

[Snap Judgement intro]

Glynn: Hey, Snappers. We know you enjoy your storytelling in the bright light of day, but if you also like your storytelling crafted in the dark of night, this is for you. Because right now, we're hiring two freelance story scouts for our incredible sister show, Spooked. In our efforts to bring you more supernatural stories from around the globe, Spooked is searching for someone who has lived in or has deep cultural knowledge of the Caribbean or the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the American South, Southeast Asia, or West Africa. This amazing story scout will find and pitch original first-person stories, and work closely with the Spooked team and work closely with me. Is this person you? Do you know someone who might be interested? For more information, go to snapjudgment.org/careers.

[music]

Glynn: I was too a little kid, didn't know anything about cars, but my uncle pulls up with his gleaming turquoise Cadillac. I know it's sharp. My cousins know it too. "Whoa! Snap, wow!" Jumping up and down all excited. My uncle slides out of the driver's side, sporting a suit the same color as his gleaming automobile, smiling like he just invented the sunny day. I suck in the new car smell through the slightly open window, "Uncle. Uncle, can we go for a ride?" "Unh-huh. See, I don't want dirty little boys get into my car." I know good and well, he's going to give us a ride. "Please, please." He grins over at my dad, my auntie, my mama. Instead of grinning back, they frown in disgust. I wonder how they're just going to hate my uncle like this. It takes me several years to piece it all out. But I'm going to give the game away to you in the title of this episode, because today on Snap Judgment, we proudly present Con Man Daddy.

[techno music]

Glynn: For love, family, and criminality are mixed into the same stew. My name is Glynn Washington. Understand, a Honda Civic after the carwash, gleams just as bright as a brand-new caddy. Well, you're listening to Snap Judgment.

We begin with a chase. Sirens get louder and louder, wind whipping onto the stinky crap backseat as a family of outlaws fly full tilt down the Texas fat roll with your tail in full pursuit. I'll let Jason take it from here.

Jason: The cop was so close to us, we can make out his face. We're in a pacer, which there's no way it can go faster than a cruiser. But they're following us and they're getting closer and closer. In the 70s, if you could make it to the county line, then they would stop chasing you. It was times like these that we're in it together. We're rooting for ourselves. We're not saying, "Dad, why'd you do this again?" We're going, "No, go, go, go, go, go. That's a county line. It's a county line. There's one of those green signs." And we step on it, the little car's going as fast as it can. We crossed the county line. Those cruisers, there were two of them in this case, they just dropped off. And then, we're just on to the next thing.

My name is Jason Russel Waller. I'd like to tell you about my father. Sometimes, the shape of a person can draw you in, and sometimes a voice can draw you in. My father was, he was shaped like Winnie the Pooh, and he had a voice with a southern ease. So, before you even met him, you liked him. My dad, he definitely had the wow factor. He was a natural leader. He worked at church, he was the assistant pastor. He was on the Chamber of Commerce involved with City Council. He was always involved in things that required wearing a tie. He dressed like the city, but he always had that good old boy charm, that country charm was always with him. He was really quite the man about town.

I was five years old and living in a nice house on a nice street in Austin, Texas. My father had a great new job at National Bank where he was vice president. I remember really good times playing with my brothers. To us, as children, things seemed like they were really good. But how that all broke up was we had a babysitter. One day, our babysitter, he came by in a new Corvette, he took us all for rides. It wasn't long after that, he went to jail for bank robbery.

He worked at the same bank where my father was vice president. We never got the full scoop on what happened. All we knew is that somehow our father was related to this robbery, because we now had to leave town. He was no longer working at National Bank, and it was time to hit the road. From that moment on, that was then end of 1976, that began our 10 years on the road, and on the run.

In the beginning, what he did was he would go into a big company and sell himself as a marketing director, talking them into, "Wow, you have this and you're doing great here. And I can see this, and I've read about you in the newspaper. But what you really need is a promotion. I'm a great promotions guy." He would just do his thing and do his slickery talk. He would say, "There's a tradeshow, and ah, this would be so good if we could get there. But what we need is we need some supplies, and we need a hotel because what would be great is if you could come and your wife, and this guy could come and that guy. And it's in Colorado. Wow, wouldn't that'd be great? Skiing is going on there. We can all be there too. When I look at it, it's going to cost about \$10,000. What I would need to do is go up there ahead of time, and I'll check it all out." And of course, there was never a tradeshow, there was never any of these things, and he'd get the \$10,000 check and we'd scoot town.

Most of our life on the run was in cars. I don't know where they came from. I don't know where they went, but we had a new car all the time. We didn't even see them disappear. We just remember that our father would maybe leave early in the morning, and then he'd come back later, and it was a different car. They all were junk. All of them had *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* type sounds coming out of them, and we were in the backseat. There was a lot of looking out the window. Seeing myself as a cowboy on a horse running, galloping beside the car. I'm a stunt man on a motorcycle and I see myself on this motorcycle jumping and hopping, and I'm imagining myself outside the window, thinking, "I have to go on. I have to keep going. At some point, we're going to get out of this."

When we were living on the road, we were living an adventure. No doubt. When dad wasn't lying or stealing, he was a hell of a lot of fun. We were always going to amusement parks, state fairs, rodeos, whatever was going on in the town we were passing through, he would take us there, and he enjoyed it

as much as we did. Even when we had no money at all, he was still the provider of fun. We'd be in a motel. And then at night, I was a night owl, and he allowed me to stay up and watch late night television as long as I turn it down way low. So, I'd watch Monty Python, Benny Hill, and old gangster movies until the station signed off the air.

[old movie audience laughing]

Jason: It sounds like a small thing, but he did this all my life, he would secretly buy me a Coke. He slips me a cold Coca-Cola that he bought earlier from the vending machine so that I can have a Coke while I watch these old movies. I think my father saw a lot of himself in me, and so he treated me like I had something special. It made me feel he understood me, in a way, and for that, we had a connection. I felt a special connection.

As time went on, during these long car journeys, the Pepto-Bismol sort of became a barometer of the trouble that we were in. If we were living fat for a while off of some big scam that he had done, everything was going okay. You didn't really see the bottle, and you didn't notice that the bottle was gone, but you definitely noticed when the Pepto-Bismol bottle reappeared, because that meant, "Oh, man, okay. The good stuff is over, and it's time to run again."

[door knocks]

Jason: There is a sudden knock on the door, and it's a couple of sheriffs. Our father is right around the other wall. We open the door. They're asking, where he's at. Have you seen him? When's the last time you've seen him? They're looking over our shoulders the whole time. He's in a closet. He's just a grown ass man, hiding in a closet.

We were sold on this yellow brick road idea that we're going down this road, but it's leading to somewhere that's bigger, brighter, shinier. There's something at the end of this. Our mindset was that just keep doing what you're doing, keep counting the fence posts, because eventually you're not going to have to. It gave us hope that something great was going to be at the end of this road.

When we became teenagers, I was working on being an actor. I thought, "Cool, I think I can crack into this acting thing. I'll at least start trying." For some reason, Austin, Texas in the 80s and 90s, it was a real hotbed of activity for films. I went on an audition, and it was for a miniseries. It was a big deal. It starred Sam Elliot. I went on the audition, I got the audition. First big great thing that I could ever do. It was quite a turning point for me. When you think about life being mostly curves, this was definitely an angle. Things can change for me after this.

My goal was to save \$10,000. I thought \$10,000, if I put that amount of money away, after high school, I could take that money, go live in California and give the acting thing a try. I just thought that was sort of the number in my head was \$10,000. Well, when I got this part, I signed a contract for \$7,500. And then, they paid me another \$3500 after I had done the acting part. So, right off the bat, I've already got the money.

I took the \$10,000 and I put it in the bank and did not touch it, had no need to touch that money, because this was my pathway to my dream. While I was on that set, Sam Elliot and I were pretty friendly because I was right next to him through all of my scenes. My scenes were with him. After this movie, he was doing one in Arizona. And he said, [mimicking Sam Elliot's voice] "I think you'd be good for the part of--" however Sam Elliott talks, but he said, "There's this part of a teenage son, and you should go to Arizona and I'll put in a good word for you." To be able to go to Arizona and be in this movie, by law, I had to have a parent or guardian. You'll never guess who was available.

[music]

Glynn: When we return, will acting save Jason from his father's life of crime? Stay tuned.

[music]

Glynn: Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Con Man Daddy episode. When last we left, Jason had just landed a new role in a movie in Arizona, but his up to no good father decided to make the trip with him. Snap Judgment.

Jason: I was scared thinking, "God, please don't talk to anybody because you're going to rip somebody off that I'm trying to get in this movie." But he was completely minding his manners. He seemed to be mellowing.

When I went to Arizona, we're living in a little condo that is on a golf course. I'm having a fine time as a teenager. I'm enjoying the school I'm going to. He bought me a moped so I could get back and forth. So, things are going what feels pretty good. Everything feels pretty normal.

I come home one day, and I look down in his hand, and he's got a thing of Pepto-Bismol. And I hadn't seen him drink from a bottle in a long time. When I saw him drinking that Pepto-Bismol bottle, I went, "Oh, man. Something's not right." He told me that some crimes he had done from the past had caught up with him. He hadn't done anything new, and that they were after him, and we had to leave right away. There we go in the cloak of night, just like we did many times before. In the middle of the night, we drove from Arizona, and we kept going until we got to Texas to my grandparents' home.

Things are not good. Things don't feel good. I'm getting a strange feeling. I had transferred that \$10,000 from Austin to a bank in Arizona. I called the Arizona bank, and I needed to check how much money did I have in my account. She told me how much I had left in my account. I said, "I want to make sure I heard you correctly. Can you repeat that?" And she said, "\$11."

\$11. In that moment, I was numb. This was the money that I was putting down on a dream. My father has known my dreams my whole life. He knew how important this was to me. He didn't just rob his son, he stole his son's dream. I'm trying to figure out how. How? How do you do this? How do you do this? [sighs] All of these things are just going around in my head.

I was out in the pasture, but I see my father. He's walking out, looked like he was looking for me and he's walking towards me. I can tell by his face he doesn't know that I know. His face changes and he says, "Well, what's wrong, son?" I said, "I called the bank." His face sunk. I had never seen my father's face do this. Without me saying anything more than "I called the bank," he started spitting out lies like they're coming out of a Gatling gun. "Oh no. No, Jay, the bank they're-- No, they've messed it up. Oh, well, I decided to have that transferred to so and so, and this is the-- it's still there." Because he was coming up with these lies on the fly, these were the worst lies I've ever heard him tell. These were terrible.

I was telling him, "Come on. Come on, Dad. Dad, you're lying. You're lying. I called the bank." My dad turned, he was scared, he was white. And he started trotting back to my grandparents' house like a fat little pony. He started trotting back to the house. What--? He's running away from me? I looked down-- many times when I walked out to my grandparents' pasture. I brought old 22 carbine rifle with me that was my grandfather's. The whole time I'm talking to my dad and asking him how and why, I forgot that I was holding a rifle. And that's why he was looking at me, and that's why he ran away. I thought, "Oh, my God. He thought he was out here and I was going to murder him." I'm glad I forgot that the gun was there.

When we went separate ways, I stayed in Texas and he went to Colorado, I didn't have a lot of contact with him. The contact I was getting was from the single women who keep finding my number and calling me and saying, "Are you the son of Ruffin Snow?" Actually, it was one of the names he used. That's quite a name. And I would say, "No, but I am Jason." Okay, they're looking for my father and I said, "I don't know where he's at." "We're supposed to get married. I gave him money for your operation." He was saying that I had cancer, and then I was dying of cancer. I don't know what kind of operation you were going to have that I was going to have with cancer. And I had to tell all of these women the same thing. Which was, "You've been taken. I don't need an operation." It just got low. It just got low.

I get one more of these calls, and this woman's name is Connie. She's from Colorado. She's looking for Bill Frank. She had given him, I believe, \$5,000. That's all she had. She had a small savings. I heard from Connie again a couple of weeks later. She tells me, "Your father came back. He asked me to marry him and we are going to get married. But he wanted me to let you know that an anonymous call was made, and he's in jail right now. And he's going to be there for a while. 10 years."

The district attorney that put him away had people speaking against him. The district attorney could not stand all the terrible things that my dad had done to other people. He gave him the maximum that he could, which was the 10 years, and he would have to pay restitution on money that he had stolen. The sense of relief knowing that he was away felt incredible. It felt like I can breathe.

He's serving a sentence of 10 years. During this time, my father tries to contact me. He tries to call me, he sends me letters. He would have his celly, he's the guy who shared the cell with him, draw pictures

for me. He made me a belt. I read these things. I opened them. I never wrote him back. I didn't want anything to do with my father. I was so relieved. For the first time, I felt like, "This is my life. Not yours."

In a typical dad fashion, he makes the district attorney like him. He writes him letter after letter. He starts doing all these great things in prison and he gets the district attorney that put him away for 10 years to reduce his sentence to 3 years. I thought, "Well, I'm going to have to take his call when he gets out because I know he's going to find me. He called when he got out. He was making his way to Texas and he wanted to see me. I said, "Okay." I wanted to get this over with, I knew it was coming. And it was awkward. The conversation barely got started when he said, "I was down for three years, Jay. You never took my calls. You never wrote me back. I've got to know, son, was it you? Was it you who turned me in?" Was it me who turned him in? He doesn't say, "I'm sorry." He doesn't say, "I wasn't in my right mind. The things I did were wrong." All he wants to know is, "Was it you? Are you the one who turned me in?" Of all the people, I mean of all the people that he stole from, everybody, everybody he met, every person he met, he ripped off. And in the end, he's taking these single, vulnerable women and taking their life savings and hitting the road. All these years, I protected him and how dare he ask me if I'm the one of all the people, am I the one who turned him in? I didn't say this, but in my mind, I'm thinking, "God. Dad, you put you there. You are the one who put you in jail."

When he asked that of me, a lot of things circling around in my head. [exhales] And in that moment, I decided to become the thing that I despised the most. I decided to be a liar just like him. Like father, like son. When he said, "I just got to know. Was it you? Were you the one who turned me in?" I looked at him and I said, "No, no, dad. What? I didn't turn you in."

[music]

Glynn: A big, big thank you to Jason Waller and as well as his brothers, Randy and Cal, for sharing their story to Snap. The original score for this piece was by Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by Bo Walsh.

[music]

Glynn: Where else, dear friends, where else are you going to rob a bank and get but just one day time served? Only on Snap Judgment. Be the most interesting person your friends know. Subscribe to the Snap Judgment podcast. Amazing stories from all over the world. Even better, you can rock a Snap judgment t-shirt and watch all the oohs and the aahs when you stroll down the street. Available right now at snapjudgment.org.

Snap is brought to you by the team that always picks the right car. Except, of course, for the uber producer, Mr. Mark Restitch. I tried to tell him, they don't play Uno at these Las Vegas casinos. He won't listen. There's Anna Sussman, Nancy López, Pat Mesiti-Miller, Renzo Gorrio, Shaina Shealy, Teo Ducot, Flo Wiley, John Fecile, Marisa Dodge, Regina Bediako, David Exumé, Bo Walsh, and Annie Nguyen.

Now, this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, after the big score with sacks of cash, you could jump into the getaway car, but it won't get away. And you would still, still not be as far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.