

Ear Hustle
"12 Hours on the Yard"
September 6, 2023

Jay: Attention on the yard. This is Officer Jay Acevedo. This episode of Ear Hustle contains language and content that may not be suitable for all listeners. Discretion is advised.

[background noise]

Nigel: So, it's like 6 o'clock and we just walked through the gate, and the sun's already out. This is the earliest I've ever been in here. I have no idea what the yard's going to look like. Do you think there's going to be anybody down there?

Right now, the yard is totally empty. It's peaceful. It's just quiet. You know that people are probably looking at you, but you don't see them.

Earlonne: Yeah, that's true. They're looking down at you, wondering what you're doing. We got one guy coming across the field now, Nyge.

Nigel: *Good morning.*

Louis: *Good morning.*

Nigel: *Are you the first person on the yard?*

Louis: *I don't know. I have a [unintelligible [00:01:23] for 6 o'clock.*

Nigel: *Oh. What's your name?*

Louis: *Louis.*

Nigel: *Do you know what time it is, Louis?*

Louis: *Maybe it's 6:15, 6:20 something like that.*

Nigel: *Is it usually this quiet at 6:15?*

Louis: *Yeah, they're going to start serving breakfast real soon.*

Nigel: *Wow. Don't you think it's actually kind of peaceful right now?*

Louis: *Yeah, it is right now.*

Nigel: *Yeah. What do you think of the view up there?*

Louis: *That's stunning. Looks real good, but not from here.*

[laughter]

Nigel: *Does it torment you?*

Louis: *No, I really don't even pay attention.*

Nigel: *Oh, no. Okay. Well, thanks for talking to us.*

Louis: *Yes, ma'am. You guys have a good day.*

Nigel: *Bye.*

Good morning

Speaker: *Good morning. How are you, guys?*

Nigel: *Good. You going to work? What's in the bag?*

Speaker: *Lunch.*

Nigel: *Look at those tiny carrots.*

Speaker: *Little carrots, some apples. I try to get all the carrots I can.*

Nigel: *I would call those tiny carrots, these are tiny.*

Speaker: *Yeah, they are. We don't get too many vegetables, so I try to get what I can.*

Nigel: *So, for most of the population, the yard hasn't really officially opened up yet, right?*

Earlonne: *Yeah, it's too early, most people are still confined to their housing units, or they stuck chow hall.*

Nigel: *So, if you're here, because cause you've got a job on the yard.*

What do you do in the yard?

Speaker: *I'm the yard worker, I work behind the fence here. Control of the toilets, all the yard equipment, all the yard equipment, trash cans, keeping all the bushes knocked down, keeping everything mowed out here, everything-- yard clean. So, when y'all come inside here, it looks really nice.*

Nigel: *It always looks nice in here, I have to say. Do you take care of the toilets over here?*

Speaker: Yes. Cleaning them every day.

Nigel: I'm sure you're used to seeing those toilets, but when people come to visit, it's so disconcerting to have to walk by toilets. But do you just get used to it?

Speaker: Yes, I'm used to it now. [chuckles] I'm used to seeing all kinds of things over there. But anyway, I got to stop for a minute because my boss just called me. [crosstalk]

Nigel: Oh. Oh-uh. Okay. All right.

Speaker: Okay. All right.

Nigel: Near the entrance to the yard, there are these two little kind of like shacks.

Earlonne: They're like small houses. What do they call them? They're on the streets now.

Nigel: Tiny houses?

Earlonne: Tiny houses.

Nigel: And in one of them, there's an incarcerated guy who's organizing stuff, and looks like he's getting ready for a busy day.

Earlonne: Yeah, getting everything in order, seeing what he got.

Nigel: What's your name?

Smooth: Navion Starks.

Nigel: Do you have a nickname that you go by?

Smooth: Smooth.

Nigel: You are Smooth. Yes, we were told we had to find Smooth.

Smooth: Oh, okay. That's me. Olay.

Earlonne: Smooth runs the rec shack, and the yard is all about rec. So, this is a very important position. He's in charge of loaning out all the rec equipment each morning and checking it back in when everybody's done.

Nigel: What do we got here?

Smooth: *The most of my recreation career, basketball, ab rollers, soccer, baseball, softball, football, volleyball, kickball.*

Speaker: *Punching bag.*

Smooth: *Heavy bag, MMA gloves.*

Speaker: *Horseshoes, dominoes.*

Smooth: *Yoga mats, cards, tennis, Scrabble, chess.*

Nigel: *Oh, there's a lot here.*

Smooth: *Jump ropes. Yeah, there's a lot here.*

Nigel: *About 20 feet away from the rec shack is the other building in the yard. It's the lower yard mac shack. And COs are in there all day kind of keeping an eye on things. And right now, Officer Acevedo, who did that listener alert at the top of the show, he's in there.*

Nigel: *Hey, good morning.*

Acevedo: *Morning. How are you?*

Nigel: *Good. Are you out here today?*

Acevedo: *Yes, ma'am.*

Nigel: *I just wanted to tell you, we are on the yard for 12 hours today recording, just so you know.*

Acevedo: *Okay, cool.*

Nigel: *I'm Nigel. This is Amy and Bruce.*

Acevedo: *Nigel is the Ear Hustle.*

Nigel: *Exactly.*

Acevedo: *Yes, ma'am.*

Nigel: *Do you listen to Ear Hustle?*

Acevedo: *I've dabbled a little bit. I'm a podcast guy. I do the murder mystery stuff.*

Nigel: *Me too. Do you listen to Dateline?*

Acevedo: *All the time.*

Nigel: *I love Dateline.*

Acevedo: *So, what are we doing on the yard? What's the plan?*

Nigel: *So, the idea is to just see what happens over a 12-hour period on the yard. So we got here at 6:00 and we're staying till 6:00. So, I don't know what's going to happen.*

Earlonne: *Where did this idea come from?*

Nigel: *Okay. Well, one day we were all down in the media lab with our brand-new crew of producers. And actually, no one's met them yet. So, do you think this would be a good time for them to introduce themselves?*

Earlonne: *Great time to hear their personalities.*

Trinidad: *Hey, what's up? I'm Roberto Antonio Michael Valentino Vigagrande de Trinidad III. But--*

Earlonne: *That's what's up.*

Nigel: *[chuckles]*

Nigel: *Oh my.*

Trinidad: *You can just call me Trinidad though.*

Steve: *How you doing? This is Steve Brooks, the voice of San Quentin.*

[laughter]

Sadiq: *It's Derrell Davis, but you can call me Sadiq. That's what I go by.*

Tony: *I'm the inside managing producer, Tony Tafoya.*

Tam: *This is Tam Nguyen. I'm part of the Ear Hustle team and I'm just glad to be here. I'm the only Asian.*

Dante: *Hello, my name is Dante D. Jones. I am the Ear Hustle official photographer.*

Earlonne: *So, throughout this episode, you're going to be hearing from these inside cats.*

Nigel: *Yep, they'll be out on the yard with us, reporting on what's going on.*

Earlonne: And actually, the whole idea for this episode came right out of this room and from this team, right?

Nigel: Exactly. As part of the training inside San Quentin, we bring in different episodes from various podcasts that we admire for us to all listen to together and critique and talk about what works and doesn't work and what inspires us. And we were listening to this old episode from--- what podcast?

Trinidad: *I think it was called This American Life.*

Nigel: Yeah. What was the name of the episode?

Trinidad: *I don't remember the name of the episode, but it was about this--*

Nigel: *[whispering] 24 hours at the Golden Apple.*

Trinidad: *Yeah. It was 24 hours at the Golden Apple.*

Nigel: *[laughs]*

Sadiq: *Golden Apple was about 24 hours at the Golden diner. They actually go there and just sit around for 24 hours with the recorder and just let the recorder just record and not knowing what's going to happen.*

Trinidad: *So, after hearing the stories in there and meeting some of the characters in that story, we were kind of thinking about our own little experience here in San Quentin, and we were thinking that we got characters and there's little stories happening here all the time. Maybe we should try to try to recreate that ourselves and give that a whirl.*

Earlonne: So, on this Monday, in early July, we are heading out to the historic San Quentin lower yard.

Nigel: And what do you think's going to happen?

Earlonne: A fight, a stabbing, a murder.

Nigel: We're going to be in the San Quentin yard.

Earlonne: Oh, okay, a pillow fight, a feather fight.

Nigel: *[laughs]* Well, I can't wait to find out.

Earlonne: I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

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

Nigel: 12 hours on the San Quentin yard.

Earlonne: Crossword puzzles. Tic tac toe-

Nigel: Sudoku.

Earlonne: -Sudoku.

[Ear Hustle theme]

Steve: *Hello, hello, hello. We're out here on the yard early in the morning, and there's a yard crew member out here setting up on the baseball diamond.*

What's up, man?

Speaker: *Good morning.*

Steve: *So, what you got going on out here?*

Speaker: *Just getting the baseball field ready for our game on Wednesday. I water the grass and then I come into the infield, water the dirt down to keep the dust and to be able to soften up the dirt. Stamp it all down and get it all nice and level again. Make it look like nobody's even played on the field yet. So, everybody gets the feeling of being the first to play on the field. I love being on the baseball field. It's therapeutic.*

Nigel: *Okay. The yard is starting to perk up. I think it's about 7 o'clock.*

Hey, good morning. Good morning. What are y'all doing here?

Speaker: *Waiting in line to go to coding.*

Nigel: *Coding. Oh, you all work for coding?*

Speaker: *Yes. This whole line's coding this morning.*

Nigel: *I didn't know so many people did coding down here.*

Speaker: *Good morning.*

Speaker: *Morning.*

Speaker: *Good morning.*

Speaker: *Good morning.*

Earlonne: *At one end of the yard, there's a fenced-in lot. Sometimes, you see a white van sitting there.*

Nigel: *This is the van that brings guys in and out of San Quentin.*

Earlonne: *Yeah. And this morning, it's out there waiting for this guy.*

CO: *Here you have Mr. Hayes.*

Nigel: *Hi. Hey, I'm Nigel. What's your name?*

William: *William Hayes.*

Nigel: *What's going on right now?*

William: *I'm going home. [laughs]*

Nigel: *Wow. So, what are you going to do when you get home?*

William: *Go back to work.*

Nigel: *What are you going to work?*

William: *I'm going to be doing construction for a little bit. I've got to make amends with my family. My dad, my sister don't talk to me right now.*

Nigel: *Do they know you're getting out?*

William: *I'm not sure if they do or not. I haven't talked to them in over a year.*

Nigel: *Wow. So, we're going to see what happens when I get out. I'm just like, "Hey dad, want to meet?" He's pretty mad at me right now because--*

Nigel: *Does he have a reason to be?*

William: *Yeah, I was selling drugs out of his house. [laughs]*

Nigel: *So, it's 8:00 in the morning and we're standing by the stairs to north block. And picture cramped cement stairs. I guess they're cement. There's at least 30 plus because I know we ran out of breath going up them. There's a bunch of people at the top of the stairs that are just waiting to come down to get to work and stuff. And I think the CO says, what?*

Earlonne: *Yard release or work release or something like that.*

Nigel: Okay. And then it's like pa-pa-pa and all these like dozens and dozens of feet are coming down those stairs fast.

Earlonne: People ready to get out of these cells. They hop out of there.

Nigel: Oh, it's Boots.

Earlonne: Here they come.

Nigel: Here comes Boots walking down the stairs. He's heading to work, I think. Boots, are you going to work? Heading down the media lab?

Boots: Yeah.

Nigel: Heading in.

Earlonne, what are some of the things guys are coming down here to do?

Earlonne: These guys are coming down the stairs to either go to their jobs, to go to school, go to the yard, hang out on a basketball court, play volleyball, tennis. That's what they come out here to do in the morning.

Nigel: Work or play.

Earlonne: Work or play. Yeah, definitely.

[crosstalk]

Walter: I don't have to be nice.

White: We don't have no nice talking over here.

Walter: Ain't no nice talking.

White: We tell it all.

Walter: Will you introduce yourself?

White: My name is Mr. White.

Walter: I'm Osmond Walter.

Nigel: And what are you doing right now?

Walter: Right now, I'm going to whoop his ass. Whoop his ass in dominoes.

[laughter]

Nigel: *Do you agree, Mr. White?*

White: *I refuse to answer that.*

[laughter]

Nigel: Wait a minute, Earlonne, I have to say I've heard about these guys for a while and clearly they are out here all frigging day playing. They're intense.

Earlonne: Yes. Dominoes is a shit talking game in prison, you know?

Nigel: [laughs] Which is more the game? The shit talk or the dominoes?

Earlonne: The shit talk is the game. But you got to have thick skin for that.

Nigel: Yes.

Earlonne: You got to have thick skin for that shit talking.

Nigel: Well, these guys definitely do and they're right behind the rec shack where Smooth works and they just are here all day playing and shit talking.

White: *I'm going to try to be nice now.*

Walter: *Let's go with that.*

White: *I want to take his money.*

Walter: *No, you ain't going to take no money. You too goddamn damn scared. [crosstalk] you scared.*

[laughter]

White: *[crosstalk] Give me another nickel.*

Walter: *This motherfucker got a nickel.*

Speaker: *This lucky pulling ass motherfucker-- domino. Give me a dime.*

Speaker: *I call this thing the squeegee. All I'm doing is trying to get the morning dew off the top of the table.*

Nigel: *What are you going to be doing once you get the morning dew off?*

Speaker: *Tabletop gaming.*

Nigel: *Is this the D&D area?*

Speaker: *Yeah. This is the D&D area.*

Speaker: *We like to call ourselves the Nerd Herd here.*

[laughter]

Earlonne: *A few tables away from Osmond and Mr. White, right behind the CO shack, are the gaming tables. And this is where the Nerd Herd hang out.*

Nigel: *Yeah. Some of them take umbrage with being called the Nerd Herd and some of them wear it proudly.*

What do you call--?

Speaker: *Nothing. We're just people. Just people. Just guys meeting for a game.*

Nigel: *May I ask you a question?*

Speaker: *Yes ma'am.*

Nigel: *If I say this word, tell me how you feel. Nerd Herd.*

Speaker: *Indifferent. At first when I was younger, nerd was considered a disrespectful. But as I've gotten older, I've considered nerd being as a compliment. Thank you. Because it shows that I do have some form of intelligence, if not much, maybe some.*

[crosstalk]

Just a 5.0 D&D game. I believe it's the Storm King's campaign.

Speaker: *We're trying to make sure this community is open to all people and has a thriving trade community and is self-sufficient.*

Trinidad: *I've heard the term prosocial gaming. Is this prosocial gaming?*

Speaker: *Oh, yes, very much so.*

Speaker: *There's no need to draw your sword every time even though you have it. It is a lot easier and a lot safer to talk your way out of it, even if talking your way out of it is running.*

Speaker: Or using a kabuki goblin for interpretive dance.

Speaker: Oh my gosh.

[laughter]

Nigel: Can we see some of that?

Speaker: No, absolutely not.

[laughter]

Nigel: Can we come back periodically and check in and see how the game's going?

Speaker: I have no problem with that whatsoever.

PSA: Dennis Rogers, report to the shack.

Nigel: Well, very charming. We'll come back.

Speaker: Of course. Have a nice morning, guys.

Earlonne: The D&D table is one of the few tables where you will see the mixing of races because if you listen to Ear Hustle, you know that the yards are segregated and that there's not a lot of interaction with races.

Nigel: Right. It's very clear when you walk down here. From my perspective, when I come in here, what I notice is like the black area is around the basketball-- the tables around the basketball court.

Earlonne: Right, right.

Nigel: And then, over by the gym equipment is the Hispanic area.

Earlonne: Yep.

Nigel: Then, there's like a tennis court area where the white dudes hang out. And then, actually behind the tennis court, there's also another Hispanic area.

Earlonne: That's more of the-- they call them Border Brothers, but they are usually undocumented Mexicans or a lot of Mexican individuals that are not involved in the gang activities.

Nigel: 9:00 AM. Can you describe the yard right now?

Trinidad: So, the yard is kind of active right now. The runners are starting to run, but it's the slow runners this morning. You got Red Beard wrapping up his holes from spraying down the baseball field. You got the Spanish-speaking church over in the corner of the yard, and they're singing and clapping.

[Spanish gospel singing]

Nigel: So, it's 10 o'clock. What's going on in the yard now?

Trinidad: All right, so the Nerd Herd is at it.

Nigel: The sun's out now.

Trinidad: The sun is out. The clouds have cleared out.

Nigel: There's some people playing tennis.

Trinidad: There's no more gloom. The white guys are lifting tables to work out.

Nice, nice. How many was that?

Speaker: I wouldn't even count.

Trinidad: That's right. *[laughs]*

Nigel: Oh, is that how he keeps tracks of his--?

Trinidad: Yeah, the rocks. We use rocks to count our workouts a lot because that's what we've got.

Nigel: So, we're walking down the yard and there's a curb here with a little rug over it. And on the rug are a myriad of teddy bears. One, two, three, four teddy bears. There's five teddy bears. They're pink and white. I mean, what can you say? They're adorable.

Teddy Bear Dude: What?

Nigel: They're adorable.

Teddy Bear Dude: Thank you.

Nigel: Who makes them?

Teddy Bear Dude: I make them.

Nigel: Earlonne, this guy is completely new to me. I've never seen him before. I would love to call him the Teddy Bear Dude.

Earlonne: Why you don't call him that then?

Nigel: Because he doesn't look like a teddy bear. You know what I mean? Like he's super wiry.

Earlonne: What is super wiry?

Nigel: You know like very low body fat content?

Earlonne: Oh, okay.

Nigel: I guess. Slicked back hair, monogram glasses. He'd be very comfortable in the corner of a dark bar that has a lot of red interior, I think. He'd fit right in there. But he's out here with like all these adorable teddy bears that he makes.

Earlonne: Different colors too.

Nigel: Yep.

Earlonne: He really get into it.

Teddy Bear Dude: *I've been locked up for a long time, and it, it helps me with my inhibition and my-- I use it as therapeutic.*

Nigel: *What are they made out of?*

Teddy Bear Dude: *They're made out sock. With Kool-Aid, I dye the material. And they're stuffed with the sweatpants or anything that, what I use as excess is they're just stuffed with extra material.*

Nigel: Earlonne, you know me well enough to know I'm not a teddy bear kind of person, right?

Earlonne: I've never took that in consideration, Nyge.

Nigel: [laughs] Well, I'm here to tell you I'm not. But I was positively giddy about these teddy bears. We talked to this one guy who had already given three of these to his wife and he was coming back for another one.

Earlonne: Right. Well, you know cats, do perfect their craft because you're sitting there all day and you're just working on this one thing.

Nigel: Have you ever heard them say it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert at something?

Earlonne: Ooh, shit.

Nigel: I bet that guy has put 10,000 hours into those teddy bears.

Earlonne: He had to. He had to.

Teddy Bear Dude: *I've been making them since 2017. So obviously for six, seven years, I've been making them and I make four per day.*

Nigel: So, you've made hundreds and hundreds, maybe thousands?

Teddy Bear Dude: *Yes, I probably could say I already reached almost a thousand bears.*

Nigel: It's 11:00 AM, what's happening on the yard?

Smooth: *It looks like it's picked back up a little more than it was at the 10 o'clock check-in. They're playing soccer now. The tennis is still going. The nerd game is still going. My bad, the D&D game is still going. The dominoes, the same domino match from earlier still going. There's more people playing handball.*

Smooth: *How you doing, man?*

Speaker: *Good morning, sir. How are you?*

Smooth: *All right. You got next on the court or what?*

Speaker: *Yes sir. I'm what you call tally. I'm next in line and I'm keeping score and I'm watching the lines to make sure the ball's in or out.*

Smooth: *How often are you out here playing handball?*

Speaker: *I'm out here every day. It keeps you social when you can communicate on the handball court--*

Speaker: *No, not on the fence.*

Smooth: *And what was that? Was that out?*

Speaker: *That was out. That ball was out because it went over the fence. It becomes like a daily vitamin. You just have to have it. You have to come out here and just let it all out. Whatever's going on, whatever you got to sort through, you come out here and you focus on that handball.*

Bruce: *What are you going to be working through today?*

Speaker: *I have a lot of stress. I just lost my mother a little over a month ago. And now my father, he went back to Samoa, and I may not ever get to see him again, so I'm a little worried about that. My mother was cremated, so he took her ashes with him. They were together 59 years, 11 months. And it was him and my mother's thing that when they retired, they would go to Samoa. So, as he finishes his life, he'll have his ashes and her ashes cast out into the oceans, which to me is a happy ending.*

Everybody, my family, they want us to all to come home. I want to go home. One day I'm going to go home. I'm going to go back to Samoa. That's where it all started for me and that's where it's going to end, hopefully.

[Samoan haka]

Earlonne: So, we are in the others section.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: Not just the other section, but the others' section.

Nigel: And can we just say the others in prison are like usually Pacific Islanders.

Earlonne: Pacific Islanders, Asians. And, of course, when it comes to Samoans, they always big.

Nigel: Yeah. They're fit. But kind of in a pretty boy type of way. You know what I mean?

Earlonne: Pretty boys, nice tattoos.

Nigel: Tasteful.

Earlonne: Tasteful tattoos, but more into their culture.

Nigel: Yes.

Earlonne: And they just so happen to all look like strippers.

Nigel: I'm glad you said that and not me. Thank you.

Tam: *Hey, how did you get into this? I mean, did you do this on the streets?*

Gerry: *I did. I grew up in dancing ever since I was in like the first or second grade. I grew up dancing Māori, Tahitian, Samoan, all Polynesian cultures all the way up until I was a freshman. And then that's when I became too cool to dance my own culture and started doing things that, I guess, didn't align with moral things with social. [crosstalk] I mean, you know what I mean?*

Tam: *Did you do anything else with your dancing?*

Gerry: *I did. Later on down the line, I started stripping.*

[laughter]

Earlonne: *I'm just curious, did you have a specific stripper move that got you the money where they just got the-- [makes money throwing motions]*

Gerry: *The money--*

[laughter]

Gerry: *Yeah. Usually, it involves a chair and a flip.*

Earlonne: *Chair and a flip. You flipping on the chair?*

Gerry: *Yeah. I'm flipping backwards while they're on the chair. And then, it would end up to where it was like a 69 position, and then you flip them over with your legs.*

Nigel: *Contact.*

Gerry: *Very acrobatic. [laughs]*

Tam: *Well, thank you guys. Next time, Nigel would like to see you do this backflip thing that you were talking about.*

Nigel: *I didn't ask for that much. It could just be a simpler move.*

[crosstalk]

Gerry: *Although I have my shirt off, I don't think it'd be a proper place to demonstrate some stripping moves. [laughs]*

Earlonne: *Oh, it is noon. 12 o'clock.*

Nigel: *It is hot too.*

Earlonne: *It's hot.*

Nigel: *Damn, there's no shade out here at all.*

Earlonne: *But you got a little wind though.*

Nigel: *Okay, I'm getting sunburned, I know it.*

Walter: *Oh, you trying to skunk me.*

White: *I ain't going to try to skunk you like that.*

Walter: *Yeah, you have.*

White: *I ain't going to try to skunk you like that.*

Nigel: Earlonne, no surprise, a few tables away, those dominoes guys are still at it. And I think at this point, Mr. White has taken his shirt off. [laughs]

Earlonne: Very girthy, huh?

Nigel: He's not going to be joining those dancers, let's just say.

[background conversation]

Earlonne: The Nerd Herd and the D&D guys? They're still at it. They do not stop. This is an all-day, everyday game, it never stops.

Speaker: *I am a very happy man right now. [laughs]*

[Spanish singing]

Earlonne: It's that time right now where you have shift changing, you've got dudes getting off work, you going to start seeing everybody going in to prepare for the next part of their day. And then, you just have guys that are about to take a break. So, I think it's about time we take a little break.

Nigel: That sounds like good a time to me. Let's get out of this sun for a little bit.

Earlonne: Indubitably.

[Spanish singing]

Trinidad: *Okay, this is Tony de Trinidad.*

All right, it's our 1 o'clock yard check-in. The yard has thinned out since 11 and 12 o'clock. The soccer game is over, but the tennis players are still tennis-ing. People are kind of milling about for the most part. There's some people doing laps. Not that many. There's a new guy at the punching bag.

[punching sounds]

Speaker: *I'm calling combinations. I'm calling numbers. Two, two punches. Four is four punches. Six. I just try to mix it up, mix it up with the guys. We do this Monday through*

Friday. I'm out here Monday through Friday, man. Whoever come or want to join or want to learn, I'm out here.

[punching sound]

So, got a skill, now I want to give it to somebody.

Nigel: Right near that guy who was boxing, there was this table with, I don't know, like four dudes sitting down that I'd never seen before, and I really wanted to talk to them. And I kind of started to walk over there with my recorder and I could just see on their face, they were like, "Leave us alone." And, Earlonne, point taken.

Earlonne: Everybody's going to be different. You're going to have the older population that don't care for media, don't care to get on the mic. Don't care to entertain you in any way.

Nigel: And then definitely, Tony and I were trying to talk to some of the guys working out, and he went over there in Spanish, and it was very clear, like, "Don't come in my area."

Earlonne: Definitely. And it might not even be you, it might not even be the microphones. It could be Tony. You never know. Dudes sometime are segregated and they are divided.

Nigel: And so, it's really easy to imagine for a new person, it's going to take a while to figure out all of these rules.

Earlonne: Right.

Nigel: And we actually just ran into a guy who got here, I think it was just like a few days ago and I think he was waiting for some of his stuff to arrive. Is that possible?

Earlonne: Oh, yeah. You're waiting for your property to get here.

Nigel: Yeah.

Speaker: *So, how you guys doing?*

Nigel: *Good. Wait, so is this your first time in prison?*

Speaker: *Nah, this is like my eighth, ninth time.*

Nigel: *Eighth or ninth time.*

Speaker: *Yeah.*

Trinidad: *Is it your first time in San Quentin?*

Speaker: *Yeah, my first time in San Quentin. It's lovely though.*

Earlonne: *Is it recidivist or are you violating or what?*

Speaker: *Institutionalized. I feel more comfortable in here than on the streets. I'm used to the streets, so I stay committing crimes, like high-speed chases, stuff like that. And I don't know, I just feel more comfortable in prison than out of prison because I've always done time since I was a kid. I started off in juvenile hall, then the ranches, county jail and now prison. And I just can't stop.*

Nigel: *Are you saying you'd rather be here?*

Speaker: *Well, I'm just used to it, I guess.*

Trinidad: *What do you think it would take for you to not feel like that?*

Speaker: *I don't know, some kind of coping skills, something that would make me understand that outside's better and something in here is a lot worse.*

Nigel: *Wait, so you don't feel sad when you come back?*

Speaker: *I mean, I do, because I leave my family and everyone behind. But at the same time, I'm more comfortable in here. I don't really know what to do when I get out.*

Earlonne: *Is it drugs? Is it no job? What do you think?*

Speaker: *I don't know. I've always been lonely, so I just stick to what I do and just don't care anymore.*

Dante: *Hey, you all. This is Dante D. Jones. I'm here on the yard right now and it is really, really hot. But there are people on the yard. A lot of people, catching sun rays. People are playing basketball as usual. Some guys are running around. The Bird Man is on the yard playing with his birds.*

Earlonne: *Every prison is going to have a bird man.*

Nigel: *[laughs] San Quentin's no different.*

Earlonne: *No matter where you at in any prison in probably the United States or the world, you're going to have somebody that's the pigeon man.*

Nigel: *And this guy's definitely the pigeon man. He doesn't have like one or two pigeons around him. Can we say there's a plethora of pigeons on this dude?*

Earlonne: Yeah.

BG: *I've just always been really inclined towards animals in general. And they just kind of vibe with me. We hang out all day. I sit out here and read books with them.*

Nigel: *But they seem to like you.*

BG: Yeah, yeah.

Nigel: *What, what do you think they like about you?*

BG: *We're sentient beings and we can recognize that sentience in each other, I think. To me, it's kind of being like touched by the divine. It's having that come right up to me and just want to be a part of my life. When you look into the eyes of an intelligent being, there is no question the intelligence that is looking back at you. So, to me it's just an apparent truth that's just waiting to be recognized.*

Amy: *And when you look into the eyes of a pigeon, you see a fellow intelligent being?*

BG: Absolutely.

Nigel: It's getting on in the day. I mean, the sun is shifting a little bit. There's a little bit of a breeze. And the yard is quieting down.

Earlonne: Yeah, and there's this one part of the yard, kind of to the side, where they've got some nice flowers growing.

Nigel: Yeah, like a little patch of garden.

Earlonne: And that's where we've found our old pal who's been on the shows before.

Nigel: Yes, he has.

Earlonne: Ol' Reggie.

Reginald: *My name is Reginald Thorpe. I'm here at San Quentin, and I'm standing here looking at the area where I first seen a hummingbird during my incarceration. I've been incarcerated for over 25 years. This happened probably like about three years ago. I was in the education area, and I was out there drinking some water, eating my lunch, And I just realized that I was looking at a hummingbird and it was visiting each plant individually. And I was like, "Wow, look at this." And I was trying to remember the last time I had seen a hummingbird in nature. I never seen it and I was just in shock. I was really in awe. It was astounding. It impressed me.*

Nigel: *Why do you think hummingbirds are so magical?*

Reginald: *They're the only creatures I know that could move in a 90-degree angle in midflight, like in a sharp angle from left to right, straight and left to right. I don't know no other creature that could move like that.*

Nigel: *And hover. The way they hover?*

Reginald: *Yeah, they hover. But without that hovering, they won't be able to cut them sharp 90-degree angles the way they do. If you ever look, they move up and down and side to side, like robotically. No other creature can move like that.*

Nigel: *Yeah, they're wild. And where are we right now? Describe the scene.*

Reginald: *We are currently on San Quentin's prison. It's a nice, clear, beautiful, sunny day. Don't look depressing for a change.*

Nigel: *What are you wearing today?*

Reginald: *I am wearing a tank top with quite a few holes in it so I could catch some of the breeze. I got some holes in my shorts and some tennis shoes.*

Nigel: *Because are you working out now?*

Reginald: *Yeah, I'm just working out.*

Nigel: *Well, it's always good to see you.*

Reginald: *I wish I could have described this ripped-up shirt with all this over it.*

Nigel: *Okay, I'm going to describe it. So, he's wearing a gray tank top. Calling it a tank top is generous because it is diaphanous, so it's probably-- I don't know how old, it's got to be at least 10 years old.*

Reginald: *You know what I like about this shirt most? Women that still say it's sexy on me.*

Nigel: *[laughs] And he just ran away. He's running away.*

Trinidad: *It's 3 o'clock, you want to do the check-in?*

Nigel: *Yeah. Oh, yeah, check in. 3 o'clock. How are you feeling, Tony?*

Trinidad: *Thirsty.*

Nigel: Me too. I don't think we've had enough water. The day started out really quiet, then it got really hectic and it's getting quiet again and it's freaking hot. I'm kind of tapped out. How are you feeling?

Trinidad: I'm feeling good.

Nigel: You are?

Trinidad: Yeah. Then again, I had lunch.

Nigel: [laughs] I had lunch too. I'm going to take a sip of water.

Trinidad: Oh, yeah, you did have lunch.

Earlonne: Usually around 3 o'clock, you have a lot of people disappearing. Most people are going into the buildings so they can get ready for dinner. But then you still have what you call like-- what do they call them? Yard soldiers that don't never leave a yard. Yard bums.

Trinidad: Yard bums.

Earlonne: So, then you have yard bums, which I was pretty much sometime a yard bum.

Nigel: Right. And there's a lot of people walking laps just walking around.

Earlonne: That's all you do. You just bend corners. You just stay on the yard pretty much all day.

Nigel: So, what I noticed is basically the laps take up the whole yard. So, you're walking around the full yard and you see guys walking singly or with a couple other people talking. Tony, I want to ask you about this superstition I've heard about which direction to walk in.

Trinidad: Supposedly, yeah, if you go against the clock and walk back, supposedly you turn back time. But I think that's a really silly notion.

Nigel: But what does it mean? Does it mean that like it's that your time goes faster here?

Trinidad: For me, that would be walking clockwise, right?

Nigel: Yeah. I know.

Trinidad: Speed up the clock. But I think if you walk backwards and turn back the clock, I don't know how that speeds up the time.

Nigel: I feel like they didn't really think this out.

Trinidad: We're not here for having the best thinking processes, [Nigel laughs] to be honest with you. But what I do know about laps though, it is therapeutic. I would say most of the time it's like a walking meditation for most people.

Nigel: Yeah, and that's definitely what's going on with this guy.

Tam: *Travis, how you doing, brother? Would mind talking to us? We're going to walk with you around the yard. This is Nigel, Amy, from Ear Hustle.*

Travis: *Hi, Nigel. Nice to meet you. I know him from church. We sing in the Catholic choir together.*

Nigel: *Can I hear a little?*

Travis: *Are you going to join me, Tam?*

Tam: *Let's go, go over there. I'll help you out.*

Travis and Tam: *Wade in the water. Wade in the water children now, wade in the water. And God's going to trouble the water. Come to the river, let the living waters rise. If you want to follow Jesus, you must come and be baptized. Wade in the water.*

Tam: *This is Travis. A lot of times, you're just going to see him walking a track and you're going to see him walking alone. He's kind of in his own head, and that's just kind of what he does. No one really bothers him. He don't bother nobody, that's for sure. But I would venture from knowing him that most of the time when he's walking the track, he's thinking about his son.*

Travis: *So I've been, writing him poems and illustrating them for a long time. And one of them was about a kid and his reaction to seeing facial hair. It's called "Not a Wizard." And it goes, "I saw a man with a very long beard, and I asked my mom if he was a wizard. She said that he probably just doesn't shave, but that we might see a wizard later on in the day."*

[laughter]

For me, walking is primarily a walking meditation. I spent a pretty significant time the other day looking at that tree. I mean, it's a beautiful tree as you can see.

Nigel: The tree he's talking about, it's not actually inside the prison wall. It's on the other side of the wall.

Trinidad: It stands alone. It stands alone, and if it catches the light at the right time of day, each individual leaf kind of catches the light. And it's like when you're looking at the ocean and it's sparkling, it's doing the same thing.

Nigel: You know what? I'm glad you brought up ocean because when I look at the way it moves, it undulates the way water does. And so, I think that's what makes it feel so alive.

Trinidad: Exactly.

Travis: *It's almost like a breathing entity. And just following those thoughts into just a space of letting go of all of my tendency to examine the past and project myself up out into a future that doesn't involve prison and just sit in the presence of the wonder of such a thing.*

Amy: *Can you just stand here, the three of us, and stare at it for about 20 seconds?*

Travis: *Sure.*

[silence]

[background chatter]

[PSA]

[counting]

Earlonne: So, count happens in a 24-hour period, maybe five, six times.

Nigel: Mm-hmm.

Earlonne: Because they want to make sure that, one, everybody is alive. And two, that nobody is missing.

Nigel: And I think sometimes guys also are kind of scrambling to get to count because it's a big deal if you miss it.

Earlonne: Well, hell yeah it's a big deal. If you miss it, shit, you can't miss that count, honestly.

Speaker: *Right now, this count is happening at every single prison in the entire state. I think the northern prisons are at 4 o'clock, the southern at 4:30, and they try to make sure that every single person is accounted for within inside the prison. They will count every single person in the prison, and they have to call that number into Sacramento. And Sacramento has to say we confirm that that's how many are supposed to be there.*

[counting]

Officer: Higgins.

Speaker: 49.

Officer: Acey.

Speaker: 87.

Officer: Davis.

Speaker: 89.

Officer: Tafoya.

Speaker: 88.

Officer: Did I call everybody? Good job, guys, thank you.

In Unison: Thank you.

Speaker: You guys have a pleasant evening, huh? All right, thank you. All right, later.

Speaker: We have a horrible dinner today, man.

Smooth: So, the vibe at the end of the day, it's kind of like a wind down time. Everybody done had their little fun throughout the day. Now it's time to just chillax and kick back. Some people come out and just enjoy the breeze because the breeze usually come like 4ish, and that's count time. So after about the end of the night, it's kind of like breezy out here.

RJ: Tony?

Tony: Hi, RJ.

RJ: What's going on? I'm just cleaning up for the night. Make sure all the trash is done. Make sure all this junk stuff, make sure nobody didn't poo-poo on the floor or piss on the floor over the side of here somewhere. I get this done and try to make it back in just before the doors lock.

Amy: How was your day today, Steve Brooks?

Steve: My day was very busy running around chasing the Ear Hustle team all day, all over the yard. We got the whole team out here for the first time, so that's nice. Yeah, because I think this is our first gig. And I think it was successful. [laughs] The sun is

about to set. You can tell everybody's starting to calm down, get ready to shower, and go to bed. And do it all over again tomorrow. So, yeah, it was a very nice day. [laughs]

Nigel: Well, Earlonne, the day's pretty winding down. There's only a few groups out here now.

Earlonne: And even the Nerd Herd is packing it in for the day.

Speaker: *Today was more of a morale booster. It was less combat, more shopping, kind of building our characters up, feeling better about ourselves, Eating and drinking, spending some time communicating and everything. It's a nice reprieve from the reality of where we are.*

[singing Wasted Days & Wasted Nights]

Earlonne: *A few guys are still over at the Mexican table.*

Nigel: *Why do you think they're the last group out here?*

Earlonne: *Well, if I was to go off of my prison knowledge, I would say that based on unwritten rules, it's mandatory for them to be on the yard from the beginning to the end.*

[singing Wasted Days & Wasted Nights]

Sadiq: All right, this is Sadiq, wrapping it up. This is the end of the night. I'm about to go in and get my shower. Get me a few phone calls before 9 o'clock. This is me checking out.

Trinidad: This is Tony Trinidad saying, bueno nachos. I'm about to go call my mama.

Tam: This is Tam Nguyen, signing off for the day. I'm going to go wash my dirty body.

Steve: This is Steve Brooks. After 12 hours on the yard, I'm going in, getting me a shower for shower, for sure, and I'm going to bed. Goodnight.

Tony: This is Tony Tafoya, and I am going to go inside, take a shower and get ready to watch *The Bachelorette*.

Dante: This is Dante D. Jones. Hasta luego, hasta mañana, and all that other good stuff.

Earlonne: This is Earlonne and I got to get out of here and go let that top town and go across that bridge and smell that seaweed that you don't get to smell in here.

Nigel: And this is Nigel and, yep, I'm out of here after a really long day on the yard and I'm going to head home.

[singing Wasted Days & Wasted Nights]

Acevedo: *It is now your recall. H Unit, West Block, North Block, South Block, and anywhere else you might stay here, it is time to go home.*

Steve: My name is Steve Brooks. And right now, I'm smelling some hot buttery popcorn I'm about to go track down.

Ear Hustle is produced by Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, Amy Standen, Bruce Wallace and Rahsaan "New York" Thomas. Shabnam Sigman is our managing producer. Our producing team inside San Quentin includes myself, Derrell Sadiq Davis, Tony de Trinidad, and Tam Nguyen. Our inside managing producer is Tony Tafoya. Earlonne Woods sound designs and engineers the show with help from Fernando Arruda, Rhashiyy Zinnamon, and Derrell Sadiq Davis.

Thanks to Acting Warden Oak Smith at San Quentin and Acting Warden Molly Hill. And Lt. William Newborg at the California Institution for Women for their support of the show. Thanks also to this woman here.

Lt. Guim'Mara Berry: I am Lt. Guim'Mara Berry, the public information officer here at San Quentin State Prison, and I approve this episode.

Steve: 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. For more information about this episode, check out the show notes on our website, earhustlesq.com. You can also find out more about the show on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram @[earhustlesq](https://www.instagram.com/earhustlesq).

Nigel: We want to welcome back all of you listeners and thank you for following us into this next season. Season number 12.

Earlonne: This is a big season for us. I mean, we're going to hit our 100th episode.

Nigel: That's crazy.

Earlonne: Mmm. Hey, Nigel.

Nigel: Yes?

Earlonne: Can you name all the episodes?

Nigel: [laughs] Hell no. We will have more news on that later in the season. Meanwhile, I want to say I'm really excited about our new crew inside San Quentin. It is growing. I mean, there's like how many guys now?

Earlonne: We got seven cats up in there, from a photographer to the line producers, the sound designers. So definitely, we got a cool crew.

Nigel: And it's promising. I mean, they've got a lot more to learn, but they did a great job on this first episode.

Earlonne: By the time we get to our hundred, they should be good.

Nigel: Mm-hmm. And also, you know what I'm excited about, Earlonne?

Earlonne: Tell me.

Nigel: We're going to be going into some new prisons. Prisons we've never been in before.

Earlonne: Maybe you've never been in them.

Nigel: [laughs]

Earlonne: And, listeners, we've got a favor to ask of you. If you like the show, please go leave us a review on Apple Podcasts. It really helps us get the word out.

Nigel: And don't forget to sign up for our newsletter, The Lowdown, where we've got photos and behind-the-scenes stuff from our episodes and news about what the team is up to. Subscribe at earhustlesq.com/newsletter.

Earlonne: Music for this episode came from Derrell Sadiq Davis, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Fernando Arruda, and me, Earlonne Woods.

Nigel: Big thanks also to everyone we talked to on the yard at San Quentin for this episode.

Earlonne: Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a network of independent, creator-owned, listener-supported podcasts.

Nigel: Discover audio with vision at Radiotopia.fm.

Earlonne: I'm Earlonne Woods.

Nigel: I'm Nigel Poor.

In Unison: Thanks for listening.

Earlonne: Okay. Man, they got a squad going. It's a gang meeting. Gang meeting. Watch out.

Speaker: Roll call.

[background chatter]

Nigel: Unbelievable.

End of Episode

[Transcript provided by [SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription](#)]