



Episode 51: The Trail
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Nigel Poor: And what are some adjectives you would use to describe your childhood?

Leonard: If I was going to describe my childhood, I would just say I was just... well, I just had a sense of being disconnected. Just being restless. No sense of purpose, no direction. Just, just restless.

Nigel: And what was a time in your childhood that you felt love?

Leonard: Never.

[as narrator]

Earlonne Woods: Today, we're going to devote the whole episode to one story. It's about a crime that took place thirty years ago.

Nigel: And we put listener advisories at the top of all episodes, but this episode deserves a special warning. This is a story about a sex crime. And there are graphic descriptions of violence. And there is also some profanity. It's a tough episode. Some listeners may want to skip this one. [music comes in]

Earlone: I'm Earlone Woods.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor. This is Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia. [music fades out]

We first interviewed Leonard back at the beginning of 2019. That was after you got out, E. [Earlone affirms] This was way before the pandemic. So, we were at San Quentin as usual doing interviews. And Earlone, you don't remember him, do you?

Earlone: I do and I don't. I kind of remember his face, but not really.

Nigel: Okay. Okay. So, when you first meet him, he's kind of quiet. [music comes in] He worked on a couple projects down in the media lab, so I would see him around. But to be honest, I don't think any of us knew much about him until he sat down to talk with us.

Earlone: Right.

Nigel: And this is where I'm going to bring our producer, John Yahya Johnson into the story, because Yahya, you were there with me the day in the studio when we interviewed Leonard.

John "Yahya" Johnson: That's right. Me and Ear Hustle's inside host, New York [Nigel affirms] who won't be co-hosting this episode because San Quentin is still on lockdown because of COVID.

Nigel: So, Yahya, you're going to help me tell this story.

Yahya: That's right.

Nigel: That day it was the four of us all crammed into our small San Quentin studio. You, me, New York, and Leonard.

Yahya: Leonard told us that he was raised by his grandparents. His mom was an alcoholic and abandoned him and his siblings to move to Florida when he was only three weeks old. [Nigel affirms] He told us that he never really knew her.

Leonard: My mother showed up on a Christmas Eve. I was fifteen years old. The police brought her home because she was blind. So, they couldn't leave her at the bus station, so the police brought her to the house. [music comes in] I remember looking at this lady she had on this long black... it wasn't actually real fur, but it was like a fur coat. And I remember looking at her like, *who is this lady?* You know, my great grandma was like, 'This is your mother.'

I never had a bond with my mother. I never had that parent bond. It was just, *okay, she's my mother.* But there was just... this is this lady. I really didn't have any feelings towards her, good or bad. [music fades out]

Nigel: Leonard grew up in a small town in South Carolina in the early 1960s. Whites lived on one side of town and blacks on the other. [voices chattering and bell jingles as store door is opened]

Leonard: I remember going to the grocery store one day with my great grandmother. She got some items, and she didn't have enough money. And she was only short, like maybe twenty cents, something like that. [distant beeping sound of groceries being checked out] And I'll never forget how the lady talked to her. Over a bag of sugar, two-pound bag of sugar. She snatched it out of her hand and told her, 'That's the problem with you niggers.' You know what I mean? And she took the sugar and put it back. But I'll never forget that look in my great grandmother's face... how demeaning, how dehumanized she was in that moment. I'll never forget that look. My brother was with me at the time and when we left the store, I don't know... [music comes in] it's like, we just knew, *okay, we gotta do something*. Later that night, me and my brother burned the store down. We set it on fire. The store burned down. See, I'm not making excuses whatsoever. But growing up in South Carolina being constantly reminded that I was nothing but a little nigger boy. What the hell did I do? I'm eight years old. I went from a sense of not only did my mother abandon me, but the world around me that I found myself in, has stripped me of my identity. Had stripped me of my human dignity. Had abandoned me.

Nigel: When Leonard was twelve, he got sent to live in a children's home run by the Methodist church.

Yahya: One day, he got in trouble for leaving the grounds without permission.

Leonard: My house mother, she beat the crap out of me. [laughs] And, uh, I guess if you want to call it, you know, she made me sleep with her, you know. She made me sleep with her. I had sex with her.

[to Leonard]

Nigel: So, first she beat the crap out of you and then she lured you into her bed to have sex with her?

Leonard: She just kind of like told me I was staying down there with her that night. And so, I slept in the bed with her. And then, we end up having sex.

Nigel: So, your first sexual encounter with another person, I guess, mixes violence and sex together in a pretty obvious way? [Leonard affirms] So, what did that make you think about sex?

Leonard: I looked at sex as just... I guess it's just... it was just something that if you wanted it, you should, you know... I guess you could get it by whatever means necessary.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: So, how would you describe seventeen-year-old Leonard?

[as narrator]

Nigel: That's our co-host inside San Quentin, Rahsaan "New York" Thomas.

Leonard: Restless. [chuckles] Just restless.

New York: Who were you? What kind of haircut did you have? What kind of dreams did you have? How did you see your life working out?

Leonard: I always had a fascination with space. [music comes in] I've always wanted to be an astronaut. And I had these dreams that I would go to the Air Force and then from there go join NASA. And I wanted you to go into space. That was one thing that I always wanted to do, you know. I was always by myself. I was always like a private person. I didn't want to be exposed.

New York: What does that mean?

Leonard: I didn't want to be exposed that... that I didn't have a mother, that I didn't have parents, you know, that I came pretty much a poor family. I didn't want to be exposed.

[as narrator]

Nigel: Leonard spent most of his youth basically just drifting. His first trip was down to Florida to reunite with his mom, but that didn't work out.

Yahya: On his way back, he got a ride from a guy who was heading to New York. The guy offered Leonard a job selling produce out of a truck. Leonard stayed with him for two years. And then he was off hitchhiking again.

Nigel: It was pretty much the pattern. He'd hitch a ride somewhere, stay there for a little while, but he never really got attached to anyone or anything.

[to Leonard]

So, for how many years did you live like that?

Leonard: I'd say from seventeen to like probably twenty-five.

Nigel: You just traveled, and you'd stay with different people. [Leonard affirms] And where would you stay when you weren't staying with these people who took you in?

Leonard: Uh... a lot of times I slept in abandoned cars and stuff like that. Or I would sleep in buildings that was under construction. A few times when I was fortunate enough that I got a job, I got like an apartment or something like that.

Nigel: You didn't have a home base anywhere?

Leonard: Uh... I travelled. I used to, I used to go back and forth cross country. I would hitchhike. But... and then sometimes I would stop. People would like, you know, give me a job or something like that. I would work for them like a day or two, and then, I would... and they'd pay me money and I'd leave.

At the time, I was using crack cocaine. And I had been doing robberies and stuff to support my drug habit. But you know, in my mind, told, *okay, as long as I just rob white people, in some kinda way, this is okay. This is...*

New York: Reparations?

Leonard: Yeah. This is like, *okay. I'm paying whitey back for enslaving Black people. So, if I just rob white people, I'm just evening the score.* That was my twisted thinking. [music comes in]

Nigel: On October 4th, 1990, Leonard got into a car with a guy who was heading south from the Bay area, driving down along the coast.

Yahya: He dropped Leonard off in a town called Carmel.

Nigel: Carmel is a very small, really beautiful little town a couple hours South of San Francisco.

Yahya: Leonard had been dropped off in the parking lot at Point Lobos State Park. And the first thing he did was start looking for a car that he could steal. [music fades out]

Leonard: I thought, *oh, this a park.* And I saw cars, I was like, *oh, this would be a good place to do a lick, right here.* There was like a little parking area for people could park their cars and stuff. And so, I'm looking in cars. Hoping that, you know, a car is open and if somebody left their keys, I can just get in the car and drive off. [music comes in] [footsteps walking along an outdoor trail] I dunno why I decided to just go down this trail. I went down this trail just to see where it went, what was down there. You know, might be... you know, I don't know, maybe a house or something, whatever.

[to Leonard]

Nigel: What time of day was it?

Leonard: It was in the evening, probably around... I'd say, probably around five, six o'clock.

[as narrator]

Nigel: Okay. So just a warning, this next section is a very graphic description of an assault.

Leonard: Right when I decided to turn around on this trail 'cause there's nothing down there, right, I see this lady coming. I had already made my mind, *okay, I'm gonna rob her. She's out here, she has to have a car. I'mma rob her.* [footsteps continue] It was just something about... that she's walking this way and I'm walking this way... she could sense me that something was about to happen. She... in other words, she could sense danger. You know how you say you can feel someone's energy? And she's like, probably about... maybe thirty feet away from me. But the energy is like so... it's like as soon as she saw me and I saw her it's like, *okay, this is my victim.* 'Cause like she knew that. But for some reason, it's like, she kept walking. She just kept walking like, *okay, maybe this guy will just pass me.* [music fades out]

So, when we got right up to one another, I actually just like, 'How are you doing?' And so, I gave her the impression that I was just gonna walk pass her. As soon as I passed her, I just turned around and I grabbed her around the neck. And I snatched off the trail into the woods. I remember I had my hand round around her neck. I grabbed the Adam's Apple, 'cause I didn't want her to scream. I was really just like squeezing it. You know, I remember telling her to shut up, and then she tried to struggle and fight and then I remember socking her. [pauses] I became enraged because she struggled. At that point, it's like, *okay, I'm gonna show you now. I'm gonna show you.* I ripped the clothes off of her. I flipped her over. And then, I started sodomizing her. I wanted to cause her pain. I wanted to punish her. I wanted to really humiliate her. I wanted her to just, you know, feel what it is to be powerless... to be... to be...you know what I mean?

Nigel: Literally at that moment you were having those thoughts or is that now you're thinking that?

Leonard: No, I was having those thoughts at that moment. I just really wanted to just dehumanize her. I sodomized her first. And then I made her orally copulate me. And then I had sex with her.

I gagged her with own panties and I just left her there. She struggled most of the time, but then at some point, she just kind of like gave up.

Nigel: What do you think was going through her mind?

Leonard: She probably thought that I was gonna kill her. [music fades out]

Pat: [over the phone] Mary's two and a half years older than me.

Nigel: [over the phone] And can you tell me about... tell me about her growing up? What was she like as a sister?

Pat: She was the older sister. I was the follower. She was the leader. [Nigel affirms] She was very adventurous, fearless. [Nigel affirms] She was always very outgoing, had lots of friends. [music comes in]

I remember one incident where we were spending the summer in Maine. My dad got us a little rowboat and we would go out by ourselves. I can't believe that we did this at that young age, but we would go out in this little rowboat out into very quiet, kind of a little inlet bay. I had kind of just learned to swim at that time. And Mary said, 'Oh, jump in, Patty! You can swim! You can swim!' I jumped into this water and of course it's like ice cold and just took my breath away, and I started floundering around. And so, Mary jumped over and got me and got me back in the boat. [music fades out]

She was always the one there to pull me up by the collar. She was like the one that always went ahead. [Nigel affirms] And I followed her. [music comes in]

[as narrator]

Nigel: This is Pat. She and her sister Mary grew up in a military family and they moved around a lot.

Yahya: Mary, who later changed her name to Marah, went to college in Utah. She met her husband there and the two of them moved out to California. Marah and her husband were both artists. According to Pat, it was a good marriage, but then he started drinking heavily. Marah stuck with him for years trying to help him, but eventually filed for divorce. And that's when Marah moved herself to Carmel.

[to Pat]

Nigel: What was her life like in Carmel, and did you ever visit her?

Pat: Oh, yes. I would go out there on vacation and spend a week. Usually a week [Nigel affirms] with her in Carmel. And it was always... we always had a wonderful, wonderful time.

Nigel: And what did you think about her art?

Pat: Her art was very beautiful. I've got many of her paintings hanging in my house. And she did a lot of them... she loved this area. She loved the gulf, the water, the seagulls, the pelicans. So, a lot of her paintings reflected that.

[as narrator]

Nigel: On October 4th, as Leonard was catching a ride to Carmel, Marah had been planning to drive to Big Sur about an hour South. But there was too much fog, so she pulled over at a gas station and called her friend to make dinner plans.

Yahya: It was still light out, so she decided to take a walk in Point Lobos State Park.

Nigel: She hiked down to the Point and spent some time there thinking about a new piece she was working on. Then she turned around and headed back to her car.

Yahya: And that's where she encountered Leonard. [music fades out] Leonard said, 'Hi.' Marah said 'Hi' back. Then, he grabbed her and dragged her off the trail.

[to Leonard]

Nigel: Could she have done anything to stop you?

Leonard: No [quietly]

Nigel: So, I guess what is confusing to me is you said you want it to rob somebody. So, how did that go from robbing somebody to assaulting them like that?

Leonard: I think what it was, it really was the fact that she fought. And then, she fought, she struggled, she fought. And then, I think my thing was that I wanted to just really, just show her who was in control. I wanted to really just cause her pain.

New York: What did you think of yourself after you did it?

Leonard: I felt, well, I felt empowered. I felt like, in some twisted way, I felt like this was like this... really sense of... relief. You know, I've gotten back at the world. I've shown the world my pain. And I had this sense that, you know, I finally got back at women.

New York: Hmm.

Nigel: And why did you have to get back at women?

Leonard: Because the one woman that should have cared for me, she abandoned me. And the white female, at that time in the sixties, I couldn't even look at the white female. You know, I carried that with me. And even though I wanted at times the white female, it just... that I don't know. In that moment, I just felt, *okay, I finally got even.*

[to Yahya]

Nigel: [sighs deeply] Yahya, I have to say when he was talking, I just remember thinking, *oh please, God, please don't say that. Because, man, you are really feeding into some unfortunate stereotypes about being a Black man.*

Yahya: Yeah, that was my thinking also, Nyge. [Nigel affirms] I try not to view people through a racist lens because I've been treated that way, so it's really hard to hear Leonard use racism as a justification. [Nigel affirms] And he's reinforcing a stereotype about Black men that's caused a lot of harm. As a Black man, I never wanna be seen that way.

Nigel: Honestly, the team wondered if we should even tell this story.

Yahya: Yeah. But from day one, I wanted us to do this story.

Nigel: Oh, me too.

I mean, a lot of true stories are hard to tell. There's just no way around it. And one of the things we really try to avoid on the show are stories that are just about redemptive narratives.

Yahya: They tie up nicely and feel good, but life isn't like that.

Nigel: Yep. And we can't shy away from it.

Yahya: And like it or not, this is how Leonard tells his story. [music fades out]

Leonard: Always had... well, I always had... I wanted to prove to the world that I mattered, you know, that I was somebody that regardless the group... regardless of what I was told in my childhood, you know, being reminded daily that I was a nigger growing up in the South. I'm gonna get my opportunity and I'm gonna prove to the world that I am somebody. It was just power. Just total domination. I want you to feel my pain tenfolds.

[to Leonard]

Yahya: And you thought that rape would be the best way to articulate that pain at that point?

Leonard: At that point? Yeah. In that moment. Yeah.

[as narrator]

Nigel: For a while, Leonard's version of the story, the way he described it in that one interview we did with him in San Quentin, was the only version we had. [music comes

in] So, we started doing our own research. We called the court in Monterrey near Carmel and got copies of the records from Leonard's case.

Yahya: These records include a testimony from Marah herself.

Nigel: And that testimony is really striking. You have to keep in mind that this statement was given only a month after her attack. So, you have to picture it: she's in court, being questioned by Leonard's attorney on these really graphic, specific details, Yahya, like, how did she get on her knees? When did he flip her over? Exactly how many times did he hit her? Was his hand open? Was it closed? All of this stuff that she has to relive, and she is so incredibly composed. I... I don't know how she did it. [music fades out]

Yahya: The court records also included accounts by other people who were there that day, including people who actually helped Marah right after the attack. Among those are a married couple, Lins and Terri Dorman.

Terri Dorman: Okay. Hi, Nigel. Okay. I'm Terri. [in the background, someone says, 'and it's gonna be off-center'] Okay. And there's Lins.

Lins Dorman: Hi. Nice to meet you.

Yahya: Lins and Terri are retired now. They live in Tennessee. But in the early 1990s, they lived near Carmel. They often worked alongside each other on cases, Lins as a detective, and Terry as the District Attorney's Victim Advocate.

Nigel: Initially, Terry was reluctant to even talk about the case. She is still fiercely protective of Marah even thirty years after this crime took place. But after some conversation, she agreed to talk to us.

Yahya: And we should warn people again here: this next part gets graphic. [music comes in]

Terri: One of the very first things I did for Marah was I went out and bought her a brand-new pair of panties because he took her own and he stuffed them in her mouth. So, I made sure she had brand new ones to take home. She had a black eye, her tooth... one or two of her teeth had been knocked out. She lost additional teeth later as a result of the impact, if I recall.

Nigel: Marah told the court that Leonard threatened to kill her if she didn't stop screaming. He bit her ear all the way through. He strangled her until she started to lose consciousness. And then, he left her tied up with her own shoe. [music fades out]

[to Terri and Lins]

Do you either of you have memories of your first impression of her?

Lins: Um, yes, I do. It's hard to describe, but she was very peaceful is a way I can put it. That she was calm. Obviously, I could tell just from her facial expression that she was very upset. But she was able to give me complete details as to what exactly had happened to her.

Terri: Marah had a very high level of dignity. I really have never met anyone like her, ever.

Lins: What amazed me is how calm she was, [Nigel affirms] despite the terrible thing that had happened to her.

Nigel: Could you describe what she told you in terms of how she ran into Leonard? And... I hate to ask this, how she described the attack?

Lins: She basically said she was sitting there in a nice area and he comes up and she says, 'Hi' and he answers back, and then moves on. And then the next thing she knows, he comes back, and they have some kind of an exchange. And I don't remember now exactly what was said, but he just attacked her.

Terri: He slugged her in the mouth, drug her off into the woods, and then when he was finished, he also took a picture of himself. He took her camera and there was a picture of himself in there. He told her he wanted her keys to her car. And if she lied to him about where her car was, then he would come back and kill her. It was heinous. [chuckles with a tone of disgust] [music comes in]

[as narrator]

Yahya: Leonard tried to get away, but a couple of park rangers spotted him up near the freeway and he was arrested quickly.

Nigel: The trial took place about three months after the attack. Leonard was found guilty on eight counts, including rape and kidnapping. On February 28th, he appeared before the judge for sentencing.

Yahya: Marah gave a victim impact statement; and according to Leonard, she says something remarkable.

Leonard: She said, 'Your honor, this man that hurt me, in hurting me, he has hurt himself.' She said, 'It was like a dark force that came over to him that day.' She said, 'I'm not the type of person that seeks out revenge or retribution.' She was more concerned about my well-being than her own well-being.

[to Leonard]

Nigel: What did she mean? I understand the words, but what did she really mean? And what does it really mean to you?

Leonard: The way that I inter— her words is that... because I was in such a dark place in my life at that time, I had the capacity to do what I did to her. That saying "Hurt people, hurt others"... by me, physically hurting her, also hurt myself. It also caused me trauma because I'm carrying this around.

New York: The way you just described, like she forgave you?

Leonard: Um... I don't know if I'mma say that she was forgiving me, I think what it was— I think she... well... I think she forgave me; but I think what it was is that I just really had the sense that she was more concerned about my well-being, about me going forward in life, as opposed to her well-being.

New York: Yeah, that just sounds so incredible because the crime you described, like, you did her *horribly* wrong. [Leonard affirms] She did not deserve that in no way, shape, or form. And the fact that she could be more concerned with your well-being than hers... how did that make you feel, in that moment?

Leonard: That hurt worse than the sixty years that they gave me. Because it's like, I did this to you, I did this hideous thing to you, and then, I can genuinely sense that you genuinely care more about my well-being in that moment than you do your own.

Nigel: It's so hard for me to believe after what... I'm going to reiterate what New York said, a really vicious crime, she had reached that realization. I mean, that seems like something that would take people decades to get to.

Leonard: I can only trust that she was able to heal and to move on her life. I kind of got that sense that she was that type of person, that strong type of person that was able to do that. I saw her as a very strong woman, a very spiritual woman. [music comes in]

[to Yahya]

Nigel: Yahya, I remember looking over at you during this interview and thinking, *you're not buying it*.

Yahya: Yeah, I didn't believe him one bit. Because when I hear this, Nigel, what I hear is Leonard still putting himself in the center of the story. [Nigel affirms] It's all about his needs. First his need to injure this woman, and then his need to believe that she let him off the hook for what he did. [Nigel affirms] In my view, he's not holding himself accountable for this crime at all.

Nigel: At San Quentin, I've heard a lot of guys talk about accountability, but I want to know, like, what does it mean to you specifically?

Yahya: Yeah; so, Nigel, accountability is something that comes up in groups a lot. [Nigel affirms] And for me it means accepting responsibility for my actions. [Nigel affirms] You know, coming to an understanding that I harmed the victim. And by accepting accountability, it allows you to put yourself in the shoes of the people that you've harmed, hopefully to convince you that that harm is something that you never want to cause anybody else.

I committed a robbery. [Nigel affirms] And I always thought that robbery was a victimless crime because the money belong to the bank. But when I started to accept accountability, I realized that I psychologically traumatized a person. [Nigel affirms] And so, when I hear Leonard speak about, uh, 'I had to let the world feel my pain and people had to understand my hurt and the way that I felt' appear to me to be a justification to perpetrate his crimes against humanity. And so, I didn't buy it one bit.

Nigel: Do you think that Leonard sees his victim as a person?

Yahya: No. I mean, the way Leonard described the crime, I think he seen Marah and potentially other victims as this concept. This concept of him being abused and victimized and him needing to strike out in [Nigel affirms] general. You know? So, I don't think that he's internalized Marah as a human being. [Nigel affirms]. Yeah, and that's not accountability at all.

Nigel: Yeah, that line about, 'she cared more about my well-being than her own.' Yahya, it really made me wonder, *what did Marah say that day in court?*

[to Terri]

Could you read the victim impact statement [Terri affirms] that you talked about?

Yahya: Terri Dorman was there the day that Marah stood up and addressed the court. Thirty years later, she still keeps a copy of the transcript.

Terri: So, [reading] "The court..." – meaning Judge Wunderlich – "said you have the opportunity and right as the victim of crime to make a statement to the court at this time, proceed.

Your honor, and the court, this has been an act that is repugnant to God, man, and woman. It has been an unimaginable trauma. I could make all kinds of poetic analogies of the atrocity of a kind of violence against any person and especially of a woman of a rape of this violent nature. I consider myself a peaceful and loving and gentle person. This kind of violence has unimaginable trauma on me. The healing process is a long one. The physical healing, I'm a strong and healthy person. As you can see, I have been healed physically, but there are many layers of healing that have to occur in something like that: emotional, mental. That healing is continuing to go on. I'm not a

person that demands revenge. I demand change and positive transformation. The only thing that can heal that in our society is understanding and love. [music comes in] I pray that the assailant, the man who hurt me, will realize that in hurting me, he has hurt himself. I pray that he's able to understand the force of darkness that came over him when he hurt me. My faith and human nature has not been damaged. In fact, it's been strengthened because I have realized that no human being who is healthy – Black or white – and in harmony could possibly do this: inflict this kind of violence on another human being. And no man – Black or white – a healthy man would be capable of such depraved behavior in regards to a woman. I thank everyone that's helped me. And I hope that this provides an example for other women who have to endure this trauma to know that they have the strength to make the choice to become stronger and more courageous human beings. That's pretty much all I have to say. Everything has been said.' [music fades out]

Nigel: Um, it's so interesting to hear that because clearly... it's not a forgiveness. And it's been... somehow, it's... like a myth has been built around that.

Terri: It's been twisted–

Nigel: Yeah, twisted.

Terri: –to his own narrative, [chuckles] in my opinion.

[as narrator]

Nigel: There was something else that Terri told us, a detail Leonard hadn't mentioned in his recounting of the trial and sentencing. Something he said in court the day after Marah read her statement.

Terri: When he stood up and was walked out by the bailiff, he turned around and he yelled out, 'See ya, in thirty-five.'

Nigel: Wow.

Terri: And then he was walked out. That was his statement. [soft footsteps on hard surface] [abstract transition sound]

Automated voice: This is Global Tellink. You have a prepaid call from, Leonard, [Leonard's recorded voice says name] an inmate at the California prison, San Quentin, San Quentin, California. This call and your telephone number... [fades out]

Yahya: It had been over a year since we interviewed Leonard.

Nigel: We haven't been able to go into San Quentin since the pandemic started, but we really wanted to ask Leonard about what Terry had told us.

Yahya: [over the phone] Hey, Leonard.

Leonard: Hi.

Yahya: It's Yahya again. So, uh... after your interview, we decided to, you know, actually do this story, right? [Leonard affirms] So, since the interview, we've learned that at the end of the trial after Marah actually made her victim impact statement, [Leonard affirms] that you shouted out, 'See you in thirty-five.' What did you mean by that?

Leonard: I remember saying, 'See you in thirty-five.' What that was saying was that no matter what life threw at me, that I was gonna persevere. And I wasn't even thinking about her or my impact that I had on her and others. I was just thinking about myself in the moment.

Nigel: You know, it probably to her, it felt like you were threatening her. And I just want to ask you, in your mind, was that a threat?

Leonard: The inner turmoil that I was going through at that time in my mind, you know, me making a statement like that, it probably was directed towards her. [Nigel affirms] Like I said, that's the space that I was in at that time.

Nigel: So, if I pushed you and asked you if the Leonard back then... if I asked the Leonard back then, was the Leonard back then threatening?

Leonard: I think the Leonard back then was... not just threatening her, I think he was just threatening... I think it was like humanity. It was like, it was directed towards humanity. [Nigel affirms] Like, you know, how, like I said, I was in that space, and I was like, *you can't stop me. I'll be back.* [Nigel affirms] In that moment, it's like, *I'm gonna continue to be me.*

[as narrator]

Nigel: We also felt like it was important for Leonard to know what we were saying about him in this piece.

[over the phone, to Leonard]

Yahya: I want you to know that when we listened back to this interview, [Leonard affirms] we really don't hear you talking about or having empathy for Marah. [Leonard affirms] Or thinking about her perspective and what she went through. To me, that's the kind of empathy for your victim that is a big part of what it means to be accountable. And so, what do you think about that?

Leonard: I don't think I'm thinking about myself. I mean, I don't know. I don't have all of the answers, you know what I mean? It's not that I'm trying to make it about me, I just

know that her words, her words, they resonated with me. They stayed with me. And when I finally arrived to that place, only then did I realize... the impact of my actions. There are no words that can convey... I don't have words. I'm lost for words. It's just it's uh... yeah, I don't have a word.

[to Pat]

Nigel: But you didn't attend the trial or...?

Pat: Oh, no.

Nigel: No. Okay.

Pat: No, I did not. I didn't hear anything about the trial.

[as narrator]

Nigel: As close as they were, Merah didn't really talk to her sister Pat about what had happened to her.

Pat: And it wasn't something that she wanted to talk about a lot. I knew about her injuries, which were quite extensive.

Nigel: Do you think that she was protecting... like, she didn't talk to you about it because she was protecting you somehow?

Pat: No, I don't think she was protecting me. I think she just didn't want to dwell on it. It wasn't gonna be something that defined her. Being violently raped and beaten [Nigel affirms] cannot not affect someone's life forever.

Nigel: Right.

Pat: But she chose not to dwell on it and to have it define her. [Nigel affirms]

Nigel: We've heard from several people that your sister talked about – I'm not going to say forgiveness – but she talked in terms of having compassion for him very quickly, even at the trial. What do you make of that?

Pat: Hate is a very toxic emotion [Nigel affirms] and for people to carry hate and those kinds of emotions within themselves, it doesn't do any harm to the other person, it harms yourself. My sister made a conscious choice that she was not going to let those kinds of emotions eat away at herself. He is going to suffer consequences of his actions for many years. And so, for her to have compassion upon him, I can see that. That she was going to release those feelings from herself in order to not have it eat away at herself. [music comes in]

Nigel: You talked about her really honoring her body and also that she was very spiritual, and you are as well. You know, like, I can't get my mind around what he did. And I just wonder how you think about that?

Pat: Well, myself personally, I choose not to judge because I do not know what led him to a point where he would commit something like that. I don't know. I think it's something that's so deep within themselves that it will always be there. But there again, personally, it's not for me to judge him. [Nigel affirms] He will receive his judgment when he stands before his Savior, his... [Nigel affirms] Jesus Christ who will judge him. [Nigel affirms] It's not for me to judge. [music fades out]

Nigel: So, from your perspective, what do you think we owe her with this story?

Pat: I think that we owe to Marah a true accounting of this crime against her. That it was unprovoked. That it was heinous. That it was violent and brutal. But also, her truth that she chose to transcend the pain, emotionally and physically, in order to live a life that she felt would fulfill her need to have peace.

[as narrator]

Nigel: In the years after the attack, Pat says that Marah went on a religious pilgrimage to India. She painted, wrote poetry, and sang in a choir. She was also single and according to her sister, committed to staying that way.

[to Pat]

So, did you go back to Carmel again and spend time with her there?

Pat: Oh yeah, we visited. I would go and spend a week or so. And outside of Carmel, there's a Zen Buddhist monastery [Nigel affirms]. And we would go there – in the summertime, they open it up to the public. [Nigel affirms] And we would go spend probably three days there which was beautiful. It was a really wonderful experience. We did that a couple of times.

Nigel: Did you notice a change in her? I mean like in her spirit, or her vivaciousness, or anything like that?

Pat: No, I don't think that I did. [Nigel affirms] She was still the same person that I remember. She was always an early riser. She would get up and she did meditation in the mornings. I think she possibly became even more spiritual after that. [music comes in]

[as narrator]

Yahya: Marah was a hiker and a vegetarian. She was in great health.

Nigel: That changed in 2004.

Pat: She had gone to her hairdresser and her hairdresser had seen kind of a little lesion on the back of her head. Thought it was maybe an ingrown hair or something like that. [Nigel affirms] And she went back a couple months later to have her hair redone; [Nigel affirms] and the hairdresser said, 'Marah, this thing on your head looks like it's getting worse. I think you really need to go have this checked out.' She took care of her body. She was very, you know, she was just the poster child of a healthy person. And then, all of a sudden, one day she just got deathly ill. I mean, she was couldn't stand up. Her equilibrium was off.

Yahya: Pat got a call from Marah's roommate who told her Marah couldn't even walk. The roommate and another friend carried her to the car and took her to the hospital.

Pat: And of course, the first thing they did was to run some scans on her and found that she was covered, I mean... she had cancer everywhere. And what was causing the symptoms was she had a couple tumors in her brain. And they were pressing on her optic nerve. And that was what was causing the nausea and the not being able to stand up. That was on a Saturday. I made an arrangements, got on a plane Sunday. Twenty-six days later, she was dead.

Nigel: Wow.

Pat: She was certain she was gonna get out of there. She did not realize that she was dying. She was gonna beat this thing. My sister, she loved her hair. [Nigel affirms] She had very fine, baby fine hair. And she took very good care of her hair. I came in one morning and they had given her a shower and had washed her hair and it was just a matted holy mess. And she didn't want anybody to take care of it, but me. And so, I was combing her hair, I got some spray that you spray on baby's hair to get the tangles out. [laughs] I was combing it just minute pieces at a time and it was just... her hair was just coming out in clumps in my hand. And I didn't let her know that. I just put the hair in my pocket.

It was a very spiritual experience for me because the morning that she passed away, I came in and I just knew. I said, 'This is the day.' I knew it. And I kneeled down by the side of her bed, and at that point she was kind of in an in-between place. [Nigel affirms] She was conscious, but she had her eyes closed. She was able to chew ice chips. And I just said, 'Mary, it's time for you to go.' I said, 'Everything's taken care of. Everything is fine. Mom and Dad are waiting for you. You need to go. It's fine.' Then I just talked to her very quietly, quietly, quietly until she took her last breath. Two of her best friends were in the room with me at the time and we just were very quiet. Um, we didn't go out-rush out and tell the nurses or the doctors. We just sat with her for a little while. And then finally I went out and let them know that she had passed. I asked if it would be

alright if we cleaned her up. And they said, 'Certainly.' So, they brought in warm, wet towels and everything, and we cleaned her and fixed her as best we could. And that was it. She had completed what she needed to do here on earth. It was time for her to go.

Nigel: Um, I have to say, I mean, this is off the story a little bit, but I hope that I would have the fortitude and the love to do what you did for your sister if I were in that situation. I'm so touched by that. It's really incredible [getting emotional]. So, I thank you for sharing that... Sorry.

Pat: No, that's fine. That's all right.

Nigel: Yeah. It's really something. Will you listen to this story when it comes out?

Pat: Yeah, I will. If you let me know.

Nigel: Of course we'll let you know. Um, I don't know how to feel about you listening to it. I mean, I feel like you've really come to terms with what happened to her and her dying. I hope it won't be upsetting.

Pat: No, it won't. Her dying, you know, it's unfortunate [Nigel affirms] that her life was cut short; but she lived a very full life. She had wonderful memories and did a lot of things, amazing things. And she basically was very, very happy. I think she did not carry that karma, the negative karma, the weight [Nigel affirms] with her to the other side. She was a beautiful, beautiful person. [music comes in]

Earlonne: Leonard is scheduled for release from San Quentin in 2022.

Nigel: If you or someone, you know, has been affected by sexual assault, you can get help by calling the national sexual assault helpline at 800-656-HOPE.

Earlonne: Thanks to Martina Lutz Schneider, Monya Davis, Terry Thornton, Katie James, Oscar Luna, Rebecca Weiker, Sonya Shah, and Lloyd Farnham for their help with this episode.

Nigel: This episode was produced by me, Nigel Poor, Amy Standen, John "Yahya" Johnson, Earlonne Woods, Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, and Bruce Wallace.

Earlonne: This episode was sound designed and engineered by Antwan Williams with music by Antwan and David Jassy.

Nigel: Shabnam Sigman is our Digital Producer. Julie Shapiro is the Executive Producer for Radiotopia.

Earlonne: 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 guy here. [music fades out]

Lieutenant Sam Robinson: This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer San Quentin State Prison. And it seems like each season, Ear Hustle does an episode that's really, really heavy and it weighs on you. And with this episode, I know this episode checks off all of that. Very, very thought-provoking. And I think it gives the listener no matter what perspective you're in, something to truly weigh in and think about. So, with that, before I give approval to this episode, I just like to take a little time and say to my family: we had a loss on December 1st this year. My uncle Winthrop Marshall who we call Win; he passed away unexpectedly. And to all that were in his circle, they knew how profound an impact had on everyone. And he will be very, very, truly missed by his children and his siblings and other people that he had opportunity to interact with. So, with that, with all the weightedness of this episode, and the weightedness of me putting myself out there with the death of my uncle, I will say that I approved this episode.

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

Earlonne: Some of the best podcasts around.

Nigel: Hear more at radiotopia.fm. I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: I'm Earlonne Woods.

Yahya: And I'm John "Yahya" Johnson. Thanks for listening. [music fades out]
[Radiotopia jingle]

END OF EPISODE.