

Interview with Darrell Cannon

[00:00:00] **Darrell Cannon** My name is Darrell, D-A-R-R-E-L-L. Last name Cannon, C-A-N-N-O-N.

[00:00:08] **Amanda Rivkin** And can you talk a bit about what happened when you were arrested. From the moment of your arrest.

[00:00:15] **Darrell Cannon** This hellish nightmare started the November 2nd, 1983 in the early morning hours, somewhere around 6:30 in the morning. A group of all white, sadistic detectives invaded our apartment where I live at with my common law wife, my son, and our cat. And they, during that day, torturing me in ways that I have never been. I have never had the experience of undergoing before in my life and nor since then. And it's something that I'll never forget.

[00:00:56] **Darrell Cannon** During that time of November the 2nd, all white detectives took me to an isolated area where they played a mock game called Russian Roulette on me where they forced a shotgun barrel in my mouth, chipping my two front teeth, splitting my upper lip, and they tried to force me into telling them things that I knew nothing about concerning a murder that happened of a dope dealer who was dealing dope around a grade school and he ended up losing his life. If you asked me how I felt about that in itself, I would tell you good riddance to bad rubbish because my position is that children should be able to go to school uninterrupted by some predator standing around trying to pollute their minds and their bodies with some dope just to get some money. So I have no sympathy for a dope dealer that's dealing dope around grade school. Now for those that do it to grown ups, you know, grown ups can make a decision on whether or not they choose to indulge in such activity. But children, their mind is still growing, so they should be left alone.

[00:02:13] **Darrell Cannon** As a result of this, these detectives, their position is that no is not an answer for them. If they arrest you, as far as they're concerned, you did that particular crime or you did something that you may not have gotten busted for. So therefore, far as they're concerned, the means justify the ends, meaning that them torturing you into confessing now is worthwhile because you probably got away with something else. Now for me, playing Russian roulette on me is something that I've never had done to me before in my life. It's a terrifying feeling to think that every time you hear the click of that shotgun, you're wondering whether or not you're dead.

[00:03:10] **Darrell Cannon** And then the detective takes the shell out of his pocket and he tells you, and I quote, "nigger listen." And he turns his back to you again and you hear the sound for what you think is a shield being placed up in the chamber. And then he jacks the pump. And when he turns around, you don't see the shotgun shell. So you got to assume that he did in fact put that shell in that shotgun. The third time they played the mock execution on me, as soon as I heard the click, my mind told me that my brains was just blown out, you know, because that's how the mind works.

[00:03:50] **Darrell Cannon** They tried to hang me by my handcuffs, which was cuffed behind my back. They wrenched my shoulders on each side in trying to do that because one of the detectives stood on the bumper, on the back bumper of the detective car while the other two held me up to him and he would grab my handcuffs. And once they let me go, you would drop down and your arm would go up behind your back. It was a terrifying feeling beyond a shadow of a doubt. And then to finally put me in the back seat of the detective, and with my feet outside the detective car, and they pull my pants and shorts down, and proceeded to shock me with an electrical cattle prod. Now, for me, this was the most sadistic act ever performed on me in my life, to have an electric cattle prod stickin me on my testicles and genitals. The feeling of it is something that's undescrivable beyond a shadow of a doubt. And I still live with it today. The same type of feeling, the anger, the hostility.

[00:05:10] **Darrell Cannon** I'm often asked, how do I feel about the detectives who tortured me? And I will tell you without hesitation that I hate the air they breathe. That's how much I hate them. From then to now, the hatred has never went away. I continue to live with this day in, day out. And then to place me in jail and to take me before a judge and to stand there and hold they hand up and swear to tell the truth when they know they lying from start to finish, and then to have judges refusing to allow my attorney to question them in front of a jury about past bad practices only showed that not only was I physically tortured but I was mentally tortured by the judicial system who refused to allow us the opportunity to prove that these particular detectives were in fact some vicious racist individuals who should have never been allowed to carry a gun or possess a badge because they have never had the people's intent within their jurisdiction to serve and protect. No, no. It was all about doing whatever they chose to do to justify the means to an end that was vicious, violent, against all common law whatsoever.

[00:06:51] **Darrell Cannon** And because of that, I continued to speak out forcefully about the atrocities that these detectives did. And I continue to do so because I'm not the only Darrell Cannon's that they tortured. There are quite a few Darrell Cannon's and a lot of

them are still in prison. Haven't had the opportunity to have a fair and impartial hearing. And God allowed me to survive this madness for a reason. My last nine years of the twenty-four years was done in super-max, where everything I did, I did by myself. Cell by myself. My bed consisted of a concrete block that had a paper-thin mattress. And God allowed me to survive all of that. So I feel like it is my mission to speak out against these atrocities and to tell the world that we continue to struggle and we will continue to struggle until the other guys who are in prison are given fair, just, and impartial hearings into them having been tortured by the same group of detectives. And if their evidence is like my evidence, please grant them a new trial. That's all we're asking.

[00:08:18] **Darrell Cannon** So I continue to battle regardless to how painful it may be each and every time I relive it. Before I spoke to you, I had to take a big swig of Pepto Bismol to keep my stomach settled. Had to have a big glass of Sprite in order to help too because the trauma never, ever goes away. It's always there. You know, but nevertheless, it is my mission and it's my job to speak about these atrocities and I'll continue to do so.

[00:08:55] **Amanda Rivkin** You've been one of the most persistent as far as stating your claims. Almost immediately. I believe the first time you went before a judge, even at arraignment, you mentioned it.

[00:09:04] **Darrell Cannon** Yeah.

[00:09:05] **Amanda Rivkin** And for a long time you weren't believed and we weren't heard? Can you talk a little bit about that experience, that emotion?

[00:09:14] **Darrell Cannon** It was always frustrating. Any time you went before a judge and my lawyer would would talk about what had happened to me. Most judges didn't want to hear. Most judges knew about it and they knew that if they acknowledge that fact, that it may come back to haunt them too because most of the judges that I was in front of were first prosecutors and they were prosecutors that worked at Area 2. So they were very much in tune with how the police operated. So in protecting the cops, they were protecting themselves as well.

[00:09:57] **Darrell Cannon** So it got to the point where every time I was blessed to get away from one judge and they put me in front of another judge, the first thing I had my attorneys do was to do a background check into the judge's background to find out where was he before becoming a judge. And if you were a prosecutor, then we would do

a further background check to see was he up at Area 2. It became very important for me to do the background check to each one of these judges because of the fact that I was not receiving any justice. Now, it was something that I intended not to stop.

[00:10:50] **Darrell Cannon** You know, it's painful going up against a wall every time you run into that wall it knock you down, you know? But I keep getting back up and I kept running into that wall. You know, my intent was to someday knock it down or run through it. And eventually I was able to run through it and knock it down, you know, and then people start saying, well, you know what? Maybe we should not have turned a blind eye and allowed the judicial system, the police department, to do any and everything to deter crime, because in doing so, you violated men's constitutional rights and those men seem to all be Afro-American. So therefore, maybe we need to look at this a little bit more seriously. And then they start taking my case serious, you know, because I wasn't going away, I wasn't going to stop screaming about having been tortured and the fact that I'm not the only person that has been tortured.

[00:11:55] **Darrell Cannon** And if you scream long enough, sooner or later, somebody's going to hear you. And that is exactly what started to happen. And it was a blessing that it did in fact happen, and that we started to finally get the notoriety that we needed. And then eventually it became so great that even other judges who were not involved in the scandal started doing their own independent investigation. And they found out that it was a consistent pattern in dealing with a group of detectives. All white. And it looks like, yes, something serious and sinister was going on with these particular detectives in the Afro-American community. And that helped even more to fuel the fire to say that, okay, yes, yes, these detectives have been doing illegal things to alleged suspects and they've gotten away with it for far too long.

[00:13:06] **Amanda Rivkin** Can you talk a bit about. Sort of what it was like to go through the trial and end up behind bars for quite a long time.

[00:13:16] **Darrell Cannon** It was, it was frustrating. I had two trials. My case never passed the appellate court, meaning the Illinois Supreme Court never had to get involved in my case because my case was so clearcut. You know, I had no witnesses against me, no evidence against me, nothing but the alleged confession and a group of detectives saying, oh, yeah, he voluntarily gave us this confession. Yeah. OK. I'mma voluntarily put myself in prison. I'm going to voluntarily, after having did 13 years in prison, I'mma voluntarily be home less than 10 months and just give them a confession about another murder which guarantees to put me either back in prison for natural life or the death

penalty. I'm going to voluntarily give you this information to put myself in that position? Anybody with any kind of sense could have seen through that right away. And then eventually they did.

[00:14:19] **Darrell Cannon** My intent was never to give up. I don't give a damn how much time I had to do or where you place me in prison. I was never going to stop trying to prove my case. So that was my focus. And because of that, and with God helping, and with my deceased parents and other loved ones, their spirits embodied in me gave me the strength to get up each and every day to fight this case.

[00:14:54] **Amanda Rivkin** And can you talk about what it was like to be released of the charges finally.

[00:15:00] **Darrell Cannon** Numbing. Numbing. When they finally released me they had to get in one more jab. They could have released me that morning of April 2007, but instead they waited until that evening so that news media wouldn't be able to be there and that's the main newscasts would already have been gone through. So they did not have to see me on TV that night.

[00:15:36] **Darrell Cannon** And as I see it, to be free was a numbing effect after doing 24 years and suddenly you are let go. No money, no nothing. Which I didn't need there little 20 or 30 dollars no way. You know, I had family members coming to pick me up anyway. But it was numbing and it was a challenge to adjust to being free again. The things you take for granted was giant steps for me, such as I've been used to walking on concrete for 24 years and now to come home and to be on a padded carpet, I kept tripping as if someone was was reaching out of the carpet, grabbed me around my ankle because I was not used to walking on carpet that had a padding on it, anything else. To eat food. I started to get sick in eating food because I was eating real food and I had been used to so much generic food for 24 years that I didn't know how to adjust, to get my stomach and everything in order. So one of the first things I learned is that I couldn't eat spicy foods because spicy. So as the years went by, my body started to readjust and I started to learn what I could and couldn't eat, and if I did eat something it had to be very little of this or very little of that because of having been gone for so long.

[00:17:24] **Darrell Cannon** So it's been one hell of a justice system for me. Adjusting to the not only food but to people. You know, after having did everything by yourself to come home and then be around a crowd of people is not easy. It is not easy, you know, because in prison, even though you don't have to worry about things, but I wasn't

worried about anybody doing anything to me. But nevertheless, you still have to be on guard a little bit because you never know when there's some youngster coming in wanting a reputation. And if he knows who you are, what better way to get a reputation if he can do bodily harm to you?

[00:18:10] **Darrell Cannon** And I had to deal with that from time to time. At the time, I was still hooked up in the organization. And so other people lives was in my hands as well. So I had to make the right decisions each and every day. So. And then work on my case as well. So it was very trying beyond a shadow of a doubt. But I knew that if I had gave up at any junction, I would still be in prison today.

[00:18:42] **Amanda Rivkin** What was the greatest challenge as far as keeping your head on your shoulders during this time?

[00:18:49] **Darrell Cannon** Just the mere fact of having to tell yourself each and every day that some day you're going to be free, just stay strong. Any time the courts may have knocked down something that I had in court, a motion or something, I had to continuously tell myself that you can not let this deter you from pursuing your freedom. You've got to find another way. Even my lawyers at times was frustrated. And I would have to tell them that sometime you have to think outside the box. Don't think like a lawyer. Think outside the box and let's make new law. You know, so besides me having to keep my self upright, I had to keep my lawyers motivated as well. So it was a continuously challenge for my quest to be free.

[00:19:46] **Amanda Rivkin** There was just reparations money paid to 53 of the victims. The amount that they received is considerably less than Burge has received in pension funding.

[00:19:58] **Darrell Cannon** No question.

[00:19:58] **Amanda Rivkin** Can you talk a bit about this. How this feels.

[00:20:02] **Darrell Cannon** Well, you know, for me, it was never, it was never about the money for me or for others. It was about justice, and it was about those who were still in prison. A couple of years ago, they offered me two million dollars if I would just quietly go away, don't talk any more or anything else. I wasn't about to accept that money because it was hush money. And by no means did I intend to sell those out who were still in prison. You know, the two million would have been mighty helpful to me beyond a

shadow of a doubt. But that's cosmetic in conjunction with people lives who have been disrupted. People lives who continuously are disrupted because they're in prison unjustifiably, you know. So two million. No, ma'am, no, ma'am. You couldn't have offered me four million. No, no, you know, it's a matter of principle. Darrell Cannon has principle. By no means can you buy me off. You know I'm not a Judas. Thirteen pieces of silver never going to cause me to compromise my principles. So the little reparations money is nothing, but I'm satisfied with that portion of it in terms of we did something here in Chicago that's never been done in America and that is saying something.

[00:21:42] **Darrell Cannon** When slavery was over with, it was said that Black people in each state will receive 40 acres and a mule. Well, we never got 40 acres or a mule. And to this day, we're still suffering. We're still owed a great deal. But at least this is a stepping stone here in Chicago. You know, we receive reparation, meaning that we receive the acknowledgement that a grievous wrong was done to Afro-Americans under the color of law. And as a result of that. Here's a snippet of what you have coming. And a hundred thousand dollars, for a lot of people, individuals; the curriculum will be taught in schools next year. I've had some teachers who have asked me to come to their class to teach the first curriculum about police brutality and the ugly chapter that has occurred. And I told them it'll be my pleasure to come and teach the first class on this matter, something which has never been done in the history of America. So we're making inroads. Am I thoroughly satisfied? No, no. The glass is only half full. There's still another half yet to go. So as long as God allow me the strength to get up each and every day, I'll continue this quest. I'll continue to fight as hard as I can to get those who are in prison back for fair and impartial hearings. So there's still a lot of work to be done.

[00:23:27] **Amanda Rivkin** Thank you.

[00:23:28] **Darrell Cannon** Yes, ma'am.