

Ear Hustle
"Pockets"
October 19, 2022

Damien: This is Damien Linnane, former prisoner and illustrator of the book, *This is Ear Hustle*. The following episode of Ear Hustle contains language that may not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

Nigel: *Are you playing Candy Crush?*

Dareta: *Yes.*

Nigel: *What level are you on?*

Dareta: *89.*

Nigel: *Oh. I love this game. I'm on 83.*

Dareta: *89.*

Nigel: *Why is it so fun?*

Dareta: *I don't know, and I'm not a game person.*

Nigel: *I'm not either.*

Dareta: *But I'm addicted.*

Nigel: *I can't figure it out. I don't play any other game but I have to get rid of it sometimes.*

Dareta: *Yeah. I am so addicted.*

Nigel: *But what do you think it is about Candy Crush?*

Dareta: *I don't know. Honestly, I don't know. I just started playing it and got addicted because I don't have a job or anything. So, I'm bored all the time.*

Nigel: *Can you hear the music though when you play?*

Dareta: *When my headphones are on?*

Nigel: *Yeah, because I like the music too. It's so soothing.*

Dareta: *Yes. When it says "Sugar Rush," and "Tasty" and all that, yes. Exactly.*

Nigel: And like, "Good Job."

Dareta: I love it.

Nigel: "Spectacular."

Dareta: Yes, I'm addicted.

[laughter]

Nigel: That's so funny.

Dareta: Yeah, I'm very addicted.

Nigel: But, yeah, when it says, "Sugar Crush," and the things get big, oh, you just feel so good about yourself.

Dareta: Yes. I love it. [laughs] Yes, I do.

Nigel: Do you think actually when you play Candy Crush, you create a private space?

Dareta: Yes, exactly. It takes me away from here. Yes, it really, really does. Yes, it takes me away.

[Candy Crush sounds]

Earlonne: I get what she's talking about with this Candy Crush, Nyge.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: For me, it was Solitaire because when I was playing it, I could tune everything else out. It was my alone time, which is really hard to get in prison.

Nigel: Oh, totally. And, Earlonne, I have a theory about this.

Earlonne: Okay. Lay it on me.

Nigel: Okay, so just stick with me for a second. All right. I think that you can call Candy Crush a kind of structure, even sort of a form of architecture.

Earlonne: Hmm.

Nigel: I see your look. Okay, let me--[crosstalk]

Earlone: Yeah. Please keep going.

Nigel: Okay, so it's a space, right?

Earlone: Right.

Nigel: Yes, it's an imaginary space, but it's still a space. And that woman we just heard from, Dareta, she's creating this Candy Crush space so that she can feel alone and have some kind of privacy. Starting to make a little sense?

Earlone: I hear you.

Nigel: Okay. And if you think about it, this is especially important. I mean, it's actually crucial in prison, because prisons are designed so that you are never alone.

Earlone: Well, shit. Yeah, they always have to have some eyes on you all the fucking time. That's what prison architecture is all about, surveillance.

Nigel: Yeah, exactly. But people need privacy. They need that teeny, tiny little bit of freedom that you can get when you feel that you're alone.

Earlone: True.

Nigel: So, that's what we're exploring in this episode and in the next one, prison architecture, real and imagined. This week, finding privacy.

Earlone: And, Nyge?

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlone: For everyone that know you.

Nigel: Yes.

Earlone: They're going to say she sounds a little bit under the weather.

Nigel: I know. I have COVID.

Earlone: What?

Nigel: Ah, yes. I thought I would get away without never having that thing, but, no, I got COVID. And so we are back in our closets again.

Earlone: Do you know what though? You've absconded COVID for two years and some change.

Nigel: I thought I was going to outrun it. I really did.

Earlonne: Feel proud of that.

Nigel: I was proud that I got my comeuppance.

Earlonne: So, yes, we are in our closets, which sounds about right for episode about privacy.

Nigel: Yes. I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: I'm Earlonne Woods, and this is Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia.

Nigel: To explore this idea of private spaces, we got to do a really exciting thing that kind of starts a new chapter for the show. We got to spend three days at a women's prison.

Earlonne: Nigel, can I sing this song real quick?

Nigel: Yes.

Earlonne: By CeCe Peniston?

Nigel: Lay it on me.

Earlonne: "Finally, it has happened."

[laughter]

Nigel: "It happened to me." Oh, my God.

Earlonne: We got inside. Finally.

Nigel: Yes, yes, yes.

Earlonne: The California Institution for Women, or CIW as it's called for short, is about 45 minutes outside of Los Angeles.

Nigel: We did have a chaperone.

Earlonne: Of course. CIW's version of Lieutenant Robinson.

Nigel: His name is Lieutenant Newborg, the prison's public information officer.

Earlonne: We pass through the security station and then stepped out into this big open yard.

Nigel: My first impression was it looked a little bit like a community college, you know what I mean? Like a lot of one-story buildings connected by pathways and scrubby landscaping.

Earlone: And, Nyge?

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlone: It was hot as you remember.

Nigel: Oh, God, it was over 100 degrees, it was almost unbearable.

Earlone: And as we walked through the yard, it was barren, it was desolate. Just a few women posted up at a picnic table, giving us shit, of course.

Person: What the fuck are y'all recording?

Person: It's prison [unintelligible 00:06:31].

Nigel: It felt a little weird, walking around this space where we knew nobody so that we could ask women about privacy.

Earlone: Right. But that's what we were there for. So, we figured we start in the obvious place where people live, their cells.

[background chatter]

Earlone: So, we walk into the housing unit.

Nigel: We stepped into this small common area and extending out was this long hallway with doors on either side, probably about like 10 to 15 doors. And each of those was a cell housing two women.

Earlone: And since there was no AC, there was these big, huge, like swamp fan type shits that was in the end of each hallway.

Nigel: Is it possible to turn the fan off just for--? Okay.

Earlone: Just looking at the cells, I don't know, Nyge, seems like women at CIW have more privacy than guys do at San Quentin.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlone: I mean, at San Quentin, it's all bar. You can see right in the every single cell.

Nigel: Oh, I know. I know. And at CIW, every cell has a door of solid wood. And the only way to see in is through this little window that's about, I don't know, like 6 by 10 inches.

Earlone: Right.

Nigel: And as we passed by each cell, I really wanted to look through those windows. I mean, I was just so curious. I felt like a peeper.

Earlone: Peeping Nigel.

Nigel: [laughs] And did you see what was some keeping those doors from slamming shut?

Earlone: Yeah, I noticed that.

Nigel: Did I tell you we were indeed in a women's prison?

[laughter]

Nigel: They were using sanitary napkins wrapped over the top of the doors so they wouldn't slam shut.

Earlone: Prison Ingenuity 101, door stoppers.

Nigel: Exactly. So, we just started walking down the hall to see if anyone would chit chat with us.

[background chatter]

Nigel: Normally, Earlone, if we were at San Quentin, we would just be shoving the mic in people's faces but it was really different there. It was kind of like a little hesitant.

Earlone: I understand that we were technically foreigners. You know what I'm saying?

Nigel: Hmm.

Earlone: We were being escorted by a PIO. So, everybody's like, "Who is that? Who is that?" And we have microphones. So, they want to figure what that is, but as we were walking down that hall, this one woman had her door popped open. So, we just kind of stuck our heads in there, were like, "Hey, what up?"

Nigel: *We're doing a podcast about life inside prison. And one of the episodes we're working on is about the architecture of prison. And so, of course, your room caught my attention. What do you call this?*

Marissa: *I call this my safe haven.*

Nigel: *What makes it a safe haven for you?*

Marissa: *Because there's things that I do to remind me of home. I shut out the prison world.*

Earlone: This woman's name was Marissa. And, Nyge, she had really bonarood her cell.

Nigel: Totally. She had handmade curtains and a matching dust ruffle. I think that's what you call that thing that you put under a mattress. She had family photos all over the walls. And the way she had a decorated, it kind of reminded me of a college dorm, but like a freshman college dorm.

Marissa: *I can't live like I'm in prison with blank walls and windows you can't cover and toilet you can't cover and all the things. I make it like home.*

Earlone: *So, you wanted to talk to us?*

Rachel: *Yeah. I just wanted to see what you guys were about. Wait, what was this? Yeah, I was nosy, just being nosy. [laughs]*

Nigel: There were a couple of women who actually wanted to talk to us.

Earlone: There's always someone who likes having a mic in their face.

Hello, how are you? Can you identify who you are? And how long have you been down?

Rachel: *Rachel Rodriguez. I had been down one year, this term.*

Earlone: *How many years in total?*

Rachel: *26, sporadically, here and there, here and there. But total of 26.*

Earlone: *So, they call them--*

Rachel: *Like it was installment plan.*

Earlone: *That's exactly what they call it. I was trying to get the words.*

Rachel: *Yeah, that's me.*

Earlone: *All the time.*

Nigel: *Can you tell me about where do you find privacy here?*

Rachel: *Privacy, when your bunky leaves for work and you're in there by yourself.*

Nigel: *That's the only time?*

Rachel: *That's the only time you have privacy or if you have a restroom that's in-- like in education that has a door, that's the only other place you have privacy. Other than that, it's a speak on your bunky kind of terms ask for privacy. "Hey, can I get 10 minutes alone? Can I get five minutes alone to change, whatever, use the restroom?" and you work with your bunky, like most of the time with everything because they're a part of you. You are a part of them and they are part of you till you're gone.*

Nigel: *Do you have a bunky that you get along with?*

Rachel: *Yeah. I have a bunky. She doesn't talk that much. [chuckles] So, yeah, it's great, I have a good bunky.*

Kathryn: *My name is Kathryn Carnero Elam. I've been down in prison for 16 years. I had a 25-year sentence. Like many other women, we have a routine to create privacy. And that's what you do a tent. If I need to focus and my bunky's got to be around, I'll put up like a sheet, fold a sheet and you get it connected and you're blocking your face, my face.*

Nigel: *So, you're enclosing yourself in your bunk?*

Kathryn: *Yes, not the whole thing. Some people do feel like they need to do the whole thing. But a lot of us it's that much. Even if it's a big towel, and then I'm like, "Okay, I'm in my space."*

Nigel: *And what kind of feeling comes over you when you do that?*

Kathryn: *Oh, gosh. [laughs] A feeling. Huh, releases stress. I could think better.*

Alyce: *During the day is the prison's time with me. My time with me is at night.*

Earlone: *This is Alyce. We've talked to her on the phone before. She was actually in one of our episodes last season.*

Nigel: *And you could tell even from those phone conversations that she had an interesting perspective on things. I was really curious to finally meet her.*

Earlone: *Alyce is in her 70s and like a lot of older women at CIW, she gets a cell all to herself. So, that mean's she's alone a lot.*

Alyce: *Being bipolar helps a lot. I usually only require three, four, or five hours. If I go to bed at 8:00, I'm up at 1:00. That's when I do everything. I think at night. I work at night. That's my space. The minute they lock that door at 8 o'clock, I'm in hog heaven. I know that door is not going to be opened again unless I'm dead. And that means everything I do in there is uninterrupted. It allows me to do what I want to do.*

Nigel: *What words would you use to describe your cell? Is it your home? Is it your studio? What is it?*

Alyce: *I always kind of referred to it as the den. I call it the den because in my house that I had on the outside, I had a den where I had my desk and I had all my stuff. And so, this is now my house, I just had to downsize. [laughs] That's all.*

Earlone: *So, your den is currently in a large estate with a gated community.*

Alyce: *Yes, indeedy. [laughs]*

[background chatter]

Earlone: When we first met Alyce, she was in a different part of prison. But I was curious on what her cell actually looked like.

Nigel: Oh, man, so was I. So, Lieutenant Newborg asked her if it was okay, if we went over to take a look.

Lieutenant Newborg: *This is it right here. This is her cell. This is what she calls her den.*

Nigel: When we arrived, Alyce wasn't there yet. And, Earlone, I have to say it felt a little weird to kind of walk into her space like that.

Earlone: [chuckles] But we were on a mission. So, of course, we took a peek.

This is bigger than a San Quentin cell, ain't it, Nigel? Yeah, you can move around. Yeah, you could definitely move around.

Nigel: I was actually kind of relieved when Alyce finally showed up.

Person: *Oh, this is Alyce.*

Earlone: *Hi, Alyce.*

Nigel: *I was wondering if you could give us a little tour of your den.*

Alyce: *Oh, okay. This is my kitchen. I have my heater where I heat up my water and what have you anyway and everything is basically done--*

Nigel: Alyce's cell was pretty tidy and organized. And also, every inch was packed with stuff, like toiletries and medications. And there was a notable amount of saltine crackers, Earlone. Did you check that out? I mean, it was like a Costco amount.

Earlone: Yeah, them crackers will fill you up in a pinch with some water, I can tell you that though.

Alyce: Like I said, down there are my-- there's my office. There's all my writing materials. These two are my artwork and art supplies and what have you.

Nigel: Under the bunk bed, she had big plastic bins full of papers and stuff.

Earlonne: Yeah, the lower bunk was set up for sleeping, and the top bunk she was using like a standing desk to put more of her property on.

Nigel: Yeah, exactly. And on the wall next to her mirror, she had these two small photos cut up from a magazine, like a teenager would do.

Can you tell me why you have Elvis and Steve Tyler next to each other?

Alyce: I grew up being in love with Elvis, and I am extremely fond of Aerosmith. I was a dancer for many years. I love dancing. I was raised in a family who kept us isolated from the world. In fact, Elvis was such a big no-no. It wasn't until I was in my 30s or so that I discovered Aerosmith and their music. Usually, what I do is when I go walking at the rec yard, I put my music on. And I'm sure I make quite a picture because, boy, when I walk, I rock. [laughs]

Nigel: Wow. When we were talking earlier about private places, and you said this is like your den, when you're out walking around with your music on and you're just rocking out, does that feel private?

Alyce: Yeah.

Nigel: Can you talk just a little bit about that?

Alyce: Because I miss the music and the dancing so much. A lot of times I've been known to do it in here after hours. And I just hang on to the edge of the rail and I guarantee you, I can rock and roll from here to Sunday, especially if I'm listening to them. For me, it's good exercise. It gets everything pumping and I just have such a good time.

Nigel: Do you have a headset on? Are you listening it out loud?

Alyce: No, I have a headset.

Nigel: We wish we could see that.

Alyce: [laughs] Yeah. [crosstalk]

Nigel: Any chance you could do it for us?

Alyce: Huh?

Nigel: Any chance you could put a headset on and--

Alyce: That would be funny.

Nigel: It would be.

Alyce has her headset on.

Earlonne: She's getting her groove on. She's shaking a leg, as they say.

Nigel: She's-- Whoa.

Earlonne: Oh, yeah. She ain't playing.

Nigel: She's listening to Addicted to Love.

Earlonne: I thought it was salsa.

Nigel: Ooh. Wow. Wish I could film this.

Earlonne: She ain't playing. She's a listening to high tekker and getting her swing on.

[rock music playing in the background]

Earlonne: She's saying, "I just got to hold on to the bunk but I'm good." She got the step, that's the step. Swing dance.

Nigel: Earlonne, this was really one of the most memorable kind of visions I take away with me from our trip. It was such a private moment to see somebody in their own reverie. It was awkward and beautiful. Seeing someone like that is kind of a gift.

Earlonne: I think we were seeing a moment of freedom, Nyge.

Nigel: Okay, Alyce.

Earlonne: I'm in it now. Aint no pulling me out of this dancing. I'm in it. I've got get it in.

Nigel: Okay, Alyce, sorry to interrupt you.

Earlonne: Look like she forgot we was there, Nyge.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: Great dancing.

Nigel: Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

Alyce: It's been a real slice of heaven. What can I tell you?

Nigel: That was so nice to spend time together.

[rock music]

Earlone: We're going to take a quick break.

Nigel: When we're back, the private spaces of San Quentin.

[rock music]

Artwork: I try to drown out the entire world, either headphones or ear plugs. I am a recluse.

Nigel: Earlone, we are back on familiar ground here, San Quentin.

Earlone: And this is Artwork, and I definitely remember this guy.

Nigel: Of course, you do. He's pretty memorable. Like Alyce, he had his own cell. I have to say his private space is pretty much a reflection of his inner being. You know what I mean? Like his inner psyche is projected onto those walls.

Earlone: Pretty much.

Artwork: I got like a hate corner and a love corner. What a love corner is the picture of the people that write you, and I will put my affirmations up on the wall. I would have places in the world that I wanted to visit. I'd have real healthy stuff going on.

In the hate corner, I had a list of names of people I wanted to take revenge on. I had different ideas on how to get back at them. I had pictures of things that I would use to get back at them. I used to get really specific. Like, "Man, I hope her son comes home late today, and lie and be telling her he did his homework and shit. He going to disappoint the fuck outta her. I hope somebody steal her mail too, and she don't get her insurance stuff, man. And fuck around in a fire hit." Nobody hates you like a dude in jail.

Then, the list got too long. I had to knock my some off the list, like you lucky man, fucking I'm going to be busy, be busy whopping his ass. See, you know what I came to realize in the hate corner? That everybody don't deserve to be hurt. Some people, you just scratch the car up some. You ain't got to penalize everybody with a rock upside the head.

The love corner was like an escape, and the hate corner was motivation.

Branden: My name is Branden Riddle-Terrell.

Nigel: How long have you been in prison?

Branden: Just over seven years.

Nigel: And what do you look like?

Branden: I like to call myself a Pretty Boy Biker.

[laughter]

Nigel: I think that's a good description of you, Pretty Boy Biker. And how would you describe yourself?

Branden: Myself? If you're on a rock star tour bus in the little barrack on a tour bus, I'd describe like that.

Nigel: But you make that that makes it sound cozy.

Branden: No, if you've been on some of them, then buses are not cozy. They're actually triple bunk, some of them.

Nigel: How about design wise? Describe to me design wise.

Branden: Paint scheme is black and white. White walls, all the trim and lockers and everything's black, it's a lot of white accents. A lot of shelving and systematical kind of organization things to make it make the cell flow and functioning. It has like a bike shop/tattoo shop feel to it, like the posters and pictures.

Nigel: So, is it a Pretty Boy Biker cell?

Branden: Yeah, Pretty Boy Biker Cell. Obviously, we have the bars to same size of a cell. But for me, it doesn't resemble a cell. I've done it just how I want it. And I took that away from the system. The system put me in a cell, well, I'm going to make this cell as comfortable as I can.

Nigel: I wonder what it would be like for someone to move into your cell.

Branden: They'd be juiced, because I know when done-up cells are emptied or someone moves out of them, I get a rush to get in them.

Nigel: It's like grabbing--

New York: Like when somebody dies in New York, they try to get their apartment.

[laughter]

Branden: Then, the view. You can't forget up there in West Block on the 5th tier, you've got the view up there of Mount Tamalpais.

Nigel: Oh, you do?

Branden: Yeah. I sit on my bunk and wake up to Mount Tam. Fifty times a day, you see the ferries go by every morning. You see the kayakers out there. It's bittersweet because growing up in the area, I'm very familiar with it. In between the buildings at nighttime, you could see the 101, the headlights going back and forth. That used to be like a daily commute. My parents, all my family, they all work here. It's like so close but yet so far away.

Nigel: Do you think they ever drive by and you see them?

Branden: There's definitely been times I've been looking over there because my mom she drives sometimes three or four times just on that little strip right there going back for Novato and Tiburon.

Nigel: It seems like you really view your cell as like a home and like a comforting place. I mean, if you have to be here.

Branden: Absolutely. End of the day, and I come back to the cell, it's like, yeah, at least everything's organized. I can relax, get some food, and not feel like I'm in a cell. And the reason why I like the analogy of the shop, garage style is because it's not permanent. It's temporary. You go to the shop and then you go home. Yeah, it's my shop, it's my garage, because eventually I'm going to be home with the family.

AI: It was one metal bunk, a toilet, and a sink. Back then, there was a light fixture in the middle of the roof where you screw the light bulb in, little chain, and then at the bottom. It was a vent with a TV cable coming out of the vent, and that was it. I'm like, "Okay, I'm here now."

Earlone: I bet some listeners may remember Al Watson. He spent 36 years in prison on death row. And on the row, everyone has their own cell, and they pretty much never leave it.

Nigel: Yeah, I mean, you rarely see them outside unless they're being escorted to, say, like medical. And even then, Earlone, you know this protocol. You're supposed to stop when they walk by and not even look at them.

Earlone: You can call it a privacy, but really, it's isolation.

Nigel: Is it loud on death row?

AI: It's very quiet. You can hear individuals, televisions turning. You can hear individuals hitting keys on their typewriters. There's no noise really. Everybody's into their own world. It's very quiet.

Nigel: So, there's like 740 worlds up there. Can you describe your world there?

Al: Lot of loneliness, sadness. It came to the point where that just became routine. Okay, this is what it is. Lot of cell time, cell studies, trying to find ways to spend my time. A lot of radio, a lot of television, a lot of books, working out. That was pretty much it.

Earlonne: During Al's time, the guys on the row were pretty much just waiting.

Al: My mindset, I'm thinking, "Okay, maybe be executed in a couple of years or so." And time started to move, ordered little stuff, TV, radio.

Nigel: How did you start making that place your home?

Al: It was never home. I existed there.

Nigel: Then, something really surprising happened for Al. He was actually resentenced and he was moved down to the general population.

Al: The first night that I came out of the dining hall, I just happened to look up. It tripped me out. I forgot all about that type of stuff. I'm looking up while I'm walking just admiring this. When I got back to the cell, I actually realize, "Man, I haven't seen the moon and the stars in a long, long time."

Nigel: Tell us a little bit about the family visiting area?

Tommy: It's like a little apartment. There's a little area to hang coats and stuff, kitchen, the little living room area where you can sit on the couch, watch TV.

Nigel: So, in this episode, we've mostly been talking about cells, and how some people can find privacy there. But there's these other areas in the prison too where, for a short period of time, you can feel a bit more free, like have some separation from prison life.

Earlonne: And one of those spaces is the family visiting cottage. It's a small building inside the prison where you can actually go spend a couple of uninterrupted days with your family.

Nigel: And it's sort of prison and sort of not. It's this in between space. And, Earlonne, I know you never had the opportunity to actually do one of these family visits.

Earlonne: Nah, I didn't qualify because I was a lifer. But our friend, Tommy, did. So, we asked him to describe the place.

Tommy: It's two bedrooms, one for the kids, one for the adults. There's a bathroom with a shower. So, just going there makes you feel like you're not in prison.

Nigel: What was it like for the first time to go there and have such a different space after you'd been in a prison for at least 12 years, right?

Tommy: *It was a little much. For one, in prison, you keep up a wall. You keep up a mask and an exterior to where you don't want people to get too close to you. So, when somebody is finally allowed to get close to somebody, it feels different. I don't want people getting too close to me. Even just hugging my wife for an extended period of time, it produces a lot of anxiety. One moment in particular, she's sleeping on my chest and watching TV, or I'm watching TV. And I hear outside the door, a motorcycle revving. I hear cars from the COs. They have a parking lot right by there. So, I'm hearing all these sounds that I'm not used to hearing and my heart starts to beat very, very heavily, and it wakes my wife up. She's like, "What's wrong?"*

Nigel: *Your heart beating woke her up?*

Tommy: *Yeah. So, I'm having a kind of a panic attack. And I'm like, "It just feels weird. I'm not used to this." And her being so close to me was uncomfortable. And I'm like, "It just feels weird. I'm not used to it." It's just hugging, just hugging, just holding hands felt uncomfortable.*

Nigel: *Like it was just too much closeness?*

Tommy: *Yeah. Well, at that time, it was 12 years without any human contact. It's like, it's cool. But for too long, now I'm getting uncomfortable. It also came to the point where when I would leave, I know that I have to come right back to this prison. And so, those moments of openness and intimacy and understanding that you grow with your partner, significant other, it's beautiful, but it became for me, like I'm tired of going back, where I have to close back off again. There started to be another wall that I was building there, even while I was in the visit with my wife.*

Nigel: Earlonne, I want to play you something.

Earlonne: Okay.

New York: *What do you have in your pockets?*

Daniel: *My ID and my work card and a pen.*

New York: *That's it?*

Daniel: *That's it.*

Nigel: *When you were on a higher level, what did you carry in your pockets?*

Daniel: *A sharpened pencil.*

[laughter]

New York: *Did you like to draw or--?*

Daniel: Nah. [laughs]

Earlonne: You want to tell me why you're asking people about their pockets, Nyge?

Nigel: So mostly, we've been talking about prison architecture and privacy, like in terms of cells and family cottage, and places where you can find some bit of privacy in prison. But I actually think that pockets are a form of architecture too. They're personal architecture. Obviously, it's this very small space. But it's a space that affords you a little bit of privacy because you carry things in there that are just meant for you. When I think about the pocket in terms of architecture, I think about how it gives you not just a sense of privacy, but a little bit of freedom. That's really what we're talking about in this episode, how privacy is a glimmer of freedom.

So, we've been asking everyone just to tell us about what's in your pocket. What do you carry in your pocket?

Tam: My ID, lyrics to a song, and my mask.

Earlonne: I don't think I know this cat, Nyge.

Nigel: No, you don't. This is Tam, and he hasn't been in San Quentin for very long. But the other day, he came down to the Media Lab, and New York and I sat him down so we could talk to him.

What song?

Tam: Oh, I write music.

Nigel: Oh, your own music?

Tam: Yeah, I write my own--

New York: I can't hear it in your pocket. Come on, let me hear it, man.

Nigel: Do you sing?

Tam: Yeah-- Are you serious?

New York and Nigel: Yeah.

Tam: I don't know if you want these lyrics though.

New York: We haven't heard them. We decide.

Tam: It's an old song I wrote. "You just want my body."

[laughter]

Tam: "I just want your body." And yeah, I don't think you want me to read the rest of this.

New York: *Ear Hustle* is rated R. You can go now.

Nigel: It was good. Just a little more.

Tam: Yeah, it just leads into me saying that we're just doing things. Can I say that?

Nigel: You can say anything.

Tam: I'll let you check it out later but it sounds-- I'm laughing as I'm doing it because I didn't expect you to ask me about something in my pocket.

New York: Why've you got it sticking out of your pocket then?

Tam: It was just because it's there. It's just in my pocket.

Nigel: Okay, so you have your mask, your ID, your lyrics.

Tam: And a pen.

Nigel: And a pen. When you were at your most high-level prison, what would you have in your pocket?

Tam: I would just have my ID. But I didn't carry anything on me because I didn't want to lose anything in case something happened. If you bring your radio, you're going to lose it. You break it if somebody's attacking you, or you get put down and the cops come and search you, they might break it. So, you just don't carry anything on you if you don't want to.

Nigel: That's a pretty big difference. If you think about your clothes or your pocket is architecture,-

Tam: Yes.

Nigel: -that is very different.

Tam: Yeah, like now, I would carry more stuff. It just so happens this is all I had. But generally, you'll see guys walking around with their lunch and folders worth of stuff. Sometimes, I come down here with my guitar. But if I would have had it, I would have never brought it with me because I don't want to lose it.

Nigel: Right. So now, how do you think about the service of your pocket? What does it mean to you now?

Tam: *I could put a bunch of stuff in there that I might need, like, pens, maybe some food, like snacks in my pocket. And I don't think much of it because I'm not worried about getting jumped on or participating in some kind of violence.*

Nigel: *Would it be fair to say that the pocket with things in it is sort of a symbol of maybe a little more safety?*

Tam: *You know what? I never really thought about it like that until you started to bring it up. But I think more freedom. Maybe, yeah, even safety because I feel like I'm not going to lose anything.*

Nigel: Okay, so remember my theory about pockets being this really tiny form of prison architecture?

Earlone: Yep, I'm with you.

Nigel: Well, our next episode, we are going to zoom way, way out.

Earlone: We're going to talk about the big public spaces in prison. The yards, the hallways, the layout, all that shit, the whole prison.

Nigel: But first, one more thing about CIW that we got to get in here before we go.

Ashley: *Well, my name is Ashley Karina Garcia. I'm just 20 years old. I've been here for almost a year already.*

Nigel: *Do you have any pockets?*

Ashley: *Pockets? I do not. They do not let us have pockets here.*

Nigel: *Why?*

Ashley: *[laughs] Well, because I guess, I think it's like a safety thing. I guess they don't want to do the extra work of patting us down. Most of the time, I'm carrying a pen just in case.*

[PA announcement]

Nigel: Okay, this is just like outside of prison. Women never get as many pockets as men do. Never.

Earlone: But you know prison got all kinds of crazy rules about women and men. Like, women get sugar candy, like Skittles and Now and Laters and all that. And men don't get none of that shit.

Nigel: I don't even know I'm going to ask but which would you prefer? Pockets or candy?

Earlone: Candy.

Nigel: [laughs]

Earlonne: I can make pockets with needle and thread. Now, give me the candy.

Nigel: Oh, yeah. [laughs]

Do you carry anything private on your person? Do you have pockets that you keep things in?

Nicole: No.

Nigel: No?

Nicole: No.

Nigel: Why not?

Nicole: Well, I don't have any pockets.

Nigel: Yeah, why don't women have pockets?

Nicole: It's the clothes that they sell.

Nigel: Yeah. So, how does it make you feel that you can't carry things that you might need with you?

Nicole: I've never really even thought about it because you get so used to it that it doesn't become something that you really think about. As long as I have my ID or whatever, and if I don't have a pocket-- excuse me, women have secret pockets. Well, we put everything at the top and then there is--
[laughs]

[pensive music]

Nigel: Oh, man, this thing about secret pockets, Earlonne, it just got me so excited thinking about the possibility of spending more time at the women's prison and also pondering what kinds of stories we're going to get out there.

Earlonne: Oh, we going to get some very different stories. I can guarantee that.

Nigel: But I know we've got some things to work on because listening to our interviews, I can hear how tentative our voices are. It's like we just haven't made that connection yet.

Earlonne: Really? I thought we were doing good but I'll say baby steps, Nyge, baby steps. We're going to get it. We're going to get there.

Ear Hustle would like to thank Lieutenant Newborg, Associate Warden Lewis, Acting Warden Core.

Nigel: Mr. Mumm, the team at Poetic Justice, and everyone else who hosted them at the California Institution for Women.

This episode was produced by me, Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: And me, Earlonne Woods, along with Amy Standen, Narolee Price, Rahsaan “New York” Thomas and Bruce Wallace. With help from Tony Tafoya and Rhashiyd Zinnamon.

Nigel: It was sound designed and engineered by Earlonne Woods, with help from Fernando Arruda, and it features music by Antwan Williams, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, E. Phil Phillips, Fernando Arruda, and David Jassy. And, Earlonne, you snuck some of your own music in there too.

Earlonne: Ha, ha, ha. Amy Standen edits the show. Shabnam Sigman is our managing producer. And Bruce Wallace is our executive producer.

Nigel: Thanks to Warden Ron Broomfield. And as you know, every episode of Ear Hustle has to be approved by this guy here.

Lieutenant Sam Robinson: So, this is Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin State Prison. For those of you out there, remember, it's election time, so make sure you registered and get out to vote. And otherwise, I will say that I approve this episode.

Nigel: 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.

Earlonne: Don't forget to sign up for our newsletter, The Lowdown.

Nigel: This week, you can see some photos from our time at CIW, and find out how to watch us live in conversation with Piper Kerman as part of San Francisco's One City One Book, celebration of our book.

Earlonne: And everybody knows Piper Kerman, *Orange is the New Black*, right?

Nigel: And our friend.

Earlonne: Subscribe to The Lowdown at earhustlesq.com/newsletter.

Nigel: Earlonne, you've been busy, this is not the only podcast where our listeners can catch you this week, is it?

Earlonne: Nope. I haven't gotten any sleep, Nyge. It's been hard. The folks at the Wrongful Conviction podcast asked me to sit in their host seat this week.

Nigel: Wrongful Conviction features one-on-one interviews with folks who have spent years in prison for crimes they did not commit.

Earlone: Right. And, Nyge, guess what?

Nigel: What?

Earlone: This was their 300th episode and I got to talk with this cat named Caramad Conley who, I think he was like 18, he was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole, plus 12 life sentences for a crime he did not commit, had nothing to do with, which is sad.

Nigel: My God. You can find Wrongful Conviction wherever you get your podcasts. We also have a link in our show notes. Good job, partner.

Earlone: Indeed.

Nigel: You sounded great.

Earlone: Thank you. I appreciate that. And we have one more, very special thank you before we go.

Nigel: That's right. This is to listener Melanie Kahl, who donated to our latest fundraiser. She's back east in Brooklyn, and Earlone, she's been listening since Episode 1.

Earlone: Ooh. We done took up some of her time, huh? [laughs]

Nigel: Yes, we did. So, we definitely owe her a big thanks.

Earlone: That's what's up. And I love this part of her, Nyge. One of the reasons she was interested in our show right off the bat was because of her favorite high school English teacher. Melanie says, "He was this totally jacked dude that coached wrestling and loved poetry and short stories. Before teaching us, he taught poetry in prison. It always stuck with me, and I love that Nigel started by teaching art." That's what's up.

Nigel: Thank you so much, Melanie.

Earlone: Them English teachers are shit.

Nigel: Oh, they are.

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

Nigel: Some of the best podcasts around. Hear more at *Radiotopia.fm*. I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlone: I'm Earlone Woods.

Nigel and Earlone: Thanks for listening.

Artwork: I went like six years without a cellie. The side effect was when I started talking to myself and playing weird ass games. I sit on the toilet way to the side of cell, be trying to spit a little loogie into the water. But this that the like two years of solitary confinement. Man, Wilson was nothing. With Tom Hanks and Wilson on *Cast Away*, man, that shit was nothing. I wish I had a ball to talk to.

Radiotopia from PRX.

[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]