

Ear Hustle
"15 Minutes"
March 02, 2022

Leslie: *My name is Leslie Van Houten. And the following episode of Ear Hustle contains language and content that may not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised.*

[beep]

Automated: *This is Global Tel Link. You have a prepaid call from*

Earlonne: Ear Hustle.

Nigel: A podcast from PRX's Radiotopia.

Automated: *This call and your telephone number will be monitored and recorded. [beep] To accept this call, say or dial-- Thank you for using Global Tel Link.*

Avelina: *My name is Avelina. My husband, Edmond Richardson, is currently incarcerated, so we've had a lot of 15-minute phone calls. I had recently moved into a new apartment, and it was starting to get cold. I didn't know how to work the heater in my apartment, which was like a wall heater. I spent probably like five hours throughout the day trying to watch different YouTube videos, but I was so paranoid that I was going to maybe set my whole house on fire. I got a call from Edmond like, "Hi, how are you?" I'm on the other end, screaming and crying and pulling my hair out. "I can't fix my heater. I'm so cold, my bones hurt." [chuckles] He was like, "Okay, take a deep breath and we're going to figure this out."*

Automated: *This call and your telephone number will be monitored and recorded.*

Avelina: *I put the phone on speaker and then he walks me through which color cord I'm supposed to light, the sounds that it's supposed to make. And then he's like, "If it starts smelling like this, maybe you did it wrong." I got really frustrated at him because I was like, "You're not going to be able to help me with this over the phone. We only have 15 minutes." But then somebody who was on the phone next to him had overheard Edmond and had told Edmond to tell me that I had to wait 30 seconds after lighting the wire to turn on the heater. There's a distinct noise when a heater turns on, and I just remember hearing that noise and having a big sigh of relief. And then me crying and being like, "You're not here to experience this heater with me." [chuckles]*

This is really corny, but whenever it's our last phone call or an evening phone call, we always pick a place to meet in our dreams. Like, "Oh, we're going to watch Harry Potter or This is Us and eat French toast." That's how that phone call ended, "And we're going to have a heater in the apartment when we meet tonight."

Automated: *Thank you for using Global Tel Link.*

[phone beeps]

[phone rings]

Brynn: *My name is Brynn Richardson. My husband was incarcerated for seven and a half years. We got married and then the Fed showed up, and were like, "Hey, I hope you enjoyed your one-month honeymoon." [laughs] We're in that early relationship stage, figuring each other out and figuring out how to even argue as a couple while doing it with 15-minute phone calls. It was a little rough because you might be about to get this point and about to drive at home and then it's like, "You have one minute remaining."*

Automated: *You have 60 seconds remaining.*

Nigel: *[laughs] We know that when you argue with somebody in person, you'd like consult and just sit there and glare at each other or you can storm off into another room? You can't really do that on the phone. Were there ever times where you just run the phone and be sat there in silence pissed off at each other?*

Brynn: *Yeah. We would literally just sit there [chuckles] and waste 15 minutes in silence on the phone, and you think all these phone calls cost, and you're like, "This is a [chuckles] waste of money." Honestly, not just a waste of money, more importantly in the feds, you only get 300 minutes a month. So, not only is it a waste of money, it's a waste, like, we running down these phone calls. So, by the end of the month, I'm not going to be talking to you when we actually have something to say, because we're just sitting here on the phone, being quiet, but yeah, we definitely sat there and in silence, for a number of phone calls. And then, would call back and sit in silence again.*

[phone beeps]

Automated: *This call and your telephone number will be monitored and recorded.*

Anthony: *My name is Anthony Gibson. I live out here in Johnson City.*

Brandy: *My name is Brandy Miller and I lived down in Johnson City.*

Nigel: *How are you related?*

Anthony: *This is my mom.*

Earlone: *When Anthony was 22 years old, he was sentenced to eight years and sent to Hardeman County Correctional Facility in Tennessee.*

Nigel: *Two years in, he became eligible for parole.*

Earlonne: He'd go before the board, and then wait a few weeks for the board to post his decision online.

Brandy: *He called sometimes twice a day during that time. I think he would say, "Did you hear anything? Did you hear anything?" You just sign into this app. And at 2 o'clock in the morning, it would switch, and it would say "Paroled" or "Denied." Oh, I would immediately just get nauseous. And then, I would exit out of the app and do it all over again to make sure it was right. Then, I'll wake my husband up and say, "He didn't make it." And then, I would just watch TV or send my mom an email saying, "He didn't make it." That I'm going to have to tell him this again. And then, I would go to work. I'm a hairdresser, so I have to be nice to people all day. So, I'd have to pretend that nothing was wrong in my life.*

Anthony: *Every time that the doors would pop in the morning, there's only six phones, and everybody runs to these phones. I'm not playing no games, [chuckles] but I need to get to one of these phones.*

Brandy: *Every time I hear a phone ring, I would run to it and check it. I was in the middle of a haircut, and I said, "I'm sorry, I have to step away for a minute."*

Anthony: *You picture over and over what somebody is going to sound like when they give you that, "Hey, you made it. This is it." And it's never that.*

Brandy: *And it would just be silence. Just silence.*

Anthony: *Silence. Just straight silence. There's nothing to say to make it go away the fact that I'm not going to make it this time, I've got to wait a whole another year. I would much rather just call my mom and just sit on the phone, and not to say nothing. Just the fact that I know she's there, I can hear, it kind of get me a little bit away from where I'm at, because as soon as I hang up that phone, it's back to reality. And I know it's back to reality for at least another year.*

Nigel: *You got that call, and you have to go back and finish the haircut?*

Brandy: *Oh, yeah. Always, yeah.*

[phone beeps]

[phone ringing]

Automated: *This call and your telephone number will be monitored and recorded.*

Tim: *I talked to my mom every day.*

Nigel: *Hmm. Why did you talk to your mom every day?*

Tim: *I think prison just brought us so close together. She was so worried about me the whole time I was in. I was her baby.*

Earlonne: Tim Manikowski served 12 years in prison in Wisconsin.

Tim: *From a very young age, my parents told me that I was adopted. They told all of us that we were adopted. They also told us that if at any point in our life, we wanted to look for our birth parents that they would help us. But to me, my mom and dad were my mom and dad. These are the people that raised me, that looked after me, that made sure that I was good. These are my parents. So, I never, never once asked my mom or my dad anything about my adoption.*

Automated: *You have 60 seconds remaining.*

Tim: *It was just another normal conversation, and we were real close to getting off the phone. When we were getting down to that point, we would start saying our goodbyes and all that stuff, and all of a sudden, my mom blurts out. "Your birth father's name is this, and your birth mother's name is this." Completely out of the blue. I was just dumbfounded. I was just like, "Whoa." Those last words from her like, "Well, I just thought I wanted you to know." [phone cuts off] And then, the phone cut off.*

Her first stroke was probably maybe a few days, maybe a week at most after that. I was literally on the phone with her and she started stumbling her words, and I could tell something was going on and I flipped out.

Nigel: *She was having a stroke when you were talking?*

Tim: *Yeah, while I was talking to her. The phone was right next to the bubble, the officer's station and I just left it hanging there and literally pounded on the door. When they answered, obviously, they're pissed off, because why is an inmate pounding on the bubble door? I had to get them to let me call my sister who then in turn called the nursing home that she was at, because if she would have just been left alone, she definitely would have died that night. It definitely saved her life.*

Automated: *This call and your telephone number will be monitored and recorded.*

Tim: *My mom was a nurse her entire career. So, I think she knew somewhere in her that getting a little more forgetful, things are not going well for her. So, I think I want to thank that it was her wanting to say it before something happened.*

[phone beeps]

[phone ringing]

Automated: *To accept this call, say or dial five now. [beep]*

Earlonne: *Can you tell us about your relationship with your mother growing up?*

Ashley: *I can give you a little bit. There's not really much.*

Earlone: Ashley is a teacher in Detroit.

Ashley: *I don't actually call her my mother. I stopped doing that when I was a little girl. She's always been Kathy or Kathleen to me. She wasn't really the best mother. She was addicted to alcohol pretty early on. She's been in and out of prison since like the year after I was born. I would see her for a few months at a time. And really, I would spend a lot of time with her close friends, Candy and Michaelene. They've also worked in the sex worker industry. They were prostitutes as well. They were just lovely, lovely women. They made sure that there was food around for me and whatever they could give to me, to keep me alive and well. I had more of a relationship with those two than I really did with Kathleen.*

Our caseworker would come. One time, they found me gnawing on a frozen chicken, pieces of frozen chicken, and that was all we had in the house. Another time in our reports, it was noted that when they came to get us, I wouldn't let them leave without taking my brother's bottles, because it was all I had to feed him, but it had been curdled for days. That was removed by the state of Michigan. We were adopted. We moved to the farm and everything I ever wanted was there.

Automated: *This call and your telephone number will be monitored and recorded.*

Ashley: *I don't know anything about my dad. I asked my mom how I would find out that information, and she reminded me that there's really only one person that would know. So, I went on the internet, and I found her in a women's prison in Brighton, and I called the prison. [dialing] I just called like the-- when you google something, and it gives you the basic phone number. I just called that phone number, and a lovely woman picked up and I told her who I was. I speak fast, so I apologized and I was nervous. I told her who I was looking for and asked if Kathleen was there, available. She very kindly told me that you can't really call up a prison and ask to speak with someone that's incarcerated there. They don't just walk back and say, "You got a phone call."*

She told me that she would take my contact information and let Kathleen know. If she wanted to contact me when she had the time or whatever, she would. I was actually really glad that she didn't let me talk to her, because I realized when I hung up, I didn't even think through speaking to this person or what I would say or what if she had a question for me. And then, Kathleen did end up calling me the next day.

Nigel: *Oh, wow.*

Ashley: *But I knew that it would be a Michigan number that I didn't know. I felt like just a big ball of nerves dropped from my throat to the pit of my stomach.*

Automated: *To accept this say or dial 5 now.*

[dial beep]

Ashley: *I said, "Hello." She said, "Hello," and asked if it was Ashley and I said that it was. I said, "Is it Kathy?" She said, "Yes." She asked how I was doing. I didn't really know how to respond. I said, "I'm fine, I guess. How are you?" She had started to tell me that she was all right, and she was looking at getting paroled. I try very hard not to cut people off, but I did. I cut her off and I said, "I really just want to know what is my dad's name." She told me. She said, "He's an immigrant from Mexico, and he's probably still living in the same area that you were born in." I said, "Thank you. I've got to go," and then I hung up the phone.*

The whole call really did just last three minutes and eight seconds. I know that we had 15 I could have used, but maybe some other time in my life, I will be able to talk to her for 15 whole minutes whether that's on phone or face to face. But right now, 15 minutes is just too big of a chasm that I don't really have the power to cross.

[phone line beep]

Earlone: Thanks to Avelina, Brynn, Anthony, Brandy, Tim, Ashley, Hannah, Samantha.

Nigel: Asinia, Darcy, and everyone else who sent us stories about 15-minute phone calls.

[music]

Nigel: Earlone, we are back in the news--

Earlone: Season 9.

Nigel: Season 9. And we're trying new things, right?

Earlone: Definitely trying new things, trying new episode approaches, new story structures.

Nigel: Like this one with the based on a 15-minute phone call.

Earlone: Yes. We did the whole episode in 15 minutes.

Nigel: I know, and that may sound easy. It was actually pretty challenging.

Earlone: Definitely tricky.

Nigel: And we have some exciting new merch coming up.

Earlone: Yes, some nice new soft, I ain't going to say what, but--

Nigel: Does it say bright colors?

Earlone: Yeah.

Nigel: If you want to stay posted on all things Ear Hustle, sign up for our newsletter.

Earlone: The lowdown. That's *earhustlesq.com/newsletter*. And Nyge-

Nigel: Yes.

Earlone: -we just found out about something else happened in 2022, huh?

Nigel: Yes. We are thrilled that San Francisco Public Library has chosen our book, Earlone.

Earlone: *This is Ear Hustle: Unflinching Stories of Everyday Prison Life* for the 2022 One City One Book.

Nigel: One City One Book is the Bay area's largest citywide literary event. It encourages folks in San Francisco to read the same book at the same time, and then discuss it in groups and events throughout the city.

Earlone: That's dope.

Nigel: It is so exciting, Earlone.

Earlone: It is.

Nigel: So, please stay tuned for One City One Book events this fall. Earlone, I cannot wait to go visit every single public library in San Francisco with you.

Earlone: Let's go.

Nigel: And if you're not in San Francisco, you can still participate because we're going to be doing in-person and virtual events.

Earlone: Please tune in. You can tune in and be there and you can buy the book in your city.

Nigel: That's right. [chuckles] Or, take it out from their library.

Earlone: From their library. Check it out.

Nigel: Yep.

Earlone: We ain't did our credits in a minute.

Nigel: I know.

Earlonne: Let's see if we can give it a shot this season.

Nigel: All right. Let's try it.

Earlonne: Ear Hustle is produced by me, Earlonne Woods, Nigel Poor, Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, John "Yahya" Johnson, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Bruce Wallace, and Tony Tafoya.

Nigel: It was sound designed and engineered by Antwan Williams, with music by Antwan and David Jassy. With additional sound design and engineering by Terence Bernardo.

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

Nigel: 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.

Lt. Sam Robinson: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol. Do, Re. Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol.

Earlonne: Okay. We'll make sure that that's on there too.

[laughter]

Lt. Sam Robinson: I'm ready, man, I'm ready. This is Lt. Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin State Prison. It is challenging. Those phone calls are more than just phone calls. They go in all different directions. As an officer in the towers monitoring those phone calls for many years, you just never know what dynamic that they go in. So, with that, as Ear Hustle always does, they give you a glimpse into the world of prison. I will say that I approve this episode.

Earlonne: This episode was made possible by The Just Trust, working to amplify the voices, vision, and power of communities that are transforming the justice system.

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

Earlonne: Some of the best podcasts around. Hear more at *radiotopia.fm*.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: And I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel and Earlonne: Thanks for listening.

[music fades off]

Automated: *You have 60 seconds remaining.*

Female Speaker: *We've got a one-minute lady and we always just call her Karen, like, "Go away, Karen." [chuckles]*

[Radiotopia from PRX

End of Episode