

The Hum Podcast

Episode 2: "I Still Believed I Was Going Home"

[Theme music fades in]

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[Music increases in volume]

Speaker: You're listening to The Hum.

[Music fades out]

Gilad: Sitting here today with Angel Cordero, a man who was wrongfully imprisoned for 13 years and put away for a crime he never committed. Look, you're not going to know this about me, if it's not obvious already, but I haven't spent 13 years in prison myself.

Angel: You could have fooled me. Yeah, you got the face of a tough guy.

Gilad: Amar tells me that all the time, he's terrified of me.

Amar: There's a lot of firsts on this podcast and that's definitely the first time Gilad's ever been called a tough guy by anybody.

Gilad: You can eliminate the word podcast and just replace that with life. But I was trying to think of something we do have in common and I want to bring it up because I'm sure people are wondering, but the Kansas City Royals had to get through both the Jays and the Mets to get their championship.

Angel: I understood them getting through the Jays, but ...

Gilad: What are you saying?

Amar: Whoa, whoa, whoa.

Angel: I'm just saying, Toronto's not New York. I'm sorry, I love Toronto, but you guys not New York.

Gilad: How many games did the Mets win? One?

Angel: We won 90.

Gilad: No, but I mean in the World Series?

Angel: Yeah, they ended up only winning one. Yeah.

Gilad: One, right. The Jays, I think, took two.

Angel: Two?

Gilad: Yeah.

Angel: Okay, okay, you got that one. But I think we play closer games though. Our games were a lot closer than your game were.

Amar: So, you're actually arguing about who got whipped worse by the Royals?

Gilad: We're going to spend half an hour here talking about baseball and maybe one minute-

Angel: One minute talking about what's going on.

Gilad: Yeah man, so maybe, Amar always likes to laugh that I like to use this word, "Let's go back."

Amar: Yeah, that's his catchphrase. "Let's go back. Let's go back a minute."

Angel: Let's go back a minute.

Amar: So, you're going to hear that about 17 times before this is over, but right now it's appropriate, so Gilad, go for it.

Angel: Yeah, you know me. Who says, "Yeah, you know me?"

Gilad: Yeah, "You know me Britta B, shout out."

Angel: Britta B?

Gilad: Yeah, you know me. So, tell me about the day that everything went down. The day the crime happened and where were you and what was happening?

Angel: Well, the day started out as a normal day, a Friday night. I was in my house and we had planned to go to one of my neighbor's son's birthday party. When I say we, me and my brother. I was supposed to take, also, my daughter that night, but I ended up not taking her because I know how a Latino kid's party usually turn out to be like grown up party after a certain time. So, all this happening was in the Bronx, the Hunts Point section of the Bronx. Me and my brother went to this party and we were just playing dominoes, talking, eating food, had a beer or two and we were, like, in a basement setting for about four hours and then we decided to go out ... My brother decided to go outside to get a pack of cigarettes, so I decided to join him to get some fresh air.

Gilad: That's what I like to call smoking too, fresh air. Let's go for some fresh air.

Angel: I wouldn't recommend smoking, but God bless whoever does. So yeah, we go up the block to a 24-hour store. My brother went to this window setting, the store is locked but it had a window in the front where it rotates and you put your money in and you get your item. I'm there talking to a couple of girls and a fight breaks out across the street. My brother right away tells me, "Let's go check it out. Let's go see what's going on." At first I ignored him, then I followed and then, once my brother crossed the street to go watch the fight some officers hit the corner, undercover cops. They come out the car with their guns pulled out and one of the people that they first dragged was my brother. So that's when I got involved and I tried to explain to the officer that, "Why are you arresting my brother? He hasn't done anything."

Gilad: We're not a part of this.

Angel: Yeah. Nothing. You're like, "Why?" Next thing you know he just turns around, puts the gun to my face, asking me to get against the wall and I refused and he smashed me with the gun and then-

Gilad: You have a gun in your face and you refuse?

Angel: Yeah.

Gilad: That's crazy.

Angel: Yeah. I mean, I am a citizen, I have rights. I have rights as a human being, especially when nothing was done wrongfully from me.

Gilad: Of course.

Angel: So, yeah, he smashed me with the gun and the cops jumped me, and while they're jumping me the perpetrator that committed the crime that night that I

got incarcerated for for 13 years ends up getting up and just running away. So now they're left with a mess, and to clean up that mess, I was their answer to that.

Gilad: They needed a guy.

Angel: They needed a guy.

Amar: So the crime was that in this fight, in this milieu, somebody got stabbed?

Angel: A kid got stabbed from the neighborhood.

Amar: And so, we should say, this is really interesting, but you're here right now still technically on parole?

Angel: Still technically, I am on parole.

Amar: It was a little bit difficult getting you up here to Toronto for this, for the weekend for the JAYU festival.

Angel: I almost didn't make it.

Amar: Why are we sitting here so confident that you didn't commit this crime, despite the fact that the state says you did? The reason we're so confident is because the other guy has confessed multiple times-

Angel: Multiple times.

Amar: Including on camera, that he did it and you didn't do it.

Angel: Exactly. And not just that, not just him, not just his confession. I could understand if it was just one person saying that he did it, and then the one person that is saying that he did it is the person himself, but also have 20 eyewitnesses corroborating what's been said from the beginning, that Dario Rodriguez committed the crime and not Angel Cordero.

Gilad: So you're in prison, right? It's five, six, seven years in and you're standing there one day, I think you're in line to go to the gym or to workout or something?

Angel: Yes, yes. I was coming from the mess hall going to my program, I was a gym porter at the time. So I was in line for the gates to open. I hear my name being called, somebody goes "Angel." I didn't pay attention and the person goes "Angel." I looked back and it was Dario calling me and I was shocked that I ... I couldn't believe my eyes who I was seeing. So he go, "Angel, I want to talk to

you. Come sit over here, I need to talk to you." So I'm looking at him and I'm like, it's a calmness coming from him and I was kind of calm myself, surprisingly calm, to see him. I'm going to ask, so I told him, "Okay, I'll see you at the yard, come to the yard." That afternoon we meet at the yard and obviously I'm a little, you know, these feelings start coming up, like anger and nervousness, because I don't know what's going to happen.

Gilad: Are you thinking choke slam, power bomb?

Angel: I'm trying.

Gilad: Tables, lighters and chairs match. What's on your mind?

Angel: The people's elbow. I'm trying to think rationally, trying to stay stable, but obviously you've got the thoughts of, "Fuck, man, I want to take him on." This aggression I had all these years on him for doing this to me and my family, but I also want to hear what he had to say. So I go through the yard, I go up to him, I'm hype, I'm like, "What's going on? What you want to talk to me about, man?" He sees I'm a little aggressive and he tells me, "Listen man. I understand how you feel, but if we end up fighting, we could fight, but ..."

Gilad: I understand what it's like to be put in prison for something you've never done?

Angel: Yeah.

Gilad: I get it, man.

Angel: I know, right? It's crazy, but yeah, so he, "But I'm here to help you. I want to help you. I haven't been able to sleep since that day, my conscience been eating me up and I would really like to help you." So I ask him, "How are you going to help me?" He just, he keeps saying, "Whatever it takes." First, Dario's background, he can't read or write, he's uneducated, obviously. He was raised with a rough background, he didn't have parents, stable parents to direct him in the right path as a youth. So he was raised in the streets. He's a street guy. I said, "All right. I'm going to put you in contact with my lawyer and you take it from there." Because I didn't want to put words into his mouth or lead him into any direction. I wanted it to come from him. The first thing I did was give him my lawyer's information. I called my lawyer that night and told her what had happened. She took care of the rest after that.

Amar: Wow, that's incredible. So you're in jail with the man you know committed the crime that you're accused of, and he's telling you that he wants to help you. What's it like in that moment? Was there excitement on your part, like this is

going to be great, I'm going to get out of here because of this. What was it like in that moment?

Angel: At the moment I was happy and excited, but I was still pessimistic. I guess I tried not get too excited, not get too high or too low on things, that's the way I try to live my life. But I was definitely hoping for the best. Obviously, the thought of me going home, if this guy does come through with the confession, always pops up. So yeah, I was excited, definitely excited that finally, after all this time, the truth is being told.

Gilad: And that's your sixth? Your seventh?

Angel: When I first saw him?

Gilad: Yeah.

Angel: That was my seventh year.

Gilad: Okay, so you still had six more to go after that?

Angel: Yeah.

Gilad: So nothing happened, really?

Angel: Nothing happened really there.

Gilad: I understand.

Angel: On my eighth year, going on my eighth year was when he confessed in front of the judge because it took a while, the motion to be heard and get accepted and all that.

Gilad: Right.

Angel: Yeah.

Gilad: And despite all this, you end up finding yourself in prison for 13 years.

Angel: Despite all this.

Gilad: And so you're sitting there and does it ever dawn on you while you're in there, is there ever a point that you reach acceptance, that you're like, "I'm just going to have to serve out my time here." Or was there ever a point where you're just thinking that it's a matter of time before people figure it out, it's not me?

Angel: I always had that, I guess, for lack of a better term, naiveness, that I always believed that the justice system would someday do right by me. A lot of that thought process was what drove me, or got me by in prison all those years. I came to terms that I wasn't going to get out early, like, with a year remaining.

Gilad: After 12 years, you're like, "I have a feeling."

Angel: After 12 years, I got a feeling I'm going to complete this whole time now. Because on the eighth year was when Dario got in front of the judge and confessed to the judge.

Gilad: In the eighth year?

Angel: On my eighth year of incarceration was when he got on the stand and confessed to the crimes in front of a judge. Even after getting to nine, I was saying, "You know what? The judge made a mistake and somebody else is going to do right by me, eventually." So I still believed that I was going home, sooner than later, but yeah, it didn't work out that way.

Amar: Let's explain that a little bit more. So, Dario, who's a person you know from the neighborhood, who you know committed this crime, comes forward, says he committed this crime and that testimony is not accepted by the system because he's been in and out of jail his whole life, he's not a credible witness?

Angel: He was not a credible witness when he testified on my behalf, but when he testified against me he was a credible witness.

Amar: So he actually testified against you when your trial originally happened?

Angel: Yes.

Amar: And they accepted his testimony then?

Angel: Yes.

Amar: But then when he admitted to actually committing the crime himself, he suddenly wasn't credible.

Angel: Wasn't credible. Convicted criminal who's been locked up more than 10 times.

Amar: So, when you're sitting there and you're hearing them say, "Oh, we can't accept this testimony." There's a person admitting to the crime that you have been accused of committing, that you know you didn't commit. What's going through

your head in that moment when they're saying, "No, we can't take this seriously."

Angel: I was in disbelief, I didn't know where else to turn. I was like, "So, if you don't believe the person that did the crime, telling you that he did the crime, what else can I do?"

Gilad: Like, the source-

Angel: The source.

Gilad: Is not the credible source. It's not like the, "I saw someone do it." He's like, "I'm the one that did it."

Angel: Yeah. I was lost. I was like, "How am I ever going to win this case?" I was at a loss for words, at a loss for thought, just shocked, shocked that I lost. Shocked that I was denied the appeal.

Amar: Can I ask you, you mentioned home, if you get to go home. What's home, who's home? Tell us about your family, tell us about the things you left behind when you were taken away?

Angel: Well, for one, I left my child, my daughter, who was only three at the time.

Amar: What's her name?

Angel: Sarah. Sarah Destiny Cordero.

Amar: Destiny?

Angel: Destiny.

Amar: Who came up with the middle name?

Angel: I did, I did. She got her first name Sarah, we wasn't sure what we was going to name her, so at the hospital we were watching a beauty pageant, so I told my girlfriend at the time, I say, "Whoever wins the beauty pageant that's who we're going to name our daughter after."

Amar: Oh my God.

Angel: Yeah.

Amar: That is a risky proposition.

Angel: It was risky, but you know, most beautiful girls have beautiful names. A girl named Sarah ended up winning, so that's how she got her first name.

Amar: I'm so glad Shaquille didn't win.

Angel: I might have reneged then though.

Gilad: You've never seen a beautiful Shaquille, Amar?

Amar: I only know the white Shaquille that we all know. Just glad it wasn't him running that year.

Gilad: He's beautiful in his own way.

Amar: Absolutely.

Angel: Shaquille, what's up, brother?

Amar: Shout out to Shaq. First time we done that, nice.

Gilad: Yeah, he's listening, I'm sure. So you left a daughter behind who was three?

Angel: Yes.

Gilad: What was it like when you got out, thirteen years later?

Angel: Well, I got arrested I didn't see my girl for the first four years. I saw her again when she was seven and then from seven to fourteen everything was fine and dandy. You know loving and missing each other, and then two years before I came home things started changing between us. I guess, I don't know, I guess her turning sixteen, being a teenager, home [inaudible] and whatnot, I started feeling the separation from her because of unknown reasons, I guess, to me. Coming home she was still unwilling to try to build a relationship with me. It was tough coming home trying to rekindle my relationship with my daughter and all that. To this day it's still the occasional text here and there, but nothing much. Also, she moved to Orlando, she moved to Orlando two months prior to me coming home. I'm from New York, so that didn't make things easier either as far as trying to get that bond between her and I.

Amar: So, it's an ongoing battle to be her dad again. It's a long thing that's going to take you a little bit of time, you think, still? How are the connections with other members of your family?

Angel: Everybody else, my immediate family, just me, my mother, my stepdad, my brother, my sister, my wife obviously and my wife's side of the family, I'm pretty cool with them. Now I have a son and also I have a daughter on the way.

Amar: What's your son's name?

Angel: Luke. Luke Cordero. Beautiful kid. Awesome, awesome kid. Anybody who ever gets to meet Luke can't help but to fall in love with this kid.

Gilad: I had the honor of listening to Luke, when you arrived here in Toronto, speak to you on the phone and he is a very cute kid.

Amar: I guess this is an obvious question, but do you feel this need to make up for time, make up for things with Luke, now that you have another opportunity with a child? Do you ever think back to Sarah's youth and the time you missed? What's that like, having a new child in your life?

Angel: Having a new child in my life is scary, it's a lot of responsibility. Once you have a child it's not about you anymore, it's about the kid now. Any time you got for yourself just forget about it. It's exciting as well. As far as making up time, you can't really make up time. Whatever me and Sarah lost is lost, that could never be made up with nobody because that relationship ... Every relationship is different. Every relationship is special. So, the relationship I have with my son, obviously I want to be there every step of the way, but I don't correlate it with Sarah. It's two different relationships. That's how I go about raising my kids and my son now. Just trying to be there and be a good father. Clothe him and feed him and love him.

Amar: So what's that like now? I mean, you're out in the world but you're an ex-convict. Can't be easy. Tell us about life now.

Angel: I have my everyday struggles obviously. Coming home I had to choose a career path wisely. I couldn't be a male nurse or X-ray technician, which I wanted to be. Obviously with a felony I was pigeonholed into choosing a path that my felony wouldn't bother me, for lack of a better term. So I decided to go to school to become an electrician. The construction field, unfortunately, is known to be a place where a lot of ex-felons end up working in. So, I did that, I went to school for nine months. I worked for a regular non-union company for almost two years and I just got involved with a local three-union recently. But it's still an every day struggle because the field itself is an up-and-down field. You never know when they're going to lay you off, when it's not going to get busy, things of that nature. It's hard work, but it pays the bills.

Gilad: You mentioned earlier about that time that was lost, the 13 years and you can't get it back, but I also want to talk about what was gained in that 13 years. We spoke earlier about finding meaning, right? There's times in life where you get cheated, you get wronged, people scam you, and sometimes it's really tough to look at a situation and understand, "What did I gain from that? Why did that happen to me? What was the meaning of this and how do I become a better person?" With 13 years serving time in prison for something you didn't do the whole time, do you ever find meaning out of that? Like, "Why did this happen to me and how am I going to come out stronger from it?"

Angel: My mother always says it might have extended my life somehow. Something could have happened to me, I could have got into a car accident, I could have got shot for whatever reason. You know, the neighborhood I lived in wasn't the best neighborhood. What I believe is, it made me a better person. It made me a warmer person and more loving towards others. Because before I never thought about other people's feelings or what they thought or what they were going through and now, a lot of the times, like if somebody's arguing with me, I try not to look how I feel, I try to think about what they going through. A lot of the time, when somebody's arguing with you, it's not about you, it's about something they're going through and you're the person they're taking it out on at that moment.

Gilad: That's interesting, prison builds empathy. Prison made you more empathetic.

Angel: It did to me, I could have went the other way. I could've been this bad ass, bitter person that wanted to hate everybody and fight everybody, because mostly that's what prison builds.

Gilad: Why didn't you go the other way though? How did you end up on this course?

Angel: For one, I am innocent and I didn't want to stay in prison. For two, I have family members who are always there for me, who backed me up throughout the whole incarceration, like my mother and my stepdad, my sister. And lastly, but most importantly, I wanted to come back home to my daughter. I knew I had a child out in the world, who needed her father, to be raised, to be loved and give her direction in life. So, those three things. And my spirituality. My spirituality helped a lot. I believe in a higher being and a higher power. I was always raised to believe in God and then later on, during my prison time, in my eighth or seventh year of prison, I took this meditation course which taught me a lot about self-awareness, mindfulness and just being a loving person towards others.

Gilad: I love it. I'm shocked though because I'm looking here at Amar and earlier this year I took an eleven day Salla meditation course and he rolled his eyes so far

back in his head at my experience. Now he's sitting here, he's like, "Yes, of course, yeah, prison, meditation, of course."

Amar: I feel like if you had done it after serving 13 years in jail for a crime you didn't commit, I might not have rolled my eyes. You did it after you had a bad weekend because your ex-girlfriend broke up with you or something like that.

Gilad: That is not true.

Amar: It's different levels of stress that you're facing, just saying.

Gilad: That is not true at all. I'm the undefeated, I have an undefeated, I have never been broken up with. I've got an undefeated streak. I'm the Floyd Mayweather of dating, 39 to nil. But I do want to say, going back to meditation, I was meditating for 11 days, and I was gone. I wasn't allowed to use the phone, talk, look at people, I was in myself. I came back and just being gone for 11 days I felt like somehow the world had changed. I remember opening up my Instagram and I was like, "Shit, a new filter. This is crazy." What's life like coming back into a world that is now 13 years advanced?

Angel: It's a little different, it's a little different. Obviously, technology is more upgraded than when I was home.

Gilad: You're like, "Where the pagers at?"

Angel: Where the pagers at? Things are a little more expensive, a lot more expensive actually. A quick story, in prison \$55 of commissary will last you a month.

Gilad: How long does it take you to earn that 55 bucks?

Angel: Oh my God, it will take you probably two months. You got 16 cents an hour. Top pay might be 33 cents an hour in prison. But luckily, like I said, I have family there for me who supported me in many different ways, especially financially. So I was one of the fortunate ones as far as I was concerned. So yeah, \$55 will last you a month in prison. You'll eat well in prison with \$55 and you come home \$55 is not going to get you too far. \$55 might get you four or five items. So that was kind of shocking to me, I was like, "What the fuck?" The first time I came home, me and my wife went to Walgreens and I went to buy a couple of items that I needed, like shampoo, razor, underarm deodorant and whatnot, some munchies or whatnot. And then the cashier did her thing and it came up \$55 and I was like, "Yo bae," I wasn't working at the time, I just didn't know, so I'm like, "Are you sure you want to get this? All right, you can put that back, I don't really need it man, I'll make do without it." But yeah, the price of things was shocking to me coming home.

Amar: How do you feel about, the world's changed in the last 10 years, primarily because of the internet and connectivity. We feel like the world is a lot smaller because of things like Facebook and Twitter and all that kind of stuff. I'm very curious as to someone who didn't experience that change with society. Coming into society now, what are your feelings about it, about the way we've changed as people?

Angel: There's obvious good things about technology, the pros about technology. I get to talk to Gilad in Toronto and I'm in New York. I could text him or Instagram or Twitter him, but the cons to that is that I feel like people disconnect from each other now. People don't want to have a warm heart-to-heart phone call or a conversation outside in the corner, or people just don't say hi or don't look at you in the eye anymore and say good morning or goodnight or see you later, goodbye. As far as that concerned I feel like people got a little colder [inaudible] generation.

Gilad: 'Cause you said you get an occasional text from your daughter, right? 13 years ago, it could have been an occasional phone call or something.

Angel: Phone call, I would have heard her voice and been able to ask more questions and she would have been able to open up to me more, where a text I feel like is informal and it's, there's no feeling to it. She could say, "Hi," and I could say, "Hi," back and ask her a question and she doesn't have to answer me. With a phone call, she will be compelled to answer back.

Gilad: Where are you at today? You're on probation still, you've got how many more years left?

Angel: I have a year and three months left.

Gilad: And is there anyone out there, yourself included, who's fighting to exonerate you?

Angel: Yes, yes. I've been fortunate because I, during my incarceration I had Claudia S. Trupp as my lawyer and she worked diligently for me. To me, in my eyes, she did the best she could and I love her for that. She also wrote a book, in the book she has a chapter dedicated to my story. She's basically saying that it was the most heartbreaking case for her, knowing that I was innocent. It was obvious that I'm innocent, but everything she did wasn't enough for her to get me a reversal. But recently now, the Innocence Project got involved. The Innocence Project is one of the biggest organizations in exonerating people, but they only usually take DNA cases and death row cases, they don't take cases like mine where DNA is not involved and none of that. But Barry Pollack, my current lawyer, called the Innocence Project and asked them to get involved because legally, we don't have

no legal issues. Hopefully with the Innocence Project's connection, Barry Scheck's connections, political connections, they might be able to pull the rabbit out of the hat or something.

Gilad: For those who don't know the Innocence Project, their mandate is basically to try to help free people who are wrongfully incarcerated, correct?

Angel: Wrongfully incarcerated, yes, yes.

Gilad: So they look at cases-

Angel: The biggest organization in the world.

Gilad: Right.

Amar: Can I ask you, you mentioned when we were first talking that you were maybe a bit naïve about the justice system. You felt like at some point somewhere the system would figure out that you are innocent and that you'd get justice, right?

Angel: Correct.

Amar: But we know throughout history, not just in America, but in Canada and all around the world, there are a lot of wrongful convictions.

Angel: I learned that after the fact though.

Amar: Yeah. You learned that in the absolute-

Angel: I never knew about the justice system, I never paid attention to it. I'm a young guy just doing what young kids do, partying, working-

Gilad: You know, being a regular human being.

Angel: Being a regular human being, you know?

Amar: So, this being a human rights podcast, what are your thoughts about the way the system basically treats human beings? What is it that we should be thinking about as people outside that system? How can we improve the system? What can your story teach us? How do you feel now about the justice system?

Gilad: And to add to that, because it's a great question, is how do we avoid having another situation like yours?

Angel: Education is the best thing. Educating yourself in the laws of your system because every system is different. Obviously, Toronto has different laws than New York, so you have to educate yourself in that. Knowing your rights as a human being, knowing what's going on with world issues, knowing that you could be in a corner not doing anything, but something could happen where you could end up losing time out of your life, like I did, in prison. I think the best thing that I can come up with is hold the DAs and the judges accountable for things because they're not held accountable for anything. Like they put me away for a crime I didn't commit, and even if I do get exonerated, the DA doesn't get penalized for it, the judges don't get penalized for it. They just keep living their lives like nothing ever happened.

Amar: You know, my first job ever out of film school, I was very lucky, I got a job working on a documentary about wrongful convictions here in Canada-

Gilad: Here comes the shout out.

Amar: The host of the show was Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, who is a very famous wrongful conviction case and I was lucky enough to get a lot of time with him, and I used to ask him a lot of questions and he said the biggest problem once he was inside was that he realized that there were all these political forces at play. His conviction meant that other people benefited from it.

Angel: Of course.

Amar: DAs, mayors, all these kinds of-

Gilad: Police officers.

Angel: Police officers, anybody that get a pay raise.

Amar: So we're sitting here talking to you. You spent 13 years in prison for a crime you obviously didn't commit. Another man has confessed to the crime multiple times and yet there seems to be this lack of movement on the part of the system to help you out. Do you feel like that's because when people do get convicted, or when there's a record out there that people benefit from that record standing?

Angel: Of course, of course. Especially the judges and the DA, they definitely benefit from it. I don't know how it works out technically, but it's definitely politically motivated. Yeah, definitely.

Amar: So those of us hearing your story now, there's going to be, as much as we want to try and avoid it, there's going to be people that fall through the cracks of our

systems. There's going to be people that, for one reason or another, are wrongly convicted.

Angel: Unfortunately.

Amar: Hopefully, they're lucky enough to have some of the support systems you had and they can rejoin us in society. What is something we can do as society, as community, for someone coming out of prison who is wrongly convicted? How can we help you? What are the best things we can do for people who are in your situation?

Angel: In my opinion the best thing is to have grants for people to go to school to educate themselves. I think education is the number one most important thing that people could do for themselves as far as succeeding and becoming a successful person in society today. There's no grants, there's nothing for somebody coming home to get money to go to school, you know? There's nothing.

Gilad: There's no, like, wrongfullyimprisoned.com grant.

Angel: Nothing, there's nothing, nothing. I came home thinking there was something and then I found out the hard way that there was nothing. So without having a strong family support, I would have been fucked, really fucked up. I don't know how people survive without having, no support. There's nothing coming home for people incarcerated, nothing. Zilch. Shit. So I guess funding for school will help out a lot. Or vocation. It doesn't have to be college, it could be a vocation, or anything, because I took a vocation, but I had to pay 10 grand out of my pocket, which I didn't have. I had to take a bank loan. So yeah, grants for school is the most important thing in my opinion.

Amar: Yeah, I think anyone listening to this, part of the reason why we wanted to talk to you, and this is a human rights podcast, but the justice system and issues around justice are definitely human rights issues, right?

Angel: Right.

Amar: And hearing your story and hearing what you've been through and seeing you come through it, reminds us, reminds me anyway, people can go through some crazy shit and still be people and still be human at the end of the day. I think we forget that, we start to forget about people that get caught up in our systems and I think that-

Angel: We are, we definitely the forgotten ones. Yeah, I mean I always considered people in prison like dead men walking. They're in a casket, just, you know-

Gilad: Rolling around.

Angel: -rolling around. They're alive but they're dead to society. People in prison are like dead to society, forgotten about. If they're lucky they only be remembered by a certain few, people that support you. So, yeah, you feel like you're a dead man walking in there, for sure.

Gilad: I want to ask you something.

Angel: No, that's enough questions, please stop. No, I'm only kidding.

Gilad: Thank you so much for this man. You come out of prison, it's been 13 years since you've been able to have a meal out of prison, what's the first thing you eat?

[Theme music fades in]

Angel: You know what, I ate whatever I could, so the first place we landed when I first came home we stopped by a garage station to get gas and then near the garage station there was a 7-Eleven, so I just went in there and grabbed the first thing to eat, which was like a cheese burrito or some shit like that.

Gilad: How did it taste?

Angel: It taste like the best thing I've ever had.

Amar: Oh my God. I can't believe we just plugged 7-Eleven cheese burritos.

Gilad: Make a mental note for sponsorship here.

Angel: Totally. For real.

[Music increases in volume and fades out]