

[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: When I was a kid, five years old, we lived in what they called a transitional neighborhood. In our transitional neighborhood, people kept getting their batteries transitioned right out of their cars. My father says, "I ain't about to be no mark." So, every evening, he starts carrying a battery out of our Chevy Nova and inside the house. One evening, my mama was picking my favorite fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and red bean gravy. My mom makes the best mashed potatoes and red bean gravy. Pops screams over at me. "You ready to tuck in boy?" "Yes, sir." Pops walks out of the front door, he says, "I'll be right back. Just got to get the battery first." [door shuts] "Okay."

Mama sets the plate down. I can see the heat wafting off the crispy chicken and I'm waiting, waiting, waiting. Everybody knows mashed potatoes only taste good when they're hot. But I don't say nothing. Still, he doesn't come back from outside. I'm staring at the food, stomach rumbling. My mama tells me to, "Go ahead and eat, baby." But I don't want to go ahead and eat. Through the window, I see a car hood popped open. My mother opens our front door. "Bill? Bill?" She sits back down, gets up, sits down again, then slightly higher pitch, "Bill? Bill?" We wait. We wait half an hour, an hour. Two hours later, she calls my uncles, the neighbors, the church folk, people start filling the house and telling me, "It's going to be all right." My auntie wraps our untouched dinner plates in saran wrap, "We'll save this for later, baby."

In the morning, the hood of our car is still popped open. My mother sits next to my auntie red faced from the crying. My uncles have taken to knocking on doors. Church ladies moan in the living room, gather in a prayer circle. Pops doesn't show up that afternoon. Doesn't show up later that evening. Finally, wailing, my mother picks up the phone to actually call the police. My father walks into the house. "Bill." He looks angry and dirty. Even as we hug him, me crying, my mama praising Jesus, "Lord. Lord. Lord," a scowl stays etched on his face. "Where you've been?" when my uncles asked, "What happened?" "What happened?" "5-0, lock me up. Said I stole my own damn battery of my own damn car. That's what happened." A heavy quiet freezes everyone in place, as my uncle's take several moments to digest the words. The silence stretches, twists expands and finally, looking first to each other than back at my father. My uncles howl. Side-splitting guffaws, tears streaming down eyes, slapping each other on the back laughing, laughing, laughing, laughing and then growing still only to

erupt laughing again at full strength. "Donnie," says Uncle Eldest, "How do you want to arrested for stealing your own battery?" "Get out." They can't stop laughing. "Get out."

My uncles shuffle away, cackling, leaning on each other for support, house empty. Me, still clinging to my father's leg. My mother retrieves the plates of dinner. First places them in oven and sets the reheated food on the table. And then as a family, we sit down to eat my favorite fried chicken, mashed potatoes, and red bean gravy.

[music]

Glynn: Today in Snap Judgment, we probably present The Feast. My name is Glynn Washington. Dig in, because you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[music]

Glynn: Now, we begin behind the walls of a level two prison in Western Michigan. And sensitive listeners should know, the story does reference police violence and contains strong language. We'll hear first from Michael Thompson, who was recently released from incarceration. And he spoke to us from his home near Flint. Snap Judgment.

[music]

Michael: Within the prison system, as soon as something hit the TV, they'd run out their rooms. They'd run out their room and they're talking to each other.

Shaina: Michael Thompson was alone in his cell at Muskegon Correctional Facility when he heard men shouting.

Michael: They were talking in anger. They said, "The motherfuckers been killing us for years." I knew what they were talking about because I've seen it myself. Like everybody else, witnessed a murder on TV.

Shaina: The men were watching the breaking news of George Floyd's murder.

Michael: They played it all day. They played it every 15 minutes. I just got [unintelligible [00:07:16]]. I mean, what is it for a person to say after you witness something like that?

Shaina: Michael needed company and went to find his closest friend at Muskegon, Robert Cannon, Jr.

Automatic: Hello. This is a prepaid debit call from "Robert." [beep] This call is from a correction facility and is subject to monitoring and recording.

Silk: Me and Michael, we sit together in the day room. We sit together and we call it our round table. We sit together and brainstorm--

Shaina: Robert and Michael run workshops together in the day room for the other men. Robert's a writer. Everyone calls him Silk because he's good with words. He's written books and books of poetry, screenplays. At the roundtable, Silk taught creative writing. Michael also led a breathing class and the two ran a workshop about forgiveness.

Silk: We sit together and brainstorm about ideas about the future.

Shaina: But the day Silk saw George Floyd's murder on TV, he avoided the round table. He needed to be alone in his feelings.

Silk: Anger at the system, anger about being helpless and not being able to voice what I was feeling, rage that the black men in this country was getting a bad deal, so to speak. The poem that I tried to write, I think, it was too militant because I was expressing all my anger and stuff. I tore it up a couple of times. I wrote it twice and I tore it up twice because I didn't like the way it was flowing. I felt that I was just too close, the reason why I couldn't generate my thoughts where they normally come so easily. Emotionally, I was too close to the situation.

Shaina: On the day of George Floyd's funeral, the two men watch together at the round table.

Reverend Al Sharpton: "What happened to Floyd happens every day in this country in education, in health services, and in every area of American life. It's time for us to stand up in George's name and say, get your knee off our necks."

Silk: I said, "Man, now people are finally saying, 'Enough is enough,' and standing up in a pack. This may be the spot, the catalyst that make people become more aware of what's really going on. Man, we need to do something."

Michael: I wanted to do a celebration. I wanted to do a celebration, because I felt that was my duty to do that.

Shaina: A celebration of life inside the prison to grieve George Floyd's death together, but not actually together.

Michael: You've got to be careful doing a celebration inside the prison because what they can do, they can say that you're trying to form some kind of organization. And that's why you can't congregate.

Shaina: It's forbidden for men at Muskegon to congregate in groups of more than five. But Silk and Michael had a workaround. The idea, a feast that men would take back to their cells and eat on their own.

Silk: We all come together with food. We're not getting grade A food, you know what I'm saying?

Shaina: The prison chow hall is known to be pretty rough. So, for this celebration, they decided to cook up their own feast with their own food.

Silk: When you come together and you're buying food, they want to be a part of something that's bigger than themselves.

Michael: I figured that nobody, no other prison within the United States is going to celebrate George Floyd like the way I wanted to do it.

Shaina: Michael and Silk put their own money in. Michael got a friend on the outside to donate enough to cover chips and soda. They invited about 60 people to The Feast, the feast they'd be eating individually in their own cells.

Michael: Everybody wanted to be on the list.

Silk: He picked some guys, I picked some guys, and I put the list together.

Shaina: Silk took on the role of logistics guy. His first task, enlist kitchen help.

Silk: I'm real funny about who I let cook my food. I'm a stickler for cleanliness and stuff like that.

Shaina: The microwave kitchen at Muskegon is a 12x8-foot room with three microwaves and a sink. When Silk was in there, he had this thing where he watched people, closely.

Silk: Are they cleaning their hands and dishes and stuff like that.

Shaina: Earlier that year, he noticed this one guy making nachos, carefully layering cheese and meat in between stacks of chips.

Silk: When you take pride and put love into your cooking, it tastes a whole lot different than you're just putting something together and going into the microwave. So, that's when I pick PE.

Shaina: Silk realize this guy, PE, was kind of a microwave wizard. He tapped PE to be the lead chef for The Feast. PE learned to cook from his grandma.

PE: My grandmother's macaroni and cheese, I never tasted nothing like them in my life. Also, [unintelligible [00:13:00] cheese, so you know me, I want to hang around the kitchen cooking.

Shaina: PE is a meticulous chef and a clean freak.

PE: When I see a piece of hair in my food, I throw the whole bowl away. It's just certain things, you don't suppose to do around food, you're supposed to be cleaning. You take your time. If you don't take your time, then how can you enjoy it?

Shaina: He makes his own food with ingredients from commissary, basically an overpriced convenience store where people living in prison can buy pouched meat, soaking in preservatives, an 88-cent bar of soap, deodorant for \$3.75, shelf-stable crackers.

PE: You got tub cheese with the spread cheese, you got jalapeno, you got mayo that come in the tub. You get cheddar cheese and we got mozzarella cheese. That's like the sprinkles. But then, you get provolone cheese, which is like the bar you cut, you got a hot provolone-- [crosstalk]

Shaina: Beyond PE's compulsive cleanliness and knowledge of edible commissary items, he's like the superstar of the Muskegon kitchen. He has a sort of famous pizza recipe with a crust he made from saltine crackers.

PE: You just crush them up and slowly add cold water, turn into a bowl. Then, you just shape it out.

Shaina: He makes lasagna with cup of noodles and cream cheese, pecan pie with a cookie crust, cheesecake with mozzarella cheese and a lemon mousse.

PE: Lemonade Kool-Aid with powdered milk with a little bit of regular milk and you get to whipping and it's going to fluff up, and then it tastes just, I swear to you, like cheesecake in the street.

Michael: This guy thought he was a real five-star chef who knows everything, with that cheap ass meat.

PE: You got pepperonis, you got salami meat sticks, turkey--[crosstalk] A lot of guys who've been around me for years know that I can cook. When they hear that I'm cooking something, they're like, "Oh, hell, yeah. We're with that because we know he can cook."

Shaina: Silk, the writer who wanted to bring everyone together, summoned PE, kitchen superstar, into the day room to discuss his plans for the George Floyd Celebration of Life.

Silk: I showed him what I had. Then, I asked him, "Listen, this is what I got."

Shaina: \$300.

Silk: "What do you think? Do you think this is enough for 58 guys?"

PE: When he told me the number, and I asked him, "Are you serious?" because it was a whole bunch of people. And that list wasn't even complete. First, I was in shock to believe. [chuckles] After I got out of the shock, I was like, "What's the menu? It all depends on what the menu is."

Shaina: The menu.

Silk: We're limited by some of the stuff we can do.

Shaina: Silk knew the options. DIY meals in prison typically takes shape as a wrap, a bowl, or nachos.

Silk: I said, "Listen, man, I don't want to do wraps this time. I don't want to do bowls because everybody's always doing bowls. I wanted to be something a little bit special that nobody normally does. Let's get them a bagel."

Michael: A bagel sandwich loaded.

Shaina: Once Michael and Silk decided on bagel sandwiches, PE, the Wizard of Prison Food, got to work, plotting a celebratory feast on a bagel.

PE: This is prison food, so how can you make it taste like you suppose you go to-- you try it a few times with different things, see how it tastes, so this is what I do. I [unintelligible 00:16:32] see if I like it. If I like it, I figured hey, everybody else will like it as well.

Shaina: PE put his headphones on and got a notebook out and listed every type of meat, sauce, and cheese available from the commissary.

PE: I started making combinations about what I think it goes together. Like maybe salami meat doesn't go good with ranch dressing or something like that.

Shaina: But onions and peppers--

PE: To me, that brings out a lot of flavor and a lot of meat slice salami and--

Shaina: PE chose his favorite combinations on paper and then went to the microwave kitchen to start testing them out.

[microwave running]

Shaina: Cheese with meat sticks, mackerel and garlic pickles. rice cooked with jelly.

[microwave bleep]

PE: I did a lot of experimenting with bagels before I decided on which ones I was going to use.

Shaina: He got his hands on every kind of bagel in the store.

PE: We got a bagel [unintelligible 00:17:25] everything, and we got a plain bagel, but for me, those don't got the type of flavors I was looking for.

Shaina: He went with cinnamon raisin.

PE: Why cinnamon raisin? It'll get this like-- let me describe it to you, like a cereal taste food.

Shaina: The final dish PE came up with was a groundbreaking fried rice bagel sandwich, layered with meat, cheesy noodles, fried rice, chili, sweet onions, and bell peppers. All layered on two halves of a cinnamon raisin bagel topped with a pickle.

PE: [unintelligible 00:18:04] you can have plain vinegary taste. So, you add that sweet, a little bit of spice, a little bit of bread, some cheese and some meat, all your flavors marinated together. You know what you get out of it? An explosion.

Shaina: An explosion. PE wrote the recipe down in his notebook. And then, he started to worry.

PE: Everybody don't have the same taste buds. So, when I come up with these different recipes and stuff like that, I do worry that some of the people might not like it.

Shaina: So, the next day, he went around to every participant.

PE: With a pad of paper, [unintelligible 00:18:37] I go around ask those guys, anything that you don't like, "Do you eat onions, bell pepper, fish?" For those who don't eat red meat, we use turkey meat sticks.

Shaina: PE chased down around 60 different men about their dietary preferences and kept tabs in his notebook. But he had another kind of bigger concern.

PE: My many worries or concerns were about the officers, because a lot of officers don't like to see us hooked up doing something positive. They like to see us going at each other's throats and beating or going to war or some garbage. They don't want to see us unified. Once we start to unify, we start tackling issues that really is our concern. So, that was my concern or my worries that the officers in the unit will take offense to what we was doing and tell us to stop or go so far as--

Shaina: PE he had gotten a writeup for congregating before. It was called failure to disperse and he was sent into solitary confinement. He didn't think the George Floyd celebration would get that tense. But if it did--

PE: Hey, this is the consequence of being in prison. We just accepted whatever came with it, but I know we're doing this for George Floyd.

Shaina: A week and a half before the celebration, Silk and Michael started buying ingredients from commissary. Noodles, rice, meat.

Where do you keep all the food as you're buying it up? Did you keep it in your cell?

Silk: Yeah, I was putting stuff under the bed, on top of the locker, hanging from hooks up under the-- you've a few hooks hanging along the walls.

Shaina: Silk bought over 60 cans of soda from the soda machine.

Silk: I bought all the pops and took all of them to my cell.

Shaina: Was it crowded? How much space did that food take up in your cell?

Silk: Well, yes, it was. It was crowded. Them cells was about 10x12. Believe it, I had stuff everywhere.

Shaina: Meanwhile, PE was in charge of getting onions and bell peppers.

PE: First, we got to get those from the kitchen.

Shaina: And how do you get those from the kitchen?

PE: That's illegal.

Shaina: Really?

PE: Yes, it's illegal. I don't see no problem with onions and bell peppers and tomatoes and squash and celery and stuff like that, but for some reason they don't allow us to purchase it. So, we're getting this through illegal contraband way.

Shaina: Do you feel comfortable talking about it, even though it's illegal?

PE: What are they going to do? [laughs] As long as I ain't got nothing right now, they can't do nothing about it.

Shaina: Plus, PE says most officers don't really care if they see you with a bell pepper.

PE: Officers, they walk down the [unintelligible [00:21:19] they really don't care. But other officers would be really mean about it, [unintelligible [00:21:26] And that's a bummer.

Shaina: Over the course of a week, men smuggled onions and bell peppers out of the chow hall kitchen. They got \$1 per vegetable. In the end, PE had about a dozen onions and a dozen bell peppers.

PE: I had other people hold them for me. [laughs]

Shaina: The night before the celebration, PE gathered up the vegetables. Silk unhooked bags of meat sticks from his wall, and slid packets of seasonings out from under his bed and brought them to the microwave kitchen.

[music]

Glynn: The men head to the microwave kitchen with vegetables and meat for a groundbreaking bagel sandwich. But will they have enough time to chop and marinate it all? Stay tuned.

[music]

Glynn: Welcome back to Snap Judgment, The Feast episode. Sensitive listeners should note, this piece does contain references to police violence. We rejoin the story, even as bagel sandwiches are being prepared. Snap Judgment.

[music]

Silk: We was on a time constraint. We get counted 6 o'clock in the morning, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, 9 o'clock at night and they take it again at 12 o'clock at night.

Shaina: Three hours between 9:00 PM and midnight to dice onions, chop and marinate meat sticks, cut up bell peppers.

PE: I cut the meat sticks in like wheelbarrows, like circles. Actually, that take a long time, you get tired, your hands start cramping because it is a lot of meat sticks.

Shaina: Silk used plastic knives to cut the onions.

Silk: I broke about seven knives.

Shaina: But PE, he had his own method.

PE: I use a pop card, it's like a credit card, but we call it pop cards, because you put them into the pop machine, you get pop, like a credit card. You got to wash it off first though, but it cuts a lot of stuff.

Shaina: But you can't cut onions with a card, can you?

PE: It's actually better.

Shaina: Really?

PE: Because it's straight. You can take your credit card right now and take an onion and you cut right down the center of it. You might got to push on a little bit, but it will come right down the center. You peel off your outer onion that you don't want--[crosstalk]

Shaina: After chopping, PE and Silk mix the peppers and the onions with brown sugar and butter in a foot tub.

PE: Please don't judge us, but they're actually foot tubs that you get in the doctors, like the big pink bowls, and we get them brand new. And we use them to cook and mix food in. So, I have one of those being this full.

Shaina: After three hours in the kitchen, once everything was chopped, diced and soaking in oils and seasonings, PE scrubbed the countertops, while Silk wrapped up the food in plastic bags.

Silk: Let me reiterate. I say plastic bags. What I did was, they have tortilla chips, bag of tortilla chips, I had four them and I secured it all--[crosstalk]

Shaina: Silk wrapped the food in those little cellophane wraps that come around taco shells.

Silk: We double wrapped them and to keep the smell down.

Shaina: Silk brought the meat and peppers and onions back to his cell, set his alarm for 4:00 AM the next morning and drifted off to sleep, surrounded by bags of food.

Silk: We didn't have no real [unintelligible 00:25:27].

Shaina: Silk got to the kitchen a bit before 5:00 AM the next day.

Silk: Before guys got up to come down and get their cup of coffee and all this stuff.

Shaina: PE was already there assembling popcorn bags that he had cleaned with toilet paper pieces and saved to us as part of his microwave magic. He filled each bag with rice and butter and seasonings and put them in the microwave.

PE: And next thing you know, they start browning just fine inside the popcorn bag.

Shaina: He blasted the rice until it was brown and crispy. And then, he added water to the bag a few teaspoons at a time.

PE: A teaspoon of water would start to blow the rice, and it would start making the rice real soft.

Shaina: PE then seasoned cans of chili in foot tubs with the juice of jalapeno peppers, barbecue sauce, and a few packets of mustard. He steamed the noodles with seasonings and cheese. Finally, around 9:00 AM, PE and Silk started to assemble the 60 something bagel sandwiches.

PE: We got these little tags with everybody names on it, so they never get mixed up.

Shaina: They had eight guys who didn't eat meat.

PE: So, we made tuna for them. We have one guy, we used bread, because we had all cinnamon raisin bagel, and he said he was allergic to raisins.

Shaina: But most guys got a bagel with meat sticks, fried rice, steamed cheesy noodles and vegetables in a brown sugar butter sauce.

PE: When I make your sandwich, before I put a piece of bread on there, I put three or four spoons of sugar on top so the inside of your bagel will be wet. That's what we call wet bagels. If I had a choice, I would eat wet bagels all the time like that. But people like it, it's a great sandwich.

Shaina: It's not just a great sandwich. It's a gigantic sandwich.

PE: I'm trying to think of a good way to describe it. Maybe-- [unintelligible 00:27:01] I'll actually use my hand. Let me just think, like inches wise right here.

Homeboy: Seven? Eight and half inches.

PE: Okay, the bagel sandwich was probably about seven inches tall. My homeboy next to me just said my hand is like eight and a half. What's my hand, about eight and a half, nine inches?

Homeboy: Yeah.

PE: All right, so I think the bagel was about seven inches.

Shaina: When they were all done, the bagel was seven inches tall.

PE: You got to hold it with both hands.

Automatic: You have one minute remaining.

PE: I'm going to send it to you step-by-step how to do it, and you try it.

Shaina: Yeah, I would love to have the recipe.

At 11:00 AM, over 60 men lined up near the day room for their bagel sandwiches. One of them who the guys called Picasso had drawn a portrait of George Floyd with colored pencils on a piece of butcher paper and hung it in the day room. As soon as PE, Silk, and Michael started passing out the bagels, an officer approached them.

Michael: Now when he first came into the day room, he was very aggressive. Like, "What the hell y'all think y'all doing?" We had like four tables together, packed with pops, chips and bagels and cookies, all types, we gave out like a whole meal. He was upset it was so much.

Shaina: The officer turned to Silk.

Michael: He asked me the question, "Well, who paid for all this food?" I said, "I did." He said, "Well, you can't just pay for food and give it away." I said, "I can. I want to give. I want to go to store and just spent \$150 and turn around and give it away, I can do that."

Shaina: PE tried talking the officer down.

PE: This was one of the more frustrating ones that I was trying to control it, because I know we're doing this for George Floyd. So, as I'm talking to this officer and talking to that inmate, I'm trying to keep that out in front of my mind, like we're doing this for a very positive purpose. But what I was thinking was, "Please just don't escalate the situation, thinking about other inmates, I just didn't want them to escalate the situation."

Michael: Then, they went, "Why are you all giving these sandwiches away?" "We're celebrating George Floyd." When he said that, something triggered off inside of him. He said, "Do the warden know anything about this? Did the warden authorize this?" Then, they got louder and they got in his face. They got extremely mad at him.

Shaina: After about seven minutes of commotion, the officer left, went to the warden's office.

Michael: I don't know what he said to him, but he never came back.

Shaina: The officer causing the commotion was white. And Silk says when that officer went back to the warden's office, there was a black officer there.

Silk: That officer told him, "They're not violating. Now, leave them alone."

Shaina: And he did. With the officer gone, The Feast was underway.

Michael: We get each and every one a bagel sandwich. They got more than enough meat in there. It was loaded. And then they said thanks to me, like, "Man, this beautiful, man." This is beautiful, man. And then, they started talking love. "Love you, man." That's unusual in prison, that they were hugging and embracing me. "Man, I really appreciate this, man. Thanks, man."

Shaina: Before the men went back to their cells, Silk made an announcement.

Silk: I told, "You just got to go back to their cell. And all I ask is you go back your cell for eight minutes and 46 seconds, and give him a moment of silence," because I want the reality of how long that is to set in. And every one of them came back and told me saying, "Wow, man, eight minutes, man, that's a long time, man. It felt like I was standing in my cell for over an hour."

Shaina: When Silk went back to his cell, he couldn't eat his bagel. He was too emotional.

Silk: My emotions are across the gamut, up and down. When you look at the justice system and you say equality, it should be all for one, it's not like that. That hasn't been my experience. How many more people have to die? It's sad.

Shaina: Michael also went back to his cell after passing out the bagels.

Michael: Well, I was thinking about [unintelligible 00:31:03] then. It was just like a video camera in my head. And how could I go back to my cell wagging my tail? That wasn't right what happened. Everything feels sad when it comes down to unnecessary death. Everything start piling up on me, all the other thoughts and the injustice I received. I was in prison for some dumb stuff, that's what I was mad about. My anger, that's what I was angry about. But the George Floyd thing, I was sad, but the only difference, I'm still alive and George is dead. That was a horrible thing that happened to him, man. [sobbing] And that ain't the first time that didn't happen. It had happened all across the United States, and it's been happening for years. And I know friends of mine that disappeared through years by the same brutality that George Floyd experienced. That's really when I went, "I want to do something," because-- Oh, boy. It'd become personal to me.

Shaina: Silk ate his bagel sandwich later that evening. It was so good, he wanted to get the recipe copyrighted and sell it in restaurants across the country. He really wanted me to make the bagel sandwich.

Silk: I was going to ask you about this. What's the holdup now?

Shaina: I haven't really gotten the chance to get all the ingredients, [chuckles] But I was thinking it could be cool to have you on the phone while I make it just in case I mess up.

Silk: Just give me a day if you get ready to do it and I'll definitely guide you to do it.

Shaina: Okay.

Silk: I definitely would do that.

Shaina: Awesome. It was good talking with you, and hopefully we'll talk again soon.

Silk: Well, you enjoy the rest of your day and give my regards to Mr. Parker, tell him--

Automatic: Thank you for using GTL.

Shaina: I never heard from Silk again. The next time I spoke to PE, I had to tell him what happened. He didn't know because of COVID restrictions at the prison. Michael, Silk, and PE were separated from one another weeks after the bagel feast.

Automatic: Thank you for using GTL.

PE: Oh, you get my email I sent you--[crosstalk]

Shaina: Yeah.

PE: -today, or the last one. That's how I found out you was going to be home right now because I just read your email. But sometimes, it takes up two days for us to get them.

Shaina: Yeah. I don't know if you heard this news, and I hate to be the one to deliver it to you. But I got off the phone with Michael Thompson last week, and he told me that Robert Cannon actually passed away.

PE: No way.

Shaina: Silk died suddenly.

PE: Wow.

Shaina: Yeah.

PE: Was he still in prison?

Shaina: He was still in prison.

PE: Wow.

Shaina: And they're doing an autopsy. So yeah, I think we're just waiting to find out.

PE: That's sad to hear.

Shaina: Yeah.

PE: Can you put him in the story?

Shaina: Yeah, he'll be in the story.

PE: Well, what can I say? That will ease the pain. Absolutely nothing because I I understand the pain.

Shaina: We did eventually get a copy of the county's autopsy report for Silk. The report lists the cause of death as acute fentanyl toxicity. PE believes the cause of death was the failure of the prison healthcare system. When Silk died, he had emphysema, renal cysts, heart disease.

PE: You can walk through the officer's desk right now and tell him that you got a headache, splitting migraine, you can't even open your eyes, they're going to tell you to drink some water. For real, that's how they're going to treat you. In George Floyd's case, they didn't believe him when he was saying he couldn't breathe and stuff. It's like a [unintelligible 00:36:31] not maybe literally, but people just speaking, it's a cry for help, like, "I can't breathe, look at me, help me." But people don't see it that way though. People think we all cry wolf. And it won't become serious until somebody's dead, like in the case of George Floyd.

Automatic: You have one minute remaining.

PE: He asked for help and it was completely disregarded. They never take us serious.

Automatic: Thank you for using GTL.

[phone call cuts off]

[*I'm Free, Praise The Lord* plays in the background]

Shaina: Robert "Silk" Cannon Jr. funeral was in Detroit on a Thursday morning, early in September. Michael was at the funeral, and he got up to talk.

Michael: He had love for writing the truth. He was a writer. Yes, he loved telling the stories. He's a storyteller. And he was talented, very smart. He was super smart. And he loved learning. That's pretty much [unintelligible [00:38:05] he read every day, every day he was with me, and I spent 26 years.

Shaina: As Michael spoke in front of Silk's friends and family, he started to get so upset that he could barely get his words out.

Michael: Me and Silk fought close--

Shaina: He's saying he and Silk fought for prison reform from inside. They did a celebration for George Floyd like nowhere in America.

Michael: [crosstalk] -we fed 80 some odd guys.

In Unison: Some of them never had a pop.

Michael: George Floyd's death was because the police, the law enforcement had a foot on his neck.

In Unison: Silk's death was because of lack of treatment that he was getting from healthcare.

Shaina: They both died.

Person: Thank you, Michael, for those words of wisdom.

[applause]

Person: Robert was awarded to the state and the state did not take care of him. And George Floyd, dependent upon law enforcement, and law enforcement killed him. It's all a joke. It's all a game. It's proof, proof with me and proof with Silk right now in the casket. George Floyd's death, the only difference I see is one had a foot on his neck and other one had an invisible foot on his neck. They both died.

Shaina: Silk's memory lives on with his girlfriend and soulmate, Dolores, his sister and brother, cousins, nieces and nephews and all the men who gathered together to grieve George Floyd's death over seven-inch fried rice bagel sandwich.

[dirge]

Glynn: This story is a tribute to Silk, Robert Cannon, Jr. Robert was 62 years old when he died. May he rest in power. A study by Vanderbilt Professor, Evelyn Patterson, shows that time served in US prisons has a direct correlation to years of lost life. For each year lived behind bars, a person can expect to lose two years of their life expectancy. After spending 25 years in prison on charges of possession of three pounds of marijuana, Michael Thompson was released in January. Since then, he's spoken about prison reform on the *Montel Williams Show* and with Snoop Dogg. Marijuana has been legal in Michigan since 2018. PE is serving the 24th year of his life sentence for a crime he committed two weeks after his 18th birthday. He loves getting email via his JPay account, specifically pictures of nature.

Special thanks to William Welch and Dee Dee Kirkwood who helped make the bagel sandwich a reality for the men in Muskegon. Additional shoutouts to Catherine Nouhan, Stephen Carmody, and Delores Ingram. And to Tana Ganeva, a criminal justice reporter who has written extensively about Michael Thompson's incarceration and petitions for clemency. You can read more about the men's George Floyd celebration of life in her article in The Counter, link at snapjudgment.org. That the original score for this story was by Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by Shaina Shealy.

[music]

Glynn: Yes, that was but one episode from the Snap Judgment kitchen. Please understand, there is so much deliciousness waiting for you to devour. Subscribe to the Snap Judgment podcast, instantly become the tastiest person you know, that is right. Subscribe to Snap Judgment on your phone device, [unintelligible 00:42:35] to Snap wherever you go. Isn't technology wonderful?

What's more? Look like a runway model, in one of those magazines people used to buy, with a Snap Judgment t-shirt available right now at *snapjudgment.org*.

Snap is brought to you by the team that eats everything on their plate, especially the uber producer Mark Ristich. Yes, he will have seconds and thirds. 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.

This is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, to create your very own cookbook of recipes made exclusively of stuff that rhymes, the steak and keg shake and bake back, anybody? Gobble up each and every bite and you would still, not be as far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.

[music]