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Season 4, Ep. 8 - Mama

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[00:00:00] **MASERATI "E"**: What's up, everybody? This is Eric Maserati "E" Abercrombie. I'm the sound designer and engineer for Uncuffed. I mix and write the music for the show. I've got a quick question for you. Why do you listen to Uncuffed, and what do you wanna hear more of? Take our two minute survey, and we'll put your name in a raffle for a free Uncuffed hoodie. Go to uncuffed.org/survey, or check out the link [00:00:30] in the podcast show notes. Now, onto the episode.

[00:00:35] **X**: K-A-L-W.

[00:00:39] **PATRICIA**: Oh, you wanna show all of mine? Oh, okay. I believe this is in front of my aunt's house. I love this one. Greg is standing there so proudly. And then this one, one of my favorite. This looks like a bicycle on one of Greg's birthday parties. But yeah, I was just so happy you have your [00:01:00] crown on your head because it was your birthday.

[00:01:01] You were the king for the day. So I always loved that. Wherever you went, people loved you. And I'm unfortunately, and I'm sorry that you didn't feel that in the family.

[00:01:15] **GREG**: That's my mother, Patricia Eskridge. A couple episodes ago, I told you about how I went back home to Long Beach for the first time in 30 years.

[00:01:26] One thing I noticed when I walked into my mother's house was [00:01:30] about 15 to 20 pictures of me on the dresser. It was almost like a shrine. There were pictures side by side on top of each other. They were everywhere. To some people, that might be a nice thing to see. To me, it was disturbing.

[00:01:55] I told you how my stepfather used to beat me when I was a kid. [00:02:00] How I ran away from home, was in and outta boys' homes, sometimes living on the streets.

[00:02:08] I believe my mother could have protected me from all that, and sometimes, that she was even responsible for it, and that made me feel like she didn't love me. So when I was in prison, I had a lot of time to work on my rehabilitation. Part of that process was trying to understand [00:02:30] why my mother had allowed me to be hurt.

[00:02:33] I wondered if anyone had ever hurt her. I would call her and ask this question, but she would always say no. There was nothing. Nothing in her past. No abuse, no neglect, no mistreatment. When I got out, I still wanted to understand why she had all these wonderful memories about me, like the ones in those pictures, while I was still feeling so [00:03:00] much pain.

[00:03:03] I'm not trying to say my mother is responsible for any of my actions, but I still felt like there was a barrier between us. So I asked my mother if she would sit down and have a dialogue with me with the help of a mediator. And the amazing thing, she said yes.

[00:03:25] What's up, everybody? I'm Greg Eskridge, and this is Uncuffed, the [00:03:30] podcast that empowers people in prison to tell their own stories. This season, I'm also telling my story, and today we are talking about mothers. For most of the episode, we're gonna go to the California Institution for Women and hear from our producers about what it's like to be a mother from prison.

[00:03:50] But first, I'm gonna tell you about that conversation with my mother. Because she and I both hope that hearing us work through our past might help other people [00:04:00] who are going through similar stuff.

[00:04:02] **ROCHELLE:** That was the best blessing or prayer I've heard in a long time. So...

[00:04:08] **GREG:** When I decided that I wanted to do this, I reached out to a woman I know really well from San Quentin for some help. (Traveled up here).

[00:04:14] Rochelle Edwards. She's a facilitator of one of the self-help groups at San Quentin, and she's also a therapist.

[00:04:21] **ROCHELLE:** So this moment isn't by accident, you know? Right. And, uh, I'm really gonna trust that whatever brought us all together in this moment [00:04:30] is also what's gonna hold us.

[00:04:31] **GREG:** Rochelle and I know each other very well.

[00:04:33] And I was mindful of this going into it all. I didn't want my mother to feel like it was two against one. I was also mindful of the fact that she hasn't done the self-help groups like I have.

[00:04:45] **ROCHELLE:** That I did kind of create this little space here, um, with little objects that I thought either might be pleasing or...

[00:04:57] **GREG:** So we got all set up. We looked at [00:05:00] photos, we set a prayer, and then I started to talk about my childhood. I talked about how I always felt closer to my aunts and my grandmother than I did with my mother. My mother was 16 when she had me, and for a while, she raised me as a single mom. Then she got together with my sister's father.

[00:05:18] When my sister's father came into the picture, you know, he brought a lot of new experiences to me.

[00:05:25] It started out good. But then he started abusing me, and I wanted my [00:05:30] mother to hear about it. I jumped to this really awful moment I remember. I was around 10 years old.

[00:05:37] You guys are separated and I did something.

[00:05:39] I don't know what I did, but you called him over to, to, to beat me, and he grabbed me by the neck, and he put me up against the wall, and he punched me in my stomach. And I fell on the ground, I was crying. I couldn't breathe. I was choking. [00:06:00] And I remember you saying, shut up, boy, that doesn't hurt.

[00:06:07] **PATRICIA:** Mm-hmm.

[00:06:08] **GREG:** And at that moment, I remember feeling like there was nobody on my side. And you didn't protect me from that, and you brought this man over here and allowed this man [00:06:30] to, to beat me when you knew this was what he was gonna go do.

[00:06:35] **ROCHELLE:** How you doing, hearing all that?

[00:06:36] **PATRICIA:** I'm doing good. It's, it's painful to hear, and I don't remember the whole incident, anything that happened and it, it makes me feel.

[00:06:56] Did I fail you as a mother?[00:07:00]

[00:07:00] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

[00:07:02] **PATRICIA:** And I didn't want you to feel that way. I don't ever want you to feel that way.

[00:07:06] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:07] **PATRICIA:** Those are your true feelings, and I have to accept that. And, um.

[00:07:11] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:13] **PATRICIA:** Right now, I apologize, and I asked for forgiveness that I wasn't there and wasn't the best mother that I could have been and should have been to you.

[00:07:21] So for that, I apologize.

[00:07:22] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:24] Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:07:28] **GREG:** She was hearing me, [00:07:30] and she was sorry. And I am grateful to her for that. But there was something else she said that was very painful. She says she doesn't remember that time or other times he beat me. And she used very different language for what he did to me.

[00:07:49] **PATRICIA:** In my mind, I didn't title it as beatings. I would've just said, I guess I'm trying to make it less painful as spankings.

[00:07:59] **GREG:** It [00:08:00] was not just spankings.

[00:08:03] **PATRICIA:** But if you felt you were being beaten, you know, that's your, that's your truth.

[00:08:07] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:08:08] **PATRICIA:** Um. Certainly no parents wants to see their child beaten. You know, that's abuse.

[00:08:15] No one wants to see that and feel that.

[00:08:17] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:08:18] **PATRICIA:** That's very painful, and it's painful to hear.

[00:08:21] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm. Yeah. It was painful for him to experience.

[00:08:25] **PATRICIA:** Oh, yeah. Yeah.

[00:08:27] **GREG:** There were a few moments that really helped me put [00:08:30] myself in her shoes. Rochelle helped me to see that maybe she was afraid of my stepfather too, that she didn't know how to be a parent in that situation.

[00:08:40] And then I asked that question again. The one I have been trying to ask her since I was in prison.

[00:08:46] So important. 'cause I've always, I've always wanted to know about you. I always wanted to know like, what was your childhood like? Were you, that's why we asked you before, like were you ever like in [00:09:00] abusive relationships or being abused as a child or.

[00:09:03] What? What were some of the things that shaped, like shaped you?

[00:09:08] **PATRICIA:** Yeah. I grew up in a household where I felt love. My childhood was basically happy. I remember my grandparents were alive. We'd always have fish fires at their house and on weekends or beer drinking contests. And of course my grandfather could out drink everyone, and I could, was not a drinker, but I would. I've had [00:09:30] beer before. Maybe just a sip.

[00:09:31] And that's it. Uh, because I saw them become alcoholics. And I didn't want that for my life because it was fear, because them becoming alcoholics, they also became violent. And I was afraid of that. When they would drink and fight and we'd always have to run for our life because we were scared.

[00:09:48] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:09:48] **PATRICIA:** But other than that, you know.

[00:09:50] **ROCHELLE:** So you witnessed violence?

[00:09:52] **PATRICIA:** Oh yes. Yeah. Oh yeah.

[00:09:53] **ROCHELLE:** Who was, who was acting out? Was it your grandma and grandpa against each other?

[00:09:58] **PATRICIA:** My grandfather against each other. That was it [00:10:00] against each other. Just the two of them. Only when they drank.

[00:10:01] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm. When they drank. And what did they do?

[00:10:04] **PATRICIA:** Uh, they would actually have physical fights.

[00:10:06] **ROCHELLE:** Wow.

[00:10:07] **PATRICIA:** And my grandfather would become violent, you know, he would chase us and we'd be afraid. And so we would run outta the house, just take off and just start running.

[00:10:15] **ROCHELLE:** So he would kind of include you guys in that process?

[00:10:19] **PATRICIA:** Mm-hmm. He would.

[00:10:20] **ROCHELLE:** And, and was there anybody in the household protecting the kids?

[00:10:25] **PATRICIA:** My mom wasn't there most of the time because she would take us there to babysit, and she would do [00:10:30] whatever she was doing. When she would drop us off, uh, they were fine, but.

[00:10:35] **ROCHELLE:** But as the day went on.

[00:10:36] **PATRICIA:** As the day went on and they started just only when they started to drinking, I have put emphasis on that. Yeah. Only when they started drinking that they would.

[00:10:43] **ROCHELLE:** Yeah.

[00:10:43] **PATRICIA:** That it would become physical.

[00:10:45] **ROCHELLE:** And how often did they drink?

[00:10:48] **PATRICIA:** Probably every weekend.

[00:10:49] **ROCHELLE:** Probably every weekend.

[00:10:49] So probably every weekend. Okay. Yeah. So here's the connection that I'm seeing is that you too, were in a situation where you weren't protected.[00:11:00]

[00:11:00] **PATRICIA:** Okay.

[00:11:01] **ROCHELLE:** Does that make sense to you?

[00:11:02] **PATRICIA:** It makes sense.

[00:11:02] **ROCHELLE:** Yeah. So, so again, in some ways that, that was part of your learning in in to be a parent.

[00:11:12] **PATRICIA:** Mm-hmm.

[00:11:12] **ROCHELLE:** And you were a parent so young.

[00:11:14] So, um, it's starting to make a connection for me. Okay. I don't,

[00:11:18] **GREG:** it just all makes sense. It just all makes sense because it just showed me that she had been through a lot of trauma too.

[00:11:28] I think. Um, [00:11:30] I just wanna just ask this question.

[00:11:32] **PATRICIA:** Okay.

[00:11:32] **GREG:** Um, that I've always wanted to ask you. Um, did you, did you love me when I was a kid?

[00:11:46] **PATRICIA:** I absolutely, I absolutely did love you as a kid, as a baby. Of course I did.

[00:11:53] **GREG:** What did you love about me?

[00:11:55] **PATRICIA:** I loved that I had a son. You were my son, my first born. You know,
[00:12:00] even though I had you at a young age, I was still proud of you as a son, and, and I, I do love you.

[00:12:07] I really genuinely loved you.

[00:12:11] **GREG:** It's good to hear that I was, that I was loved. Um, it's probably gonna take some time for that to really, truly sink in.

[00:12:21] **PATRICIA:** Of course.

[00:12:22] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:23] **GREG:** 'Cause this isn't, you know, it is been a lot of pain in my life.

[00:12:27] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:27] **GREG:** And [00:12:30] as a, as a homeless little boy.

[00:12:34] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:35] **GREG:** Sleeping in abandoned buildings and on railroad tracks and stealing outta stores to survive.

[00:12:45] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:46] **GREG:** Stealing clothes, stealing food when everybody else had shelter.

[00:12:51] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:52] **GREG:** It's hard to, it's hard to,

[00:12:55] **ROCHELLE:** To feel that love.

[00:12:56] **GREG:** Feel that there was any love.

[00:12:58] **PATRICIA:** Yeah.

[00:12:58] **GREG:** But [00:13:00] I appreciate hearing it. I truly appreciate hearing it, Mama.

[00:13:05] **ROCHELLE:** It's hard to hold those two truths. Like, that the fact that your mom could love you, did love you, does love you, but also the way that it got played out didn't feel like that. But both can be true.

[00:13:18] **GREG:** Mm-hmm.

[00:13:19] **PATRICIA:** You know, you can really, really love someone, but you don't always treat them the way that you wish you did, but it doesn't mean you don't love them.

[00:13:26] **GREG:** Mm-hmm. It [00:13:30] is been a few months since that conversation, and my mother and I are moving forward. We even talk a few times a week and now there's just something lighter about the way we talk to each other. That heavyweight I used to feel when I talked to her is now gone, and I can really feel that she is making an effort.

[00:13:49] I recently went down to see her again in Long Beach for my sister's birthday. My mother and I told Rochelle all about it on the Zoom call.

[00:13:57] **PATRICIA:** I think we're communicating more, we're [00:14:00] laughing more, but this time it seems like it's just, seems like, it just feels natural, really natural.

[00:14:07] **GREG:** My mother's really funny, so I've always known that she had a little sense of humor, but I think I was still carrying like a lot of stuff that wouldn't allow me to see certain parts of her. And it's just funny that, uh, now that that barrier is gone.

[00:14:26] **ROCHELLE:** Yes.

[00:14:27] **GREG:** I can see so much of myself [00:14:30] in my mother.

[00:14:31] **PATRICIA:** Yeah.

[00:14:31] **GREG:** And it really, it really makes me appreciate her even more.

[00:14:35] Not only do we look alike. But like our mannerisms are somewhat the same.

[00:14:40] **ROCHELLE:** Mm-hmm.

[00:14:41] **GREG:** And my sister as well. Like we all are Patricia's children.

[00:14:45] **PATRICIA:** That's my DNA!

[00:14:52] **GREG:** And now we're gonna spend the rest of the episode at the California Institution for Women. You'll hear a short essay [00:15:00] that Haena Worthing wrote to her 15-year-old daughter on Mother's Day. Then you'll hear a roundtable with our producers about being mothers to their kids and other family members while incarcerated. And Daphnye Luster would talk about this song that reminds her of the moment she realized she would be able to mother her daughter from prison.

[00:15:22] **HAENA:** Today was Mother's Day, and you picked blueberries in the blueberry field all day. You were with a mama, but it wasn't [00:15:30] me. I had blueberries too, but I was in a

chow hall across the country and ate my blueberries alone. Later in the night, we saw each other on a video call, and I asked you how the blueberries tasted.

[00:15:45] You don't like blueberries, you told me, and I've been gone so long I didn't even know. Every time I see a blueberry, I'm gonna remember how much you don't like them. I'm making a list of what you like and what you don't. [00:16:00] Not because I was there when you made your decision, but because I wasn't. How could I be your mama and not know you didn't like blueberries?

[00:16:08] It stung like a bee, and I didn't like it. So much that was bittersweet on that video call. Much like the blueberries I've never seen you eat.

[00:16:24] Hi, everybody. We're here at the Uncuffed Studio tonight. We're here for a very special [00:16:30] roundtable. I have two of my co-producers in the house, Keyna Osorio and Patricia Bellows. And my name is Haena Worthing, and tonight we're talking about what it's like to mother from prison and what it's like to take care of people we love from prison.

[00:16:47] Keyna, how many kids do you have?

[00:16:49] **KEYNA:** I have five children.

[00:16:51] **HAENA:** Bellows, I know you're not a mother, but I know that you take care of a lot of people that you love from here. Who are those people?

[00:16:57] **BELLOWS:** Those people will be my [00:17:00] brothers, which is seven of us. Seven brothers, one little sister, and I take care of my mom and my dad.

[00:17:08] **HAENA:** It's a lot of people. And for me, Haena, I am a mom to a beautiful 15-year-old girl. What are some of the most ordinary moments you miss with your kids.

[00:17:22] **KEYNA:** So me having so many kids, um, I would say with my beauty for sure is Fridays after school, [00:17:30] I would pick her up, and me and her would go and secretly have ice cream together.

[00:17:34] My daughter, I call my beauty, uh, she's nine and she's almost as tall as her older sister. But that was our thing. We would go and have ice cream together, and we would just go and sit outside on the bench in front of the little local ice cream shop and eat our ice cream and watch the people going by. Um, and it's just, you know, it's a lot of the things that I miss, just that one-on-one time with my children.

[00:17:55] **HAENA:** Yeah.

[00:17:56] **KEYNA:** Um, 'cause right now it's hard to get that, you know, with the 15 [00:18:00] minute phone calls, it's like I have to compress all of my calls into, you know, hodgepodge. And

then with the baby, she, uh, she's a bully. She takes the phone from everyone and screams, it's my mom. No, no. And so they don't get to talk to me very much. So.

[00:18:16] **BELLOWS:** Well, I'm gonna just double back with what she, uh, Keyna was saying about how she's, uh, very active in her, in her kids' life. Um, my mom wasn't like that when she was in the pen. Well, she was in the county for like nine [00:18:30] months, and I know I only talked to moms probably like, maybe three or four times out the nine months she was there because she felt like that was the best time, or how she could do her time the best way she could do it.

[00:18:44] But that was probably the worst time for me and my brothers ever. So. That's actually good that you actually like, keep in tune with your kids. Um, the ordinary thing that I miss the most is like, just vibing with my [00:19:00] people. Like in the living room with my mama. Um, watching movies or just clowning. Clowning my mama so bad. That's like the most genuine thing that money can't even buy, you know? Yeah. Nothing came by that quality time. Yeah. Got a room full of thugs over here, dying laughing from a spot that's so small. It's like we go back to a little kid, and I, I feel like that's what I miss the most. How about you?

[00:19:29] **HAENA:** Yeah. Sometimes [00:19:30] I, when we're on the video chat. I'll just stare at her, and I'll just say, you're so, I love you. You're so beautiful. And she's got these big, beautiful eyes and she's just staring back at me. And I just, the other, actually, after the Mother's Day call, I called her back. I said, sorry if I just awkwardly stare at you and say how much I love you.

[00:19:47] She's like, no, mom, it's okay. I was just like, I love seeing her. You know, and I, I, it's just like, that's the bittersweet part of it is that I just wanna jump through that screen.

[00:19:56] **BELLOWS:** How old is your daughter to be?

[00:19:58] **HAENA:** She's, uh, 15.

[00:19:59] **BELLOWS:** Oh, [00:20:00] 15. Oh yeah.

[00:20:00] **HAENA:** Yeah, she's 15.

[00:20:01] **BELLOWS:** So she was probably looking at you like, why you keep sharing?

[00:20:05] **CROSSTALK:** Yeah. She like, she's a weird, yeah.

[00:20:11] **HAENA:** It was a special moment, but it was also a difficult moment. But I was happy that we were able to talk about it together 'cause I don't ever wanna feel like we sugarcoat everything. 'cause I feel like sometimes when you're here, you wanna be strong for your people. You wanna be strong for your kids.

[00:20:28] **KEYNA:** Cry baby.

[00:20:29] **HAENA:** You wanna be strong. [00:20:30] You know.

[00:20:30] **KEYNA:** I on phone and cry. My kids know I'll get the boo hoo-ing. And if I feel like crying, I'm gonna just break down and cry and we'll cry together. Eh, it's a healing process. Sometimes you just have to let it out.

[00:20:43] **HAENA:** Yeah, mine, mine doesn't always like it. She, if she hears me, she's like, oh no, mom, you're not gonna cry, are you?

[00:20:49] And 'cause it happened actually over the weekend when, um, I called her and, uh, I asked her, you know, where she was and she was like, oh, I'm here doing this, this, and this. But when [00:21:00] I hung up the phone, I heard motorcycles in the background and I was like, it literally, it was like, vroom. And then the light, the line clicked, and I was like.

[00:21:08] That doesn't sound like she's at her friend's house. That sounds like she's somewhere where the motorcycles are, you know? So, and then of course, she didn't answer when I called back and didn't answer again, and I kind of worried all night, you know, like, where is she, she's 15. I said, motorcycles is already 9:30 there.

[00:21:23] Where'd she go? You know? And when I talked to her in the morning, she had, she told me where she was and explained the motorcycles and that she was, you [00:21:30] know, at a, you know, a pool. So, either it was a really good story or it was the actual story.

[00:21:38] So I fell for it. I fell for it. I fell for it, but my po, but I cried because I was worried, you know?

[00:21:45] And that was the first time I'd really kind of broken down in a while with her.

[00:21:48] **BELLOWS:** I have a question. So as a mother, why is y'all first response is always to fear with your kids.

[00:21:56] **KEYNA:** As far as being a mother, for me, I know what type of, [00:22:00] uh, adolescent I was. So when it comes to my children, I know the type of stuff that, uh, they're already genetically inclined to be able to do.

[00:22:10] **HAENA:** Exactly, exactly. That's how I felt when I, I heard that motorcycle because it took me, flashed me back to when I was about 16 years old, and I was on the back of a motorcycle, driving down the freeway with some boy that I probably, you know, shouldn't have been driving down the freeway with on a motorcycle.

[00:22:28] **KEYNA:** Exactly.

[00:22:28] **HAENA:** So, yeah. So, and she, [00:22:30] I didn't tell you that story.

[00:22:32] **KEYNA:** Genetically inclined, though.

[00:22:34] **HAENA:** Yes, yes. And if anything, I tell her, you know, I hope you learn from my mistakes.

[00:22:38] **BELLOWS:** Mistakes is not always bad. Mistakes is, is going to be made with any child. Any human being period that walks this earth.

[00:22:48] **KEYNA:** Mm-hmm. Facts.

[00:22:49] **BELLOWS:** But don't allow your own mistakes or your own, your own shame of that mistake be hidden [00:23:00] from your child. You know, I feel that you should tell your, your daughter about you being 16-year-old in the back of the vroom, vroom.

[00:23:12] It's like, she's not the only one to have done it, and she, she's not looking at you like you're just a mom because you was once 16 years old.

[00:23:24] **HAENA:** Yeah. What would you say was one of the hardest things you've had to [00:23:30] do as a mother from here?

[00:23:32] **KEYNA:** Um, I would definitely say the hardest thing for me is, um, parenting through the emotional ups and downs.

[00:23:40] Um, I don't deal with emotions well, so having to walk my children through their emotional battles. Um, my beauty is going through abandonment issues. Uh, she feels like I abandoned her, so every time we have a conversation, it's the same conversation on repeat. Um, so I have to walk her through that. And, um.[00:24:00]

[00:24:01] Just basically take accountability for my actions. So, um, to them it's like I just up and left them. I chose, I willingly chose to leave them. And so getting around that has been difficult. So trying to find different ways and different angles to deal with their emotions, um, it, that's definitely been a struggle.

[00:24:20] It's been, it's been hard, but, you know, I'm getting through it, and I'm doing everything I can to make sure that they don't feel like they're abandoned.

[00:24:29] **HAENA:** And what about you, [00:24:30] Bellows? What is like the, what's the hardest thing you've had to do from here, caring for your brothers and your sisters and your mom?

[00:24:36] **BELLOWS:** Um, the hardest thing I think I had to do is, uh, hold on to faith.

[00:24:42] In the pen, it could get dark in here, so people get lost. People get lost in the shade at some time, or you get too comfortable in that darkness. I have to continuously be positive when I talk to my folks. You got times where you could be honest with 'em and say like, the [00:25:00] demons is whooping me out today. But at the end of it, I have to make sure I call everybody at night and say, oh, yeah.

[00:25:06] I end up beating his ass, you know, because if I don't, that could, that could put a, a effect on my whole family, you know? And I feel like it's just a whole mental battle. That's it. It's a, it's a mental battle on a daily basis.

[00:25:23] **HAENA:** Your mindset.

[00:25:24] **BELLOWS:** For sure. For sure. Yes. Yeah.

[00:25:26] **HAENA:** Yes. Your mindset. And then one last thing before we close it up, you guys, what's [00:25:30] the thing you're most proud of. For you, Keyna, that you do here from prison as a mom?

[00:25:35] **KEYNA:** So I'm proud that I've put in my, my own emotions to the side. 'cause it's hard for me, like when I get off the phone, I just wanna break down and cry 'cause I should be there. Um, and I'm not. And there's so many things, like you said, milestones that I've missed out on. Um, just the other day my daughter was telling me about, um, a parent teacher conference they were gonna have and she was gonna be leading the, the conference and she was [00:26:00] like, mom, can you call?

[00:26:01] And I couldn't call 'cause I had a test that day at work, and it's like, there's things sometimes that I can't miss out on because I'm doing everything I can in here to get home to them sooner.

[00:26:13] **HAENA:** What about you, Bellows? What's the thing you're most proud of when you take care of all

[00:26:16] the people you take care of?

[00:26:17] **BELLOWS:** Uh, man, I'm most proud of the fact that when I call home, it don't matter which one of my people I call. They always respond is, girl, why it took so long for you to call.[00:26:30]

[00:26:30] **KEYNA:** I can feel that.

[00:26:31] **BELLOWS:** You know, and it's like, alright, lemme know you love me. I'm proud of, I send my little sister into college. She graduates December.

[00:26:40] Uh, I have a brother that's also in college right now that I motivate.

[00:26:46] **HAENA:** Well, I just wanna say to you, Bellows, so that you're such a bright light, you know that I can only imagine what a bright light you are for your family. You know? That's why they wait by that phone.

[00:26:54] **BELLOWS:** Yeah. To shine light like a diamond. I think Rihanna's selling that to me.[00:27:00]

[00:27:00] You diamond I that to me.

[00:27:04] **HAENA:** But you are, you're a bright, bright light. Bright, yeah, bright.

[00:27:07] **BELLOWS:** Well, you is too with that Mrs. Rogers voice.

[00:27:14] She's Ms. Rogers, but I, I thank y'all for all y'all for opening up with your kids, being a mother, being vulnerable at this table right now. I appreciate y'all as well.[00:27:30]

[00:27:30] **DAPHYNE:** My name is Daphnye Luster, and the song I chose is "Nice and Slow" by Usher.

[00:27:40] This song resonated the most to me because it was a emotional time and it was a hard time. I was sentenced to 20 to life. And I didn't know what that looked like being a mother to my daughter.

[00:27:56] It was 1997, and she was seven years old [00:28:00] and we were on the phone. And she was telling me that she had the song that she wanted to sing me. And I was like, okay, well you can sing it when you come up.

[00:28:07] You coming up this weekend. So when she came to the visiting room, which is a small room with a lot of chairs and tables and the vending machines, and then you have a patio or you can go outside. And the women goes there to to visit. So my daughter came with her stepfather and she was so excited. And she was like, mama, I have the song.[00:28:30]

[00:28:31] So she started singing, take you to a place nice and quiet. I was like, where no one else is there. I was like, oh my gosh, what is she singing? And she sung the whole song. And when she started singing it, I was like, oh my goodness. And once she got done with the song, I asked her, who you want to take somewhere where it's quiet at?

[00:28:52] And she just laughed. She thought that was the funniest thing. And I said, you got somebody you [00:29:00] want to be somewhere nice and quiet where nobody's gonna interrupt you? And she just tickled, just tickled her to death. And I didn't explain that it was an inappropriate song because she was so pure and so innocent.

[00:29:13] She didn't know what she was thinking. She just memorized the words.

[00:29:20] And I think that was the first time at that age where we connected, and or she shared something with me because prior to that we were behind [00:29:30] glass in a county jail and I, it wasn't contact. And so, she was able to sit on my lap and sing that song and we could laugh and, and I could be there physically with her.

[00:29:41] And that kind of changed the trajectory of how I did my time.[00:30:00]

[00:30:02] **GREG:** That was Daphye Luster. Her story was produced by Keyna Osorio. I just wanna say, from all of us at Uncuffed, a huge congratulations to Daphye. She was recently granted parole.

[00:30:21] Next time on Uncuffed, we're talking about what it means to find home.[00:30:30]

[00:30:30] That's all for this week's episode of Uncuffed, a production of KALW Public Media. You can subscribe to Uncuffed in any podcast player or find us on the radio in the Bay Area at 91.7. FM or Uncuffed dot org. The Uncuffed crew at the California Institution for Women is Koi Bagnerise, Patricia Bellows, Julie Harper, Daphnye Luster, Keyna Osorio, and Haena [00:31:00] Worthing. The outside team who works on the show is Eric "Maserati-E" Abercrombie, Chirae Cannon, Ninna Gaensler-Debs, Galnadgee Joe-Johnson, Angela Johnston, Kelly McEvers, Kathy Novak, Sonia Paul, James Rowlands and Eli Wirtschafter. Our theme music is by David Jassy. A special thanks to my mother, Patricia Eskridge, and therapist Rochelle Edwards for participating in this episode.

[00:31:29] [00:31:30] And thanks to the staff at San Quentin who make this possible, especially Lieutenant Newborg, who approves our stories from CIW. Uncuffed gets support from the California Arts Council, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, the Unlikely Collaborators Foundation and donations from listeners like you.

[00:31:50] I'm Greg Eskridge. Thanks for [00:32:00] listening.