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Opening Up After Getting Out: Stories From Re-Entry

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[00:00:00] **x:** K A L W.

[00:00:11] **SHAKUR:** Welcome to Uncuffed, the podcast that empowers people in prison to tell our own stories. We learn the art of audio storytelling, and with those skills, we make this show, featuring the humanity behind prison walls. But today, we're doing something a little different.

I'm Tommy Shakur Ross, and I used to be one of those producers inside San Quentin State Prison. I'm proud to say that today, I am out and living as a free person. For this special episode, I've gathered some other incredible storytellers.

[00:00:47] **JAE:** That's us.

[00:00:48] **SHAKUR:** All of us are formerly incarcerated, and we are here today to talk about what it's been like to re-enter and re-acclimate back into society.

[00:00:58] **AJ:** Mind blowing.

Yeah.

[00:00:59] **SHAKUR:** So, so we're going to go ahead and begin to introduce ourselves.

[00:01:03] **JAE:** My name is Jamaal Morgan. Nickname Jae. You can call me Jae. I'm having a wonderful day. I'm blessed to be here. And I just want to thank you guys for giving me the opportunity to be in the space with you guys.

(Yeah, yeah, yeah.)

You guys are incredible today, so thanks for having me on this podcast again.

[00:01:18] **AJ:** Man's got an electric smile, doesn't he?

[00:01:20] **SHAKUR:** Yes. And so who is that voice that I'm hearing right now? Go ahead and introduce yourself, sir.

[00:01:24] **AJ:** Well, the name is Anthony Michael Jefferson. Friends and family call me AJ. And I'm glad to see everybody here. It's been a while since we've seen one another. Really looking forward to what we got going on today.

[00:01:35] **SHAKUR:** Right, great. Absolutely. It's a blast seeing you as well. Yes, and so, okay, we have a third person.

[00:01:41] **CHRIS:** Yeah, that's me. I'm, I'm Chris. And it's Roberts last name, too. Chris Roberts. Christopher Roberts. Okay. Christopher Lee Roberts. Christopher Lee Roberts. Christopher Lee, yeah. You know, people get it mixed up with Winnie the Pooh, Christopher Roberts.

Ah, got it. So I'm hesitant to throw 'em together. But you, I love Tigger. It's all right. I got, you know, you know, we have fun. We like honey and stuff, so it's good.

[00:02:01] **SHAKUR:** That, that's right. I like that. I love that. Thank you. I really appreciate all the energy that we're bringing. I'm just really thrilled. I'm really excited right now, and it's hard for me to contain myself to some degree.

Right. I can see. Because things are coming up. So about a year ago, you know, we all got together and we participated in the first audio storytelling class on the outside for Uncuffed. And it's for formerly incarcerated people.

[00:02:31] **AJ:** Yeah, man. To be the first, that's, that's, that's something special. I was in the room with all of you, and I felt safe.

I had never been in front of a mic before, prior to it, and I'd always been checking things out, you know, podcast this, podcast that, how does that really work? And the way that you made it so elementary. You talked to us as if we were intelligent enough to pick up the intricacies of it. But you made it so simple and so easy.

So that was one of the things that I picked up on. And one of the things I know that I got from Chris was being emotionally available and vulnerable.

[00:03:12] **SHAKUR:** That's right. I appreciate that, you know, because like what we had was really special because we did create a space where we could be open and honest and vulnerable.

And that's what it's all about with me. You know what I mean? Because when I'm being open and honest and vulnerable, I can look you in the eye, and you can see that I'm being sincere, and that I'm being real, right. Mm hmm. I can't bulls*** you.

[00:03:37] **CHRIS:** No way. No. I'd bet my life on it, for sure.

[00:03:40] **SHAKUR:** One of the things I also appreciate about this program is that we're all formerly incarcerated, right?

And we're out here doing great things. Like I'm looking at each of you right now, and you have, like, bright eyes, right? I see the future, right? (Oh, thank you, man.) And so, and when I see you, it continues to motivate me. Just let me know, okay? It's like a reflection. So I just want to say thank you for that.

Speaking of which, as a returning citizen, you've told a story about pain.

[00:04:13] **CROSSTALK:** Yeah, how's the daily life going, man? So tell us about that. Come on, man. Okay, alright. Write it out, come on. Listen.

[00:04:21] **AJ:** So, it's 2015, March 15th. I've paroled, and I'm trying to get myself together. And here we are now. And I'm still not together, but there's a funny story.

[00:04:36] **CROSSTALK:** Okay. Alright. Okay. I like that.

[00:04:39] **AJ:** The story, it just popped into my head because I wanted to be authentic, I wanted to share from the heart, and I wanted to make people laugh. So I thought, yeah, let's be vulnerable. Let's dive into the deep end instead of sticking my baby toe into the shallow end.

[00:04:56] **SHAKUR:** I like that.

[00:04:59] **AJ:** Well, I'm a returned citizen of over eight years. I am currently a proud owner of my own catering business, which is called Renegade Catering, and I'm also an actor and an activist here in the Oakland area. I'm from a small Southern California beach town called Hermosa Beach, California. There are times when I was incarcerated that my sister would purposely put coconut oil and cinnamon on my letters to remind me of home.

I, by grace, all things great and small, I discharged my parole number in 2021. You know, there are the kind of mundane challenges that a returned citizen faces, getting your ID together, physical, meeting your parole officer. And those challenges I was prepared for because I had set a plan, a course of action for my success returning into the community.

But that, that word community means more to some of us than it may mean to just the average listener. To commune with, to be a part of, was my big, big challenge. We all do what when we're first children, we are all held. And I, being a, a healthy young man. Coming out of incarceration, wanted to be held and wanted to hold somebody.

But that was that big hurdle that was staring me right in the face and I didn't know how to deal with it. I didn't know how to meet women. I'd forgotten. Because I'd been relating to men and the pitfalls that happen when you're in prison. So I was very guarded in prison, and when I came home, back into the community, some of those guards were up, and I didn't know how to share that I had been previously incarcerated.

In fact, I didn't. I was the chameleon. I did everything but, for lack of a better term, tell the truth. In the work environment, as a chef, or as a line cook as I was at the time, you build relationships through showing up every day, checking your feelings at the door, performing your duties in a timely manner, answering yes chef, no chef, being kind and considerate to my other employees if they weren't a little behind.

If I would help. If I was behind, they would help. So that, to me, was bridging those relationship gaps that I was missing. But again, it didn't happen in my, I guess for lack of a better term, my romantic life, because, although I wasn't sharing with, my fellow employees that I was formerly incarcerated, it didn't matter, right?

And I just developed that ideology, which was false, that it didn't matter. You know, I was just me. Accept me for who I am as you see me today. And what I found out is, I probably robbed myself of some really meaningful relationships because that last barrier hadn't been deconstructed and reformed. And then, I got an acting job where I had to tell the story, but I wasn't telling my story, I was telling another person's story.

And when we were doing panels, people would ask, well, what does it feel like? What does it look like? And I began sharing the feeling, the looking, until one day, I met a young lady and, and... it leapt out of my mouth. It literally left. Hey, before this goes any further, I'd like to share with you something that's really, really tough for me to say.

But, I feel it's necessary before we go any further. And she kind of looked at me quizzically, and she did the most magical thing that I had ever seen. Instead of pulling away, she leaned in. My mind was blown, and I shared the story with her. She did something else that kind of rocked my world. She reached across the table, put her hand on top of mine, and said that's okay. And I shared my dreams, my wildest dreams, and the fact that I, I wanted to be held by somebody who wanted to be held by me.

[00:10:04] **SHAKUR:** Wow, that was, I gave up the wild on that. Like, in just a glimpse, you share so much with us, right? So, wait a minute, before you respond, I just want to just take a moment, just take a breath. Like, for me, that was, that was really deep. We talk about vulnerability. So, like, what it's like for you, AJ, hearing that today?

[00:10:28] **AJ:** It's bringing up the fact that what we did at Uncuffed back then, has helped to heal me now. What we are doing today and I, do you know what? I mentioned safety and feeling secure. I must've felt all kinds of like brinks, safety and secure. I'm telling you because I didn't realize how far I had gone in. On this second listening, I feel myself on the verge of shedding tears.

I see you. Right? I really felt that I was on the verge of shedding tears, and I thought I was being light. I really did, man! I thought I was being light, but I guess I dove into the deep water and got cleansed.

[00:11:16] **SHAKUR:** Yes. There's so many things that you shared up, but I want to hear from Chris and Jay. Like, so, Like, what came up for y'all, like, hearing AJ's story again, here, today?

[00:11:27] **CHRIS:** The hug and the hold and the stuff, it's a, it's a huge, and being accepted for where you're at, I know, in relationships post-incarceration... That's huge, I mean, it's vulnerable, because you're in there, you ain't, you ain't touching me in there, you ain't, you know, you ain't, I got no feelings, ain't working with those. That's huge. Being able to be honest with that and being like, yeah, you know, because we're all human beings. We all just want to be hugged and held and, and, you know what I mean, and we all deserve that, But that's honestly that right there, regardless if you ever went to prison or not, it's real for everyone in this room, I guarantee you. I'm wanting that same thing.

[00:12:00] **SHAKUR:** Jae, what's going on with you over there, talk to us.

[00:12:03] **JAE:** Couple emotions, I can tell that I appreciate how authentic and how genuine it was. You can hear through the audio the feelings and rawness of it. Like he wasn't faking anything he said in that, you can feel it, so part of me was touched.

And I related to him, he felt, and I kinda actually felt sad too, this part of me felt sad because it's like. It made me think about the society that we in now and how caged in he might can feel because, you know, that person, like he said, we all are like that. But we are in times where masculinity is being redefined, and femininity is being defined to where if he sounds like that to some people, they'd be like, oh, you need to be a man.

Men don't cry, men don't want to be held, stuff like that. And I just kind of felt sad because I'm thinking like, if one person's like that, you know, you can't control how somebody else may perceive it. I wish that everybody would take him in and be looking at it from a partly how we're looking at it, but, you know. The dating social scene, so hard when you're like that, and then people say like, oh, you get roasted sometimes, like, yeah.

[00:12:59] **CHRIS:** AJ's a big dude. If you guys don't see him, he's a big dude. This is not a dude you see in the yard, you just walk by and step on his shoes. This is a big man. Like, this is not a dude that has feelings, you know what I mean? Like--

[00:13:10] **AJ:** Well, you asked about how things are in the now.

[00:13:13] **CHRIS:** Yes! What's going on, man?

[00:13:15] **AJ:** How things are in the now. Well, we did that about a year ago. And the person that reached across the table, the person that leaned in, also said, Hey, make up your mind. It's either me or down there. This is the time. And we had met on Words with Friends in 2016. Dating back and forth, literally, I absconded to come up and be with this woman.

And she's my person. Life is good. Man, I'm happy. Life is grand. Thank you. Yeah. Words With Friends? What, Words With Friends? I'm a word nerd. I consider myself a word smith. I played Scrabble in prison for stamps. It was a hustle. Out here, there was an app. It was the first app that I'd ever downloaded. And it's called Words With Friends.

And I saw this person. And she, I called her radium one. Chris, I'm telling you Chris, we started chatting. I literally sent her a piece of poetry that I--

[00:14:21] **CHRIS:** I met her, she's a real person, so I know they.

[00:14:23] **CROSSTALK:** Scrabble dog fishing and then Scrabble and then, then, you know,

[00:14:28] **CHRIS:** A message in Words With Friends led to a letter. Led to a date.

[00:14:33] **SHAKUR:** So I really, I really appreciate that, Chris, and like, like, just your expression right now, like, it's, it's just the laughter and the humor. It's a lot, it's coming up right now. Yeah. It's so, like, up next, actually.

[00:14:47] **CROSSTALK:** Oh, no. Yeah, man, let's hear it, let's hear it. What happened?

[00:14:51] **SHAKUR:** We have another story about becoming comfortable with who you are.

[00:14:56] **CROSSTALK:** Yes. Yes. Right? Yes. Yes. I'm lovin it.

[00:14:59] **SHAKUR:** Why don't you tell us a little bit about your story?

[00:15:01] **CHRIS:** Well, my story's just kind of about, you know, education and stuff, and, cause I, I like education, I like learning. What really made me want to tell this, my story, at least as far as what I'm going through currently is cause I'm going through it right now.

Oftentimes you don't think that people think like you, or maybe they do think like you, and you know, and you know what, and I'm going, maybe I'm not crazy, or maybe, and it's amazing to be able to have that opportunity to be like, hey, you know, there's an opportunity for people to, like, there's different perspective, you know, out there, and people want to hear it. That's kind of where I led, why I decided to go with this story, just a little bit, what's going on, you know, about where I'm at, and. Where we're going, kick a**. Use the French.

[00:15:43] **SHAKUR:** Okay, well, let's hear it.

[00:15:48] **CHRIS:** My name is Chris. I'm a 40 year old, neurodiverse, ex-felon, college student, and I'm from Bay Area, was born in Vallejo. As a baby, I was in foster care, in and out, till us about five years old, when I met my father and my older sister for the first time. I guess that's when my life started.

I moved in with them and we were raised, I was raised by them. My dad worked a swing shift, so it's pretty much my older sister. She was a couple of years older than me. Our relationships weren't good, fought, a lot of animosity, a lot of, you know, fighting over attention and, you know,

what little we had, you know, we were always squandering over fighting over, you know. So, relationships were always something of, having to, meet someone on their level, I guess you could say.

But didn't really have any kind of real life experience, example like how a relationship's supposed to be with a, you know, a woman and a man, or how even a family's supposed to eat together at a dinner table. So, I didn't really have much to model on except for maybe married with children and The Simpsons.

I used to hug myself, actually, and I used to wish that I had really long arms so that I could, like, totally reach around and hug myself so that I would never have to cry again. That was my goal. I got long arms, but, I still cry, and hugging doesn't work by myself. You know, they have this thing with the class clown, I wasn't a class clown, I wasn't pretty enough for that. But I was the kid that was in the back of the class.

I remember third grade, they had a piece of cardboard

that would block me from the rest of the students because I was distracting. Always asked a lot of questions, too many questions. And then they started having this special education program started. And then they would have me go to this little office and tell me that, basically just tell me I had all these problems without solutions. And you know, that kind of went on. That definitely didn’t help because it made me more ostracized in the classrooms. But there was something true to it. There was obviously something different in the way I learned, so.

It led to a lot of pain and grief for me, because, you know, as I've seen a lot of other people, when they have shortcomings in other areas, they, they try to always, you know, we all want to fit in, so we, we end up doing things that, you know, that might be, you know, riskier. So it didn't really, it didn't end, you know, for me, I was in and out of, of school, never really even got an, never got a grade, a straight Fs all the way through, until I, you know, tried to go to college. And, I tried to go to college and then I got diagnosed with a learning disability and, we started to get somewhere with the help, you know, and, and that was, that was kind of a plus thing for me.

Getting some help, at least getting started and realizing that, you know, I have, I learned differently and that, that, that's okay, you know. When I was incarcerated, I, I learned something that I learned that I wasn't alone. I learned that, there's a lot of other, other, other human beings that have, they learn different, too.

And they didn't necessarily get a lot of good breaks in their life, and, you know, I would, I'm not to say that that was a direct correlation between them being in a situation that they're in, but it definitely didn't help, and. Knowing that, it strengthened me to know that I wasn't alone, and then I was able to learn more by sharing and having community and helping other people.

So much so I got a high school, graduated high school in prison. Got a college degree in prison. And felt strong enough that I could get out and do it again out here and continue. And of course that's why I'm at the university now. The only thing I didn't really count on is that there wouldn't be as many resources for us neurodiverse people yet.

And I say yet because that's the goal we're working on. Well, I like to think of them as a learning ability, in a different way of thinking. We're able to, we, you know, we're blessed with these individuals in our classrooms that have different perceptions of things, that can look outside the box or, or see things from an angle that we can't necessarily see.

And that is a, that is a truly, I believe, is a gift. However, there are certain things that, that, you know, they, they learn differently and, and, you know, maybe need some accommodations or, or some special tools that will help bring out the best in them. And knowing that they have something to offer, it's been a very, a very good strength to finally hear that you're not wrong or bad.

Or at any kind of shame and guilt that, that, that there actually might be people that want to hear your perception because maybe you have the secret to internal life or something, you know. To feel important again, to, for being different. I'm getting chills just talking about it. And what's crazy is those people that were considered special education and special being a derogatory, name or word meaning back in the day, it's actually means something.

What it's supposed to be is they are special. You, we are special. We do have something to give and offer. Just want the chance, you know, and, I feel strengthened. I feel like, wow, getting it off my chest, I feel strong, stronger than I ever have.

I'm running for student government at our university.

[00:20:50] **CROSSTALK:** Really? It's the first.

[00:20:52] **CHRIS:** Like, maybe the first Project Rebound person that's run, and probably, obviously an older person, so it's kind of, don't tell anybody.

[00:20:58] **AJ:** I won't. I promise. We're only on podcast. You don't realize that you're telling them right now, right? I'm just saying. We're only on podcast. Maybe it does. We're only on podcast.

[00:21:04] **CHRIS:** I don't want him to shoot us down and be like, oh, he was a bad guy, he can't be on, you know, teen government, student government, but I mean, I feel like that's even more of a reason why I should go on there to tell that perspective.

(I think you have a greater perspective.) You know, and I'm just trying to work in a team, I'm not trying to be a Presidente or whatever, I'm just trying to work as a team, and. But that's what led me to want to do that, come in here and go, man, this is work that needs to get done, and the only way it's going to get done is if I pull my pants up and get going, you know?

Roll my mattress up and head out in the yard.

[00:21:31] **AJ:** So my question to you, or I put this before you, because you're far more aware than I am. How do we change that perception? And I'm talking about for the young ones coming up, because I know, I believe, I won't speak for you, but I believe that that's why you're working.

Yeah. So hard and so diligently.

[00:21:50] **CHRIS:** Labels. Labels. Even this label itself, even the label Neurodiverse and Special and all that, those are, those are, labels only isolate you. The things that they're asking for is not anything but just like, hey, like, see me. That's all it is. Just seeing us. Seeing every student in the classroom as something worthwhile to give and not having labels.

Because you don't know what that person is. You don't know what they're gonna bring.

[00:22:11] **SHAKUR:** So after listening to your story, I hear how you were able to like, in so many words, get the services that you needed for your education while you were in prison. And, I mean, the irony is that you get these services while you were in prison, right?

Just imagine if you had those services available to you before you went to prison.

[00:22:36] **AJ:** Wow, did you see that response right there, bro?

[00:22:38] **CHRIS:** Yes. That's amazing. You know, I never really thought about that. But sometimes you gotta get, I don't know, for lack of better words, hit on the back of the head. You know what I mean?

And to kind of see where you're at. I can't say that it was any particular situation, more or less just good people and good vibes. Really going in and going, I have nothing else left to give. Here I am. You know, kind of like when you, not to get religious, but kind of like when you, you humble yourself and you're going, hey, okay, here I am on my knees.

This is it. What's up? You know, here I am. I have no point, nothing else going on, but everything, you know, everything I can give out. And that moment of coming humble for a second and realizing that something opened up. People like you came in my life. Came in there and said, hey, you know, check this out. But a happy ending, for sure, because that's really what it is.

There's a lot of good medicine in there if you look for it hard, you know?

[00:23:27] **SHAKUR:** But I really appreciate these stories, but you see that, you know, there's need for systemic change.

[00:23:32] **CHRIS:** Big time.

[00:23:33] **SHAKUR:** So with that, you know, I just, let's pivot over to Jae. Jae!

[00:23:39] **JAE:** What's up, man? It's good to see you, man. I swear, it's so good to see you.

I'm doing good, I'm blessed.

[00:23:43] **SHAKUR:** Man, that smile, you know what I mean? I really appreciate that. Let's transition to your piece. Can you just, like, drop us into your piece?

[00:23:51] **JAE:** Yeah, sure. So my piece, I decided to spend time on my segment talking about childhood trauma. I feel like that's something that everyone, every single body can relate to, no matter if you're from here, there, this tall, that tall.

And it was important to me at the time because I was still reeling. I even lost my mom, dad, around that time I was doing that, and at that point I felt like it was just the focal point of what I wanted to have the discussion based around, healing. Sometimes we lose ourselves and not know who we are now because we haven't identified what we haven't got past then, so.

[00:24:24] **SHAKUR:** So, okay.

[00:24:25] **JAE:** There's a lot.

[00:24:25] **SHAKUR:** So with that, we gonna, we gonna--

[00:24:26] **CHRIS:** He's a humble guy, he's the most humble person I've ever met, like really, he's so humble.

[00:24:31] **JAE:** Yeah, life will humble you, man.

[00:24:32] **SHAKUR:** So we gonna drop into Jay's story. Thank you.

[00:24:40] **JAE:** My name is Jamaal Morgain, Jae for short, I'm from Pittsburg, California. I saw my best friend get killed when I was 12 across the street at our high school. So, that mentally has scarred me for a long time. Knowing that we can be killed at any age and at any time. And, you know, he was robbed of his innocence.

He was probably like 13 at the time, so he didn't even get to live life. Or, so a lot of psychological and mental scarring and trauma came from my environment. We went to go to our high school to play basketball, used to be able to hop the fence and just play basketball in the back of the high school.

We're walking to the front to go get the ball or something. I just remember we needed to just walk to the front to go get something, and it was across the street. And I remember a car, a silver car pulled up, all 10 windows and whatnot. They were talking to him and whatnot. Me, I was scared at the time, you know, cause I don't, I don't be trusting people like that or whatever.

I thought my best, I assumed my best friend knew them because he was talking to him in the car and you just hear some loud ringing going off, and the car turned off and I, I see my friends there on the bench. We had like a blue bench that was right in front of a bus stop there. And it was just so in slow motion.

Like I don't, I'm not registering that he got shot or anything. Like it's still so young. It's just, but I see him physically looking like, it looked like a ghost. He just looked like something that happened to him. So when I ran over to him, asked him if he was okay, he couldn't say anything. And then I seen like blood coming out and whatnot.

And I panicked. I didn't know what to do. And later on I ended up eventually hearing that he had been shot, and he didn't make it. The feeling was nauseating, unreal. It was, it was a plethora of, of, of emotions that I now as an adult can pinpoint. But in the moment as a kid, he, I felt, I just felt lost seeing him get shot.

And, and then hearing that, okay, he got shot, and, oh, he's, you know, not coming back, you know, they try to explain stuff to a 12 year old and not make it as blunt as possible. And it kind of made me go numb, and kind of contributed to why I got into this, this street stuff. Because I felt like I had to protect myself at that.

I was walking with my head on a swivel. If you can die at 12, 13, you can, you know, you can pretty much do anything to anybody, so. My childhood trauma taught me that it, there is a pattern if you don't try to heal from it and try to address it, right? That the victims actually can end up becoming what you were victimized by and then hurting other people.

My childhood trauma should teach you that one, everyone has a story. And I'm sure that everyone has childhood trauma, but that, that we can overcome a lot of our childhood trauma and not fall victim to it. And not let that be the reason why we harm others or give others, not even just childhood trauma, but trauma as adults.

I go back to the juvenile hall that I was in and, and, and speak with kids there. I go to my group home that I got out of, and I speak with them. I just do a lot of volunteer work and try to share my story and try to be like that opening door for someone who might feel like, you know, they want change as well, but they don't know, or they're, they're just waiting for somebody to kind of lead the way.

So I've just been doing a lot of activism, a lot of work to try to address these things. For anybody who's listening, I'm proud of you. Your story is just as important as mine's, even if it doesn't align with what this topic is, right? Whatever's important to you, stand on it. And, and, and, and know that you have people out there that's willing to support you and do believe in you.

And don't let society make you feel like you're alone. And don't become what society makes you feel like you have to become.

[00:29:04] **SHAKUR:** Yeah. Man, yeah. Thank you. Yeah, Jae. Wow. So, yeah, that was, you know, a piece, you know, about how our childhood experiences shape us.

[00:29:14] **AJ:** There's strength that oozes out from you, man, and I am just so proud to be a part of anything that you do. Thank you.

[00:29:21] **CHRIS:** Jay, you ever heard of living amends?

[00:29:25] **JAE:** Living amends?

[00:29:25] **CHRIS:** Yeah, like, living amends, like. Kind of like what you're saying, like, you, I mean, tell the story with, like, a really, you know, okay, like an okayness.

Like, I mean, that's a, that's, I could imagine what that would be like, but I felt like safe when you told that you talked about being safe. Like, I felt like you do not seem like a person that is, you know, it's been scarred by that or, or has been victimized and is now a victimizer themselves. Yeah, I don't even need to see you.

I mean, I'm sure people can hear it through this. They can hear it in your words, not even the words, just how you say them, just as like, it's okay. Like it's, it's, it's, You're living an example by how you, you know, how you do that. Thank you. Thank you for that.

[00:30:06] **SHAKUR:** I like that, but I'm wondering, like, what was it like for you, like, hearing this today, right now?

[00:30:14] **JAE:** Kind of revealing because, like, that was a year ago, and I can hear where I was at, and I'm glad he said living amends. Because one of the things I want to focus on is how he said people can't tell that I've experienced this type of stuff. Well, when I was, the day of that recording, I don't know if you remember. Do you remember one of the classes, I end up going off to the side, and I end up minty, I cried.

Like, there was a time where, yeah, I went out of the room and I cried. Well, you know, during half of that recording, I was living in my car. Like, I was like dead ass homeless, you know what I mean. And but when I'm with people, and it's, the mission is to create a safe environment and stuff like that, I just think about other people before mine, right?

So, it's crazy that you guys said that, because now, as I'm listening, I see I'm not homeless now. I do have a place now. Bless that, bless you. But I'm kind of getting emotional because I'm like, damn, you know, even as I'm saying that, you know, I remember exactly where I was, like, coming to these sessions. And the reason why childhood trauma was such a focal point, too, is because, like, I remember I was, it was Chris, foster care, I'm, I'm actually day one foster care, was, you know, adopted, and then I was ended up putting into a group home, so it's like...

Very early age, right, I kinda got the gist that, like, I was like a product of the society and state. So I didn't have a mom, dad, so I was like, on my own at a young age, and nobody cared about us as foster kids, like, we wasn't loved the same way as my boys, logically, and we were just processed numbers, so as I got older, I recognized that I was hurting people by having that same type of mentality.

I put myself first a lot. A lot of my needs, I felt like, like, if I saw somebody struggling, I could help them. Knowing that it could change their life, I was like, but what about me? If I was struggling, would you have done that for me? And I felt like that was, once I realized that how much I was hurting other people by doing that, I started to conduct myself was like, I want to put other people first.

So now, like, even what I'm going through, that space and the purpose of that podcasting workshop was for everybody to have an environment and a space to talk. So I share what I felt was necessary with you guys, but I only withheld it because one, I didn't want to make a lot of things about me.

[00:32:20] **SHAKUR:** But that's understandable.

[00:32:20] **CROSSTALK:** That's respect. Humble, man. That's what it's all about. Much respect, brother.

[00:32:24] **SHAKUR:** I appreciate you, and thank you for being vulnerable with us today, you know.

[00:32:29] **JAE:** Yeah. Thank you for having me. Like, like I said, this, it was helpful. And I'm actually proud and put it as my accolades in life. Like, I don't really talk about my degree, but I talk about being a part of Project Rebound and being a part of this.

And I appreciate you guys for allowing me to share my story and, and be vulnerable.

[00:32:45] **CROSSTALK:** Thanks, brother. Thank you.

[00:32:46] **SHAKUR:** I just want to say, it's really been truly an honor and a pleasure, you know, sitting here at the roundtable with the fellas, so I just want to say thanks again, it's good seeing you all.

[00:32:57] **AJ:** Thank you, Tommy. Thank you for having us.

[00:32:58] **SHAKUR:** Go out and do great things in the world.

[00:33:01] **CROSSTALK:** Alright, thank you. That's what we do. When's the next one? Hahaha.

[00:33:06] **SHAKUR:** You can find Uncuffed on the radio at KALW 91.7 FM, and WeAreUncuffed.org, or you can subscribe to Uncuffed in any podcast player.

The Uncuffed crew here today at KALW Studios. is Christopher Roberts, Jae Morgain, Anthony Michael Jefferson, and me, Tommy Shakur Ross. Thanks to the team at KALW Public Radio: Ninna Gaensler-Debs, Angela Johnston, Sonia Paul, Kathy Novak, Hakim Owen, James Rowlands, Eli Wirtschafter, and our sound designer, Eric "Maserati E" Abercrombie. Our theme music is by David Jassy.

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