

Ear Hustle
"OGs Got Hella Tricks"
March 15, 2023

Sam: This is Sam Lewis, Executive Director of ARC, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition. The following episode of Ear Hustle contains language and content that might not be suitable for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

Gator: *I had two life insurance policies taken out on me in the 80s because I really didn't think I was going to make it. It was just that bad.*

Earlone: *Give us an example, like how bad was it in the 80s?*

Gator: *Well, every day you come out your cell, you better be GQed up.*

Earlone: *What'd that mean?*

Gator: *GQ magazines. You get four GQ magazines. You tape one up to the top half and the lower half of your front and the same in the back. State belt, tightens them in. And you three, four jackets down because you don't have to be a gang member or anything to get stabbed. People were still getting stabbed in the eyes with bed springs, getting hit 13, 14 times with flats and rods. Come out of that cell, anything's liable to happen. Whatever happens, you need to be prepared.*

Earlone: Alvin "Gator" Williams is an old school convict.

Nigel: He got to San Quentin, in what, like the early 1980s?

Earlone: Yeah. He's been around a long time.

Nigel: *San Quentin's pretty different now.*

Gator: *Oh, [chuckles] no doubt. It was times that you would never see a person lay down on the grass on the lower yard. If you did, he was either stabbed or dying or something was wrong, but now you can go out there and throw a blanket out there and just lay back if you want to.*

Nigel: *So, is there any part of you that misses the way it was?*

Gator: *Just a little. I don't miss the violence. I miss the rules and regulations that each convict had to live by, because it's none of that anymore.*

Nigel: It's really interesting to be nostalgic for a time when San Quentin was as violent as Gator describes. But like he said, it's not the violence, it's the order that that violence made possible, or was able to reinforce.

Earlonne: Definitely. Because back in those days, there was a whole structure, a system that kept people in line. Rules about what type of people could associate with which.

Nigel: So, like if you were in prison for like a sex crime or you were a snitch or a cop--

Earlonne: You wouldn't be walking that line.

Nigel: Things aren't going to go well.

Earlonne: No, not at all. It'll be all bad. And there were a gang of other unofficial rules too, a lot of which have changed or dissipated.

Nigel: It's not the place it used to be.

Earlonne: No, definitely not. We're going to talk about those changes today and see what OGs like Gator have to say about it.

Nigel: Okay, Earlonne, before we go any further, let's talk about all the possible things that OG could actually mean.

Earlonne: Original Gangsta.

Nigel: [laughs] It's not Old Geezer?

Earlonne: No, it might be Old Guys in this instance.

Nigel: Or, how about Older Gentlemen? That's so respectable.

Earlonne: Maybe "Older Gentleman" might be cool. It just might be Old Gramps.

[laughter]

Nigel: Grampy, Old Grampy. I'm Nigel Poor.

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

[Ear Hustle theme]

Gator: *It's hard to define San Quentin. Now that you got gang members, dropouts rapists, a lot of youngsters, a lot of dude with mental issues, what I mean? All that entwined off into this. I'm trying to figure out is this still San Quentin? It might be something other than that, just holding the name.*

Nigel: One big change that's happened at San Quentin, and I hate to say it, but I think we're going to have to explain it one more time.

Earlone: Two words. Non-designated.

Nigel: Yup, because that's the change that Gator's referring to. Will you take a stab at this one please?

Earlone: A stab, really?

Nigel: Okay. [laughs] Sorry. Will you try to explain this one please, sir?

Earlone: So, a few years ago, San Quentin became what's known or what's called a non-designated yard.

Nigel: Tell me more, my friend.

Earlone: A non-designated yard means that no matter what your crime is or whatever your standing is in prison, you're in the general prison population.

Nigel: So basically, anybody can be there.

Earlone: Anybody can be there, no matter who you are, where you come from, what your crime is, you can be in that type of environment.

Nigel: And this definitely bothers some of the old timers.

Earlone: It bothers a lot of the old timers.

Nigel: Yeah.

Gator: *The administration don't want the guys over there in a section to tell us anything about what they're in here for. Snitches, rapists, or people that did things to senior citizens and stuff like that. We can't tolerate that. I mean, it's a code of ethics to the wrong side of the law.*

Nigel: This "code of ethics" that Gator is referring to, it's more than just about what people's crimes are. It's a whole system of prison etiquette.

Earlone: Like no wearing shower shoes, no disrespecting each other. No saying certain words.

Nigel: Yeah, like not gambling, no debts.

Earlone: No gambling on your ass.

Nigel: Okay.

Earlone: You can gamble, but no gambling on your ass. Meaning, you better have some money to pay them debts. Back in the day, people would learn that stuff at a higher-level prison, like a Level 4.

Nigel: Right. By the time you got to a Level 2, like San Quentin is today, you'd know all those rules. So, you wouldn't be doing stupid shit and drawing attention to yourself.

Earlone: Exactly. You'll cut that shit out quick.

Gator: *I can see where a lot of dudes that's doing time here need to go to a Level 4 before they come here so that they can know how to respect everybody else. So that they can get a full understanding of the concepts of doing time in a prison. Even staff. Everybody should start at Level 4 to see exactly how prison rules and the prison game goes because it'll help you in the long run. This is my home. You cannot come in here and disrespect my house. You're going to abide by all the rules, just like everybody else do. But now, you can't even say that to them anymore because I don't know what this place is now. I really don't. It's a place that I know that a lot of dudes, they're probably turning over in their grave at the way it is going today because of the youngsters that's coming in and they not being educated.*

Eddie: *First time I came, I have never seen a white guy. Where I come from, I never seen a white guy that weighed over 300 pounds, 6'7". He looked like a barbarian and his hair came weighed down here and his shoulders were this wide. It scared me to death. I'm like, "Wow, where'd they get these creatures from?"*

Nigel: Eddie Turner is 62, and he's been incarcerated for a total of about 17 years over three stints, twice at San Quentin. The first time he was there was in the early 80s, that time Gator was talking about. He was brand new to prison at that time and he's a perfect example of what Gator's talking about. Getting schooled by your elders.

Earlone: Right.

New York: *Can you tell me about any lessons you learned the hard way as a youngster first coming to prison?*

Eddie: *Well, I learned about that word, the N word, real bad. I used to be saying it over the tier. And these brothers came at me, they came to my cell and they looked at me and they said, "Hey, young brother, we don't use that word here. That's your first warning and your last warning." And then, I've seen a knife about that long.*

Nigel: *That's like 20 inches.*

Eddie: *Yeah. He said, "You get the point or you want the point?" I said, "I get the point." And I never had a problem with that word again.*

Nigel: Hey, Earlonne, a 20-inch knife? That's a real lesson.

Earlonne: That's some movie shit.

[laughter]

Nigel: Well, what do you think about that particular use of language?

Earlonne: So I think, now when we speak of OGs, we're speaking of OGs, like individuals that guided people through the system, that literally walked around the track with you and talked. We're not speaking of guys that just sat there and got old, didn't bother nobody. We're talking about people that really molded other people. Back in those days, they were hella conscious, and they weren't with saying the N word. They wasn't none of that.

That was more, I would like to say during the Black Power, Black Panther type movement. But then when the gangs came through, like the street gangs, the Crips, the Bloods, it was nigga this, nigga that, and you were going to be fighting a major fight just behind a word. And I don't think it rose to that, but I know for a long time, you had certain individuals that did not like the word, period. Mainly, it was more people that was on the black conscious or the Muslims or something like that.

Nigel: I still hear guys debating it inside San Quentin today.

Earlonne: Yeah, because you're going to always have the old heads and you're going to have the young cats.

Nigel: I'm with the old ones.

Earlonne: Yeah. I mean, definitely. They definitely had a point.

Nigel: Yeah.

New York: *Let's start off with, are you down for this interview?*

Person: Yes.

Nigel: *Wait, can I ask you a quick question? I'm out of breath. You do those five flights every day?*

New York: *Every single day. I do two steps at a time. I'm used to it.*

Nigel: Last summer New York and I went up to the top tier, the fifth tier of North Block. Earlonne, what tier were you on?

Earlonne: When I first started there, I was on the fifth. I was on the Dirty Nickel. That's what they call it.

Nigel: The Dirty Nickel, I love that they call it the Dirty Nickel. How was your breath getting up to the top?

Earlonne: It all depends. It's cool on the reg but if you're carrying groceries, like you're going to the store, that's when it sucks.

Nigel: We went all the way to the dirty nickel because we were looking for a couple of old timers. And Earlonne, do you remember on the *Muppets*, there were those two old guys that like sat up on the balcony?

Earlonne: Nah, Nyge. I don't think I watched the *Muppets*.

Nigel: Doesn't ring a bell for you?

Earlonne: No. kind of. Sort of, now that you say it, I don't know.

Nigel: Yeah. Okay. So, it was these two curmudgeonly guys who basically just sat up on a balcony, looked down at everybody and just talked shit about everything that they saw. These guys on the Dirty Nickel are just like that. They lean over the tier and complain about everything that they see happening below them.

Earlonne: Kind of like prison TV.

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

Isiah: *My name is Isiah Caldwell. I've been incarcerated 24, almost 25 years. I've been here in San Quentin for almost 17 years next month.*

Nigel: *And how old are you?*

Isiah: *I'm 52.*

Nigel: *Would you consider yourself an OG?*

Isiah: *Yes.*

Nigel: *What does it mean to be an OG?*

Isiah: Well, coming up from the streets, it usually means original gangster. But in the prison life, it's more of the older gentleman that has the wisdom, that's been around, that's actually conveying information to the youngsters.

Nigel: Is New York an OG?

Isiah: He's more of an Old Geezer.

[laughter]

New York: Wait a minute, I'm a year younger. [chuckles]

Isiah: Doesn't matter.

[laughter]

Isiah: He moves old. Everything he does is old.

Earlone: I'm going to take a wild guess and say these two dudes have some opinions about the new generation coming up at San Quentin.

Nigel: Of course, they do.

Isiah: You see some of the strangest things here, if you got out and told somebody this story, they would lock you up.

New York: They would not believe you whatsoever.

Isiah: They'll start back in way, like, "He's been incarcerated too long. Something's not right with this guy. He's off of his rocker." That's the stuff you're going to see. Screw ball behavior. Screw ball behavior.

[laughter]

Isiah: It's depressing. It's the best way I can describe it. It's depressing. A lot of them is just aimlessly wandering around the bottom tier with nothing to do. Play cards all day, all day long and dominoes. When you go on the board, they're not going to ask you about your domino hand or anything like that, they want to ask you about the crime you committed and how you have changed. And some of these games is not going to teach you how to change. It'll teach you how to be a better prisoner.

We sit here, we talk and laugh about it, but it's really sad. It's not nothing to really laugh about. The youngsters' conversations, it's mind blowing. It's like they're talking alien, because you don't understand nothing they saying. And the substance of it, there is no substance.

Nigel: Like what? Can you give an example?

Isiah: The use of language, the substance of the conversation is about absolutely nothing. They can pull this conversation all day long. And you be like, "How do you talk about nothing for hours at a time?"

Person: Most of the time it's about the person on the outside, not doing the package, not sending the money, da, da, da, da, da. "Hey, is she going to come visit?" "I don't care if she visits. I just want the money." And it's not the language that I'm using. A lot of profanity. But they never get visits. They never get visits.

Isiah: And you wonder why.

[laughter]

Nigel: So, I'm looking down on the tier and I see that somebody threw a book. Do you see that book down there?

Isiah: Yeah.

Nigel: Is that screwball behavior, throwing a book?

Isiah: That is screwball behavior, all the time. [laughs]

Nigel: Seeing them and listening to them, it just made me think about older people in general and how as you get older, you start to see your own obsolescence. One of the ways to deal with that is to talk about how things have changed, and things aren't the same as they used to be. And I think it's just because you know you're not going to be part of it forever.

Earlone: No, there's nothing else to do but nag.

[chuckles]

Nigel: Nag on how bad the youngins are.

New York: How many cells have you lived in since you've been in San Quentin?

Hitman: Oh, one, two, three, four, five cells.

New York: Can you name the numbers?

Hitman: Yes. 104, 180, 183, 174, 220, and 164 by the police station, but I didn't like that. It was too close to the police station.

Earlone: William “Hitman” Hearn has been incarcerated for 17 years. And he’s had a bunch of cellies in that time.

New York: *Where they currently have you caged?*

Hitman: *I'm in west block, 269 lower.*

New York: *269 lower. And who runs that cell?*

Hitman: *I run that cell.*

New York: *You the cell captain?*

Hitman: *I'm the cell captain.*

Nigel: So, cells are a typical place where OGs try to share their prison wisdom. And, Earlone, I'm just wondering, how do you react to that idea of a cell captain?

[laughter]

Earlone: I get triggered. That's how I react because I'm always the person that try to think rationally.

Nigel: Yeah.

Earlone: Like they gave us a cell, that's for both of us. So, it's both of us, not just you.

Nigel: You are the furthest thing from a cell captain. I can't imagine it.

Earlone: No. You can do what you do, but don't implement your rules on me. I'm good with that.

Nigel: *What is the cell captain?*

Hitman: *A cell captain is the one that keep everything in order in the cell. He keeps it clean. Only thing I ask for you to is when you come in is to clean up behind your cell. If you come in the cell in the first day, I like to really peep you and see how you're living. And sometimes you come in, you might come in with a lot of dirty clothes. So, I try to keep something in there for you, because the clothes get to smelling.*

Nigel: Hygiene. OGs are obsessed with hygiene.

Earlonne: I mean, hygiene is one of them things you cannot live in small quarters with someone else that's funky.

Nigel: Okay. Well, fair enough, then maybe they have something here.

Earlonne: But you don't have to be looking for that. He looking for it.

Nigel: I just imagine him going around like [sniffing].

Earlonne: He looking for dirty clothes. Yeah, we all know dirty clothes stink, but you know.

Nigel: The sniffer.

Hitman: *"Okay, man, I know you need a shower. You ain't been showering or something over there. You can go shower right now. You ain't got no clean clothes." He said, "Well, you can see, I got something tomorrow." "Okay, then." We work with them like that. But I also let them know when you come in that I'm a Muslim. I pray five times a day, I like to pray inside the cell. Shoes off at the door when you come in. The floor looks like water running across the floor. That's how it waxed up it is, it costs money to keep that wax on the floor like that.*

Nigel: *What other rules are there? So, no shoes?*

Hitman: *No shoes, shoes off. I would ask you, "If you're not a Muslim, if you use urinate in the bathroom, would you mind if you sit down?" I say, "If you don't sit down, well, can you squat down, get low?" They just say, "Well, I'm not no woman." "Okay, then that's cool. Well, if you want to stand up and urinate, you got to clean up behind yourself because urine splashes upside the wall. Anytime that you use the toilet, I got to brush there. I got disinfect and I got bleach. You need to clean that toilet every time that you use it."*

Nigel: *Every single time?*

Hitman: *Yes, ma'am.*

New York: *So, list all your rules, man. So far, we got no shoes, socks only.*

Hitman: *Only socks.*

New York: *Piss sitting down.*

Hitman: *Yeah.*

New York: *I only cook for me.*

Hitman: *Only cook for me. You ain't going to sit down there and watch my TV because you don't have one. See, because one thing, if you start with them, youngsters, letting them push on your TV. And then when you come in, they got your music. I come in and they playing the music loud. I can hear the music coming up the stairs. I said, "What happened?" They said, "OG, I thought we was cool." "I never told you to touch my stuff."*

Earlone: [deep breath]

Nigel: What are you thinking, E?

Earlone: No, if a person wants to keep the cell clean, cool. But me personally, I'm going to clean what I need to be clean. A lot of dudes had rules on cells and that's what starts a lot of the problems. And it's like, "Man, listen, man. Fuck all that shit. Let me do me."

Nigel: I hear you. You're more a live and let live type guy.

Earlone: Yeah. Don't put no-- we already got-- the officers got their rules on us. Fuck, you got rules in the cell. Out of respect, but all that extra shit, no.

Hitman: *I get a cellie, they don't stay long.*

Nigel: *Because of the rules.*

Hitman: *No, they don't stay long. I don't know whether it's because of the rules. One dude said that I'm too neat and too picky. So, they'll move out. I don't have to keep them in there too long. They're gone. We are incompatible. You're nasty and I can't deal with it. It's best for you to find you somewhere to go. "I like you, youngster, but we just can't live together," and you leave it like that.*

Nigel: *And do you have a cellie now?*

Hitman: *Yeah, I got a Muslim in the cell with me now. Youngster. Yeah, I got a Muslim brother. He's good. Talk so much, I have to put the headphones on.*

Nigel: *Oh, well, what's the rule around talking?*

Hitman: *Really, you talk all day-- I talk all day outside. When you come in, it's time to shut up, like rest, read a book. [chuckles]*

Nigel: *How do you tell him to be quiet?*

Hitman: *I don't tell him nothing. He be talking. I'm doing something else. I put headphones on. I ain't hear. I keep on telling some, "Yeah," "Uh-huh," "Mm-hmm." We don't do that.*

Nigel: You get mostly younger cellies?

Hitman: Mostly younger. I have never-- since I've been down, no old cellies. I don't know. They just bring young cellies to me.

Nigel: And do you think that these young guys are looking for a father figure, so they're--
[crosstalk]

Hitman: I think it is, but I can't help them. This generation right here now, they just want to smoke some weed and get high. One dude comes in, I give some toothpaste, soap, deodorant. He took it and sold it so he could smoke. If you ask me something, I give it to you. If not, I don't try to tell you nothing. I ain't raising nobody's kid.

Nigel: After the break--

Earlone: The youngsters clap back.

Nigel: What's an OG?

Person: OG is somebody who is older than you, who is going to give you advice. Yeah, we call them OG because where he's been, you never been there. He always tells you, "Hey, do this, do this, do this," but sometimes you feel like, "We are in prison. I want to do whatever I want to do too." They've been down for a minute. So, they know every trick and they got OG tricks.

Nigel: Magic.

Person: They've been tricking the youngsters because--

Nigel: What's an OG trick?

Person: OG trick is like, "Okay, I'm going to the water fountain, you're going to go drink water." As soon as he's getting close, you were there before him, but he can call you, "Youngster. Hey, this guy calling you." As soon as you tell this, he'll pass by you and go drink the water. And you see, they got hella tricks. You've got to be careful about it. They got hella tricks. OGs got hella tricks.

New York: What age do you become OG?

Person: I think like 50.

New York: What is an OG to you?

Person: Okay. And OG, man, it's two different terms from what I know, maybe. You got the hood term, OG gangster in the hood. But then, you got the one where it's talking about the people who experienced life, who've been down a minute, who's seen some things.

Nigel: What do you think when you see guys who have been in prison for decades?

Damien: Well, if I'm thinking of my criminal lifestyle, I think that's somebody that I respect. But if I think if I'm trying to get out and do the right thing, then I just think that's someone that's made a lot of bad decisions.

Nigel: What does a typical OG do on the yard?

Person: Hopefully stay out the way. [chuckles] Stay out the way.

Person: From what I've known and seen some of them, really just kick back. They play their little chess games, they dominoes. They do their little workouts. You got some very healthy OGs around here.

Nigel: Is there an OG section in the yard?

Person: I wouldn't say that. The OGs, he's going to be where he at [chuckles] and he's going to be where he be. [laughs]

New York: He was there first too.

Person: Yeah. I got here early. [laughs]

Nigel: Is there that anything that irritates you about OGs?

Person: Yeah. When they think they just know everything. They think they just know everything. And it can be something that they didn't know, they going to act like they knew it first. [laughs]

Nigel: There's an older guy walked by, shaking his cane at us.

[laughter]

Person: Yeah, angry people.

New York: How did you get started with Shakespeare?

Tall: I happened to see a San Quentin news thing and I saw some brothers on it. And I seen lots of pretty women on there too. [chuckles]

Earlonne: Darwin "Tall" Billingsley is in his 60s. He's been incarcerated 41 years. And for the last couple of years, he's been involved with a group that performs Shakespeare's plays in prison.

Tall: *The idea was to come in and just, "Hey, can I just come in and watch y'all?" I was hoping nobody would really notice me. I didn't want to get up. I was scared, I was nervous, I was very shy, and I just wanted to be quiet and watch. So, I sat up there in my little corner looking all like I was cool, just cool kicking back. And then, the lady said, "Hey, Tall. You want to come up here and join us?", because there's nobody else. I ended up getting out of the shyness some kind of way, but I was still nervous. I was very nervous. One of the ladies had me said, "Breathe, breathe, just breathe."*

"Oh, foolish youth. You seek the greatness that overwhelm you. Stay, but a little for my day is down."

Nigel: We went out to the yard the other day, and Tall did an impromptu performance as one of Shakespeare's classic OGs, *Henry IV*. A young guy named Rayray is playing his son, Prince Hal.

Rayray: *Oh, pardon me, my liege. There's your crown. And he that wears a crown immortally. Long guard it yours. But I whence here came in--[crosstalk]*

You know, King Henry's old now, and he has a son, which is me. And he's young, he wants to party, he wants to be with his boys, be around the women, all that type of stuff. Prince Hal doesn't want to be king. He just wants to live his life. He don't want to take responsibilities, take care of his people, take care of the kingdom. King Henry is just trying to tell him, like, "Man, it's going to come a time where you going to have to really step up to the plate and take the king role. if you don't, our kingdom is in jeopardy."

Tall: *Oh, my poor son, come hither, Harry. Sit down by my bed and hear I think the greatest council I shall ever breathe. God knows my son--*

Rayray: *King Henry, he's sick. And so, he's on his deathbed but at the end of the day, he wants to get everything with God that he messed up, all his sins and all that type of stuff. And he's basically explaining to Prince Harry, like, "Dude, you got to be ready for these responsibilities because heavy is the head that wears the crown."*

Tall: *I met this crown and I myself know well, how troublesome it sat upon my head.*

Rayray: *And so, with the responsibility that Prince Henry sees like, "Damn, my father's really finna die."*

Tall: *God, glory be to God. And now, I lie. In this moment shall Harry die.*

Earlonne: Just like Henry IV, Tall is a bona fide OG now. But, of course, when he first got to prison, he was anything but that.

Tall: I was wild and wicked. I wanted people to know me. I wanted people to respect me. I wanted people to know that they can't mess with me. I was a selfish person. I was hateful. I thought the world wasn't a good world. So, I got into things to try to build myself up.

Nigel: Now that Tall is an OG himself, when he sees young guys on the yard, he wants to reach out to them.

Earlonne: I mean that's what cats that give a fuck want to do. You see some of these cats just a little bit of guidance. Just a little.

Tall: Some of them are really hard. Some of them are really going through it, and people ain't listening to them.

Nigel: So, why do you want to talk with them?

Tall: Because I can see it in some of them. By being in the prisons for so many years, you can read them just like that. You can read them like the snap of a finger. And some of them, I feel something for, they're sitting and they're just alone--

Nigel: And you want to do something about it when you see that?

Tall: I do.

Nigel: Why? What makes you want to do something about it?

Tall: I generally care about people because I can remember myself and I needed somebody-- I wish somebody had talked to me, especially when I was a kid. I would've listened.

Earlonne: So, Rayray, the young dude that's playing Tall's son in the play, when he first got to prison, he wasn't really interested in what the older guys on the yard had to teach him.

Rayray: Coming here. I felt like, okay, this OGs telling me stuff, he's not my dad. "I only got one dad, so why are you telling me this?" Some OGs have to understand is some youngsters didn't grow up with a father. So, they felt like, "Okay, I was the man in the house, I had to take care of my mom, I had to take care of my little sister."

Earlonne: But something happened a few years ago that changed things between Rayray and Tall.

Nigel: Totally. And, E, in a weird way, it's kind of an echo of that Shakespeare play, about facing your parents' mortality. For Rayray, that's exactly what happened in real life too.

Rayray: 2020, during COVID, my parents caught COVID, and it was looking bad. My dad and my mom were on the verge of death. Constantly calling my parents and nobody's answering. And so, I started to get scared. I started to get worried. I started stressing. I started to be angry. And I really thought to myself, I'm like, "Okay, if I lose my mom and my dad, what's the point of living?" When they finally came and released us, he was the first person I talked to. And he was like, "Man, how you been?" And I was like, "Man, I'm not going to lie to you. I had thoughts of committing suicide." He said, "Why would you try to do that? Do you know people who actually care about you?" And so, it made me cry. I was like, "Damn, I really have people out there that really loves me."

Tall: I wanted him to know that he has a purpose here, and part of the purpose, he's been of service even with me. He's a valuable person. He's got lots of stories to tell. He's got talent, skills and stuff that people would be entertained by him. And to be so young and smart, this guy is really smart. He's smart. And I let him know, man, I love him as if he was my kid, my young friend. I think of him in all kinds of ways, man. I love him. And I tell him that all the time.

Nigel: Earlonne, did you have anyone in prison that was kind of your mentor like that, or did you do that for anybody else?

Earlonne: Yeah, I had a lot of mentors throughout my prison stint.

Nigel: What was the first lesson that you learned that has stayed with you?

Earlonne: Mind your own business.

Nigel: That is so you. That is so you.

[laughter]

Earlonne: No, serious shit. Mind your own business. If you not getting full and shitting off of it, it ain't got nothing to do with you.

Nigel: Well, what else I've learned from you, and I bet you learned this also from an OG? Only say what you have to say.

Earlonne: Yeah. I had an OG that told me, he say, "Once it leave your lips, you don't own it no more. People can do whatever they want to do with those words."

Nigel: It's really good advice.

Earlonne: Real talk. That was one of those things that really stuck.

Nigel: That makes it feel like you have gratitude toward some OGs. And I do too because I've learned vicariously through you.

Earlonne: Oh, that's what's up. Yeah, that's what's up. So, you the little homie.

[laughter]

Earlonne: Thanks to Tony, Africa, Damien, and Cassell for speaking to us out on the yard at San Quentin.

Nigel: Ear Hustle is produced by me, Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, Amy Standen, and Bruce Wallace, along with Neroli Price and Rahsaan “New York” Thomas.

Earlonne: With help from Tony Tafoya and Rhashiyd Zinnamon. This episode was sound designed and engineered by Earlonne Woods, with help from Fernando Arruda.

Nigel: It features music by Antwan Williams, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, E. Phil Phillips, Aaron “Showtime” Taylor, Gary Harrell, and David Jassy.

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

Nigel: Thanks to Acting Warden Oak Smith. And, as you know, every episode of Ear Hustle has to be approved by this woman here.

Guim’Mara Berry: I am Guim’Mara Berry, the Public Information Officer here at San Quentin State Prison. And 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: And don't forget to sign up for our newsletter, The Lowdown, where you can learn more about each episode and find out what the Ear Hustle team is up to. Subscribe at earhustlesq.com/newsletter. You can also find out more about the show on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram [@earhustlesq](https://www.instagram.com/earhustlesq).

Earlonne: 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. To hear more go to Radiotopia.fm. I’m Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel and Earlonne: Thanks for listening.

Person: They complain about everything, and they whine too much.

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