

Ear Hustle
"Saber-Toothed Cat"
March 29, 2023

Anne: This is Anne Irwin, Founder & Director of Smart Justice California. The following episode of Ear Hustle contains language and content that might not be suitable for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

Jerry: *I'm really paranoid and I want to know what I'm going into, and how I get out of there. I check out who's hanging on the yard, who's hanging in these areas right around this door.*

Nigel: *So, as you were walking down here, what sort of stuff did you notice?*

Jerry: *It ain't no trap. I don't see like a gang of officers waiting around this corner to gaffle me up or a gang of inmates over here to get me. You do that, I do that naturally. You've got to realize that I'm conditioned a certain way to react. My defenses go up soon as I come out my cell. I'm looking for a saber-toothed cat. Even though they've been extinct all these years, I'm looking for that thing. When a caveman came out of his cave, he's looking for that pterodactyl or he's looking for that saber-toothed cat, or he's looking for something to get him. And nowadays you got people that walk out the door and get hit by a car. But a car ain't going to never hit that caveman, because his defenses are already up.*

Nigel: *So, you're constantly vigilant.*

Jerry: *Yeah. You've got to be constantly vigilant.*

Earlone: One thing I can say, Nyge, is that a lot of cats that's been locked up a long time, you definitely keep your head on a swivel.

Nigel: Mm, yeah. This is not the first guy we've spoken to do that does this.

Earlone: Right.

Nigel: Hey, when we go to a restaurant, you think about where you sit?

Earlone: Of course. Because I'm thinking about the dude that's going to come in and rob it.

[laughter]

Nigel: You're looking for that saber-toothed tiger?

Earlone: Yes, I am. [laughs]

Nigel: On the last episode, we talked about a bunch of guys like this. You know the OGs who have been incarcerated for a long time?

Earlone: Mm-hmm.

Nigel: But this time, we're going to focus on just one, Jerry Walker.

Nigel: *When you look around this room, what do you think you notice about it that I don't?*

Jerry: *That I notice about it?*

Nigel: *Yeah. That I wouldn't notice because I'm not as vigilant as you are.*

Jerry: *Hmm. That if there was no other way out, I could climb out of here. You know that the opening up there? As old as I am, I'd have problems getting up there, but--*

Nigel: *But you could?*

Jerry: *Yeah, and then I notice that there are some windows where I could get out of here. I notice that there's not a lot of security back here.*

Nigel: *Do you feel safe in this room now?*

Jerry: *Want to know what? I'm going to say something. Don't take this personally. But when he came in, I felt a lot less safer.*

Nigel: *Interesting.*

Earlone: Who's he talking about?

Nigel: It was just like some random person who walked through the room while we were doing the interview. Jerry didn't really overly react, but you could see he noted it. It was like, "Ooh, something in the room shifted."

Earlone: Got you.

Jerry: *My environment changes, I change.*

Nigel: *So, do you think because of how hypervigilant you are, you're a good reader of character.*

Jerry: *I read character pretty good.*

Nigel: *What do you read about this dude?*

Jerry: *He got the openness in the face. Exudes a lot of honesty, he don't even have to say nothing. He exudes a lot of honesty and it's partially the way he walks.*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Jerry: *He don't walk like a convict. He walks more like a free person.*

Nigel: *Interesting. Okay. Give me a read of me.*

Jerry: *You, I've seen you a lot. [Nigel chuckles] And you walk like one of the homegirls. I asked somebody the first time I seen you. I said, "Who's that?" They tried to say your name. I still ain't got your name, Nigel something--*

Nigel: *That's right. That's right. You got it.*

Jerry: *"Oh, she runs the media. Oh, man, she's going to want to talk to you, man." I don't want to talk to these people, man. I'm out of here. So, I take off.*

Nigel: *But we won you over.*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Earlonne: Typical OG. Doesn't want to say nothing to nobody.

Nigel: Yeah, but in the end, they come around.

Earlonne: Well, some of them. Good thing for us that this guy did. I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor. This is Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia.

[Ear Hustle theme]

Nigel: So, Earlonne, I don't think you ever met Jerry Walker, at San Quentin.

Earlonne: Nah. I don't think I know him.

Nigel: And I know you're a super observant, not much gets past you but even you might not have noticed him.

Earlonne: Oh, he was one of those low, low-profile cats.

Nigel: Exactly. He just doesn't take up a lot of space.

Earlonne: New York, you remember Jerry?

New York: Yeah, he's always around but you never see him.

Nigel: And it's not like he's this little guy.

New York: No, very tall, black man but he just blends in somehow.

Nigel: Mm, yeah.

Nigel: I don't know if he has camouflage blues or something.

[laughter]

New York: A cloak of invisibility, something. The next thing you know, I'm minding my own business and he's there. Where'd he come from? [laughs]

Nigel: Yeah, he does not draw attention to himself.

New York: Not at all.

Jerry: *Here's one thing that I'm always trying to do. How would you put it? It's a collage. That whole wall is painted that way and you look at it and, and then a guy walks out of there that blended in?*

Nigel: *Mm-hmm. Yeah. Camouflage man.*

Jerry: *I'm trying to get to that point at all times. That's my whole thing, is not to become noticed.*

New York: I think that's a great survival technique. If you're not there and nobody's paying attention to you, then you can't get hurt.

Nigel: I wouldn't mind if some of the younger guys at San Quentin learn that. [laughs]

New York: To roam or to disappear?

Nigel: No, to not take up so much space.

New York: Young people need attention. They're different.

Nigel: They sure do. Earlonne, when New York and I met Jerry, he had done 46 years in prison.

Earlonne: You know what? You don't often meet people who have done that much time.

Nigel: He's basically a walking encyclopedia of a prison experience.

Earlone: He's an expert.

Nigel: Yeah.

New York: *During your 46 years, what is the most unusual place you had to live?*

Jerry: *Vacaville was--*

New York: *[laughs]*

Nigel: *What does that mean?*

Walker: *Okay. I'll explain that to you.*

Nigel: *Do you know what he means by--?*

New York: *Yeah, uh.*

Nigel: Okay. Earlone, I know you weren't there, but at this moment in the interview, Jerry made this sort of hand gesture and I think it was dismissive?

Earlone: Right, right.

Nigel: *[laughs]* Basically, he was saying that this particular prison, it was too soft for him?

Earlone: Yeah. Guys like Jerry, you know they're from a different time. They are from when prison was really hard, and nobody was talking about their feelings. They probably would have been victims if you talked about their feelings back in those days. I mean, shit, you've seen the movies.

Nigel: Totally. But at this place, that was the kind of thing you had to do.

Jerry: *Within your first week, you have to get up and you tell your story.*

Nigel: *Wait, what year was this?*

Jerry: *This is '74.*

Nigel: *Wow.*

Jerry: *You have to tell them. "Yeah, I'm here and I was an alcoholic and I killed somebody because I was under the influence," or "I was a gang member or--*

Nigel: This one prison was a bit unusual for Jerry. But, Earlonne, I really wanted to hear about the ordinary places. You know like what was prison actually like 20, 30, 40 years ago.

Earlonne: It makes me think about one thing, Nyge.

Nigel: What's that?

Earlonne: Nobody had TVs in the cells. That's why a lot of guys were like scholars. They just read. It was cool to be smart back then. There was nothing else to do.

Nigel: *What did you have in the cell then?*

Jerry: *Nothing. One of them boxes over there.*

Nigel: *He's pointing at like a two by three-foot box.*

Jerry: *All your property was fit in there. And that's transcripts from your court and everything else.*

Nigel: *Okay. So, in your cell, there was-- what was in there? [chuckles]*

Jerry: *Nothing. Books, or you had a radio.*

Nigel: *Okay.*

Jerry: *And you had a speaker in there and you could turn it A or B and either have country western or rock on one station or rhythm and blues and something else on the other station.*

Nigel: *That's it. So, you could only listen to stuff.*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *And then, you got state issue clothes. How many-- what did you have for clothes? Tell me all the clothes that you owned.*

Jerry: *You had two different types of clothes. You had khaki material clothing and you had denim. The denim you could only wear to trade and to work sites. If you were going to go to library, if you were going to go any place else, visiting, you had to get into what they call polished cottons. You had a khaki-colored set of clothing, and you had a powdered blue khaki material set of clothing that you could wear on a visit.*

Nigel: *So, how many pairs of pants and shirts--?*

Jerry: *Five.*

Nigel: *Five pants. How many tops?*

Jerry: *Five.*

Nigel: *How many pairs of underwear?*

Jerry: *Seven.*

Nigel: *How many pairs of socks?*

Jerry: *Seven.*

Nigel: *T-shirts?*

Jerry: *Seven.*

Nigel: *Shoes?*

Jerry: *One.*

Nigel: *Those are all the clothes you had.*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Nigel: What I love about this is that Jerry Walker remembers all of this. And it's like 40 years ago. He remembers all the details.

Earlone: [chuckles] Yeah. Nah, what else does he have to remember? You know what I'm saying? [Nigel laughs] No, seriously. In prison, it's like one thing that happens continuously over and over, and over. So, you don't really forget it.

New York: *What was the food like in '74 before packages?*

Jerry: *Oh, man. They fed you good in the chow hall. You take a doggie bag to breakfast with you, to lunch with you, and the dinner with you. Might only ate half of your steak at dinner.*

Nigel & New York: *Steak?*

Jerry: *Yeah. You didn't get hamburgers and hot dogs for dinner.*

Nigel: *You got like real food.*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Nigel: Like somebody was making from scratch.

Jerry: Hot dogs, hamburgers and casseroles was lunch meals. Pork steak, pork chops, ribeye, round steak, chicken.

Nigel: On the bone?

Jerry: Yeah. On the bone, always on the bone, then not this stuff that they give you today.

New York: So, you weren't getting that processed food out at the can and the salad out the bag? Wow.

Nigel: And like real vegetables?

Jerry: They were growing it here, up in these hills around here, around Soledad, around Tracy and around Folsom.

Nigel: What about dessert?

Jerry: Cakes. They had a bakery. We had a bakery, butcher shop, vegetable-preparing rooms at every prison. It was like a lot of food.

New York: Describe the CMC cells.

Jerry: They're over under. One cell's an upper bunk. The next cell's a lower bunk.

Nigel: Earlonne, let's try to explain this succinctly. Because you really need a diagram [Earlonne laughs] and obviously we can't have a diagram here.

Earlonne: You know what it's like? It's almost like one cell is like a L.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: And then, the other cell next to it is like a backward C.

Nigel: It's like a bunk bed, but you're not in the same room. If you're on the bottom, you're in an alcove. If you look up, you see the cement or whatever of the other cell where they're--

Nigel: Okay.

Earlonne: It's more of metal: Like the whole wall is metal.

Nigel: Okay. But regardless of material, you can't see the person, but they are sleeping above you.

Earlone: I know I said an L and the C. Turn the L backwards and then turn the C the right way, and that's how it's positioned.

Nigel: I think the easiest thing to say is it's a bunk bed, but they're in different rooms.

Earlone: Jigsaw.

Nigel: Mm, okay. Also, I imagine it's like if you've ever slept on a train.

Earlone: So, you're not finished with this.

[laughter]

New York: *And then, when they put a second person in that cell, they put a bed that folds up.*

Nigel: *Oh, no.*

New York: *You got to put it down--*

Nigel: *No.*

New York: *You got to put it down for your cellie to go to sleep. And once you put it down, it blocks up the whole cell. There's no floor, no more.*

Jerry: *There's no floor.*

Earlone: Then, you have what's considered a king size.

Nigel: A lower-lower?

[laughter]

Jerry: *We're on a lower-lower. If he rolls over, we're in bed together.*

Nigel: *What do you mean a lower-lower?*

New York: *So, the way the lower-lower works, this person is sleeping on the bottom here.*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

New York: *And this bed that pulls up, he is like right in your face.*

Nigel: *Oh, I see what you're saying.*

New York: *Right into each other's face.*

Nigel: *If you were in that kind of cell. Yeah, I get it. Cozy.*

New York: *Yeah.*

Jerry: *He rolls over--*

New York: *He can fall right into your bed.*

Nigel: *Sweet dreams.*

Jerry: *Yeah. Right into your bed or if he has to get up to use the restroom, he's got to step on you or move all the way to the end. I told him, "We're not sleeping in there. You could sleep in the morning or afternoon. Let me know what you can do while I'm here. From 10 o'clock at night until 6 in the morning, we're going to play cards or watch TV, or we're going to read or whatever."*

Nigel: *So, you took turns sleeping during the day?*

Jerry: *Yeah. during the day.*

Nigel: *The idea of sleeping that close to a man was just too much to take. So, you'd rather disrupt your whole sleeping pattern.*

Jerry: *I think it was more just the perception of somebody walking by and seeing me.*

Nigel: *That's what I mean.*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *So, because of that, you completely changed your sleeping pattern.*

Jerry: *Yeah. You change your sleeping patterns, no matter where you are.*

Nigel: *You know, Earlonne, listening to this, what really strikes me is that Jerry is really good at adapting.*

Earlonne: *The word he kept using is "coping." And it's kind of his superpower.*

Nigel: And the best example of that might be pretty early on in his sentence, Jerry got in trouble, and he was transferred to Pelican Bay and put in this special unit for people who are separated from the general population.

Can you describe as if you're walking in for the first time, what does the unit look like?

Jerry: *When you come in the unit, you're kind of confused. It's like a maze in there. Like you're just going around in circles and circles. And then, you're in the unit. The cells are right there. They walk you to the end of it.*

Nigel: *And what do you remember?*

Jerry: *Soon as you step in, there's a toilet right there about 10 feet to where the bunks are. The bunks are on the back of the cell. Like if I'm standing at the door of the cell, the bunks are on that wall right there.*

Nigel: *Okay.*

Jerry: *They're concrete with two slots that you put your property in.*

Nigel: *Mm-hmm. And when you go in there, do you get a sense of the other people who have spent time in there? Can you tell other people have been in there?*

Jerry: *Sometimes.*

Nigel: *What gets left behind?*

Jerry: *Markings. Somebody always put, "I was here," put their name on there.*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Jerry: *There used to be a superstition, "Don't put your name on the wall or else you'll come back." Some guys that was their way of--*

Nigel: *They exist.*

Jerry: *They exist. Yeah. Usually, blacks were more superstitious. They ain't writing on their wall. They don't want to come back. Hispanics or whites, they don't care. They're going to mark their name on there so their homeboys or friends or whatever would know that they'd been there.*

Nigel: *Did you ever write anything on the wall?*

Jerry: *No. Yeah, I'm superstitious.*

Nigel: *I guess. [chuckles]*

Jerry: *I'm not coming back, but I always returned. I had nothing. You didn't get nothing.*

New York: *No books?*

Jerry: *No books.*

New York: *What clothes do you have?*

Jerry: *T-shirt, shorts.*

New York: *Nothing--*

Jerry: *Socks.*

New York: *No blues?*

Jerry: *No.*

New York: *And so how do you cope without books? Did you have writing paper, pen?*

Jerry: *No.*

New York: *You can't write letters?*

Jerry: *No.*

New York: *So, what did you do in there? How did you cope?*

Jerry: *Probably, first thing you're going to do is sleep, exercise, eat and sleep.*

New York: *How did you know what time it was?*

Jerry: *If you weren't tired enough to go to sleep, then it was exercise time. If they weren't feeding you, it was exercise time. After you get through exercising, you wash off, you go to sleep. And you sleep until you wake up again and need to exercise again, or they opened up the tray slot and you know it's time to eat.*

New York: *So, when you ate, how was the food and how did they feed you?*

Jerry: *I'm not a gourmet, so I eat food to live. I've always did that. Taste a lot of times don't even matter. I'm just eating to fight hunger and to nourish myself. Even now I don't eat for taste.*

Nigel: *Were you actually underground?*

Jerry: *No.*

Nigel: *No. Okay.*

Jerry: *It's not underground, but it feels like it because there's no windows. If you're escorted someplace, you don't see no windows, no nothing.*

Nigel: *What else?*

Jerry: *Uh, white. You start noticing all the white. They shut the door, put your hands through you and handcuff you and then they leave, shh, bang. And then all of a sudden, you don't hear no noise. Next thing you know, somebody's at the door. You don't even know they walked up because you can't hear them come.*

Nigel: *It's a solid metal door.*

Jerry: *It's a plexiglass over thousand eyes, I call it.*

New York: *Metal honeycombs.*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *So, what happens to you when there's no sound? What changes for you?*

Jerry: *I can't speak for everybody.*

Nigel: *For you.*

Jerry: *But for me, I just cope with it.*

Nigel: *You say you didn't notice it at first. How did you start to notice, "Wait, I'm not hearing."*

Jerry: *Somebody came to the tray slot and the tray slot opened, and then the noise came in. If you live by a freeway--*

Nigel: *By a freeway, yeah.*

Jerry: *That's a good example. If you live by a freeway, when you open your door-*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Jerry: -and then tweak that a little bit more to where it's even quieter when the door isn't open and it's louder when the door is open.

Nigel: Hmmm.

Jerry: Magnify it.

New York: I went to the hole in 2012 for eight months.

Jerry: Yeah.

New York: Once I got books and writing paper, I actually liked the hole, because I liked to read and I liked to be by myself and it just allowed me to write really good letters I liked to write when I didn't have the time to do in population. But that first week or two, when I didn't have any property, no soap, no food, no deodorant, no toothpaste, I didn't have a book, I didn't have paper, it was nerve wracking. Once I got acclimated and learned how to make a fishing line, got into swing of things and learned how to trade books with other people and got cool on the tier, it was easy. I liked it after that. But you can't fish, you got the rubber thing blocking-- How do you come out of that--?

Jerry: They give you a soap.

New York: They give you a hotel bar of soap, the hand soap. So, it's not going to last.

Jerry: It's going to last

New York: For what, a day? Two bird baths and it's gone? But let me get to the point, what changed when you came out? What changed about you?

Jerry: You mean what changes it made on me?

New York: Yeah. How did it affect you?

Jerry: No, it didn't. It didn't really affect me. You ain't supposed to be there for five days.

New York: Yeah, but you were there for 90.

Nigel: Yeah. Maybe you can't remember, but I think what we're pressing you on is, it had to-- What did it do to you? Okay, I hear you slept, you ate, you exercised.

Jerry: Yeah.

Nigel: That's and then what else?

Jerry: *You exercise again.*

Jerry: *I don't do a lot of thinking about the streets. That's when I think you do the crying, thinking of your grandparents, your parents. Ugh, you might go through your times table, whatever. You know, like if that song is stuck in your head and it keeps going over and over? Everything is that way then. I could direct what my mind concentrates on and what you do is start pushing endorphins. What makes you feel good? Whatever makes you feel good, you're going to push that endorphin.*

Nigel: *Like what?*

Jerry: *Friends, family, music, things you want to do, things-- people--*

Nigel: *So, it sounds like what you're saying is you create.*

Jerry: *You cope.*

Nigel: *You create a strong mental life.*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *And you relive things over and over. Okay. How'd you tell time?*

Jerry: *You didn't worry about it. I'm going to get out of there when I get out of there. When I first went back there, I thought that you're back there five days and they bring you out.*

Nigel: *Mm-hmm.*

Jerry: *And so, when I figured it was about five days, I didn't come out and I'm not going to ask them. That's what they're waiting for. You can't come out of there that way. The main thing you're trying to do is not look weak, not submit, like being a prisoner of war.*

Nigel: Earlonne, do you know what really blows my mind here?

Earlonne: What's that?

Nigel: That he had the restraint to not ask when he was getting out. It's so hard to get-- if you haven't had this experience, it's really hard to get your mind around that because only thing I could imagine is being obsessed with, "When is this over? When is this over? When is this over?" And he just did not let his mind go there.

Earlonne: Do you think he gave up?

Nigel: No. I think it's a kind of power of will.

Earlone: Yeah. Either you have it, or you don't.

Nigel: Could you have done that, Earlone?

Earlone: Hell no. After five days, maybe four and a half, I would've been banging on the door. "Hey."

Nigel: "Let me out."

Earlone: "Let me out."

Nigel: Yeah.

Earlone: Let me up out of this motherfucker.

Nigel: We are going to take a quick break.

Earlone: We'll be right back.

Nigel: *What was the most surprising thing that happened to you while you were in there? what didn't you expect to have happen that happened?*

Jerry: *That I didn't start screaming like everybody else, ahhhhhh. When the tray slot comes open, that's what you hear. Guys that couldn't cope, ahhh. "Get the psych up here and let's see if we--" And then them guys are gone. You don't see them no more.*

Nigel: *Mm.*

Jerry: *You don't see them anyway. I'd say you don't hear them no more. Then, somebody else will come there a few days, he'd be belligerent, ahhhh. Then, he'll leave out screaming, "Ahhhhhh."*

Nigel: *So, you walked in and walked out the same?*

Jerry: *No. You never walk in, nothing-- How can you-- No, you don't walk in and walk out the same. I have a lot of stuff that I hide. My paranoia is a lot more. My vertigo is a lot worse. Everything's a lot worse. My suspicion of people, my way of dealing with people. My reliance on what I could feel, what I could smell, what I could taste, what I could see, what I could touch. If I can't do that, I don't want to hear about it. You trust people less, you rely on people less, you rely more on yourself, and you utilize less.*

Earlone: Hey, maybe at first Jerry's self-reliance was a strategy or a tool of survival. But now, I don't think he could be any other way.

Nigel: I know it's just part of who he is now. And sitting with him, you realize that he doesn't need anybody or really anything.

Earlonne: Self-sufficient.

Jerry: *Me and my brother, Robert, he's four years older than me, we're totally opposites. He's worked for the department of motor vehicles for 40-45 years. Wherever I go, I call, "Yeah, this is a call from Jerry Walker. He's at San Quentin Prison, blah, blah, blah." So, he knows where I'm at now. But he's going to write. "Man, if you need anything, man, let me know." And I'm in the cell and I barely got toothpaste and the stuff I need, but I don't overuse it. That's not my way of doing things. He deserves everything he got. He chose that life. Why would I have him sacrifice?*

Nigel: *I can't remember what the exact word was, but you kind of said you don't need much. For example, when New York was talking about the soap, he's like, "That's not enough soap." And you said, "No, it was plenty of soap."*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *So, you have a very different view of what "enough" is. So, do you think your view of what is enough is different than a lot of people's? You seem to not need a lot.*

Jerry: *Yeah. I don't need a lot.*

Nigel: *Yeah. So, what do you need, what do you need?*

Jerry: *The one thing I'm not going to get, freedom. Real freedom.*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Jerry: *I'm not talking about just let me out to where I could go to a factory and work. No, the freedom where I could get out and I could live off the land, where I go fishing, getting food, finding a place to sleep. And even in here, it doesn't seem it, but yeah, that's what I'm doing. I always get an almanac every year. So, I always have the Constitution and the amendments. From the start, we gave up our rights to fish, hunt, use the restroom where we want to, to not live on the streets and all this other stuff. And the government is supposed to give you freedom. But even before the ink could dry, they're like, "Yeah, but we're going to tell you how freedom is." It's not your freedom. You're giving away yours for the way they want you to act. You basically enslave yourself and I can't get over that. 40 some years later, I still can't get over it.*

Nigel: *What do I need to know about you to know you?*

Jerry: *Oh, man. I would like to be honest, and I'm going to be as honest as I can be with whoever I'm talking to at that present moment. But the closer you get to society and established rules, the more I pull away. Another thing you'd know about me is I'm sensitive. There's a lot of things I have suspicion about. I've never committed a murder. I've assaulted people and I've assaulted them to let them know. Just don't mess with me. Just leave me alone. I won't bother you. I won't tread on your toes. But I don't want to do that sin. I do not want to kill nobody.*

Nigel: Jerry said there was this other thing that he learned to do while he was in Pelican Bay. Do you remember when he said he'd think about memories and pushed endorphins that made him happy?

Earlone: Mm-hmm.

Nigel: So, there was this whole soundtrack that would go through his mind, to accompany these memories. Like, he would score them.

Earlone: [laughs] Yeah. I can imagine that.

Jerry: *When I was in the unit, sometimes I found myself singing or humming. It's distraction. The music will always be whatever you're thinking about. Your last dance, your last party, your last time you seen that person. It's like when I think of my brother, it's usually Temptations. They used to dress like the Temptations. They even had acts where they danced like the Temptations dance. When I think of my homeboys, it might be a little bit more rock, like America, beginning of ABBA.*

Nigel: *Well, that surprised me.*

Jerry: *What?*

Nigel: *ABBA.*

Jerry: *I like them. That's a good group.*

Nigel: *Yeah. Just didn't expect it.*

Jerry: *I listen to Grateful Dead, listen to Santana.*

Nigel: *You know I'm going to ask you to sing something.*

Jerry: *I can't, I can't sing.*

Nigel: *You did it in the vacuum.*

Jerry: *That's to myself.*

Nigel: *Well, just pretend you're in the vacuum.*

Jerry: *Oh, okay. I'll do one. [in a singing tone] I was slipping into darkness, when I heard my brother sing.*

Nigel: About three years after that first interview, Earlonne--

Earlonne: Mm-hmm.

Nigel: We got Jerry Walker, to come back down to the media lab to talk to us again.

In our interview, you talked about what real freedom means to you. And for you, real freedom would just be to sleep wherever you wanted to sleep, fish, and eat whenever you wanted to eat. Do you remember that?

Jerry: *Yeah. If I was able to, I would like to. The thing is that's not a possibility now.*

Earlonne: Jerry sounds like the oomph got knocked up out of him.

Nigel: Oh, Earlonne. It was kind of a shock. I mean he was diminished. It was tough. He had gotten COVID, and I think it really took a toll on him.

Earlonne: Yeah. I think it did a number on the older crowd.

Nigel: Yeah.

Jerry: *I couldn't run from here to that wall. I can't run from a dog.*

Nigel: *Yeah.*

Jerry: *I couldn't fight him off.*

Nigel: *So, are you saying it's better for you to be in here? I*

Jerry: *I don't know. No, it's never better for you to be in here. Not with the type of stuff that goes on in here. It's hard for me to move. I barely get through each day.*

Nigel: *Oh boy. And you walked all the way down here.*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *You sang for me last time, and I was hoping you'd sing a little bit more of Slipping Into Darkness for me. It was so good.*

Jerry: *No. Well, now, I'd have to ask for royalties because--*

Nigel: *I'll give you royalties. [laughs]*

Jerry: *--the first time was for free. Now, since you --*

Nigel: *[chuckles] Because I want it so much, you're going to charge me?*

Jerry: *Yeah.*

Nigel: *Oh, you're hard. You're a hard man.*

Jerry: *Ain't that what everybody else do in this world?*

Nigel: *[laughs] Just a couple lines.*

Jerry: *Oh, man. I don't know why you're putting pressure on me.*

Nigel: *Because you have such a good voice?*

Jerry: *No, I don't have no voice.*

Nigel: *Yes, you do. I remembered your voice more than I remembered your face.*

Jerry: *Let me see. [in a singing tone] When I was slipping into darkness, when I heard my brother say. I was slipping into darkness, when I heard my brother say. He said you been slipping into darkness and soon you'll have to pay. I think that's it. I don't know if that's the right lyrics.*

Earlone: *So, Nigel.*

Nigel: *Mm-hmm.*

Earlone: *Could you imagine doing 46 years in prison?*

Nigel: *My immediate answer would be no, I don't think I could. But there's some situations where you absolutely couldn't know until you are in it. Me sitting across from you in a studio right now, no, I don't think I have that will.*

Earlone: *It's a long time. It's a long time.*

Nigel: *Well, I don't know when we're going to see Jerry again, but I definitely want to catch up with him.*

Earlonne: I like it when these old cats get on the mic. They give us something we don't usually get.

Nigel: I know. I mean, their memory is-- I don't know, it's a museum in a way.

Earlonne: Yeah.

Nigel: It's a museum and the history of a prison.

Earlonne: Definitely. And we did make a record of him.

Nigel: I got to introduce you next time we go in.

Earlonne: Please do. Looking forward to it.

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 me, Earlonne Woods, with help from Fernando Arruda.

Nigel: It features music from Antwan Williams, Earlonne Woods, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, 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: 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. Please subscribe at earhustlesq.com/newsletter. You can also find the show on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @earhustlesq.

Earlone: Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a network of independent, creator-owned, listener-supported podcasts. Discover audio with vision at *Radiotopia.fm*. I'm Earlone Woods.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

Nigel and Earlone: Thanks for listening.

New York: Jigsaw.

Nigel: Mm.

New York: We've confused everyone.

Nigel: I'm obsessed we're making this visual thing beautifully explained through language. It's really fucking hard.

-End of Episode-

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