



**Episode 58: The Whole Shabang**  
**Air Date: May 12, 2021**

[in the field – at Lancaster State Prison, outdoors, voices chattering in the background]

**Mike Oog:** My name is Mike Oog and I've been incarcerated twenty-nine years.

**Nigel Poor:** OK, "The following episode of *Ear Hustle*..."

**Mike:** [repeating after Nigel] The following episode of *Ear Hustle*...

**Nigel:** "Contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners."

**Mike:** Contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners.

**Nigel:** "Discretion is advised."

**Mike:** Discretion is advised.

**Nigel:** And can you say where you're standing right now?

**Mike:** I'm standing in front of the program office at LAC, Lancaster State Prison.

[strong wind picks up]

**Nigel:** Oooh!

**Speaker 1:** Watch your eyes! Oh yeah, [theme music comes in] that's a dust storm. [voices chattering in the background, reacting to dust and wind] We just got dusted. This is the Mojave Desert and we just got dusted.

**Nigel:** Wow. That hurt.

[as narrator, to Earlonne]

**Nigel:** Oof, Earlonne, that was not like being at San Quentin.

**Earlonne Woods:** Nah... I haven't been in heat like that in so long to where I forgot my hat. [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel:** I know. But, OK, you didn't have your hat, but you were dressed up that day.

**Earlonne:** Oh! Any time I step back in a penal system, [Nigel laughs] I'm gonna be suited and booted. You know what I'm saying? I gotta inspire cats.

**Nigel:** Right! Success walks back in, right? [Nigel laughs]

**Earlonne:** Indeed. In 95 degrees weather.

**Nigel:** 95 degrees in April.

**Earlonne:** Those desert prisons ain't no joke, Nyge. [Nigel affirms] But the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation asked us to come. [Nigel affirms]

They wanted us to talk to guys about our experiences getting the vaccine.

**Nigel:** Yeah. The CDCR is trying to get all prisons up to an 80% vaccination rate. And this prison, California State Prison, Los Angeles County, which a lot of folks call Lancaster because it's in that town, is at a 62% rate which is one of the lowest rates in California. [theme music fades out]

[in the field - at LAC]

**Ike Dodson:** [speaking on a mic to crowd] Alright. So I've always wanted to say this... but... my name is Ike Dodson and I approve this message. [crowd laughs] I'm going to bring up actually both Nigel and Earlonne right here. There's two microphones. You guys can both speak if you guys want. [voices chattering]

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** There were about ten guys sittin' out in that hot ass sun. A few had already taken the vaccine, but a bunch were undecided.

[ambient sounds from LAC, scattered chapping and then, Nigel says, 'Thank you' while on the mic heard quietly as if in the distance]

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** After we talked, guys had some questions. And this one dude, Shabaz, he was sitting there with this look on his face, like, *someone come talk to me*. So, I went over to talk to him. He had all these tattoos on his face, but man, he was a hard sell about that damn vaccine.

[in the field – at LAC]

**Shabaz:** I believe I had caught COVID, and I survived so to say. So to me, it's like, what's the use of getting a shot to prevent from catching COVID and I had COVID and it didn't live up to the hype, as if you know all this dramatic stuff happening to me, just me personally...

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** But the other guys were on his *head*.

**Nigel:** Oh yeah, pretty much everyone was like, 'Hey, come on. We're here to support you. You should do this thing.'

[in the field, outside at LAC]

**Speaker 2:** ... Let me tell you what they told me at the auto dealership: 'What can I do to get you into this car?' [everyone laughs, followed by chattering and casual side conversations]

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** And I guess it worked. 'Cause all of a sudden, Skeptical Shabaz had a change of heart.

[in the field, outside at LAC]

**Shabaz:** I'mma vaccinate. OK, let's go. [everyone cheers] [theme music comes in]  
[as narrator]

**Nigel:** Earlonne, this guy, man. It just seemed like he was swaying with the wind.

**Earlonne:** So, we swung with him to see if he'd go through with it.

**Nigel:** Yep. And we'll get back to that a little bit later.

**Earlonne:** For now, let's get into this week's episode. [music fades out]

[to Chayne]

**Earlonne:** Who are you, man? Don't anybody know you. [Chayne laughs]

**Chayne:** I'm Chayne. [continues laughing]

**Earlonne:** It's that laugh. You ain't even need to say nothin' – the laugh, right there.

**Chayne:** I'm Chayne. What are we talking about?

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** Old Chayne! He's an *Ear Hustle* alumni.

**Nigel:** Oh, Mittens. You know how I feel about him. It doesn't take much convincing for me to say, 'Let's get him back on the show.'

**Earlonne:** Nope. That's why we drove down to pay him a visit over in Santa Cruz a little while back. And he told us about this theme that happened to him while he was locked up. [music comes in]

**Chayne:** Now, see, I saw someone in... when I was in prison, with like a iPad tablet.

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** Mittens was really curious about this tablet. [Nigel affirms] It had really nice graphics and all these games and shit on it. So he's like, 'Yeah, I'm about to get me one of these.'

**Nigel:** So Chayne decides he's gonna place an order through a catalog.

**Earlonne:** Not just any catalog.

**Nigel:** Right. The catalog for a prison approved company that specializes in selling stuff to incarcerated people. And the tablet in that catalog, E...

**Earlonne:** Hey...

**Nigel:** You know it's not an iPad, right? [laughs]

**Earlonne:** No! [sarcastically]

**Nigel:** It's from a company called Clear Tech.

**Earlonne:** Yup. Clear Tech is a *very* different situation. [music fades out] But Chayne didn't know that yet. He was psyched.

**Chayne:** So I thought that that was the quality that I was getting. [Earlonne laughs] 'Cause he was playing games on it and I'm like, 'Oh yeah! This tablet's about to be lit.' [laughs] And then I get my Clear Tech and it had like solitaire on it. I'm like, 'Oh, this thing's fuckin' sucks. [laughs] It's worst one!'

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** You wanna tell them why the other guy's tablet was so much better than Chayne's?

**Earlonne:** Because unlike Chayne, that guy didn't get his through the catalog. He got his through... shall we say *unofficial channels*.

**Chayne:** [reenacting dialogue between him and another resident]

'Why is yours so good?'

'Oh, it's because like it's brought to you by Apple.'

So, it was like... Wi-Fi and everything on it. Mine was just like... had a reader on it with like *Moby Dick* and *Where the Red Fern Grows*. [laughs] [music comes in] Both books I read...

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** Today on the show: What you can and can't *legitimately* get in prison. It all depends on the catalog.

**Nigel:** Finally... a shopping episode. You know I'm excited.

**Earlonne:** But not yo' type of shopping, Nyge.

**Nigel:** Not exactly, but still... it's shopping.

**Earlonne:** I'm Earlonne Woods.

**Nigel:** And I'm Nigel Poor.

**Earlonne:** This is *Ear Hustle* from PRX's Radiotopia. [theme bass drops and then fades out]

[flipping through pages]

[to Earlonne]

**Nigel:** Can you hear that?

**Earlonne:** Yeah. It sound familiar.

**Nigel:** Yes. It sounds like the catalog, right? [both laugh] Of course I have one with me. And let me describe it: It's the prison supply catalog. It's kind of like a thin phone book. It's actually 300 pages, but it's got that same flimsy kind of paper. And as I flip through it, the first page I come to is two pages of different kinds of peanut butter and almond butter. [Earlonne affirms]

Then there's a section with condiments, and I'm looking at an item here that looks quite appealing to me called Sucker Punch Gourmet Pickle Chips. [Earlonne chuckles]

—But what was your favorite section? [music comes in]

**Earlonne:** Of course it was the shoes. [Nigel affirms] That's actually everybody favorite section... you know. You gotta look through and see what fits your fancy. Because if I can remember, their selection was like Nikes, Pumas, FILA's, [Nigel affirms] and shit like that.

**Nigel:** I'm saying 'yes' because I actually happen to be on this sneaker page now. And this is what strikes me: There's five pages, every single pair is white. [both chuckle] There's no color choice.

**Earlonne:** Yep. CDCR somehow tripped out on the color choice. I forgot when... but you used to be able to have whatever color you wanted, except red or blue, you know, the gang colors.

**Nigel:** But now, it's pretty much all white. And they have to cost less than 75 bucks. [Earlonne affirms] And they can't have those air pockets in the soles either.

**Earlonne:** 'Cause supposedly... you can hide shit in there.

**Nigel:** Hm.

**Earlonne:** Really? But after you check out the shoes, [Nigel affirms] you used to gander over to the clothing section. [Nigel affirms] 'Cause you might see a nice suit in there that you can, you know, get. [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel:** I think you've forgotten because all the clothes here are actually white and gray.

**Earlonne:** Alright. True, true. But the nice thing about ordering clothes is that you get to hold on to something. It's like, clothes for me will last for a while.

**Nigel:** Right. As opposed to just buying food, right, 'cause that goes real quick.

**Earlonne:** Too quick! But everyone got their different preferences, you know what I'm saying? Some guys have real strong feelings about their favorite shit, you know.

**Nigel:** And back when we were at Lancaster Prison, outside of L.A., for that COVID vaccine awareness event, [Earlonne affirms] we had a chance to talk to some guys about the catalog. [music fades out]

[in the field – at LAC]

**Nigel:** When the catalog comes, what's the first section you go to?

**Speaker 3:** Yeah, I always go to the shoes, but shoes are... not that good.

**Speaker 4:** They fall apart quick. [Nigel affirms] They sell us Nike's and New Balance and Sketchers. But they're the low end. They're bottom rung shoes.

**Nigel:** What's your go-to item?

**Speaker 5:** Coconut oil.

**Nigel:** Coconut oil?!

**Speaker 5:** And the reason being is because it's a super food. And it's antiviral. So it fights against valley fever. It fights against COVID-19. I can use it on my skin, on my face.

**Speaker 6:** My favorite item is candy and Chinese sausages, I guess.

**Speaker 7:** I go to the seafood a lot. Um... mackerel... octopus...

**Speaker 8:** They have an eight-ounce bag of coffee for \$2.90 and I can't pass that deal up because I can buy ten bags.

**Nigel:** You get ten bags at one time?

**Speaker 8:** Well, it's for three months. So...

**Nigel:** I was gonna say, how many cups of coffee is that?

**Speaker 8:** That's two a day, roughly.

**Nigel:** Do you share?

**Speaker 8:** Yeah, absolutely I share.

**Speaker 9:** Cereal, granola cereal, granola bars, rice, beans.

**Speaker 10:** I've been buying Ritz crackers.

**Nigel:** What'd you put on top of the Ritz cracker?

**Speaker 10:** Tuna... oysters... sometime I like that, you know.

**Nigel:** Does this mean anything to you? *Everything tastes great when it sits on a Ritz.*  
[Speaker 10 laughs]

**Speaker 10:** That's probably true though.

[garbled speaking over loudspeaker, message indistinguishable, followed by abstracted electronic sound as a transition into next scene]

**Natalie Tovar:** So like with our creamers, I mean, the options... We have French Vanilla Creamer McDaniels; we have hazelnut coffee creamer; we have Coffee Mate Caramel Macchiato Creamer... [edited to speed-up pace as Natalie continues to list types of creamers] Coffee Mate Creamy Chocolate Creamer, French Vanilla Creamer; we have hazelnut creamer... vanilla, caramel... I mean, it's like the list goes on and on.

[flipping through pages in catalog] [music comes in]

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** This is Natalie Tovar. She's a rep for the Walkenhorst's Package Company.

**Earlonne:** Walkenhorst's. I used to always say that you needed a black card to order from that place. [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel:** You mean 'cause it's fancy?

**Earlonne:** They was in Napa! You know what I'm saying? C'mon.

**Nigel:** Synonymous with money.

**Earlonne:** Exactly.



**Nigel:** Walkenhorst's is one of the big prison supply companies. And a big part of Natalie's job is traveling around to every prison in California and asking people what they would like to see more or and less of in that catalog. [music fades out]

[to Natalie]

**Nigel:** Who is harder to deal with – the women's prison or the men's prison? Who gets more intense about stuff?

**Natalie:** Um... I would say... the women come with a bigger list. And they're definitely a lot more detailed on the things that they want. Like, I may go in a men's prison, I might only have five items that they talk about... where I'll go into a women's prison, and I'll have thirty-two items that we're going to talk about. [music comes in]

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** And of course, when you're dealing with prisons there are a ton of rules about what the catalogs can and cannot sell.

**Earlonne:** Yep. Here's one: Men can't have dried fruit, hard candy... even ketchup. All that kind of stuff's gotta have some artificial sweetener in it, like saccharine. And that shit... leaves a *horrible* taste in your mouth.

**Nigel:** And that's all because prison authorities don't want guys having real sugar and using it to make pruno. You know, that delicious, prison made alcohol. [Earlonne laughs]

**Earlonne:** But you know what's crazy, Nyge?

**Nigel:** What?

**Earlonne:** Women are allowed to order that kind of stuff. I think it's some bullshit. [music fades out] But, you know, whatever.

**Nigel:** Yeah. I mean, the rules can seem a little... arbitrary.

**Natalie:** A situation that was kind of a big deal for a long time was gray clothing, and what is considered dark gray and what is considered the appropriate gray. Really, it could change based on opinion. I could put ten RNR sergeants here [Nigel affirms] and

they could all be like, 'That's just regular gray.' And some would say, 'That's dark gray.' So I think that would have been a gray area.

**Nigel:** There's a lot of catalogs around, so people do other things with it besides shop. Have you ever heard about any of those things?

**Natalie:** No... I mean, I know that if there's a calendar in them, they'll tear out the calendar and put it up. But I really don't know.

**Nigel:** You haven't heard?

**Natalie:** I haven't heard.

[music comes in]

[in the field]

**Earlonne:** What do you do with those catalogs? If you're not just using it, what do you use them for?

**Speaker 11:** Oh, well, for us that like to work out, we'll roll them up with tape and use them for a workout bar. Get two or three of them together. That usually works 'cause they're thick. They don't break or bend.

**Matt Coda:** [over the phone] One of the things that I learned to do when I was in county was origami. It gave me something to do with my hands.

**Chayne:** I mean, I like to make a little chair out of them. So like when the homies come over, everyone's got a place to sit.

**Nigel:** Can you describe how you made the chair?

**Chayne:** It's not too complicated. [chuckles] You just stack a lot of them on top of each other, and then you tie them up. You know what I mean? Then maybe you could make like a pad. 'Cause my boy would come over, 'cause he worked in the kitchen and he'd come back with some ice cold milks at night. And like, I had the red velvet cookies from canteen, and, like, *The Mick* would be on. And we'd be like, 'Oh well, Let's party!' [chuckles] You know, like, [laughing] drink cold milk and eat some cookies.

**Nigel:** You're such a nice host!

**Chayne:** [laughing] I try. [music fades out]

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** The company Natalie Tovar works for, Walkenhorst's, is one of seven companies that are authorized to sell stuff through catalogs, inside prison.

**Earlonne:** Yep. And they're all competing with each other for your business. That's why there are so many catalogs floatin' around in prison.

**Nigel:** So, Natalie's job is to promote her catalog over everyone else's.

**Earlonne:** Yep. And I remember seeing her when I was at San Quentin. She'd come out into the yard and shoot the shit with the guys, talk about Walkenhorst business.  
[Nigel laughs]

**Nigel:** All business. But actually, she's been coming to San Quentin since she was a kid.

**Natalie:** So my first exposure to prison was when I was a child when my dad was incarcerated at San Quentin.

**Nigel:** How old were you?

**Natalie:** Um, ten.

**Nigel:** Ten. And what do you remember from the visits?

**Natalie:** OK, well, [laughs] I remember not minding the visits in the visiting room so much 'cause we would get good snacks and play games. I *hated* the three-day family visits. From my memory, there was like six trailers and there was a swing in the middle. So the kids could actually play together. We could interact with other fam— like, you know... um... we got locked out of the trailer for eight hours. [Natalia and Nigel laugh] And we only got to come in to eat. [both continue laughing] So, that's my memory of family visits, and I hated them.

The only good thing about those visits was the fact that my mom could— we could bring in all of our own food... which is very different because now you have to pre-order that stuff from [Earlonne affirms] the package companies. She would make enchiladas and

tacos... and it was like *feast time*. 'Cause we didn't have a lot of money, so that was when we ate the best, was when we went into family visits. My mom really did some great cooking.

**Nigel:** Wow.

**Natalie:** But other than that, yeah, I hated it. [music comes in]

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** Natalie told us that at home, her family pretty much ate just potatoes and beans. And it was only on those family visits where she got those full-on meals. And she said that she resented that. [music fades out]

**Natalie:** We didn't have a lot to eat growing up. And I think there was a little bit of animosity on my end when he would complain about some of the – my dad – about some of the things that he didn't have. And I know it's different, but from a kid's perspective, you're like, *Whoa, dude. I mean, at least you're getting some kind of meat. We're just eating rice and beans.* You know? [Nigel affirms] I'm not saying that's completely the truth, but that was how I felt.

**Nigel:** That was your experience.

**Natalie:** That was my experience, yeah. [Nigel affirms]

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** That's gotta be hella hard on a kid.

**Nigel:** Mmm. But from Natalie's mom's perspective, she wanted to do anything she could to show love to her husband. And she didn't have a lot of options.

**Natalie:** When an inmate gets incarcerated, that family member loses all control. They have no control over the crime that was committed, the time that's being served, where that inmate is being sent to. The one thing that family member has control of is getting that inmate a package, their person, a package, and making sure that they're comfortable.

[transition comes in – abstracted sound of phone ringing comes in and then fades out]

**Matt:** [over the phone] My name is Matt Coda, and I have a Whole Shabang problem. [laughs]

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** Not long ago, we put a call out to listeners to see if anyone out there wanted to tell us about a favorite package item. And Matt was one of the guys we heard from.

[over the phone, speaking to Matt]

**Nigel:** Could we start by asking— do you have the email in front of you that you actually sent to us by chance?

**Matt:** I'm told that I read in a monotone, but whatever, here you go: [reading]

*The thing I miss most about prison and jail is the “Whole Shabang Crunchies”. They went in everything, literally everything. Crammed into a bun when we got them with the hot dogs, on top of stew, in peanut butter and jelly sandwiches... Everything. Crushed up, used like a condiment. Probably the only thing that I miss about county lockup.*

[music comes in]

**Earlonne:** Describe that flavor.

**Matt:** Uhhh... [said with a sigh] so, the first thing is vinegar. And it's almost like that vinegar that you get when you first have a salt and vinegar chip. And it's not a flavor you get much inside.

**Earlonne:** Nah. [agreeing with Matt]

**Matt:** There's not a lot of stuff that has vinegar in it.

**Earlonne:** Nah. [agreeing with Matt]

**Matt:** But then right after that, comes spicy and a little bit of sweet. Like I said, they were like the universal condiment. [Nigel laughs] They went with literally, *literally* everything.

**Earlonne:** What was your first exposure to the Whole Shabang chip?

**Matt:** [laughs] I was in county. And I'd probably been there for... two, three weeks, something like that. Maybe not even that long. And one of the guys that I've gotten friendly with gifted me some, gave me a little baggie. And he was like, 'Yeah, you've been here long enough. You deserve to taste something.' [laughs] It's completely possible I sat in my cell and cried.

**Earlonne:** Was it 'cause that's how good it was, you cried or that's what you missed, those flavors – what?

**Matt:** 'Cause that's how good it was. There is still an outside, you know, there is still life. And also, just... especially when you're first down, and if it's your first real experience being down, getting that first exposure of somebody just throwing a little love your way. Somebody looking out for you. That's huge. [music fades out]

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** Earlonne, you know I am a serious chip lover.

**Earlonne:** Yes, I do.

**Nigel:** But I've never had the pleasure of having the Whole Shabang. But I know you had them inside.

**Earlonne:** Of course. The Whole Shabang is the *shiznit*. They had this nostalgic taste. And they only cost like two dollars [Nigel affirms]. So that was a good price. So if you're making your catalog order, it's a really popular item.

**Nigel:** But not every catalog carries the Whole Shabang. Different catalogs carry different things.

**Earlonne:** Right. And the rule is, you can only order from one catalog every three months. So there's a whole hustle around this – guys making all kinds of deals to try to get everything they want each quarter.

**Matt:** If you were getting shoes from somebody else, you would find someone who was ordering Shabang and you would just get on their package.

**Earlonne:** Yeah, definitely.

**Nigel:** Can you explain what you mean by, in quotes, "get on someone's package"?

**Matt:** Yeah, sure. So, with the packages, each company has a really limited list of stuff. Like, if you want the good sneakers, you're going with one package company. But they might not have the snacks that you want, or they might not have the fish that you want. So the catalogs come out, and everybody gets together, and you work out what your order is gonna be, and you're horse tradin' with other people. You know, and trying to

keep it under the weight limit or keep it within the amount of money that you had, whatever it was.

**Nigel:** So it's like a group shopping experience.

**Matt:** Yes. That was the only time when the guys who really wanted nothing to do with me would talk to me... if they knew that I was ordering from the right package. Didn't matter how much you hated each other; you'd be able to figure out some way to work together. [Nigel affirms] [crosstalk]

**Earlonne:** [crosstalk] Yeah. You know, everybody can talk over some food. We can come to some agreement.

**Matt:** Mhm. [music comes in]

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** So once you go through the catalog and figure out what you want, you can either order it yourself if you have money on your books...

**Earlonne:** Or, if you've got people on the outside looking out for you, you can tell them what you want and they'll order for you. [music fades out]

**Nigel:** That was the case for Chayne, who we heard from earlier. Whenever he was ready to order a package, he would get on the phone with his girlfriend, now wife – Hannah, and tell her what he wanted.

**Chayne:** Every item on there is like... so let's say a bag of chips. It's like D2 and then like a 12-digit number. And then that's how you order them. So throughout the course of a 15-minute phone call with Hannah, you're trying to give off like, thirty pounds of food. [laughs] Sounds like you're speaking in binary, like, '2-6-9-1. Do you copy? 3-6-14-12.' [Nigel laughs] And I'm like, 'Read it back to me, babe! Read it back to me!' And then you get a number wrong. And then like...

**Nigel:** I know! If you're dyslexic that's a nightmare. [Chayne affirms] That would take up all of your phone call. [crosstalk]

**Chayne:** [crosstalk] Or if you're living your life, not in prison, and she'd be working like, 'Okay, babe.' [laughs] You know what I mean? [continues laughing]

[music comes in]

**Chayne:** For Valentine's Day Hannah got me like thirty pounds of chocolate which was... it's like a lot of chocolate.

**Nigel:** How much of those thirty pounds did you personally eat?

**Chayne:** Oh, tons of it. [laughs] And I told myself, I wasn't going to. I'm like, *I'm gonna give this to the homeboys*. You know, like, *All the white guys are gonna get some candy*. [laughs] Like some real tough, like, *I'm looking out for the boys*. And instead, I just ate it all in the middle of the night. [laughs]

**Nigel:** [heard faintly in the background] You woke up covered in melted chocolate I don't know.

**Chayne:** I don't have an off switch though. [laughs] [music fades out]

[to Earlonne]

**Nigel:** Oh my God. That's gotta be so hard. If you're a snacker, how do you make that stuff last for three months? [Earlonne laughs]

**Earlonne:** Yeah, 'cause sometimes in the middle of the night you get the *munchies*.

**Chayne:** Our dorm, right, echoes. And my lock... and you can't see... it's not like I have a phone light, so I'm like, [imitating clanking sounds] *ch-ch-ch-ch*. Like, you know, tapping things together, and it's just loud. And then you're shuffling your bag. Like, [imitating shuffling sound] *ch-ch-ch-ch*.

**Earlonne:** Soon as you rip it open, 'Hey, how you doin', Chayne?' [crosstalk]

**Chayne:** [crosstalk] Exactly. Yeah. Right. Some guy pops over the pony wall, like, 'Oh, I'm hungry too.' [all laughing] 'Oh, man. I like chocolate' – that's my favorite one; whenever you see someone eating something that you like, like, 'Man, I really like nachos, too.' [music comes in]

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** But the stuff Chayne would order in those packages... wouldn't always make it back to the dorm with him.



**Nigel:** No... Chayne was fighting a real bad addiction: Heroin and meth.

**Earlonne:** Pretty much everything he got in his package he was trading for drugs.  
[music fades out]

**Chayne:** That's your currency. People are always willing to trade for food. And sometimes people are mad specific, like, 'Yeah, I'm down to trade for food. Get me these *exact* items.' And it's like, 'Oh man, they only have the Chatas in chicken and not beef.'

And he's like, 'Oh man, sorry. You're shit outta luck.'

And I'm like, 'Ah, fuck! [laughs] Now you're running around dorm to dorm trying to fill this grocery list all panicked 'cause you want to get loaded so bad. Hannah, I mean, my people, right – my parents and my wife – they weren't really eager to, you know... 'cause they'd come to visit and see me and they're like, 'Ah, I don't know... maybe no packages for you, mister.' And no calling and asking for money.

**Earlonne:** So they'd see you and you look like you're still in the streets.

**Chayne:** Oh, *pfft*... worse! That's what she told me. She's like, 'You look worse than you do when you're out there, man. What's going on?' I had like a black eye and weighed like 120 pounds.

I remember my last time using, I hadn't used in like two days, and I got up at like 4:00 a.m. to use the bathroom. I walked down the wrong aisle and walked by this guy's bunk. He was like doing an issue, like doing a shot at his bed... and he just looked at me and I looked at him, and he just held it out to me. And I was like, 'OK.' And I just remember laying in my bed and just, like, [exhales] mind going like a million miles an hour 'cause of all the meth I just did... and just having to sit there and be like, *What the fuck am I doing here in prison high on meth. This is crazy.* [laughing] *I just, I gotta stop.*

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** Chayne got clean in prison which is a big deal in that environment because people who were doing it with are looking at you are like 'Bro, what's up?'

**Nigel:** Yeah, it's real easy to get pulled back in. But Chayne somehow did it.

[to Chayne]

And then when did you share with Hannah that you had really stopped?

**Chayne:** She was on the phone... we spoke every day when I was in prison, you know. And she could just tell [Nigel affirms] after a while. I mean, there was me telling her, and then her having heard it before...

**Nigel:** That's what I was gonna say, that couldn't have been the first time she heard that.

**Chayne:** Yeah, her having heard it before, and then slowly, I mean, you could just tell in my voice. 'Cause when I do heroin, I feel like my estrogen skyrockets and my testosterone plumes. So like, I get this... you can really hear the bitch in my voice, you know what I mean? [laughs] [Nigel laughs] It's very, like, [in a whiney voice, imitating self] 'I'm okay today, I guess.' 'Cause I'm always hedging my way into getting some money out of you, you know what I mean? So it's always kind of a sad, manipulative thing, like this drag I'm running. And then one day, I wasn't asking for nothing. I was just like, 'How's your day going?' 'Good. Just worked out. Gonna eat here in a minute, you know, *The Bachelor* is on tonight. I think Becky's gonna make it.' [laughs] [Nigel laughs] My stories became a lot more chill.

As soon as I started doing good, Hannah, my wife would... she'd give me packages, like, she knew I was like doing the right thing with them. When I first stopped getting loaded in prison and I'd be walking back from the store with my packages, the guys that used to sell me dope would be like, 'Hey, what's up, man? We're gonna to see you later? What's up?'

I'm like, 'No, stay away! [laughs] This is my food now. I'm not buying anything!' [Nigel laughs]

**Earlonne:** I'm gaining weight!

**Chayne:** Yeah!

[in the field – at the office]

**Nigel:** What the hell are we doing up here?

**Antwan Williams:** I have no clue.

**Earlonne:** Hey, uh... I don't know. I just roll with the punches.

[as narrator]

A few days back, we got orders to report to the office STAT based on something top secret.

**Nigel:** You, me, and Antwan. The orders were, "Just be there, 11 o'clock sharp. And don't ask questions."

[in the field – at the office, someone says, 'Open it up!]

**Earlonne:** [quietly in the background] OK.

**Nigel:** [enthusiastically] Yes. Yes! Woohoo! [Earlonne, Nigel and Antwan exclaiming with excitement and joy]

**Antwan:** The Whole Shabang!

**Earlonne:** The Whole Shabiz-zang!

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** There was a box on the table. And we opened it up, Earlonne, it was a whole box of the Whole Shabang chips. A little treat from our editor Amy Standen.

**Earlonne:** Yup, like eight or nine big bags. [Nigel affirms] And ol' Antwan, he was having a moment.

[in the field – at the office]

**Antwan:** *These* take me back.

**Nigel:** Where they take you? Where they take you?

**Antwan:** [crinkling chip bag] First had my taste of the Whole Shabang in 2007 in Los Angeles County Jail.

**Earlonne:** The Whole Shabang.

**Nigel:** Are you shocked, E?

[as narrator]

As soon as you opened those bags, that vinegar smell was everywhere. [music comes in]

[in the field – at the office]

**Earlonne:** He's about to go back. Is your mouth salivating?

**Antwan:** It really is. [crunches on chip, savoring and continues eating]

**Earlonne:** He's starting to think about the old... the oldies is playin'. [crosstalk]

**Nigel:** He's smiling! He's smiling!

**Earlonne:** People yelling on the tier...

**Antwan:** [mouth full] These was my chips!

**Earlonne:** [chewing] *Mmm.* Yeah I remember that. This was like *the* chip. You didn't need no other chips.

[abstract industrial sounds as transition into next scene] [music comes in]

[in the field – at San Quentin]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It seems like if something's not selling, then of course they take it out... like supply and demand, right?

**Kevin Sawyer:** Right.

**New York:** The tighty whities keep being in there. Who's buying the tighty whities, Kev?

**Kevin:** I wouldn't know. [New York laughs]

[as narrator]

**Earlone:** This of course is my boy, our inside co-host Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, back in bidness recording interviews in San Quentin State Prison.

**Nigel:** He brought Kevin Sawyer into the studio to talk about, well, Earlone, [laughs] I have to say, I have heard this conversation many times: The debate over over underwear.

**Earlone:** Tightly whities.

[in the field – at San Quentin]

**New York:** If they show up in the next catalog, we get the new ones in July. If it shows up in July, somebody wearin’ tightly whities around there.

**Speaker 12:** Yeah, well, it's not me.

**Speaker 13:** The dun-du-duns?

**New York:** The dun-du-duns. [Speaker 13 laughs] Who is buying the dun-du-duns, bruh? I don't really... men who rock the dun-du-duns.

**Speaker 14:** Not that I know of.

**Tommy “Shakur” Ross:** Well, see, that's just it – that's because we're in a male prison and toxic masculinity is all around us. [someone affirms] You know.

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** And here’s Tommy “Shakur” Ross. Earlone, thank God he’s bringing some adult perspective to this conversation.

**Earlone:** Tommy Ross all grown up.

**Tommy:** But for the most part I would imagine like in society, people wear those dun-du-duns all the time, right?

**New York:** I call them underoos.

**Tommy:** Underoos.

**New York:** I remember back in the days when I was a kid, they had the Superman and the Batman and the... [Tommy affirms] Ran around and you're a superhero in your drawers. [Tommy affirms] [laughs]

**Tommy:** Yeah. And that's where you get the [singing] dun-du-duns!

**New York:** [singing] dun-du-duns! [both laugh]

**Tommy:** Exactly, exactly.

**Kevin:** When I came to prison, the Walkenhorst catalog wasn't in color. It was black and white, like a newspaper. And it was as thin as a newspaper.

[as narrator]

**Earlone:** Here's Kevin again.

**Kevin:** I also have in my cell some of the original package forms from New Folsom or California State Prison Solano, Level 4 – it's the package form that you send out to your people so they can order from the street. And it has information on there where you can order, like, televisions from JC Penney's or Radio Shack. I had a cellmate of mine once call those "travel brochures". [Kevin and New York laugh]

**New York:** Why'd you hold on to that stuff?

**Kevin:** Travel brochures.

**New York:** Just want to, uh... everywhere you travel, you want to make sure you keep them with you or just mark the time, the passage of time?

**Kevin:** Yeah. I kind of look at how things have changed over the years. It's like, wow... and it takes me back to when I was at those prisons.

**New York:** What's your name and how long have you been incarcerated?

**Gerald Walsh:** My name is Gerald Walsh and I've been incarcerated for sixteen years. On this one.

**New York:** On this one. What year did you start coming to prison?

**Gerald:** In 1992.

**New York:** What was different about the package catalog in 1992 to now?

**Gerald:** In 1992 we used to have our family send us our packages. We didn't have catalogs. [New York affirms]

**New York:** And what was the package from your family like?

**Gerald:** Great. I mean, everything was fresh. It was bought from the store. It was what they wanted to send... 501 jeans, real nice radios, decent radios, a lot better than what we have now, canned tuna... instead of the package, lot of candy.

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** Gerald is talking about a major change that took place in the prisons... really not all that long ago.

**Earlonne:** Yep. When I first got locked up, families could buy their own stuff, pack it up in a box, and send it to you inside. A *real* care package.

**Nigel:** Made with love, right?

**Earlonne:** Indeed.

**Nigel:** But according to CDCR, the prisons were spending too much time and money going through packages to make sure that everything inside was copasetic.

**Earlonne:** So they changed the policy. Now the only way to send an incarcerated person a package is through one of these companies.

**Nigel:** Oh my God, Earlonne, it must have *pissed* people off.

**Earlonne:** Hell yeah. 'Cause now all of a sudden a package that your family could've put together for fifty bucks, now cost hundred to two hundred dollars.

**Nigel:** And the rules about what could and couldn't be sold, got a lot stricter.

**Lee Jasper:** I'm Lee Jasper and I've been incarcerated for twenty-five years.

[as narrator]

**Earlone:** Lee Jasper.

**Nigel:** Yep. The “Velvet Fog” of San Quentin.

**Earlone:** The who? [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel:** The Velvet Fog. You know... what they used to call Mel Tormé. Someone with a *really* smooth voice.

**Earlone:** That’s a new one.

[in the field – at San Quentin]

**Lee:** Used to be able to buy 501 Levis. [New York affirms] Can’t touch ‘em no more. Less and less individualized clothing. The self-narrative is becoming smaller and smaller and smaller.

**New York:** When a new package book comes out, what's the first thing you look for when you get it in your hands?

**Lee:** Make sure they got Taster's Choice. [laughs] Used to be you could buy the Taster's Choice container with the flip top lid. And it snapped shut. I still got one of those. I've been filling that same container up for ten years. It's all bags now. Everything's bags. All the tuna's bags. Used to could buy a can of tuna. You could buy some big cans of chili beans, or some roast beef or something like that in cans. One dude put a can of chili beans in a sock and killed his cellie with it.

**New York:** Damn.

**Lee:** So they said, ‘Oh, you can't have no more cans. ‘Cause y'all are using them as weapons.’ You know how it goes. [New York affirms] Soon as some fool does something stupid with it, everybody gets deprived. So there is no cans no more.

**Sam Lewis:** You couldn't wear jeans anymore. You had to have gray sweats. Your individuality as I saw it, was being stripped away from you.

[as narrator]



**Nigel:** We heard from Sam Lewis in the last episode. He's out now, but he spent twenty-four years inside.

[in the field]

**Sam:** What are those shoes you wearing?

**Earlonne:** Uh... Nike Air something.

**Sam:** You can't have those. You can't have Pumas. He's got Nike's on, I got Puma. Two different choices. Everybody can only get a specific type of shoe and you might have five or six types of shoes. And so, where's your uniqueness?

[music comes in]

**Nigel:** Do you think the switch to the catalog was purely a monetary decision on the CDCR's part?

**Sam:** I'll say this, Nigel. Right now, they still have drugs going into prison. Families haven't been on a visit in over a year. And I'll just leave that there. So you can't say it was packages although yeah, a small percentage probably did go through packages. And a small percentage probably did go through visiting, but if you still have a drug problem in prison, what does that tell you?

**Earlonne:** Without no visitors.

**Sam:** Without no visitors for over a year. And so I'm just going to let that lay there. If that's the case, and you see that, then why not restore what used to be? Because for families, I mean, it's great to be able to pay for a package. To be able to go shop for your loved one... 'Whatchu doing?'... 'I'm gonna go shop for my brother to get him a package.' It's different than going online and clicking a button.

[music fades out]

**Nigel:** Alright. We've got one more package story to tell.

**Earlonne:** This one is from Ceasar McDowell.

[in the field – to Ceasar]

You got any package catalog stories?

**Cesar McDowell:** Crazy ass package story.

**Earlonne:** Tell us about it.

**Cesar:** I told you my father was a pretty famous musician called General Caine, back in the funk era.

**Nigel:** And did he sing? Did he play—?

**Cesar:** He sung. He had a funk group back in the days. They were pretty famous though. He was... I can't lie, I used to always hear him on the radio.

**Nigel:** Wow...

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** Cesar's dad also ran a bail bonds shop in L.A. It was a family-run business and everyone was expected to put in some time behind the counter.

**Cesar:** I got straight A's on my report card one day. My pops says to me, 'Man, you got straight A's. Tonight, you go take my car, man, you go out for the night. I'm going to go to the office. I'm gonna cover your shift.'

**Earlonne:** What did he give you at that age to go drive?

**Cesar:** Oh, his Rolls Royce. Yeah. He gave me his Rolls Royce, like, 'Man, you can go take your lil' girlfriends, go out to Hollywood. And I'll go to the office. I'll cover your shift.' So I called at about midnight... and I hate this part... but I called about midnight and my cousin answers the phone. It's really loud in the office at midnight – people laughing and playing in the background.

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** Turned out Cesar's family had just closed a big bond and everyone was celebrating.

**Nigel:** Yeah, but Cesar, he wasn't ready to come back and join them yet.

**Cesar:** My father was notorious for saying, 'Who's that on the phone? Tell him to bring his ass in the office.' You know, it was family. So I tell my cousin, 'Man, let me get off the phone before my father calls me into the office.' That was like at 12:00. At like 4:30 a.m. somebody called me and said, 'Man, they killed your whole family in the office. Your family was murdered.' [music comes in] That's what happened. To this day, they don't know who did it.

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** Fast forward a bunch of years, Cesar is serving twenty-five to life.

**Cesar:** So one day I'm going through the package book, and I'm looking to order me some CDs, some Yo Gotti's, or whatever it may be, Jay-Z, whatever it may be. [music fades out] And I come across a page that says some record company just remixed and re-released three or four of my father's albums that I knew absolutely nothing about. Nobody in my family knew nothing about, but they're in the package books in the prisons.

[music comes in]

**Nigel:** Can you tell us about when you got the music and you played it for the first time, what it was like?

**Cesar:** It was weird. I have never played it all the way through. I may have played it for maybe twenty seconds.

**Nigel:** Why's that?

**Cesar:** Hearing his voice. It's crazy Yeah... it's kind of hard... being in a prison cell, playing the CD. I did try, but as soon as you put it on, it's kinda like hard to do. So I never have...

**Nigel:** So you just kept the CDs, but just didn't listen to them? [crosstalk]

**Cesar:** [crosstalk] Yeah, I have them sitting on my desk in my bedroom right now at the house.

**Nigel:** When are you going to sit down and listen to it?

**Cesar:** That I don't know. [music fades out]

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** Before we end the episode, we gotta check back in with Shabaz.

**Nigel:** That Lancaster dude who was so on the fence about the vaccine.

[in the field – at LAC] [voices chattering in the background]

**Shabaz:** I just want to keep my family safe and if I get blessed to return back to the community, I want to be fully vaccinated and you got to be a soldier and stand up and do the right thing.

[as narrator]

**Nigel:** Yeah, and I think Shabaz was feeling it, like the vaccine was the right thing to do for his community and all.

**Earlonne:** While the nurse was getting his shot ready, she was asking him some questions.

**Nigel:** Yeah. She asked him which arm he wanted to get it in and, Earlonne, that put Shabaz into a tailspin.

[in the field – at LAC]

**Shabaz:** But the left side is your vital side where everything operates accordingly.

**Nigel:** Yeah, it won't hurt that much

**Shabaz:** Ahhh [hesitant] I don't know, man, I'm getting cold feet now, man. [laughter and chatter in the background] I don't know, man. Listening to all these questions, man, my heart rate is saying 'Don't do it'... to be honest.

**Louie:** You gotta make the decision. What's best for you as best for your family and what you want for yourself and your family and for other people.

[as narrator]

**Earlonne:** That's Shabaz's friend Louie. Louie was released from Lancaster last year, but then came back inside for the vaccine awareness day.

**Nigel:** He was getting his shot at the same time as Shabaz. The two of them talked it through some more, and then...

**Shabaz:** Left side, I'm going to left side too.

**Louie:** [at a distance] Yeah, that's what I'm talking about! [Shabaz laughs]

[to nurse]

**Shabaz:** So it's coming out the same bottle?

**Nurse:** It's coming out of the same bottle. You want to watch me draw it?

**Shabaz:** Not really, nah. [Shabaz and several others laugh, followed by friendly banter in the background]

**Nurse:** Just take a deep breath, inhale through your nose. Take a deep breath. Take a deep breath. [Shabaz inhales sharply] And let it out. [Shabaz exhales] [Louie says, 'You got this. There we go' in the background and then several others applaud] There it is man.

**Shabaz:** For real?

**Nurse:** For real.

[music comes in]

**Speaker 13:** [over the phone] *Ear Hustle* would like to thank Peter Michael Lopez, Anthony Valencia, Charlie, Sam Brown, Rodney Turner, and the rest of the folks at Lancaster prison.

**Speaker 14:** Thanks also to Kevin Sawyer and the other guys at San Quentin. Thanks to Quan Huynh for his thoughts on package catalogs.

**New York:** And thanks to Terry Thornton and Alia Cruz at CDCR for their help. *Ear Hustle* is produced by Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, me – Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, John "Yahya" Johnson, and Bruce Wallace.

**Speaker 15:** This episode was sound designed and engineered by Antwan Williams, with music by Antwan, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, and David Jassy. Amy Standen edits the

show, Shabnam Sigman is our digital producer. And Julie Shapiro is the executive producer for Radiotopia.

Thanks to 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 at San Quentin State Prison. And I *don't* approve this episode. No, no... I'm messing with you. [laughs] Put a shock to the *Ear Hustle* world system. [continues laughing] As always, I do approve this episode.

[music comes in]

**Speaker 13:** This podcast was 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.

**Speaker 15:** *Ear Hustle* is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. Radiotopia is a collection of independent, listener-supported podcasts. Some of the best podcasts around. And please hear more at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). [music fades out]

**Speaker 16:** Them sardines cans, you open a can of sardines, lined up [New York affirms] like that. They tasted *way* different to me than anything you gon' buy in one of those pouches. I open up a pack of sardines, and it's not all neatly lined up like it used to be in the can. It'd be little chunks in there, all busted up in there. You know what I'm saying? So, you lose.

**New York:** You lose, man.

**Speaker 16:** And that's my story.

**END OF EPISODE.**