

**Ear Hustle**  
**Episode 95: Transitional**  
**October 4, 2023**

**Kim:** *Hi, I'm Kim Kardashian, and the following episode of Ear Hustle contains language and content that might not be suitable for all listeners. Discretion is advised.*

**NY:** *We're at the Dream Center on International Boulevard. Going in the back gate. That's the BART going by. This office is nicer than my cell.*

**Corey:** *You ain't got a cell no more. You got a room.*

**NY:** *You ever seen a room with a sink in it?*

**Corey:** *Yes.*

**NY:** *And a bunk bed?*

**Corey:** *Yes.*

**NY:** *And another dude with a felony?*

**Corey:** *Yes.*

**NY:** *That sounds like a cell.*

**Corey:** *No, it's a room.*

**Nigel:** *Another dude with a felony? Okay. Want to tell us where we are, New York?*

**New York:** *Nigel, this is my transitional house, and it's the second one I lived in since I got out of prison in February.*

**Earlonne:** *And we should get you to introduce yourself.*

**New York:** *Sure thing. My name is Rahsaan Thomas. Most people call me New York. I started working for the Ear Hustle crew back in 2018 when I was still incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison. And now that I'm out, I'm working with y'all on the outside as one of the show's producers.*

**Nigel:** *So, we're doing something a little different this time. You and E are driving this episode because we're talking about something you both experienced firsthand and that you're going through right now, New York.*

**Earlonne:** *That's right. Transitional housing. New York, why don't you tell them what that is?*

**New York:** *A transitional house is a place where you go to after you get out of prison, and you live there rent free for a little while you look for a job, get back on your feet, and basically start your life post incarceration.*

**Earlonne:** *And you're going there whether you like it or not.*

**New York:** *Exactly. Most people getting out on parole are required to be in some sort of transitional housing typically for the first six months after getting out. You can request where*

you want to go, and if there's space, you may make it. But at the end of the day, your parole officer tells you where you're going, and that's where you go.

**Earlonne:** Transitional housing is a big deal for most people getting out of prison, but we really haven't talked about it on this show before.

**New York:** Som let's get to it. I'm Rahsaan "New York" Thomas.

**Nigel:** I'm Nigel Poor.

**Earlonne:** And I'm Earlonne Woods. And this is Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia.

**Nigel:** Earlonne, let's talk about transitional housing because there's a variety of them. What was yours like?

**Earlonne:** Mine? Well, on a scale of bad to good, mine was great.

**Nigel:** I remember when I saw your transitional house, I was like, "This is nicer than my house."

**Earlonne:** Yeah, we literally had a whole house, and it was only like two of us or three of us.

**Nigel:** Well, it wasn't even that you had your own house. You had great furniture. You definitely had big bathrooms. I mean, you had your own bathroom. I think you got a car. And listeners might not know this, but there is a huge range of transitional housing. They're not all created equal. And what you got, Earlonne, was rare. I mean, I would call it a boutique transitional house situation. Fair?

**Earlonne:** [laughs] Very fair. I mean, I had a lot of people that was pulling for me when I got out of prison. So, in that respect, I kind of lucked up.

**Nigel:** And what about you, New York?

**New York:** I started out so lucky at first. I mean, I didn't have a car, but I was in a nice house, and I had my own room, Nigel, for the first time in decades. And then one day, I got a call from my parole agent, and he said, "Report to a new spot."

*Is this a shortcut to the day room?*

**Woman:** *Uh-uh. It used to be, not anymore.*

[background chatter]

**Nigel:** I've definitely been to this place that's called the Dream Center. I picked people up there to go out to dinner and stuff. But can you remind us what it's like?

**New York:** *I didn't even know we had a vending machine.*

It's in a pretty rundown part of Oakland. It's a three-story building with gates and cameras. Inside there's a chow hall and a day room where people hang out and watch this big TV. And there's a lot of rules. There's a 09:00 PM curfew. And every time you leave or come back, you have to be buzzed in.

*There's a locked door on the second floor. You go through the first locked door, you can let yourself out, but you got to be buzzed in. [buzzer sound] There's cameras everywhere. They see you, so they know.*

**New York:** And so, there's some little stuff that bugs me too. So, I brought one of those things up with Corey. He's a supervisor at the Dream Center.

*One of my issues with the Dream Center, even though the staff is bomb but the big design flaw I have with the Dream Center is there's no sink in the bathroom. So, everybody, you use the bathroom, you have no choice but touch a bunch of stuff to get back to your room.*

**Corey:** *True. We took that complaint into consideration. You're right. It is a health and safety code. And with COVID going on, you want to minimize as many contaminants, germs as you possibly can. What we did do is put hand sanitizers in the restroom.*

**New York:** *Where are they? I haven't seen them.*

**Corey:** *So, once they get empty, we may not replace them in time, but they are in the restrooms. If you go up there right now, there should be some in all four restrooms.*

**New York:** *I wasn't so sure about that, so you know I wanted to go fact check. So, my producer, Amy, and I went to go take a look. Can she see my room right quick? Want to get some ambi around the joint?*

**Corey:** *I don't know. Women are not allowed. [crosstalk]*

**New York:** *All right, come on. You can come see it and leave. You can't stay.*

Corey was definitely a little nervous about letting me and Amy go upstairs because there's a strict rule at the Dream Center. You can't bring women inside. But eventually, he gave in and went up to take a look.

*Going up the stairs to the Dream Center, you got to be in great shape. Ain't no elevators. Knock, knock, anybody here? All right, this is what I call the cell. That's my bunkbed right here. There's no top bunk. Just because there's no mattress here, don't mean it won't put one day and move somebody in on me. This is my snoring cellie lives.*

**Earlone:** So, this is a room for four people.

**New York:** Well, up to three, actually. There's a set of bunkbeds and a single. The room is maybe like 12 x 12ft. There's two dressers, and it's like this bar going across you can hang your clothes on because it's like there's no closet.

**Man:** *There's a big ass spider in there too.*

**New York:** *Oh, and there's a big ass spider in there somewhere.*

It's pretty tight quarters.

*One last thing I want to show real quick.*

**New York:** While we were up there, I needed to set the record straight about those alleged hand sanitizers in the bathrooms.

*Ain't no hand sanitizer.*

**NY:** *Ain't no hand sanitizer.*

**Corey:** *Okay. Let's go out to that.*

**New York:** For full disclosure, there was hand sanitizer on the second floor, but to this day, I have never seen any on the third floor while I live. Maybe somebody's taking them.

**Corey:** *Two different demographics. It's okay to come and you have to go back there.*

**New York:** All right. Thank you.

This guy, Corey, the manager who was showing us around, I was shocked that he put up with that janky bathroom setup because Corey's meticulously clean. I know that because we go way back.

**Corey:** *Rahsaan and I, we were roommates at San Quentin State Prison.*

**New York:** *That wasn't no room, bro, that was a motherfucking cell.*

**Corey:** *No. We were cellies at San Quentin State Prison. One of the best cellies I had.*

**New York:** *This is the cleanest cellie I've had.*

*[laughter]*

**Corey:** *That was my only qualm with you. He was just sloppy. [laughs]*

**New York:** Corey used to polish the toilet seat.

**Earlonne:** Bruh, ain't nothing wrong with that, bruh. I did the same thing.

**New York:** Bro, it's a toilet seat, not a Mercedes.

*Different levels of cleanliness. He thought the toilet was a chrome rim.*

*[laughter]*

When Corey was released from San Quentin, he got sent to another transitional house that sounds way worse than the one I'm in.

**Corey:** *I was housed in a room with 18 people. So, there were just some very inhumane conditions, like feces in the toilet, blood in the sinks, urine in the showers. A lot of guys here complain about the conditions. And my first response is, "Hey, you're eating and living here free." And I reflect back on when people used to tell me that. So, I kind of have to check myself sometimes and humble myself, because you know what? I used to be the one complaining. Now, I'm the one who get the complaint, so I have to be empathetic. Yes, I do. [chuckles]*

**New York:** Okay. Honestly, I know some of the stuff I'm complaining about might sound nitpicky, but I am happy to be living rent free. I know that's a big deal. I guess my real issue is that I already had a job coming home. I already had an apartment waiting. I felt like I was ready to be free, ready to fly. But instead, I have to live in this transitional housing with a bunch of strict rules that kind of hold me back.

**Earlonne:** You and I, we were really ready to get out and hit the ground running. I mean, we spent a lot of time in prison getting ourselves ready for that. But for a lot of other formerly incarcerated guys, they ain't ready. So, the transitional house is kind of like one size fits all.

**Corey:** *Unfortunately, it's an umbrella, and everybody have to fall under that umbrella. We can't make rules and have things mandated for this population and not mandated for their population because everybody is housed here, and we try to keep everything in unison.*

**New York:** There's a lot of stuff like that. I mean, some people have to do drug and alcohol counseling at their transitional home, even if they have no history of addiction.

**Earlonne:** Because if they're there, they got to do the classes. And then, there's the saving account.

**New York:** Right. Everyone at the transitional home has to put money into a savings account with no interest that the transitional house controls.

**Earlonne:** So, every time you get paid, they take a portion out of your check.

**New York:** And then, they give it back to you when it's time to leave the transitional home so when you get out the program, you have some money saved up.

**Earlonne:** And this too is not optional, even if you already have a bank account you'd rather use instead.

**Corey:** *A lot of guys come here, they don't know how to budget, they don't know how to save money, and they graduate from the program penniless. They got the most glamorous wardrobe you can think of. No vehicle and no place to live. You guys know how to save your money because you prepared for that when you was incarcerated, to learn how to budget, finance, so on and so forth. These guys, literally, 9 times out of 10, they have no structure, they have no discipline, they have no way of putting their life in order. So, the reason we ask people for trust withdrawals is basically for that demographic so when they complete the program, they're not going out in society penniless. They have money saved so they can have a place to move into with first and last month's rent. So, I get it. Don't no one want to give their money to someone who they don't want to give it to. We do it for the betterment of the resident.*

**McCree:** *What do you do these interviews for?*

**New York:** *You never listen to Ear Hustle?*

**McCree:** *I never listen to who?*

**New York:** *Ear Hustle, the podcast? You don't even know about it. This is bad.*

**McCree:** *I don't ever listen to radio.*

**New York:** This woman, McCree, she also works at the Dream Center. She's the one who's always at the desk when I check in at night.

*Can you describe what the front desk is like?*

**McCree:** *That front desk up there reminds me of the cop shop in the women's prison. They have a desk that's just like that. You have to stand in a line to get in, and I just hate that. I hate that desk. No, I hate that.*

**New York:** McCree has to deal with everyone, including guys who just got out and might not be 100% ready.

**McCree:** *[laughs] Some of them make it hard, but I guess maybe it's probably where they came from. You never know. Some of them work. Some of them just stay around in here, don't do nothing.*

**New York:** Like Corey, McCree also spent a long time in prison, and that's true with most of the staff at the dream center. They've been there. They know what we're dealing with. In McCree's case, she spent almost 30 years behind bars. When she got out, she didn't know where to start.

**McCree:** *I missed the prison. I'm going to be truthful. A lot of people say that's crazy, but it wasn't for me, because that's all I'd known. My family was the prison, the ladies in the prison. I would call my counselor every day, and then I would ask, "Well, how's this person doing?" Or, "How's that person doing?" My counselor used to say, "Cree, you got to start living out there." [sobbing] So, I had to adjust to something that I knew nothing about. I'm sorry, but that part is very emotional for me. I kind of dug into myself because I needed to know who I was, and that kept me going. It was all new to me. Everything had changed. I didn't know how to use a phone, none of that. Everything was new to me. It was very, very lonely.*

**New York:** What saved McCree was this one lady she met, a house manager at the transitional home.

**McCree:** *We called her Mama Sally. Mama Sally was 72, Caucasian lady, like one of them grandmas, she really was. But Mama Sally was down, I guess, from all the being around, everybody being in and out of prison, and she knew all the tricks in the trade. You couldn't run nothing past her. That's one thing. Everything that happened, we went to Mama Sally. We didn't care what it was. Any of our issues, I know we poured in issues over this lady.*

*I remember when my mother had passed and she came to me, and it was 02:30 in the morning on July the 4th, 2005, and she said, "Cree," I was sleeping. That's kind of strange. "Mama Sally, what are you doing?" "I need for you to come to office so I could talk to you." She takes me in there. She tells my mother had passed. She gave me every reassurance. She was like my comforter. She was my pillow. And she would not let me go back to my room. She made me stay in there in her room until the following morning until the other ladies from the program and the counselor got there, she would not leave me alone. She was like my grandma. She was like my grandma. I love Mama Sally. Yeah.*

*[pensive music]*

**Man:** *Gentlemen, dayroom is now closed.*

**New York:** We're going to take a short break.

**Earlone:** When we come back, we're tapping in with our friend, Zo.

**New York:** Your old barber.

**Earlone:** Yep. He just got out and he's posted up at a transitional house in San Francisco. So let's go see how he's holding up.

**New York:** We'll be right back.

[upbeat music]

**Agent Yee:** *Morning, everybody. I'm Agent Yee. I'm a parole agent in San Francisco. Everybody has been given a handout for parole conditions.*

**Nigel:** So, I know for some guys who are about to get released from prison, there's anxiety and questions about where they're going to end up.

**Earlone:** Right. So, at San Quentin, one of the things that they do here is they have these presentations where they bring parole officers in and they come in, they just answer all the guys' questions about what the transitional housing process looked like.

**Nigel:** Mm. Like an orientation.

**Earlone:** Pretty much.

**Man:** *I don't have family. The house got foreclosed. When I get out, if I just have a place to stay, I can make it from there and get a job. But first you got to have a roof over your head and to be out there in the cold, be out there homeless, then that eventually turns to person getting stressed out, turning to drugs and this and that and the other, whole bunch of stuff come behind it. But when a person can have a place to stay, in my era, that would help me.*

**Nigel:** Earlone, this guy, we haven't really heard this in the episode, but this guy sounds like a bunch of people I've talked to who are thinking about what it's going to be like when they get out of prison.

**Earlone:** Definitely. I mean, if you spend a few decades in prison, sometime there's nothing to come out to. No job, no saving, no house, no furniture, no clothes. It's just a lot of guys get out and they're their own.

**Nigel:** Yeah. And they really need help.

**Earlone:** *You hear this dude? What's happening with it, man?*

**New York:** *Welcome home, bro.*

**Zo:** *How you guys doing?*

**Earlone:** *We're chilling, man. Let me see this.*

**New York:** *I texted you like an hour ago to let you know we coming. "I said text back to confirm." Did you get the text, bro?*

**Zo:** *I probably did. I'm a dummy when it comes to these phones, man, because I didn't mess with them in prison or nothing. Ooh, I lost it. Or I'm trying to do this while I'm talking to my mother or my father, and I hang up on them. I got to learn how to really, really work that phone, that email and texting and all.*

**New York:** This is Lorenzo. He just got out of San Quentin about three months ago.

**Earlone:** This guy was my old barber when I was inside. I used to set my appointments up with him, go to the yard or in the building and get trimmed up.

**New York:** Yeah, that's his trade, and it's what he really wants to be doing on the outside too. But first, he's got to go back to school to get his license. So, while he's getting all that started, he's living in a transitional home.

**Zo:** *This is what they call a reentry home.*

**Earlone:** I know this place. It's called the Geo-Reentry Service. It's really strict. Every time he comes back in, they search his bags, pat him down, run him through the metal detector. I mean, Lorenzo can't even leave the building unless he fills out a form that shows he's looking for a job.

**New York:** And this Geo place, it's in a rough part of town. It's like in the Bowery or Skid Row area of San Francisco.

*What is it like living in this environment? How does that help you or not help you?*

**Zo:** *It makes me want to hurry up and get a job and start working and saving money, because I don't want to wind up like this out here.*

*You want to work. You see everybody working, you see the cars, you see the clothes, you see guys at functions, and you're like, "Man, I want to get like Earlone." I want things. But it's going to take time. The biggest problem is for a lot of us, we want to rush everything. When you rush, you run smack into that brick wall. So, I've learned, just take my time, smell the flowers, look at the ocean. [sniffs]*

**New York:** *Hey, you the most common, rational, unemployed motherfucker I've ever met in my life.*

*[laughter]*

**Nigel:** I can totally get wanting to rush, and I've seen a lot of guys who are like that, like they're just making up for lost time, but it seems like it can actually take a while to get on your feet. And I feel like that's the whole point of transitional housing. It's supposed to be that buffer.

**Earlone:** Yeah. I mean, and for Zo, it turned out to be this other thing too. It's a place where he's around a bunch of cats that pretty much are in the same boat, and these are the ones that's helping them out.

**Zo:** *I have been sitting on my bunk, and guys have just-- my phone rings, "What's up? You ain't going to say nothing?" I'm like, "Who is this?" "Man, this is Joe." "Joe?" "Little Joe used to play basketball with you." "Oh. What's up, Joe?" Joe came and got me. I don't know who told him, but he said, "Come on, we're going over here to buy you a jacket. You need a jacket." And I'm still, to this day, trying to figure out, how did he know?*

**New York:** Hey, E, you remember Big Sky?

**Earlone:** Yeah, the tall dude who looked like a tree.

**New York:** That's him. He's been helping big Zoe out too.

**Zo:** *Big Sky, he pulled up, and we've always been fanatics about tennis shoes. He comes with a pair of Jordans. Nobody else has, and everybody in the building is like, "Man, where you get those from?" And my chest is out to here, "My friend gave these to me." People are giving me money, people are buying me clothes, taking me to eat, taking me to see the*

sights. Wow. These are the same guys I was with in prison. They didn't forget. It feels good to not be forgotten.

**New York:** How long you been out?

**Ishme:** I've been out since April, so actually it's three months now, actually.

**New York:** Like Lorenzo, Isme is fresh out of prison. She spent 10 years inside, and since she's gotten out, she's been volunteering at this nonprofit in Oakland, which is like an urban farming type place near the freeway.

**Ishme:** I've been volunteering here to actually see if I could get an opportunity to work here. It's pretty challenging to find employment, but I've been looking around, and I've been putting applications in. What else do you want to know? [chuckles]

**Earlonne:** Isme is making no money at all. She's just trying to get her life back on track. If it wasn't for free transitional housing, she'd be in trouble.

**Ishme:** I have no family members, nobody here because I transferred from Long Beach to over here. So, since I've been here, I've been just waiting. And sometimes the wait is kind of, like overwhelming too, because it's like I want to start working, I want to start having income, and I don't want to depend on nobody. I want to depend on myself. I have to use those coping skills of, "Okay, calm down, be positive. Everything's going to be just fine." But sometimes even if you do the self-talk, sometimes ain't working.

**New York:** One thing making it hard for Isme to get started is that she's gotten bounced around in different parts of the state. Initially, she got told she would be paroled to Alameda County near San Francisco. But there was a clerical error and she got sent to Southern California instead.

**Ishme:** I was approved to be in Alameda County. They sent me to Alameda Street, LA. Never been to LA in my life ever. So it was all bad. [chuckles]

**Earlonne:** It took like two months. But Isme's parole officer corrected the error and got her into a transitional house in Alameda County. And it sounds like it's a nice one.

**Ishme:** It's calm. It's different. They're not on you. They let you be. They actually trust you to do the right thing and continue doing the right thing. So they will help you if you need any counseling, therapy, just let them know. Any questions you got, you could always talk to the staff. It really doesn't matter. And they don't charge you for no rent, no nothing. So you could actually get back on your feet. So, that's a blessing.

**Earlonne:** Isme is dealing with something pretty different than the other people we spoke to. For her, it's not just getting a job or looking for a place to live. It's dealing with the aftermath of having left your children when you got sent to prison.

**New York:** Isme had two kids when she was arrested. Her son was four years old, and he got placed with a family that said they wanted to adopt him, but they wanted a closed adoption, which meant she have to cut off contact with him entirely.

**Ishme:** My attorney said, "If you don't sign today, they're not going to adopt him, and he's going to be in the system, like up and down in different homes. Do you want that for your son?" So, I said, "Okay." I have to not be selfish. I'm fighting a life sentence, and if I'm going to do something good in this life, is give him up. [sobbing] Had to let him go.

**New York:** Isme also had a daughter who was just a baby. Isme's daughter was taken in by another family too, and they raised her without telling her she's adopted. So, to this day, Isme's daughter doesn't know that Isme exists.

**Ishme:** *I'm not going to be the one to destroy my daughter's life if she doesn't know who I am, I'm not going to be selfish and be like, "Guess what? I'm your mother." I'm not doing that to my little one because I love her. I'm not doing that. If the time comes that she finds out the truth or something, okay, I will be there and I will face it. However, when it comes to my son, most definitely, I'm looking for my son. I don't care. I don't care if I got to go around the world. I'm looking for my son because he knows who I am. He was four years old when I left, and I will not give up, even if he's married or with another girl. I'm like, "I'm sorry, boo, you got to go, because this is my baby." I lost him for so many years. Just let me be with my baby. And I think I'll cry my eyes out and kiss him so much and just stare at him. Honestly.*

**New York:** *Yeah. What is it like trying to transition back to society and get your life together, and you carrying this worry about your kids and just all this pain?*

**Ishme:** *My biggest challenge is knowing that I'm physically free and that I can look for my babies, and I can't. I cannot hold them and I can't be around them. I have to carry that because I cough that pain too. Nothing in this world could really hurt me or break me more than that.*

**Earlonne:** So, basically, she's got a deadline. When Isme's son turns 18, legally she can go find him. So, she's got four years to get back on her feet.

**Ishme:** *I always wanted to be in the medical field. I always wanted to be a nurse. I want to take something like that to my son, and my daughter one day where, "Yeah, my mother went through this. She put us through this." And look, everything that happened, they could hate me, fine, but I want them to see too. Life was not easy for me but look how far I got. So they're my motivation, and they're going to continue being my motivation. And that's why even though I'm out here and I don't know nobody, and I'm having a hard time with reentry, I'm breathing, and I'm living for them, and I will make it.*

**McCree:** *Where are you coming from?*

**Rubio:** *I was coming from the BART.*

**McCree:** *What you just got off work or what?*

**Rubio:** *No, I was just doing a side job.*

**McCree:** *All right. So, you ready to go up?*

**Rubio:** *Yes.*

**McCree:** *Okay. Go in there [gate creak] [gate close]*

*It's 9:03. Remember what I told you about curfew?*

**Man:** *Yeah, but a [mumbles]*

**McCree:** *It don't matter though. Curfew's at 9 o'clock. That's why you should leave at-- [crosstalk]*

**New York:** This was a few weeks ago. It was at night right before curfew was up, and McCree was standing in front of the Dream Center. People were checking in, letting her know what was going on in their lives. One guy offered to bring a barbecue later, she was just shooting the shit with the residents.

**McCree:** *I'm proud of y'all. Y'all just getting up out here, getting your own houses.*

**Man:** *One step closer to the front door.*

**McCree:** *Okay. But you making it though. And as long as you keep your nose clean, everything, you fine. Because this thing they call life is not easy. The struggle is real. For real. It really is.*

**New York:** Yo, this is what I see McCree doing, like, every night. She knows everybody that comes through. She knows their name, whether they're on the right track or whether she needs-- give them some guidance.

**Earlone:** That's what makes the big difference. When you're living in these type of situations, whether the people that work there treat you like an individual or they treat you like something else.

**New York:** And that's what helped McCree, when she first got out. She found Mama Sally, who recognized what she needed and was like a grandma to her. And now that McCree's out and working in transitional house herself, I feel like she turned into her own type of Mama Sally.

**McCree:** *Yeah, that's what they call me, Mama Cree. [laughs] All of them. "Ma, Mama Cree." [laughs] "It's like, "Whoa, okay." When I pray in the morning, when I get up, I pray that Mama Sally is up there shaking it up like she shook it down here and then saying to her, "Mama Sally, I'm doing what you told me to do. I learned from you, so I'm going to carry this torch that you have." So, that's what I try to do, because she really made me the woman that I am today.*

**Earlone:** *You getting your barbering in on, huh?*

**Zo:** *Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.*

**Earlone:** *Working with combs and razors?*

**Zo:** *I have everything.*

**Earlone:** *[laughs]*

**Zo:** *I got a couple pairs of scissors. I've got clippers, I got capes, I got everything. I'm fully functional.*

**Earlone:** This is Zo. He's the cat we heard from earlier who spent 27 years in prison and is now living in a transitional house in San Francisco.

**New York:** We wanted to check back in on Zo, to see what's up with him and see if he got his barber career back on track.

**Zo:** *I've been away for so long that my license for cosmetology had expired, so I have to retake the course again. Right now, I'm a candidate for Paul Mitchell in San Francisco.*

**Earlonne:** In the meantime, while he waits for that course to start up, Zo got a job and is saving money.

**New York:** And the transitional home where he's been living, Geo Reentry Services, the one with all the crazy rules about when you can come and go, they kind of lighten up on them.

**Zo:** *Basically, the staff has gotten to know me, and I've gotten to know the staff, and the staff kind of sees me and knows me that, "Okay, this guy, he's not a knucklehead. He's not going to be a problem for us." They still search me, but it's pat down and going about your business. It's basically me getting used to them and them getting used to me. "This man, he's not going to be a threat." I'm not going to be a problem. I'm here to reenter into society the smoothest and most easiest way that I can for myself. A lot of people say, "Oh, man, Geo is this and then the other." Yes, it is. It's strict. It's real strict. And they on you. But now that I understand because I have a job, I have a lot of leniency.*

**Earlonne:** *I've always looked at some of these transitional housing as more predatory, more-- it's almost still like prison. Like, you're not out, like you don't have your freedom.*

**Zo:** *Right. No, you do. There's a reason why everything is done the way it's done. There are a lot of guys that were at San Quentin that are here now, and the first thing that they asked me was, "Is this place really messed up?" And I told them, "At first, yes. But trust me, deal with it. You're out. Just hang in there. Be patient, because in the end, you're going to win." And all of them right now have jobs. Every last one of them is making over \$22 to \$25 an hour. I have dental. I have medical full benefits. This is my steppingstone, me taking care of myself.*

**New York:** According to his parole, Zo can leave his transitional housing in a month, go live wherever he wants. But he also has the option to stay longer.

**Earlonne:** *Do you think you're going to stay in there for the next six months, or are you going?*

**Zo:** *Yeah. Yes, I am. I'm not going to lie to you. I am because for the simple fact that I have a lot of people on my side that are willing to go the distance for me. It would be in my best interest for me to stay here another six months and save as much money as I can to get my own home, my own place to live. So, everything that I'm doing right now, there's a reason behind it. It's time for me to take care of my family. My siblings, my sisters, they passed away. My mom and dad are getting up in age. My dad needs his son at home. I need to be there to support him and to help him. My mother is getting up in age. I need to have her back and support her and look out for her.*

*This isn't just about me anymore. This is about us as a family. I owe that to them. What I have left in my family, I plan on making sure that we are tight and keeping us that way. Nothing else to me matters right now.*

**Miguel:** My name is Miguel C. Fuentes, and I'm about to go meet with Warden Oak Smith about the basketball game I'm organizing between the COs and the incarcerated residents of San Quentin coming up in October.

Ear Hustle is produced by Nigel Poor, Earlonne Woods, Amy Standen, Bruce Wallace and Rahsaan "New York" Thomas. Shabnam Sigman is the managing producer. The producing team inside San Quentin includes Steve Brooks, Derrell Sadiq Davis, Tony de Trinidad and Tam Ngyuen. The inside managing producer is Tony Tafoya. Earlonne Woods sound designs and engineers the show with help from Fernando Aruda, Rhashiyd Zinnamon and Derrell Sadiq Davis. Thanks to Acting Warden Smith at San Quentin, Acting Warden Hill and

Lt. Newborg at the California Institution for Women for their support of the show. Thanks also to this woman here.

**Lt. Guim'Mara:** I am Lt. Guim'Mara Berry, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center, and I approve this episode.

**Miguel:** 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 Ear Hustle's website, [earhustlesq.com](http://earhustlesq.com). You can also find out more about the show on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @[earhustlesq](https://www.instagram.com/earhustlesq).

**Earlonne:** And please don't forget to sign up for our newsletter, The Lowdown. Subscribe at [earhustlesq.com/newsletter](http://earhustlesq.com/newsletter).

**Nigel:** Special thanks to Pastor LJ Jennings and the staff of the Dream Center, and to the folks at Planting Justice for letting the team stop by.

**Earlonne:** Music for this episode came from Antwan Williams, Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Dwight Krizman, and Joshua Burton.

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

**Earlonne:** Discover audio with vision at [Radiotopia.fm](http://Radiotopia.fm). I'm Earlonne Woods.

**Nigel:** I'm Nigel Poor.

**In Unison:** Thanks for listening.

[snoring]

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**End of Episode**