



Episode 45: The Gray Goose
Air Date: September 9, 2020

Nigel Poor: [00:00:38] Hey, E!

Earlonne Woods: What up, Nyge? How you doing?

Nigel: I'm good. But I think you know what's up.

Earlonne: Yes, we are back for Season #6. S-I-X.

Nigel: Aren't you glad to be back?

Earlonne: Hell yeah, I'm glad to be back.

Nigel: So, you said this is Season #6. What does that mean for you?

Earlonne: So, what that mean to me is I did three seasons inside [Nigel affirms] and now this is my third season outside.

Nigel: It's great. I love that.

Earlonne: And you know what, Nyge?

Nigel: What's that?

Earlone: Listeners might be wondering why are we recording in a car, if they can hear that? [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: Well, for one, we have not been able to go into San Quentin since March 11th because of COVID-19.

Earlone: We'll be updating you on the situation with COVID in prisons throughout this season. [Nigel affirms] And doing a whole episode on that later in the season.

Nigel: And we are not sure when we'll be back in San Quentin, but we will definitely be getting dispatches from, [to Earlone] do you remember our other co-host, Rahsaan?

Earlone: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I know Rahsaan "New York" *Thompson*.

Nigel: [laughs] Thomas. Rahsaan "New York" Thomas

Earlone: Oh, *Thomas*

Nigel: Yes, yes, yes. Rahsaan "New York" Thomas. And we'll also be hearing from some of our other friends inside whenever we can.

Earlone: Right. So, this season Ear Hustle is going on the road. [theme song comes in]

Nigel: Yep. You'll be hearing voices from other prisons in California, from around the country, and around the world.

Earlone: Of course, we'll be talking to people who are readjusting to life after prison. And we will be doing a lot of interviews outside at a *safe social distance*.

Nigel: Definitely. With our Ear Hustle masks on.

Earlone: I love the mask.

Nigel: They're great. Earlone, and we're also on the road for another reason, because I know you; you love to drive.

Earlone: I do. I get in the car and roll. I don't know, it's just my peace.

Nigel: Also, if I call you, I'm like, "I need to go somewhere", you come pick me up and take me.

Earlone: Definitely. So, you know, driving is— it's a freedom. It's a freedom!

Nigel: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I love driving with you because I always feel so safe. I know I can fall asleep and nothing bad is going to happen.

Earlonne: Do you know how I feel comfortable with drivers?

Nigel: How?

Earlonne: I look at they car before I get in.

Nigel: Oh, what does my car tell you?

Earlonne: You done hit some shit before, Nigel. [Nigel and Earlonne laugh]

Nigel: Okay. Fair enough, fair enough. Okay, now let me ask you this: if you were going to go on a road trip, [Earlonne affirms] what would be your ideal song?

Earlonne: It all depends, Nigel.

Nigel: Okay.

Earlonne: But I will say that at nighttime, my favorite genre music, [Nigel affirms] is trap music.

Nigel: Can you play some for me?

Earlonne: Of course. [trap beat comes in]

Nigel: *Okay—*

Earlonne: See you be dancin' to the beat.

Nigel: I like it.

Earlonne: So you don't fall asleep. [trap song continues]

Nigel: Okay. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait a second. [song stops abruptly] Alright, Earlonne. Before we go any further, I think you know what we have to say? [Earlonne laughs] Do you want to start?

Earlonne: Alright. The following episode contains language and content that may not be suitable for all listeners. And there's some tough stuff later in this episode.

Nigel: And I have to add on this one, there is a lot of talk about things that happen in bathrooms.

Earlonne: Thus, discretion is advised.

Nigel: So, what's up with your love of the open road?

Earlonne: For one thing, [sighs] because I couldn't drive while I was locked up.

Nigel: Mm

Earlonne: That was like the main thing. I mean, I used to dream about driving *everywhere*. But you know what, Nyge? [Nigel affirms] incarcerated people do get on the road from time to time, probably more than listeners would think.

Nigel: Yeah. Like there's transfers, court appearances, medical trips...

Earlonne: Yeah, I spent a lot of time on those buses. I used to be looking into other cars and wishing, I mean, *wishing* I was in that car. [theme music comes in]

Nigel: And that's what we're going to talk about on this episode: what you see, hear, experience, and long for while you're locked up on the road.

I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlonne: And I'm Earlonne Woods. This is Ear Hustle from PRX's Radiotopia. We're back with Season 6. So, buckle up. [seatbelt clicks]

[to Nigel] That's a hell of a view.

Nigel: I know, isn't it a great view? Oh yeah. That's um— we're looking out towards where Candlestick Park used to be. [music fades out]

Carl Cattermole: In the UK, we call prison vans "sweatboxes," AKA "sweatys." And the reason for that is because either you're sweating about your predicament, or [00:05:00] because, you know, just because they don't have any air conditioning. And from the inside they look like a cross between a tupperware box and a pissy elevator. It's a tiny cubicle with white enamel walls and a grayish-brown tinted window.

Brenda Birungi: There's like, six little booths in the van. Most of the time you don't really see who else is coming in with you. You just go in and then you just hear the kind of handcuffs and everything coming off the other person. Then they put them in there. I think it's one of those moments that people just don't really talk. I think it's that moment that you realize, *this is it*.

Earlonne: That's Brenda Birungi and Carl Cattermole. You may remember them from our "Summer Listening" episode. We met 'em through our friends over at the Prison Radio Association. They've both done time in the UK prisons, including riding in those "sweatys."

Carl: There's an area of London where posh people live, it's called Clapham. And they wear white chinos and have little white dogs. And I remember looking out from the sweatbox, out the windows; and thanks to the tint, their chinos and their little dog looked

a disgusting shade of grayish-brown, like they just got pulled out of the canal. [beat comes in]

There's multiple energies flying around in that environment. There's like, macho disguised as macho. There's vulnerable disguised as macho. There's drugs disguised as, um, well, they're not really disguised 'cause they've gone cold turkey and puking and shitting themselves. And there's people who are just not ready for it at all, who weren't expecting to get to get "guilty." And they're just some little guy in a suit who's not souped up and ready for that jail bullshit. [music fades out]

Earlone: I know me, when I used to be on that bus, I used to always look in other people cars and wish I was in the car with them or wish I was somewhere else. [Nigel affirms]

[to Branda] I mean, did you have those moments on that bus? Like, [Brenda affirms] / *wish, I wish, I wish, I wish.*

Brenda: Yeah, hundred percent. I remember when I was in one of the vans, we stopped at the traffic lights and there was a car just full of guys. You know, guys that all look like people that I knew. They looked like my friends, how my friends dressed, you know. And I remember looking and they all looked as well. And it was one of that— kind of the realization that they thought, *oh wait, is she an inmate?* You know, and then the traffic lights went green. [soft beat comes in]

The drive to that prison was kind of the same journey that I used to make to go to my cousin's house. We used to walk out of her house, cross the road, walk literally on the side of Holloway to go into, like, the shopping center and everything. Not once did we say, "oh my god, I wonder how many women are in that prison." It never even crossed our minds. We talked about, you know, somebody's got a boyfriend, or somebody likes, or got a crush on a boy. You know, that was what we talked about. And it was that all of those moments flashed before me; it's like you can see your younger self as a spirit walking down that road. You can see your younger self just reliving that not knowing that the older you is sittin' in this van. [music fades out]

Carl: Londoners who've been affected by the jail complex show solidarity by waving at sweatboxes or slapping them when they're stuck in traffic. And I always thought that was a good gesture. It's a good bit of, uh— how do I put it politely? FTS? You don't know what that means?

Earlone: No, what's that?

Carl: Maybe you got to bleep out my term, but, "fuck the system."

Earlonne: Oh! Oh, oh, oh! F-T-S. Fuck the system. Yeah, yeah. Out here it's FTP. "Fuck the police." So, it seems like we have the same sentiments around the world.

Carl: Yeah. I guess that's worldwide.

Carlos Flores: Just listen to this intro [intro of *Hotel California* by the Eagles comes in]

Nigel: Okay.

Carlos: You remember this. You're shackled. All those guys, sweaty, hot.

Nigel: That is Carlos Flores. [to Earlonne] He was in San Quentin with you. And he's actually been on our show a few times.

Earlonne: So this one time, [Nigel affirms] we were in the studio getting set up and he mentioned that he'd been listening to the song, *Hotel California*. And he had a theory about it.

Nigel: Yep, he did. He claims that *Hotel California* is a song about being incarcerated and it starts [00:10:00] in a prison bus.

[*Hotel California* continues to play]

Carlos: You feel it in the music. You feel this is a serious thing. So, when we get transferred to prison, you're literally on this bus. Most of the prisons are highways. They usually transfer you at night, safety things, and they're dark. The warm smell of *colitas*. In Spanish *cola* means "ass." So, the warm smell of *colitas* rising up in the air. You can smell that it's dingy on the buses. Then when you get to the prison, you do see a shimmering light. They look like little cities. And when you're approaching, I remember, your head does grow heavy, it's like, *fuck, it's about to get real right now*. It's scary. It's scary when you first go to prison. [laughs] I'll take it from there...

Nigel: [to Earlonne] Do you remember the way this came up in the interview? We were just getting warmed up and we asked Carlos how he was doing. [*Hotel California* fades out]

Earlonne: Right. And Carlos, who'd been out of prison for a while at this point, said he was having a tough time adjusting to life on the house.

Nigel: And this one line from *Hotel California* summed it all up for him.

Carlos: *Last thing I remember I was running for the door, had to find the passage back to the place I was before*. I think that's, like, an allusion to what we were before we went to prison. I'm adjusting mentally, waking up out of that fog of like whatever we created when we were in there.

Earlone: [to Carlos] So, you didn't just snap back to the streets? Like, *oh, I'm back*.

Carlos: No. Hell no. [laughs] I haven't completely come back. I'm trying to find the patches back to the place I was before. [*Hotel California* comes back in] Anybody who says it's about American excess in life, they don't know what they're talking about because when you listen to the words, that guy...

Earlone: Was doing time?

Carlos: Oh, yeah.

Nigel: Okay, so Carlos has this stack of evidence here that *Hotel California* includes stuff about prison. For example:

Carlos: *I heard the mission bell*. The mission being, you know...

Nigel: The mission bell chimes, those are the gangs that are calling you on a mission.

Carlos: ...you go on a mission, the alarm sounds.

Nigel: I mean, he does literally say, "we're all just prisoners here."

Carlos: *Then she lit up a candle, and she showed me the way*. They're taking you to cell back. *How they dance in the courtyard* is fighting. *Last thing, I remember I was running for the door*. *They stab me with their steely knives*, [simultaneously with Nigel] *but you just can't kill the beast*.

Nigel: I hate how I know all the lyrics to this song. [laughs]

Carlos: Oh, *there's plenty of room at the Hotel California*. I think that's pretty— there's room for you. Plenty of room.

Earlone: So, what do you think, Nyge?

Nigel: You know what? I love his enthusiasm. I think it's great that art is so open that you can see whatever you want to see in it. What about you?

Earlone: I don't see that much though from that song. [Nigel laughs] But you know, I hear you, Carlos. I feel you. [Nigel affirms] Well, there's another musician that I think was serving time or served time.

Nigel: Oh, really? Who?

Earlone: Adele.

Nigel: What? [Earlone laughs] Why do you say that?

Earlonne: Because she has songs that only a prisoner could write.

Nigel: Like what?

Earlonne: You know what I'm saying? Like, *hello from the other side*. [*Hello by Adele comes in*]

Nigel: So, when you were on that bus, does your head get heavy like it says in *Hotel California*?

Earlonne: I think after a while everybody head get heavy and you leaning on that window, if you sit next to it.

Nigel: What's it like on the bus?

Earlonne: Well, first of all it's called "The Gray Goose." It used to be silver back in the day. [Nigel affirms] That's why they call it that. And you know, you had these paper suits on that you're wearing.

Nigel: Okay. Wait, I have got to understand what these paper suits are like. Please, explain that.

Earlonne: They're like see-through, you know. You're, you know...

Nigel: Like paper you would write on? Tyvek?

Earlonne: It's almost like those havevac— what they call it?

Nigel: Oh! The hazmat suits. Okay. Okay. Okay.

Earlonne: It's almost like the hazmat suit. And you know, the suit is see-through, and you would see, vaguely see some shit. [Nigel says, "stop" while laughing]

Nigel: All right. So like, give me a visual of the bus. You get on there, what is it like? [music comes in]

Earlonne: You get on there and usually when you get on the bus, that's when they put the ankle shackles on you. [Nigel affirms] 'Cause, like, right when you're standing outside the bus, that's when they're putting the waist chain and your handcuffs on you and you're— cuffing you to the waist. And, you know what, Nyge?

Nigel: What?

Earlonne: When you're shackled on that prison bus and the guards have the guns, [Nigel affirms] you feel like you're on a slave ship. [Nigel says, "oh god" softly] And when you pull into the prisons, it's like you're pulling into a port and you're stripped, then

searched, then checked. And it has this eerie feeling as if you're being sold. And you have no control over where you're going. [music fades out]

Nigel: Tell me about that bus. Is it like a school bus, you know, with like two seats on either side?

Earlonne: It's like a Greyhound bus. [Nigel affirms] And I mean, instead of the cushy seats that the Greyhound buses have, they have these little hard plastic seats and you have to deal with the CO's.

Nigel: And every guy we talked to about this had something to say about how the COs act when they're on those transport buses.

[montage of incarcerated people sharing their experiences begins]

Speaker 1: [impersonating CO] "Any you motherfuckers talk, I'll pull this bus over and kick your ass"

Speaker 2: [impersonating CO] "you'll have a [00:15:00] whoop-sore ass 'cause we ain't taking you to the doctor"

Speaker 3: [impersonating CO] "And if you get up without asking to go to the restroom, you will get DP."

Speaker 1: [to Speaker 3] So what does DP mean?

Speaker 3: Discipline, physically. Physically discipline.

Speaker 4: And if they do hear someone talking, they're going to stop the bus, pull you off the bus and give you a little bit uh– what did they call that they used to call it? [men respond in the background, "road therapy!"] Road Therapy. That's what they do.

Earlonne: I mean, just a gang of threats. They threatenin' the shit out you while you on the bus.

Nigel: And what's the longest ride that you've been on?

Earlonne: It was three days. Going from prison to prison, to prison, to prison, to prison, collecting everybody that was going to the SHU and other places. And we went all the way up north [Nigel affirms] to Crescent City, which is like Eureka.

Nigel: Oh, you're almost in Oregon.

Earlonne: Almost in Oregon– actually, we went through Oregon to get to Pelican Bay. [Nigel says, "oh my god" softly] And then they'll stop at one of the prisons and you'll stay there overnight and sometimes they don't even put you in a cell. You be in a hallway,

just sitting on a bench all night, waiting on them to come get you. But I say this, Nyge, [Nigel affirms] I've had some epic ass rides.

Nigel: Oh, I believe you.

Earlonne: Yeah. But not like my boy Aly. [music fades out] [transition sound]

Aly Tamboura: My name's Aly Tamboura. I served twelve— a little over twelve years in the California Department of Corrections. Been home about four years now. Back— I want to say it was around 2008, I got transferred away from San Quentin because they needed the cells for higher custody incarcerated people. And since my points had dropped, I was like in this limbo spot, so, they shipped me off to the California Men's Colony. [beat comes in]

Nigel: We've got to explain this. So, when you start out in prison, you start out with a certain amount of points. [Earlonne affirms] And then if you do good stuff while you're inside, like, having a job, or going to college, you lose some of those points. [Earlonne affirms] But, if you start to do bad stuff, points get added.

Earlonne: Yep. But because Aly had lower points, CDCR decided to transfer him to another prison. [Nigel affirms] The California Men's Colony. For short, CMC.

Nigel: And when he gets there, he says that it sucks. [music fades out]

Aly: You know, people are funkin' down there, having these little mini riots and stare offs and, you know, and I'm thinking, *oh man, why did they send me back to this stuff?*

Nigel: Okay. But the thing that is really difficult for Aly is that he had been taking college classes at San Quentin, right? And they don't have a program like that at CMC. So, when he got transferred, all of that stopped.

Earlonne: And so, Aly started doing everything he could to get back to San Quentin.

Aly: The Executive Director of the college program's like, "look, just hang tight. We're going to try to get you back so you can finish your college degree." And I was like, "okay, cool."

Earlonne: Pretty soon, Aly got called to a classification hearing, which is an administrative thing you have to do before you're transferred.

Aly: So, when they called me to classification, I'm like, *yeah, she did it! She's getting me back to San Quentin.* So man, I was happy. People trip 'cause they don't think we have happy days in prison, but man, that was one of them happy days. So, I'd go up in the classification hearing and they're like, "yep. We puttin' you up for transfer." And I'm

just sitting there, got my arms folded a little bit, you know, thinking, *yeah, alright– they did this*. They said, "yeah, you're going to an out of state facility." [laughs]

Nigel: Out of state facility?

Earlonne: Nah. Yeah, they used to do that. [Nigel says, "really?" in the background] They used to do that a lot. That shit was common when the federal courts told California to lower their overcrowding.

Aly: And then I was just like, "well, you gotta be kidding me! I was supposed to be going back to San Quentin!" And those classification hearings, they don't even let you talk, man. I tried to talk. They just like, "well, bring that up with your counselor." And I went back to the dorm. I was devastated. [beat comes in]

Earlonne: So, Aly facing another long ride on "The Gray Goose." This time he's headed out of state and a world away from San Quintin and the college classes.

Nigel: Ugh. And it's like when you move anywhere. It's like you're starting a new life, only in this situation, you have no control over it. You have no idea what that life is going to be, you're taken away from everything that's familiar, and your life is totally in somebody else's hands.

Earlonne: This is exactly what Brenda Birungi went through. A little while into her incarceration, she got transferred out of that prison near her cousin's house to another one way outside of London. [music fades out]

Brenda: So, we went from multicultural kind of streets to no black, no ethnic, no nothing, like it's just white people. You know, I think that journey for me was the most fearful, most heartbreaking because I was like, *nobody looks like me. There's no black people. There's not even an Asian person, like, what's happening?*

As we went deeper and deeper, like away from London, my whole– if I can say it, my life was ending, like, *again*. [00:20:00] I felt like a part of me was being taken. [soft atmospheric tones come in] When we finally got to the prison, I saw a black man. I saw this black guy in the prison uniform, you know, I can tell he's an officer. And he opened the gate for us and that was the first black person I'd seen in like three hours. So, I said, okay, *maybe it's okay here*. But that would be the last black officer. [laughs] [Earlonne affirms]

Earlonne: And he at the front gate.

Brenda: And he at the front gate. [both laugh] He ain't even in there with me. I can't even holler at him to talk to him, like, "hello, fellow black man. Do you understand what's happening here?" No, he ain't here. [music comes in]

Aly: So, I'm thinking I'm going straight to out of state, right? No. They come pick me up. They take me to Wasco State Prison. [music fades out]

Earlonne: So Aly doesn't get to Arizona right away. He has a layover at Wasco State Prison in California.

Nigel: Wasco?

Earlonne: That's one of them towns that you only hear about because they got a prison there.

Nigel: Oh, okay. And Aly says this prison is actually worse than CMC.

Aly: And, man, the first day I was there, they mixed the wrong gang members together. They mixed a Sureño and a Norteño and so it was— they start fighting and I get the overspray of that O.C. spray. And that stuff is— it's human Raid, is how I describe it. You just like, "Ahhhh!" Right? So, man, I'm at Wasco, sittin' in my cell on fire, burning up from this pepper spray thinking, *how did I get here? How did I get here? How can it get any worse?*

Nigel: Three weeks later, Aly finally moves on from Wasco.

Aly: So finally, the bus came at like midnight. [soft country music plays in the background] Loaded me on the bus and we drove all the way to Arizona, listening to country and western music that the CO's played on the bus. I like all kinds of music, but I don't like country and western. You know, *my dog died, my truck broke down, my old lady left me*. Just depressing all the way to Arizona. [music fades out]

Earlonne: I'm going to cut in here because Carl Cattermole might take issue with Aly's assessment of country music.

Carl: I remember one time I was going up to the North of England, like the Midlands of England in a— I was going up the M1, which is the big motorway, in a sweatbox and from London. And it was like a four-hour journey or something like that. And they were playing the worst music, man. They were playing all this like Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, kinda— it's not my thing. I'll put it like that. So, I was like, "just turn that fucking radio off, man!"

Earlonne: You're torturing us!

Carl: Yeah! [Earlonne laughs] I was like, "I feel like I'm fucking locked in a McDonald's. Turn this shit off!" So, they turned it some different radio and that Johnny Cash tune, "Hurt"— [Johnny Cash's "Hurt" begins] I don't know if listeners will know it. I'm not even going to try and sing it. I'm not that type of guy. Now the first lyric on it is like, *I hurt myself today, to see if I still feel*. [Johnny Cash singing lyrics simultaneous with Carl's

narration of the lyrics] And I heard that come through the radio, I was like, "Yeah, yeah, leave it on that station! This is a tune, man! This is a fucking banger!" And a couple boys on the bus were like, "No not this shit, man! It's some emo bullshit. This is some like, slit your wrists shit, man. I'm not listening to this shit." And I was going, like, "shut up, you lot!" So, I'm listening to this. "I'm having my one bit of Johnny Cash. And then, you lot can have your fucking Lady Gaga, saccharin, teenage girl bollocks. They were like, "Carl gettin' emotional, man. He's gettin' emotional!" Like, trying to wind me up. It's all fun and games, like, it's not— do you know what I mean? Like, we were just having a laugh, really, it's not too serious.

Earlone: They were all just taking the piss as the Brits say.

Nigel: Yep. Taking the piss. But then, they got to the prison. And the officers in reception had heard about how Carl responded to that melancholy Johnny Cash song.

Carl: I go into the reception and they were like, "right, so a single cell, high-risk to other prisoners." [Earlone laughs] And I was like, "I'm a good guy, man!" [music comes in]

Nigel: We're going to get back to Aly, who is still on the road trying to get back to San Quentin right after this quick break. And I like that country music— [music fades out]
[00:25:00]

Earlone: [music comes in] It's been nineteen months since Aly was transferred out of San Quentin and away from his college program. And he's been trying to get back ever since. [Nigel affirms]

Nigel: But instead, he wound up in a prison in Arizona. [music fades out]

Aly: So I get to Arizona, right? And get in the cell, and I'm telling my new bunkie, I'm like, "yeah, man, they're gonna get me back to San Quentin. I was in the program there." He looks at me. He says, "no one leaves here." [soft music comes in] I'm sittin' in the cell, you know, the days go by and my property comes about two, three weeks in. They transferred me out of that unit into a permanent housing and all my hope was gone. The hope was gone. Like, the hope that I was going back to San Quentin. I was just like, *I'm stuck in Arizona.*

Nigel: *Months* go by. [music fades out]

Aly: And then one day, the guards came to my door and they was like, "you got a phone call." And you know how that is. You know, every time that's happened to me in my life while I was incarcerated, it's to let you know that someone in your family died. So, they come, they handcuff me, take me to the program office. And you know, there's a lieutenant sitting there. And they have the chair flipped around backwards, so you can sit in it with handcuffs on. And the guy dials a number and someone picks up on the

other side and they say, "hey, is this Mr. Tamboura?" I say, "yes." "Is your CDC number F17843?" I'm like, "yes." She says, "were you at a college program at San Quentin?" I said "yes, yes, I was!" [laughs] They said, "would you like to go back?" I said, "yes, I do." They instructed me not to let anybody know, just keep it under wraps because— I don't know how they did it or what they did, but this is something that's rare, right? This doesn't happen. And so, you know, I went back to my cell and first thing I did was tell my cellie. [laughs] They don't understand the code. You know what I mean? I'm not gonna not give that information out. Man, if I could get back, that means someone else could get back. [music fades out]

Once I saw that California "Gray Goose" they call it, that bus parked out there at the prison in Arizona, and they came with the chains and, you know, chain you up, shackle you up. And I mean, at least— I did feel like a slave, but I felt like a slave that's being sold to a better place. I'm going to a better plantation, you know, [laughs] greener pastures. [music comes in]

Earlone: Aly is finally headed back. But you know that Gray Goose doesn't run express.

Nigel: Nope, it definitely does not. Aly's trip back took three days. And he stopped at five different prisons before he got to San Quentin.

Earlone: And another thing about prison transport, you do not get to choose who's on that journey with you.

Nigel: And during one of those layovers at another prison, Aly was unlucky enough to get stuck with a guy named Washington. [music fades out]

Aly: [beat comes in] He just wouldn't shut up. Man, I'm irritated. I'm thirsty. My wrists hurt. My back hurts. I mean, I've been on the road literally shackled for two days— over two days. They gave me a piece of chicken at Soledad. We got there in time for a hot meal. That was the best chicken I've ever had in my life. And for a while, this dude Washington that was running his mouth, I didn't even hear his mouth. Right? 'Cause I'm just eating this chicken. I'm like, "ahhh." [sighs of relief] But when the chicken was over, Washington—"blahblahblah" running his mouth. And I remember, officer says, "hey man, the bus doesn't come 'til tomorrow, 6 AM. Does any of you guys want to be housed in the hole overnight?" Man, I raised my hand, "send me to the hole," thinking that I'm winning, right? I'm going to finally be able to lie down. Man, there's doodoo everywhere in this cell. There's doodoo on the mattress, there's doodoo all over the sink. There's doodoo [00:30:00] on the floor. I mean, man, I was just like, "Oh God and baby Jesus." Right? So, I get the mattress and I turn it over and there's doodoo on the other side too. So then I figured out alright, I could fold the mattress in half and there was a doodoo-free zone.

Nigel: The next morning, Aly gets to leave, um, the doodoo dorm?

Earlonne: Nyge, you can call it the shithole. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: And then he lines up with the other guys for his final transfer.

Aly: So, they shackle us all up. This dude Washington's in the front of the line. They open the door for us to go outside to where the bus is. Washington goes through and they close the door. *Boom*. "Wait right here." All I hear is, "oh, ow, oh, ow! Goddamn motherfuckers. Take these off! You gonna beat me up..." you know. And then it went silent. We get on the bus, they're done. A lot of people don't know, but inside the buses, they have an isolation cell there for protective custody incarcerated people. So, they had thrown him in there upside down. So, when we were getting on the bus, he was still trying to right himself. And he's cussing and screaming. And he's saying, "this is gonna be the worst fucking bus ride of your lives! You motherfuckers gonna listen to me the whole time, you punks!"

Earlonne: This guy would not shut up. [Nigel laughs]

Nigel: Nope. And the bus is about to leave. Then one of the guards gets out and starts unloading boxes from the back of the bus.

Aly: So, like, now we're telling dude, "shut up, man! Shut up! They're taking our property off. The gonna do stuff to our property!" 'Cause that's what they always threaten. And he's still runnin' his mouth, runnin' his mouth, runnin' his mouth. And so, there's a brother on the other side of the bus, he's giving us a play by play. And dude goes, "Aye, uh..." And this is how I knew the cat's name is, they go, "who's Washington?!" "That's me! [mimicking a straining voice] So now he's really going off. [sound of bus motor running comes in] So I'm thinking, *oh, they're gonna leave this dude's property here*. Man, the bus backs up and it's like, *badump, badump*. Right? And then it goes forward, *badump, badump*. Then it backs up, *badump, badump*. So, they're running this dude's property over, man. They put it all behind the wheel of the bus. And then, on the last pass, I'm looking across the aisle and I just see lotion squirt up the window. [laughs]

Nigel: Oh my god, Earlonne.

Earlonne: Yup, fuckin' with your property is one of the main things CO's on the Gray Goose threaten you with. And they're not kidding.

Nigel: Yeah, clearly.

Earlonne: They're serious.

Aly: So, so then, the correctional officer gets back off the bus and he gets three brand new boxes and a broom and a dustpan. [music comes in] And so he takes this dude's property, sweeps it up, puts it in brand new boxes, and puts his labels on it, and puts it back on the bus. [laughing] [music fades out]

Brandon Davison: I'm Brandon Davison. I did three terms and five violations over a period of ten years. I was just on that revolving door cycle, man. I'd get out, I'd take my gate money to the drug connect and I'd be back in a week. [laughs] [soft music comes in]

I grew up in a broken home. Both my parents were drug addicts. My dad was in and out of prison when I was a kid, so, I started getting arrested early, like twelve years old. By sixteen, I was smoking meth. And, I first went to prison— was just a couple of weeks after my eighteenth birthday.

Earlonne: Brandon had been at Wasco State Prison.

Nigel: But they were shutting down a building there and moving a bunch of guys four hours north to Old Folsom. [music fades out]

Brandon: So, the morning we transpack, they get you up super early. You're in the paper jumpsuit, they put the shackles on you, they put all your property on the bus, right? We get on the bus and they say what they always say, "when the wheels are moving, shut up." And so, me, I thought I was kind of a hard ass, like I ain't listening to no cop. So, as soon as we're rolling down the 99 freeway, I strike up a conversation. So, I'm talking to the dude next to me and the cop in the front he goes, "aye, shut up! The wheels are moving. Don't make me tell you again." And I'm like, "ah, whatever," right? So, I be quiet for a while. And then after a little bit, I strike up a conversation again, and I'm talking to this dude and I get all animated when I talk and I talk kind of loud and this bus driver goes, "aye, what's your name?" And I go, "Davison." He goes, "alright, Davison, I got something for you." So, then I was like, *uh oh, what does that mean?* [music comes in] So, [00:35:00] I shut up the rest of the bus ride, 'cause I'm like, *man, am I going to get beat up?* Like, I don't know what's going to happen.

Earlonne: They get to Old Folsom and everyone's lined up to get their boxes.

Nigel: And Brandon sees the CO's are checking all the names on the boxes.

Brandon: And they were like, "nope. Johnson. Nope. Nope. Washington. No— oh, here's Davison." And they go and chuck the bags back on the bus and I go, "hey, wait a minute. That's my property!" And they go, "we know. We told you to shut up." [laughing] And I was like, *oh*. And they just shut the compartment and I was like, *oh, I see what's going on*. Man, I didn't see my property for three months.

Earlonne: [to Brandon] Mmm. And, and what kind of property did you have in there?

Brandon: Man, I mean, I have my fan, my radio. You got your sweats, you got, you know, personal clothes, all my letters, my pictures, I think I had a little bit of canteen, some drawings. Just everything that I had 'cause you don't take nothing with you on the bus. It's all in the bag. So, I didn't have nothing. I didn't have a toothbrush. I didn't have soap. I didn't have nothing, man.

Earlonne: But you know what, as hard as it was for Brandon, there was kind of a silver lining to all this time on the bus.

Brandon: As I got old enough to where like I could travel on my own, I never did. I was always on drugs. I was always trying to hit a lick. I was always just worried about the next come up and the next bag of drugs, right? So, I had never traveled. Like the farthest north I had been was like thirty minutes and the same was going south. And so, the most I had ever traveled in my life was when I finally caught a bag to go to Old Folsom. When we were driving north on the 99, I was sitting there and I was like, *man, I'm finally getting to travel*. And so, I sat there staring out the window, man, just like, *wow, this is what the rest of California looks like*. But it was like, *ah, but like I'm on a prison bus*. [transition sound]

Matthew Hearn: My name is Matthew Hearn. Altogether, I served about thirteen years. My first five and a half years, I did State time and then after that, I finished up in the feds.

Earlonne: And one thing about federal transportation is that a lot of times, you're shackled to another person.

Matthew: Just do the waist chains with the, you know, your hands on your side, and then you've got the ankle chains on too. And then at our waist chains, we're chained to somebody else with about, maybe eight inches of slack between us.

This particular individual that they had chained me to, he was undocumented. He didn't speak very much English. And, he looked *real* sick. Like he was keeled over, you know, he was sleeping for a large portion of it. And then all of a sudden, he woke up and he was like, "hey, baño, baño." And I was like, "okay."

Earlonne: In order for this guy to use the bathroom, he and Matthew, who is chained to him, need to do this little two-step dance all the way down the aisle of the bus to one of those tiny bathrooms in the back of the bus: a bathroom with no door on it.

Nigel: Ooh.

Matthew: He goes into the bathroom and he drops his pants to as much as he can. And he turns around to take a shit. And I was like, "oh, no. Oh, no!" 'Cause there's no like— I gotta be up on him. You have to be there. And, the bathroom didn't have toilet paper this time. So not only, when he gets done taking a shit, he can't even wipe his ass. And I'm yelling at the CO's. They tell us, "you gotta wait for the next stop. Whenever the next stop is, we'll do it." So, this man just had to, he had to pull his pants up and, you know, we had to sit for like another 45 minutes 'til they did a stop. Then they put toilet paper in there. And then we went back there and then he took another shit. [laughs] And then about an hour before we got to our last destination, man, he had to take *another* shit. And it was just like the worst. It was like, you know, he's sick. This is when I start to understand that this man is just like real— like, he's really sick. So now it's all starting to make sense. But it just doesn't make my ride any better at that time. You just, you're hot! [Earlonne chuckles] You're sitting over there, you're upset. You're mad at the world. You're mad at these cops. You're mad at this dude. [laughs] You're mad at yourself. You know, you're mad at everybody at that point. Worst bus ride I ever had.

Nigel: Matthew also told us about something that feds do called "diesel therapy."

Matthew: So, if I've ever done something that is an egregious offense to administration, [00:40:00] they'll do "diesel therapy," which is they're going to put you on a bus, and you are never going to find a home. So, you're gonna get on and they're going to be like, "oh, we gotta take you to— all the way across the country." And then you're going to go onto the bus ride. And then once you get there, they're going to be like, "oh no, we got to take you over here." And basically, you're stuck in perpetual transit and they do it so much that your mail doesn't even catch up with you.

Earlonne: Damn. So how long would that last? About a month?

Matthew: Diesel therapy? [Earlonne affirms] No, there's people who've been on diesel therapy for three, four years. Those buses are running nonstop. So, they're just going to be on the next bus.

Earlonne: That's deep, man.

Matthew: Yeah. That's, you know, some of their punishments are limited. Well that punishment in particular isn't limited. They could transfer you and transfer you and transfer you. And then you're just stuck on a bus, *all* the time. [transition sound]

Jack Corey: My name is Jack Corey. Presently, I am a special deputy with the Eau Claire County Sheriff's Department in Wisconsin. Actually, all that means is I do prisoner transports. [music comes in]

Nigel: Okay. Wait, we have to pause for a moment and acknowledge. This is one of the rare moments that a CO, aside of course from our beloved Sam Robinson, has agreed to talk with us.

Earlonne: Hell yeah. Jack is not a California CO, but he's a CO. He lives in Wisconsin and started driving prisoner transports eleven years ago.

Nigel: Yep. And that was after three decades as a police officer.

Earlonne: He drives prisoners from jail to prison for medical trips or for court appearances that are often all the way across the state.

Nigel: And he says court trips can get a little ridiculous. [music fades out]

Jack: There was one week in particular, it just was so stunning. Absolutely every person we brought back for a hearing, none of them saw the judge or had a hearing. There were probably about twenty-five or thirty, if not more. Every person we transported that week, none of them resolved one point whatsoever.

Earlonne: What's crazy is that a lot of times they could accomplish everything they need to through a teleconference.

Nigel: But for some reason, judges often want to see people in the flesh.

Jack: So, it sounds good that they want to know the people that they're dealing with, but, if you're bringing a guy across state to say, "how do you plead? Guilty or not guilty?" "Not guilty." "Okay. We'll see you in a little while." And you take 'em back. I mean, they're not doing anything. This is when it gets a little bit silly.

Nigel: So, Jack is driving folks back and forth, back and forth across the state. He's really spending a lot of time with these people he's transporting,

Earlonne: Right. And sometime, he sees some tough shit, like this one transport he drove.

Nigel: And heads up, the next bit mentions attempted suicide.

Jack: It was a young lady. It was a girl. She was a fourteen-year-old girl. She was actually from another state. Her relatives literally drove her from Minnesota to Wisconsin, dropped her on the street and said, "good luck." And she wound up with our agency on a mental health commitment. And, she had real issues. I mean, a lot of severe abuse issues. And she had a psychiatric condition where she would eat anything, called Pica. And they gave her a sandwich to eat before the transport and instead, she ate the plate, which was a porcelain plate. She broke it up and ate the plate. And, so they had to hold her a couple of days to get that out of her system. And

they decided that to make the transport easier, they were going to put her to sleep. And so, they gave her Haldol and that was supposed to keep her asleep for the whole trip. Well, halfway through the trip, she woke up. And then she decided to try to hang herself with the seatbelt in back. And so, then my partner had to go and sit back there with her for the remainder of the trip. And I don't know whatever happened to her. I have no idea where she's at right now. And that's hard. [soft music comes in]

Earlonne: When incarcerated people get on his prison transport, Jack says he tries to keep one thing in mind.

Jack: This is a bad day for them. This is about as bad a day as it gets. There are a couple of steps higher; it could get worse, but not many.

Earlonne: Nyge

Nigel: Yeah?

Earlonne: I got to say, so many of the stories we hear about CO's in transit buses are *really* cold, you know? [00:45:00]

Nigel: Yeah. It's almost like in every story, the CO's are mistreating incarcerated people in one way or another.

Earlonne: Yeah. And them CO's be on a power trip. I had to ask Jack about that.

[to Jack] It's like, [mimicking a CO] *you're going to be quiet. We're gonna pull this bus over, throw your property off! Beat you up! Kill you!* [Jack affirms] Have you been in the presence of other officers like that or is it a tactic? Is it a power trip?

Jack: Well, the answer to all that is "yes." But, [chuckles] those guys are out there. We've met them. We know who they are. I can think of some guys that I worked with that were like that. And, thankfully they're no longer working for the agency. And I'd like to say that I'm the norm. Believe me, I am not. [soft music comes in]

Aly: I remember driving up to San Quentin, right?

Earlonne: My boy Aly. Three days after he left the prison and Arizona, he finally made it back.

Aly: And a lot of the people on the bus, man, this is their first time going to prison. You know what I mean? They come from the county jail and there's some transfers on there. But me I'm like, I got a big, giant grin on my face. I'm happy. And I know other people must've thought I was crazy. *Man, why is this guy happy to go to prison?* We went into those gates, man, I was just grinning ear to ear.

Earlonne: But this point, Nyge, [Nigel affirms] it had been almost two years since Aly was transferred out of San Quentin.

Nigel: Yup. And when you're gone that long, people really assume that you're gone for good, like you are out. [music fades out] [Earlonne affirms]

Aly: I get off the bus and I get in R&R and the first person I see is this guy, Phil. He is an incarcerated person that was working in our R&R. [music comes in] And, I look at him and I say, "hey Phil! Hey, Phil!" Phil sticks his hand out and waves me down, like, total disrespect 'cause he thinks I had paroled and caught a new case and I'm back on a new case. He didn't know that I had been gone, you know, to CMC, Wasco, Arizona. I had never got out.

Nigel: And of course, there was one more person we had to check in with about vehicles and prison life.

Rahsaan "New York" Thomas: [over the phone] This is Rahsaan "New York" Thomas. Spinnin' live from San Quentin.

Earlonne: We got him daydreaming about this drive he took one time down the California coast, bumping Chico DeBarge, *The Game*. [Chico DeBarge's *The Game* comes in]

New York: [over the phone, signing]
Win or lose
That's the way you play life's game
If you play it wrong
Then you're the one to blame (You're the one to blame)
If I could choose
I would make a change
But it's the same old song
That everybody shame
Get the money, money, money, money.

Nigel: [over the phone, to New York] We miss you, New York!

New York: I miss y'all too. [*The Game* fades out]

Earlonne: [soft atmospheric tones come in]

[to Nigel] Where else are we going this season?

Nigel: Okay. We are gonna go down south to retrieve three boxes of objects that have some very heavy, emotional weight.

Speaker 5: All the things I collected over my life, they're all beautiful, they're all cool; but they're also bound up with, like, a lot of angry demons and old memories.

Earlonne: We're going to hear kids around a campfire talking about what they would like to say to their incarcerated parents.

Speaker 6: [reading] *You don't understand at all. You don't know how upset it makes me. Why do I always cry over you? Do you ever cry over me? It doesn't seem like it anymore.* [voice breaks]

Sorry. [Earlonne says, "it's okay" faintly in the background]

I just feel like now, I'm not even motivated to even talk to him. There's never anything to talk about. And like, I'm not even sad. I'm just angry. I have so much like anger.

Nigel: We're going to take you to the scene of Ear Hustle's very first cooking contest.

Earlonne: Indeed.

[clip from cooking contest begins]

Up next, I would say is Adam. [clapping]

Adam: I am Awesome Adam. I'm going to win this. This is my competition. You know, I mean, I'll encourage and support always, however; the cream must rise to the top and that's happening with me. [clip ends and beat comes in]

Nigel: And we're going to bring you untold stories from earlier this year, when COVID-19 hit the California prison system.

We've got a packed season coming up.

Earlonne: That we do.

Nigel: And, we have a ton of people to thank for this episode.

Earlonne: Ear Hustle is a big ass family.

Nigel: Thanks to Carl Cattermole and Brenda Birungi.

Earlonne: Carlos Flores, and the homie, Aly Tamboura.

Nigel: Brandon Davison and Matthew Hearn.

Earlonne: And thanks to [00:50:00] Jack Corey. Thanks also to Robert McNutt, Gregory Rogers, Alex Rivera, Eddie Hollingsworth, and Michael Stone.

Nigel: And I'm so excited to thank Rocket in Australia. And Nadya from the band Pussy Riot. They both told us great prison ride stories, but unfortunately, we just couldn't fit them into this episode. Doesn't mean we don't think they're great.

Earlonne: Bonus episode after the season.

Nigel: Ah yes, I hear a bonus coming.

Earlonne: G'yeah. Thanks to Peter Ruzavin who put us in touch with Nayda.

Nigel: And to Johanna Bell who talked to Rocket for us. And please be sure to check out their amazing podcast, Bird's Eye View about a female prison in Australia, and you can hear more Rocket there.

Earlonne: Ear Hustle is produced by Nigel Poor, Rahsaan "New York" Thomas, Bruce Wallace, and me, Earlonne Woods.

Nigel: And also, John Yahya Johnson.

Earlonne: Yahya!

Nigel: We are so glad he joined Ear Hustle's outside team.

Earlonne: Indeed. This episode was sound designed and engineered by Antwan Williams with music by Antwan Williams, David Jassy and Dwight Krizman.

Nigel: Amy Standen edits the show and Julie Shapiro is the Executive Producer for Radiotopia.

Earlonne: We said goodbye to our long-time, hardworking...

Nigel: So hardworking!

Earlonne: ...hustling [Nigel affirms] Digital Producer, Erin Wade. She's going over to our sister Radiotopia show, Criminal. They're lucky to have her.

Nigel: Ear Hustle would like to thank acting warden Ron Broomfield. And as you know, every episode of Ear Hustle has to be approved by this guy here. [music fades out]

Lieutenant Sam Robinson: Hello, Ear Hustle world. This is Lieutenant Sam Robinson, the Public Information Officer at San Quentin State Prison. And who would have thought when we began this venture that we'd be entering into Season Six! And I believe we've just scratched the surface of all of the stories that can emanate out of a place like this. So, welcome into the sixth edition of the Ear Hustle world. And so, with that I will say, I approve this episode. [theme comes in]

Earlone: 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.

Nigel: Ear Hustle is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around. Hear more at radiotopia.fm.

I'm Nigel Poor.

Earlone: And I'm Earlone Woods.

Nigel: Peace.

Earlone: Peace out. [theme fades out]

[to Matthew] They didn't have a bidet— what they call it? Boo-day?

Matthew: Yeah, a bidet. [laughing]

Earlone: They didn't have a bidet on the bus?

Matthew: No, they didn't have a bidet, man.

Earlone: I think bidets are mando—

Matthew: Yeah, Europeans know how to do it. [laughs]

[00:52:55] **END OF EPISODE.**