



**Episode 63: Stormy Monday**  
**Air Date: October 6, 2021**

**Speaker 1:** The following episode of Ear Hustle contains language and content, including a mention of child molestation. It may not be suitable for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

[violin playing scales comes in]

**Speaker 2:** I remember when I started learning, our teacher gave us like blindfolds to help us with our bow positions and pitches. Nowadays when I'm trying to learn new skills and stuff like that, I put on my blindfold, and my friend Mark plays the piano and hits those notes for me. And then I just try to find it on the violin.

My name is Daniel Le. I turned myself in July of 2019, and I came to San Quentin in August of 2019.

[as narrator]

**Earlonne Woods:** You might remember Daniel. He was just in our last episode.

[to Daniel]

**Nigel Poor:** Being in prison, that's a new situation where there's a lot to figure out. Have you ever done that, like, metaphorically put a blindfold on to help you figure out how to navigate prison?

**Daniel Le:** When I first got here, I really don't know what to do or where to go to... and... it really did feel like a blindfold, like I was blind... I don't know where to go... who can help me out. And there's still a lot of things that I don't know.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** I feel like I have a blindfold on too when I put on my music. 'Cause when I put on both headphones and like turn the music up, it feels like the rest of the world doesn't exist. I'm just in my own world with the music.

**Daniel Le:** Yeah. When I play the violin, I just concentrate on the violin. I don't really think about anything else. Just thinking about the pitches, try to improve on my fingerings, bow movements. Just trying to improve myself, just concentrating on myself and nothing else in the world.

[Daniel finishes playing song on violin for Nigel and New York]

**Nigel Poor:** Awww, that was beautiful!

**Earlonne Woods:** Nyge

**Nigel Poor:** Uh-huh

**Earlonne Woods:** Music is really important when you're locked up. [Nigel affirms] It's a way to create your own world around you.

**Nigel Poor:** Mm.

**Earlonne Woods:** Block out all the crazy shit. [Nigel affirms] Like, I remember I used to always listen to music when I was running. [Nigel affirms] And if I didn't have my music I didn't run. It kept me focused on what I was doing.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Earlonne Woods:** It kept my own thoughts out my head. [Nigel affirms] And I always like to weave through people, [Nigel laughs] you know, as I'm running, and you know...

**Nigel Poor:** You're like running that circle over, and over, and over again.

**Earlonne Woods:** That circle! When you're at San Quentin, that's all you can do. You run in a circle, running around people, running around the geese, up the thing, [Nigel laughs] round the thing, back down. [Nigel laughs] But the music, when I get into the music, I'm not thinking about my thoughts 'cause I be singing a song.

[Ear Hustle theme song comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** Today on the show, we've made a mixtape for you. And this is actually, Earlonne, the third music episode we've done.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah. And we get tons of mail asking us about music in San Quentin.

**Nigel Poor:** Oh, totally. So put your headphones on, forget about the rest of the world... because we're back with another Ear Hustle mixtape of songs and stories. I'm Nigel Poor.

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

**Nigel Poor:** Can you sing that?

[Earlonne starts to beatbox and Nigel laughs]

[Ear Hustle theme continues then fades into transition that sounds like a cassette tape being put into a boombox]

[ambient noise comes in – voices chattering the background on the yard at San Quentin State Prison]

**Nigel Poor:** It's really striking hearing music out on the yard at San Quentin. As someone going in, it's one of the things that jumps out at you. [music comes in] And I remember, Earlonne, so clearly when I first heard someone playing a sax on the yard. It's actually extraordinary just to see like this lone figure out there on the yard. There's actually something really beautiful and mournful, just hearing music in a place you don't expect it.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah, I used to see guys playing trumpet, [Nigel affirms] guitars, beating on the tables, beating on they chest, you got the Native American guys playing the flute.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah. But... violins? [Earlonne snickers] I mean, c'mon! That's a new one.

**Earlonne Woods:** You know, I think San Quentin might be getting a little *bourgeois*. [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** Oooh, judgey, my friend. [laughs]

**Earlonne Woods:** And you know Daniel's not the only violin player.

**Nigel Poor:** Really?

**Earlonne Woods:** Check out this other cat New York found.

**Nigel Poor:** Ooh.

[music fades out]

**Speaker 3:** Henok Rufael.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** How long you been incarcerated?

**Henok Rufael:** I’ve been incarcerated coming up on 15 years.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** 15 years.

**Henok Rufael:** OK.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So it’s more like Rufael [pronounces as RUF-ael]

**Henok Rufael:** Ruf-AEL

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Ruf-AEL

**Henok Rufael:** Yeah.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** You're unique, brother. You got the Jordan haircut.  
[Henok Rufael laughs] The... Rufael... Rufael name...

**Henok Rufael:** Yessir.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** And a violin.

**Henok Rufael:** And a violin.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** How did these things come together, man?

**Henok Rufael:** So how do these things come together? Um... in 2017, I was at a point in my life where I was, I felt stale. I felt like I was on pause. And just didn’t really have a challenge in my life. And walking across the yard, I seen this guy playing a violin. And I was like, ‘What the hell is going on? A violin in prison?’ And the sound, the joyfulness of it. So I approached this guy, and long story short, he was classically trained. Got his bachelor's degree in music and was willing to teach. At that point in my life, I was learning about the neuroplasticity of the brain. And this seemed to be like the perfect bridge between: Can I learn something new in my older age? Can I really see if these new neurons can fire together and create this way of being, right?

[violin comes in with ambient noise from the yard in the background – voices chattering]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** When you play violin on the yard, what is it like? How do people react to you?

**Henok Rufael:** We talking about now? Or are you talking about the beginning? [laughs] ‘Cause... [voices interjecting indistinguishably in the background and laughing with Rufael]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Well, now I wanna know about both.

**Henok Rufael:** Yeah, so, in the beginning it was really interesting because I definitely had guys looking at me like, *What the hell is you doing?* And then I had some people that were true friends and true supporters and were like, ‘Man, I appreciate you taking your courage to the yard and just saying, “You know what, I don’t care. It sounds horrible, it sounds like cats is fighting...”’ [violin music continues]

The beautiful thing that I think, also.... I appreciate is, it allows people to share their stories. So many people picked up the violin when they were four or five years old or when they were younger. And they come and they just want to share their story. Like, ‘Hey man, I used to play it when I was younger. But then the kids started saying stuff to me so I just put it down.’

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So, there’s a lot of guys in prison that would’ve played the violin had the homies accepted it?

**Henok Rufael:** Absolutely.

[ambient noise continues followed by transition that sounds like a cassette tape rewinding, and then being turned to the other side]

[to New York]

**Nigel Poor:** Rahsaan “New York” Thomas. My God. It is good to be back on these mics with you!

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Awesome. [Nigel laughs] Finally, after three seasons on the bench, I’m back. [music comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** Crazy. COVID has been scrambling our work in San Quentin. I can’t believe it’s been three whole seasons.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It was ridiculously long. [Nigel sighs with an “Oh”] Especially with all these splinters to show for.

**Nigel Poor:** Why do you have splinters? [laughing] [New York laughs]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Sittin’ on the bench!

**Nigel Poor:** Oh no! [laughing]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Damn COVID. [laughing]

**Nigel Poor:** Oh man! But we’ve been able to do more work together down in the media lab these past few months. And things are slowly getting back on track... as much as possible anyway.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Yup. And one more thing that’s definitely back on track...

**Nigel Poor:** What’s that?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** The yard.

**Nigel Poor:** Mmm.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Guys are out there, and you know on a crowded day, everybody comes out, and the atmospheres poppin’ when it’s really crowded.

**Nigel Poor:** Ah, I love that. Guys are playing basketball and working out. And lots of guys have headphones on... listening to music.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** [singing] *Must be music...* [snaps]

[joining in singing with New York]

**Nigel Poor:** *Sweet music... Music everywhere.* [New York laughs]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** But off to one side of the basketball courts, [Nigel affirms] there’s that one red brick wall...

**Nigel Poor:** Yes. Yes, yes, yes. And that’s where we used to see our friends Quentin Blue ‘cause they always played over there.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Exactly, but those guys blessed; they got out.

**Nigel Poor:** Mmhm.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So nowadays, you’ll see another group playing guitar... [music fades out]

[ambient noise comes in – someone plays acoustic guitar while two people speak in Spanish to one another. One man says “Vicente” and New York repeats the name back to him]

**Juan Rodriguez:** *Mi nombre es Juan Rodriguez.*

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Juan.

**Martin:** *Mi nombre es Martin...*

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Martin.

**Martin:** Gomez

**Juan Rodriguez:** Oh OK, we talkin’ about music. [ambient sounds continue – voices chattering in Spanish]

[to Nigel]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** There’s two Mexican dudes, and this dark-skinned Cuban guy. He’s older with a shiny bald head, and a big bushy white *brocha!* [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** *Brocha?* [both New York and Nigel laugh] I think I know what that is...

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It’s Spanish slang for mustache! This guy’s name is Juan, [Nigel affirms] and he’s their teacher.

[Juan comes in teaching guitar to students]

**Juan Rodriguez:** [in Spanish] *OK. Este es Do major, OK?* [students respond with OK and Juan continues teaching]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So Nyge, these guys make a circle around Juan, [Nigel laughs] and he teaches them about scales or harmony. Juan is *all* about harmony.

**Juan Rodriguez:** *Porque cuando se esta hablando de armonía, se esta hablando de respeto musical.*

**Speaker 4:** [interpreting Juan’s Spanish into English] ‘Cause when you’re talking about harmony, you’re talking about musical respect.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Shoutout to Edwin over at *San Quentin News* for hopping in as the interpreter.

**Nigel Poor:** He's doing a great job.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** Awesome.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** So Nyge, Juan, the guitar player, he was born into music. His father was a well-known musician in Cuba, [Nigel affirms] and Juan studied at the National School of Art down there. In 1980, when he was 19, he moved to New York and he tried to keep up with music, but things went way wrong for him. [Nigel says "Oh" quietly] He's been in prison for 20 years now.

**Juan Rodriguez:** *Yo había soñado con el que esta de tras— mira, mira, mira como me hizo.*

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** So, Juan told me about this dream he had not long after he got to prison. [Nigel affirms] And Nyge, while he was telling me this story, he pointed to his arm to show me that thinking about the dream *still* gives him goosebumps.

[Juan shares more details about his dream in Spanish and starts playing guitar]

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** In this dream he had, Juan saw a man across a sugar field. [Nigel affirms] The man was holding a guitar, and, somehow, Juan knew he needed to teach this guy how to play. So he told him: *I am going to show you how to play that guitar.*

**Juan Rodriguez:** *Yo te voy a enseñar a tocar la guitarra...*

**Nigel Poor:** So, why does he still get goosebumps when he talks about this story?

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** Because Nyge, after this dream Juan couldn't find any students who wanted to learn from him. [Nigel affirms] He kept offering and offering, but guys would lose interest. Then he got transferred to San Quentin. And he noticed this guy, Vicente.

[Juan shares his story in Spanish and Edwin interprets]

**Edwin:** But he see Vince go back and forth with his guitar all the time. [Juan continues and Edwin interprets] And then I used to go by and ear hustle what he was playing. And I replied to him, "I'm going to teach you how to play guitar."

**Speaker 5:** *Que yo le estaba siempre pidiendo a Dios, "Señor, mándame un maestro de verdad para enseñar me a tocar la guitarra."*

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** This is Vicente Gomez, Juan's student.

**Nigel Poor:** Huh... I don't think I know the guy.



**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Yeah, it’s my boy, man. He has a bushy mustache. I call him *Muñeco*.

**Nigel Poor:** What does that mean?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It means “toy” in Spanish.

**Nigel Poor:** Why do you call him toy? [laughing softly]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** When we used to work out together, and he’d be playing around, I know he can do more than that. [both New York and Nigel laugh]

**Nigel Poor:** That’s pretty cute.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So the crazy thing is that just as Juan has been hoping and praying for a student, Vicente’s been doing the same, looking for a teacher. And then, one day Vicente spots Juan in the yard at San Quentin.

**Vicente:** [speaks in Spanish while Edwin interprets into English] When I saw him, I was walking, I was walking. And I looked around, I saw him, and I felt the Holy Spirit. “God”. I say, “God. Father, what is this? Is this the help that I ask you? That I’ve been asking you so I can know how to play the guitar?” And feel my body that was being touched by something so beautiful, so nice. And I just kept looking at him, staring at him. [Vicente says, *La la la la la* referring to the harmony he felt in his heart] I started to feel the... I started to internalize... I start to feel harmony in my heart. In my heart and in my body as he’s playing. And I say “Oh God. He’s the indicated one that was going to help me.” He gave me a lot of work. Task, homework. I’ll tell you, man, they’re so complicated, they’re so hard, it makes me cry when my finger starts getting stiff. But by the grace of God, he has a lot of patience. And up to this day, been over a month now and we’re still going at it.

[guitar music continues]

**Nigel Poor:** So, he and Juan played something for you, right?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So... you see what happen is... [Nigel affirms] Juan and Vicente weren’t quite ready to play that day—

**Nigel Poor:** OK.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So they left, promising to practice and return to play for us in a week or two.

**Nigel Poor:** OK.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** But... that was the end of July. And...

**Nigel Poor:** Oooh... *dang*. I think I know exactly where you're going.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Yep. Early August. Some people in San Quentin tested positive for the COVID-19 Delta variant...

**Nigel Poor:** Yep. And the prison went on lockdown... again.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Yep. For a month, nothing was happening, and we fell out of touch with Juan and Vicente.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, and we fell out of touch with you again.

[guitar music continues and then fades out]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** ...Until! Just as we're wrapping up the episode, Vicente shows up. He let us know Juan couldn't make it. And so I asked Vicente to go to his building to grab the guitar, and meet me at 2:30. And I feared he wouldn't show up... but at 2:35... [laughs] [Vicente strums guitar softly] he walks in the door with a big ole' smile and a guitar.

[Vicente begins playing a song on guitar and singing, then music fades out]

**Earlonne Woods:** Whew, we got the recording.

**Nigel Poor:** Yes.

**Earlonne Woods:** That ended well.

**Nigel Poor:** Totally.

**Earlonne Woods:** And I like how this next one starts. New York asking a question I have *always* wondered about.

[to Speaker 6]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** What it feel like to sit in that... you sit basically in a tent... [Speaker 6 affirms] with a fire, in the summertime!

**Speaker 6:** Yeah.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** How do you do that without— How does that feel? [Speaker 6 laughs] How do you do that without passing out? [Speaker 6 continues laughing]

**Nigel Poor:** Guzman is Native American, from the Ute and Blackfoot tribes. He's done time in prisons all over California. In fact, prison is where he started learning more about these Native American songs and stories and about the sweat lodges.

**Earlonne Woods:** And Nyge, when I saw Native Americans going into the sweat lodge at San Quentin, [Nigel affirms] I *always* wondered how did they deal with that heat?!

**Nigel Poor:** Oh, I know.

**Guzman:** First of all, we hydrate ourselves four days in advance, and we pray four days in advance, and some of us fast four days in advance. We don't go in there thinking it's going to be hot. We don't go in there thinking — *Oh, I'm going to burn up in here.* We go in there thinking of our families, of our loved ones, of our crimes, of our victims, of all the people that we've hurt along our life and our journey that we didn't acknowledge before. Now being in a good way and having the tools to understand who we are, we're going there in a good way. It's like we're being children again.

[music comes in]

It's kind of actually like being on a picnic somewhere with your family. An then you just go to a different place. You're free for those four hours that you're in the lodge... You cry... you smile... you feel your ancestors there. You become one with that heat. And it's the most beautiful experience you can have in the universe.

[to Guzman]

**Nigel Poor:** I just want to say—because this is audio, people can't see—but when you were talking, your face just transformed. Your eyes got really wide and bright and full of light and your face was so happy. Thank you for sharing that. [music fades out]

**Guzman:** [softly] Thank you.

[music fades out]

We have a saying... [speaks in indigenous language] in my language: *All my relations.* When brothers, Natives, use that word it means that we're connected to everything that grandfathers and mothers created. From the four legged to the winged, to the water animals, to the creepy crawlies. We call ourselves the pitiful two legged. We were the last to be created. In this way we can understand our place. This song... a woman honoring song. You sing it four times, once in each direction. It's a power song. [shakes rattling instrument and begins singing]

[continues singing and shaking the instrument and then closes with "Thank you"]

[transition comes in]

**Earlonne Woods:** Next cut on our mixtape, back out to the San Quentin yard for a quick gospel hit.

[ambient noise comes – voices chattering and others playing basketball on the yard in background, and then, someone says, “Put it down for his best friend” and another person starts signing a gospel song acapella]

**Speaker 7:** It goes... [signing and snapping]

*My best friend, my best friend  
This relationship we have will never end  
You were my best friend. [That's right]  
You're my best friend*

*And this relationship we have will never end  
The tightest friend that I have up in my life is  
the kind of friend who makes sure everything's all right*

*He keeps it real  
Never squeal  
Fight a bullet if he must*

*My best friend in the world  
Name's Jesus  
I said he died for me  
so I could see some brighter days...*

[song fades out]

**Nigel Poor:** Earlonne, [Earlonne laughs] that really gets you into the church mood.  
[music fades out]

**Earlonne Woods:** Indeed. I was like, “Heyyyy.” [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** Snappin' along.

**Earlonne Woods:** That was cool. Now, we're gonna flip this mixtape over. [sound of cassette tape being flipped over in cassette player] And for Side B, we're going to escape San Quinten and go outside the gates.

**Nigel Poor:** That's... after the break.

[transition comes in – abstracted soundscape featuring beatboxing]

**Earlonne Woods:** Right here... say something? *Try that...*

**Speaker 8:** One two, one two

**Earlonne Woods:** All right, cool.

[as narrator]

**Nigel Poor:** This is Bobby Gonzales.

**Earlonne Woods:** Bobby Gonz for short.

**Nigel Poor:** Right.

**Earlonne Woods:** He's from San Jose, here in the Bay Area. Growing up Bobby's mom was dealing with a lot of stuff — addiction, abusive relationships, all that.

**Nigel Poor:** So, most of the time, Bobby lived with his grandma.

**Bobby Gonz:** And all I did was ask when I could live with my mother again. And... they just told me when I was 18... and when you're eight, that's a century away, you know?

**Earlonne Woods:** But before he hit that 18-year mark, Bobby was getting in trouble. And actually, some of the first adults Bobby really felt connected to were two counsellors in juvenile hall.

**Bobby Gonz:** Mr. Crockett, Mr. Franklin, definitely shout them out every time. Honestly, just as simple as just sitting at the edge of my bunk and hearing me as I cried.... and that was it.

**Nigel Poor:** When he was 16 years old, Bobby was sentenced to 25-years-to-life for murder.

**Earlonne Woods:** Now, he was headed to the pen. Before he left, he packed a few things that his counsellor, Mr. Franklin, had given him.

**Bobby Gonz:** Franklin gave me a pencil, gave me a notebook, said that, you know, he had always heard me as the little rapper dude. So, he felt that that writing it down was going to be a part of some type of healing. It will help me keep sane. And I'd say for the first eight years, that's all I really did, was write.

**Earlonne Woods:** Bobby Gonz created a whole 'notha world within the four corners of that notebook

**Bobby Gonz:** I stayed writing... writing down thought, writing down notes, writing down rhymes. Not necessarily songs yet. [chuckles] But for the most part I was realizing that I was starting to come to some type of healing. [music comes in]

**Earlonne Woods:** Nyge, [Nigel affirms] I saw a lot of guys inside do this — pick up a pen and paper and express themselves. Some cats couldn't articulate in a conversation, but through their writings they could.

**Nigel Poor:** Right, right.

**Earlonne Woods:** It's like writing a letter. You have time to reflect, look at stuff that happened to you, stuff you did to other people.

**Nigel Poor:** Oh yeah, I totally remember being down in the media lab and there'd be guys be pounding the table and getting their thoughts out... and sharing it. It was really cool.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yup. And with Bobby, word soon got out about this penitentiary lyricist. [music fades out]

**Bobby Gonz:** I started getting a little attention from other spots. Dudes would roll up from different prisons and they had heard about this rapper dude, Bobby Gonz. And, you know, on some battle rap.

[to Nigel]

**Earlonne Woods:** These prison battles, [Nigel affirms] not the physical ones, but the...

**Nigel Poor:** Right. [laughs]

**Earlonne Woods:** You know, the rapping...

**Nigel Poor:** The verbal ones? [laughing]

**Earlonne Woods:** The rapping. It goes down! I mean, cats just get there— one dude beating on the table, one dude beating on the chairs, whatever. [Nigel affirms] And dudes be just rapping and then some dudes be like, they just suck. [both laugh]

**Nigel Poor:** *Ohhh.* [sympathetically]

**Earlonne Woods:** Sometimes those battles be good, you know what I'm saying? You sit there and watch dudes, and you know, it's a trip because some dudes be on some gang shit, [Nigel affirms] some dudes be on some regular shit, you know what I'm saying?

**Bobby Gonz:** There was dudes trying to battle me, and if they lost, it might be a fight. They trying to fight me afterwards! But it was through that challenge of like, *nah*, I believe music— like, this was gonna be a bridge. I don't care how many tats you got on your face. I don't care how many bars you're rapping about being the hardest, we're

gonna connect. We are friends. It's not going to just be some lyrical fight going on in the middle of the yard.

**Earlonne Woods:** So, like a coach telling his team to save their aggression for the field, Bobby started getting all these guys who wanted to battle rap and sat down to write with them.

**Bobby Gonz:** And, of course, it wasn't just like talking about music or talking about songwriting; it was about what brings us to a point where we believe in music in such a way that it could free us from metal and concrete? Like, what gets us to that point?

**Nigel Poor:** And for Bobby, hearing other guys talk about the traumas they went through growing up, helped him start looking at his own life, too.

**Bobby Gonz:** All this fear and confusion that I had been dealing with since five years old, after being molested by a 13 year old boy, was really something to bury deep down inside of me and never let out. And how I do that is by being violent.

**Earlonne Woods:** Finally, Bobby did open up.

[music comes in]

**Bobby Gonz:** I had found the courage to share with my own parents about being molested, something that I've always kept away from them. And it's incredible how throughout my life, I felt that it is something that I needed to bury down, that not even my own parents would love me after knowing such a secret, you know, and blaming myself. They loved me, cried with me... through it. Of course, it's easy to say, 'I wish I would have done that when I was five years old', but I was five years old, you know?

[music fades out]

**Earlonne Woods:** A couple weeks after Bobby had this conversation with his parents, he was back in his writing group. And he decided to tell them his story too.

[ambient noise comes in from inside San Quentin – someone starts making a beat by hitting a hard surface and snapping can also heard in the background as Bobby Gonz begins rapping over the beat]

[speaking to group at San Quentin while beat continues]

**Bobby Gonz:** The fear and confusion and resentment... I was being molested five years old by a 13-year-old boy, and not knowing how to understand that... [someone else comes in singing]

[to Nigel]

**Earlonne Woods:** And Nyge, it wasn't just incarcerated guys in the group that day.

**Nigel Poor:** Who else?

**Earlonne Woods:** Common was there.

**Nigel Poor:** Oh, yeah... Common. I remember seeing him in San Quentin.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah! Remember we took the picture, [Nigel affirms] and hung out in the studio.

**Nigel Poor:** He was very cool. And Earlonne, I mean, a lot of musicians and other people who come into San Quentin, but Common seems just a little bit different.

**Earlonne Woods:** Right, right.

**Nigel Poor:** Like, he's dedicated! I think he goes into prisons on a pretty regular basis.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah, Common's a real one.

**Bobby Gonz:** That day being in that circle with Common, you know, one of the things that compelled me in that moment was Common just simply saying like, "Yo, I know we see cameras here, we see all this, but I come here to listen to something I need to listen to. You know, I come here to learn." And I raised my hand and I... [chuckles] and I put that, that desk through a beating real quick.

[ambient noise comes in – Bobby Gonz begins singing over beat]

**Bobby Gonz:** [singing]

*Time and I have not been friends for quite some time  
Time and I have not been friends for quite some time*

[rapping]

*As my pen writes  
It's just me and this dim light  
Sitting in a five by nine  
Trying to find you some insight  
'Cause I ain't never really been the type  
to let just anyone into my psyche, but  
tonight I'm a make an exception  
I hope...*

[song fades out]



**Earlonne Woods:** And later that day, when Common performed for a few thousand incarcerated guys there, he called Bobby Gonz up on stage with him.

[ambient noise from Common's performance at San Quentin comes – loud cheering while Common and Bobby Gonz perform]

**Nigel Poor:** Oh, that's great. So E, you were in touch with Bobby pretty recently — What's he up to these days?

**Earlonne Woods:** He's doing good. I mean, he got out in 2019, [Nigel affirms] and actually went back into prison with Common to perform a little while back.

**Nigel Poor:** Oh, wow.

**Earlonne Woods:** I think he's still trying to figure out what freedom looks like, [Nigel affirms] you know?

**Nigel Poor:** Mmhm, mmhm.

**Bobby Gonz:** To me was... it was still the scent of the grass of the neighborhood I grew up in,,, and the way it smelled getting off the light rail... and the way that, you know, San Jose air could be nice and crispy and wet my shoes if I walked through the grass on my way to school. Like, all those little things played a part in what I once thought would be freedom. But if I just go home, it's not going to be the healthiest for me

Freedom, eventually came to mean jumping off the cliff, coming to Los Angeles, into all the unknown, right? Learning the Metro system, how to ride the bus from point A to point B. And how to show up to work for the first time, you know, and I'm coming fitted with my tie. I'mma be hip hop, but at the same time, I'mma gonna be grown, like I'm going to show up. [Earlonne and Bobby Gonz laugh]

**Earlonne Woods:** All the time.

[transition comes in – sound of radio static and abstracted electronic sounds]

Alright Nyge, for these last two cuts on our mixtape, we're gonna do a throwback.

**Nigel Poor:** Ooh, throwback, nice.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yup, we're going to catch up with some friends we made inside who are now out here in the world.

**Nigel Poor:** Who's up first?

[transition comes in – sound of cassette tape being put into player]

**Earlone Woods:** All right, identify yourself, man. Tell who are you, dawg?

**Eric “Maserti E” Abercrombie:** What's going on? It's your boy, Eric “Maserati E” Abercrombie.

**Earlone Woods:** And you've been on Ear Hustle a few times.

**Eric “Maserti E” Abercrombie:** Absolutely.

[guitar music comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** Maserati! Earlone, I'm so happy to hear his voice. I think about him all the time when he was down at the media lab, and he'd carry that stack of journals that were just filled with handwritten lyrics. [Earlone affirms]

**Earlone Woods:** Yeah, and I know you liked it 'cause they were all weathered. They woulda probably been on your wall or something. [laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** Oh, they were like a work of art. You know me very well.

**Earlone Woods:** Yep. And he's out now, and has a cool new gig.

**Nigel Poor:** I know. I'm so proud of him.

**Earlone Woods:** He is the sound design instructor for KALW's podcast Uncuffed.

**Nigel Poor:** Yes. And Uncuffed records right next to us inside the media lab at San Quentin.

**Earlone Woods:** As well as Solano State Prison.

**Nigel Poor:** Right. Not too far.

**Earlone Woods:** So it's a collaboration between the both.

**Nigel Poor:** Yup. Great show.

[ambient noise comes in – Maserti E in the studio with another person audio producing]

**Earlone Woods:** So I met up with Maserti E and another guy we know from inside, Cutty.

**Nigel Poor:** Oh, yes, Cutty. I remember we talked to him for the first episode we did outside of San Quentin.

**Earlone Woods:** Yup, my first story from the outside.

**Nigel Poor:** Oh, such a good memory,

**Earlonne Woods:** Freedom! [Nigel laughs]

**Earlonne Woods:** Maserati E and Cutty have been spending a lot of the time in the studios making music.

**Nigel Poor:** Hey, alright. Will you play a little of it for me?

**Earlonne Woods:** Game time. Where my phone at?

[transition comes in – sound of iPhone message sending, followed by airhorn sounds as part of hip hop beat]

[Game Time by Maserati E and Cutty comes in]

[transition comes in – tape cassette place in tape deck, followed by Earlonne singing along with the song that starts with “I wash my hands...”] [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** Earlonne, I never get tired of seeing the passion that song brings out in you, like, you throw your hands up, you look up to the sky. And listeners may remember this band, Quentin Blue. We mentioned them at the top of today’s show. They used to play out at that brick wall on the yard while they were inside San Quentin. And we knew them pretty well inside... they were actually on, *hmm...* more than a couple episodes.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah. And we've definitely used some bits of their music playin' in our sound design from the bass to the guitar, [Nigel affirms] to Richie to Charlie — we've used all of them. But now, all those guys who were in Quentin Blue, have been released. So, for this last cut on our mixtape, we went down to L.A. to meet up with three of them.

[ambient noise comes from visit with Quentin Blue members – voices chattering]

[to Quentin Blue members]

**Nigel Poor:** It was just so fun to see you guys walk up the steps. [one of the members laughs] It was surreal, it's really amazing.

**Quentin Blue Member 1:** Yeah.

**Quentin Blue Member 2:** It was fun to get to walk up steps. [Nigel affirms] They didn't have bars on the other side of them.

[as narrator]

**Nigel Poor:** Dwight Krizman is the bass player in the group.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yup. He's a dope-ass player.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, and he got out of San Quentin during the first wave of the COVID pandemic.

**Dwight Krizman:** I'm gonna to describe it as feeling like that circus clown that gets shot out of a cannon, and he's in mid-air and hopefully the net is positioned in the right spot that you'll land in the net, you know? Initially it was a lot of fear... of like, *I hope they didn't make a mistake*. I hope somebody is not going to knock on the door and go, "Cuff up, Krizman. We goofed. You're going back."

**Quentin Blue Member 2:** [in the background] That's tomorrow.

**Dwight Krizman:** Ha!

[as narrator]

**Earlonne Woods:** Richie Morris got out a little before Dwight, at the beginning of 2020. He'd been locked up for close to 35 years. And the world outside ... was pretty overwhelming.

**Richie Morris:** I walked out the gate, and my son was standing behind me and I didn't recognize him. I didn't recognize him. I had to do a double take, you know what I mean? And then it dawned on me, *Hey stupid, you're looking at your kid!* [laughs] But it was just that kind of— it was almost disorienting.

**Nigel Poor:** Did you not recognize your son because it was out of context? Or because you hadn't seen him in so long?

**Richie Morris:** He wasn't in the visiting room. My son grew up spending time with me in the visiting room. He was a year and a half old when I fell. He was 37 years old when I paroled.

[as narrator] [music comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** Richie used that word, "disorienting". And I feel like a lot of people use that word when they first get out.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah! I mean, all sorts of different things can feel that way. [Nigel affirms] Seeing family, figuring out how to get around a town, trying to order at a restaurant.

**Nigel Poor:** Oh, I know how you feel about menus.

**Earlonne Woods:** Menus still get me to this day.

**Nigel Poor:** Too many options, right?

**Earlonne Woods:** Too many.

**Nigel Poor:** Mm. Yeah, Earlonne, like you said, it's disorienting when you get out. Really easy to get knocked off your game.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah. And that happened to Richie this other time, too.

[music fades out]

**Richie Morris:** I was going north to visit my family... [pauses] And I— the train stopped at Merced, and I left my bag on the seat. I left my guitar on the rack in the back. And when I came out of the bathroom, both my computer, and my bag and my guitar were gone. [music comes in] I know who it was. I know exactly what he looked like. He was pacing up and down the thing and I should have been on cue right there. Because I've been around people that are spun on methamphetamine for 30, 40 years. Right? [chuckles]

**Nigel Poor:** How long were you in prison?

**Richie Morris:** 34.5 years, ma'am.

**Nigel Poor:** You're not used to being a victim.

**Richie Morris:** No, but...

**Nigel Poor:** And you're used to reading your surroundings. So, how did it feel to be on the other side of that? to know that somebody was looking at you as a mark?

**Richie Morris:** Is it okay if I say it sucked?

**Nigel Poor:** I think that's probably pretty honest, yeah.

**Richie Morris:** It sucked. [music fades out] But it brought to bear my own victimization of other people. [Nigel affirms] And how I mistreated people in the past. It brought it all around full circle, you know? I'm not trying to play a hard case or nothin', but nobody would dare do that to me in prison. But this guy skedaddled with my property. Nobody would dare to do that to me in prison. [music comes in] Because I knew what the consequences were.

**Nigel Poor:** E, I was pretty surprised that a guy who had spent all that time in prison could let his guard down like that.

**Earlonne Woods:** [chuckles softly] It's a trip. When you're just out, [Nigel affirms] since we've spent this time in prison correcting our shit, and we've been around a lot of other people who've been correcting their shit, [Nigel affirms] we have this false sense of, *Hey, it's all good. I'm safe. You safe.*

**Nigel Poor:** Mm. But I have to say, I feel like you're always hyper aware of what's going on around you.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah, well, yeah, now. 'Cause I've seen shit happen to people out here. [Nigel affirms] So, I don't think you start questioning things again until you experience something happen.

**Nigel Poor:** Mm. Until something bad happens. [crosstalk]

**Earlonne Woods:** [crosstalk] You see the shit. Right. [music fades out]

**Nigel Poor:** And E, the things Richie lost, I mean, they weren't just random objects.

**Earlonne Woods:** Nooo. They were really important to him. [Nigel affirms] I mean, music is everything to Richie. And that computer had the music and words to all the songs he had written.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah. And the guitar, it wasn't just any guitar.

**Richie Morris:** The guitar [pronounced as GEE-tar] was a gift from my nephew who is now deceased. He died of cancer when I was in prison, I didn't get to see him again. So, I had a piece of him, right? My brother had entrusted me with it, and I was taking it up north to get to a luthier to get adjusted, to get it fixed. [sighs] And I had to deal with that... and the feeling that I had failed again in my mission. Not cool. [Nigel affirms] Not cool, fresh out of prison. And I was on a mission. I was taking this thing up to get it fixed. It just didn't work out that way. It didn't work out that way.

[ambient noise comes in – Quentin Blue practicing together]

**Earlonne Woods:** Richie has a new guitar [pronounced GEE-tar] now. [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** Yup. So they tuned up, and played one of Quentin Blue's new songs.

[Quentin Blue drummer counts band off by hitting high hat and group begins playing song and singing original song]

[music fades out]

**Nigel Poor:** I really have a special place in my heart for them. I love hearing them play. But E, there was one member of the band missing that day. So, as the other guys were

packing up their instruments, you do what you do... [Earlone and Nigel chuckle] You made a phone call.

**Earlone Woods:** I make it happen.

[Earlone takes call on speaker phone with Quentin Blue members in the room with him]

[on the phone] Here's Charlie.

**Charlie:** [over the phone, on the other line] Yeah, this is Charlie.

**Dwight Krizman:** Charlie...

**Richie Morris:** Charlie.

**Dwight Krizman:** This is Dwight and Richie...

[as narrator]

**Nigel Poor:** Charlie was a longtime member of Quentin Blue.

**Earlone Woods:** Yup. As long as I can remember he was there. [Nigel affirms] And he was one of the best guitar [pronounced GEE-tar] players I ran across in my prison history.

**Nigel Poor:** Ooh, that's saying a lot. [Earlone goes, *pshaw*] Wow. And he had the sweetest voice.

**Earlone Woods:** Charlie's out now and living in San Francisco.

[over the phone to Charlie]

**Dwight Krizman:** When are you going to be in L.A.?

**Charlie:** Huh?

**Dwight Krizman:** When are you going to be in L.A. ?

**Charlie:** I got some news that might not be so good for you fellas...

**Richie Morris:** What do you mean?

**Charlie:** Man, they got me on the terminal list and cut short.

**Richie Morris:** Oh, dude, come on, man.

**Charlie:** I got stage four cancer. I had cancer five years while I was in there. Prostate cancer. They never told me about it. I don't see it 'til I get out and get my prison medical records. I didn't see it. My doctor saw it. And I'm only down here on Saturdays, [indistinguishable] right now.

**Dwight Krizman:** Oh, Charlie, we love you, so sorry to hear that.

**Charlie:** Yeah, no, I'm blessed, man. Every day I'm here, I'm blessed.

**Earlonne Woods:** Well, look... hey man, it was definitely good talking to you, man. I'm gonna pass your number onto the fellows, man.

**Charlie:** Boy, y'all don't know how good this made me feel. And I was laying up here feeling kinda bad for a minute.

**Nigel Poor:** Awww.

**Dwight Krizman:** Well, we love you, man and we're thinking about you a lot.

**Richie Morris:** I'm still singing off key. [laughs]

**Earlonne Woods:** Richie says he's still singing off key, man.

**Charlie:** Hey, continue to always do that, it's beautiful. [everyone laughs]

**Charlie:** I think about you guys all the time, man.

**Richie Morris:** Charlie, we love you, man.

**Dwight Krizman:** God bless you

**Charlie:** Shit, that's one love. [Dwight laughs]

[acoustic guitar music comes in]

[as narrator]

**Earlonne Woods:** A week or so after we got back from L.A., we went to visit Ol' Charlie.

[to Charlie]

**Nigel Poor:** Well, actually I mean...

**Charlie:** Yes.



**Nigel Poor:** What's today?

**Charlie:** Today is my birthday, August 11. [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** How old are you?

**Charlie:** 29. [both Nigel and Charlie laugh]

**Nigel Poor:** Well, happy birthday.

**Charlie:** Yeah, I'm 69 today. [Nigel affirms] And blessed. [Nigel affirms] Overly blessed. And I have to smile every day. My worst days I get up and get goin'. You know, I'm not going to lay down in no misery [chuckles] because you'll wake up in it. And I get up and get goin', I get to feeling better, get to movin' and I'm back on.

**Nigel Poor:** Earlonne

**Earlonne Woods:** Mm?

**Nigel Poor:** I was a little nervous to see him.

**Earlonne Woods:** Why? '

**Nigel Poor:** 'Cause... I knew he was sick, and it had been so long, and you know, when we first saw him that day, he'd lost so much weight.

**Earlonne Woods:** I know, you was like, "Woah!"

**Nigel Poor:** Woah, I did not expect that. But he was also Charlie, you know, he was super dapper, his jeans were pressed, he had on those nice dress shoes... his gold ring... [Earlonne affirms] and I think, a necklace. [Earlonne affirms] He was just Charlie.

**Earlonne Woods:** And... he made sure he let us know he had a fast motorized wheelchair. [Nigel laughs]

That's true. [Earlonne laughs]. We had to keep up with him going down the hallway. [laughs] So, of course, once we settled in and caught up, we had to ask him to play a song.

[Charlie starts playing guitar, and asks, "What's today"]

**Earlonne Woods:** Today is Charlie's 69<sup>th</sup> birthday.

[Charlie begins singing bluesy tune, "Stormy Monday"]

**Charlie:** [singing]

*They call it Stormy Monday  
But Tuesday's just as bad  
They call it Stormy Monday  
But Tuesday's just as bad  
Wednesdays worse  
And Thursday's also sad  
Now Friday, the eagle flies  
Hmm, and so do I  
Said the Eagle flies on Friday  
And so do I*

[speaking to Earlonne and Nigel, "Now check this out, you know what happen on Saturday?"]

*Saturday I go out to play [But here's the good point]  
And Sunday I go to church  
Get down on my knees and pray. [What do you pray?]  
I say, Lord have mercy,  
Lord have mercy on a poor little soul like me  
See you blessed me friends  
Like Earlonne and Nigel, you see  
I have no worries  
[voice breaking] 'Cause you always been there for me*

[continues with acoustic guitar solo and finishes by saying, 'That's "Stormy Monday"']

[transition comes in – cassette tape inserted into tape deck, tape rewinds]

[Charlie playing soft acoustic guitar comes in]

**Charlie:** Ear Hustle is produced by Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, John "Yahya" Johnson, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, and Bruce Wallace, with the help from Tony Tafoya.

**Richie Morris:** It is sound designed and engineered by Antwan Williams, with music by Antwan, David Jazzy, and Rhashiyd Zinnamon.

Amy Standen edits the show. Shabnam Sigman is our digital producer, and Julie Shapiro is the executive producer for Radiotopia.

Thanks to Richie, Reseda and Indigo Mateo, who also spoke to us for this episode.

Ear Hustle would also like to thank 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 again, I say Ear Hustle has missed the mark and have made a mistake. Last time, I complained about there not being any country music and you know, with our history with Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard and everyone else feel, we missed the mark with a whole genre that's very, very important to this country. So, I will say I approve this episode... but we're missing something. This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin State Prison. Yes, I do like music. And yes, I do approve this episode.

[Charlie comes back in playing acoustic guitar while sharing the show credits]

**Charlie:** 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.

**Richie Morris:** Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX.

**Charlie:** Radiotopia is a collection of independent, listener-supported podcasts. Some of the best podcasts around. Hear more at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). [music fades out]

**Nigel Poor:** Charlie and Richie back together again.

**Earlonne Woods:** Quentin Blue.

**Nigel Poor:** Love it. Thanks guys. I'm Nigel Poor.

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

**Earlonne and Nigel:** [simultaneously] Thanks for listening.

[transition comes in – cassette tape inserted into tape deck]

**Earlonne Woods:** Wait a minute.

**Nigel Poor:** What?

**Earlonne Woods:** We got something else.

**Nigel Poor:** We do! We have another little special tidbit.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yes, yes. We trying to do that. Surprise y'all. Just in case y'all turn this off, y'all gon' miss this. Y'all gon' come back for it. [music comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** We have a ghost track from my very own sound designer.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yes. Yes, Antwan Banks Williams.

**Antwan Williams:** [rapping]

*Where do I start?  
Where do I end?  
I'm stepping out so I can show what is within*

*Life is a cycle  
This a universal plan  
My blood is all in the soil  
Me and mother earth is kin  
No time to grin  
Of all the time I spent  
Well over a decade  
got me thinking about many men*

*Headed to win  
I'm pushing hundred percent  
I'm focused  
I got this drive  
And you could see straight through the tint  
Cool as the air I vent  
Priceless I am a gem*

*Time flying just like a bird  
I'm feeling one with the wind  
I'm 'bout to go for the win  
I'm going out on a whim  
I'm suited, fitted for greatness  
You can see it in the hems*

*Blessed and condemnin' all of the prisons that I've been  
Hated 'cause of my skin  
But still bright, I would never dim  
Go for a swim  
And you could say that this a wave  
And I promise this gon' get deep  
No shallow person gets saved*

*If this is my one chance to speak to the people  
I'mma say feel the earth that's beneath you  
Stay grounded  
Whatever road you on  
Always stay balanced*

*I just lost my brother  
I know that the Lord found him  
So I'mma choose to celebrate  
Don't hesitate  
find joy and let it resonate*

*Give me a second  
I inhale and exhale these blessings  
I'm just living out a plan that's destined*

*Where do I start [Where do I start]  
Where do I end [Tell me where do I end]  
Life is a journey  
I'm just sharing where I've been  
I need a moment [I need a moment]  
All I got is these moments [And all I got is these moments]  
I'm in a moment [I can see just where I've been, man]*

*I said, where do I start [Tell me where do I start]  
Where do I end [Tell me where do I end]  
Life's a journey  
I'm just sharing where I've been  
I need a moment [I need a moment]  
All I got is these moments [Man, all I got is these moments]  
I'm in a moment  
I can see just where I've been [I can see where I've been]  
There's no turnin' back*

*I can see the connection  
Historically destined  
to speak for the restin'  
the past and the present*

*We share complexion  
I'm learning they lessons  
The world is like a weight  
It's a ton of oppression*

*Not stressing  
Not vexing  
Strong but not flexing  
And prison is a business  
Everybody invest in*

*Bin with no exits  
Tell me where are we headed*

*Right into a hell  
if we don't stand on our blessings  
I was born to be legend  
I'm going bigger than Texas  
Up all night because a bigot is restless  
I've been affected  
Treated than treated less than  
And never seen as right  
But I can ball with my left hand*

*So I refuse to just let my image confuse  
Those that I watch  
I let the critics get fooled  
I used to clean up  
But man, I'm becoming anew  
Perception is everything  
I'm covered in truth*

*Now I'mma reboot my hard drive  
Don't archive  
Memories of a false life  
You say that I'mma say that I'm alright  
Home is the dog fight*

*Inspections in the morning  
So we cleaning up all night  
Is this what they call life  
Bound and I'm hogtied  
The world is so cold  
And I'm feeling the frostbite*

*I'll be the fall guy  
Standing in harsh light  
Calling my [indistinguishable]  
'Cause I'm mourning a lost life*

*Where do I start [where do I start]  
Where do I end [Tell me where do I end]  
Life is a journey  
I'm just sharing where I've been  
I need a moment [I need a moment]  
All I got is these moments [And all I got is these moments]  
I'm in a moment [I can see just where I've been]*

*Where do I start [where do I start]  
Where do I end [Tell me where do I end]*

*Life is a journey  
I'm just sharing where I've been  
I need a moment [I need a moment]  
All I got is these moments [And all I got is these moments]  
I'm in a moment [I can see just where I've been]*

*There is no turning back*

[song fades out]

[ambient noise from the yard - voices chattering and others play basketball]

**END OF EPISODE.**