Audio file

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Transcript

00:00:15 David

From the Greater Boston area, you are listening to my turn conversations brought to you by the Tufts University education and Reentry network. My turn. These are stories of life during and after incarceration, told by people who have lived it.

00:00:31 David

And are working to overcome the odds.

00:00:42 Supreme

Hey, my name is A Supreme Hassan. I went inside when I was 18 years old, I served 33 years. I've been in an adult relationship for about 2 1/2 years now.

00:00:54 Swinks

My name is Swinkels LaPorte.

00:00:57 Swinks

I went in at the age of 17. I spent 16 years in prison, and I have been in a relationship for six months now.

00:01:06 Kaylee

Hi, my name is Kaylee Lopez and I'm currently a sophomore at Tufts.

00:01:11 Kaylee

I was born in Brooklyn, NY, and growing up in a community vulnerable to incarceration and being part of MyTERN has made me realize the importance of having conversations like the ones we're having now.

00:01:25 Kaylee

I am grateful for this opportunity to facilitate this discussion and bring attention to this topic. Since stories of reentry often gloss over it.

00:01:33 Brianna

Hello, my name is Brianna Amador. I am currently a senior at Tufts University, and I first learned of MyTERN at their yearly symposium during my sophomore year.

00:01:43 Brianna

The year I was sitting in that symposium, I was able to hear the voices of men and women who have been impacted by incarceration, and I was able to reflect on the members of my community that I grew up in, the Bronx community, who were subjected to over policing, both in schools and in our neighborhoods and I knew I wanted to be a part of this conversation. So, I'm very privileged to be involved in MyTERN my senior year.

00:02:22 Brianna

As former juvenile lifers, how did you think about romantic relationships when you first were incarcerated?

00:02:29 Swinks

My idea of a relationship was again since I went in so young was just like puppy love and understanding those dynamics of being so in love, it's like. You know, being in the honeymoon stage and that's kind of like everything is always supposed to be perfect. And we're supposed to always be in love. And when I call, she calls. And when I text, she text and you know, so it was kind of like that Hollywood type of dynamic. That's the kind of idea that I had going into prison. And it was kind of like really romanticized because now I'm watching like hip hop videos, and they're always talking about if I get locked up, my woman got to hold me down.

00:03:14 Brianna

Supreme.

00:03:16 Brianna

What did you think of a relationship as you were now going in?

00:03:22 Supreme

Prior to going in I was running the streets, and I would be what they call the player So, the woman that was my girlfriend when I went in, she remembered who I was on the street, and she didn't want to go through that. I remember reflecting on the reason why she left me. And I was like, I don't want to be in a situation where I'm hurting someone's feelings because I watched everyone around me for the most part. The majority of the people around me were manipulating these relationships, these male female relationships was more about control than it was about being in a relationship.

00:03:59 Brianna

OK.

00:04:01 Brianna

What did that control look like?

00:04:03 Supreme

Control looks like hold me down. Hold me down is euphemism for loyalty. And it wasn't the fact that these men were loyal to a woman. It was loyal to what the women could do for them. I've witnessed brothers who've had women who were receiving government subsidies cry about getting the $50 pair of sneakers and a $50 money order. As opposed to, why didn't you get me the $100 sneakers? Why didn't you send me a $100 money order. Knowing that that woman who comes to visits you 3 \* 4 \* times a Week, who has your children, who's paying rent, who's taking care of your children, plus put money

on your books. That shit was shameful. There was very little intimacy involved from the perspective of knowing that person. Understanding that person's feelings, knowing how to show up in support of that person. I realized that I did not want to bring another woman into prison. I was already doing time I didn't want anyone else to do time?

00:05:11 Kaylee

So, you said that you weren't involved in a relationship while incarcerated, but what about you Swinks?

00:05:17 Swinks

So, when I first got incarcerated, the woman I was with, he was together since like the 6th grade. And so, I was in high school by then, you know, we had on and off relationships so. When I first got incarcerated, she was there for like maybe 2 1/2 years. It was stressful you know, ‘cause she's 16, so she's still growing into herself, and her life is going on and mines has just stopped. So, there's experiences that she's having and I'm kind of like, OK, that's cool. And now she's in the club and now she's doing certain things. And it was stressful just hearing that over the phone. And then it got to a point where she's like, hey, you know -- I don't know if I could really do this because you know, I don't know if you're going to come home. The severity of the case was high profile and all that. And you know, she started becoming lonely so. She was like, hey, you know, we could still be friends. And I think that was like, the hardest thing. For me to hear from her, but I know it was something that needed to be done. I had a lot of things to focus on. As far as my case and making sure that I had everything situated, understanding what this process really meant. And finding my own sense of self, right? Just like she was doing. She was discovering who she was as a young lady going into adulthood. And I had to start doing that on my own. So, when we severed our relationship after 2 1/2 years that it was it, it was painful.

00:06:46 Supreme

But you raised a great point about stress, and you got me thinking. Well, another reason why I was discouraged from entering a relationship was seeing the stress and how hard it was for those who had to work to cover up their lies. And I was like, I don't have time for that. And I do not want to be doing time worrying about everything else but doing the time I'm doing. I didn’t have time to be stressed over what my woman's doing, I just didn't have that in me to be trying to control a woman while trying to do my time at the same time.

00:07:13 Kaylee

What about you Swinkels? What did you observe from either your own relationship or other relationships that occurred in prison? Yeah, I agree with Supreme. It gets into because you know we have so much power in our.

00:07:26 Supreme

How so.

00:07:28 Swinks

Yeah, I agree with Supreme. It gets into because you know we have so much power in our.

00:07:26 Supreme

There's like different categories of like relationships. That's all right. You got the guys who have.

00:07:34 Swinks

The ones that go on writer prisoner and you have like a pen pal, so it is kind of you're trying to get something out of writing me, right? Either you're lonely and you want to know where I'm at. So this is the psychology of it. And the man is saying, OK.

00:07:49 Swinks

Make a fair exchange. I'll give you the attention and the time that you need. And I'm here. Just give me the support that I need. That means sending me a $50 bag, right? So those relationships worked out like that, it' contractual.

00:08:01 Swinks

Thing.

00:08:01 Swinks

So it's like you give me this and I give you that. So it's just like alright, you guys are trying to satisfy whatever.

00:08:07 Swinks

Desire that you guys are looking for it. The man's going to reap the benefits of it because I just feel like, hey, you're just gonna contact me here and write me, and I'm not gonna get no money from you. I'm gonna get the things I need.

00:08:16 Swinks

To survive while I'm incarcerated. Then you have the guys who came in like myself. Who?

00:08:21 Swinks

Who came into prison with someone that they really cared about and just that separation?

00:08:29 Swinks

You know, puts a lot of strain, like a lot of stress because it's like you want to be a man and your woman is out there defending for herself. So you kind of like, you know, how do I protect this person while I'm through the phone? How can I provide from you when I'm only getting a dollar?

00:08:42 Swinks

Right. So these are these are the two things that's constantly on your mind, how do I protect you? But also how do you?

00:08:55 Kaylee

So going back to your experiences with relationships and what you've witnessed while in prison, how has that affected your mindset on what a relationship is to you today?

00:09:07 Swinks

Yeah, that's a that's a. That's a good question, I.

00:09:10 Swinks

I think it all that.

00:09:12 Swinks

Observation of like trying to be like in a relationship like this in relation to prison relationships.

00:09:18 Swinks

For me, at least.

00:09:22 Swinks

It it affected him like I became very like.

00:09:27 Swinks

Independent.

00:09:29 Swinks

So I kind of like stood to myself and I didn't really understand like the the impact of that right until I got released from prison. But it's just like, you know, I'm going to stay to myself. I became very closed off because it's like, well, where is this going to get me, you know, it's it's only going to last a year.

00:09:47 Swinks

And then I'm going to end up not having to speak to nobody and just have to just focus on myself more self reflection, more self growth, so that that dynamic just made me just really like closed off and a little bit like paranoid and like being in a relationship because not knowing the longevity of it because I never had that.

00:10:07 Swinks

Experience of knowing what it's like to be longer than a year or two or four like you know.

00:10:12 Swinks

So.

00:10:13 Supreme

This conversation is so needed because even as you guys are asking us the questions more and more of the reasons why I moved the way I did in there prior to meeting someone and falling in love with her.

00:10:31 Supreme

Really is justified because it was demoralizing and dehumanizing in there, seeing observing all of that and seeing and asking myself the question.

00:10:43 Supreme

Do I deserve to be in a relationship if I'm going to show up that way?

00:10:49 Supreme

And what does that do for the other person? Am I going to dehumanize another person for my human satisfaction?

00:10:56 Supreme

I couldn't become.

00:10:58 Supreme

What I didn't want to become.

00:11:01 Supreme

So I was not going to into into a relationship that was going to be fraudulent. That was going to be predicated on transactions instead of transformative.

00:11:10 Supreme

It took me 31 years before I got involved in a romantic relationship and it happened.

00:11:17 Supreme

Naturally.

00:11:18 Supreme

And when I entered the relationship, one of the things that I said to my love was that we have to know each other's minds first and foremost.

00:11:26 Brianna

Did your mind change about how you felt about relationships like you guys are both in one now? What transform?

00:11:35 Swinks

Yeah. So that changed for me because I'm like, man, I'm no longer in prison like, now I can actually physically be there for a woman. There's be it's going to be more quality time. So, you know, I gave myself that space, you know, like 30 days to say, OK, let me just get.

00:11:50 Swinks

Acclimated to being.

00:11:53 Swinks

Back out here.

00:11:54 Swinks

In in, in society you know just to see like, what's going on and get a little bit of a sense of like.

00:12:03 Swinks

Direction of where I want to go. So, after I got like you know that grace period? Yeah. I was just like you know what I want to get back on this horse man I want to I want to start dating and I want I want to be in a relationship.

00:12:16 Swinks

And because it's the only thing that is going to kind of like keep me grounded.

00:12:20 Swinks

You know, making sure that I have. I have.

00:12:23 Swinks

Someone that I could lean on and speak to.

00:12:26 Swinks

And get that support and get that comfort, you know that I've been missing since I was 17 years old, and now I'm as an adult. So now I want to be in an adult relationship. I want to experience what an adult relationship looks like, you know.

00:12:40 Brianna

So did you find?

00:12:41 Swinks

That absolutely I did. So after that 30 days and I bumped into.

00:12:48 Swinks

A crush of mine that I had when I was in middle school.

00:12:53 Swinks

And I, you know, I contacted her and then we went out on our first date.

00:12:59 Swinks

We wanna get on a boat.

00:13:01 Swinks

And it was like a boat ride. Very romantic. And we spoiled. We did a lot of catching up. And I'm just like, you know, like, what's up, man like, you know, let's let's let's make this thing happen. She was like, absolutely. So, yeah. And we just been rocking out ever since.

00:13:17 Supreme

I think there was something so important about what you said only about adult relationships. My woman helped me understand the importance of being an adult relationship. I went.

00:13:28 Supreme

Then at 18, back then according to the law, I was technically not a juvenile, but I was a juvenile. My mind wasn't developed. I didn't understand what it meant to be an adult relationship, and a lot of the intimacy of my wife and my conversation was about adult relationships. So she, in a lot of ways, prepared me.

00:13:49 Supreme

For that adult relationship that I'm in today.

00:13:52 Supreme

And that transformation came through growth and development.

00:13:57 Supreme

You know you're going to find.

00:13:59 Supreme

Categories of brothers and men that incarcerated the men that's working on themselves. The men that ain't checking for nothing, and the men are they're stuck between following the pact and trying to discern, you know, this is who I am. This is what I want to.

00:14:13 Supreme

Become I knew.

00:14:15 Supreme

That love meant everything to my new family and everything to me. I knew that.

00:14:19 Supreme

I wanted a queen.

00:14:21 Supreme

As I know that I was a king, so falling in, you know, meeting my wife.

00:14:27 Supreme

And having that engagement of the minds.

00:14:30 Supreme

August 31st of 2023, the day I was released. The first time I physically laid eyes on my wife, I knew I made the right choice.

00:14:39 Supreme

The energy that existed between her and I was instant. I can recall telling her based on the way she felt about previous relationships, that if I was ever in a room with a million people.

00:14:56 Supreme

And she made eye contact with me. I would always be reaching for.

00:14:59 Supreme

Her hand.

00:15:01 Supreme

That day, when we climbed in the.

00:15:02 Supreme

Car.

00:15:03 Supreme

I instinctively reached my hand back to receive hers and she told me she knew that she would be protected all.

00:15:09 Supreme

Her life.

00:15:17 Brianna

What's been most surprising or challenging about your relationships?

00:15:24 Supreme

Challenge.

00:15:26 Supreme

Is showing up in a very supportive way when.

00:15:31 Supreme

My wife has triggered.

00:15:33 Supreme

By something happened in her past.

00:15:36 Supreme

And expecting it to happen in her present relationship.

00:15:40 Supreme

And showing up as a compassionate, caring, but most importantly, understanding partner.

00:15:46 Supreme

It's challenging from the perspective of it's not my bag. It's not how I show up. So I I'm reminded to stay humble.

00:15:55 Supreme

To be there for.

00:15:56 Supreme

Her when she when it does happen.

00:15:58 Supreme

At times it is challenging because that's not me.

00:16:02 Supreme

The one of the most important things is listening and not being judgmental but understanding that this is a part of what she's experienced and that.

00:16:13 Supreme

When you have bad experiences, oftentimes you rehearse tragedy and you expect bad experiences. And the one thing I pride myself on is not being that dude.

00:16:23 Swinks

Well, yeah, surprising for me. I thought I had it all figured out. I'm having a lot because I'm like I'm incarcerated. You know how you deal with different personalities. You know, you're dealing with 400, a thousand, maybe 1600 different personalities of people, right? So, I'm like, OK, I've seen this different type of personality before, but in the context of.

00:16:45 Swinks

Of men.

00:16:47 Swinks

Right. So we show our emotions in our intellect, our temperaments, and our behaviors and habits in certain ways. So I'm just. I'm used to that dynamic.

00:16:56 Swinks

So.

00:16:57 Swinks

When I was released.

00:17:00 Swinks

I'm like, alright, I gotta. I kind of got like a base understanding of like.

00:17:05 Swinks

You know people's temperaments. Now I know expert, right, but I'm just like, I gotta base. Understand. So by the time I got with.

00:17:12 Swinks

The woman I'm with now.

00:17:14 Swinks

Or in the beginning when I got with the with her, who eventually became my wife.

00:17:21 Swinks

I was like, yeah, you know, I'm. I'm going to.

00:17:25 Swinks

I'm going to know how to deal with these types of behaviors and these type of.

00:17:29 Swinks

Temperaments. When they get upset, but it was in a woman's perspective, right? So that was surprising to me because I'm like, oh, I am very inexperienced.

00:17:37 Swinks

We're dealing with women's emotions and how their viewpoints intellect, you're dealing with her intellectual and you're dealing with, like, spiritually, right. So, I'm just like, oh, that was a little surprising for me because, like, I do not know how to deal with women.

00:17:51 Swinks

Because I've been around men for like 16 years and the women see yours, you have limited conversations with them, so you're not really tapping into like who they are and like what they want like their needs and everything like that. Right. So, you're not really going beyond the surface with them. But now I'm with my. I'm with my wife, and they're just like, oh, I'm very inexperienced. I don't be having clue what, half the time we should be wanting so.

00:18:10 Swinks

That that's part of the challenge, right?

00:18:12 Swinks

Because the challenge is now, I have to kind of like mesh my behavior and temperaments along with hers. So, there was a lot of times I got a lot of things wrong, like things like pretty much talking about, you know, coming from a place of understanding. I just kept going with the preconceived notion. Like, no, I think I got.

00:18:28 Swinks

And not really paying attention.

00:18:30 Swinks

To a lot of her.

00:18:32 Swinks

Her languages, you know. So, for one example.

00:18:36 Swinks

When I got it completely wrong.

00:18:38 Swinks

Because my one of my love languages is support, so I'm over here buying your things to do whenever, like and she got it off the off the rip, she said. Oh, I know you need this. So she's just giving me gifts, gifts supporting me and then.

00:18:49 Swinks

So I just started doing it back and then it was just like.

00:18:52 Swinks

There was a little moment.

00:18:54 Swinks

A little break that we had where it just kind of felt like it was, it was a little ripple effect going on in our relationship. And I'm just like what like what's up with you? So, she posted sign on social media. She posted these chocolate like these little chocolate things. Right. And I'm like.

00:19:09 Swinks

Why is she posting that like I just like I just went and did some outrageous thing for you, right. And I felt some type of way. So, I called her. And I'm like, yo, what's up with you, like, posting the chocolate? What's that about?

00:19:22 Swinks

You who? Who? Who sent you that?

00:19:25 Swinks

You see, I'm saying that's the juvenile aspect. Like now he's just like, oh, the little.

00:19:28 Swinks

Insecurity start kicking.

00:19:29 Swinks

In right. So I'm like, who sent you there? Like what? You got a little work boyfriend is like. And she's like. Nah, I posted that because I'm trying to tell you something.

00:19:37 Swinks

Like you're not. You're not catching the love language that I'm giving you. Like. Yeah, I appreciate everything that you've done, but I'm really into, like, small jesters.

00:19:44 Swinks

Right.

00:19:45 Swinks

So like the intimacy part of me is like those small little things. When you text in the morning, when you send me like little chocolates randomly something like spontaneous like I like stuff like that. You know what?

00:19:55 Swinks

I'm.

00:19:55 Swinks

Saying so, I'm just like, alright, I get you now and still then I still get it wrong sometimes. Like I still need to check like, alright. You ain't getting it like you need to. I'm. I'm trying to feel you.

00:20:06 Swinks

Over here. So I'm just like well.

00:20:07 Swinks

If we're going to be adults about this, right?

00:20:10 Swinks

They communicate that with me.

00:20:12 Swinks

Like I you're trying to like play all these like.

00:20:15 Swinks

Like doing little things, not like that. You know, you could throw like little sibling those little messages, but like I'm.

00:20:20 Swinks

New.

00:20:20 Swinks

To this you know, I mean like just just give me. Give me that too. But you see, if I'm getting it completely wrong, you're going to have to tell me about that man.

00:20:30 Swinks

It looks completely different now as an adult.

00:20:33 Swinks

Looks real different now as as as an adult, you know, like when you when you have that the juvenile I was I was.

00:20:39 Swinks

Thinking about that.

00:20:40 Swinks

It's like intention and purpose, man.

00:20:42 Swinks

You know, it's like when you when you get with somebody as as a, as a juvenile.

00:20:47 Swinks

It's uh.

00:20:50 Swinks

Just to say that you have somebody and it just stays there like, oh, this is like you showing them off. It's my boyfriend. It's my girlfriend. And we do things together. Right. And it's.

00:20:58 Swinks

Just.

00:20:58 Swinks

Like, but you're really not building too much stuff off of like like a substance base, right? Like it just stays on the surface, like I'll call you every day. Just call me like. And so you call me every day.

00:21:10 Swinks

You say like you don't do this and like you just try to understand it from adult level.

00:21:14 Swinks

But then it's it's levels to it.

00:21:17 Swinks

Like you know, when you when you're having deep, meaningful conversations about bills not being paid.

00:21:23 Swinks

Like, how are we gonna figure this out together as a as a as a team, as a couple. Like, yo, like we got bills. We got responsibilities here, you know, like, how are you going to chip in? And like, like, how are we going to be interdependent now?

00:21:34 Swinks

Like you doing your your your part and I'm doing my part. What does that look like for for both parties?

00:21:39 Swinks

You know, so.

00:21:46 Brianna

How do you share that? Like that's the level of vulnerability.

00:21:49 Brianna

With your partner, that may not always be.

00:21:52 Brianna

Detectable at the moment are easy to even speak on at the moment so.

00:21:57 Supreme

It's not about the agency of controlling, it's about the agency of trusting.

00:22:03 Supreme

And that is what I stand on today. And I'm seeing how all these little things in my life informed who I am in an adult relationship today, think we've.

00:22:12 Supreme

That is the key. I can't tell my woman what to do and not to do. We say understanding is the best part and understanding is indicative of love. So if my woman understands that this might land on me a certain way.

00:22:29 Supreme

She does everything with in her power to take care of me and not do those things. My woman says. You know what?

00:22:36 Supreme

I want to go out with my girlfriends.

00:22:39 Supreme

I'm sending. You have everything you need.

00:22:41 Supreme

Make sure you have a good time.

00:22:44 Supreme

So that comes from again, it goes back to that aspect of being 18 years old and seeing those relationships and seeing how they were manipulative. And they were about control. And when I think about it, it's like, yo, here is the real.

00:22:59 Supreme

Here is the ups, the down, the ebb and flow of relationships with one thing. You see I see is consistency of two people caring for each other.

00:23:14 Kaylee

Going back to like what was said about incarceration, what was it like resolving conflicts whilst in relationships whilst incarcerated, or if not, what did you observe and how other people resolved their conflicts? Or really was there any resolution that some just kind of end off without solving anything?

00:23:33 Swinks

Conflicts that I had while I was incarcerated, if, if, if me and the person I was talking to on the phone and.

00:23:39 Swinks

We.

00:23:39 Swinks

Had an issue or some type of conflict, right?

00:23:43 Swinks

It'll be like 2 weeks I ain't calling.

00:23:45 Swinks

In my mind.

00:23:46 Swinks

I'll be like, oh, you acting crazy.

00:23:48 Swinks

I'm not gonna call you for like 2 days. You know, you get a little lonely, but then I'll be like I if two days don't work. Then I extended time. If another conflict happens, I ain't calling for five days.

00:23:59 Swinks

Because I could, just like, keep my mind and be occupied with something, right. And if that don't work, then I'm going. Two weeks. I'd be having to hold tight because you'll be wanting to call. I'll be thirsty. I'll be wanting to call, right? So I'll be like like 2 weeks go by. Then I'm going to talk to you. Just like, are you OK? And it's like it. It wears down. But that's in prison. Like when you come home.

00:24:20 Swinks

You just not gonna. You're just not gonna call your partner for, like, 2 weeks. You're just not gonna do that. You're. You're always together. You'll talk, text you goodnight or whatever. And if you live together, you're definitely not what you gonna just sleep somewhere for, like, 2 weeks? Bro, you gotta go hotel for two weeks. I know some people that do that, but now the conflict is like, now we got to work this out and it'd be.

00:24:38 Swinks

Like 2 weeks we'd be beefing.

00:24:40 Swinks

For like 2 weeks and I just be like yo, this conversation has been going on for like 2 weeks now. I have one issues like for a month it's just really getting to like, OK, we're like pinpointing what are you not understanding?

00:24:54 Swinks

Wait.

00:24:55 Swinks

Like, OK, what, like learn those conflict resolution skills? Like, OK, like Prim was saying, listening. Now I'm missing. Like, OK, what what are you what are you hearing that I'm saying and and and what are you not getting from from. From what I'm saying. So it's like vice versa. So we just like we're working through these.

00:25:11 Swinks

These these conflicts by like proper communication, is definitely one coming from a place of understanding and just keep working at it like it's not like.

00:25:22 Swinks

OK, here's the conflict, and here's the solution, right? Because everything's going to be tailored different, so it's always come from us, OK, let's make sure we at least have a dialogue where I'm not cutting you off and you're not cutting me off.

00:25:36 Swinks

And I'm going to tell you, I understand where you're coming from, but it doesn't necessarily mean that I accept your behavior or accept everything about it, but I can, at least.

00:25:43 Swinks

Hear.

00:25:43 Swinks

You out though. You see what I'm saying. And sometimes it look the conflict just left at that. Like I I heard you out and you heard me out. And we just continue on.

00:26:08 Swinks

Thank you for listening to the My Turn podcast. My turn is a community based university accredited program providing education, mentorship and career development support to and by those who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system. My term objective is to provide an opportunity for each participant to reframe their skills.

00:26:29 Swinks

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00:26:33 Swinks

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