IAN MANUEL INTERVIEW
LIFE STORY FEATURES
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

IAN MANUEL
Poet, Activist
January 11, 2017
Interviewed by: Teddy Kunhardt
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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Life Story Features

Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Ian Manuel

Poet, Activist

00:00:12:00

Ian Manuel

Poet, Activist

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Ian, before we start, can you just please tell me your name and what you do for a living?

IAN MANUEL:

My name is Ian Manuel. I'm a poet activist, and I work for the New York Mayor's office in the criminal justice field.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
Thank you. Now, where would you like to start your story?

IAN MANUEL:
In Tampa, in the beginning. I grew up in a place called Central Park Village. But I like to start with the worst thing I ever did in my life, the night that I shot Debbie Bakery as a 13-year-old child. I remember sitting on my 12, 13-year-old girlfriend's porch and being… like trying to get her to go upstairs with me, and she just kept refusing, saying it was too soon. Last time we went upstairs, I told my mom. And I remember one of my friends came to ask me if I wanted to go to the game room. And I told him no, I was going to stay with my girlfriend. And he left, and another guy came and asked me to go somewhere. I turned him down as well, but by this time, hours had started to elapse. And I remember sitting on the porch getting frustrated with her that she wouldn't go upstairs with me.

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IAN MANUEL:
And by this time, the third guy came, which was my friend, Marquise. And he asked me to step off the porch, and he whispered in my ear he had a gun and he would— asked me did I want to go downtown to do a robbery? He actually said the street terminology for the word, which was go jacking. And I was like, "Sure, might as well. Nothing's going on here." And I often think back to that moment because I wonder if I had left the porch the first time with my friend that wanted to go to the game room, or the second friend that I think wanted to go to the park, how much different my life would've been. But

instead, I went with my friend that had the gun and we went downtown. And we met up with two older teens, a guy by the name of Keith and Ronald. And we ended up going downtown looking for people to rob.

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IAN MANUEL:

They gave me the gun, and we began to search downtown for people to actually rob. But it was in such wide open spaces that I kept saying, "No. No. Not this one. Not that one." Until they became frustrated with me after a couple hours. And I remember sitting down on a curve, all of us sitting down on the curve, and they was like, "If you're scared, give the gun to someone else." So I remember sitting and giving the gun to Marquise, and Marquise gave the gun to his cousin Keith, and he passed the gun to Ronald. So we're sitting there passing this gun back and forth like a hot potato. And finally, the gun ended up in Marquise's hand again. And he was like, "Ian's not scared. I know Ian. Ian will do it." He gave the gun. So we made a decision amongst ourselves that the next people that we approach, no matter if it was too wide open or not, that we was going to go through with the crime, and I agreed to it.

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IAN MANUEL:

And as I'm telling you the story, I'm visualizing this parking lot that we were in. And every time I remember this story and just think about how much different my life would've been if I just didn't go through with this crime, it kind of bothers me. But I remember the oldest guy, Ronald, approaching the couple. It was a white couple sitting in front of a car, red car if I remember correctly … saying "Do you have change for a 20?" And I thought I heard the

couple say, "Yes, we do." I pulled out the gun. The lady screamed. I immediately fired. And…I didn't know no one was shot because in the movies and in my childhood mind, when someone was shot, they always fell down. No one fell down.

00:05:01:00

IAN MANUEL:

Debbie, I actually later found out her name was Debbie, she took off in the street running. I shot at the guy, told him to get on the ground. He didn't get on the ground. I shot again; missed both times, thank God. Debbie was turning the corner. I shot again at her, and I turned and ran. And the guys were searching the man for money. And Marquise caught up with me. He was like, "Slow down. Slow down." I was like, "How much did you get?" And he like, "He didn't have anything on him, Ian. He didn't have any money." So I always think back to that, not to get ahead of the story, but I always think back to that because I ended up being charged with the armed robbery when there was no money taken from any of the victims that night. So that's where I wanted to start at.

00:05:57:00

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Wow. Thank you for sharing that. That's incredible. Where were you living at the time? And talk about that you were only 13 years old.

IAN MANUEL:

So, where I was living at the time, surprisingly, I didn't know this until my social worker, Morale Morrison, pointed this out to me. She was hired by the Equal Justice Initiative to be my social worker while I was still in prison and

doing my initial reentry process. I was homeless and didn't even realize I was homeless because mom fell behind on the rent. And we lost our apartment in Central Park Village on 1255 Burton Court Street, Burton Court. And we moved to 1239 Scott Street with a friend of my mother's, Lois, who I knew as Aunt Lois. So, I was homeless and didn't even know it.

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IAN MANUEL:

And that's where I was at the time of this crime. But I was still working a job. I had a job. I was always very innovative and very driven. And so, at the age of 11, I went downtown looking for a job, and I was given a job by a guy that's still my friend and president and CEO of the YMCA, Bob Gilbertson. And we would do things like work at the YMCA and clean off the exercise bikes. And he introduced us to a side of Tampa that we didn't even know existed. The white part of Tampa, the middle class part of Tampa with sailboats and yacht clubs and things like that. But being 13, I was a child, and I just had a difficult life, childhood growing up. So on one part, while I was striving to become something, the environment that I was in, in the neighborhood, it was a pull. It was a constant pull from doing the right thing, but yet being surrounded by violence and negativity all day. So I was conflicted, and it was just a tough childhood growing up.

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TEDDY KUNHARDT:

What physical damage did the bullet do to Debbie?

IAN MANUEL:

The bullet knocked out some teeth, a piece of her tongue, from what I read in the interviews that she's said over the years. And it took years of reconstructive dental surgery… to fully heal from that pain. But, you know, something that I'm always thankful for is that she didn't die and she came home from the hospital the very same night. That doesn't take away from the damage and emotional pain that the bullet caused, but I was very thankful that she survived.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And after the shooting, there was three days, and it eventually led to you stealing a white Cadillac with two friends. Can you describe those three days?

00:09:26:00

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah. I vaguely don't remember those three days, they were a whirlwind. I remember going to work for Bob at his house during that time. Like wash his car and stuff. But I do remember stealing a car with my two associates, OB and Ron. God bless the day, OB's passed away now. But we went to another part of Tampa to steal a car, and we were joy riding and I was in the back seat. And OB or Ron was driving, and they were in the front seat. And the police got behind us. And I told them to just stay calm and pretend like it was our car and to drive normal, and maybe the cop would go past us. But there was a shattered window from— in the back where we had used the screwdriver to open up the window, and the police stayed behind us.

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IAN MANUEL:

And I just remember I almost died that day. Because when we jumped out of the car, we always heard that if you let the car keep rolling that the police would go after the car and not chase after you. That's not true. At least it wasn't true in this instance. Because when we jumped out of the car, my foot got stuck under the car's tires and I was going down falling, and I literally had to snatch my foot from under the tire so I wouldn't get rolled over by the car. And the police said he seen it. The officer said he seen it, and he thought I was dead. But by the grace of God, I survived that. But they got the K-9 dogs out there, arrested me initially, and then they chased the other guys. They caught up with them soon afterward and we all ended up in a police station.

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IAN MANUEL:

And I remember seeing an officer in the police station that night that had approached me in the neighborhood the night of the shooting. And I… it was gnawing on me what I had done to Debbie. And I just remember asking a cop, Did they ever catch the guy that he asked me about that night that shot Debbie? And he said, "No, I don't think we did." And that eventually led to me confessing to the officer in the back seat of the car as we got to the detention center. A different officer, the arresting officer of the stolen car incident. I remember him saying, "If you got anything else to tell me, we'll just let it stay in the car."

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IAN MANUEL:

And I did something that…it took years for me to forgive myself for. And that was because when you're from the streets, one of the first rules of the street is don't snitch on nobody else, especially yourself. And I told on myself. The

night of the crime, you know, telling them about the night of the crime. And then the police officer told me he was going to let it stay in the car. But as soon as I made my confession, he went into the detention center, picked up the phone, called a detective, got back in the car and turned around. I'm like, "Where are we going?" And he's like, "We're going back to the police station. The detective wants to talk to you." And I don't know if anyone's ever been like understands—that hasn't been arrested understands the police process is a long one.

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IAN MANUEL:

I had been in the police station for like five hours already, got arrested around six o'clock until 11 o'clock at night. All I want to do is go into the detention center and go to sleep. And I'm hungry, I'm sleepy. I'm a child and I just want to go to sleep. And the detective— the officer did something that he wasn't supposed to do, and he stopped at a chicken place. It's probably why I hate chicken to this day. He stopped at Popeye's and got us something to eat, and took me to the police station to finish confessing to the detective. And that's when I told the detective what I did that night. And they took me back to the detention center, it was about one or two o'clock in the morning.

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IAN MANUEL:

But the reason I said the police wasn't supposed to do what he did, because he was actually coercing me into a confession by buying me food. And later on my attorney would try to suppress that evidence, and the officer would say he was just doing a good deed. He didn't want to— He was buying hisself

food, but he didn't want to eat in front of a kid. So he was doing me a favor by feeding me.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And again, how old are you? I want to keep on reminding the people watching this that you were just a child.

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah, I was 13 at the time. And there's case law out there that says there was so many things they did wrong in my processing. But looking back on it now, everything was meant to happen for a reason.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And then you were sentenced to 21 days for grand theft auto, and did you think that was it?

00:15:42:00

IAN MANUEL:
I did. I did. That's a great question. Because I distinctively remember… there's this—in the juvenile detention center there's a door with a window and a cage that you can stop by and check with the classification department to find out if you have any pending holds, to find out if you have any court dates coming up. And I just remember two weeks into my 21 day sentence constantly stopping by this office to ask, "Hey, anything new on me?" They're like, "No, Ian, you getting ready to go home?" And I'm like, "You sure?" This is after my confession. And they're like, "No, we don't have anything on you."

You're 14, 15 days in, you're secured detention is what they call 21 days. Your secured detention is almost up.

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IAN MANUEL:

So, I was arrested July 30th, and then on August 17th when my 21 days was almost over with, I remember getting called out of the dormitory to come talk to a staff supervisor who we called DJ Blind. And he's like, "Ian, what's your brother's name?" And he was standing there with a guy in a suit and a hat. And I said, "My brother's name is John John." "What's his real name?" I say, "Sean Manuel." The detective was like— the guy in the suit was like, "Yeah, I know him. I remember him." I said, Okay." I remember I had asked DJ earlier in the day, could I come out in the hallways and clean up? Because when you come in the hallways and clean up, you could have access to extra snacks and you can go talk to the girls who was in the detention center. And it was almost like a privilege. So I thought that's what he called me out there for, to give me an opportunity to clean the hallway.

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IAN MANUEL:

So I'm like, "Okay, I'ma go get the broom DJ and start sweeping out here." He was like, "No, you're not." I'm like, "What you mean no I'm not? What you call me out here for?" He said, "Man, you're going to jail." I'm already in a detention center, so what he's saying isn't computing in my brain. I'm like, "Man, yeah, going to jail. Okay, seriously, what you got me out here for?" He said, "I'm not playing, I'm dead serious. Detective Dessau is here to take you to the county jail." And Dessau had these chains and shackles in his hands and he shook them. I'm like, "This is for real?" He like, "Yeah, you made it to

the big time now." And I just remember going back telling him, "Okay, well let me go back to the dormitory to get my stuff." So I went back to the dormitory and my stuff only consisted of a few letters that I had received from my mom while I was in the detention center.

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IAN MANUEL:

And I just remember going back, telling the other kids, "Man, I'm going to the county jail, man." They're like, "Man, get out of here." No one believed it. I didn't believe it. Because I—when you're 13 you think you know everything and you don't. And I thought that you had to be 14 years old to be waived over to the adult court. Which you do. But I didn't know that Florida had a law that says a child of any age that's indicted for a life or death felony shall be treated in every respect as if he were an adult. So what that means is, a child, I could have been 6, 7. This law is still on the books and we're fighting to get it overturned. Because a child, 6, 7, 8, there's no age limit in the state of Florida to a child being tried as an adult. If they have been charged with a—grand jury indicted for an adult—for the crime of attempted murder or robbery, or anything of that nature, a life or death felony, they can try you as an adult. And I didn't know that at the time.

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IAN MANUEL:

And so Detective Dessau chained me up, put me in his detective car, and was driving me to the Hillsborough County Jail in downtown Tampa, which is right across the street from Central Park Village where I grew up. And I remember him asking me what was my birthday? And I clearly told this man 3/29/77. And the reason I bring that up is because he only got the three and

the two. And for 26 years in the Department of Corrections that was my birthday, erroneously, 3/2/77.

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TEDDY KUNHARDT:
All right. So now you're in jail. It's the day of your court, and your public defender tells you something about changing your plea.

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah. I had been in jail. I had been in the county jail. I distinctly remember this. I went to jail August 17th, and around the end of January of 1991 my paid attorney that the state was paying for… I have to put this in there, because to this day I don't remember why the public defender's office said they had a conflict with handling my case. And so, what that meant was that a private attorney had to take my case, but the state of Florida was paying for it. So essentially it was still a public defender, but he was a private attorney being paid by the state.

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IAN MANUEL:
And he told me, "Ian, I want you to plead guilty, throw yourself at the mercy of the court." And this was after we lost our motion to suppress my confession hearing, despite the fact that the officers had coerced me into, you know, by giving me food. And there's tons of case law that says you can't do this to a child. They asked me—My attorney asked me to plead guilty. And I was like, " I don't want to plead guilty. I don't want to go to prison at all. Can you try to get me life probation?" Not even knowing what I was asking for, but I just know I didn't want to go to prison. Period. I had heard so many stories

about prison. And he was like, "Ian, if you go to trial, you're going to make the judge mad and you're going to get a life sentence. And I'm like, "Well..." He said, "But if you plead guilty, I can get you 15 years."

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IAN MANUEL:

Now, I don't know about you, but telling a 13 year old child who hasn't even been alive 15 years yet that he's going to get 15 years in prison, that in and of itself sounds like a life sentence. So, I didn't see the difference between a life sentence and 15 years. I was like, "Man, just try to get me life probation." He wasn't satisfied with my response, so he went into the audience on his crutches, because he had just torn his achilles, and he was on crutches. And he hopped over to my mom and talked to my mom for about five, 10 minutes. And then my mom came, made our way over to the jury box, because that's where they sat the kids at, the juveniles. They separated us and put us in the jury box. And my mom harbored over to the side of the jury box, I mean, walked over to the side of the jury box and was like, "Ian, baby, do what your lawyers say. Please plead guilty. Do it for me."

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IAN MANUEL:

And I thought about all the times that I had did the exact opposite of what my mom had asked me to do, and ended up reaping the consequences of that behavior, whether it was don't go outside that night, and I go outside after 11 o'clock, which was my curfew, and get arrested. I just thought about all the times that my mom had told me to do something and I did the opposite and she was right. And plus, she had been in the criminal justice system before, so I took her word and I said, "Okay, Ma, I'll do it. I'll do it for you." And, I can

honestly say she went to her grave regretting that decision of asking me to plead guilty, because I didn't receive 15 years. I was sentenced to the rest of my life in prison.

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TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And was Debbie at the trial?

IAN MANUEL:
There was no trial. Debbie was at the pre-sentencing hearing and sentencing hearing… And she sat with my mother at times. She told my mother she didn't want me to go to prison, that she understood. And yet, when it came time for her to finally speak to the court, you know, that wasn't what she initially conveyed to the judge.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And something happened. She saw you do something.

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IAN MANUEL:
Yeah. Debbie saw me laughing at one of the pre-sentencing hearings. One of my… I was going to say friends, but one of the kids that I was in the county jail with had said something funny, in the court, amongst ourselves in the jury box. And I laughed. And, I didn't know at the time that in the court of law, you have to be stoic and present like you're taking every iota of the circumstances that you're in serious. I was a 13 year old child. Someone, another child said something funny. I laughed. Debbie seen me laughing, interpret that laugh that I wasn't taking these court proceedings seriously. And, when it was her

turn to speak during my sentencing to the judge, Debbie said, "He's been in here laughing about this. I could have died. If he doesn't care, then I don't care."

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IAN MANUEL:

This was not the woman that had been hearing my mother tell me was on my side and wanted to see me come home. But, I don't think… even if she would've said that in court, it would've made a difference to the judge who sentenced me. He already had his mind made up that I was unfit to be a part of society, and he was determined to banish me… and obliterate me from existence in the free world.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And what was your sentence?

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IAN MANUEL:

The judge looked at me and he said, "Mr. Manuel, there was a statement made about giving you a second chance. However, judging from your past, you've had too many chances already. And I sentence you, for the crime of attempted murder, to life. For the crime of armed robbery, I sentence you to life. For the crime of attempted armed robbery, I sentence you to 15 years. And those sentences are to run concurrent. And for the other crime of attempted murder for shooting the guy, I sentence you to life probation." So I ended up with the life probation that I wanted, but it also came with the rest of my life in prison. And he said, "That the life probation was being imposed, in case the Department of Corrections should, for whatever reason, ever release you."

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

What was going through your head when you heard that?

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IAN MANUEL:

I didn't comprehend that. I didn't comprehend… Again, 15 years, life sentence all meant the same to my mind. Life probation, I'm like, how can I get out of prison to do the life probation if you just gave me a life sentence? But oh maybe, the life sentence is only 25 years. Maybe it's only 20 years. I didn't know. I didn't know to understand the legal consequences of that sentence. I didn't know that life in prison meant until I expired, until I took my last breath in prison. I went back to the holding cell where my childhood friend/cousin Sam, who was Lois' son that we were staying with at 1239 Scott Street, and he was in the holding cell for…pending a trespassing charge. And he asked me, "What did they do?" And I told him, I said, "Man, they gave me 40 years."

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IAN MANUEL:

I'll never forget. I told him they gave me 40 years. That's what I thought I had. I thought each life sentence meant 20 years, 20 years. And, I just remember him busting out in tears. But they were angry tears. He just started crying. It was like, "Man, I promise you, man, when I get out, man, they going to pay for what they just did to you, man." And seeing him cry in front of me gave me the permission I needed to release some of the emotions I felt, because I remember my mother hugging me in the courtroom, not knowing that was going to be the last time I ever touched her. So I started to cry, thinking about

what had just happened. And we just both kind of cried and kind of hugged each other in the holding cell. That was August, I mean, April 11th, 1991.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
I want to jump back in time now. Can you tell me about your mother being sent to prison?

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IAN MANUEL:
Yeah, I can, even though I don't remember much about it because I wasn't born. I can only tell you the stories that I heard. And the stories that I heard was we were staying in a part of Tampa called Ropers Park at the time. And there was no gate that separate the yards in the neighborhood, in the projects. And apparently, my brother used to always play in, my brother who was nine or ten years older than me, Sean, he would play in the neighbor's yard. And she had warned him and my mother to keep Sean out of her yard. And Sean went in her yard one day, and apparently, she hit my brother. And my brother ran in the house and told my mother. And my mother was irate that someone besides her would put their hands on her son. And my mom acted out of anger and shot the lady. I don't know what part of the body she shot the lady in, but I do remember this fact from that crime. It was a .32. And what's crazy about that is it's the exact type of gun that I used as a 13-year-old child when I shot Debbie.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And how long was she sentenced for?

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IAN MANUEL:
She only got three years.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And do you find it odd that you used the same gun, similar crime, she only got three years, you got life in prison without parole?

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah. It was definitely odd. It was definitely striking. I don't know what went into that thinking except… And I'm not... When I say this, when say what I'm about to say, I don't want this to be mischaracterized. I'm just saying I've always thought about the case of Emmett Till, and I just recently seen the movie. So it's stuck with me that a 13, 14-year-old child was allegedly caught for whistling at a white woman, and here I was, I don't know, so many decades, years later, guilty of shooting a white woman. So since they couldn't lynch me like they did Emmett Till, they did it legally with this corrupt judicial system that they have in the state of Florida. They lynched me in a different way.

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TEDDY KUNHARDT:
Wow. And who is Linda Johnson?

IAN MANUEL:
Linda Johnson was my grandmother who loved me unconditionally and taught me what love was; a very, very special woman in my life. What I find ironic about my grandmother is she couldn't read and write. And reading and

writing is something I do as well as anything in the world. It's my gift. And so I always found it ironic that my grandmother couldn't even sign her name on her checks, her retirement checks that she received from Morrison Cafeteria or the government. She always, when we used to go to the bank to cash her checks at the first of the month, the teller would ask her, "Ms. Johnson, just sign your name." And she was like, "I don't know how." And the teller would tell her, "Just sign a X, and you'll be able to receive your money." And that always stuck with me years later that my grandmother couldn't even read and write, but she was able to support herself for several years in the kitchen in the cafeteria of Morrison.

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TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And did she take care of you while your mother was in prison?

IAN MANUEL:
Not initially. Initially, I was bounced around from, uh… between my mother's friends. My mother had a friend named Lynn Creole and another friend that kept me. But my grandmother would not leave them alone about taking care of me. So finally, Lynn went to my mother in prison and said, "Ian's grandmother, Linda, won't leave me alone about this boy. And so I want to give her to him to raise while you're incarcerated." And my mom gave her a blessing.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And then when your mom got released, she would often tell you that you weren't her baby.

IAN MANUEL:

Yeah, she'd say harmful things. My mom would say harmful things throughout the years. She'd talk about the color of my skin and how dark I was, and how she found me on the doorstep, or they must be switched babies in the hospital, and all type of hurtful things that I didn't know was hurtful at the time. But I think I was dealing with a very conflicted individual who had her own issues and didn't quite know how to love because she also said some good things that I can think back on in my life that I would recall growing up in solitary.

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IAN MANUEL:

Not to get ahead of the story, but she said something that stuck with me for years. And that was, "Ian, you're brilliant no matter what. Don't never let anyone take your mind." And that resonated with me growing up in prison and specifically, in solitary because when she made that statement, I was just a little Black kid growing up in the ghetto. I wasn't in prison. So why would she hammer it in my head to not let anyone take my mind? And I depended on that in solitary because it was like my last line of defense against the insanity that surrounded me.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Can you tell me about Sean, also known as John-John?

00:38:22:00

IAN MANUEL:

Yeah. My brother was a big athletic 250-pound guy that should have been in the NFL if you ask me. He was very, very fast, particularly for a guy his size, 6' 3", 6' 4", 250. In order to be successful, one thing I've learned is you just got to have that fire in you, that motivation to excel. And he was just satisfied being a neighborhood hoodlum. He never wanted to, I guess, explore. And he was extremely smart, particularly in a subject that I'm not too good in, which is numbers and math. My brother, Sean, was someone I looked up to as a kid, and also the guy that violated my trust, ultimately.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
Why do they call him John-John, and why do they call you Jim-Jim?

00:39:34:00

IAN MANUEL:
Great question. You might not believe this, but I remember my mom telling me she named him John-John after President Kennedy's son. And I think… My dad real name is Jimmy. And so it was just a play off my dad's name, why my name was Jim-Jim. So it just went together.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
Can you tell me about Jimmy Reese?

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah, from what I… the vagueness that I remember of him in my mind, because he wasn't around often during my childhood. I don't remember seeing my dad until around 1988, and I was born in '77. So to not really see my dad that much until '88 was kind of like… I knew he existed, but he

wasn't a part of my life, not initially, anyway, until years later when I was in prison, after my mom had passed away.

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IAN MANUEL:

But he was a tall man with a big laugh. His nickname was Rock Jaw. Don't ask me why they call him Rock Jaw. He was born at Cordele, Georgia, a country boy. And he drank a lot of beers. And I just remember one time he got drunk, and came to my grandmother's house, and tried to beat me for some reason. And I'm like, "Who is this guy that I don't even know trying to impede in my life after not being there for such a long time?" But I really don't know my dad to be able to give you a lot of input on him.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Can you tell me what John-John did to you as a boy?

00:41:47:00

IAN MANUEL:

Yeah. Kind of painful to talk about, but to just be… I was sexually abused as a child by my brother. The details are kind of foggy. It happened when I was five or six years old. But that's the ultimate thing that he did to betray my trust as a kid brother.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And can you describe the cone of silence and the impact it had on you?

IAN MANUEL:

Yeah, you know, in the Black community, that's something that's looked down upon, and it carries a lot of shame with it. And so it's something that's never talked about after it happens. I mean, he was sent away for a little while to a juvenile detention center and a juvenile program, but after we came home, we just never talked about it. And I remember... I don't know where this poem is to this day, but I remember him calling me while he was on his deathbed in prison. I mean, I was in prison, and he was on his deathbed in the hospital dying of heart disease. And I wrote him a poem.

00:43:06:00

IAN MANUEL:
And I basically was telling that I forgave him for what he did to me as a child. And I wish I had that poem, because it was special. But that was the only time that we ever addressed it. I don't know, 30 years later.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
We're going to get to that point, I was disappointed the poem wasn't in the book too. So when John John came back, your mom put him in the same room as you.

IAN MANUEL:
You're still developing emotionally as a child, you're still developing mentally, so there wasn't a fear factor. It was just something that happened. And where else was my brother supposed to go? And it never happened again, and we just never discussed it. But looking back on it now, that was a pretty intense environment for you to ask a child to grow up in, living in the same room with

his abuser, I don't know, a few months later. And then just carrying on like nothing ever happened.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
It was about this time that you started robbing people. Can you tell me what was going on through your head, and did you think you could get away with it?

00:44:41:00

IAN MANUEL:
Oh, yeah. Around sixth grade I started participating in group robberies with my 12 and 13, 14 year old friends. And at that time, man, I didn't have what I have in me now. First of all, death wasn't real to me. I didn't think I could die. I didn't think I could go to prison. I was a child, so those two realities, death and prison, didn't seem real to me. So it was why I lived the way I lived. It was only years later that I would start to value life and realize that it's a gift and how short it could be. But at that time I couldn't see it.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And were you getting put into juvie at this time?

00:45:54:00

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah, I was going to the juvenile detention center quite frequently, starting in the beginning of 1989. Around February '89 when I first started getting in trouble, and doing things like stealing cars, robbing. And when I say robbing people, the first time we did it was with a fake gun that didn't even work. And we were getting $3.75 cents from. We were just not valuing our lives. And it

was just something idiotic. Man, I wish I could go back and tell that little kid that this is not worth it, man. This is no way to live your life.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
It was around this time too that you got in an argument with Grandma Linda and slapped her. Do you remember that day, and what your mom said?

00:46:52:00

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah, I do. I can't remember— I just remember Grandma Linda slapped me. And I forgot what we were arguing about, but we were standing at the bus stop. And I was getting ready to go to school. And she slapped me in front of all of my… people I thought were my friends. And I just reacted man and hit my grandmother back, man. And that's one of the worst things I've ever done, man. Besides shooting Debbie. To hit the lady that loved me unconditionally. I don't know if I've ever forgave myself for that. But I remember her taking me to my mom. I didn't go to school that day, and she took me to my mom. And I remember my mom telling her it was her fault that I did it, that you treat that boy too nice.

00:47:52:00

IAN MANUEL:
That's what you get for treating him that way. And sitting here now reflecting on that, how much that must have hurt my grandmother to hear that, because that wasn't the reason I hurt her and hit her back. I did it out of embarrassment of being shamed in front of my friends. But there's no excuse for what I did, I mean, it was my grandmother. 70 year old woman slapping

a... I think I was in the third grade at the time, so maybe a nine, 10 year old child. It pains me to even remember that moment.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And around 11 your grandma developed dementia. Can you describe that period of time and watching her fade?

00:48:50:00

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah. She… Seeing my grandmother fade, that was hard, because she began to fall down in the house and she began to defecate on herself, couldn't control her bowels. And it was hard seeing my grandmother like that because this was a lady that had nurtured me since I was a child. And was my superhero, so to speak. She had watched over me. This is the lady that the other children envied me for. Because when I used to get off the bus as a child, she used to be standing there waiting with Burger King, Happy Meals. And Burger King, those three little sandwiches they used to sell like sliders back in the days.

00:49:59:00

IAN MANUEL:
No parents, nothing else was there for the other kids when you got off the bus. And here was my grandmother that just went out of her way to make me feel so special. And yeah, here she was— I couldn't do nothing to help her. But fortunately she had family in Cordele, Georgia that would check on her and seen she began to fade, and they came down and took her back to Georgia and put her in a nursing home and looked out for her until she passed away a short time later.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

But that same year you found out something about your mother's own health.

00:50:38:00

IAN MANUEL:

Yeah, my mother contracted HIV from a bisexual man, a guy by the name of Herbert. My mom becoming infected with HIV was like, is this real? Because she's kept the same weight, she did become sick. So I was like, okay, she got AIDS but— HIV, but my mom's not going to die. Again, I'm a child. I was a child. And she used to do things like take me with her throughout various neighborhoods of Tampa to pass out condoms and AIDS awareness material. She'd do things like when the AIDS quilt, they had this… I think it's still around to this day. There was this AIDS quilt that traveled the country and she'd take me with her to sign our names on it. Yeah, I was conflicted when my mom told me that she was HIV positive.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

You keep on saying you were a child, you were a child. Can you talk about growing up in a cycle of trauma and terror and punishment, and describe that effect it has on a child?

00:52:14:00

IAN MANUEL:

That's a deep question. Because one thing it taught me, and it came into play in prison, it taught me how to push things down and not feel them as much. Because one thing I learned from growing up in society and in prison, and seeing how people allowed themselves to feel these emotions. Would either

A, kill themselves. Or B, become so detached from reality that they didn't want to feel that pain. So they created this imaginary world in their mind and became schizophrenic, that developed in the schizophrenia. Fortunately for me, the terror and the pain that I experienced throughout my entire life, I was able to transform that into poetry. I was able to push it down, but it created an intense amount of pain in the center of my heart that I would need years of therapy to try to recover from.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And describe arriving at prison and the emotions you were feeling.

00:53:52:00

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah. I arrived at Lake Butler Reception Center, and I had heard so many horror stories about it. But, they strip you of your identity and your will. They try to anyway. Soon as you step off the bus, they strip you naked. And thinking about it now, it kind of reminds me of the movies, where they show the slaves at the auction block being stripped naked and dehumanized and made to turn around. Here I am, with all these adults, strip butt naked, standing in a line full of men, and they make you raise your hands, turn your hands back and forth, showing that you're not hiding anything. Pull your ears back, show you're not hiding anything behind. Run your fingers through your hair, making sure you don't have anything in your hair.

00:55:03:00

IAN MANUEL:
And then, they tell you to turn around, bend over at the waist, squat and cough. And you can just hear all these grown men, just coughing in such a

dehumanizing position. And then they ask you to step forward, say your name and your age. And I remember, when I stepped forward and said, "Ian Manuel, age 14," I had just turned 14 and the officer's response was, "Call Kay Wayne, and tell him we got another one of those pop out ass kids for him." And, they sent me to confinement my very first day, because of my age, at the reception center. And when I got to confinement, a sick, twisted-minded officer stripped me again. I was like, "I already been stripped, sir. I already been stripped searched." He said, "You got to get strip searched again, and you better turn around and spread your ass as wide as you possibly can, so I can see up and make sure you're not hiding any contraband. Because if you don't do it, and I feel like you're hiding something," and he put on a rubber glove and popped it and he's like, "I'm going to search you and make sure you're not hiding [anything] up in there."

00:56:31:00

IAN MANUEL:

So to tell a child who had been sexually abused this, I was terrified at that time. It wouldn't be who I continued to be, but in that moment, I was terrified that this guy was going to try to sexually abuse me, so I did what he said. Then they placed me in my cell and I stayed there for three weeks.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

When people think of a 14 year old boy in your situation, were you sexually taken advantage of in prison? What was it like when you were in prison in the beginning?

00:57:19:00

IAN MANUEL:

So, the thing about, particularly Florida prisons at that time, even though it might have been happening, I didn't see any rapes. Sexual exploitation happened more through manipulation and having the child become emotionally dependent upon a person, and then taking that emotional dependability away. So, let me explain what I mean so you can understand clearly what I'm saying. I would see other young kids between the ages of 17and— between the ages of, because I was the youngest guy on the compound, so between the ages of 15 and 17 come to prison, and they would develop these emotional bonds with these homosexuals. And the homosexual would reel them in and get the kids to be emotionally dependent upon them, and then cut them off, like stop talking to them.

00:58:31:00

IAN MANUEL:

And it became to the point where the kid would do anything for this homosexual's affection and attention, and the homosexual would invariably say, "Well, you have to do a sexual favor for me." And before long, I would see these guys dressed out and becoming homosexuals themselves. So that wasn't a lot of rape, it was more manipulation going on in the Florida Department of Corrections with the younger generation. But as far as me, no, I didn't experience any sexual exploitation like that or physical assault from the inmates. It was more the security staff that you had to be worried about being physically abused more than anything, growing up in prison. But that wouldn't happen.

00:59:30:00

IAN MANUEL:

That would happen at Lake Butler where I was abused by this captain, by the name of n****r Charlie. I wrote about it in my book, how they beat me and put me in the hole at Lake Butler, which is confinement inside confinement. And then years later, where they would gas me with this high power military style Mason, stripped me and beat me with their fists and stuff. But there wasn't a lot of… I can't say that I seen one rape happen in my 26 years of incarceration.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
Did the guards hate you?

01:00:08:00

IAN MANUEL:
Not initially. They had a hate for all inmates, particularly if you were Black and coming to their Department of Corrections. They had a will to break you, to dominate you, to make you subservient. That was the mentality of the Florida Department of Corrections. I was a child, and so I had to grow up in there and learn how to maneuver and what I could get away with, what I couldn't get away with, and also, how to respond to the brutality of the Department of Corrections. And one thing I learned is, when they were abusing you, like the sadist that they are, that if you were to cower and scream and beg for mercy, and "Please don't do this," and "Leave me alone," and "Don't hurt me," that it only intensified their willingness to abuse you.

01:01:21:00

IAN MANUEL:
When you would psychologically… build a defense mechanism against that and say, "Hit me more," or "You're not affecting me," they would label you

crazy and "Oh, leave that one alone. The gas doesn't affect him." And it's a crazy mind game in there, man. But it did hurt, you just couldn't show it. You just couldn't show it. If you showed any iota that it hurted you, that it hurt what they were doing to you, it only intensify. If you pretended like it didn't hurt, the opposite effect, they give you privileges. It's a crazy world inside of a world that's difficult to explain.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
Because of your age, you were placed in solitary. Can you explain that? Not that…

01:02:24:00

IAN MANUEL:
Initially. Initially, I was placed in solitary because of my age, because at Lake Butler, the way the rule was designed was, you had to be 18 years old to be in open population. But that was only for three weeks. Once I was transferred to my permanent institution, which was Apalachee Correctional Institution, in the northern part of Florida, I was placed in the general prison population with all the adults, and given all the responsibilities of an adult, except, I couldn't buy a pack of cigarettes. I wasn't old enough by law to buy a pack of cigarettes. And I didn't smoke. I don't smoke to this day. But, in prison, cigarettes act as commerce. It's the highest commerce that you can have. So, I always found it ironic that I was old enough to be sentenced to the rest of my life in prison, to be placed in a prison with all adults, and yet, the law said I wasn't old enough to buy a pack of cigarettes. I always found that ironic.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And what was the food like?

01:03:45:00

IAN MANUEL:

I laughed at first when you asked me that question, but now when I think back, the food was actually better at the beginning of my prison experience incarceration, than it was in the latter years. I thought the food was horrible when I first went to prison, in the early '90s, '90, '91, '92. But compared to how horrible and lack of nutrition the food became years later, when it was literally like they were feeding us dog food, the food was pretty good when I first entered prison. I thought it was horrible because it wasn't what I was used to eating. But I actually got to say, at the beginning, there was more healthy than in the latter years, in the 2000s, when budget cuts and things of that nature just caused the food to just deteriorate to the point where it wasn't even worth eating, which is why I stayed between the weight of 150 and 160 from like 1991 until 2010.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And at the beginning of your sentence, you still had some hope that there was going to be a motion to mitigate your sentence. Can you describe that? And then, did it finally sink in when they said they would not, that your motion was denied?

01:05:29:00

IAN MANUEL:

So, great question. I did have hope that my sentence would be overturned, because this fake attorney, Brian Gonzalez, who was the private attorney that the state hired for me, he told me that we're going to appeal this. And I

thought, by appeal, I thought the motion to mitigate sentence was the appeal he was talking about. And he filed a motion to mitigate sentence. The judge, Manual Menendez denied it, and that was it. But, the motion to mitigate sentence is like the bare bones thing you can do as an appeal process. After that, there should have been an initial appeal to the second district Court of Appeals, and there wasn't. It was like, "Oh, okay, I did all I can do by following this motion to mitigate sentence," and that's it. And then he sent me all of my paperwork, saying, "Hey, Ian, I've done all I can do for you." But the silver lining, when he sent all of my paperwork to me, that's where I found Debbie's phone number and address.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
Was there ever any Christmas spirit in jail?

01:06:47:00

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah. Initially, they used to give everybody in prison $5 for Christmas. It's called the Christmas Five back then. And all year long, people would look forward to this Christmas Five. And then in later years, in solitary confinement at Florida State Prison, they would pass out Christmas cookies and Coke, Coca-Cola soda. And all year long, you wouldn't believe how guys would anticipate receiving these four to six chocolate chip cookies and this cup of soda. You live for it like it was literally Christmas, like a kid waiting on a gift under the Christmas tree. So yeah, that was definitely Christmas spirit in prison.

01:07:52:00

IAN MANUEL:

But I will say this, growing up in prison, particularly in solitary, you kind of, I know at least I did, you got used to not receiving gifts. You got used to not receiving visitation. I mean, I only received three personal visits in 26 years of my incarceration. One visit in 2006… I mean 1996 after my mom died, another visit in 2010, and then another visit in 2015. So, you kind of suppressed your emotions around holidays because you didn't want to feel the pain of not being able to share your holidays with your loved ones.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
In that first Christmas Eve, what happened?

01:08:46:00

IAN MANUEL:
Oh, that first Christmas Eve, I was sitting at a table, and I was going through all the paperwork that my lawyer had sent me, and I found a police report in there with Debbie's phone number and address, home address. And I just got the… I've always been an imaginative thinker, and I just got the idea that, let me call Debbie on Christmas Eve and wish her and her family a happy holiday and stuff, and try to apologize to her. So, they had the phones outside of the dormitory. I took the police report, wrote Debbie's phone number down, and went out to the phone banks in the middle of the compound. Back then, you could dial 0 and get a live operator. I remember the live operator coming on the phone and asking me, and I told her I wanted to place a collect call to Debbie from Ian. The operator said, "Sure."

01:09:56:00

IAN MANUEL:

And she placed the call through, and you could hear the person pick up on the other line, and the operator said, "You have a collect call from Ian for Debbie. Do you accept?" And Debbie said, "Can you ask him his last name?" I wasn't expecting that question. So, the operator asked me, "Sir, can you provide your last name for the caller?" And I just remember nervously saying, "Yes, Manuel. Ian Manuel." And Debbie said, just as nervously, "Yes, I accept." And the call went through. Now, what do you say? I've overcome the hardest part, which is getting contact with this woman and having her accept this collect call. What do you say to the person that you shot a year ago? I just remember saying, "Debbie, I called to wish you and your family a Merry Christmas, and to apologize for shooting you in the face."

01:11:10:00

IAN MANUEL:

And she said, she asked me a question that no 14 year old should ever have to answer. She said, "Ian, why did you shoot me?" And I remember telling her, "It was a mistake. It all happened so fast." And then we talked. And I don't remember much about the rest of the call, except I asked her, could I call back? And she said yes. And then I don't remember much about the second call except, at the end, I asked her, could I write her? And she said yes. And then, that's how our correspondence started and we began communicating with each other.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And then in August of '92, you did a TV interview called Kids That Kill. And Debbie watched this program. She wrote you after. What did you say in that interview, and what did she write?

01:12:07:00

IAN MANUEL:

Oh, great question. I said in that interview that Debbie kept going for the gun. And Debbie was furious. I guess, in my childhood mind, looking back at that statement, Debbie jumping off the car screaming was me saying Debbie went for the gun. But in reality, she never went for the gun. She was responding to the threat of a gun being in her face. But she wrote me and was like, "Ian, why are you on national television, saying I went for the gun? That isn't what happened. You know that isn't what happened." And she scolded me like I was her child. But it was the first letter I got from her, and I wrote her back. I don't remember what I said, but I know it started our correspondence to finally start going. Because I wrote her immediately after that Christmas, she didn't write back. She didn't write back until she saw me on the news, on a show called Kids That Kill, that I should have never been on because I never killed anybody.

01:13:33:00

IAN MANUEL:

But, um, I also remember my mom writing me, after she saw that interview, and her heart just pouring out to me like, "You look so innocent and so small. Are they taking care of you? Are you eating?" Two instrumental women in my life, looking at this interview and seeing two totally different things. But that's what I remember from that interview the most, except that they also asked me how was the food, how was they feeding me. So it's kind of funny to answer that question, 35 years later or whatever.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And speaking of your mom, how did you sustain relationships with your loved ones?

01:14:20:00

IAN MANUEL:

Through letter writing. I know she… I wrote her in '91, basically saying it was her fault that I was in prison with a life sentence. And, um, I remember her writing back with a card. And inside the card, she basically was like, "Boy, don't try to lay that guilt trip on me that I'm the one who got you in prison with a life sentence. Had you not been out there shooting people, robbing people, you wouldn't be in the predicament you're in now." Yeah.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Did life without hope challenge your sanity?

01:15:11:00

IAN MANUEL:

No. I wouldn't say it did, because first of all, I still didn't comprehend until I was in my late twenties, mid to late twenties, that life meant life. And I was always just a hopeful person like, "I'm not dying in prison." I didn't kill anybody. What have I done so bad that they would never let me out of prison? And then I would look around the United States and I would see different cases. I'm a very spiritual person. And so I would look at cases like Lionel Tate, a case from Florida, the kid in Florida that accidentally killed a classmate with a wrestling move. He ended up with a life sentence, and different organizations, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and all, they raised holy hell about his circumstances and he got out of prison. I ended up meeting him in prison after he came back for another crime.

01:16:20:00

IAN MANUEL:
Or the Casey Anthony case or kids and other… And I was like, "They getting out. I didn't do anything. I haven't killed anybody. I know I got to be… I'm going to go home." I just was hopeful. And so, I wouldn't say that being hopeless challenged my sanity because I never lost hope. I always believed that I was coming home.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
But you wrote Sharpton and you wrote Jesse, and never got a response.

IAN MANUEL:
Yes. I didn't. I never got a response. So, that hurt, not hearing from those people, not hearing back from Jesse and Al Sharpton. But it didn't dampen my hope that some way, some day, somehow, Ian Manuel would be released from prison. I just didn't know how.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
That's amazing. And what did the psychiatrist diagnose you with?

01:17:21:00

IAN MANUEL:
Everything under the sun. In prison, they have to justify being there. And if you are receiving disciplinary reports… I've had every diagnosis from conduct disorder to bipolar to… personality disorder. They– they misdiagnose you would be the proper way of saying this. They misdiagnose you consistently in there, depending on what psychiatrist or psychologist you

dealt with. I definitely had some issues. ADHD for one. Trauma. PTSD was definitely a part of it. But I personally don't believe I'm bipolar. I'm definitely not schizophrenic. I've seen what schizophrenia looks like. I've seen a guy go from having a normal way of train of thoughts to checking out and being an astronaut, being a doctor.

01:18:41:00

IAN MANUEL:

Like this guy, this one guy had five different personalities that he was, and I'm like… So I know what schizophrenia looks like, and that wasn't me. And I think, believe it or not, though they did it to hurt me, placing me in solitary confinement for such a long time, doing it when I was already a child before my mind fully developed, helped me cope, because I still had my imagination. Albert Einstein says imagination is more important than knowledge. And I was able to dive within the depths of my imagination to survive the intensity of solitary confinement

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TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Great. But let's jump back, because last you said you were in general pop and you couldn't buy cigarettes. So explain that you were then put into solitary and how the corrupt system kept you into solitary.

01:19:39:00

IAN MANUEL:

Okay. Yeah, great question. So I would receive write-ups when I was in the adult population. I would receive write-ups for things like walking in the grass when I'm supposed to walk on the sidewalk, getting into fights, or the officers would yell at me, I'd yell back. They consider that disrespect,

disorderly conduct. And if you receive enough write-ups, you go to confinement for 15 days, 30 days. And they put you back in general population, they have this thing where they call you— they label you a management problem if you receive excessive disciplinary reports. And the things I were doing in prison was typical teenage behavior, like kids talk back to their parents. The COs took the place of my parents. The correctional officers took the place of my parents. And so I would talk back to them, yell at them, they'd yell at me. I'd be in places I wasn't supposed to be.

01:20:40:00

IAN MANUEL:

And I received these write-ups and it became excessive DRs. And there was a colonel there looking out for me, Colonel Harrison, and he got promoted to assistant warden and transferred to another prison. And boy, they couldn't wait for that because as soon as he left, they recommended me for long term solitary confinement, which in Florida it's called close management. And the thing about long term solitary confinement, the way it works, the way I try to explain it, it's like an out of control elevator. Imagine going in an elevator that has three floors to it and then the elevator, in order to get from the first floor to the second floor… The first floor is the most restrictive. CM one is the most restrictive form of solitary. Second floor is the second least form of solitary, and the third floor is the least restrictive. And on the first floor, you have to stay on this first floor for six perfect months.

01:21:40:00

IAN MANUEL:

And if you do six perfect months, they might let you go to level two. If you do another six perfect months, you might go to level three. But if you get a

write-up at any stage, like say if you are on level one and you get caught with a magazine that doesn't have your name on it, or you go to the shower and get caught talking, or your bed's not made perfect, or you're caught standing on a door looking at a female because you're not allowed to look out of your window, any of those things can extend your stay in solitary confinement for an additional six months. And what's crazy is, for the first few years I tried my best to have a perfect six months, but I couldn't. And then when I did, I'd get five months and 29 days and receive a write-up on the last, that was an additional six months. And so, I was caught on this out of control elevator and those months turned to years and those years turned to decades and before long, before I knew it, I had spent 18 consecutive years in solitary confinement from November '92 to November 2010.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
How did you get relief from solitary?

IAN MANUEL:
How did I-

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
There were some tricks you had with the guards to get out of solitary.

01:23:10:00

IAN MANUEL:
Oh, sometimes I would cut myself. Sometimes I would overdose on Tylenol, just to get to the outside hospital, to be in a remote control bed, to see a television, to see a woman, to have communication with another human

being in this hospital bed, losing pints of blood. But I was never suicidal. I was never seriously mentally ill. I would do that to be placed in a more lenient environment. But I would still be confined for a few months and then I would be placed right back into the strict…I have a friend right now that's still in solitary confinement, by the name of Dow Streeter.

01:24:14:00

IAN MANUEL:

He's been in solitary confinement… He broke my record. He's been in solitary confinement for 25 consecutive years, and he needs the most mental health treatment in the world, but he can't stop— He can't stop his behavior because he's been doing it so long and they won't give him the mental health treatment that they need to actually cure— He's being punished for wanting to connect with other humans. Man, it's a sad, sad state. Hopefully though he's like, I think he's on CM two now. And hopefully someone will see this interview and want to change the way the corrupt CM system works because no one needs to be in solitary confinement for 25 consecutive years.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

On a lighter note, can you tell me about one of your heroes who was Tupac Shakur?

01:25:21:00

IAN MANUEL:

Yeah, Tupac was somebody I wanted to embody when I was younger. I used to listen to Tupac rap and just really wanted to be Tupac at one time. And then someone sent me Tupac Shakur's book, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*. It was his poetry book, and I looked at the poems and they were so regular, dare

I say, to me. And I was like, "I could do this." Now, granted, Tupac wrote those poems in that book when he was in high school, but in prison, Tupac was looked at as like a god. And so I took Tupac's poems and began rewriting his poetry and sharing them with my fellow prisoners. And they were so impressed. Prisoners are hard to impress. They're like Simon Cowell or [inaudible] or Apollo.

01:26:35:00

IAN MANUEL:
But when I began to rewrite Tupac poems and sharing it with the fellow prisoners, they really saw that I had a talent and a gift. So they started paying me with cookies and stamps to write their girlfriends and their wives poetry. And anytime you can get a prisoner to pay you to do something, you are really good at it, because money is hard to come by in prison and they're not coming off their hard earned funds. And so I started rewriting Tupac poems, man. Then I started rewriting Eminem songs. And then I realized that I had a gift, and it's what I really tapped into to help sustain my brain in solitary confinement.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
So these musicians were the gateway into your poetry?

IAN MANUEL:
Yes.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

In 1996, McCall's Magazine, Debbie wrote an article, it's titled, “I Forgave The Guy Who Shot Me.” She wrote, "I not only have recovered, but have been able to develop a relationship with my attacker and I've found a new direction in my life." What did you make of this article when you read it?

01:27:54:00

IAN MANUEL:

Well, that article, it's a good thing, but it also reminds me of a lot of pain that I went through. The funny thing about that article was… a law clerk connected me to this journalist named Ru Tonely, who wrote that article, and me and Ru I thought became friends, but I was in prison, and after my family died, I didn't have anyone to support me and Ru would send me money. I'm going to get around to answer your question, but this is what came to mind. I would ask Ru to send me money and he would send me money, and then one day he told me, "Ian, don't ask me for any more money." But I'm in solitary confinement and I'm suffering and I don't have any family members to support me at this time.

01:28:54:00

IAN MANUEL:

So I stopped asking him for money, but I didn't want to. And finally after a few months of not asking, I wrote him again and asked him could he send me some money so I could buy some deodorant or some soap, and some stamps, and some food to eat, and he wrote me back and he said, "Ian, I told you, don't ask me for any more money." And he ended his correspondence to me, and that really crushed me. It really hurt a lot. And I told myself, if I ever got out, I was going to visit his house. Fortunately when I got out— Unfortunately, when I got out, he had already passed. But I still kept that commitment to

myself and visited this house. But the answer to your question about the McCall Magazine interview, it was like a highlight of my prison time at that particular point in my life because it helped open the door where the media start paying attention to my case again.

01:30:03:00

IAN MANUEL:

After that McCall interview came out, Maury Povich show… Back then Maury used to actually do real interviews, before he became, "Who is the father" Maury. And he reached out to do an interview, but they wouldn't let him. They wanted to do a— Montel Williams reached out to do an interview, but they wouldn't let him. And the national media was really trying to get in and get at me to bring some national attention to my case. And the prison just wouldn't let him do… They wanted to do live satellite and the prison says, "This guy's in solitary confinement. He's dangerous. We can't let you guys in here and do this." But the McCall's interview was great because actually, if I'm not mistaken, I brought a picture with me that I just got from my aunt from that interview where I'm in cuffs with a pen in my hand, that I'd love to share with the camera before we go.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And that sort of reengaged your writing relationship with Debbie, is that correct? You guys started exchanging letters again.

01:31:24:00

IAN MANUEL:

So me and Debbie wrote from 1992 to 1996 or '7. And yeah, it fell off periodically. But yeah, we started communicating again around that time. And

I don't really remember what we were talking about. I just remember asking her for magazines like *Sports Illustrated* and *People*, but I just couldn't remember what the heck a 16, 17 year old Ian Manuel was talking to Debbie about.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Now we all remember certain dates in our life. Tell me about June 8th, 1996.

01:32:14:00

IAN MANUEL:

Yeah, that's the day my mom died. It was a— I had worked my way to CM three at that time. The out of control elevator was finally within my control, I thought. But after I got the news that my mom died from the prison chaplain, I just went on a downward spiral because I felt like everything that I had been living for was gone. I wanted to get out of prison initially to show my mom that it wasn't over, that I could overcome the worst thing that had happened to me. And when she died, I was just so crushed. I was hoping… I'll never forget walking to the chaplain in handcuffs. Was I in handcuffs? Yeah, shackles or something. I just remember walking to the chaplain and hoping it was somebody else. I just knew I had bad news from the chaplain and I was just hoping, "Anybody but my mom, anybody but my mom, anybody but my mom."

01:33:37:00

IAN MANUEL:

And I remember our last conversation was May 31st, 1996. And I was just calling to call because I was on, you know, CM three at the time. They let me use the phone and I called and she was like, "Why are you calling, Ian? You

don't want anything." And I didn't understand it at the time. I do now a little bit. And she was like, "Don't call me no more until next month." And I was like, "Mom, well okay, tomorrow's next month." And she was like, "No, don't call me no more until my birthday." Her birthday's June 19th and she never made it to June 19th. It stuck with me the two times that I remember doing exactly what my mother told me to do, plead guilty and don't call me no more till my birthday. I did those two things and then they became the biggest regrets of my young life.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
Now just to ground people back into reality, that prison is dangerous. And you wrote that you wrapped a razor blade in a salt packet and kept it in your mouth. Can you describe that and why you did that?

01:35:08:00

IAN MANUEL:
Wow. Yeah. I hope I'm not giving away any secrets to the DOC staff right now, but I didn't do it for what you might have think I did it for. I didn't keep that razor in my mouth for protection from inmates. I kept that razor in my mouth as a way to protect myself from the brutality of the guards because it was my way of escape. By having this razor, in my mind at least, it could even the playing field in no matter what situation they put me in. And what I mean by that, I had a fear factor of being stripped naked and left in a cold cell. I had trauma from that because it had happened to me so many times.

01:36:08:00

IAN MANUEL:

And what the razor gave me power was to be able to cut myself, lose a lot of blood, and go from being on security strip where I had no mattress, no blanket, and 60, 50 degree cold cell, 50 to 60 degree cold cell with the wind blowing, and unable to warm myself, doing naked calisthenics to stay warm. To being able to have that razor and cut myself and be placed in another cell with a mattress, with a blanket, with the suicide gown, just to be able to be warm, or to go to the hospital and get myself out of that situation. It was my way of protecting myself.

01:37:07:00

IAN MANUEL:

And I can honestly say… I can't believe— it was like that razor was an extension, another appendix, of my body. And for you to bring it up now, it reminds me that I haven't walked around with a razor in six years, since I've been released from prison. And that's kind of deep because it was like I would never leave my cell or anywhere without that razor. It was like my protection against everything, like my magic wand.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

What struck me was when you wrote, "Blood, it seemed, was the only thing respected in the Florida State Prison."

IAN MANUEL:

Yes. Yes. Blood, whether yours or somebody else's, was the only thing. Yeah, yeah. Blood was– was the thing that the guards as well as the inmates respected. I remember one guy had a knife and all I had was a cup of blood, but I remembered the human reaction from guards when I was in a cell and I

had a cup of blood, they were scared to death. These were the officers that beat you and pummel you, but they seen a cup of blood and they didn't know if the inmate had AIDS or HIV, which I don't, thank God. Growing up in a cell, I never had a opportunity to contract none of that stuff, thank God. But just seeing a cup of blood would petrify the officers to the point, it was like you had a gun. So, in open population I remembered that. And in one situation a guy had a knife and all I had was a cup of blood, and he was more scared of me with the cup of blood than I was of him with the knife. And I just thought about that during this conversation. That's all.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
On a brighter note, let's talk about Harry Potter. You said you read Harry Potter and it allowed you to escape. And you talked about the final struggle between good and evil to determine the fate of the world.

01:39:26:00

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah, Harry Potter, man. I was surprised I was able to get into those books because I'm not a big fantasy guy, far as fantasy type of writing. But growing up in solitary confinement, I read a variety of books. I just wrote a poem recently, and I was struck by the fact that I remembered learning about… My sexual education came from the books like Jackie Collins' *Lucky*. I mean, *Chances*. *Chances*. And Harold Robbins' *Goodbye Janette*. And so, I learned a lot about life reading books in solitary confinement, the books I could get my hands on. But I was so engrossed with the Harry Potter novels because what I liked later on was the story about the author, how she was turned down so

many times to be successful with this book and no one would give her a chance.

01:40:46:00

IAN MANUEL:

And here she was sitting on one of the greatest stories, fiction stories, ever told, and no one would listen to her. It just really goes to show you that the decision makers don't know what the hell they're talking about. But I really like the Harry Potter series. I don't really remember a lot about it because I haven't read it in years, but I just know that I really like that Harry, against all odds, was able to save the world.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Well, we've been speaking a lot about hate and evil, but there is a bright star in this story, which his name is Bryan Stevenson. Can you tell me who is Bryan Stevenson and how he reached out to you?

01:41:33:00

IAN MANUEL:

Yeah, Bryan Stevenson is a lawyer and he's like a modern day Martin Luther King. And he reached out to me in 2006, around October, um, with a letter I'll never forget. I got a knock on my door and said, "Manuel, you got legal mail, sign for it." You have to sign your name in this little box. And I got the letter and it said Equal Justice Initiative with big red insignia on it and Bryan Stevenson. And I'm like, "I don't know nobody in Alabama. Who could be writing me from Alabama?" I opened the envelope, took the letter out, and basically, you know, I've read this letter a thousand times. And basically the letter said, "I am the executive director of a non-profit organization, law firm,

in Montgomery, Alabama. For years we have primarily dealt with death penalty cases. However, we recently started a project dealing with juveniles who have been sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. And from afar, from studying your case, it looks like we might be able to offer you some legal assistance, if you don't have a lawyer and could get in touch with us quickly. We do not charge anyone that we represent a fee, and we'll be willing to take your case pro bono. Again, if you're interested."

01:43:11:00

IAN MANUEL:

And I thought… First of all, that letter was like winning the lottery, right? I didn't know it at the time, but this is what… Like, EJI gets thousands and thousands of letters and emails and phone calls every week from people begging them to take their case, take my brother's case, take my son's case. And here I was, the guy that everyone was trying to get to, reaching out to me, asking me to take my case for free. This is every prisoner's dream and for it to happen… But I didn't know who this guy was. I just knew someone was offering me legal assistance. So I had a little pull in the dormitory I was in, where you could trade good behavior for a phone call. So I told the lieutenant, "Hey man, I got this legal letter," showed him the letter, "I need to make a phone call." He let me get a call, while they stood over my back listening to everything I said.

01:44:19:00

IAN MANUEL:

And I remember calling Bryan and getting through to him after convincing the lady on the line that I really did get a letter from her boss, and she connected me with Bryan. And Bryan promised to send two attorneys down

to see me soon after, and he did. And he sent Rachel Germany and Irene Joe, two lawyers, down to see me. And they told me they wasn't making any promises, but if my case fit what they were looking for, they'd come back with a retainer agreement. And I signed that retainer agreement in 2006 and EJI has been a part of my life ever since.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And what should the world know about Bryan? The one thing everyone should know about Bryan.

01:45:10:00

IAN MANUEL:
Yeah, Bryan's a man of his word. He's real, he's authentic. A lot of these, without saying any names, a lot of these guys are people who are pretending to be something they're not, especially in this day and age where the Black Lives Matter movement or the social justice movement is so prevalent that people manipulate it to get money. Bryan is exactly who he says he is, someone that genuinely cares, that wants to change the world for the better and leave an impact and leave this world better than what he found it. And I'm forever thankful that Bryan is not only my lawyer that saved my life, but someone I consider a friend.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
And Bryan came and visited you. Can you describe that visit?

01:46:04:00

IAN MANUEL:

I can. We were at Santa Rosa Correctional Institution behind the glass. He couldn't touch me and I was chained up like an animal. And we had a two hour visit, but I just remember wanting to share my poetry with him, and I gave the officer a stack of my legal work and some poetry to give Bryan. And I remember reciting… I recited a lot of poetry to him, but the poem that I really wanted to recite to him was called, "Yes We Did." And it was about President Barack Obama winning the election. The way people in prison had responded to that poem… I mean, I read him "Uncried Tears," I read him other poetry too, and he ended up putting "Uncried Tears" in his book, *Just Mercy*.

01:47:04:00

IAN MANUEL:
But the poem that I felt had the most impact to him was "Yes We Did," because it was political and very well written. And I shared it with him and he took it back with him and took it to his office. And it was just a special moment to visit with Bryan and for him to take his time out to come see me was something that I'll treasure forever.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
What did EJI base its case on to reopen your case?

IAN MANUEL:
So as Bryan said in his letter, the Supreme Court had recently ruled in a case called Roper versus Simmons that giving a child a death penalty was cruel and unusual punishment. So one of the statements that… One that Justice Kennedy said in his state, and his opinion was something of the nature like…

Sentencing a child to death is definitely cruel, and I even wonder if it's legal to sentence a child… constitutional to sentence a child to life without the possibility of parole. So that little nugget of information kind of planted the seed in lawyer's heads to challenge death in prison sentences for kids that had been sentenced to life in prison.

01:48:24:00

IAN MANUEL:

So for non-homicide crimes, they felt like to get to court to even consider that, they had to take cases that was non-homicide crimes like mine to the Supreme Court's attention. And that's what they did. And so being that I had a non-homicide crime, they began appealing cases like that to the US Supreme Court, and just happened that one of them made it up there to the Supreme Court before my case did. Joe Sullivan, who's another client represented by Bryan. And once the court ruled that it was cruel and unusual punishment to send a child to life without the possibility of parole for a non-homicide crime, we went back to court for me to be resentenced. And once we got there, the state of Florida said, "We are appealing this decision." And everyone in the courtroom was shocked like, "What is there to appeal?" This came from the US Supreme Court. And the state of Florida said, "Your Honor, the Supreme Court said children who had been sentenced for non-homicidal crimes to life in prison, Mr. Manuel was charged with attempted homicide, which falls under the homicide statute. So we don't believe that this ruling applies to Mr. Manuel."

01:49:45:00

IAN MANUEL:

So I was sent back to prison to languish in a cell while the state of Florida filed this frivolous appeal to the Florida Supreme Court and then to the US Supreme Court, who thankfully denied certiorari. Denied certiorari means they didn't accept the case. And then I was taken back to Florida to be resentenced thinking I was going home. And instead, the judge said… There was a statement made about rehabilitation, but I want everyone in this courtroom to know that in 1990 the legislative intent was to punish, not rehabilitate. So think about that while going by chambers to deliberate. And he went in his chambers and deliberated and came back out and said, "I nullify Mr. Manuel's life sentences and in place of the life sentences. I resentence him to 65 years to be followed by 10 years probation and 2 years community control. It is so ordered."

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
So hope was gone?

01:51:01:00

IAN MANUEL:
Hope was dashed. I went back to my cell. I will never forget. This was in 2011, I went back to my cell, man, after being in the legal room with my lawyer being Lawyer Tatiana and my social worker, Mariah. I went back to my cell. Adele was very big at that time. She's still big, but her song, “Someone Like You,” really got to me that weekend, and I just cried and cried. Which is odd for me because I usually take things so well and don't show no emotion. But I just cried all weekend listening to Adele. And then when I got in that van, a couple weeks later I was headed back to the prison, I just remember looking out through the tiny cracks in the van, the cage, looking at my city of Tampa

get smaller and smaller. And I'm listening and thinking about Adele like, "Don't forget me. Don't forget me. I'm coming back. I'm coming back and I promise you things are going to be different this time."

TEDDY KUNHARDT:
So the judge resents you 65 years, Bryan's team has a new plan to appeal, but it was really important for you to remain disciplinary free for three months. Why was that so important?

01:52:32:00

IAN MANUEL:
I wrote US Senator Bill Nelson when I was in solitary confinement. And I wrote Bill Nelson, and I basically was telling… Because I had wrote Bill Nelson before about my sentence and he was like, "There's nothing I could do about your sentence because the federal laws won't allow us to intervene in state laws, but if there's ever anything else that ever happens, just write me, reach out and I'll see if I can help you." So I remembered that. So after being on CM for 17 and a half years… In solitary confinement at that time for 17 and a half years, I remember writing to Bill Nelson saying, "Listen, I've been in solitary confinement since I was a 15 year old child, and I'm steady cutting myself, hurting myself, they keep putting me back in the same cell with the same blood, and no one's trying to help me, man." Basically I said, "Solitary confinement is causing me to decompensate, and I need help. I want to get out of solitary confinement."

01:53:45:00

IAN MANUEL:

Bill Nelson did something— He's a sitting US senator. He sends the letter to the head of the Florida Department of Corrections. They panic like, "Oh my god, our sitting senator is looking into our situation." And the warden runs down there, they gotta release information to the senator and they're like… Anyway, long story short, they cut me a deal. If I go to mental health and tell the mental health staff that CM isn't causing me to decompensate, that CM isn't causing me to cut on myself, that they'll give me a deal, that they'll let me out of solitary confinement after 17 and a half years and three months, that they'll give me a runaround job, like be able to walk around and clean up and all of this stuff, and they'll kill all of my disciplinary confinement time. All I have to do is tell the mental health staff that solitary confinement isn't causing me to lose my mind or decompensate.

01:54:56:00

IAN MANUEL:

So I did it. I went and I told them that, and they kept their end of the bargain, except after 90 days, they didn't place me on open population, they transferred me to another prison, a better prison at that time, Suwannee CI, and I had to do another 90 days in confinement. And finally after 18 years in solitary, they let me go to open population. And it felt like I was born again. Like to finally be out of confinement after two decades, it felt free. But I still had one more step to go, I wanted to finally get out of prison as well.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Bryan and his team figured it out, and you were resentenced.

01:55:41:00

IAN MANUEL:

Oh yeah. I was resentenced to… Time served to… I was resentenced in 2016 in November to 40 years time served, and I was released in Tampa from the county jail that night to go. And the first person I touched was Mariah. And then they drove me to meet up with Debbie at a gas station. And me and Debbie hugged and kissed each other. I had always told myself if I ever got out of prison, I would kiss Debbie on both sides of her cheek because I didn't know which side of the bullet had actually went in. And that was my way of actually physically saying I was sorry. And then we went to a pizza spot in downtown Tampa. My lawyer, Ben, didn't know this at the time, I was still getting used to phones. He scrolled on his phone and found a place with the most stars and it just so happened to be a restaurant in downtown Tampa right down the street from where I had shot Debbie 30 years earlier.

01:56:57:00

IAN MANUEL:

And then we drove to Gainesville to spend the night at a hotel, me, Ben, my lawyer, and Mariah, and I got to lay in a hotel bed for the first time. And then woke up the next morning to the hotel buffet, and I was like, "Man, I can have anything I want here?" I was just so new to society, man. And just so… Everything, like a kid being reborn, just wanted to taste everything. Had Starbucks for the first time the next day. It was just a fun experience and I was just so happy to be free.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

And you've been a free man now since 2016, what has life been like?

01:57:43:00

IAN MANUEL:

Oh, life is a struggle. Life is definitely a struggle now. It has been difficult. The reentry process is… It's hard, man. Having to find a place to stay. Had EJI not been a part of my life, my life would look a lot different than it does today because they helped me find a place to stay. They're definitely still a part of my life. They taught me work skills, how to fill out a resume, and just the simple things that you take for granted. And I'm still learning. I still don't know how to drive a car, I still don't know how to cook, but that's because I don't like… I'm traumatized from my prison experience and it takes a lot. Like, I don't go to the clubs or anything like that. I work for the mayor's office now. Bill de Blasio helped me get a job at the mayor's office. He felt like my experience in the criminal justice system would be so helpful to that office.

01:58:48:00

IAN MANUEL:

And I go to the detention center talking to the kids and trying to deter them. I was just there last week, deter them from committing crimes and they really appreciate me. My life has been a whirlwind, man. But I wouldn't change a thing though, man. As painful as my life's been, it's been meant for me to live this life, so others could actually have hope that you can come back from anything at all. And like I said, poetry is what helped me sustain my sanity and solitary confinement.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

Bryan Stevenson was interviewed by Oprah. And he specifically discussed your case. Can you talk about having watched that interview? And the impact it had on you hearing it.

01:59:37:00

IAN MANUEL:

Yeah, I was surprised Oprah asked Bryan, specifically, to tell us the story of Ian because it's a lot of characters mentioned in the book, *Just Mercy*. So for her to single me out must have meant that my story touched her. And then I heard Oprah was a big fan of poetry. So I'm kind of surprised that I haven't heard from her since I've been out to actually get an interview. But I was impressed with the way Bryan described me so perfectly, the way he talked about my intelligence, the way he talked about my poetry, and how bright I was, and how I was a child. And how he talked about solitary confinement and them wanting that six perfect months to get out. It's almost like he shared in my experience with me. And he had never been… Bryan's never been in solitary confinement, at least not as an inmate.

02:00:40:00

IAN MANUEL:

So I was kind of impressed that he got it so right. But now that I'm out, it feels good to be able to share my own story with the world, and to tell my own truth. And I'm just glad I survived an experience that so many others didn't. And it's others still in prison fighting for their freedom that might never get the opportunity. But I get phone calls and letters and emails all the time from prisoners telling that, "Ian, you give us hope. You're our inspiration that we can make it, man. So keep doing it, man, and keep going up." That's a terminology that they use to keep being successful. So I'm inspired that I'm inspiring others.

TEDDY KUNHARDT:

So using your poetry and listening to your story, what do you want the public to take away from this interview? What can we do? What can we…

02:01:37:00

IAN MANUEL:

Well, you can support real organizations like the Equal Justice Initiative that's doing the work. You can reach out to a prisoner. JPay and Securus are apps that you can use to correspond. Mail call is the most important part of the day in prison. And prisoners just love to hear from the outside. They love to get pictures from the outside. I get overwhelmed from people on the inside asking me for pictures of food that I'm eating. There's this one chick, this one girl named Ethel that wants me to… Every time I'm eating to take a picture of my food and send it to her. She just want to see what street food looks like. There's other guys that want pictures of women. They always want pictures of women because that desire, that human connection is so suppressed in prison, that it's something that they long for all the time.

02:02:35:00

IAN MANUEL:

But I want you to take from my experience that I was a child and that what happened to me should have never happened in the United States of America. I constantly… Like when I do these *New York Time* interviews, or CNN, or Trevor Noah, and I go back and I look at the comments, one thing I get is how blown away people are for my poetry. But that people are so surprised that this actually occurred in the United States of America. They don't believe that laws like this exist in this country to treat a child in the way I was treated. I mean, not only was… It would be one thing if I was placed in solitary confinement and just kept there and not bothered, but I was tortured. Like

tortured. Tortured in so many different ways with gas, injected with psychotropic meds that I… It's hard to even talk about, man.

02:03:39:00

IAN MANUEL:

And I just thank God that I survive with my sanity, my talent, and my humanity intact. And one thing that I… It's a poem. There's so many poems that I want to share, but the poem that comes to mind that I wrote called "My Time Will Come" is one of the poems I wanted to share because I wrote it after that 2011 resentencing hearing when I went back to prison. And it says, "I promise you, the brunt of my oppression has a purpose. And the same person that you persecute will one day be worshiped. Though I stand before you bare chested and shirtless, with my soul and emotions naked, just wanting to be nurtured. Yeah. Despite the desperation, desertion, and hurting, my time gone come. Though I compose this poem not knowing if I'll ever be able to perform it in an auditorium. I do it with the faith of a poet that believes he was born to do it like an acorn caught up in a storm, flung from the branch where it was born."

02:05:01:00

IAN MANUEL:

"You can only hold me back for so long, my time gone come. Despite the difficulties and disappointments, my determination remains undaunted. Though the waters of my tomorrows are deep and uncharted, the buoyance of my character will float unwavering towards them, like a song written, yet unrecorded. My time gone come. Though you wrapped me in chains and sprayed me with chemical flames, and did all of the things you did to add to my pain, my circumstances will change. I believe this with the depths of my

being, that as long as this world continues to spin, it cannot end until it's been enjoyed by end. Remember this day, because things won't always be this way. My time gone come, my time gone come. Against all conceivable odds, my time gone come." And it did. Thank you.

END TC: 02:06:25