



**Episode 67: Tray, Tumbler, Spork**  
**Air Date: December 8, 2021**

**Rick Peterson:** This is Rick Peterson, Nigel's husband. The following episode of Ear Hustle contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

[Nigel's audio diary comes in, recording from home]

**Nigel Poor:** *There is a tray that we are going to use for food every day, three times a day. I'm going to say it's about... maybe 13 by 9 inches, something like that. And it has [counts slots on the tray] 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6 different slots. Then there's a spork, and it's red. And then there's a red tumbler that we're going to drink out of. [sniffs] It's made out of some kind of rubber. It does not have a pleasing smell. I assume that the smell will change over time when I start using it. But it's going to be weird to be drinking everything out of this tumbler which I'm guessing doesn't hold a lot. It looks like it holds maybe 8 ounces.*

[as narrator, to Earlonne]

**Nigel Poor:** I remember when this big box arrived on my doorstep. This was when the Ear Hustle 30-Day Challenge really became concrete.

**Earlonne Woods:** And you were amped up, Nyge. [Nigel affirms]

**Nigel Poor:** I know people have said, “Mmm, you gotta be careful, you can't act like you're too excited about this.” I mean, what the fuck? I am excited about it. Not because I think I'm going to replicate life in prison, but because I'm going to explore something new. [music comes in] And when you explore something new, you learn things about yourself, and you learn things about other people. And you're gonna see life in a different way. So, for me that's exciting.

**Earlonne Woods:** Indeed. And I think this is gonna be a different kind of episode for us.

**Nigel Poor:** I mean, that's just the creative process. You gotta change. You've got to move forward.

**Earlonne Woods:** Let's do it. I'm Earlonne Woods.

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

[theme music comes in, then fades out]

[Nigel's audio diary comes in]

*OK, so, [rustling cardboard] opening my package with all the stuff for the 30-Day Challenge. There's a binder that is maybe two and a half inches thick, and it's broken down into weeks. And when you open it up, there's a shopping list for each week [rustling continues as Nigel goes through package] that's a couple pages long. And then every day is broken down by menu.*

[music comes in] [as narrator]

**Nigel Poor:** This past October, Ear Hustle did something we've never tried before. We called it the 30-Day Challenge, an experiment where some of our team tried to see what it was like to live under a set of constraints, inspired and informed by our colleagues inside San Quentin.

**Earlonne Woods:** We're always talking about all those crazy rules and shit. [Nigel affirms] This was a chance to kind of try 'em out yourself, know what I mean?

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, absolutely. So, definitely life inside San Quentin was one of the inspirations for the 30-Day Challenge. But another inspiration was this artist I really admire, the durational performance artist Tehching Hsieh, whose work explores a lot of things; but really in the forefront of everything he does, he's thinking about constraint and freedom, and how those two things might work together.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah, this sound like your type of shit Nigel... extreme! [Nigel laughs softly]

**Nigel Poor:** You know it is! So, for example, Tehching Hsieh did this one piece where for a whole year he lived in a cage that he built for himself in his studio. And he didn't allow himself radio, TV, books, he couldn't talk to people. He just had to sit there and be sustained by his own thoughts for a *full year*. I mean, Earlonne, isn't that wild?

**Earlonne Woods:** Hell yeah, that's wild. I couldn't do no shit like that. That's like a voluntary prison.

**Nigel Poor:** The Ear Hustle Challenge was pretty different. For one, it wasn't just one person. There were several of us on the outside team doing the challenge, a whole bunch of listeners joined in, and then the guys *inside were* acting as kind of our coaches.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yep, I mean, they are the experts in prison, right? [Nigel affirms] But another difference is that the 30-Day Challenge wasn't one single big challenge. It was a whole bunch of stuff.

**Nigel Poor:** Right. And we weren't trying to reproduce prison. We picked a handful of rules that govern how incarcerated people live. Like, we wore a certain set of clothes, ate a prescribed prison breakfast, and we did a workout based on what our colleagues do inside San Quentin. And Earlonne, as you know, those were just some of the rules.

**Earlonne Woods:** And of course, y'all were documenting the whole thang, with pictures and audio diaries and all that. It was pretty intense, Nyge!

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, well, Earlonne, you know if you don't document and archive something [Earlonne laughs] ... did it really happen?

**Earlonne Woods:** Right. [Nigel laughs] And I know at the end of it when it came time to produce this show, you all were like, 'No way we gonna get to all of this in one episode.'

**Nigel Poor:** No. I mean it was just too much. So, today we're just talking about a couple parts of the challenge, including one big one. Um, Earlonne, something you and I love.

**Earlonne Woods:** Eating?

**Nigel Poor:** Eating, yes, eating.

**Earlonne Woods:** And the food part of the 30-Day Challenge all began with that box you were talking about just a minute ago, Nyge.

[Nigel's audio diary comes in]

***Nigel Poor:** So, [moving around items in package] you see what you're going to eat, and then you have a visual of what your tray is going to look like, where you're going to put each of your food items into each slot. It is, like I said, maybe two-and-a-half-inch thick binder? It is a lot of information.*

[as narrator, to Earlonne]

Yep. The box. Every week inside San Quentin, the kitchen staff posts a menu of what's being served in the chow hall.

**Earlonne Woods:** Our team gave a month's worth of these menus to a dietician who specializes in prison food. And she created a one-person version.

**Nigel Poor:** A month-long food plan with recipes and this insanely detailed shopping list.

[audio diary comes in]

*So, I just want to read some of it. This is for one week: Dinner roll, hamburger buns, a hundred percent apple juice, coffee, sour cream, liquid eggs, 1% milk, vitamin-fortified drink mix, frozen waffles, pancakes, frozen or mixed, frozen carrots, navy beans (dry), celery, onions, peas, Italian low-cal dressing, corn, fried potato slices, pinto beans (dry), broccoli cuts, margarine, sliced American yellow cheese, shredded cheddar cheese, apple, banana, orange (one each day at lunch), assorted individual snacks (two per day), for example, granola bars...*

**Earlonne Woods:** You showed it to me. I mean, *dozens* of recipes. [Nigel affirms] Recipes with really specific instructions on how to make all the meals that guys in prison eat.

[montage of different challenge participants reading off challenge recipes comes in]

*Jumbo cheese ravioli, 3 each. Creamy cucumber salad onion salad, 4 ounces. Sandwich. Hard-boiled egg, 2 each. Italian tomato sauce and kidney beans, chicken Texas hash, 6 ounces. Turkey bacon, 2 slices. Pinto beans, 4 ounces. Glazed strawberry topping. Pudding, 4 ounces. Boneless chicken breast sandwich, chicken Texas hash. Fruit with vitamin c, 1 packet. Serving size, 3/4 of a cup. 1% milk, 8 ounces. Coffee, 8 ounces. Turkey-bologna? 2 ounces. Wheat bread, 2 slices...*

**Nigel Poor:** And I knew this was going to be a huge change for me. In part because, Earlonne, you know this about me, I'm a pretty specific eater. I have a routine, and it's *my* routine. So it was weird to hand that control over to someone else.

[audio diary comes in]

*I have the same thing for breakfast. I have the same lunch, and I tend to eat the same dinner 3 to 4 nights a week. I can't do that on this challenge. Every meal is different. So I'm finding stress thinking about the variety of food I'm going to eat. And I know this is supposed to be about constraint and deprivation, but when I look at the menus, I think, 'Oh my god, every night I'm going to have to cook a different meal?'*

**Earlonne Woods:** One of the first things you did was bring in the binder with all of those menus to show it to the guys inside.

[in the field at San Quentin State Prison]

**Nigel Poor:** We have New York, and Rhashiyd, and Tony and I wanted to share with you our menu plan for the 30-Day Challenge. I want to know what you all think of it. So, each day has our breakfast, lunch and dinner laid out and where we need to put stuff in the tray.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** That's what we had today! Waffles. [Nigel laughs] That's right on point with Monday. Turkey bologna sandwich. That's what I threw in the trash today. [Nigel laughs] That's what we got tonight — Italian meat sauce. *Whoa*, when mass producing garlic bread, you can see the assembly instructions are different than how you normally make this at home at home.

Rhashiyd: What kind of bread is that?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Garlic bread. [crosstalk]

**Nigel Poor:** [crosstalk] Garlic bread.

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** Oh, you said *gah-lic*. [everyone repeats *gah-lic* imitating New York’s New York accent] Comin’ out as *gah-lic*.

[music comes in] [as narrator, to Earlonne]

**Nigel Poor:** New York and Rhashiyd and Tony were going through the binder and New York got stuck on this one recipe for garlic bread.

**Earlonne Woods:** Hm.

[back at San Quentin]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Yeah, we get garlic bread once in a while. And a couple of weeks ago it was so good. It was so good.

**Nigel Poor:** Was good about it?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It was this golden brown I’ve never seen before.

**Nigel Poor:** *Mmm*

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It was like extremely brown, but without being burnt at all.

**Nigel Poor:** Crispy. [crosstalk]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** [crosstalk] And it was— yeah. And it was saturated with butter. When you touched it, it felt like you were squeezing butter out.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** And it was delicious.

**Nigel Poor:** Someone made it with care.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Someone made it with care. It was that one magical week, two, three weeks ago with an angel came through the kitchen, and then left us with the rest of this crap— [indistinguishable]

**Tony Tafoya:** That was the same day as the chicken.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** The same day as the chicken patty— was cooked correctly, it was like...

**Nigel Poor:** But doesn't that show you, it is how it's prepared.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It is definitely how it's prepared. [Nigel affirms]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** You haven't committed a crime. [Nigel laughs] I don't know if you deserved for the food to be cooked the way it's cooked for us.

**Nigel Poor:** I'm gonna try my best.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** I don't know if I want you to. [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** *Awww*

[music fades out]

**Earlonne Woods:** I have a confession to make, Nyge. [Nigel affirms] Need to be straight with all the listeners.

**Nigel Poor:** Always.

**Earlonne Woods:** I... did *not* get a box! [Nigel laughs] I mean, I support you, love you, but this challenge thing, I can't do it, Nyge. I cannot sign on to eating that food ever again in my life. [Nigel laughs] Plus, I've only been in society for a few years. What, three years now? [Nigel affirms] So I'm still getting used to this free people food, you know?

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, Earlonne, I totally understand why you feel that way. I mean, you ate this way for decades. And I know our sound designer, Antwan, who's also formerly incarcerated, had a similar reaction.

**Antwan Williams:** The first Monday when our Slack... it was photos of the trays! Of what people were eating for breakfast. And I was just like, you know, it just brought back to the sense of like, I have traumas around prison. And just seeing those meals, and it's like, *ah*, like the worst times of *my life!* Like, that was literally it.

[music comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** Obviously, Earlonne, before we started this, we asked a lot of questions. Like, what does it mean to voluntarily take on some of the constraints of prison life when obviously we were never going to replicate prison?

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah, and that's something that came up when we invited listeners to join us in the challenge. [Nigel affirms] We put all the menus and recipes online, and we started getting responses. And I know a couple of them felt this was almost like making fun of incarcerated people.

**Nigel Poor:** That was something we ended up talking about a lot with the guys inside – especially with New York and our friend Reggie.

[music fades out]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** What would you say if somebody said that, for people in the street to try to emulate people in prison by trying to do this 30-Day Challenge, but it's not real. They're just playing with it because— [Reggie interrupts briefly, but New York cuts him off] Hold on, let me finish— because at any moment they can stop. We can't stop.

**Reggie:** I'm glad that somebody is taking the time to try to understand what it is that I'm going through up in here. You know, 10 years ago I was in a dark place up here in, Nyge. I was like, *Damn, nobody care about me. Nobody love me. Nobody give a damn about what I'm going through up in here.* And I just— the fact that people were starting to identify with what we goin' through up in here, you might get one person, one inmate in here to change his life because of what y'all doing out there. Think of it like that.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It's like when people protest in front of the prison, [Reggie affirms] during COVID, right, like, “Let 'em out, let them out, let them out.” [Reggie affirms] That means you care.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It's empathy that got to me.



**Reggie:** There you go.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It's empathy. [crosstalk]

**Reggie:** [crosstalk, affirming New York] There you go.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Being treated like a human being. And so, I love people that want to understand how it feels to go through this. And not only that, like, how can somebody say I'm being disrespected if I don't feel like that? [Nigel affirms] They can't speak for me.

Anybody that's willing to eat state food for 30 days is not making fun of me. But if you want to do the workout, if you willing to eat the food, if you willing to stick the three outfits for the whole month. If you want to do the duties type of things, you're not making fun of me. You're trying to understand what I'm going through. And that's love, man. Last I heard it's like 200, 300 people signed up to do this, [Nigel affirms] and they don't have to.

[someone in the background says, “Over a thousand.”]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It's over thousand now.

**Reggie:** What?!

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So, over a thousand people signed to do this, and they don't have to. So I just want to say right now, we love you. And for the 200 people that are gonna drop out in two weeks, I still love you because you tried. [Nigel laughs]

[as narrator]

**Nigel Poor:** OK, we should clarify something about how guys eat inside San Quentin. The meals served at chow, those are provided by the prison. That's what we're calling “state food”. But Earlonne, those who can afford it, don't just rely on that.

**Earlonne Woods:** Nah. 'Cause when I was incarcerated, Nyge, [Nigel affirms] I was eating a lot more than state food. And that's true for New York, Rhashiyd, Reggie. I mean, most of the guys we talk to in there.

**Nigel Poor:** Right.

**Earlone Woods:** If you can afford it, you're gonna supplement those menus by buying food from package companies or going to the commissary. [Nigel affirms] 'Cause that's where you get all the good shit, you know, the honey buns, the meat logs, the Snickers...

**Nigel Poor:** Right. But for this challenge, we made a very specific rule. For us, no canteen, no quarterly packages. We were only able to eat what served on those San Quentin menus.

**Earlone Woods:** And there was one guy who agreed to do the same thing, from inside San Quentin.

**Nigel Poor:** Yep. Tony, our newest addition to the inside team. I mean, every time we sit down to eat lunch in San Quentin, Tony's got some kind of special meal he got either at the commissary or from a catalog. So for a whole month, he was gonna have to give that up.

[at San Quentin]

**Tony Tafoya:** My comfort is eating. And before prison, it was self-destructiveness and harming people and not taking accountability for any of my actions. But now that I've learned a lot about myself, I've filled that with eating. And it's not like, *Oh, I've had 5 bags of almonds*, it's like, no, I've eaten an entire box of Hostess Zingers... [Nigel affirms] in 24 hours. It's never enough.

Like, I wanna nosh and I wanna eat. I wanna to just like satiate whatever sadness is going on in my body. But I can't. It's kind of like, if you're a smoker, you know, you always put your hand to your mouth. And you're always constantly eating. And I'm just constantly noshing all day long on stuff. That's my comfort in the uncomfortable.

[as narrator] [music comes in]

**Earlone Woods:** I gained 30 pounds in prison. [Nigel affirms empathetically] All because of my love for honeybuns. Comfort food.

**Nigel Poor:** Yep, yep. I totally get that. And I think it's also about control. I mean, the food you buy in commissary, you choose it! [Earlone affirms] You keep it in your cell, and you decide when you're gonna eat it. There's no schedule around that.

**Earlonne Woods:** Nah. With the chow meals, it's very specific schedule. [Nigel affirms] 'Cause breakfast at like, 6:15. And you gotta go there to get your lunch. [Nigel affirms] And then dinner at is at 5 PM.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah. So between dinner and breakfast there's 12 hours! From 5:30 PM 'til 5:30 AM And if you don't have commissary in your cell, there's nothing to eat during that time. [music fades out]

[at San Quentin] [to Tony]

So, since you've experienced this, what advice can you give us?

**Tony Tafoya:** You'll be extremely hungry. 7 o'clock is going to be the worst hour of the day.

**Nigel Poor:** AM or PM?

**Tony Tafoya:** PM.

**Nigel Poor:** Why?

**Tony Tafoya:** It's 'cause you really wanna snack on something, but you're so hungry that you ate everything during that day. And so, it's gonna hurt for the first two weeks. Then after that you get used to it.

[music comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** So what would you do?

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** Starve! [laughs softly] I mean...

**Nigel Poor:** But what did you do to occupy your mind?

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** I try to read, but mostly I try and go to sleep or drink water to try to trick your body. [Nigel affirms] 'Cause you can get all the water you want, right. And so, you try to drink water to try to convince your stomach, you know, get rid of the hunger pangs for a minute. [Reggie says, "To get full!" in the background]. [Nigel affirms]

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, I wish I remembered who told me this, that in prison, “You'll never starve, but you always be hungry.” It's... really sticks with me. And that seems to be the truth. I mean, you're not gonna die of starvation, but you will be fuckin' hungry a lot of the time.

[music fades out] [to Earlonne]

**Nigel Poor:** Oh man, Earlonne, over the course of the month my relationship to the clock *really* changed. I was obsessed. I was always looking at it, like, *How long until lunch? When can I eat again? Oh my god, 6 minutes 'til I can eat, 30 minutes 'til I can eat.* I'd never felt that way before.

[transition comes in - abstract industrial sounds]

[at San Quentin, to New York and Reggie]

But I'm so hungry. [New York and Reggie laugh in the background] Like, I'm already thinking, *Oh good. We can eat lunch in 53 minutes!* [Nigel laughs] [Reggie and New York continue laughing and someone says, “Heat that water up!” in response to Nigel]

Yesterday I had lunch and I had... I went to wash my tray. And I was still so hungry when I went to wash it and there was a *little bit* of a chip I found in the corner of my tray. I was so happy. [New York and Nigel laugh and then someone in the background asks, “Did you eat it?”]

Yes! I ate it. [everyone laughs] And I noticed as days go by, my tray is cleaner and cleaner and cleaner before I go to wash it because I'm eating *everything*.

[as narrator, to Earlonne]

**Nigel Poor:** And Earlonne, you even recorded an audio diary of your own on this subject. [Earlonne laughs] And in typical Earlonne fashion, it was so loving and supportive and thoughtful.

[audio diary comes in]

**Earlonne Woods:** *Man, shit. It's about 9 o'clock in the morning and I'm hungry. Oh, wait a minute, man, I'm finna go get me some breakfast. I ain't doin' this challenge. What I'm tripping on? Get me a nice breakfast too. Orange juice, eggs, bacon, and pancakes, some cool syrup. Probably some banana pancakes or something...*

**Nigel Poor:** Always appreciate you. Thanks a lot. [Earlonne and Nigel laugh] So, the hunger I expected. But the thing I didn't expect is that because I was eating at these weird times, I became sort of separated from my people. And it was lonely.

[at San Quentin, to New York]

I mean, I will tell you a little bit about the eating. Um... it's lonely. And I think that's one of the things I think about in here is that food isn't— on the outside, for me, food is about eating with my husband or friends... and at the end of the day, we have a drink, and we sit down and talk about the day. But now we don't have that 'cause I eat at, what, 5:15? [New York affirms] He doesn't eat until 7... we eat different food. So, all the kind of fun of eating has been taken away.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So, the ironic thing is in prison, food is about community as well. 'Cause we celebrate— we don't have anything, like, if it's your birthday, you're not going to a party. [Nigel affirms] Your birthday is like— this year, Rhashiyd cooked for me. That was my birthday. His birthday is around the corner in November. We're gonna cook something. [Nigel affirms] And even when you go to the chow hall, you sit at a table with other people. [Nigel affirms] And it's a crowded chow hall situation, so food is always bringing people together in prison. Every different community has its own little tables. Like, the Muslims have a table area. The different locations have a different table area. And it's really— you don't have to stick to that, anybody can sit anywhere, but you usually congregate with people that you normally like to hang out with.

[music comes in] [as narrator, to Nigel]

**Earlonne Woods:** I hear what you're saying about eating alone, Nyge. [Nigel affirms] But I know there were these other times too when eating became social in a new way for you. Like, you had your own lil challenge community and shit.

[audio diary comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** *October 18<sup>th</sup>, [rustling can be heard as Nigel talks about her meal] And this is a first. Amy, Bruce, Shabnam and I are all eating lunch together! Holy shit! At CIR. [someone says, “Yay!” in the background]*

[to Earlonne]

**Nigel Poor:** Oh yeah, like this one time when the team got together at the office, and we all pulled out our identical sad little lunches.

[audio diary comes in]

*So, I'm going to see the different peanut butter sandwiches, [rustling with lunch] Peanut butter and jelly. Shabnam, tell me about your... oh, this is looking very sad.*

**Shabnam Sigman:** *Yeah, here's my little peanut butter and jelly on very squishy wheat bread. And here's my banana that I took a bite off 'cause I was really hungry. And here's my Doritos.*

**Nigel Poor:** *Is that the best part?*

**Shabnam Sigman:** *It is.*

**Nigel Poor:** *It has the most flavor.*

**Shabnam Sigman:** *Yeah.*

**Nigel Poor:** *I've been putting my Doritos in my sandwich to add a little bit of flavor.*

**Shabnam Sigman:** *Totally, totally. I can't do a PB & J without...*

[audio diary fades out]

[to Earlonne]

**Nigel Poor:** A *really* big difference between our food experience outside and the chow experience for the guys *inside* is that, obviously, we were cooking for one person. [Earlonne laughs softly] Not for, like...

**Earlonne Woods:** Thousands!

**Nigel Poor:** 1, 2, 3000 people, right.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah, like, you were buying your food at Safeway or Food Co. Like, when your menu called for chicken, it probably looked like chicken. [Nigel affirms] In prison, you don't get that. You get these little hockey puck things, you know, some kind of compressed chicken "product" that's glued all together. You know what I'm saying.

[music fades out]

**Nigel Poor:** I've heard about these meals for years, but never actually had one. Because basically volunteers aren't allowed to eat in chow. But for the 30-Day Challenge, it just felt important, you know? So, I made some requests.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yep! You called Lieutenant Sam Robinson and made a reservation for a unique dining experience: A metal table for four.

[ambient noise from inside San Quentin comes in – rumbling and metal tables moving in the background]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It is 4:54.

**Nigel Poor:** All right, we are heading into north block chow hall.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Yep.

**Nigel Poor:** We're having dinner together for the first time!

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It's gonna be interesting. It's gonna be very interesting. I'm waiting to see how you like our food. [ambient noise from dinner time comes in and fades into the background – conversation quietly in the background]

[to Earlonne]

**Nigel Poor:** I remember when I walked into that chow hall, it's one of I've never been in before, and it's one of the largest spaces I've seen inside prison. Usually when I'm in prison, I'm in the more contained spaces, so when we walked in there, there were, I don't know, seats for hundreds and hundreds of guys. And there's this line you get into, and you walk up there to this, like, slot. You don't even see a person; you just see these hands putting this tray out that you grab with the food on it. So I asked this one guy to describe: What's on your tray.

[inside San Quentin chow hall]

[to Speaker 1]

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

**Speaker 1:** Puddin'! Banana puddin'.

**Nigel Poor:** OK. [pointing out other items on tray] Beans...

**Speaker 1:** Beans...

**Nigel Poor:** Chicken

**Speaker 1:** Chicken...

**Nigel Poor:** Green beans...

**Speaker 1:** Cucumber!

**Nigel Poor:** Which one are you looking forward to?

**Speaker 1:** The greens, cucumber. And the pudding.

[as narrator]

**Nigel Poor:** And then the four of us, it was me, our editor Amy, Lieutenant Robinson, and New York, we sat down to eat.

[audio from San Quentin chow hall dinner continues]

**Nigel Poor:** *I like the cucumber salad. This tastes really fresh.*

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** *This is fresh.*

**Nigel Poor:** *It seems like they made it today. Um, the green beans are what I would expect, you know, they're probably canned, so they're... well-cooked.*

[audio fades out]

[to Earlonne]

**Nigel Poor:** Earlonne, I hope this is going to disappoint you, but I gotta be honest. I mean, it wasn't like the food was scrumptious, but it wasn't terrible, you know? I mean, it was bland. It needed salt and seasoning. But it was totally edible.



**Earlone Woods:** I'm pretty sure that Lieutenant Robinson warned everybody that you were coming into that chow hall... [Nigel and Earlone laugh]

**Nigel Poor:** You know, I know. We wondered about that. But there's no way, I mean you go up to that slot, and they're just like pushin' out trays, pushin' out trays. They didn't know when we were gonna be there. It wasn't like they had a 'Ooh, here's a Nigel tray!' [laughs]

**Earlone Woods:** Well, it's true, it's not terrible every night. I mean, there are some people in there who are trying, you know?

**Martha Garcia:** My name is Martha Garcia. I'm the Correctional Food Manager II here at San Quentin State Prison.

[as narrator]

**Earlone Woods:** Ms. Garcia has worked in food services in the California prison system for 22 years.

[to Martha]

**Nigel Poor:** So, how many people work for you?

**Martha Garcia:** Right now, I have 1 assistant, 2 supervisors and 9 to 10 cooks.

**Nigel Poor:** 9 to 10 cooks, OK.

**Martha Garcia:** So we are a small but mighty crew... [crosstalk]

**Nigel Poor:** [crosstalk] That's small!

**Martha Garcia:** And I wanted to say: Shout out to all my hard peeps at San Quentin food service! [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** Do you know how much is spent per day on food?

**Martha Garcia:** Yes, I do. We are given \$3.74 a day per inmate for the three meals entirely. Break it down, I have \$3.64 cents for food and \$0.10 for materials, like, the

paper bags that we use, the wax bags that we use, the paper trays that are used here at San Quentin.

**Nigel Poor:** Does that amount seems sufficient to you?

**Martha Garcia:** I manage to make it work.

**Martha Garcia:** So, I'm always looking for a good sale. When you guys see different things on the items, but they're not consistent, it's 'cause I was able to find a vendor that will sell it to me a cheap price. And that's where you see like the granola bars, the peanuts, the gummy bears, My watermelon craisins? \$0.10 each!

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** Wow!

**Martha Garcia:** Yes.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** First time I've ever had asparagus was in prison.

**Martha Garcia:** Awesome!

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** And it was about a few months ago, and I was like, "Well, it's healthy. Let me try it. Oh my god, it's gonna be bad." And I ate it, and it was delicious. And I never saw it again!

**Martha Garcia:** So what I do for that is I wait 'til the summer months, it's like your asparagus is just like... plethora. And that's when I get a good buy for them, and I can order it for the institution.

**Nigel Poor:** So you are constantly trying to save money.

**Martha Garcia:** Everywhere I can.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** I want to ask you about something that happened about a month ago. [Martha affirms] So they have this chicken breast. [dreamy music comes in] But on a yard we call it the hockey puck. It's usually over cooked, dried out. But one day I went in there, and it was cooked to perfection. It sat on this garlic bread. It was like this perfectly golden toasted brown. And when I squeezed it, the butter just like wet my fingers. It was saturated with butter. And it was delicious. The vegetables look fresh, and it was like cauliflower and broccoli and carrots. It was like this special, magical day. Who made the food that night? [music fades out]

**Martha Garcia:** It would be Ms. Sapao. She gives directions to the staff, and she works one-on-one with them when it comes to the food and all that.

**Nigel Poor:** He's talked about that bread and the butter so many times. [Martha laughs] Like, he is in love. He loves that bread more than he loves people! It comes up all the time. [New York laughs]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** The understanding I'm getting, right, on days that it's not so good, it's also like, you're trying to pull off a miracle every day. You're trying to feed us really good, 3 times a day with \$3.75. [Martha affirms] And I don't even know how that's possible. And so, I can't expect the miracle every day with your hands tied. And so, you might hear the complaints from me, but I know it's not your fault because you're doing the best you can with \$3.75.

**Martha Garcia:** I try.

**Tony Tafoya:** OK, we're good right? Yeah, I just wanted to say thank you because especially someone who eats for comfort, that's definitely me. That's something that, COVID, it's helped me get through COVID. And, like, I cried a little bit during the interview because it feels like we're cared for, you know?

**Martha Garcia:** And I will do it every day that I'm here at San Quentin.

**Tony Tafoya:** Thank you.

**Martha Garcia:** No problem.

**Tony Tafoya:** Really.

[transition comes in – sound of dialing numbers on landline phone followed by montage of abstracted voices leaving messages for Ear Hustle]

**Listener 1:** I'm glad to hear about this project and I'll wish the people well proceeding through this. I just completed a three-year prison stint. I would be a healthy judge to know if someone actually followed through their frickin' 30 days or not. [voicemail beep]

**Earlonne Woods:** Nyge, [Nigel affirms]. We heard from a lot of listeners. But how many of them you think actually were eating all those crazy meals?

**Nigel Poor:** I don't know. I mean, I don't think not a lot. Earlonne, it was really hard, so I'm just not sure how many people could actually commit to it.

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah, so we started coming up with these mini-challenges — things listeners could do for just a day or whatever. And people got into it. That was cool to see.

[voicemail beep]

**Listener 2:** My name is Julia, and I decided to wake up earlier than I prefer. [voicemail beep]

**Listener 3:** Hi, my name is Lauren. Last night I took part in the mini challenge of sleeping in my bathroom. I took with me a cushion, a pillow, a blanket, and a book. And after spending half the night trying to fall asleep, I eventually caved and went to my actual bed. [voicemail beep]

**Listener 4:** Hello, this is Anna from Italy. It's now half past 4:00 PM Central European Standard Time, half past 7:00 AM in San Quentin. And I'm reporting to be counted. [voicemail beep]

**Listener 5:** I have already been to prison, spent many years. And I think I joined not so much to know what it was like, because I already do know, but to remind myself to be grateful that I am not any longer in prison. I'm sitting outside of my job as a construction worker, and it's sunshine and I'm smoking a cigarette and I can get in my car and go get lunch. So thank you for the opportunity to do this. Bye-bye! [voicemail beep]

[music comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** We heard from a listener named Rosa, here in the Bay Area. Her son Joseph is incarcerated in Soledad, California. And she wanted to get a taste of what his life is like. So for a month, she really pulled back from a lot of her activities and lived kind of a quieter, more solitary life.

**Earlonne Woods:** And whenever her son called her, she'd fill him in on what she was up to.

[music fades out]

[on the phone speaking to son, Joseph]

**Rosa:** You know eating at certain times, exercising at certain times, you know... not going to the gym, but using what you could in your house.

**Joseph:** Right.

**Rosa:** Um, not being able to watch Netflix and, you know, whatever you felt like entertainment wise. [Joseph says, "Oooh"] Feeling the difference of how time moves.

**Joseph:** OK. You didn't do Top Ramen did you?

**Rosa:** I did! I did a lot of Top Ramen.

**Joseph:** [laughing] Oh my god.

**Rosa:** I did! [laughing]

**Joseph:** All right, Mom!

**Rosa:** I did a lot of Top Ramen! [crosstalk]

**Joseph:** [crosstalk] You actually did it! You did the thing. I need to know more. When I get off the phone, I can't wait to go tell a couple of the guys, my guys.

[as narrator]

**Earlonne Woods:** When Rosa talked to Joseph a few days later, he'd come up with his own version of the 30-Day Challenge

[music comes in]

**Joseph:** Cool. I have the challenge. Are you ready? Are you gonna write this down?

**Rosa:** Yeah. I'm ready!

**Joseph:** You gonna write this down?

**Rosa:** I'm recording it.

**Joseph:** I'm calling it the 30-Day Hygiene Challenge. [music comes in] Cheap generic single ply toilet paper, 3 rolls. Real cheap. Cheap generic bar bath soap. You can only use the above cosmetics for the 30-day challenge period. You can only shower, no baths allowed. The showers are to be 5 minutes only. 'Cause that's what we're allowed. You go to your closet, you separate the following clothing repertoire... [fades out]

**Earlonne Woods:** OK, we gotta take a break here. [Nigel affirms] But when we come back, Nyge... [Nigel laughs] she's... how can I say this?

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah? [laughing]

**Earlonne Woods:** The world... y'all don't get to see this part of her.

**Nigel Poor:** Spicy?

**Earlonne Woods:** She was really... conflicted!

**Nigel Poor:** We'll be right back.

[music fades out]

[transition comes in – abstract industrial sounds with the sound of a bell ringing incorporated]

[audio diary comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** *I'm so fucking irritated. I'm really hungry. I've got all this work to do for our next episode that's coming out and the episode after that. And, um... I'm tired...*

[audio diary fades out]

**Earlonne Woods:** Sheesh, Nyge! I don't get to hear you talk like that too often.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, I mean, Earlonne, as the month went on, it just really was hard! I'd been on keto for three years, so it was this *huge* change in my diet. All the shopping and the cooking took up a lot of time, we were busy with the podcast. So, it was easy to sometimes just get a bit cranky. And it was one of those things I really wanted to go in and talk about with New York and Rhashiyd.

[at San Quentin, to New York and Rhashiyd]

I have been a little bit cranky, but I've been trying to keep it to myself. But like the other night, I was watching TV with my husband, and for some reason he was narrating everything, like he was talking about everything. And inside I was like starting to boil over, and I was like, "Rick, I'm just going to say this to you nicely. Can you please stop doing that? I just want to enjoy the TV." But I could feel like I was ready to be like, "Would you just shut up! I don't want to hear a running narration. I just want this to unfold on its own." [New York laughs] But I felt proud of myself for at least saying it nicely. But inside I was raging. And it was a silly thing to rage over, but I was and really irritated. Yeah, so— and I have felt a little bit snappy, but I've been trying to keep it in. I think I pouted a little bit at one of the Ear Hustle meetings 'cause I wasn't in a good mood. [New York laughs] Will you guys promise me that you will tell me if I get really crabby? Like, will you say, "Nigel, you're really being—". [crosstalk]

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** [crosstalk] Oh, absolutely not! [Nigel laughs] I'm gonna stay out your way.

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** [imitating what he might say to a cranky Nigel] *Nyge, calm down.*

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** *Breathe with me.* [inhales sharply as Nigel continues to laugh]

**New York and Rhashiyd:** [simultaneously] *Woooo-saaa* [both break into laughter]

**Nigel Poor:** What was that?

**New York and Rhashiyd:** [simultaneously] *Woooo-saaa.* [both laugh] Oh wait, wait, I got one more thing to say. [Rhashiyd laughs] I just thought of something, right. 'Cause they portrayed prison as being as violent place full of locked-up evil people. I realized, Nyge, after talking to you today that... we just hungry! [everyone erupts into laughter, and someone stomps for emphasis]

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** Yup! And if you could feed us, there would be no violence in prison if we got Kentucky Fried Chicken.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** Bring the steaks back! [crosstalk]

**Nigel Poor:** [crosstalk] Oh my god!

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** There would be no violence in prison.

**Nigel Poor:** We're just hungry! [New York laughs] That's so funny.

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** Not violent, just hungry.

[music comes in]

[as narrator]

**Earlonne Woods:** Yeah, I know it meant a lot to those guys inside to see all y'all doin' this. But I think it was also pretty damn entertaining, Nyge.

**Nigel Poor:** Really? Tell me more.

**Earlonne Woods:** I mean, for New York and Rhashiyd and them cats, they were watching you all like some kind of reality TV show.

[at San Quentin, to New York and Rhashiyd]

**Nigel Poor:** So any other queries about how we're doing?

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** I gotta ask you to inform, Nyge, I hate to do this. How's Bruce doing? [both New York and Nigel giggle]

**Nigel Poor:** I think he's doing pretty good!

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** Is he really, Nyge? Is he really? We saw him last week. He didn't look like he was doing very good, Nyge. Are you covering for him? [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** Um, I think he's trying his best.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** [sighs] We have to talk to Bruce. [crosstalk]

**Nigel Poor:** [crosstalk] How 'bout that?

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** [in the background] Bruce fell off.

[Bruce's audio diary comes in]



**Bruce Wallace:** *It's Bruce around 10:30 on Wednesday, the 13<sup>th</sup>, I believe. I just rode to the top of this hill that I ride my bike to every few days. I guess I'm 15% more winded than I used to be.*

[at San Quentin]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** How about Amy?

**Nigel Poor:** I think Amy's doing pretty good.

[Amy's audio diary comes in]

**Amy Standen:** *It's about 6:30 and I'm... [sighs loudly] looking at this lump of peanut butter, and it's so unappetizing to eat a big lump of peanut butter at 6:15 in the morning.*

[at San Quentin]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Good thing it's only for a month, Nyge. [Nigel laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, exactly. [New York laughs]

[transition comes in – abstract industrial sounds with the sound of a bell ringing incorporated]

[audio diary comes in]

*OK. It's October... Oof, it's the 2<sup>nd</sup>. And I'm at Philz Coffee. And, um... can you tell me who you are?*

**Michael:** *My name is Michael.*

**Nigel Poor:** *And what do you do?*

**Michael:** *Um, I'm a barista here at Philz.*

[as narrator]

**Earlonne Woods:** Philz Coffee.

**Nigel Poor:** Mmhm.

**Earlonne Woods:** You took me there the day I got out of prison. That's yo' spot!

**Nigel Poor:** Yep. I've been going there every morning for years. And this brings up a question that I've been ruminating on, really, for a long time, even before this challenge.

**Earlonne Woods:** Oh yeah?

**Nigel Poor:** It's kind of an esoteric question, and it has to do with disappearing. Like, what happens when you just suddenly disappear from all of your daily interactions? I guess you'd say with like strangers? But they aren't really strangers; they're those people you see every day when you're moving through the world.

**Earlonne Woods:** That's what happens when you go to prison, you know? A lot of people that just don't see you around anymore.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, and I mean... Do those people even notice that you're gone?

[ambient noise from inside coffee shop come in, low whirring sound]

[to Michael]

*So, I come in here every day. I always get the same cup of coffee. And I was wondering if I didn't come in for 30 days or a month, would you notice that I was gone?*

**Michael:** *Um...*

**Nigel Poor:** *And be honest.*

**Michael:** *Yes. I would notice that you'd be gone for— if it's been 30 days. And I start to get to wondering.*

**Nigel Poor:** *What would you think might've happened to me?*

**Michael:** *You probably went to a new café, or you probably moved, or, you know, you'd probably be takin' a break from coffee — who knows! [laughs softly]*

**Nigel Poor:** *Would you ever think anything negative could have happened?*

**Michael:** *Um, I wouldn't want to put that... I wouldn't want to put that in the atmosphere. You know, I would think something, you would probably do something better. [Nigel affirms] Yeah.*

**Nigel Poor:** *Well, I appreciate you talking to me. So do I have your permission to potentially put this in the podcast?*

**Michael:** *Yes. You got my permission, yes. [Nigel affirms]*

**Nigel Poor:** *Well, thanks again for giving me some time.*

**Michael:** *Yeah, no problem.*

**Nigel Poor:** *And, um, I'll see you in November!*

**Michael:** *All right. See you in November. Have a good one!*

**Nigel Poor:** *Thank you.*

[as narrator]

**Nigel Poor:** On one of my visits to San Quentin, I ran this idea by New York and Rhashiyd.

[at San Quentin, to New York and Rhashiyd]

I have a lot of routines. Like, I told you, I go get coffee every day. And I was wondering if people who know me in that way, they're not friends, will they even notice I'm gone? And I wonder, did you ever think about that when you went to prison? Like, not people that are friends, but did people notice that you were gone?

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** I was invisible, Nyge. Nobody even know I was there.  
[laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** Why do you think that?

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** I was always low key. And then half the time I was on the run, so I made a point to be low key.

**Nigel Poor:** But did you like do anything every day? Like, you went to buy a newspaper... or, you had no patterns? [crosstalk]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** [crosstalk] Number 1 rule of being on the run — no patterns.

**Nigel Poor:** [crosstalk] You had no patterns.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** [crosstalk] So I can't even remember a place I frequented. [Nigel affirms] And the places I did where like really crowded places, like Roscoe's Chicken and Waffles or Jerry's Deli where... [Nigel affirms] there's so many people who I'm sure no waitress or cashiers were wondering where the tall light-skinned cat went. The closest to a routine I might've had is, I went to this 24-hour fitness at weird hours. I liked to go late at night when it's not crowded, so I can jump from machine to machine. [Nigel affirms] And there was this one lady at the counter that was really hella friendly. Maybe she's wondering where I'm at. [crosstalk]

**Nigel Poor:** [crosstalk] I wonder if she might have wondered...

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** You got me goin' back to high school, like ridin' the same train every morning goin' to school. [Nigel affirms] You see a lot of the same people in the morning when you get on the car at the same time. I don't know 'em, but I just know their face from that every day in the morning. So just missing them one day, I wonder, like, where they at? Or did I miss my normal train?

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** Like, we would ride the bus, and we would see the same people on the bus consistently. [Nigel affirms] And then when you didn't see one of them, you was like, man, like, “Where's the old man with the big coat with the hat?” [Nigel affirms] You know what I mean?

**Nigel Poor:** So there's probably a lot more people out there than you think that might've been like, “What happened to that tall guy?”

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** Yeah...

**Nigel Poor:** “What happened to the—” as you described yourself, “the light-skin guy?”

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** The invisible type? Light-skinned?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Now we all know. I'm at San Quentin State Prison.  
[Nigel laughs]

**Rhashiyd Zinnamon:** This is how I disappeared. [Rhashiyd and New York and Nigel laugh softly]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Save my seat on the train.

[music comes in]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** One thing I'm going through now is kind of a positive thing. Most people are going home. And now it feels like most of my closest friends are home.

**Nigel Poor:** I know, so people are going home and that's great. And I know you're happy for them. But it's also a loss... for you. It would be like, you know, it's the same thing on the outside if people that were just gone all of a sudden, that were part of my—it's not easy.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Well, at first, I was just too happy for them. And then when it's so many left now, it's like, *Damn, who'd I really hang out with now?* Now I'm startin' to feel kind of lonely. [Nigel affirms] It felt like I'm supposed to be with that group out there. [Nigel affirms] It feels kind of left behind-ish.

**Nigel Poor:** It might not be too far in the future where you're the person who disappears.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** I hope. I hope.

[music fades out]

[on the yard at San Quentin – basketball bouncing in the background and voices chattering in the background]

[to people on the yard]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Do you have a spork?

**Speaker 2:** A what?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** A spork.

**Speaker 2:** Yeah.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** What does this spork look like? What color is it?

**Speaker 2:** It’s orange. It’s a mix between a fork and a spoon.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Do you have a spork? And do you carry it around with you?

**Speaker 3:** Do I have a sport? Uh, yeah, basketball.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** How many sporks have you had since you've been down?

**Speaker 4:** Since I've been in prison? One.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Describe it.

**Speaker 4:** Pretty self-explanatory. A spork, a spoon with little four tips, you know.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** I don't think people on the street have things like that. I've never seen a spork in society.

**Speaker 4:** You know, I never have neither, but I mean, uh, you know, it's kinda best of both worlds. HA! [laughs loudly]

[as narrator]

**Earlonne Woods:** So that box you all received at the start of this challenge, it had recipes and menus. Plus, some other stuff too.

**Nigel Poor:** It sure did. If we were gonna be eating San Quentin meals, we had to eat them the San Quentin way.

**Earlonne Woods:** Absolutely. With a tray and a spork!

**Nigel Poor:** Yup. With a plastic tray, tumbler, and spork. Those objects became really important to me over the course of those 30 days. And I wanted to see what New York and Tony inside San Quentin had to say about them.

[at San Quentin, to Tony and New York]

And then, we've got... what's here?

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** That is a red spork.

**Nigel Poor:** A red spork.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** And that is a red, uh, tumbler.

**Nigel Poor:** What do you think of the texture?

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** I like it.

**Nigel Poor:** Me too! Why? Why do you like it?

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** I don't know. [tumbler rolls around on surface] It feels comfortable in my hand.

**Nigel Poor:** What do you think Tony?

**Tony Tafoya:** This feels so strange. It feels so intimate. It's like, I'm looking into a piece of you. It's so weird.

**Nigel Poor:** Wait, why does it feel intimate?

**Tony Tafoya:** 'Cause it's yours, right?

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah. It's so funny that you have this reaction to it because that's how I felt. It felt so human to me. It felt very feminine. Like, I couldn't really explain the attachment that I had to these three objects.

**Tony Tafoya:** Yeah.

[Nigel's audio diary comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** *It's uh, September 24<sup>th</sup>. It's about 6:00 AM. I was just thinking about [moving around tumbler and laughs] my spork! And my plastic tumbler. Those are mine. Those are my things. And, um... I'm suspecting that over the month saying those are my things, that expression is gonna have more important somehow. And I want to talk to New York about that today.*

[music comes in]

[at San Quentin, to New York]

So do you always carry your spork with you?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Yeah! It's in my pocket right now. If you don't show up with your own spork or spoon, you are eating with your fingers, which happens a lot to guys who forgot — “Ah, I forgot! Let me borrow your spoon.” [Nigel laughs]

“No, it's COVID. Be like a Ethiopian. Use your fingers.”

**Nigel Poor:** Can I see yours? Can you unwrap your spoon? [Tony says, “I can” quietly in the background”]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It feels very important to me.

**Nigel Poor:** It's definitely bigger. Yeah.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Oh, yeah.

**Nigel Poor:** Oh my god! Look at it! It's like Mom and Dad.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Yep. Yep. [Nigel laughs] [playfully, in a high voice personifying the utensil] *Hey, hey, hey. Hi!*

**Nigel Poor:** Hello! [laughing]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** *How you doing? How's the weather down there?* [laughs]

**Nigel Poor:** So, New York's is yellow, and it's about a head taller, and it's a spoon. They actually look like a really nice couple. They match, don't they? [Tony says something indistinguishable in the background]



**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So, the one actually given to us is brown. This is a canteen spoon I bought.

**Nigel Poor:** I think the yellow is preferable to the brown.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** It's way better. It's bigger, it's stronger.

**Nigel Poor:** And it's cheery!

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Yeah. I love the spoon. [Nigel affirms]

**Nigel Poor:** And so how many you think you've gone through?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Oooh, sometimes they fall on my pocket — I lose 'em. I'm not exactly sure. Maybe 10?

**Nigel Poor:** And how long?

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Um... I would say in... 18 years?

**Nigel Poor:** That's... pretty amazing, actually.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** If they don't break, and if I don't lose them, they'll stay with me forever. Might bring one home. But yeah, I can't think of any other item that I keep around me so much.

**Nigel Poor:** So that sound, just to mark it, was the spoon getting wrapped up all carefully. Put him back in his pocket. [New York affirms]

[music fades out]

[to Nigel]

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** I want to ask you a tough question.

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah!

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** So, I killed somebody, Nigel. I'm in prison because I killed somebody. [Nigel affirms softly] Um... and you know, I struggle with remorse

about it because I felt like it was self-defense. But then I had to realize, I put myself in a position to need to be defended, and then ran and didn't handle it. If I wasn't a criminal, it would have never happened. Nobody'd be dead. And so, part of the reason why I'm here is punishment. [Nigel affirms] And so, one thing about the 30-Day Challenge that I really love, it feels like empathy. But what would you say that the people that say we don't necessarily deserve empathy?

**Nigel Poor:** Man, I think empathy and being open to other people's experiences is the best way you can be as a human. Like, I don't understand how the world moves forward without empathy and wanting to understand someone else's experience. So, you might be an example of this, or other people in prison, you know your worst, darkest side and you know your brightest, lightest side. And like, how amazing is that to know yourself in such a three-dimensional way? Most— a lot of people haven't really explored their darkest side that everybody has. And I think people like you and Tony who are doing work, have had that opportunity to go really deep into what it means to be a complicated human.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Well, prison's an opportunity. It's an opportunity to just clear everything off... all the distractions away, and just sit with yourself and just really... just sit with your own thoughts. Because I think a lot of people don't do that. So, prison forces you to face yourself. The reason why it's not the ideal place to do it, is it can be a dangerous, depressing... it can— I've seen people being prison too long and break. I mean, it's a gamble whether you get these positive results, right?

**Nigel Poor:** Yeah, totally.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** Um... prison for most people... um, well, I won't say most, but I say a lot of people, they come home better criminals instead of better people.

**Nigel Poor:** Mmm.

**Rahsaan “New York” Thomas:** And the more you treat people like animals, the more animal they act like. The more you treat them, like human beings the better they become.

[music comes in]

[as narrator]

**Nigel Poor:** On one of the last days in October, I went to San Quentin, Earlonne, and saw Tony. Right, you remember him?

**Earlonne Woods:** Mmhm, mmhm.

**Nigel Poor:** The one guy the inside who was taking part of the challenge, and you know what? [Earlonne affirms] He did it! He made it through the entire month.

[at San Quentin]

[to Nigel and New York]

**Tony Tafoya:** The first two weeks were horrible. I wanted to break it so badly.

**Nigel Poor:** And why didn't you?

**Tony Tafoya:** 'Cause I always fail at things and give up on certain things. And I'm tired of that. I'm tired of being that person that says if I'm going to do this, I don't come through with it. Like, really, I want to be a different person. I don't want to be the flake.

**Rahsaan "New York" Thomas:** So now that you are this different person who is not a flake, how do you feel?

**Tony Tafoya:** I guess we have to wait to see what the results are, right? I mean, ask me again in a month.

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

**Tony Tafoya:** See if I'm still doing the same thing.

**Nigel Poor:** But right now, how do you feel about your success?

**Tony Tafoya:** Kind of proud of myself.

[music comes in]

[audio diary comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** *It's November 3<sup>rd</sup> and it's a 7:00 AM. First day of not doing the 30-Day Challenge, or I should say the end of the 30-Day Challenge. I'm back to my regular life. So I slept in a little bit.*

[audio diary fades out]

[as narrator, to Earlonne]

**Nigel Poor:** Earlonne, I thought this month was gonna feel like forever. [Earlonne laughs] But as the month came to a close, I have to be honest, like, actually it was kinda hard to end it.

**Earlonne Woods:** I knew that was gon' happen.

[audio diary comes in]

**Nigel Poor:** *Instead of today feeling exciting, like, 'Oh my god, I'm going to do this. I'm going to do this. I'm going to do this', my mind is more focused on, 'Oh, what I'm not gonna do.' Not gonna have my breakfast on that flesh-colored, white flesh colored tray. I'm not gonna be eating everything with my red spork. Um, I'm not going to be putting on the same clothes. I'm not going to be eating dinner at 5:30. I'm probably not gonna have the excitement of running into San Quentin on Friday and discussing what's happening with the 30-Day Challenge, 'cause it's over. I'm a little sad! I'm a little sad that it's over. I'm not excited. I didn't wake up excited thinking, 'Wow! I can go to Philz Coffee. I can put on whatever I want. I don't have to go exercise. I'm gonna kind of miss it.'* [takes sip of water] *Ooh. First sip of water out of a glass. [clinks glass intentionally] Anyway, end of the 30-Day Challenge, so lots of not doing today. And I suppose soon I'll get to the 'the' doing today.*

[audio diary fades out] [music fades out]

**Speaker 5:** Ear Hustle would like to thank Reggie Thorpe, Elton Spencer, Jason Robenson, Garcia Anicasio, and Seneca Terrell for speaking with us from inside San Quentin.

Thanks also to Rosa Warder and Joseph Whitaker Davis, and to Michael and the rest of the team at Philz Coffee in Dogpatch for letting Nigel record in there. Big thanks also to Ms. Sapao in the San Quentin kitchen, as well as Casey, Julia, Lauren, Jamie, Anna, all of the listeners who posted on social media, and everyone who gave the 30-Day Challenge a try.

This episode was produced by Nigel Poor and Amy Standen with Earlonne Woods, Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, John “Yahya” Johnson, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Bruce Wallace and Tony Tafoya. It was sound designed and engineered by Antwan Williams with music by Antwan, David Jassy, and Rhashiyd Zinnamon.

Shabnam Sigman is our digital producer and Julie Shapiro is the executive producer for Radiotopia. We’d 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]

**Earlonne Woods:** So, Lieutenant Robinson, tell me. How do you feel about this 30-Day Challenge?

**Lieutenant Sam Robinson:** I’ll tell you, I was really surprised by how Nigel broke, right. [laughs]

**Earlonne Woods:** Broke?! What you mean?

**Lieutenant Sam Robinson:** Givin’ her husband a heard time, you know, he was just sittin’ around trying to have a good time.

**Earlonne Woods:** Talkin’ about the movie.

**Lieutenant Sam Robinson:** And she go, you know... [indistinguishable] [continues laughing] This was one of the episodes I really do appreciate how people— for everyone who took the time out to really dive in, to just experience some aspects of it. Much respect from me. So, with that, I will say that this is Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin State Prison, and I do approve this.

[music comes in]

**Speaker 6:** This podcast is made possible with support from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, working to redesign the justice system by being empowering opportunity for communities impacted by incarceration.

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

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

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

[music fades out]

[to her husband, Rick]

**Nigel Poor:** We're out of time.

**Rick Peterson:** No, I know! Discretion is advised. Can you start over?

**Nigel Poor:** No, just start there.

OK, this is Rick Peterson, Nigel's husband. The following episode of Ear Hustle contains language... [Nigel says something indistinguishable in the background] that may not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised. [says in a spooky voice]

**Nigel Poor:** OK, you gotta do it again.

**Rick Peterson:** I know.

**END OF EPISODE.**