[Snap Judgment intro]

**Glynn:** Okay, so, as a kid, we moved to a super small town in Northern Michigan. We had to do it the hard way, the harder way, because we didn't just move to the small town of nowhere, no. No, no, no. We move the outskirts of the small town in the middle of nowhere. And we'd venture into the small town, get a stack of dog food from the IGA grocery store, maybe put some gas in our Country Squire station wagon. Well, we're in for some special looks from some very special people. And yes, as the only black family around, a lot of that can be expected, but sometimes, it seems put a little bit more oomph into the outrage, the suspicious glances. And one day, I asked the neighbor boy, "Carl, man, what's all that about?" And he says, "They are just trying to tell you, we are on the pecking order. See, in the town, they're on the top and out here, we're on the bottom. They just want to let you know."

I nod even though I don't know what he's going on about pecking order. But then we get chickens, and I learned that pecking order is a real thing, chickens, especially chickens that are just being introduced to each other. They will peck, they will fight with other chickens until they establish who's who and what is what. After that, mostly it frightens down mostly, mostly. Unless you introduce something new, something odd, something from the outside, then, then the fight can start back up again.

Today on Snap Judgment, we add something odd, and it comes from up above. Snap Judgment proudly presents Space Rocks. One amazing story you will not soon forget. My name is Glynn Washington. Strap in, but remember, on the farm, the chicken that causes the most trouble, gets cooked. Well, you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

But again, you know there's something special about the small town of Montrose, surrounded by the majestic mountains and the quiet mesas of Western Colorado. These mountains, they've always had a pull, drawing people who want something more, something bigger, something shinier. Which brings us to today's story, a story that starts off with a crash. Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

**Blaine:** Because we know something fell up there.

**Shaina:** It was a cold morning. Blaine Reed strapped into a neighbor's two-seater Piper Cub airplane and ascended over the mesas of western Colorado, up to where the air gets thin.

**Blaine:** My hope was is that we could look down on this airplane and see impact pits in the snow, maybe some broken tree limbs or something.

**Shaina:** But when he looked down, he instead saw the hillsides, crawling with people.

**Blaine:** When we get over the drop off into Montrose, there that mountainside there with people crawling all over it trying to find something. Yeah, they were trying to find a meteorite.

**Shaina:** Scores of people, with metal detectors and backpacks, were trying to find a piece of rock that crashed down from outer space.

[crash]

**Duane:** Dude, I took my quad, went up there across the bridge and hunted for it. It was fun to go look for something that might be valuable. And, of course, everybody was out trying to find it, get a piece of it and everything.

**Shaina:** Duane was one of those hopeful prospectors on the mesa that snowy morning, searching for a fallen space rock. Like a lot of people in town, he'd seen the fireball in the sky the night before. He had been driving home from a square dance meeting.

**Duane:** All of a sudden, the sky just lit up with this orange screamer. It come in with a lot of magnitude and fire everything behind it. Boy, it really left a streak across the sky and everything. Like that red fireball streak come out of the sky and then landed out there in the prairie someplace.

**Shaina:** The fireball was a piece of cosmic debris, plummeting through the atmosphere as fast as 36,000 miles per hour, leaving a glorious orange afterglow in the night sky.

**Duane:** I've always remembered mom said, "If you see a falling star, you're supposed to make a wish and it will come through," so I'm sure I made a wish.

**Shaina:** What do you think you wished for?

**Duane:** Oh, I don't know. Probably to win the lotto or to meet a pretty girl. Who knows?

**Shaina:** [laughs] Duane Renfrow is 70 now. He's a retired vet, he lives alone in a trailer, in the small used-to-be-mining town of Montrose, Colorado.

**Duane:** Never been married, never had no kids. I've got lots of hobbies. I'm in a black powder club, and I'm in the quad club and the metal detector club and the gold prospecting club and the square dance club.

**Shaina:** So, people like Duane Renfrow were already geared up to go hunting when the fireball came to town.

**Blaine:** There's one, there's three--[crosstalk]

**Shaina:** And then Blaine Reed, the guy who went up in the Piper Cub airplane, he wrote an article on the Montrose Daily Press, telling them exactly how to do it. Exactly how to find a meteorite.

**Blaine:** When an asteroid out there starts as a chondrite like this, it gets big enough that it impacts, aluminum-26--[crosstalk]

**Shaina:** When it hits the earth from space, like a blast from a shotgun, it'll form pits in the ground.

**Blaine:** It stays on the surface with the stone material. So, there is no such thing as an iron meteorite that has 1% manganese in it. That's just a matter of just physics. That's just what happens when you melt this stuff down, and that's how it separates. The meteorites themselves, that's kind of their interesting part is they have to connect you with another world because they're not from earth. I mean they're not from a different universe or different solar system, but I'm used to thinking outside the box--[crosstalk]

**Shaina:** Blaine says he was a nerdy kid with few friends and mean parents. He was in sixth grade when he saw his first fireball standing in his front yard in the west side of Denver. He looked up at the sky.

**Blaine:** I saw this meteor starting to come in. It was white, and then it turned brilliant green, and even started going to yellow. I swear, good thing there was about six eight inches of snow on the ground because I just was so dumbstruck, I literally fell over backwards.

**Shaina:** Blaine was so excited by the dancing flames he saw on the sky. He ran around the neighborhood for hours searching for fragments of the meteorite.

**Blaine:** I started searching the neighborhood, and I came up with this really vesicular, weird metallic glassy looking rock and, "I found my meteorite." It makes you think differently, it makes you have to expand your mind to consider it. You have to ignore all the day to day earthly stuff when you're holding a piece of outer space.

**Shaina:** He didn't actually find a meteorite that day. But today, Blaine's office is covered in maps and rock diagrams, pictures of the Bolivian mountains where he actually found a meteorite.

**Blaine:** That is what's called a eucrite, it's a type of meteorite called an achondrite. That is actually from the surface of the asteroid Vesta.

**Shaina:** And there's this desk. It's a mess of rocks in dishes and rocks in plastic bags.

**Blaine:** This isn't that pretty, but this is telling us the story of an asteroid that survived big enough and long enough to actually become quasi small planet with an iron core and all of the enriched mantle and a basaltic lava surface. [crosstalk]

**Shaina:** The rest of Blaine's house is decorated with dinosaur bones, a World War II missile, a toy airplane. He drinks water from a reused yellowed plastic Gatorade bottle, and reaches into the front pocket of his jeans.

**Blaine:** It's so incredibly valuable. Here's a piece I carry in my pocket, normally, it's there. Basically--

**Shaina:** It's there that in your pocket all the time?

**Blaine:** Not all the time.

**Shaina:** It just happened to have that in your pocket.

**Blaine:** Well, I like showing people. Now you've got something that was out there, somewhere around Jupiter, and that's it. I mean, you just have something that is not from this world. It makes you think differently. [crosstalk]

**Shaina:** Blaine's bought and sold space rocks from all over the world. He has a degree in geology.

**Blaine:** I'm a meteorite guy but if I said "the meteorite guy," I'm sure one of these other clowns will come out of the woodwork.

**Shaina:** So, on his 30th anniversary as a meteorite guy, he came up with a new name.

**Blaine:** The meteorite pimp. [crosstalk]

**Shaina:** He even made commemorative wine glasses.

**Blaine:** -30th anniversary, I think that's why I said, "Pimping meteorites for 30 years." [chuckles]

**Shaina:** He sends paper catalogs to customers and twice a month emails to some 300 subscribers. He's so well known in the space rocks community that people like Bill Nye The Science Guy called Blaine when they want meteorites. Blaine has handled hundreds of meteorites. So many, he says he can identify them with his hands.

[phone rings]

**Shaina:** He takes calls from prospectors and collectors from all over the world who want his opinion. Is this rock I found from outer space? Is it a real meteorite?

**Blaine:** All right, talk to you late. Bye. [hangs up the phone]

**Shaina:** All this, actually turns out to be quite dangerous work.

**Blaine:** It has come close a couple times to throwing fists. When I tell them they don't have a meteorite, they get so angry, they start swinging. Don't get me wrong, I will swing back.

**Shaina:** Another hopeful prospector came to his house with rocks in his hands.

**Blaine:** I said, "It's not a meteorite. I'm sorry." He said, "Well, it has to be because I was raking my leaves, and this was sitting on top of the pile. Where else could it have come from?" I say, "What it looks like to me is that somebody has been out finding old lead tire balancing weights and melted them down." He just started getting angry, to the point of pushing me around. "This is a [bleep] meteorite. You don't know what you're doing." And yeah, it came real close.

**Shaina:** Right after that fireball, after Blaine wrote that article about how to identify meteorites, calls came in from all over town, from excited folks who had found rocks. Blaine was the guy who had to over and over again tell them, "Nope, not a meteorite."

Does that take some sort of emotional toll on you?

**Blaine:** it does. Yeah, sure. I'm not the guy is like, "Oh, ha-ha, you have a fake rock, and deal with it." No. I mean, it's sad. I don't have to do that too many times, thankfully.

**Shaina:** One of the saddest cases was a man in Montrose, who found what he believed to be so many meteorites in his front yard, that he went out and bought a new Durango truck. He filled it with his meteorites and brought them to Blaine.

**Blaine:** He'd thought he'd won the lottery. His wife had called me before he drove up there screaming at me that she was going to sue me, that I needed to fix her husband, I needed to help him because I created this mess.

**Shaina:** Blaine unlisted his phone number, and got a PO box for his mail.

**Blaine:** I'm not going to allow people to come here. So, Dave, I talked with him because he sells metal detectors and stuff.

**Shaina:** He stopped meeting people at his home for meteorite appraisal. Instead, he met them in a store called--

**Dave:** Mr. Detector. We try to meet the needs of the prospectors and meteoroid hunters.

**Shaina:** Most towns don't have a store that meets the needs of prospectors. But Montrose is kind of a rock and gem town that used to serve the nearby gold, silver, and uranium mines. But most of those mines closed a long time ago. At Mr. Detector, you can find metal detectors, then and now golden gem maps, silver coins and laminated $2 bills in shiny display cases.

**Dave:** I think everybody should have a pet meteorite.

**Shaina:** The store is run by this guy, Dave Lehman.

**Dave:** [crosstalk] -you've got one. Wouldn’t you like to have one?

**Shaina:** Every few days or so, Blaine goes into Mr. Detector to identify any rocks dropped off by hopeful meteorite hunters.

**Dave:** When we look at something, it feels like a rock, it looks like a rock, we call it a rock. Well, Blaine looks at it and he says, "Oh, this is a Brescia feldspar." "This is granite." "This is whatever." I should show you one here.

**Shaina:** Dave puts a cardboard packing box on the table and opens it slowly. He pulls out index cards, glued to rocks.

**Dave:** Seeing similarities here?

**Shaina:** Yeah. Does that fit in?

**Dave:** This is a meteorite. This is a meteowrong.

**Shaina:** Whoa. How do you know?

**Dave:** It's the difference--

**Shaina:** It's less heavy.

**Dave:** That's got high carbon, right?

**Blaine:** Yeah, carbon, manganese. It's one of the Steve Curry specimens.

**Shaina:** Steve Curry.

**Dave:** That's the one he gave me.

**Shaina:** And why do you keep it?

Steve Curry came into Dave's shop many years after that Thanksgiving fireball.

**Dave:** He asked me one day if I would be interested in handling any of the ones he had. It didn't make any difference to me.

**Shaina:** Steve Curry left rocks with Mr. Detector. But he did something else that most rock hopefuls don't really do. Along with his rocks, he left a list of elements to prove that the rocks were actually pieces of meteorites. So, Blaine went to Mr. Detector to look at the rocks.

**Blaine:** Of course, I went down there, and there was four different rocks. I looked at them all. Here's a chunk of magnetite. Here's a basalt rock. Jere's a weathered quartzites. And here is--[crosstalk]

**Shaina:** You know, meteowrongs.

**Blaine:** Osmium, iridium. Well, I don't think it's osmium meteorite, iridium maybe. SU, there's no element SU.

**Dave:** It's for sucker.

**Shaina:** Do you think he believed that this was a meteorite?

**Dave:** I think he did. I really think he did.

**Shaina:** When Dave called Steve Curry, and told him his rocks were mere rocks--

**Blaine:** They wouldn't accept that. And that's when he called me and starts yelling at me that I need to come to his house and learn the error of my ways. He was like, "Well, you just don't understand what you're looking at." He had already fallen into this idea that he was a billionaire. He had deluded himself into believing our science wasn't right and his was better.

**Shaina:** Steve Curry wasn't your average hopeful prospector.

**Blaine:** This guy was just doing nothing but growing in strength and stature.

**Shaina:** Steve Curry also used big words like octahedrite and feldspathic breccia. He carried around binders full of lists of mineral elements, books like NASA's Apollo lunar sample Atlas, and the Lunar Meteorite Compendium. Rocks of all shapes and sizes. All that he found here in Colorado. He pointed to all this science of his own when he gave lectures at the local library, saying that anyone could find a meteorite if they just looked.

**Blaine:** Basically, looking for meteorites is a very, very labor and financially intensive job, and not to be negative, but it's something that is extremely hard. He was like, "Well, screw you."

**Shaina:** When I tried to track down Steve Curry, first, I found him on Facebook. His cover photo is a woman holding a cat on top of a human-size boulder. His comment below the picture, "Even a cat can identify a lunar." He wrote his own articles about local meteorite findings for the Montrose Daily Press.

**Blaine:** [crosstalk] -did full-page spreads on him and hyping all this bulldink, that was purely bulldink, so--[crosstalk]

**Shaina:** Blaine felt like he couldn't just stand by and watch someone else spread lies to his own town about meteorites. So, he called the paper's editor.

**Blaine:** I says, "Look, this is bulldink."

**Shaina:** Blaine says no one at the paper took him seriously.

**Blaine:** I left papers behind and they just had no interest in communicating. Their theory was that I'm trying to hide new meteorites from the world to keep mine more valuable. And I tried to explain that to him. "I'm not trying to hide anything."

**Shaina:** Steve Curry and his growing reputation was getting to Blaine. He seemed unable to let it go. Blaine even picked up the phone and called the library, asking them to stop Curry from giving his lectures.

**Blaine:** They just basically said FO, and hung up.

**Shaina:** So, Blaine started hanging posters around town with a word "WANTED" in big capital letters up top. Underneath, Steve Curry's specimens.

**Blaine:** "I'll pay $10 per specimen. I only need to borrow it, nondestructive." And again, it was going to be left with Dave Lehman here. I understood there might be some issues, but I had no concept, no knowledge, no idea that it would go this way. So, what do you do? Again, once your wheels leave the ground, you're on the ride.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** When we return, will Blaine Reed be able to prove his theory that Steve Curry's rocks are just rocks? Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Space Rocks Episode. When last we left, Blaine Reed had started a poster campaign to collect Steve Curry's rocks and prove that they were just mere rocks. What happens next? You'll never guess. Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

**Shaina:** Blaine's game plan, collect Steve Curry's rocks, prove they were mere rocks, then take them to the police as evidence of Steve Curry's fraud. Soon, townspeople began to offer up their magic space rocks. The rocks they had gotten from Steve Curry to Blaine's scientific testing.

**Blaine:** One poor girl brought in her little rock, and she was a hairdresser, and she had a note signed by Curry, "North [unintelligible 00:19:43] lunar highlands breccia, this is worth $64,500," for this little golf ball sized rock. It was just a hunk of basalt or something. I had to let her know. And she starts crying, saying, "Oh, my God. What are we going to do? What are we going to do? Oh, my God." I felt really bad because she was just bawling her head off.

**Shaina:** But it's not like Steve Curry had sold that little rock to the hairdresser. It was a gift. All the eight or so rocks Blaine was able to get from his poster campaign were gifts given out by Steve Curry. As Blaine went around town saying Steve Curry was a fraudster, Steve Curry's followers said, "No, he's a giver." They said he's a guy who knew how to find magical pieces of the great big universe and wanted to share them. He was like an intergalactic Santa Claus. When he showed up at local clubs, like Duane's metal detector club, people embraced him.

**Duane:** He knew a lot about geology and everything. But I don't know much anything about geology. I pick up a rock, and if it's pretty, I take it home. He brought all his meteorites and stuff and gave a talk and showed us all about meteorites and how you could tell it was a meteorite. Some of them bring you, according to the news and stuff, some of them bring them pretty penny.

**Shaina:** Steve Curry told stories to the townspeople, about finding meteorites right outside of Montrose.

**Duane:** So, we ask him if we could go with him and he said, "Sure." I think he really expected 5 of us would show up and I think there was at that 20 of us.

**Shaina:** The hopeful prospectors showed up at Black Canyon National Park that day.

**Duane:** We got out there, and I figured I must have found 13 different rocks with my metal detector. He come up and examined it, and he showed us exactly how he could tell it was a meteorite because as it entered the atmosphere on fire, it showed like the molten rock and everything that it would have been in a trail that would have probably left behind it and everything. He could explain it a lot better than I could. But standing there looking at that rock, I believed that was a meteorite and everything.

**Dave:** He even almost convinced the Montrose City Council and named Montrose, the Meteorite Capital of the World.

**Shaina:** After the gold and silver mines closed down decades ago, Montrose went from a well-oiled boomtown to a sleepy ex-mining town. So, as Steve Curry went around showing how Montrose was a hotspot for meteorites, he became sort of a hope. A hope that Blaine, for the life of him, could not break down with his anti-Curry poster campaigns or internet blasts. People in Montrose were hooked.

**Jane Doe:** I was sitting there with a broken leg. And rather than ask somebody to take me to the seminar at the library, I called the librarian and she said she would give my phone number to Steve Curry, the speaker. He called and came down. I had to yell, "Come in." So, he came in. Then, I wheeled over to one of the windows where we could look out that I could point out to him where I had seen black rocks, and he went down with his truck, came back into the house. He brought in, how many rocks, they were grainy, and they weren't smooth. He put them in my lap to start with [chuckles] gently because I was in a wheelchair. He explained a little bit about meteorites to me. He washed one or two of them in the sink, and I was kind of horrified at that, that, "Ah, that clay soil going down my drain, I hope he doesn't clog it up." But I can't say that there was anything unusual about him. He didn't have long hair. I know that.

**Shaina:** Steve Curry spent a whole day bringing rocks back and forth from the front yard into the house. And then, he stood in the kitchen holding a rock.

**Jane Doe:** I could see he kind of weighed it mentally in his hand. And then, he said, "It should sell about $2,000." And it surprised me, you might just as well have told me, you've got a diamond mine here that's worth a million or $2 million. I was left speechless. I was just simply left speechless.

**Shaina:** But you believed him?

**Jane Doe:** Yes. I had no doubt, or had no reason to not believe what he was saying.

**Shaina:** So, I feel if someone came to my house and picked up a bunch of rocks and said, "These rocks are worth $2,000 each." I probably would say, "Well, I don't believe you." I'm wondering what made you believe him?

**Jane Doe:** Well, I had no reason not to believe him. He was going around giving seminars to the library and had apparently accepted him as a speaker. At any rate, I was friends with Steve Curry. Everybody needs friends. When you live alone, you need friends just like anybody does. Can you let the dog in?

**Shaina:** Can you tell me again, just introduce yourself, your name and how old you are?

**Jane Doe:** Well, you already know, my name is Jane Doe.

**Shaina:** Okay. And can you tell me a little bit about why you don't want to use your name?

**Jane Doe:** If the meteorite society is powerful enough to eliminate Steve Curry, what will they do to me? That is why I do not want to be advertised.

**Shaina:** When she's talking about the meteorite society, she's actually talking about Blaine Reed. And while he didn't eliminate Steve Curry, their feud would escalate to heights no one saw coming. Blaine was waiting and waiting for any evidence at all, that Steve Curry was actually profiting off his meteorites. And then he got a call from a friend, Steve curry had been spotted picking up money at a local gem store in the next town over. Blaine knew the store. He'd already tried to prove to them that their display case of Steve Curry's meteorites were fake.

**Blaine:** I tried to see if the store would allow me to come up and show them that their stuff was fake, Curry stuff was fake. And they just said, "No. We won't sell it to you because we know you're out to get Curry."

**Shaina:** And they want Curry stuff?

**Blaine:** Yes, because they said, "He has neat paperwork. He's got maps and diagrams. You say this but he shows that, so what are you going to do?"

**Shaina:** Blaine strapped an old spy watch onto his brother's wrist. It had a hidden video camera. The pair went inside the store.

**Blaine:** I've never done anything like that before, but you just have to, breathe deep, calm down, and say, "Well, okay, here we go."

**Shaina:** They found a case with rocks priced, Blaine says, in total for some $750,000. Blaine pointed to the most affordable one, about the size of a penny priced at $640.

**Blaine:** From the meteorite (meteowrong).

**Shaina:** They all came with papers saying it was from that same fireball that flew over Montrose so many years ago. But as far as Blaine could tell, it was a piece of scrap iron. He bought it with his wife's credit card.

**Blaine:** Because I couldn't lay it on a credit card that says Blaine Reed.

**Shaina:** Did you regret spending money on a fake rock?

**Blaine:** Ah, yes and no.

**Shaina:** You needed it for-- [crosstalk]

**Blaine:** Yeah, I absolutely needed it.

**Shaina:** This was his chance finally to prove that Curry was committing fraud.

**Blaine:** Yeah, I didn't take it to a lab. I maintained possession of the rock the entire time because I want to make sure there was a chain of ownership.

**Shaina:** Key Labs showed that the rock had almost no nickel in it. Only trace amounts. So not a meteorite by Cambridge Encyclopedia of Meteorites standards. Victory. Blaine drove with those papers down to the police station.

**Blaine:** I went up to the receptionist and said, "I need to talk to somebody. I've got a fairly serious case of fraud." When I went in there to do all of this, they just thought I was freaking nuts. She looked at me, shook her head like, "Whatever."

**Shaina:** She handed Blaine a form for a traffic ticket.

**Blaine:** "Just write something down," and I filled it all out and said, "Okay, I'm done." And then, they sent out an officer to collect it up and he's looking like this big burly guy, "I don't know what this is just-- As far as I'm aware, this is just buyer beware." And he took it away and I felt really dumb, really stupid because honestly, I'd never considered it as just a buyer beware issue.

**Shaina:** Were you like, "Maybe they're right, like maybe--"

**Blaine:** Yeah, I never thought of it that way. I just thought like, "You've got a guy openly committing fraud."

**Shaina:** And then two weeks later, Blaine got a call from a police officer. Officer Petroski asked Blaine to come down to the station.

**Blaine:** And that's when I sat down. It was just him and I, and this great big meeting room table. He had enough knowledge and meteorites to know that I wasn't talking to BS. He understood enough to see the evidence. He was saying, "I can show the evidence we have, but there's no guarantee the DA is going to do anything with it."

**Shaina:** Were you relieved?

**Blaine:** Yeah. I mean, something might happen. Yeah, sure.

**Shaina:** Did you feel less stupid?

**Blaine:** Yeah.

**Shaina:** Officer Petroski called Steve Curry in for questioning.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** It ain't over, Snappers. It's nowhere near over. When we return, Steve Curry finds himself inside a Colorado police station at the center of an investigation. Snap Judgment, the Space Rocks episode continues. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Space Rocks episode. My name is Glynn Washington. And when last we left, Steve Curry was being interrogated by the police.

**Officer Petroski:** Just let me know.

**Steve:** I'm good.

**Officer Petroski:** All right.

**Steve:** I could probably spend more time than you want to spend on meteorites.

**Officer Petroski:** Yeah. Meteorites are very interesting. [crosstalk] They're a pretty cool thing to learn about. So--

**Shaina:** On the tape of that interrogation, Curry takes rocks, books, and binders from his briefcase and sets them onto a table. Officer Petroski asks him if he agrees with the accepted definition of a meteorite from the Cambridge Encyclopedia of Meteorites. Curry says yes, and--

**Steve:** See, what we're experiencing here is a new science, and I'm a part of that wave that is giving the scientists new information to go back and correct the things they've said about meteorites in the Cambridge. You have to look back because Cambridge basically came together in the 50s 60s, early 70s. And that information was good then, but it's not necessarily good now.

**Officer Petroski:** It's also good in here.

**Steve:** Well, you have to take everything that you do, including myself with a grain of salt, until you can actually prove it.

**Officer Petroski:** And it's been proven at that standard in many different levels.

**Steve:** It's been accepted, but all of those things are up for change. And that's the science that we live in. I'm sorry, it's just-- if you make a new discovery, and you get it accepted, like these folks--

**Officer Petroski:** What's your new discovery other than the fact you're saying meteorites don't have to have nickel in?

**Steve:** No, they don't really have to have nickel. See, nickel is only--[crosstalk]

**Shaina:** Curry explains to Officer Petroski that meteorites don't need as much nickel as we once thought. He also tells officer Petroski, he has researchers on his side.

**Officer Petroski:** Who is [crosstalk] with your findings?

**Steve:** University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

**Officer Petroski:** Who can I contact there?

**Steve:** Dr. Neil Greenberg.

**Shaina:** But then, cautions Officer Petroski against contacting them. They're all against him, Curry says.

**Steve:** [crosstalk] -there is a massive campaign to destroy all my research and it starts with this number one guy and that's Randy [unintelligible [00:34:06]. Two years ago--

**Officer Petroski:** To destroy you?

**Steve:** Absolutely.

**Officer Petroski:** But you said he's someone I should contact that agree with you.

**Steve:** Sure. He should, he would.

**Officer Petroski:** But you said he will, but he wants to destroy you?

**Steve:** He does what he does. Here it is, in his official publication--[crosstalk]

**Shaina:** Petroski decides that what Curry is selling is not a meteorite as defined by the scientific community.

**Officer Petroski:** What you're selling and purporting to be selling is not accurate to what people are actually getting, they're not meteorites or real treasure pieces--[crosstalk]

**Steve:** I beg to differ.

**Officer Petroski:** And we can differ all we want, but at this point you've got to understand too, there's different levels to handle this. I'm dealing with the one specific case.

**Steve:** Okay.

**Shaina:** Officer Petroski gave Curry a summons to a trial.

**Officer Petroski:** But you need to understand that what you might think is right, may not be right anymore.

**Steve:** I'm going to leave you with some things and I trust that you will read them.

**Officer Petroski:** Sure.

**Steve:** The fellow that started all this, of course, would be Blaine Reed.

**Officer Petroski:** Okay.

**Steve:** All right, and I'm going to--[crosstalk]

**Shaina:** And about a year after Blaine hung his first wanted posters, Blaine and dozens of local Montroseans found their seats in a county courtroom for the trial of Steve Curry.

**Blaine:** I've never felt and seen so much anger and hatred aimed at me.

**Shaina:** Blaine and about five or six other people were on one side of the courtroom. The other side was jam packed. Curry followers had come out to defend their rocks.

**Blaine:** This one woman screaming that Curry had given her $1.2 million of rocks and she's hidden them in a deep place. So, "this piece of man," and then points to me, "and wants to steal them because when I die, those go to my church and they can build new buildings."

**Shaina:** One of those people was Jane Doe. The woman who had let Curry search for meteorites in her backyard.

**Jane Doe:** Steve Curry said very plainly, meteorites are abundant.

**Shaina:** And Jane Doe believed that Blaine had an agenda.

**Jane Doe:** Meteorites are rare. They are very expensive. Who's going to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for that meteorite if they're abundant? Ah, so Steve Curry was in--

**Shaina:** But the court sided with Blaine. Steve Curry was found guilty of theft, fraud, and affecting sales in criminal simulation. He was given a sentence of three years in prison.

**Paul:** It was just another interesting chapter on the western slope of Colorado.

**Shaina:** This is Paul Paladino, the Director of the Montrose Library.

**Paul:** You read the old newspapers, you find out that people are people, and these things happen all the time, and they have happened all the time--

**Shaina:** Which means?

**Paul:** Meaning stories and-- if you want to talk about fraud, the Old West is full of it. Swindles and land schemes, and it's just-- people are always looking for an easy way, and they find people who are willing to believe.

**Shaina:** Steve Curry didn't respond to multiple requests to talk to us. And Blaine, he's still living in a mobile home outside Montrose, selling meteorites.

**Blaine:** We got the moon coming up. I've got to get this thing aligned quickly because we're going to lose-- So, I've got to figure out how to do this real quick.

**Shaina:** It's a summer night. Blaine is setting up a telescope in his front yard.

**Blaine:** Nice move, buddy.

**Shaina:** He wants to show me [unintelligible 00:37:29], to how me how far away into outer space these pieces of rock come from.

Can you just explain it for me?

**Blaine:** Well, it's the moon in fine detail. I mean, come on, the thing is 60 million miles away, on closest approach 35, and far distance is 130. It's neat. And you can look at it and say, "I'm holding a piece of that right now." "Hey, that one's coming up." I'll put the 50 grams of moonrock in your hand and see what you feel when you look and say, "I'm touching a piece of that right now. I know you probably don't give [bleep]. But that's it. I mean, it's a tangible connection."

**Shaina:** Because if I make the connection between what I see in outer space, and the little moonrock I held in my hand, maybe then I'll understand the value of Blaine's rocks and his fight to keep them separate from mere scrap metal and gravel.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Big thanks to Brendan Borrell for his original reporting in Montrose and Delta, Colorado. To hear more about the continuing fallout between Steve Curry and Blaine Reed in his article in The Verge, we'll have a link at *snapjudgment.org*. Additional digital thanks to Blaine and his brother Blake Reed, Ryan Brown, Zillamay at Mountain of the West, Paul Paladino, Dave Lehman, and Duane Renfrow. The original score for that story was by Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by Shaina Shealy and Jazmin Aguilera.

[upbeat music]

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This is not the news. No, this is not news. In fact, you can collect all the dust and leaves and trash, left at the Mr. Barnes old woodshed into a single pile, and then tell all the neighbor kids, it's cotton candy. And you would still, still not be as far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.

[upbeat music]