Oooh"]

Audience member: What would you like to ask him?

Earlonne: I don't know. I'll talk to Jenn White about that one. [everyone laughs]

Audience member : Thank you.

Nigel: Sorry, I don't have an answer for you.

Jenn: Up top?

Audience member: Hi, I wanted to start my first apologizing to Earlonne. When I heard the episode that you'd been freed after initial elation, the former radio producer in me kicked on and said, *what's going to happen to the episodes? How can this possibly continue?* It was very selfish. I'm very happy for you.

Earlonne: Thank you.

Audience member: And for your freedom.

Nigel: And I guess you had no faith in me, huh? [crowd laughs]

Audience member: Well, and so my actual question is for you, Nigel. [Earlonne laughs mockingly] I'd love to know more about how you'd gotten started as a volunteer and about how the volunteer process works there. We hear about restorative justice and the moderators that come in and how that was your calling.

Nigel: Yeah. I started as a volunteer professor at the Prison University Project and. I teach the history of photography class. I'm a professor and a photographer when I'm not working on the podcast. And I was interested in prisons. I wanted to go in, but I wanted to go in with a purpose. And so, going in as a professor was a good way to go in. I did that for three semesters and that's how I met a lot of guys and got to understand a little bit more about life inside and got the administration to get to know me. But San Quentin

is an unusual place in that they have something like 3,000 volunteers that go in and out of the prison every year. So, if anyone is interested in prisons, I think they all need volunteers. So, that's just a good way to start. I could talk about it much longer, but I know we've got other people, but that's the gist of how I got in there.

Audience member: Thank you.

Nigel: Yeah, sure.

Jenn: Okay. We're going to take our last few questions from down here. Go ahead.

Audience member: Great. Thank you. So, I think one of the things that makes Ear Hustle so appealing, even if it's not the central focus, is your friendship and your relationship. And at the same time, you guys have talked about that there has to be that boundary between those who come from the outside and those who are on the inside. And so, I'm curious if there were ever times that you felt like that boundary was getting blurred or that it was difficult for you to maintain that as you grew as colleagues and as friends.

Earlone: Well, I would say that one thing about Nigel, she's going to keep the professionalism going. If like individuals step across, she'd be like, "Hey, look here." She gangster like that though. [Nigel laughs] [crowd laughs]

Nigel: No, there wasn't a problem. I mean, we always had a professional relationship. And it's a really serious topic. I mean, you can lose your clearance to go in if anyone in the administration thinks that there's an inappropriate relationship. And that doesn't just mean sexual, it means just getting too close to somebody. So, I was always aware of that and the safety issues that that would cause. So, no, it wasn't an issue, sorry. I wish there was more to say. [crowd laughs]

Earlone: Lovely shirt.

Audience member: Thank you. Welcome back, King. Welcome back.

Earlone: Thank you.

Audience member: So, one of the questions was just, how's your brother feeling about your success? And Cook County prisons need you all in there to hear their stories. And what about the sisters? [crowd claps]

Earlone: So, thank you, you right. So, my brother [pauses] I used to go to a group, talk about certain things, open up my life, and then realize like, *damn, I followed my brother*. So, I used to go back to the cell and be like, *man, you got me in prison*. He used to be like, *nah, man. Go on with that*. But I mean, he feels— he's grateful. He's grateful that I'm

out here and I'm doing positive things and changing a lot of things in the community. So, he's happy.

Jenn: And you said more stories with women are—

Earlonne: Oh, and, as to more stories with women, we're definitely looking to go inside of women's prisons [Nigel affirms] and bring more formerly incarcerated women into the stories as well.

Jenn: And maybe Cook County because, you know— come on back. [Nigel affirms] Come on back and see us again.

Earlonne: Definitely!

Nigel: We would love to.

Earlonne: Get us in. We here.

Audience member: Hi. Um, oh, I'm close.

Earlonne: Hello

Audience member: Along similar veins as the last question, Earlonne, specifically, you guys tell stories that are disconnected a bit from you. They're not as personal. So, I was wondering how you came to the decision to tell the story about your brother and your nephew, and was that very intentional or something that you felt like you had to do for you?

Earlonne: Well, that was one that was always on my mind. It was mainly— it wasn't like my brother, was more of my nephew. You know, honoring my nephew in some way. And being incarcerated, my nephew was shot nineteen times by a Long Beach police officer. And I never, you know, it's a conversation— I was in a cell with my brother and we really didn't even talk about it. And this was after the fact. And so, like doing that story, I was able to sit back and hear his perspective and hear my nephew mother's perspective. So, it was like, it was just one of those situations that came together. It was bittersweet. But I had a lot more insight into how they were feeling at the time because we were all incarcerated. So, that was interesting.

Audience member: Thank you guys so much.

Earlonne: Thank you.

Jenn: Alright. Our last question here.

Audience member: Hi.

Earlonne: Hello.

Audience member: So, I'm really interested in criminal justice policy and legislation and prison reform. But everyone who makes these policies and laws are not the same people who have experienced these policies and laws. So, I was curious, especially now, since maybe being out; first, what you think really needs to be changed that people aren't looking at? And maybe what has changed now that you've been out that you think really needs to be changed? [crowd claps]

Earlonne: Okay. Thank you for the question. So, one thing I can say about California right now is the new governor is Gavin Newsom, and he's very progressive. He's the type of dude that call formerly incarcerated individuals into his office and asks about how can the system change? And then you have the heads of Department of Corrections doing the same thing, bringing in formerly incarcerated people, sitting them at the table and basically, letting them be a voice. And how I think things can change is like in these mandatory minimum sentences. So, that's one of the things and push on your legislators. [crowd claps] Definitely.

Jenn: Well, we're gonna have to leave it there. [music comes in] I want to say special thanks to PRX, Radiotopia, and the Ear Hustle team for collaborating with us on this special event. Thanks to Blake, Amanda, Ellie, and her team from the Studebaker Theater. And finally, thank *you*, our WBEZ audience and members. We really appreciate you coming out and appreciate you supporting the station. Let's give it up one more time— [crowd claps]

Earlonne: Appreciate it! Thank you.

Jenn: – for Nigel and Earlonne. [applause continues]

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[as narrator]

Earlonne: Thanks to Jenn White for the great conversation and Tyler Greene, Kyle White Sullivan, Marqita Wiggins, Simon Tran, Sarah Ballayma, and Amin Cyntje for their help with the event.

Nigel: This was part of WBEZ's podcast, Passport Series. They have one coming up on December 2nd about the podcast, Motive. And you can join that virtually. Check out our website for link to that at earhustlesq.com.

Earlone: Ear Hustle was produced by Nigel Poor, Earlone Woods, Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, John “Yahya” Johnson, and Bruce Wallace.

Nigel: This episode was engineered by Antwan Williams with music by David Jassy.

Earlone: Amy Standen and edits the show. Mariel Cariker has been our interim digital producer for these past few months.

Nigel: Thank you, Mariel.

Earlone: Appreciate you. And Julie Shapiro is the Executive Producer for Ear Hustle and Radiotopia.

Nigel: Ear Hustle would like to thank Acting Warden, Ron Broomfield. And as you know, every episode of ear hustle has to be approved by this velvet-voiced guy right here. [music fades out]

Lieutenant Robinson: [over the phone] You know, there was one— one of the questions asked at the event in Chicago was about the makeup of Ear Hustle: Nigel, Earlone, maybe even myself, and how and if it could be replicated. And I just think that sometimes there's this magic in the air and things happen for a reason. And I don't know if Ear Hustle would be the same without all the pieces in place as they are in their space and at this time. Earlone has been heaven-sent as Nigel said. You know, he didn't speak. Even I didn't think— I wondered *why him?* 'cause I never heard the brother speak. Nigel and I had an interesting beginning where I denied part of her additional projects at the prison. And then myself, I don't know exactly how I fit. I think there were a lot of good PIO's out there. For me, I was the right PIO at the right time. So, with that, I will say I approve this episode. [music comes in]

Earlone: This podcast is made possible with support from the Chan Zuckerberg initiative, working to redesign the justice system by building power and opportunity for communities impacted by incarceration. Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around hear more at radiotopia.fm.

We'll be back in a couple of weeks with a brand-new episode for y'all.

Nigel: Yup. See you then.

END OF EPISODE.