

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 stories 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, will 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](http://snapjudgment.org/careers).

[music]

**Glynn:** You see it on the playground. You see it in business, in politics, in romance, in war. You see it between groups and you see it between individuals from those that have known each other for decades, and others that maybe just met. This dynamic, one side, for whatever reason, confuses flexibility for weakness, and they push, and they push, and they push, and they push until they push that one step too far, and that one step changes everything.

[music]

**Glynn:** Today, on Snap Judgment, we proudly present *The Line*. My name is Glynn Washington. Assume nothing when you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[music]

**Glynn:** Now, we begin in the 1970s, Nobuko Miyamoto was JoAnne Miyamoto. She and Chris Ijima put out one of the first folk records focusing entirely on Asian American identity. But today, we're taking you to a time before all that. A surprise call from an international superstar turns into a fight for Nobuko's right to sing her own song. Sensitive listeners should know, the story does contain strong language and does reference instance of racial violence.

The year is 1972. I'll let Nobuko take it from here.

[music]

[telephone ringing]

**Nobuko:** One day, I get this phone call out of the blue. And this woman's voice says--

**Yoko:** Hello, this is Yoko.

**Nobuko:** I didn't know any Yokos that came to my mind. I said, "Well, Yoko who?"

**Yoko:** Ono.

**Nobuko:** And I went, [in a whisper] "John and Yoko." Then she went on and she said--

**Yoko:** John and I are doing this, *The Mike Douglas Show*, and we'd like to know if you and Yellow Pearl would like to come on and sing something.

**Nobuko:** I didn't know whether to say yes or not, and I didn't give her an answer. I said, "Let me call you back," and I hung up. [phone hangs up]

It was around 1972. Chris and I had been singing a lot everywhere. East Coast, West Coast, in universities and rallies, in churches, and prisons, everywhere. We were everywhere. There were very few Asian American performers in those days that did political music, music of Asian American consciousness. So, we were, I think, pretty rare, especially on the East Coast.

I'm a third-generation Japanese American. My grandparents came to this country. Chris Iijima was one of the young leaders of Asian Americans for Action, a really smart guy. I really met Chris in Chicago in 1970. This is a few months after Fred Hampton had been murdered.

**Fred Hampton:** I believe that I will be able to die as a revolutionary in the international revolutionary proletarian struggle. And I hope that each one of you will be able to die in the international proletarian revolutionary struggle or you'll be able to live in it. And I think that struggle's going to come. Why don't you live for the people? Why don't you struggle for the people? Why don't you die for the people?

**Nobuko:** We wanted to convince the Japanese American Citizens League to take a stand against the Vietnam War. So, we went back to the church, the Japanese church that we were sleeping on the floors. We had dinner there, people were cleaning up. And Chris brings out a guitar. Now, I didn't know he played music, and he starts diddling around, and he starts singing, and I'm going like, "Holy shit! This guy can sing." And he was starting to get into a groove. And he was using the phrase that Fred Hampton often said, 'The People's Beat'. [singing] "Every day, I can hear, like a heart that beats, it's the people's spirit. Every day." I just started singing with him, and it felt good. Before the night was over, we had a song.

At the big convention that we were addressing, we sing the song. The young people start clapping, and somehow the whole place started rocking with us. To see people that look like us, see us reflected in this audience, it was a moment. A song does something to your body, it does something to your spirit. And we knew that we hit on something powerful that you couldn't do in a speech, that you couldn't do in a book. We had a song. Yeah, it was a song of the moment. And there were more songs to come, but this song was really waiting to come, in a sense. We didn't have our own song. We had helped to build this country. We had not had our own song. We have been here, people looked at us as foreigners. We have not had our own song. Now, we had it.

[music]

**Nobuko:** For the American housewife and people that watched television in the middle of the day, Mike Douglas was the bread that they ate [chuckles] every afternoon. That was the cup of coffee. John and Yoko are going to be a host for the entire week. I think we were a little bit wary of whether we'd want to do something like this. We were against this kind of major media thing.

We weren't just open, "Hey, this is a great opportunity. Hey!" We weren't like that. We were going into it thinking, "Alright, let's see what this is going to be about. Let's keep our eyes open. Let's be aware what has happened before to people like us on television." Most of the things if we saw an Asian on television, it was the enemy, it was the waiter or the houseboy, it was the spy. The guys people wanted to kill. For Asian women, the Hula Hands, the South Islander or the geisha. But those are actually roles that I had played [chuckles] when I was in show business, and I wasn't going to repeat myself.

One thing that helped convince us that it was safe to do this was that they were going to have Bobby Seale on there, that they were going to have Jerry Rubin. These were characters in the movement, who were very strong, who were very clear about who they were, and we were representing another element of that radical left. We said, "Yes."

We go to their apartment in The Village. Their bed was on a platform and there was a TV hanging from the ceiling. It was like walking into a movie in a sense. "They're here, John. Yellow Pearl's here." Every time Yoko referred to us in their house, they kept calling us Yellow Pearl. And we kept saying, "No, no, we're not Yellow Pearl, we're Chris and JoAnne," and we were very clear about that. But it was like, she wasn't listening.

[A *Grain of Sand* song playing in the background]

Media used to call us the Yellow Peril and made caricatures of Asian people as these monstrous invaders. Chris took that phrase and turned it into the Yellow Pearl, making the imagery of thinking about this little irritant [unintelligible 00:10:12] and layers and layers of oppression etc., and building up until, you create this beautiful pearl. So, it was a way of turning a negative into a positive. In her mind, she thought Yellow Pearl was a good title for us, even though we weren't Yellow Pearl, we were Chris and JoAnne.

[A *Grain of Sand* song playing in the background]

When we walked in the room, John Lennon was talking on the phone to the Mike Douglas people. And he was arguing like hell to have us on the show and saying, "I don't care, blah, blah, blah," and then he says, "Fuck you," and slammed down the phone. Yoko said, "Oh, don't worry, John. They can't do that show without us. They'll call back." And we're looking at each other, like, "What's going on?" And they were going to have to push a black singer off in order to make space for us to come on. We said to them, "No, you don't have to do that. It's okay. We don't have to do their show." We clearly said that because we felt bad that somebody who would get national exposure who really wanted it would get

bumped because of us. But it wasn't about us. It was about John and Yoko getting their say and getting their way. Finally, yes, they did call back. The network called back. And they said, "Okay." We couldn't get out of it at that point. There was no pulling out for us.

We load up into this limousine with John and Yoko, and they're in the front with Bobby Seale and Jerry Rubin. We're sitting in the back of the limo looking at this scene in front of us, looking at each other, like, "Nobody's going to believe this. This is like a movie." We're driving to Philadelphia, and we're already late. Chris and I are looking at each other, "What are we going to sing?" If we have one song to sing, one chance, three and a half minutes, how do we want to present ourselves? What is the song we want to sing? And if we only get to sing one song, we're going to sing *We are the Children*. It was one of our favorite songs, but we just felt it was emblematic of who we were.

[singing] We are the children of a migrant worker. We are the offspring of the concentration camp. Sons and daughters of the railroad builder who leave their stamp on America. We are the children of the Chinese waiter. Born and raised in a laundry room. We are the offspring of the Japanese gardener, that's me, who leave their stamp on America. [singing ends]

I was about two years old when my whole family was uprooted and forcefully relocated in a concentration camp. We were considered a threat to US internal security since we were on the Pacific Ocean. Before they put us into the normal concentration camp, they put us in a racetrack. Santa Anita Racetrack was a place that had horse stalls and barracks. You have to understand most of these places were dirty, windy, sandy places. Also, there was the hum of people's voices, English and Japanese people who were worried and mumbling. When we went to mess hall, some clatter of dishes of tin because we were eating on what soldiers ate on these tin platters. It was horrible food, and there wasn't food that was normal to us. There was no sour sauce, there was no rice. This was what white people ate.

The limousine rolls up at the television station in Philadelphia. Everybody's waiting, and there's a huge crowd of fans in front of the studio, blocking the doors, waiting for the car to arrive. Yoko and John were used to this routine. Yoko turns to John and said, "John, are you ready?" "It's ready, get set. Okay, let's go." And they go out and as much as possible, they're pushing through, and people are trying to protect them to get them through the door, and we're in their shadow, pushing ourselves through as well, "Okay, you got your guitar?" "Yeah." "Okay," we're getting through, and we get in the studio. And, of course, when the door closes, it's another world.

If you've ever been in a TV station, there's nothing more unreal. It's not even like a real stage, because the lights are really loud, they're really bright. Everything is made for the camera. You as a person up there really don't have that much power once you're on there and the cameras are rolling, and this is live television. So, they're rushing us up, because we're the unknown. Chris and I are the unknown. They want to hear the song that we're going to sing. They were anxious about it, and they have two seats up there, and the lights on us and as gracefully as possible, after all that fuss, he pulls out his guitar, and he starts playing, and we go into the song.

[singing] We are the children of the migrant worker. We are the offspring of the concentration camp.  
[singing ends] And we get to this line, [singing starts] watching war movies with the next-door neighbor,  
we're secretly rooting for the other side. [singing ends]

And the director is coming up and very nervously saying, "What else do you have to sing?" "How many songs do we get to sing?" "Just one." Chris and I look at each other, and that's when I said, "If we're only singing one song, we're going to sing this one." "Well, you know, there's the housewives of the Midwest, watching war movies, rooting for the other side, they might think it's subversive." And I'm thinking, "Subversive? They've got Jerry Rubin up there. They've got Bobby Seale over there. They're worried about us being subversive?" That was crazy. We stood our ground. "No, we want to sing this song." And then it didn't stop, he kept pressing us, "Well, what else do you have to sing?" It was getting very uncomfortable.

Then, John Lennon comes up. "Can't you just fudge the words a bit?" We didn't. John Lennon is asking us to fudge our words? Would he change his words from revolution to evolution or strawberry raspberry because somebody wanted him to? I think he would have said, "Screw you. I don't need to do this." And then, the director again comes at us. "What else can you sing?" Pushing, pushing, pushing. All of a sudden, I just felt red. Red, thermometer just filled me up, and something took over me, and I heard this voice saying, "You put us in concentration camps and you're saying we can't sing this song!?"

And I see my finger pointing out in front of me, I'm looking around and I see Chris looking at me in shock. I went, "Oh, my God!" That was me. John and Yoko were frozen too, "Who are these people that we brought here?" They didn't know what to do, but they knew they had to know that I was right. I was going to cry. I didn't want them to see me to cry. That's the last thing I wanted them to see.

I just turned around and started walking for the door. Finger's still pointed in the air, still wondering what I was going to do. And before I could reach the door, the director's coming at me, from behind, "No, no, it's okay. It's okay. You can sing anything you want. I didn't do it. I didn't put you in a concentration camp. You can sing anything you want. It's okay."

I never lose my temper like that. Never. I don't even know if I lost my temper. I just lost it. We have heard, "You can't sing that song. You can't be here. We don't want you. "You have to be quiet. You are the good, quiet Americans," all of those things have been stuffed down our throat for a century. Everything melted down and came back into real time. And then, John Lennon, after this whole incident when the director happened, he was very tentative about how he introduced us.

**John Lennon:** These are two young people, they call themselves Yellow Pearl. Their grandparents were Japanese, I guess. They're young singers called Chris and JoAnne, and beautiful singers and they have a story to tell. They're going to come on now and do it. Here they are, Yellow Pearl.

[applause]

**Nobuko:** But we were affected, however, by that moment. How could I not think about what had happened before? That's why I grabbed the microphone to make it my microphone.

Usually, people know very little about Asians. And this is a song about our movement, about our people's plight in America.

We are the Children  
We are the children of the migrant worker  
We are the offspring of the concentration camp  
Sons and daughters of the railroad builder  
Who leave their stamp on America

**Nobuko:** That's where I felt the ability to say, "We're singing the song about us, who we don't know anything about."

[*We are the Children* playing in background]

**Nobuko:** I just recently saw the whole thing when we sang, "and we will stamp on America." Oh, my God!

[*We are the Children* playing in background]

**Nobuko:** We will stamp and stamp and stamp, and we will stamp and stamp and stamp. Yes, we will stamp on America. [laughs] Oh, my God! I was even embarrassed watching it myself.

After that, John and Mike Douglas come forward and there's no other word for it, but patronizing.

**Mike Douglas:** Some of the lines I picked up on was, "foster children of the Pepsi generation,"-

**John Lennon:** That was a beauty.

**Mike Douglas:** -which is a classic line, and "watching the war movies and secretly rooting for the other side." Now, John, you said that their grandfather was Japanese, but you're third generation, you're American born?

**Nobuko:** Yeah.

**Mike Douglas:** Where in this country?

**Nobuko:** LA.

**Mike Douglas:** LA.

**John Lennon:** It must be a strange thing, wasn't it? Being either Japanese or German or even Indian here, all the time watching them war movies, they don't know which side to identify.

**Nobuko:** Oh, what a great song, especially those words, "watching war movies and rooting for the other side." I don't know, they showed my mouth open, "Are they kidding? Did he really say that?" In a sense, the whole situation was a confirmation of what we already knew. We knew that we were representing young Asian Americans who wanted to revolt against this whole system that had kept us subservient. They had kept it silent. So, breaking that silence was important to us. I'm here to be myself. I'm not here to be on your stage. We're making our own statement on our own stage on our own terms. That's why we wanted to do this show.

After that incident, I can't remember ever being asked to do another big TV show. [laughs] Strangely enough, I never ever heard of any letters from the Midwest housewives. I think they sort of absorbed it without much trouble at all.

[music]

**Glynn:** Nobuko, thank you so very much for sharing your story. After their first and last TV performance, Nobuko and Chris recorded *Yellow Pearl, We are the Children*, and other songs that are in the 1973 album, *A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle by Asians in America*. While Chris unfortunately passed away in 2005, Nobuko is still making music to this day. For more, check out her recently released memoir, *Not Yo' Butterfly: My Long Song of Relocation, Race, Love, and Revolution*. And check out what she's working on next on her website. [nobukomiyamoto.org](http://nobukomiyamoto.org). The story featured the music of Nobuko Miyamoto and Chris Iijima, as well as recording from an episode of *The Mike Douglas Show* that aired February 15th, 1972. Original score by Daniel Riera, was produced by David Exumé.

[music]

**Glynn:** Now, after the break, a massage therapist in Miami Beach gets the business offer of a lifetime and shakes hands with the devil. Stay tuned.

[music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment. Today, on The Line episode, we're featuring stories from people who had or thought they had a very specific point at which they knew they would go no further. With some folks, that line, it gets a little fuzzy and before you know it, you wonder exactly how you got where you got. Snap Judgment.

[music]

**David:** It was Friday night, and Efraim asked me if I wanted to go to a rabbi's house for dinner. We were just going for the free food and free drinks and to meet good-looking girls.

**Female Speaker:** David Packouz and Efraim Diveroli were old friends from synagogue. They had actually left the Jewish faith, but free food was free food. So, they got into Efraim's old black Mercedes and drove through the streets of Miami Beach.

**David:** While on the way, he was talking about his business. He said that he could introduce me to a business that would be much, much more lucrative than what I was doing now and that he could prove that he was making a huge amount of money and he could teach me how to make it. So, I asked him, "Well, how much money are you making?" And he said, "Well, this is top secret information." And I said, "Well, you would expect me to join you in business and you won't even tell me how much money you're making? I need to know what the potential is." And right then, we had arrived at the rabbi's house and he turned off the car and he looked at me and he's like, "I'm only telling you this to inspire you, not because I'm bragging. I have \$1.8 million in the bank." And he was 18 years old.

**Female Speaker:** David was a part-time massage therapist, putting himself through college. So, almost \$2 million in the bank was both totally alien and completely captivating. Their group of friends passed their time sneaking into hotel pools. To David, Efraim was an unlikely owner of a multimillion-dollar business.

**David:** He just seemed like a total clown. and just like another stoner, he was constantly scheming about different ways of making money. So, I knew he was making money. I mean he was said he was making money, but I had no idea how much. Well, when he told me he had \$1.8 million in the bank, I said, "Holy [beep]." [laughs] I couldn't believe it.

**Female Speaker:** When Efraim told David about how much money he made, David had only one question.

**David:** "What is it that you do?" And he said, "Well, the government is always looking to buy things. For example, handguns or various common ammunition. They don't really care who they get it from as long as they get the best price and from someone who's reliable, who will actually deliver it. So, they put it out for open bid."

**Female Speaker:** Most of the contracts Efraim won were military contracts. Basically, he was an arms dealer.

**David:** My mind was swimming. I couldn't believe that he actually had made that much money. He definitely didn't live like a millionaire. We had some drinks, and pretty much I was quiet the whole time just thinking about it. And by the end, I told him, "I'll give it a shot." My plan was to make a few million dollars and then get out and do what I like doing in order to live the life I always wanted.

**Female Speaker:** Efraim took David to his office, which was actually just his apartment, opened up his laptop and said-

**David:** "Let me show you how it works."

**Female Speaker:** Efraim was getting contracts to sell arms and ammo from a website, *fedbizopps.gov*. On FedBizOpps, he would scan the listings for contracts he thought he could win. The listings read almost like a Craigslist ad. Except instead of asking for help mowing the lawn, these ads ask for large quantities of military supplies. You can find ads for everything, from guided missiles to Blackhawk helicopter landing gear, to strangely corncob grounds.

**David:** My first contract that I actually won was for 50,000 gallons of propane.

**Female Speaker:** Well, I would have no idea where to find that much propane. How'd you know where to go?

**David:** Google. That's it. Really.

**Female Speaker:** Oh, okay. But can I google where to find like 50,000 grenades or AK-47s?

**David:** Absolutely. Of course, you can. Who makes grenades? Who makes AK-47s? A range of companies do it, and those companies are looking to sell as long as they think you will buy and that you're legally allowed to do so. Most companies dealing with government contracts are large companies. You have your Lockheed Martins, Boeings, General Dynamics, these are Fortune 500 companies with tens of thousands of employees. And we were just two guys in a living room, smoking weed and bidding on contracts. It's like the local lemonade stand going against Tropicana.

We actually won a fair amount. We started winning more and more as we learned how to work the system. We were working at his desk, he had a big desk in his living room that we had two laptops on, old laptops, and piles of paper everywhere. This was 2005-2006, there's these two huge wars, Iraq and Afghanistan, raging and the government was looking to buy massive quantities of things. They were looking to buy huge amounts of bedsheets and body armor and bullets and air conditioners and trucks. Pretty much anything you could think of, they were looking to buy. But because he had a lot of experience in military equipment, he focused on that. 80% to 90% of the business was weapons and ammunition.

On a typical day, we would work around 18 hours. And that's pretty much from when we would wake up until when we would fall asleep, and we would order delivery so we wouldn't have to leave to get food, so we could eat while we worked. I'd never worked so hard in my life.

**Female Speaker:** They'd be eating Chinese noodles from a carton and sleeping on the floor, and delivering weapons to Colombia and Germany. They bid on contracts for Nepal, Niger, and Chad.

**David:** But most of the business was in Iraq, and later in Afghanistan.

**Female Speaker:** As they bid on these contracts, David saw the promise of really big money flash on the screen before him. If everything went well, he could be making millions.

**David:** There were many moments I considered backing out, but then I would see the money coming in, I just told myself, "I could put up with it for a little bit longer, I just need to make some money and then I'll quit." So, I was planning on retiring after that and traveling the world, and buying a yacht, and living the good life. That was the plan. Who is the Efraim guy, who it was-- one of the robber barons, the guy who cornered the silver market in the 1800s. A reporter asked him, "How much money would it be enough?" And he said, "More." [laughs]

**Female Speaker:** Then, David got a call, promised all the money he wanted and then some. It was the call to step up into the high stakes arena of the big-time arms dealers.

**David:** I was driving to see my girlfriend and have dinner with her. Efraim called me, and he said, "I just saw one of the biggest solicitations request for quotation I've ever seen on FedBizOpps, which is bigger than anything I've ever seen. You have to come to the office right now. We've got to discuss it." And I told him, "I'm on the way to dinner with my girlfriend." He's like, "Well, [bleep] that. You want to hang out with your girl or do you want to get rich?"

**Female Speaker:** David and Efraim pored over the contract. It was a deal to supply all the munitions for the new Afghan army and police force. So, they got to work.

**David:** We looked at the request for quote, and it was huge. I mean it was like 100 million rounds of AK-47 ammo, 100,000 grenades, anti-aircraft rockets. It was enormous.

**Female Speaker:** David spent two months working around the clock. He called every contact in the world he thought might be able to supply the stuff for the contract, scouring the planet for lots and lots of bullets.

**David:** I was calling Russia, I was calling Ukraine, I was calling Bulgaria, I was calling Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Korea. I'm calling most of these countries, they usually don't speak English very well. So, I would just say, "English, English, English. I want to buy. I want to buy." We would say, "Oh, yeah, I'll get my sales team working on that." Or, "I'll have my accountant contact you." "We'll get our procurement division on that right away, sir." We would act like we had like a whole staff. But, of course, it was just us two. We lied all the time.

**Female Speaker:** David and Efraim put in a bid for the Afghan ammo at \$300 million, and they won. They were the lowest bidder by far, partly because two guys in an apartment have a lot less overhead than a company with tens of thousands of employees.

**David:** It was-- how do I put it? It was surreal. It was very odd. I was [beep] myself on a constant basis. [laughs] It was a constant state of panic. Without us, the Afghan army had no ammunition, and they wouldn't be able to fight the Taliban.

**Glynn:** Oh, it doesn't stop there. Don't go anywhere. The stunning conclusion in just a moment, when Snap Judgement continues. Stay tuned.

[music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment. You're listening to The Line episode. My name is Glynn Washington and when last we left, David Packouz and his partner, Efraim, were in quite a fix. And David, he's got a habit of going from the frying pan into the fire.

**David:** Without us, the Afghan army had no ammunition, and they wouldn't be able to fight the Taliban.

**Female Speaker:** The hard part now was that David and Efraim actually had to find the ammo and the weapons to fulfill the contract.

**David:** In Abu Dhabi, every year, there is one of the biggest arms exhibitions in the world. I went there by myself to try to source ammunition for the Afghan contract.

It was like the cantina scene in *Star Wars*. Pretty much every degenerate in the world was there, or at least in my mind. You'd see generals in full military gear, sleazy-looking businessmen, government officials. Pretty much every single country was represented, Chinese generals, Africans, Europeans. Everyone was just having cocktails together and it was just incredible to me because I knew some of these people are mortal enemies and they're fighting each other and here they are, and they're just schmoozing over cocktails. Rumors were flying around of who was going to go to war next, where the best countries were to get the best prostitutes.

During the day, you're in the exhibition halls. They had very expensive bottles of wine and champagne and caviar and hors d'oeuvres and really good-looking women to serve it all. They spared no expense. Outside, they had live fire weapons drills, where they would have like tanks jumping sand dunes and blowing things up, and helicopter gunships, and it was live military drills that you could watch. There were bleachers where everyone would stand and drinks and hors d'oeuvres being passed around. It was being at a big football game where the sport was military maneuvers. I was by far the youngest person there, of course, because everyone in this business is military or ex-military. So, they're all men in their middle ages, and they just looked at me as if I was some kid and they were wondering what I was doing there, which is why I always had copies of our contract in my briefcase to prove that it was the real deal and actually had real business deals to do.

**Female Speaker:** Was the arms business, in your experience, more morally dubious than other industries? Was it shadier?

**David:** The arms business by its nature is definitely shadier and more dubious because arms could be used for great evil, and the people that you're dealing with sometimes sell to people who used them for great evil. But at the time, did it stop me? No, it didn't.

**Female Speaker:** David kept working to get the guns and the bullets. But as they worked, these wayward kids from Miami Beach that snuck into the halls of power, started to get some unwanted attention.

**David:** Because we were winning so many contracts, we were upsetting a lot of our competitors. They worked real hard on these contracts, and they kept on losing them to us. They started slandering us to various people in Iraq. They started telling people that we were coke dealers and that's how we got the money to fund the contract.

**Female Speaker:** David was sending plane loads of ammo all over the globe for the Afghan arms contract. At one point, he had over 5000 tons of bullets waiting to be loaded into cargo planes in Albania. And it was there that the two-man operation began to crumble against the powerful tectonic plates of the international arms trade.

**David:** Albania is famous for-- how do you put it? Let's put it this way. The State Department guy told us, "Most third-world countries are third world. But Albania is the fifth world, they need to be supervised."

**Female Speaker:** He sent a friend over to Albania to check on the deal. Make sure the ammo wasn't faulty and to repackage it so it would cost less in airfreight. But when their friend walked into the underground Albanian bunker and saw the piles of bullets, he immediately called David.

**David:** When he went over there, he told us, "Hey, there's Chinese letters all over the boxes," and we had no idea. We're like, "Uh-oh, this could be a problem."

**Female Speaker:** Here's the thing about Chinese ammo. It was illegal. Their contract said it explicitly. And while technically, this ammo hadn't been bought directly from the Chinese. They knew this mountain of Chinese ammo was a really big problem.

**David:** We discovered that it was Chinese ammunition, and then we figured, "Well, it's better not to tell the army about this." What they don't know won't hurt them. The ammunition is excellent quality, and that's all that really matters. It's not enriching the Chinese government in any way, and that's all the anti-Chinese ban was meant to be about. It'll be fine.

We took the ammunition out of the wooden crates that they were packed in and out of the metal sardine cans and we packaged it in plastic bags and in cardboard boxes. We were very careful not to include any papers that had Chinese letters in the boxes. So, there was no more Chinese words on the packaging once we had repackaged it. We started delivering, and we delivered, I think, by the end close to 70 aircraft loads of ammunition, each holding around 45 tons.

**Female Speaker:** He says anybody would have done that. He says shenanigans like this happen every day in the arms trade. The big boys don't get caught, but David and Efraim were not the big boys. A rival competitor, an Albanian businessman who had been cut out of a deal, started this whisper

campaign against David and Efraim. He told the Pentagon officials to check them out, and soon David and Efraim's was raided by the feds.

**David:** The government eventually decided that constituted fraud. As they say, it was a conspiracy to defraud the United States of America. Well, I felt my life was over, because they said, "Okay, you have 71 aircraft loads that you delivered to Afghanistan, each one with a certificate saying that the point of origin is Albania and you signed off on that, and really the origin was China. And therefore, each aircraft load delivery, each document you signed is one count of fraud. And each count of fraud has a maximum of five years in prison. So, 71 counts of fraud for 71 aircraft loads, is around 350 years in prison."

**Female Speaker:** I feel all of us in our dark moments of shame feel like-- I don't know, there's some kind of celestial checks and balances. Did you ever feel you would caught because of greed, because you had been greedy?

**David:** I did think that. When I got caught and I realized that I was facing possibly a lifetime in prison, a lot of things go through your head and you evaluate your entire life and how you got up to this point, and how you could be so stupid and all the mistakes that you've made. One of the big ones I was constantly thinking about was getting involved in the business in the first place. I wondered why I did it. Of course, I knew but I thought that it was certain-- it's almost like a punishment for turning a blind eye towards certain things. I wish I had never gotten involved in the first place, that's for sure.

**Female Speaker:** In fact, David never saw any of the money he dreamed of. Now, he was broke and a federal criminal.

**David:** Like any sane person caught up in the system, I pled guilty and they reduced my charges down from 71 counts of fraud to 1 count of fraud. Eventually, the judge had mercy on me and gave me just seven months of house arrest and seven months' probation.

**Female Speaker:** He had to reset. There would be no more drinking cocktails and watching rocket launches with African warlords. Instead, after serving his house arrest, David walked out of his apartment, armed with a backpack full of scented candles and soothing music.

**David:** Well, I went back to doing massage to make ends meet. I would have my massage table on a cart and a little bag with all my equipment, such as essential oils and massage oil and music. But it was strange. It was definitely strange. After I went back into massage, I informed all of my former clients that I was doing massage again, and the vast majority of them were very thrilled to hear that and they asked me, "So, what have you been doing the last year or two?" I would say, "Yes, it's a long story." It's been interesting.

[music]

**Glynn:** Big thanks to David Packouz for sharing your story. If you want to find out the dirty, dirty, gritty, gritty behind this piece, check out the book written by Guy Lawson, out in stores right now. It's called *Arms and the Dudes*. Find a link on our website, [snapjudgment.org](http://snapjudgment.org). The piece was produced by Anna Sussman and Julia DeWitt in collaboration with Guy Lawson. Original score and sound design by our own Renzo Gorrio.

[music]

**Glynn:** A lot just happened, so much, and that was but one episode. If you dig in, more, so many more stories await for your listening pleasure and understand. Stories are sexy. Subscribe to Snap Judgement Podcast, and instantly become the sexiest person you know, and what's more, you can make passersby green with envy by rocking your very own Snap Judgment t-shirt available right now and exclusively at [snapjudgment.org](http://snapjudgment.org). That was brought to you by the team, but never crosses the line. Except, of course, for the producer, Mark Ristich, when he heard about that, two-for-one donut special, he crossed the line quick. 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. And while this is not the news-- No wait, is this the news? In fact, you could draw a line in the sand and dare your little buddies not to cross it, and when they do cross it, you could draw another line and you will still, still not be far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.

[music]