



Episode 37: Myths & Monikers Air Date: March 4, 2020

Earlonne Woods: [00:00:00] I'm Walter Woods. The following episode of ear hustle contains language and violence scenes that may not be appropriate for all listeners. Discretion is advised. [Ear Hustle Theme song begins]

Nigel Poor: [00:00:12] Walter Woods? [Both laugh] Okay, *Earlonne*.

Earlonne: [00:00:16] I haven't used that name since elementary. [Nigel laughs] It was like too old for me.

Nigel: [00:00:20] Anyway, this is a first! You have never done a listener alert before.

Earlonne: [00:00:22] Nope, because usually these [Expletive] alerts are made for me. But since I'm not in this episode, they made for you, Nigel. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: [00:00:32] I guess we both swear too much. In any case, we want to welcome listeners back. This is the first episode of Season Five of Ear Hustle.

Earlonne: [00:00:39] Season Five. [Nigel Affirms] This is my second season as your outside cohost. Like last season, I'm gonna continue to do stories about life post-incarceration. [Nigel affirms] So, I'm gonna send you back in there with, you know who.

Nigel: [00:00:52] Oh, you mean Rahsaan "New York" Thomas?

Earlonne: [00:00:54] Yeah. The light-skinned dude. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: [00:00:56] And on this episode, we're going inside. So I gotta leave you here, Earlonne.

Earlonne: [00:01:00] Hey, I am cool with that. [Laughs] I'm not, I'm not, I'm not arguing, Nige. I'm not tryna to go back in there right now. [Both laugh] But I'll be back before you know it, 'skillet.'

Nigel: [00:01:09] Wait a minute, who are you calling 'skillet'?

Earlonne: [00:01:11] I call everybody 'skillet.

[Abstract industrial sounds transition to inside San Quentin prison] [Montage of various speakers sharing their nicknames in succession: Dumb Dave, Big Mike, Kamikaze, Tucker the Fucker, Lowkey, 12 Gauge, G-Rock, Bonnaroo, Kill Will, T-bone, Alley Cat, Squeak Box]

Nigel: [00:01:31] What do you think of your moniker New York?

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: [00:01:32] I love my moniker.

Nigel: [00:01:34] Oh yeah?

New York: [00:01:34] I love that I'm from New York 'cause there's like a cool ring to it.

Nigel: [00:01:37] Mmhmm.

New York: [00:01:37] Cause if I—

Nigel: [00:01:38] So there's pride there?

New York: [00:01:38] There's definitely pride there. But if I was like from like Arizona, [Nigel laughs] I'm not saying it wouldn't be pride there. I'm just saying I don't want to be known as Arizona. [Laughs]

Nigel: [00:01:46] Wait, why are you even known as New York anyway?

New York: [00:01:48] In California, they tend to name you by a— or give you this nickname by where you're from.

Nigel: [00:01:53] Well, I have to say it's not the most creative way to come up with a nickname.

New York: [00:01:56] Well, you know, naming you by where you're from is not that creative, but there are a lot of other kinds of names in here.

[Montage of people sharing nicknames: "We got Rat, Country, Dog Patch, Big Dog, Little Dog, Mad Dog, Dirty Dog, Dirty Red, Scalers Red, Scalers Black, Pookie, Beat Him Up, Hot Sauce, Third Rai , Whitey, Trouble, Trigger, Negro, Pelon, Dopey, Joker, Clown, Rambo"]

Nigel: [00:02:19] Usually when I meet guys, they introduce themselves by their monikers and I don't even know their birth names for quite a long time. So there was like Hitman, Razor, Mittens, Slash, Big Az, and I have to say, I didn't actually meet this person. I only heard about Bootylock.

New York: [00:02:35] [Laughs] I don't know what a bootylock is. I'm not going there. [Nigel laughs] But I know my boy Wall Street, [Nigel affirms] Alias, K-Born, Scarface, and Blackened Knees, and Juvenile Hall, and Taco...

Nigel: [00:02:45] Oh my god, [New York laughs] the list goes on and on!

New York: [00:02:47] Some of these names are crazy. [Minimalist electronic tones begin] Some of them are funny.

Nigel: [00:02:50] And some of them, you have to admit, are boastful.

New York: [00:02:52] And they're all part of prison lore.

Nigel: [00:02:54] Yup, they all have interesting backstories, and that's what we're talking about today, prison lore: myths and monikers.

New York: [00:03:00] The names we call ourselves and the crazy stories we tell ourselves about life in prison. [Minimalist tones continue with the addition of bass] I am Rahsaan "New York" Thomas.

Nigel: [00:03:08] I am Nigel "No Moniker" Poor, and this is San Quentin's Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia. [Electronic beat continues and then fades out into ambient sounds of chattering voices]

Jason Griffin: [00:03:30] So it's my, it's my first time in prison, California. Um, I walk into my cell and reception and, uh, my cell mates about six foot three, 240 pounds, he's got a pair of SS bolts on his cheek. He's got a swastika on his throat in the front, the middle [Nigel says in the background, "Oh painful" while Jason laughs] On the back of his head, he had a Hitler and Mussolini and Ava Patron, and he immediately asked for my paperwork. There was no small talk. It was, "what's up? You got your paperwork?"

Nigel: [00:04:05] The very first thing.

Jason: [00:04:06] Absolutely. Yeah, sure.

Nigel: [00:04:09] The paperwork said his name, Jason Griffin and his crime. But New York, will you explain why Jason had to present his papers to his cellie?

New York: [00:04:16] Yeah. So in prison, if you're not there for like, what's called, acceptable crime. [Nigel affirms] If you're there for child molestation or rape, it's an issue. You have to show your paperwork [Nigel affirms] to prove that you're in for a crime that is acceptable.

Nigel: [00:04:29] So literally guys have paperwork that says what their crime is.

New York: [00:04:32] Literally. Yes.

Nigel: [00:04:33] Okay.

Jason: [00:04:34] I've got ten felonies, including a high-speed chase, some commercial burglaries, and some false personations, some stolen cars. And then I have a prior that he also saw for bank robbery. So he was like, "okay, solid, you can stay."

Nigel: [00:04:50] Jason passed, he passed the test.

New York: [00:04:52] He passed *that* test.

Jason: [00:04:54] So he's like, "hey, what's up man? I'm Kill Switch." And I was like, okay, here we go. And uh, I said, "well, I'm Jason." And he's like, "Oh, okay, what should I call you?" I was like, "uh, Jason?" [Simple percussive beat begins] "Nah, we gotta figure out—you don't have a handle?" "No, not really, I don't have a handle" and he was like, "well, we need to get you a handle. We're going to give you a handle before morning. You're going to have a handle." And I was like, "okay, that's cool."

Nigel: [00:05:26] [Synth introduced to percussive beat] So why do you have to have a handle, New York?

New York: [00:05:29] You gotta create an image, Nigel. [Nigel affirms] You gotta be bigger and tougher than you really are.

Nigel: [00:05:33] Alright

New York: [00:05:34] Jason might be cool for school

Nigel: [00:05:35] Definitely

New York: [00:05:36] [Nigel laughs] But it's not going to cut it in a prison.

Nigel: [00:05:38] Especially if your cellie is "Kill Switch"? [Beat fades out]

Jason: [00:05:43] He starts saying, "well, what are you thinking?" "I don't know. You know, I never really thought about it." Um, he's like, "well, what do you like? What's your thing out there?" And I said, "well, I love music." You know, I absolutely love music. That's like my passion. He's like, "ah, yeah, good." He's like, "well, you like metal?" And I was like, "not particularly." I was like, you know, "it's all right. And I love all sorts of music, but really that's not my, my go-to genre." And he's like, "well, ah, what kind of music you grew up on?" And I said, "well, man, I grew up on Motown and Funk." And he was like, [Laughs] he was like, "I'm gonna forget you said that." So we just moved along. He's like, "well, what else are you into?" And I was like, "well, I like boats." And he's like, "well, how about cars?" "Yeah. I mean, I like cars in that like they get me from place to place and you know, I like to have a nice one, but I'm not like super mechanically inclined or anything." He was like, "well, we'll just think on it."

Nigel: [00:06:42] So Jason thought on it and he came up with something car-related.

Jason: [00:06:46] So I kind of threw out there: "Manifold". How about "Manifold"? I got an idea and I'm kind of half joking, you know, and I'm kinda like snickering to myself and he's like, "that's it. That's solid." [Indoor ambient noise, voices chattering] The next morning we're at breakfast, you know, and, and people are introducing themselves and everybody's got a moniker, you know. It was like "Caveman" and "Psycho" and, and I'm like, "hey, I'm Ja—" And I go to like, say Jason, he kind of shoots me a look, you know, like shoots me a unit. And so I was like uh "Manifold". And the guy who I was talking to like mid-bite looks up and he's like, "that's bad ass." [Strong beat comes in]

Nigel: [00:07:35] I kinda think it's bad ass too. [Nigel and New York laugh] But, Manifold didn't stay Manifold for long. When he got out of reception and went to his first prison, believe it or not, he went back to Jason. [Beat ends]

Nigel: [00:07:49] So what do you think, why do you think in prison people want to have monikers?

Jason: [00:07:55] For the most part, people in prison are hiding behind a mask. And I think that that mask needs a moniker.

New York: [00:08:07] You know, Nige. I don't totally agree with Jason.

Nigel: [00:08:10] Why not?

New York: [00:08:10] It's not always about hiding behind a mask. Sometimes a moniker can actually tell the world who you are.

Nigel: [00:08:16] Alright.

New York: [00:08:16] And if I had been Jason's cellie, I'd have been calling him "Jukebox".

Nigel: [00:08:20] Oh, I definitely like that.

Jason: [00:08:23] [Singing Al Green's *Let's Stay Together*]

New York: [00:08:31] The guy can sing Motown, Country, Blues, Hippity-hop.

Nigel: [00:08:37] Right. You can just ask him to sing stuff and he does. And we're gonna hear more from Jason "Jukebox" later.

Jason: [00:08:44] [Singing *Let's Stay Together* continues then fades out into an abstract sound]

New York: [00:08:54] So when I heard that you're a kidnapper [Shorty affirms] Um, I think you should be a little bigger. Can you describe yourself?

Lamavis Cho "Shorty": [00:09:00] Um, well then I was about 115, 125 pounds max. And I was about, well, I still am five, three and a half. Maybe.

Nigel: [00:09:10] This is Shorty. It was clear how he got his name.

Shorty: [00:09:13] Well, anybody who is under five, four– five, five-ish, we're all "Shorty".

Nigel: [00:09:19] And how do you feel about that?

Shorty: [00:09:21] I'm comfortable with that. Yeah. I'm comfortable with that. [Laughs] I might even like it. In some aspects, it kind of helps me because when you hear about the stuff that I've done in prison over the years, you would think that I'm like six, two– six, three like, "Oh, no, he didn't do that." And then when they meet me, they're like, "that's him?" [Laughs] Yeah. So I mean, you know, uh, yeah.

Nigel: [00:09:51] Shorty's a tough guy. I think he's even intimidating

New York: [00:09:54] Definitely for guy his size. He says that in prison, there are big dudes and little guys, and he says it's a lot like the movie *Jurassic Park*.

Shorty: [00:10:03] When um, little bitty raptors saw the dude and one of them came up to him and he was like, "shoo, get away." That's true. The big dude could do that. Then the

next one comes and the next one comes. Oh damn, you got a problem. Shit, shit. You better run. [Laughs] If you don't run, I promise you, you could be the biggest, baddest dude on the planet. You could be Mike Tyson and Bruce Lee mixed. But when them little bitty raptors get on you, I promise you, you will not get away. Oh no, no, no, no. You're gonna accept everything they have to give you. And I promise, you will be the one that's hurt.

Jason: [00:10:43] [Singing Nirvana's *Come As You Are*]

Nigel: [00:10:52] This is Jason again.

New York: [00:10:54] You mean Jukebox? [Jason's singing continues, then fades into abstract transition sound] [Simple electronic beat begins]

New York: [00:11:09] Nigel?

Nigel: [00:11:10] Yes?

New York: [00:11:10] Do you know how a co-producer John "Yahya" Johnson got his moniker?

Nigel: [00:11:14] Believe it or not, I've never asked him.

New York: [00:11:17] Never asked?

Nigel: [00:11:17] I know, it's crazy 'cause you know how curious I am about stuff.

New York: [00:11:20] 'pposed to ask questions.

Nigel: [00:11:21] I know I actually feel bad. Do you know the story behind it?

New York: [00:11:23] Yes, yes, yes. So "Yahya" is Arabic for John.

Nigel: [00:11:28] Oh. [New York affirms] That's great.

New York: [00:11:29] And Yahya recently went out to the yard to record guys telling the stories behind how they got their names. [Beat ends]

John "Yahya" Johnson: [00:11:35] What's your name? Do you go by a moniker? And if you do go by a moniker, how did you get that moniker?

Alvin: [00:11:42] My name is Alvin Williams. They call me "Gator". I got "Gator" on my last life sentence when I was a sparring partner. I was working out with a heavy weight and I was showing him his, his problems and he kept hitting me hard with his jabs. You know, being a lightweight back in those days, it was kind of hard and I got upset at him and because he kept hitting me with his jab and I bit him. And when I bit him— this was in 1970. I bit him and I wouldn't let go.

Yahya: [00:12:12] So when you bit him, did you spin on him like a gator too and rip off the limb?

Alvin: [00:12:16] I was trying to take his chest off. I had bit him right in his chest, you know? And I was trying to bite it, take the skin off of it because he hurt me. You know what I mean? And I was trying to get back at him and 'cause I couldn't whoop him, but I had that grip on

him and uh, I wouldn't let him go. And when they got us apart, when they wiped the blood and stuff away was the shape of a gator. I'm telling you, it was unbelievable. '

Jason: [00:12:37] [Jason singing Bon Jovi's *Wanted Dead or Alive*] [Singing fades out into abstract transition sound]

Speaker 1: [00:12:52] When you go to prison, you better do your homework, you know? Know who is who and what is what.

Nigel: [00:12:58] Alright, New York. [Gentle synth tones begin] This is where moniker meets myth. Where the story behind the name is so strange, it's the stuff of legend. It's time to talk about Purple Passion.

New York: [00:13:08] Purple Passion, Pink Passion, Pink Panther, Mother Dearest, Dead Arm Row. These are names for a guy that according to prison lore, you should stay away from. [Synth tones end] How did they describe this guy?

Alex Ross: [00:13:24] They say he, you know, big dude with some squabbles. And, uh, he's not afraid to hit the yard and he done defeated a few people that came at him.

New York: [00:13:34] That's Alex Ross, and this is Tony Tafoya.

Tony Tafoya: [00:13:38] This person will walk up to you, knock you out, take you into your cell, and when you wake up, there will be a candy bar on your chest or your pillow.

Alex: [00:13:47] So supposedly when he was in Corcoran, the police used to use him for inmates didn't they didn't like, and when they get into it with the inmate, they send him to that cell and he'd do his due.

New York: [00:14:01] Wait a minute. Wait a minute. How do you know about this? First of all.

Alex: [00:14:05] Just hearing, hearing, hearing, there hearing over the years you're hearing about it.

New York: [00:14:10] So where are you in Corcoran?

Alex: [00:14:11] No. I was never there.

New York: [00:14:13] So, how you know this was true?

Alex: [00:14:14] Some credible people told me.

Tony: [00:14:17] Everything in prison was based off of something that happened at one time. Um, so at one time, yeah, I believe that maybe it did happen, but did it happen a lot? I don't know. [Spacey synth tones begin]

New York: [00:14:28] You know I first heard about Purple Passion when I was locked up in New York

Nigel: [00:14:36] Like three thousand miles from here.

New York: [00:14:37] Three thousand miles from here. It's one of the stories you hear all across the country, a prison legend.

Nigel: [00:14:42] Yeah, but what about what Tony just said that everything in prison is based on something that actually happened at one time. So do you think it's possible Purple Passion could be based on a real person? [Synth tones continue with the addition of a percussive beat]

New York: [00:14:52] I don't know. All I know is that Purple Passion keeps popping up in one guy's or another. [Nigel laughs] We talked to someone who says he actually met the man behind the moniker in the myth.

Nigel: [00:15:02] Except his name in this case was Pink Panther. [Synth beat ends]

New York: [00:15:06] Tell me about the Pink Panther.

Rafael Bankston: [00:15:08] I heard a lot of stories about this dude. "Hey man. I'm gonna to sit it with him." "Why?" "Man, he'd be knocking people out and takin' they booty." Straight to the point.

Nigel: [00:15:15] This is Rafael Bankston. He goes by Nephew.

Rafael: [00:15:18] He done did this. He then took that from him and left a Tootsie Roll on his pillow.

New York: [00:15:22] Nephew got some bad news when he got the Corcoran. He was going to have to cell up with this guy.

Rafael: [00:15:28] What you, aye, I kid you not, at that moment, I clinched both my cheeks as tight as I could. Seriously. And I'm like, "man, what the hell?" Right? Somebody said, "hey, look man, judge for yourself, man, judge for yourself." Right? I walk in the cell, lift my head up, my chest up like I'm a g-force something like that. "Hey what's up" tried to change my voice and everything. He was like, "what's up?" You know, we both in this cell and everything. He's like, "What you in for?" I'm lying, "Man, I killed nine people." I didn't kill no nine people, right? He like, "well, I did some things too and I'm stuck. I got a life sentence" this and that. And I'll never forget I said, "hey man, um, people told me before I came in here that, you know, you done took advantage of younger men, my age or, you know. He said, "whatchu mean?" And his voice got a little more higher now. Said, "nah, man. I'mma say it to the point though: people told me that you raped people in here, man." You know, makin' eye contact with him. I'm serious. I kid you not, if he'd have touched my chest, he'd have seen just how scared I was.

New York: [00:16:31] What size was he? What'd he look like?

Rafael: [00:16:32] He had some big arms. Both of my arms is one of his arms. And probably— plus an extra arm on top of that. His arms is huge.

New York: [00:16:31] What size was he? What'd he look like?

Rafael: [00:16:32] He had some big arms. On both of my arms, his one of his arms and probably plus the extra arm on top of that. His arms, just huge man. Like he do push-ups for breakfast. I'm like, man, if he ever really get into it, he gone break some jaws, right? He

says, "man, I got a past. Just like you got to past." He said, "I'm not proud of my past. I've done things that haunt me to this day. But I'm a new person, right?" I've said things like that to people to disarm 'em, you know, manipulation things. So I kinda had to figure out if this person telling the truth or not. I'm still kind of sketchy about going to bed around you. I want you to go to sleep first. But I also want to get a good night's rest man. And I couldn't do that just because of my fears of this person's past.

New York: [00:17:23] But he never tried nothin' right?

Rafael: [00:17:25] No, he didn't. And um, I'm just thankful.

New York: [00:17:30] So let me ask you this. The past never came up again, but this myth, this legend, legendary aura around, was it true? Was he really like that? Would he really leave Tootsie Rolls on people's chest?

Rafael: [00:17:44] This person told me they did, but this person also told me they are no longer like that. And so all the stories that people was talking about, he didn't deny 'em...

New York: [00:17:54] So did you, at some point, did you realize that his conversion was true?

Rafael: [00:17:58] I moved out!

Jason: [00:18:01] [Rapping Ice-T's *6 'N The Mornin'* - Six in the morning, police at my door, fresh Adidas squeak across the bathroom floor, out my back window I make a escape, don't even get a chance to grab my old school tape, mad with no music, but happy cause free, and the streets to a player is the place to be]

Nigel: [00:18:18] We'll be back after the break with more myths and monikers. [Jason continues rapping then fades out and into minimalist electronic tones]

Nigel: [00:18:37] So New York, I have a theory about Purple Passion.

New York: [00:18:39] So do I.

Nigel: [00:18:40] Okay. You go first.

New York: [00:18:41] It's taken on mythical proportions, [Nigel affirms] but it's based on something true. There aren't that many predators in prison, but they do exist.

Nigel: [00:18:48] That's what I was thinking. It's kind of a cautionary tale. It tells guys coming to prison, watch out, watch your back...

New York: [00:18:55] ...Or you might wake up with a Tootsie roll on your chest.

Nigel: [00:18:58] Okay. I can see why guys might want to have a tough guy moniker like "Kill Switch." I mean, who's going to mess with a guy named Kill Switch, right?

New York: [00:19:05] No. People tell you who you are. And if a guy's telling you that if you switch him on, he'll kill you, I'm not messing with 'em. [Laughs]

Nigel: [00:19:09] Stay back.

New York: [00:19:10] It's not just Kill Switch and Purple Passion you got to worry about, Nigel. [Nigel affirms] There's lots of things to worry about and are cautionary tales for almost every one of them. There's one of our kites, for example.

Nigel: [00:19:23] Oh yeah. The secret notes that are passed from cell to cell.

New York: [00:19:26] Here's Steve Brooks on that topic.

Steve Brooks: [00:19:29] Oh man, so when I first came to prison in 1996. I was 23 years old. First time on the yard. I was at old Corcoran, one of the most dangerous prisons in the state. And the first thing they told me is, "if somebody throw a kite under your door, don't read it because if you read it you in." And I was like, "in what?" And they was like, "well, don't worry about all that. If they throw a kite on your door, don't read it." And so for a long time I was just kicking kites right back under the door 'cause I was like, man, "I'm not reading nothing. You got something to say, say it through the door" or whatever. [Minimal electronic tones begin]

New York: [00:20:06] If you read the kite, you're in, you're part of the plot. You are now implicated in some kind of trouble that has nothing to do with you. At least that's what they say.

Nigel: [00:20:16] It's like you're locked into a contract you never signed. Is that something you were warned about back in New York, New York? [New York laughs]

New York: [00:20:22] No, actually I never heard of the kite issue in New York...

Nigel: [00:20:26] Oh really? [Crosstalk]

New York: [00:20:26] Nah. But Once I came to California, people told me the same thing over and over again. Don't read the case that come your way. [Electronic tones end]

Nigel: [00:20:33] Well, what could have been in there?

Steve: [00:20:35] Well, I don't know. That's, that was the reason why I didn't read it. [Nigel and Steve laugh]

Nigel: [00:20:40] Your curiosity never was like, I wanna read it.

Steve: [00:20:42] No— mind my own business. That was the first thing I learned when I hit the level four yard. Just mind your own business. Yeah.

New York: [00:20:48] Have you seen anybody, uh, in your twenty-five years, like get in trouble for reading the kite? Like it went bad for them? They read a kite they shouldn't have?

Steve: [00:20:54] No, actually, I haven't. I've never seen it happen. I've never seen somebody read the kite and be in. So I was like, okay, that had to be a legend or something.

Jason: [00:21:03] [Singing Otis Redding's *Sittin' On the Dock of the Bay*] [Singing fades out into abstract industrial transition]

Nigel: [00:21:42] There is another legend related to kites and it has to do with mice.

New York: [00:21:46] Yeah. I tried to get to the bottom of this one with Richie Morris. [Nigel affirms] He's been incarcerated for more than thirty-four years.

Nigel: [00:21:53] A long time.

New York: [00:21:54] So you've probably heard a lot of different rumors and myths and legends and different, you know, stories throughout your penitentiary years.

Richie Morris: [00:22:02] Yeah, I guess I have.

New York: [00:22:03] There's one I'm trying to get to the bottom of. We heard that people in prison have used, or maybe even still use rodents, actual rats and mice to deliver messages to other people's cells.

Richie: [00:22:18] I've heard the story of Freeway Freddy. They put a string on his leg and sent him down the tier with a kite.

New York: [00:22:24] Wait, hold on. Who's Freeway Freddy?

Richie: [00:22:27] Freeway Freddy was a mouse. [Simple electronic beat begins] The tier mouse.

New York: [00:22:30] So tell me how this work?

Richie: [00:22:32] Well, you tie a string to his leg and send him from cell to cell. You can send him all the way down the tier. You know, somebody giving a little something to eat down the tier and then they send 'em back with a kite.

New York: [00:22:43] And so how did this Freeway Freddie know what cell to go to?

Richie: [00:22:47] Guys would be watching for him and they'd pull him in.

New York: [00:22:51] Well, what if he went to the wrong cell?

Richie: [00:22:53] Nah, I don't think it's gonna— you know, there was respect back then. So, you know, people weren't gonna mess with something that wasn't directly coming to 'em. The guys knew better than that, you know. And if they did something like that, there were going to be repercussions. So that was the nature of the politics back then.

New York: [00:23:10] So do you believe in Freeway Freddy? Do you think you really delivered messages?

Richie: [00:23:14] I've been looking at the ingenuity of incarcerated men for decades, right? And you know, you know as well as I do that when we're in a situation where we're limited in terms of our movement, we find a way to get what we need to where it needs to go. You know? It's just, just how we are, man. [Simple percussive beat begins]

Nigel: [00:23:40] There's another legend that seems to be everywhere in American jails and prisons. And this one is right out of a seventies Kung Fu movie. And New York, you talked about it with David Gadley, who's also known as...

New York: [00:23:51] D. Yup, Nige. I heard about this one when I was back East on Riker's Island. [Simple beat ends]

New York: [00:23:57] I heard this story about these two, uh, Asian brothers that whooped a whole bunch of correction officer butt. And then I come to LA County jail and I heard the same thing. [David affirms] That it was one Asian dude, so I'm wondering, man, is this a myth? Is this made up? Is this something Asian people would tell people to say, thinking you'd be fearful of them— that we think they all know Kung Fu, or, what's popping with this, man?

David “D” Gadley: [00:24:22] No, actually it was a true story, man. About this Asian guy up in LA County jail.

New York: [00:24:27] What you know about it, man?

D: [00:24:28] So what I heard about it, 'cause this was before my time of going to the County jails, but all my uncles and my cousins and all of them was going at that time. So what happened was, they weren't tryna feed this dude his meal. So one of the CO's came in, talking madness to the guy. And the guy whooped on him and threw him out the cell. Then when one of the Co's see that the other CO ran up out the cell, he ran in there. Then when he ran in there and tried to do something, he mingled him. And when they saw him mingle, they try to rush up in there. And as they was rushing up in there, he squabbling with 'em— boom, boom, boom! And he knockin' 'em out the cell. He put his back up against the wall and he's just going at it. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. They had sent like five at one time on him. They couldn't do nothing to him. They just kept sending in sheriffs, kept sending them, kept sending them. Well nobody getting the job down 'cause they couldn't get him down 'cause he knew karate real good. And he beatin' they asses. I ain't gonna— I'm not gonna sugar coat it. That's what he did. He's beatin' they asses. It got so bad, out of hand, they had to airlift his father. I think his father was in Folsom at the time. They had to air lift his father to LA County jail. And they sent his father in there to talk to him to calm him down.

New York: [00:25:38] So how do you know this is true, man? Why do you believe this story?

D: [00:25:40] Well, because every time I hear the story, it's the same way. It hasn't changed. I know you say you heard it and it was two Asian guys.

New York: [00:25:50] That's in the New York version. [D laughs]

D: [00:25:52] Yeah, but inside of LA County jail. It was just one Asian guy.

New York: [00:25:58] I heard that that dude is in another prison right now and people know him. And they said, he only beat up four sheriffs.

D: [00:26:05] No. It was more than four. [Simple percussive beat begins]

Nigel: [00:26:09] Alright, New York. I don't know about this one. It really relies on tired, old stereotypes.

New York: [00:26:12] I hear you, I hear you. I can see that. But I talked to someone with a different perspective on the story.

Nigel: [00:26:19] Okay. [Simple percussive beat ends]

Joe Garcia: [00:26:21] Joe Garcia. I've been incarcerated sixteen years and rolling.

New York: [00:26:26] And what County jail did you come through?

Joe: [00:26:28] Los Angeles.

New York: [00:26:29] Did you hear anything about a guy who supposedly took on a bunch of deputies?

Joe: [00:26:36] I think you're referring to an Asian gentleman and yes, I heard a crazy story, about some younger Asian prisoner. For some reason he was in distress. He wanted to see his father or his grandfather, something like that. And he wasn't gonna take no for an answer, and he just kept doing some matrix type stuff. Somersaults, screaming, yelling, sprinting up walls and karate, kicking them. He was, you know, submission, twisting their wrists and pushing them away. And it all sounds hinky because rather than shoot him or kill him, which is what they probably would have done if it were a real story, is they ended up getting his dad or his grandfather to talk him down and tell him to calm down.

New York: [00:27:27] We should point out here that Joe Garcia's mother is Chinese and his father is Mexican.

Joe: [00:27:33] I heard it from other races, blacks, whites, and they always spoke of it in that legendary Bruce Lee type of sense. So when certain things happened or people found out, Oh, you're half Asian, they sort of put me in that same category. They used to say, wow, you really know your shit then, huh? You know that stuck. I mean, what am I going to do? Correct them that I'm not a legend.

New York: [00:27:57] So I heard about that guy and I heard about another guy in San Diego and I heard about two brothers in New York on Riker's Island. And so, and all these stories, they were Asian guys that whooped the hell out of a whole bunch of officers. Why does that story go around so much?

Joe: [00:28:12] I guess it circulated because we all dream of not letting the sheriffs get the best of us. And again, this is a legend. And again, I think this legend was mainly perpetuated by non-Asians. And so there's that whole stereotype that we know martial arts that just like, you know, a black guy must know how to play basketball. If he's like six foot five or taller, he could probably dunk. So, you know, if you're Asian and you're somewhat athletic, you must be able to kick people in the head and, you know, flying tiger, crouching dragon, whatever it is and all that stuff, you know. So it's the power of stereotypes, the power of imagery. I do kind of like that story. I'm not gonna lie. I do kinda like it. I'm proud that it is an Asian stereotype. You know?

Jason: [00:29:02] [Jason sings Red Hot Chili Pepper's *Under the Bridge*. Jason's singing fades out and transitions into abstract industrial sounds]

Nigel: [00:29:22] Alright. Some of these prison myths are based on fear, some on stereotypes, and some are about self-preservation. And some are just plain weird and gross.

New York: [00:29:31] Like this one. Told to us by Erick Copeland, AKA Slade.

Erick "Slade" Copeland: [00:29:36] They're doing count and the counts off. It's off by one guy, you know. So he slam the whole prison. They're looking for this guy. They don't find this guy. The guy's cellie is like, "I don't know where he's at," you know, maybe his, I don't know.

I don't know. So fine. I guess they come to this guy's cell. And there are traces of blood in his cell. There's stuff, this and that. And he had killed his cellie, cut his cellie up, flush most of his cellie down the toilet, and they caught him trying to bust his skull open to flush it down the toilet when they caught him. [Laughs uncomfortably] That's a story I told before I even got here. And then, it was like confirmed when I got here that this is supposedly something that happened here. I don't know.

New York: [00:30:31] Do you believe it?

Slade: [00:30:32] Seems a little far-fetched, but I've heard some pretty crazy prison stories, so... [Dreamy tones begin]

Nigel: [00:30:42] So, there are crazy prison stories. They're really more cautionary tales. And also, as we heard, there are many crazy monikers.

New York: [00:30:50] A lot. [Nigel affirms] And like we said, each moniker has a story behind it. But what happens if the moniker you had since you were fifteen sounds a whole lot different to you fifty years later?

Nigel: [00:31:00] Richard Johnson was in an episode way back in Season One about the SHU.

New York: [00:31:03] That's the security housing [Nigel affirms] where you get sent when you get into trouble with the CO's. When he came in for his interview, as soon as we started recording, he got shady. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: [00:31:13] Shady?

New York: [00:31:13] He put his shades on!

Richard: [00:31:17] The eyes are the mirrors to the soul. So I'm kind of protective of my soul. So I wear my glasses where you can't see. But I can see you.

New York: [00:31:26] What is your name?

Richard "Razor" Johnson: [00:31:26] Richard "Razor" Johnson.

New York: [00:31:29] And so, how did you get the nickname Razor?

Richard: [00:31:32] Well, it started as I dressed. People would say, "Razor Sharp." But when I came to prison, people just dropped the sharp.

New York: [00:31:42] And just started calling you Razor.

Richard: [00:31:43] Right.

New York: [00:31:44] And so when I think of razor, I think of Riker's Island. The little single edge razors, the gemstars that people carry in their mouth. It didn't have nothing to do with that?

Richard: [00:31:52] No. It had nothing to do with violence.

New York: [00:31:55] Have you ever been to the hole for an incident involving a razor?

Richard: [00:32:00] Yes. At one time I tried to live up to that moniker. If there was a fight or a riot or whatever, I wanted to be on the frontline. I wanted to be the first one to throw the first blow. And that builds your rep.

New York: [00:32:19] And how often did any of those incidents involve a razor?

Richard: [00:32:23] Anytime I can get my hands on one.

New York: [00:32:25] When was the last time that you got in trouble or you got into a disciplinary issue or anything?

Richard: [00:32:31] My last one fifteen is almost, believe it or not, over thirty years ago.

New York: [00:32:34] Wow.

Richard: [00:32:35] They accused me of stabbing some people here in San Quentin in 1980.

Nigel: [00:32:39] So, but now for thirty years, you have been living with this moniker and in some ways not being able to get away from it. Is that, do you think, is that correct?

Richard: [00:32:50] That's accurate.

New York: [00:32:51] You went to the parole board recently?

Richard: [00:32:52] Yes, I did.

New York: [00:32:53] What do they call you?

Richard: [00:32:56] Richard. Mr. Johnson. And they specifically said they do not want to hear Razor again because they say it's still connected to the old, you know, and they don't want to hear.

New York: [00:33:11] When they told you that, right, that it's connected to your past, how do you feel about that now after that having time to reflect on that?

Richard: [00:33:18] I have to agree. If you say you just stepped out of the darkness, into the light, but you dragging along with you this moniker that people associate you with violence or street activities. But you won't, you won't discard that moniker, you haven't changed. So now everybody calling me Richard. Well, how Richard supposed to act? I know how Razor act. But Richard. He's still finding himself, you know. Here's a man who spent his whole entire prison career and juvenile career in the SHU and this— that's a heavy transition.

Nigel: [00:33:52] Can you just describe to me who Richard is?

Richard: [00:33:55] He's, um, an alright guy. Richard likes to laugh. He just likes to have fun.

Nigel: [00:34:04] But I've seen a huge change in the three or four years that I've known you.

Richard: [00:34:08] I think the next phase is comin', takin' these glasses off. 'Cause I wear glasses on the street. I had a whole box full of glasses and I wear them in the night, day,

didn't matter. I still where 'em and I'mma continue to wear 'em until I feel comfortable letting people see my soul. My name is Richard Johnson, not Razor. [Gentle synth tones begin]

Nigel: [00:34:50] Hey E!

Earlone: [00:34:51] Whaddup, 'skillet?

Nigel: [00:34:52] So most guys have monikers when they're in prison, but I wonder what happens when they get out. Do you think most guys keep them?

Earlone: [00:34:57] It all depends. I mean, some do, like our Ear Hustle colleague, Antwan Williams. He still goes by Banks.

Nigel: [00:35:04] I always called him Antwan. And in my heart, he will always be Antwan.

Earlone: [00:35:08] Well, I call him Bankers, Banker hours. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: [00:35:12] You always like to add a little extra, at the end of someone's name.

Earlone: [00:35:15] I think you do that to everybody name. [Nigel laughs] You know, you call 'em what you want to call 'em, you know?

Nigel: [00:35:18] Um, what about, uh, our friend "Sticks"?

Earlone: [00:35:21] He's still Sticks or he's Chap.

Nigel: [00:35:23] Oh my God, you know what? Sometimes I can't even remember his birth name. I always think of him as Sticks.

Earlone: [00:35:26] That's Chapelle. [Nigel affirms] But we call him Chap. [Nigel repeats "Chap' and laughs] That's the first four initials of his name it's chap

Nigel: [00:35:31] That's right. And god, there's been so many people in our stories who are now out.

Earlone: [00:35:35] Kenyatta is still Yatta. Or I call 'em "Bly" sometimes.

Nigel: [00:35:38] Why? [Laughs]

Earlone: [00:35:39] But I'll say this. Some guys wanna make a clean break from all that prison shit. [Nigel affirms] So they are reclaiming the name that they had when they came into this world. Like Richard Johnson. [Ear Hustle theme song begins]

Nigel: [00:35:55] There's a lot of people to thank in this episode, so take it away guys.

New York: [00:35:59] Ear Hustle would like to thank Jason Griffin, the original ["Pop, pop" sound with mouth] "Jukebox". Lamavis Cho "Shorty". Alvin Williams, which is "Gator".

Jason: [00:36:06] And Richard Johnson, Rafael "Nephew" Bankston, Alex Ross.

New York: [00:36:10] Don't forget Tony Tafoya. David Gadley. That's the boy D and Steve Brooke.

Jason: [00:36:14] And how about Joe Garcia. Richie Morris, and finally, Erick "Slade" Copeland.

New York: [00:36:19] See Ear Hustle is produced on the inside by Nigel Poor, AKA Frisco Freeway. You know, we got Rahsaan Thomas, AKA Purple M&M, AKA New York when they've been out there since forever. Right? We got the original bookworm, too though. That's John Johnson, AKA Yahya. Phew— that took a lot of breath out of me on that one, right. But then we also got Pat "The Mix Master" Mesiti-Miller.

Jason: [00:36:42] And on the outside by Earlonious "Fatboy" Woods and Bruce "The Wolverine" Wallace.

New York: [00:36:47] See, this episode was scored music by Rhashiyd Zinnamon AKA Feather Fingers, Mr. Soft Touch. But don't call him soft. He look like ? David Jazz, the Sweetest Phenom. With additional engineering by Don Tran. That's Megaton, y'all the human man-bot.

Jason: [00:37:02] Our Senior Producer is Curtis "Scissor Hands" Fox, Erin "Machine Gun" Wade is the Digital Producer. Julie "Seabiscuit" Shapiro's the Executive Producer for Radiotopia.

New York: [00:37:13] Ear Hustle would like to thank acting warden, Ron Broomfield. And as you know, every episode of Ear Hustle has to be approved by the guy we call the Velvet Voice, Red carpet treatment, right.

Lieutenant Sam Robinson: [00:37:24] I am Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin State Prison and into Season Five, riding shotgun with New York and Nigel and Earlonne and Pat and Yahya and Rhashiyd, I do approve this episode. [Theme song continues]

Jason: [00:37:46] This podcast was made possible with support from the Chan Zuckerberg initiative, working to redesign the justice system by building power and opportunity for communities impacted by incarceration.

New York: [00:37:56] Ear Hustle sends fans emails, newsletters, every month with extra tidbits about the show and the people who make it. Find out more about that and a whole lot else at earhustlesq.com. The show is also on Twitter, y'all, Instagram and Facebook @earhustlesq.

Jason: [00:38:11] And stay tuned because you do not want to miss what's coming up next on Ear Hustle.

New York: [00:38:17] Straight up.

New Speaker: [00:38:19] And it's like eighty cops out there. They got they name tags covered up, they got they gloves on, they got towels around they necks, they out there shadow boxing and stretching. We tell them like, "look man, we already know what time it is." You know what mean? "Take the cuffs off and we just, you know, let it happen how it happened..." [Minimalist version of the Theme song begins]

Nigel: [00:38:36] The complicated relationships between Correction Officers and guys inside. That's next time on Ear Hustle.

New York: [00:38:43] Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Hear more at radiotopia.fm. I am Rahsaan "New York" Thomas.

Nigel: [00:38:53] And I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: [00:38:54] I'm Earlonious "Fatboy" Woods.

Nigel: [00:38:57] You know what? I got a hard time for calling you that.

Earlonne: [00:38:59] Why? Well, see, Earlonious came from Kenyatta.

Nigel: [00:39:04] No, the fat—

Earlonne: [00:39:04] Oh, but it's P- H -A-T. It's not F-A-T.

Nigel: [00:39:07] No, I told them it was F-A-T.

Earlonne: [00:39:08] See, that's where you fucked up at [Nigel laughs] That's where you fucked up. You was in if you just said it's P- H -A-T. That stand for somethin' whooole— totally different. Alright.

Nigel: [00:39:15] I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: [00:39:17] and I'm Earlonious "Fatboy" Woods

All: [00:39:19] Thanks for listening. [Theme song continues and then fades out]

Jason: [00:39:22] [Rapping *La Di Da Di* by Slick Rick & Doug E. Fresh]

END OF EPISODE.