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Hole in the Heart: A Love Stronger Than Prison Walls

Published November 7, 2023

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

[00:00:12] **b.f.:** Hey, what's going on, people? This is Uncuffed from the Solano side, and I'm b.f. Thames. I'm here with a few people for the roundtable. Who we got here?

[00:00:22] **Mazza:** This is Brian Mazza.

[00:00:23] **Jay:** I'm Jay Evans, solid gold on the mic like the Oscar Academy Awards.

[00:00:28] **Ivy:** Hey, check me out, this Anthony Stick Talk Ivy, you already know who it is.

[00:00:33] **b.f.:** Well, actually, we don't know who you are. You're kinda new to the program, both Jay and Ivy.

[00:00:39] **Ivy:** Well, I'm the rookie of the year, man, you know. I just started this Uncuffed thing, you know. Diggin it. You know, I'm lovin it. I'm with my boys in here. And we finna do our thing.

[00:00:51] **b.f.:** So today, we're gonna talk about a few things, maybe a couple heavy things, love being one of them.

You know, and I was just wondering, have any of you, any of us, ever thought about or had or experienced, quote unquote, the one that got away?

[00:01:09] **Jay:** Yeah, it happened to me with Desiree Goree. So if I was to consider the one that got away, it would definitely have to be her.

[00:01:19] **b.f.:** Alright, well, I guess I gotta speak on that too, and the reality is, no. I'm always the one that got away.

Yeah, facts.

[00:01:29] **Mazza:** That checks out.

[00:01:31] **Ivy:** Yeah, I don't know about the one that got away, but I would say the one that came back into my life. I would say, my wife, Vivian Ivy, we met when we was kids, you know, brief. But she came back in my life after, like, seven, eight years of me being in prison, and, she'll be happily married right now.

[00:01:54] **Mazza:** Congratulations on that one, Poe.

[00:01:56] **Ivy:** I appreciate that.

[00:01:57] **Mazza:** It's amazing the strength that women have coming and seeing us in prison. You know, it just takes so much heart and so much, so much strength to come inside here and to see us, and you just gotta tip your hats off to them.

[00:02:09] **Jay:** I would more call it strength, because what a lot of people out there in society don't know is, not only are these prisons a long ways from most of us, residential areas. They have to drive a long ways, stand in a visiting line, sometimes for hours.

[00:02:25] **Mazza:** Yeah, it's a logistic nightmare coming up into these prisons to come visit sometimes. There's obstacles everywhere. It takes a lot of perseverance.

[00:02:34] **b.f.:** Yeah, so... And the reason why I asked you guys that question is because our new guy, the Golden Child, Anthony Ivy, he did an interview, a really moving interview with someone...

Who had his own version of the one that got away, but with a twist.

[00:03:01] **Ivy:** Yeah, I just want to say shout out to Rodney Hines for doing this, for doing this story with me. But it was crazy how it came about. I remember one time I was coming up to the Media Center, and we were just sitting waiting. And he said, hey man, you do podcasts?

I said, yeah. He's like, you know what? Can I tell you this story? And he started breaking the story down, but as he was telling me it, right. I can, I can see the emotions in his eyes and in his voice, and hear it in his voice, and I'm like, yeah, that's, that's one we gotta revisit. And I think that this story was my best story.

[00:03:42] **b.f.:** Well, let's give everybody else a chance to appreciate this story. Let's hear it.

[00:03:48] **Rodney:** Her name was Shanay Browning. I call her Kegs. When I first made eye contact with her, I was like, wow, she kind of different, kind of, I mean, I was feeling her off the dribble, you feel me? Like, even right now, I hear her voice in my head. You know what I'm

saying? Like, she got a voice that's real unique. She was Chinese, Black, had that long jet black curly hair.

[00:04:12] **Ivy:** So, what was the reason, like, you never hollered at her?

[00:04:16] **Rodney:** For one, I was a few years younger than her, and I'm from the concrete, so I seen her as a higher skill.

[00:04:26] **Ivy:** Tell me, like, over the years, what kept y'all apart?

[00:04:31] **Rodney:** I'ma just say, life. I don't think we was able to really have a moment.

[00:04:37] **Ivy:** So what was that moment when y'all did have time?

[00:04:39] **Rodney:** I had just paroled from prison, so I popped up on my mom's at church. I'm sitting down and, you know, you know how prison make you, I'm super observant about everybody who up here, who up in the church.

[00:04:52] **Ivy:** Looking.

[00:04:52] **Rodney:** Just looking, and I happen to catch her in my peripheral. So I turn around and it's her like,

[00:04:58] **Ivy:** Ooh.

[00:04:58] **Rodney:** Like, ooh.

You know what I'm saying? And, you know I'm still on some old penitentiary stuff, you feel me? So, I write a kite right there.

[00:05:07] **Ivy:** You did not ride a kite.

[00:05:08] **Rodney:** I gave it to the usher and was like, Hey, you blast after her right there. And I smile like a big ole Kool Aid smile. So, we get outside and, you know, we embrace.

[00:05:20] **Ivy:** And what happened after that?

[00:05:22] **Rodney:** What happened after that?

[00:05:23] **Ivy:** You got her number now. She got your number.

[00:05:25] **Rodney:** Bingo. Look, right. She happened to call. She said, I wanna, can I meet up with you when I get off work? I'm like, it's good. I met her right there on Florida Franklin, it was the old Rite Aid in that parking lot.

I'm never gonna forget. You know how they say your first impression is its last? So I timed it perfect. Soon as she hopped out, I hit play on this particular song, that Avant and Keke Wyatt.

Nothing in this world I wouldn't do for you. So soon as she step out, I turn it up loud as it go. Bam.

I see them high heels, them fishnet stockings.

Oh my God, you know how we, how we be about them walks.

[00:06:07] **Ivy:** But surely.

[00:06:08] **Rodney:** Yeah, so, put her arms around my neck. And squeeze me, hug me, and I'm like, Ooh, okay, here we go. And later on that night, she called again. She was like, I just want to know, can I come get a kiss before I go to bed? I'm like this, you know what I mean?

You only get certain opportunities once in a lifetime. You know what I'm saying? I hop in the car, and blast directly to where I do about a hundred over here trying to get there. I'm like, oh my God, is this really happening? So, it's like, I'm in the middle of saying something, and next thing I know, her lips is on mine, her tongue in my mouth, I don't see no fireworks, you know what I'm saying?

And bright lights, you know what I mean? This kiss was passionate. It was sensual, it was like from there, she, she put a stamp on my heart forever. Maybe a day or two after that, I ended up going on my way to prison.

[00:07:02] **Ivy:** I'm like, damn, after the kiss you went to prison. How long did it take for you to like, get back in touch?

[00:07:09] **Rodney:** I get a letter in the mail, and I'm like, what the hell? I'm thinking I'm tripping. So I open up the letter, and lo and behold, it's from Shanay. I was surprised, I'm like, hold on man, I'm locked up, and she locked up. How that's gon work.

[00:07:27] **Ivy:** I can't really imagine, like, you know, I'm talking to her and she in the same situation as me.

Could you read that first letter that she wrote you?

[00:07:37] **Rodney:** She said: I'm just really trying to work on my relationship

[00:07:43] **Voiceover:** With God so he can make me into the woman that he has called. I've been into many other relationships that have failed and when everyone left...

[00:07:53] **Rodney:** He remained with me. If I was presented the opportunity to be with her, I would never have left her.

[00:08:03] **Ivy:** I'm like, dang, she must have really was thinking about you to really, like, take the initiative to do that.

[00:08:10] **Rodney:** Right, right.

[00:08:11] **Ivy:** You know what I'm saying? You got people on the streets that don't even contact your own family. So for her to do that, I knew it was something deep.

[00:08:19] **Rodney:** Her letters was uplifting and encouraging.

We started off as friends first, and as time progressed, our feelings, our love, and our respect, it grew more and more for one for each other. And I know that my letters meant something to her.

[00:08:39] **Ivy:** You know, in prison, dudes, they, they don't, they don't be passin they letters, and they don't show they, they feelings about the female.

You know how we get down in here, you know? It's kinda like a vulnerable thing, but, for you to do that, that's, that's a real man right there.

[00:08:53] **Rodney:** She wrote me this letter back in January 2015. She say, Greetings, and invisible kisses...

[00:09:00] **Voiceover:** And thoughts. Right back at you. I just received your letter, and as always, it brought a smile to my face, and thoughts to my head.

I look forward to your letters. I haven't been feeling good, back and forth to the hospital. It's been taking a toll on me. They found a hole in my heart, and they said when my heart is stressed, the blood and oxygen is not getting into my muscles. But then he says, well, even though I have a clogged artery, I don't function like I do because I can take a shower on my own and fix my bed.

So it's not on top of his to do list to do anything. They say I can't run or do anything to stress my heart out.

[00:09:43] **Rodney:** To stress my heart out. But, thank God my life is in his hands and not theirs.

[00:09:50] **Ivy:** Man, that's deep. How did that hit you when you got that letter, bro?

[00:09:55] **Rodney:** Like a mountain fell on me, man. Because, you know, that's one of the worst things, man.

Especially with us being in prison is for somebody close to us to have some type of condition that could affect your life or possibly take your life. You know I'm saying, and you not be able to be there with them. So it hurt. It hurt deep.

[00:10:18] **Ivy:** She got out. What kind of relationship did y'all have?

[00:10:21] **Rodney:** She immediately put money on the phone.

She stayed right and send me bundles of pictures. And the way we engaged with each other was as if we had like our own little thing. It was like special.

[00:10:35] **Ivy:** It wasn't matched.

[00:10:36] **Rodney:** This was the only time that... you know, me and her kind of made a left hand turn. And this kind of hurt me, too. It hurt, it hurt me bad.

Man, one morning, I'm meeting one of my partners, and you know, this dude, you know, he was one of them, wanna be Mr. Big Shot type dude, you know what I mean? He like, he like, hey Seb, he like, yeah man, you remember your grilled cakes? He like, yeah man, I knocked her on Facebook.

[00:11:04] **Ivy:** When you saying knocking, what do you mean by knocking?

[00:11:07] **Rodney:** Like...

[00:11:07] **Ivy:** For people that don't know.

[00:11:08] **Rodney:** As if he got her. So, without letting him see me sweat, you know, I kept my poker face on. I'm like, is that right? And when I got back to my cell, I wrote her a letter. And, I don't feel good about the things that I said to her at all to this day. It comes back and it haunts me, and it hurts me that I said such terrible things to such a beautiful person who didn't deserve that.

She cried so bad, she told my mom about it. And my mom got at me, was like, told me how wrong I was for things I was saying. It was a while before me and her even communicated again. You know, she was a very forgiving woman. She was like, You've been knowing me since we was kids. I would never disrespect you like that.

And it made me reflect back. I was like, Damn, you know, this dude, he always had been a snake. He got a reputation for doing this kind of stuff. So, once she told me that, she allowed me back into her life, and, you know, our communication. We was back on. You know what I mean, she was always on me, about bettering myself. Just like, not savage, but I knew she cared, and she loved Rodney. But I was on the phone one night, with my mom, I'm like, Mom, hold on, so I click over, and it's Cakes. She said, what's you doing baby. Let me finish this up with my mom, and I'ma holla right back at you. Finish my conversation with my mom. I dial her numbers. The phone is ringing. No answer. Call her again. Just ring it.

You know, next morning I wake up, and man, I... I call my mom, man. She tell me like, Rodney, Shanay died. And like, when she said that, it was like, everything like, froze for a minute. And I just, I just replay back... everything from last night. And I remember like, before I told her, I was gonna call her back. She told me, she said, Baby, make sure you call me back, I gotta tell you something.

So, at that moment, I'm like, damn, like, everything, it just crumbled at that very instant. And that moment, I felt a lie, but I felt dead. What was that she was going to tell me? What does she going to talk to me about? And when they found her, and when they, when they picked up her phone, my number was the last number in her phone.

My voice was last voice that she heard.

Man. It's al, it's always gonna haunt me forever, man. Just to know what she wanted to talk about. It's like living without a limb. You know what I'm saying? It hurt, bruh, straight up. It put me in a mind state of just taking life for granted. I hold myself responsible for the fact that she eventually had told me that when she had got that letter from me, it motivated her to get her own place. So when she had the heart attack, if she'd have been at home with her parents, maybe she would be here now. Shanay, I'm sorry for every negative and bad thing that I said to you when I wrote that letter. I love you more than love itself. I miss you. I look at you every day. You know, I got you on my wall.

And more than that, I got you in my heart. Oh, yeah, I almost forgot too. I got a tattoo of an angel. It says Shanay Browning.

[00:15:50] **b.f.:** Wow. That conversation between our own Anthony Ivy and Rodney Hines was so deep. Heavy. Bryan, I'm looking at you, it looks like you have something on your mind about this.

[00:16:05] **Mazza:** You know, that really affected me deeply, because I, I had a similar experience in my life. I was blessed. You know, Ivy, listening to this piece made me, think a lot about a past relationship I had with, with Tara Wythe.

I met this beautiful girl on the streets, at a party, and I asked her to dance, and I didn't even know how to dance myself. She was so beautiful, and I was willing to put myself out there. You know, we fell in love, and I ended up going to prison, and she came down to Pleasant Valley State Penitentiary and married me in a Level 3 Penitentiary visiting room, which showed great heart.

And, it was, it was, you know... She committed herself to me, and married me in prison, and I ended up being with her for a couple years. I had like eight, eight and a half years to do a long time, and the love endured. And, but one thing happened, you know, she came to see me many times, and, family visiting and whatnot, which was a great experience, you know, emotionally, for both of us.

She ended up telling me, you know, I can't go on with this relationship because I can't stand leaving, leaving prison and not taking you with me when I leave these visits. And, I understood totally, and she wanted children. So, it was kind of one of those situations where... I had to let her go and we divorced.

I was up in Calaveras Shard in Jamestown to go into fire camp and, you know, we, we divorced. And... and she dropped out of my life for like 20 years. So she moved on, and she met somebody, moved to Texas, and, and she had, she had, she had twins. A wolf and moxie, beautiful little babies, you know, something that she always wanted out of life, you know.

And that relationship... Ran its course, and she ended up moving back to California. This is 20 years later, this is like last year, I think. She contacts my mom, and says, Hey, what's going on with Brian? we got back in touch, and you know, it was, you know, It was really wonderful to talk

to her and to make that connection again after so many years, it was like we picked up right where we left off.

We were thinking about, you know, visiting again, getting back together. And, and she got sick. And, you know, it turned out to be a diagnosis of liver cancer, and it took it really fast. You know, listening to this story really hit home to me because of the way that, you know, love's transcended the penitentiary and the span of years, and all the obstacles that life puts in front of us. And, you know, and how sometimes it doesn't always turn out the way we want it to.

[00:18:49] **Ivy:** Thank you, Mazza, for telling us that story, that was deep. And... I just appreciate you wanting to be on this roundtable. You weren't even scheduled to be on this roundtable, but you did your thing, man, and I appreciate you.

[00:19:02] **b.f.:** You know, listening to that story, it sounded pretty clear to me that Rodney somehow blamed himself.

He had some harsh and mean things, according to him, to say to her when.... when he thought that she was involved with somebody else. So I know how that can make him feel guilty. It just felt like he was blaming himself, like he felt responsible for, you know, her passing, alone like that, and then him not making the connection.

[00:19:36] **Mazza:** I sensed a, I sensed a lot of regret. Um, and sadness in it, not being able to get on the phone and talk to her and I understand that... he might've been the last person to try to call her, and it's just, phew, man, that took me on one right there.

[00:19:51] **Ivy:** Yeah, I think... I know I done went through similar situations when I blame people and then thought back later, like, I probably shouldn't have did that, you know, I was working off emotions. You know, we in prison, we say we don't, but, you know, we do, especially when it come to women, and, you just in the cell thinking, and.

You don't have that outlet in here to be able to just talk to people about your feelings like that. It's luckily if you do have a friend that you can express that to, but that could be a sign of weakness. So for him to be going through that in prison, I know it was deep, and I still can hear it in his voice to today when he still bring her up.

He has something to do with, you know, her, her passing.

[00:20:35] **b.f.:** You know, one thing in this story, that was actually funny, in a story that wasn't meant to be funny is when he showed how institutionalized he was. When he sat in church and passed a kite to the usher. A kite being a note. He actually wrote a note, and he gave that note to the usher, and he called it a kite.

You know, and, and that whole thing was funny to me. Is, is, were there other things that, like, you, Bryan, and Jay, other things that, like, stood out to you, the way the kite did, you know, for me?

[00:21:10] **Jay:** What stood out for me was all the tactics that he used to get her, get her attention, besides the moment of writing the kite, writing the note, is playing the, playing the certain music.

Making sure that he has all these mannerisms and other characteristics that he knew would get her attention. It's like, yeah, I understood him right there because I didn't use those type of tactics in the past. Pulling up, playing SWV or something like that, and knowing for a fact that's gonna get the attention of whoever is around.

I saw you nodding your head, Ivy, when he mentioned tactics. Why'd you do that?

[00:21:45] **Ivy:** You know, when he was telling me this story, it's like, when I was, I was like, I was there when he was telling me this story. I was right there with him. I can visualize what he was doing when he, when he, you know, had the music bumping when she pulled up, when she, when he bounced out, you know what I'm saying?

So... I was just, I'm just glad that he, like, remembered like that and he was a good talker.

[00:22:09] **Mazza:** You know, I want to ask you guys, you know, I experienced loss. I lost my brother last year, the woman I mentioned, Tara. And then a year or so ago, I lost my dad. I want to ask you guys, have you ever experienced loss while you've been in the joint?

[00:22:23] **b.f.:** You know, the two people closest to me in the world died two years apart. My dad died in 2004. My mom died in 2006, almost exactly 24 months later. I was a daddy's boy, for sure. You know, I tell people that all the time. So, when this man died, for me, it was like God dying. You know, I mean, if God could die, God died in 2004.

I remember crying for 10 consecutive days. I tried to... Arrange to speak at his funeral, and I knew I wouldn't be able to go because they have a process. CDCR has a process. If you have the money, you pay for the security. That has to be COs who are off duty. It has to be, they're off hours. So it's like all these hurdles you have to jump.

They say, no, you can do it. But then they make it so hard for it to happen. So what I tried to do is I tried to arrange to speak at my dad's funeral over the phone. So they called me to the chapel, and then, you know, calling my brother. My brother was not on like he was supposed to. That didn't work out.

That's that feeling of, you know, not being in control. That was horrible to me. Fast forward two years later, but just quickly, to my mom passing. I didn't understand the language that my sister used when she had the counselor call me to her office and put me on the phone with her and she said, Mom's in the hospital.

She got all these tubes sticking in and out of her. All that meant to me is she had tubes, and it probably was serious. Nobody told me until after the fact that that was life support. So a week later, I'm called to the program office. Every prisoner that hears this knows if you don't have

committee, some other stuff going on, you don't want to be called to the program office, you're gonna get some bad news.

That's what the chances are. It's a high likelihood. High probability. So I went to the program office, and the counselor put me on the phone. And my sister Vicki was there, Deborah was there, one of my mom's best friends, some other church lady, cause my mother's deeply religious. And she's unconscious, and they told me she was gonna die that day.

I was angry. F*** you mean. You know, even though it was so long ago, it still, it still affects me now because this was one of those situations, Ivy. I wasn't always good to my mother. So there were things that I wish I could've taken back, didn't get a chance to do that, because they said, the doctor said that she's gonna die today, and she did.

I was on the phone talking to her unconscious self, and at 1:17, I heard the beep in the background. Beep. So, she actually died while I was talking in her ear on the phone. So that... that, that was a huge loss for me. And I can get why Rodney would have felt guilty, you know, in his story. Because we gotta take responsibility for how we treat people, you know?

And I felt like I just had no control over the situation. I had no control over anything. I just had to sit there, and I just...

I was just that.

[00:26:06] **Ivy:** When I, when I was sentenced, you know, to 17 years in life, I mean since 17 years, I knew that people was gon, gon, gon be dying, you know. But one year, I had four cousins die within, you know, months. You know, I'm like, damn. It, it got real, so. You know, over the years, my family's been passing, and it seems like more people have been passing as I get closer to home. But I remember one time in Corcoran. I'm in a visitor room, and... a CO said he'd seen me do something that I didn't do.

I went to the hole for it, and, right before I, you know, this was my birthday. My family said my grandma had a stroke. So, they asked me if I wanted them to send me pictures of her. I'm like, nah, I don't, I don't like to look at people, you know, when they, you know, on they last, you know, days are sick. But, so I'm in a hole.

I'm stressed out about being in a hole for something I didn't do, and my wife comes and sees me and she says... your grandma passed. They wouldn't let me, I was in the hole, so they wasn't gonna let me go to her funeral. So I wrote her, you know, wrote something for my cousin to say.

To this day though, it didn't, it ain't really sunk in all the way, you know, like that, you know, cause I'm not out there, you know. But I do remember before I went to jail, my grandma, she used to always say. Like, go in, why you always hanging out like that? I got a grandma, I'm good, I know what I'm doing, you know what I'm saying?

She just wanted the best for me. I felt guilty that I still was in the streets, and I wasn't there, you know, for her, like I wasn't there on her last days. I was in prison, and all she wanted me to do was stay out of trouble. But you know, I'ma still have to face that when I get out, not having her there.

[00:28:26] **Mazza:** I'm feeling you, man. That's regret. And I, and I, and I have the same feeling towards my dad. You know, I never knew my real dad till I was 20 years old, and, you know, I went to see him, and our relationship was fleeting because my course in life was set. I was already a criminal. I was already, I'd already been to prison, you know, so... I spent most of my life, or most of our relationship, in the joint, communicating over the phone. He came out here, he was in Chicago, he comes out here with his, his wife to visit me a couple times. And, you know, like Brian, I, I got to, to talk on the phone to him when he was on, you know, life support, he was on, you know, a coma, had a bunch of heart problems, and... the most important part of my life, needing a father who wasn't there, and the most important part of his life, towards the end, needing his only true born son to be there with him.

I wasn't there either, so... the guilt and the shame and all the emotional stuff of not being there for him or that family... I don't think I'll ever recover from that, so there is a lot of regret there, loss of control and everything else.

[00:29:39] **Jay:** For me, the toughest loss was my little sister.... it was during the second year of COVID. And my family told me that she was sick, but I didn't know how sick she was. And during the week that I thought that she sounded the strongest, it ended up taking a dive for the, for the worst. And... anytime when it's somebody, for me, that's younger, I always look at it as like, man, they have more, they should have more time on earth.

She was always a good person. And my concern was more for her kids, for my mom...

I can't go through... I can't go through....

[00:30:43] **b.f.:** That's understandable, bro.

[00:30:46] **Mazza:** I'm sorry, Jay.

[00:30:49] **b.f.:** I remember you had mentioned it to me before. So... I, I know how close you were with your sister.

[00:30:56] **Ivy:** And that goes back to the control thing, you know, us being in prison, and not being there for them last days, you know. That's why this story hit deep, because I feel like we all can relate to it in some type of way.

Being in prison, and, and just... I guess taking the time that we was on, on the streets for granted, not knowing what was going to happen in the future. We didn't know what was going to happen. We didn't know all this stuff was going to happen, but, you know, it did. And, I appreciate y'all doing this roundtable with me on my story.

And I appreciate y'all just laying it all on the line, you know what I'm saying? Because people need to hear this.

[00:31:44] **b.f.:** You know, I really appreciate you guys sharing and being so vulnerable. Especially thanks to, uh, our golden child, Anthony Ivy, for doing such a great story. That's all for now.

That's it for this episode of Uncuffed. I'm b.f. Thames. You can find Uncuffed on the radio at KALW 91.7 FM, or at weareuncuffed.org. Or subscribe to Uncuffed in any podcast player. The Uncuffed crew at Solano are Anthony Ivy, me, b.f. Thames, Bryan Mazza, and my buddy, Jay Evans from the heavens.

Thanks to the team at KALW Public Radio. That would be Ninna Gaensler-Debs, Angela Johnston, Sonia Paul, Kathy Novak, Eli Wirtschafter, James Rowlands, Ben Trefny, and our sound designer, Maserati E., also known as Eric Abercrombie. Our theme music is by David Jassy. And thanks to the staff at Solano who make this possible, especially Lieutenant Guerrero, who approved this episode.

We fact check everything to the best of our ability. Uncuffed gets support from the California Arts Council and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. I am b.f. Thames.