[Snap Judgment]

**Glynn:** When I was four years old, my parents, they took me to the Detroit Zoo. And there, we walked by a chimp, kept in a cage, looking out at us, looking out at me from his prison. Something inside I saw, him and me, I saw me and him. I screamed, I wept, I begged for them to let him out, let him out. My parents, eventually, they had to take me home. Later, I read everything I could about the great apes, watch everything I could about them on the TV. Imagined myself, the apes and Jane Goodall.

In fact, just consider the chimpanzee. They share 98% of our DNA, they laugh, when you tickle them. They can see and recognize themselves in mirrors. They live in groups, and they communicate using vocalizations and body language. When you look at a chimpanzee, you're seeing a highly intelligent creature. A creature capable of joy, and anger and sadness. They experience depression, they grieve. To quote Jane Goodall, there is no sharp line between humans and the rest of the animal kingdom. It's a blurry line.

And that's why I have to let you know that this episode, like most stories, concerning the intersection of our two respective species, this episode contains violence. Sensitive people should be advised because today on Snap Judgment, we proudly present Zoo Nebraska. The story of a chimpanzee and of a man. A man whose dream to study apes had a profound impact on one small American town in the Great Plains. Author Carson Vaughan brings us this story. Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

**Carson:** September 10th 2005, Northeastern Nebraska, Antelope County. A place with endless rolling cornfields and very little crime.

**Brian:** I've got to tell people, the biggest decision of my day is where I want to go eat. Where am I going to meet somebody for lunch?

**Carson:** For Nebraska State Trooper, Brian Detlefsen, that day started off like any other.

**Brian:** Come around lunchtime, I decided to meet up with the Antelope County Sheriff. Our office was across the street from a little cafe called Daddies. My favorite meal there was egg and hashbrowns and little toasts on the side. So, I was all excited to get that. The sheriff and I were sitting there eating, and he's a big, round guy. Back then, we had pagers. His pager went off, and he wiggles it off from his gun belt there. He reads it, looks up at me, looks back down there, and he goes, "Animals loose at the Royal Zoo. Need 10-49." 10-49 is traffic control.

**Carson:** The town of Royal was about 20 minutes from where they were sitting. Brian hadn't thought about the zoo there in years.

**Brian:** It was like a petting zoo with a couple of animals and stuff, and I guess I feared the goats got out on the highway or something small like that. I heard the cafe phone ring, and the waitress come over and say, "You're wanted on the phone, and that’s the Antelope County dispatch on the phone." And she goes, "They need guns. They need you up there now. Things are out of control."

**Carson:** Brian pulled off the highway near the zoo's front gate.

**Brian:** When I rolled in, I could see that there were two chimpanzees walking outside the fence. I wasn't expecting to see chimpanzees. As I'm watching these two chimpanzees walk around like nothing's going on outside the fence, here comes the guy on the golfcart. I see this guy on a golfcart coming from my right, out of the tree line, and he has a .357 Magnum handgun. He's shooting like crazy all over the place, shooting over his left shoulder, shooting behind him.

**Carson:** As Brian watched the shooter fly past the two galloping chimps on a golf cart, his phone rings.

[phone ringing]

**Brian:** Hello.

And it was my wife at home. She told me that the washing machine was not working at the time.

**Brian:** Okay, sure. I've got a situation here. I've got to go, bye.

The wind is blowing like crazy. And I hear that scream.

[chimps screaming]

It's a completely horrific scream, like they're hurt or angry, all together. As a human being, you can't make that sound. It just made you curl inside.

**Carson:** Before the chimps escaped, the zoo had been a key tourist attraction in Northeast Nebraska. Busloads of children flocked there every week.

**Dick:** I don't like zoos. I hate zoos. My personal opinion, I think all zoos should close and I think that animals should be in the wild.

**Carson:** Dick Haskin founded the zoo in Royal in the late 80s.

**Dick:** I can look into their eyes, I see their soul, and they're all individuals. They need to be respected, no matter what they are. They shouldn't be abused. They shouldn't be in cages. My grandpa was born in this house.

**Carson:** Oh, cool.

**Dick:** And great grandma lived there--

**Carson:** I first heard about the zoo over a decade ago, and I quickly started researching the story. But it took me seven years to get Dick to go on record.

**Dick:** [unintelligible 00:06:27].

**Carson:** He hasn't told his story to anyone.

**Dick:** I'm just a normal person. I didn't do anything extraordinary. I didn't do anything special. I made a bad career choice and made bad decisions, that created a monster that destroyed me.

**Carson:** A monster, that's what did cause the zoo.

What legacy do you hope it leaves behind?

**Dick:** I just want to forget it. I just want it forgotten. There's nothing that it can leave behind.

**Carson:** Well, I mean, I know that you want it forgotten, but like I said, it was there for almost 20 years, people are going to remember it. How do you hope it's remembered?

**Dick:** I don't care. I wish people would forget it. Let it die. Just forget about it and let it die.

**Carson:** From the highway, you might mistake Royal for a cluster of old sheds and broken farm equipment. There's a water tower, a crumbling brick schoolhouse, 12 gravel streets stitched into what author Willa Cather once called "The Loose Hide of the Great Plains." Dick grew up here. Still today, he lives just a few miles north of town. His journey to the zoo started in that brick schoolhouse when he saw a film in eighth grade about Jane Goodall and the wild chimpanzees of East Africa.

**Recording:** She's been told how a frightened chimp once ripped away a man's cheek. She's also been warned, you'll never get [unintelligible [00:07:56].

**Dick:** I just became so fascinated with apes. And I go, "Boy, there's so much we can learn about, so much they can teach us about ourselves."

**Jane:** My five years observing the chimps have been the most satisfactory of my life. I've done what I wanted to do from early childhood. But the work has not yet ended. Just the beginning-- [voices fades away]

**Carson:** Dick was a loner, a ginger-haired boy, more comfortable with animals than people. Now he knew exactly where he wanted to go, and who he wanted to become.

**Dick:** Boy, that's what I want to do. I want to go over to Africa. I want to study apes in the wild.

**Carson:** After he graduated college, Dick sent letters to primate research facilities all over the world. But they all told him the same thing, he needed experience working with primates to work with primates.

**Dick:** How do I get the experience? I can't get the job. "It'll never happen," they said.

**Carson:** The only viable alternative was the zoo. But Dick had only been to the zoo once when he was a kid with his parents.

**Dick:** That's where I saw my first chimpanzee in real life, and I felt so sorry for him. He was just in such a little cage.

**Carson:** Despite his pride, he made a trip to Lincoln, to visit the Lincoln Children's Zoo.

**Dick:** I said, "Well, they've got primates there. Maybe I'll go work with their primates."

**Carson:** He told the director he wanted to work with their two chimpanzees.

**Dick:** "You're not going to work with those chimpanzees," he said, "They'll kill you."

**Carson:** Adult chimps are incredibly strong and often aggressive. They're extremely dangerous.

**Dick:** People who work with chimpanzees, usually, if they've worked with chimpanzees for more than 18 months, they're missing body parts.

**Carson:** But Dick impressed everyone at the Children's Zoo with his knowledge of primate behavior. And one day, his boss, Al, asked him to shadow the zoo's chimp handler, Monica.

**Dick:** He said, "She's just not getting along with those chimps." I went and watched her a couple days. I went back to Al, I said, "Everything she's doing is causing problems because of the way she's moving. She's scared of them. They know she's scared of them. The way you move, the way you stand, their communication system is gestures and postures mostly. You've got to get her out of there."

**Carson:** A week later, Dick was at work when his boss approached him again.

**Dick:** And Alan comes over, he says, "You're going in with the chimps today." "Huh?" "Yeah, Monica was attacked and mauled last night. She's in the hospital." And so, yeah, I went in with the chimp that had mauled her that afternoon.

**Carson:** Dick climbed into the enclosure and faced real live chimps for the first time. Animals he'd read about, dreamed about, seen projected on the walls of his eighth-grade classroom. That first month, he hired a friend to film him at work with the chimps. At night, he analyzed the footage, like an athlete studying his game.

**Dick:** And I watched their behaviors, my response to their behaviors, so I could monitor my posture, my gestures, my facial expressions so that I'm not triggering an attack.

**Carson:** He was still attacked. One of the chimps nearly ripped off his scalp. But slowly, he gained their trust.

**Dick:** I felt sorry for them. I worked with them so that they'd be more comfortable in the environment that I could provide for them. That was honorable.

**Carson:** Do you remember the very first time you laid eyes on Reuben?

**Dick:** Yeah.

**Carson:** Reuben was a 16-month-old baby chimpanzee.

**Dick:** He's got his burlap bag and he's got a little teddy bear something he's curled up with. He's sleeping.

**Carson:** Reuben carried that burlap sack with him wherever he went, like a toddler with his blankie. His parents had been captured in Africa.

**Dick:** I felt bad that he had been pulled away from his mom, as a practice done in zoos at that time period. So, I felt sorry for him. I liked his personality. I mean, he was mischievous, wasn't overly aggressive. He was calm, as chimps go. Chimps are never calm, but as chimps go, sure, he was very calm. He was special, a special chimp. I mean, when you're changing their diapers, you can't help feel paternal towards them. That was very early on, and the bond had formed quickly, and it was a strong bond that was between us. He viewed me as a parent, and I was his primary caretaker. And yeah, he was like a kid to me.

**Carson:** Dick brought him canvases and art supplies. Reuben loved to make paintings. He also liked cartoons. And when Dick taught the chimp sign language, he took to it the fastest.

**Dick:** He was losing his baby teeth. He'd show me which tooth was loose. If he was sick, he could tell me he was sick. If he was thirsty, he'd let us know he was thirsty. And then, he could insult. There was one time he was angry with me. I'd set him in the corner for a timeout, "Sit there." He turned around and he [signs], which is nut. He called me a nut.

**Carson:** Dick sign language work with Reuben landed him on the front page of the Lincoln Journal. He became the zoo's most trusted primate expert. In 1985, when an international primatology conference was announced in San Diego, Dick packed his bags.

**Dick:** It's like being a primatologist to be able to talk to any of these people.

**Carson:** There was Francine Patterson, who taught sign language to Koko, the gorilla. And Dian Fossey, who lived among the wild mountain gorillas of Rwanda. Fossey was one of Dick's heroes.

**Reporter:** How did you manage to gain their confidence?

**Dian:** I was just lucky, though I had to crawl around for two years.

**Dick:** I really wanted to work with Fossey. I really wanted to work with her, and I knew what she was doing.

**Dian:** Imitate their peaceful vocalization, their contentment vocalizations, [imitates a chimp] like this, which elicited their curiosity.

**Carson:** Dick didn't expect to meet her. But when he arrived, there she was, working her way through a crowd of animal rights protesters outside the conference center.

**Dick:** She was huge. She was 6'3", I think 6'3" or 6'4". She was the biggest woman I've ever seen. Intimidating, to say the least.

**Carson:** They struck up a conversation, and later Fossey invited Dick to dinner. She told him about her risky efforts in Rwanda to protect mountain gorillas from poachers, who'd sell their skulls and hands as trophies.

**Dick:** She would torture the poachers when she caught him. She had been known to hang him by their feet. She'd been known to pistol whip them.

**Carson:** Fossey must have seen something in Dick, because at the end of the conference, she offered him an internship at her camp in Rwanda.

**Dick:** It's like I have finally made it. I have reached my goal. It was a dream come true.

**Carson:** Dick went back to Nebraska, and waited until the day he left, to sleep in a small hut in Virunga National Park, watching apes move freely through the jungle. No keepers or curators or specialists to corral them and keep them locked in. Alongside one of the most respected primatologists in the world. And then--

**Dick:** The phone rings, and I forget who it was, it was somebody from the Gorilla Foundation.

**Carson:** December 1985.

**Dick:** And they said Dian had been killed. [sobbing] Sorry. It was a terrible day. [exhales]

**Reporter:** It was revealed today that American zoologist, Dian Fossey, has been found murdered in her home in a tiny African country of Rwanda, where she had spent--[crosstalk]

**Carson:** Dian Fossey's murder is still a mystery. But for Dick, it meant his lifeline to Africa had vanished.

**Dick:** So, I got over to Africa, it had to be somewhere.

**Carson:** If Dick couldn't observe great apes in their natural habitat, he'd bring them to Nebraska, by building a state-of-the-art research facility in a place where land was cheap and plentiful.

Did you ever think about returning to Royal after you left?

A place like Royal.

Was that ever in the works for you? You thought--[crosstalk]

Dick quit his job at the Children's Zoo and applied for custody of Reuben, the baby chimp.

**Dick:** With Reuben having that attachment to me, and him still being what was he, two?

**Carson:** Yeah.

**Dick:** They knew he needed to stay with me, that that was going to be harmful to him to be anywhere I wasn’t.

**Carson:** The two of them hit the road.

How did you transport Reuben back to Royal?

**Dick:** In the back of a pickup with a topper on it, and I was back there with him.

**Carson:** And he rode okay back there as long as you were with him?

**Dick:** Yeah, as long as I was with him, he was fine.

**Carson:** What were you thinking about? You're on the highway, you've got your chimp in the back of the pickup, you're about to start a brand-new chapter in your life, what was that like?

**Dick:** I think I started getting the feeling that maybe I was crazy.

**Carson:** Dick had just quit his job, and he had a 40-pound chimpanzee locked in the back of his pickup, who he was now responsible for, and banking all his hopes on.

**Dick:** My family tried to talk me out of it. "It'll never work. It's stupid."

**Carson:** Reuben would be the cornerstone of a research facility with 10 primates. Dick would continue to teach the chimp sign language as he raised money for a proper facility. But until then, Reuben needed a home. So, Dick improvised. For the first few weeks, Reuben spent his waking hours in a corn crib, a circular steel cage, with a pointed roof, built to hold corn. Later, a trailer home was donated.

Were you ever concerned at that point in time of the optics of keeping a chimp in a corn crib or a trailer?

**Dick:** Yeah, because I didn't like seeing them in cages anyway. It's like I just--

**Carson:** Travelers on Highway 20 can sometimes spot Reuben hanging from the corn crib, hitching his diaper, while Dick stood below him with a treat in hand.

**Dick:** He loved apples. That was his favorite food, was an apple. I mean, you could give him bananas or grapes or anything like that, but no, he loved the apples. And he could tell it, I asked him, "What's your favorite food?" "Apple." He knew that was an apple. He [chuckles] liked Pepsi, which he didn't get very [crosstalk] every so often, I would give him a little bit of Pepsi.

**Carson:** You just put it in a bowl or how do you--?

**Dick:** Just a little cup, and just a little bit. He loved Pepsi, and I tried to get--[crosstalk]

**Carson:** Dick had to be careful about drinking Pepsi in front of Reuben. Once, he went after Dick's cousin, Arvin.

**Dick:** He's like, "What in the world?" So, I had to stop the attack. He's like, "Why in the world is--?" And then, Arvin was holding a Pepsi. So, Reuben saw that and was going to get that Pepsi from Arvin. You've met Arvin. Arvin is a big guy.

**Carson:** He is.

**Dick:** And it's like this champ didn't care how big that guy was. "That guy is going down. I'm getting that Pepsi."

**Carson:** Reuben also like peppermint leaves, having his tongue tickled, and he was constantly trying to get Dick to play his favorite game.

**Dick:** Chimpanzee Chase, we called. He wanted me to chase him. And he could tell me if he wanted a tickle. He could tell me if he wanted a tickle, and he'd laugh. Tug of war he loved, but not a good thing to do with a chimp--

**Carson:** What does laughing in a chimp sound? [crosstalk]

**Dick:** [mimics chimp's laugh]

**Carson:** Okay. If he's smiling, is he showing gums, what is that like?

**Dick:** No, the top lip is pulled down over the teeth like that. That's a smile. You see chimps on television where they got this great big grin, you think they're smiling. That's a fear grimace. When they're doing that, that's fear.

**Carson:** The only thing that seemed to scare Reuben were the sounds he heard rippling across the plains.

**Dick:** Every now and then, the East Pasture, there'd be gunshots and like that, that frightened him.

**Carson:** Did the train set him off sometimes?

**Dick:** He loved the train. Children and families there in Royal just absolutely loved him. I'd go anywhere and it didn't matter, people would recognize me. And kids especially, "There's the monkey man." "There's Reuben's daddy," or something like that.

**Carson:** He opened the primate center every day, charging guests to walk through the donated trailer home with the title, The Midwest Primate Center, hand painted in capital letters across the front.

**Dick:** We had people stopping in. They're like, "Wow." So, I had a little money I could buy Reuben food.

**Carson:** But Dick needed much more money to build out the research center. So, he added a nature trail to attract more visitors and some goats, and foxes, a pair of lemurs from a drive-through safari in Arkansas. It still wasn't enough.

**Dick:** Ad I was hoping for larger donors. That never really happened. It was a struggle.

**Carson:** Dick was terrible at raising money. And Reuben had grown into a seven-year-old wunderkind, 100 pounds of muscle and fur.

**Dick:** That winter, 1989, he wasn't going to be in that trailer. He was going to break through it. Something's got to be done, and it's got to be done now. I'm not getting away, we're having a lot of--

**Carson:** Desperate, Dick decided to leave the fate of his facility of Reuben up to the people of northeast Nebraska. He advertised a public meeting, and a board of directors was elected on the spot, composed mostly of Dick's neighbors and friends.

**Dick:** And the first thing they did, their very first meeting, was change the name from the Midwest Primate Center to the Northeast Nebraska Zoo.

**Carson:** The name would later change again to the sleeker Zoo Nebraska. By unanimous vote, Dick was made Executive Director, putting him, a man who hated zoos, in charge of the only zoo within 100 miles.

**Dick:** See, the facility had taken on its own life. When you're writing a story, sometimes it goes the direction it wants to go, no matter what you want to do with it.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** It is not over. When we return, Zoo Nebraska is about to receive a gift from a very special Nebraska native. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment. When last we left, a man who hated zoos was just elected Executive Director of Zoo Nebraska. Snap Judgment.

**Carson:** But the money didn't just start rolling in. Dick still lived with his parents. He couldn't even afford to pay himself a salary.

**Dick:** My savings account had been wiped out. My checking account had been wiped out.

**Carson:** He drew up plans for a new enclosure for Reuben. 1100 square feet of steel reinforced concrete with sliding steel shift doors and heavy gauge wire mesh. But the zoo couldn't possibly afford it. In July 1990, Dick spent two full days in Reuben's cage in a desperate stunt to broadcast his plight.

**Dick:** Everything was futile and early in--

**Carson:** Letters were sent to the biggest names of the day.

**Dick:** Donald Trump, Ted Turner, Michael Jackson, and Johnny Carson was one of them.

**Carson:** Johnny Carson wrote back.

**Presenter:** And now ladies and gentlemen, here's Johnny.

[audience cheers]

**Dick:** Johnny Carson calls, and he said, "I will give you $55,000 to build the building for Reuben, for the children of Royal."

**Carson:** Johnny Carson grew up in Nebraska.

**Johnny:** And when I was five years old, the only toy I had was a tumbleweed.

[laughter]

**Carson:** But he would never visit the zoo, and he would never meet Dick, the only person in town even remotely qualified to care for exotic animals. Before the donation, Dick had seriously considered throwing in the towel.

**Dick:** I can't leave. If I leave, I'm letting down Johnny Carson, I'm letting down the people of Royal, I'm letting down those children. I can't leave. And so, there I was.

**Carson:** Dick stayed with Reuben during his first night in the new Johnny Carson building, sleeping on the concrete floor.

**Dick:** We started getting more people coming through. We started getting more memberships.

**Carson:** Soon, he'd add more animals.

**Dick:** So, we had Reuben, we had the snow monkeys.

**Carson:** Bringing the slapdash menagerie to a dozen.

**Dick:** [crosstalk] -we had emus.

**Carson:** Then 25.

**Dick:** Mountain lions.

**Carson:** And then 60.

**Dick:** The wolves, bobcats.

**Carson:** Attendance jumped from 4000 people a year--

**Dick:** [crosstalk] -gray fox--[crosstalk]

**Carson:** To 25,000. [crosstalk] Dick had removed Reuben from one zoo only to build another one around him. Around them both. He felt trapped and he began to regret ever bringing Reuben to Royal.

**Dick:** It seemed like every year that went by saw the zoo grow, and every time the zoo grew, my hours increased, and the stress increased.

**Carson:** Dick woke up at 3:30 every morning and rarely went to bed before midnight.

**Dick:** I would just get a little bit of sleep. I was eating a can of Campbell's soup a day.

**Carson:** Dick looked gaunt. He wandered the zoo grounds on autopilot. Feeding the animals, cleaning poop, leading tours of elementary school kids. 11 years passed in a haze.

**Dick:** There was no soul in that body anymore. I was just going through the movements.

**Carson:** And then, his worst fear came to pass. One day, he was doing the rounds.

**Dick:** And I forgot to lock a cage. I went, got mail, went back. Always, when I get back, I check the animals, make sure everything was fine.

**Carson:** He walked into the Johnny Carson Building.

**Dick:** And it's in shambles, waters turned on, bleaches spilled everywhere. Reuben's door is open and no Reuben. And I walked around the Carson building, no sign of Reuben.

**Carson:** The town's brick schoolhouse was still open at the time. Dick told one of the zoo volunteers.

**Dick:** "You be ready to call at school and tell them to keep the kids in for recess. I'm going to go back and see if I can find Reuben, and then I'll let you know." I went back, Reuben's in his cage, playing with some equipment that he shouldn't have played with, got the equipment away from him and closed the door. But an animal in the zoo, when they find themselves out of their enclosure, they generally try to find their way back in because that's their home. That's their territory. That's where they feel safe. That's where they feel secure.

**Carson:** Dick realized he had to get out. The situation was no longer safe for him or Reuben.

So, you were ready to say goodbye to Reuben for good?

**Carson:** Yeah. Yeah, I was.

**Dick:** He had to walk away, from his dream, from the zoo, and from Reuben.

**Carson:** Was that a hard decision that you had to come to in your mind?

**Dick:** At that time my health is gone, and my brain isn't thinking clearly. I was worried that I was going to get somebody killed. I was worried I was going to leave cages unlocked. I was worried I was going to let an animal out or make another serious mistake that would cause somebody injury or their life. I wasn't thinking clearly. My memory was gone. I needed out. I just needed out.

**Carson:** Reuben was 18, and Dick felt like the chimp didn't need him anymore.

**Dick:** Reuben doesn't have that bond with me that he had.

**Carson:** So, you felt Reuben was old enough at that point that he didn't need you specifically as a caretaker?

**Dick:** Yeah. I could. I could step away.

**Carson:** Dick found replacement directors, a married couple, who had previously run another Nebraska Zoo. He'd worked with them before.

**Dick:** I needed a bobcat. So, we got a bobcat from them, they needed a snow monkey.

**Carson:** The new directors added three male chimpanzees to the zoo. There was Jimmy Joe, once the pet of an eccentric older woman who drove him around in her convertible, and two retired Hollywood chimps, brothers named Tyler and Ripley. Ripley had been on *Seinfeld*.

**Kramer:** I stopped to look at the monkeys. When all of a sudden, I am hit in the face with a banana peel.

[laughter]

**Carson:** They made good companions for Reuben, who had spent most of his life in the company of one man. After Dick left, he didn't come back.

**Dick:** And I purposely was staying away for Reuben's sake, because if he'd even see me at a distance, he'd have gone berserk. So, I didn't even dare even get close to the facility.

**Carson:** But the new zookeepers didn't last long. When they began exploring plans to move the zoo and its animals to a larger town, they were fired by the zoo's board, and eventually replaced by Ken "Junior" Schlueter. A tall, stern man whose most recent job was managing an auto parts store across the highway. I tried to interview Jr. He declined multiple times.

So, you never had any conversations with Ken while he was director?

**Dick:** Maybe once or twice.

**Carson:** Dick watching from afar, grew increasingly worried about Reuben. He begged Junior to find him a new home.

At that point, you would have been asking him like to get rid of the chimps?

**Dick:** Yeah. My goal was to get them to ship those chimps out but they wouldn't even meet with me.

**Carson:** So, he called one of the zoo's board members and told her Reuben and the other chimps were in danger.

**Dick:** I said, "We had to get those chimps out of there. Those chimps need to go. You need somebody specifically trained in working with chimps to work with a chimp. They aren't something you can just put anybody to handling." They didn't know. They had no experience whatsoever.

[pensive music]

**Glynn:** After the short break, Dick grows increasingly worried about Reuben and the other chimps' safety for very good reason. Stay tuned.

[pensive music]

**Glynn:** From Snap Judgment's underground lair, welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Zoo Nebraska episode. My name is Glynn Washington. And when last we left, Dick had just called one of the zoo's board members and told them Reuben and the other chimps were in danger. They were being handled by a man whose most recent job was managing an auto parts store. Snap Judgment.

**Dick:** I said, "We have to get those jumps out of there. Those chimps need to go. You need somebody specifically trained in working with chimps to work with a chimp. They aren't something you can't just put anybody to handling." They didn't know. They had no experience whatsoever.

**Carson:** And then, September 10th 2005.

**Brian:** I had to sit there and talk to myself, "Are these really chimpanzees? And what am I going to do about it?"

**Carson:** One of the zoo's volunteers forgot to lock the backdoor of the Johnny Carson Building. Reuben, Jimmy Joe, Tyler and Ripley all walked out single file, calmly, like children waiting for the school bus. The chimps descended on the town, running through the gravel streets. One of them, possibly Reuben, chased a frightened teenager into his house. Another tried to enter a gas station. All over Royal, people barricaded themselves indoors. The zoo had a tranquilizer gun, but nobody knew how to use it. Junior, the zookeeper, picked up a revolver, jumped on a golf cart, and went after the chimps. That's when Brian, the state trooper, arrived on the scene.

**Brian:** I got a situation here. I've got to go. Bye.

**Brian:** He's coming in with the golfcart. He shoots one side, and he turns around and shoots the other side, and hits the chimpanzee on the other side, and just keeps on driving off with the golf cart.

**Carson:** One of the chimps had been hit in the chest. Brian followed this one, as it took three quick strides and launched over a 12-foot-high fence.

**Brian:** Jumped over the fence with one arm, like us just hopping over a little garden fence.

**Carson:** There was an old red van on the other side.

**Brian:** He punched the window with his paw or hand, jumps in there. And he just gets in there, screaming like crazy, ripping the seats out, ripping everything, the carpet up on the floor. I mean, it's just going nuts. I don't like to see animals get hurt, and I thought maybe we could still save him. Even though it's just an animal, it still has feelings and everything. He doesn't know what's going on. He was scared too. You can't talk to the chimpanzee to calm them down. That's why I tried to hold off as long as we could.

**On Radio:** We should've been using tranquilizers.

**Carson:** A crowd started to form around the fence. Farmers zoo volunteers, more cops, and finally the local vet, with a tranquilizer gun.

**On Radio:** And they're trying to find out what dosage we can give them.

**Brian:** He goes, "I can't get a shot off unless I hit him in the rear. If we could get somebody to distract him up front so the chimpanzee would stare out the windshield, so I could shoot the chimpanzee in the rear." So, that's what the plan was.

**On Radio:** Probablydistract him out the front window, [unintelligible [00:33:36] that way.

**Carson:** The vet moves into position, standing on some cinderblocks, trying to get a shot through the van's broken back window.

**On Radio:** No. He's not coming out.

**Brian:** He can't get a shot off. He was going to try one more time. And I'm standing off to the vet's right side, just a little past his shoulder.

**Carson:** Brian braced for the worst.

**On Radio:** No, hang on, hang on.

**On Radio:** He's coming out. What do we do?

**Brian:** He would have came and grabbed at least one or many of us that were standing around there, because that was the last line of defense because I don't think we would have had time for all of us to get away. The vet was just about ready to get a shot off when that chimpanzee jumps out the back window towards the vet. How that bigger body fit through that little window that quick, it still just amazes me. That chimpanzee flew through that window like nothing, and he just glided through there, went to reach for that fence to swing himself over like a diver jumping with his arms out. He was jumping. He was jumping with his arms straight out to grab that fence. And before he could do that, I raised the rifle.

**Carson:** Brian fired one shot.

**On Radio:** I got him. I got him. I got him. He's out.

**Carson:** It was Jimmy Joe, the chimp who in a past life, rode around in a convertible. Three of the four chimps were killed that day.

**Dick:** Dad comes in the house. And he goes, "Well, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm sleeping." He says, "You're not going to sleep after what I'm going to tell you." "What?" He goes, "Reuben's dead." "What?" "He was shot. He escaped and he was shot." "What?" And I just went flying in.

**Carson:** Dick jumped in the car and floored it. When he got to the zoo, there were patrol cars in the parking lot and an ambulance.

**Dick:** There was chimpanzee blood everywhere and on everybody.

**Carson:** He pleaded with the Antelope County sheriff to let him in.

**Dick:** He goes, "This is a crime scene." I go, "Darrell, I've got to go in." "You cannot go in there."

**Carson:** When Dick persisted, another cop stepped forward.

**Dick:** He bodily just grabbed me and moved me out, and I felt like just leaving. And for some reason, I just went over towards it, I collapsed.

**Carson:** After he recovered, Dick was let inside. He walked to the Johnny Carson Building, and saw Ripley, the chimp from *Seinfeld*, who'd survived by running back inside his enclosure when the shots rang out.

**Dick:** I'm reading Ripley, as I'm walking in. It's been four years since I'd worked with chimps. Yet, it kicked in, and I'm reading Ripley. And all at once he turns his back and submits because of a gesture I had made that nobody else saw. He turns his back and submits to me. A couple of people there said, "Well, he's never done that to strangers before." Well, he didn't do it to strangers because the strangers don't know how to communicate with him. And they took me to Reuben so I could say goodbye. [sobbing] Let's stop.

**Carson:** That's all right.

**Dick:** I wondered why I wasn't called.

**Carson:** They laid Reuben's body on a tarp in the back of a small utility vehicle. He was a crumpled mess. The most famous chimp in Nebraska, Reuben was 22 years old, roughly 120 pounds. The adopted son of a man named, Dick Haskin. He liked Pepsi and cartoons.

**Dick:** Reuben was shot trying to get into his cage.

**Carson:** In Dick's view, Reuben had been trying to return to safety when Junior, the zookeeper, shot him in the back.

He was crawling back up the Carson Center, the outside cage?

**Dick:** Yes, he was crawling up, trying to get back in his cage when he was shot.

**Carson:** The next day Dick went to see Junior.

**Dick:** Junior Schlueter was there in the office. I asked him, "Why wasn't I called?" He said, "There was no time." I said I could have got those chimps in, and Junior stood up, he said, "You could not have got those chimps in. There is no way you could have got those chimps in." I said, "Junior, you have never seen me work with chimps. I could have got those chimps in."

**Carson:** Dick had seen in the dashcam video from Brian's patrol car. When Junior came flying out of the trees in the golfcart shooting, he'd said the chimps were chasing him. But chimps can run nearly 25 miles an hour.

**Dick:** "They're chasing me. They're chasing me." "No Junior, they're not chasing you. They're following you. If they were chasing you, they would have been on you and killed you because they can go faster than that golfcart can." They were following-- The golfcart brought them food.

**Carson:** When seven chimpanzees escaped from the Kansas City Zoo a couple of years ago, they were lured back into their enclosure with malted milk balls.

**Dick:** He had things going his way. The facial expressions, the postures of those chimps at that time, they weren't aggressive. They were following him. He couldn't read them.

**Carson:** The zoo closed shortly after in a tangle of lawsuits, 20 years after Dick brought Reuben to Royal on the back of his pickup. Today, Dick lives alone, in a drafty old farmhouse six miles north of Royal.

**Dick:** I know I can never go back and work with chimps or work with orangutans. That dream is gone. I don't even watch shows that depict chimps or zoos or anything like that anymore, although I did start watching some orangutan videos on YouTube recently.

**Carson:** He keeps a painting that Reuben made on his wall, one of the few reminders of the zoo days. A green, black blob with a tiny hint of yellow and red, Reuben's heavy hand visible in the wide brushstrokes.

**Dick:** He was my kid. A large piece of me died. [sniffles] A large piece. It changed me.

**Carson:** How so?

**Dick:** I simply exist. I'm not living. Maybe I lost the will. A large piece of me died. [sniffles]

No, I've tried to redefine who I am. What I am in the past, it's gone. That person needs to die. And the zoo died, and it needs to stay dead.

[pensive music]

**Glynn:** We want to thank everyone who helped us put that story together. We appreciate it. Original score was by Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by John Fecile and Carson Vaughan. It was based on Carson Vaughan's book of the same name*, Zoo Nebraska.* I highly, I highly recommend you read his account for yourself. And it's hard to take, I know. Given what happened, it is hard to take, but there is some light at the end of this tunnel. After the zoo closed, Ripley, the surviving chimpanzee and former *Seinfeld* cast member, was sent to the Center for Great Apes. It's a sanctuary for chimpanzees and orangutangs in Wauchula, Florida.

**Patti:** We have 54 great apes here right now, 23 orangutans and 31 chimpanzees.

**Glynn:** I called Patti Ragan, the Director of the Center, one of Ripley's closest human associates.

**Patti:** Right now, there's about eight chimpanzee sanctuaries in North America. We're one of them, but we're the only sanctuary in North and South America that has orangutangs.

**Glynn:** Right on. Well, we just heard here on Snap, story of four chimpanzees. Three of them who met a really horrible fate, but there was a fourth. His name is Ripley, and Ripley is with you in your sanctuary. Is that right?

**Patti:** Yes, he's in our care now. And he's been here since, gosh, I think 2009, is when he came here.

**Glynn:** Well, can you tell me about his life today?

**Patti:** Today, his life, he's in a group of seven chimpanzees. They are all former entertainment chimpanzees like Ripley. And then his best friend is a big male who's older than him, and that is Bubbles. It was Michael Jackson's pet.

**Glynn:** Ripley hangs out with Michael Jackson's former chimpanzee?

**Patti:** Yes.

**Reporter:** Bubbles wore designer clothes, flew first class, and made appearances on TV talk shows. You like heavy metal music?

[audience laughing]

**Glynn:** [chuckles]

**Patti:** Bubbles is a 37-year-old adult male chimp, and a beautiful boy. He's probably the more dominant of the group because of his size, but Ripley is like his right-hand man. There's a lot of females in that group, and they have squabbles and Ripley runs around, calming everybody down.

**Glynn:** What's a day in the life like?

**Patti:** Well, I have to say, they're adult males. There's lots of resting and kind of laying around in the sun. They groom each other. The females groom them. When they get up in the morning, we have three big meals a day that all the apes here are offered of fruits and vegetables and a biscuit called a Primate Biscuit.

**Glynn:** Let me ask you this, Patti.

**Patti:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** Have you ever tasted the Primate Biscuit?

**Patti:** Personally, I haven't, but my staff have all done it. Some are banana flavored, some are orange flavored, some are cinnamon. [chuckles]

**Glynn:** So, there's different flavored biscuits.

**Patti:** Oh, sure. And there's--[crosstalk]

**Glynn:** Patti, why have you not tasted the biscuit?

**Patti:** I'm a picky eater.

[laughter]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** I remember Bubbles. I remember seeing Bubbles and wondering why Michael Jackson had a chimp.

**Patti:** Well, yes, what you saw, and it's still on the internet now, are photographs of Michael holding a baby chimp with a pink face, pink ears, little cute round face. Bubbles is huge. As I said, he's over 180 pounds, and he's a big adult male now. Baby chimps, while they're adorable, get to be juveniles and adolescents and adults. They have all the same sentient qualities that we have. They just have much greater strength. So, when a chimp is very angry or jealous, it's something really to deal with. You would not be able to handle those chimps yourself. So, that's when they get relegated to people's basements in tiny cages, to garages for 40 years. We rescued a chimpanzee from a garage, a wild caught chimp, who was captured in Africa over 50 years ago. And the only way they've ever captured great apes is to kill at least the mother and probably other adults, because the troop would never let people go in and take a baby.

When those babies were sold, this couple bought this baby. He went to Ohio, and they loved him as their son, and raised him in their house for a few years, ended up in the garage, in a very tiny cage. And he was 45 when they called me and asked me to take him.

**Glynn:** Oh, my God.

**Patti:** He was probably in the worst condition of any great ape that we've ever had here. Atrophied, bedsores everywhere, he could hardly stand. And I looked at this boy, and he'd not been in the sun for over 40 years. And thought, he may be with us only a few months. So, we prepared a nest for him indoors every night and outside every day. He would climb up the stairs and lie down on that shelf in the sun and sleep. And I thought, "Well, at least before he passes, he's sleeping in the sun."

Well, he gained weight. He got rid of the bedsores. He started being more active. We introduced him to the very first chimp he had ever seen since his mother was killed, and he was taken as an infant. And it was another elderly female. And at first, he was like, "What is this thing? And I'm terrified." They became the dearest couple. They would play chase together. Very slow, two elderly chimps kind of padding around their habitat, tickling. And he passed when he was just about 50. So, we had him here five years in the sunlight, living with a female. That's what we do, is really try to give them the best life we can with things that they need to be healthy.

**Glynn:** Patti, I remember seeing a chimpanzee when I was little at the Detroit Zoo, and I remember getting that connection, that buzz. I was like, "That's another version of us." I remember feeling that, little kid. My question for you, Patti, is it worth it? Is it worth locking an ape in a cage so that a kid can have a feeling of connection?

**Patti:** So, I would rather them all be in the wild. But the fact is that they're not, so you have to look at each individual situation. These great apes that have been raised by humans as pets or entertainers or research subjects will never be able to be returned to the wild. They don't have the skills to live in the wild, to interact with their wild counterparts. Here, in a sanctuary, captivity is the next best answer.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** According to Project Chimp Care, there are over 1400 captive chimps in the United States, about half of them aren't sanctuaries. To learn more about Patti's work at the Center for Great Apes, visit *centerforgreatapes.org*.

[upbeat music]

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Well, this is not the news. You know this is not the news. No way. In fact, you could take anybody that have a chimp locked in one of those tiny little cages and put that person in the cage instead and-- actually that would probably just be a really good idea, but you would still, still not be as far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.

[upbeat music]