[Snap Judgment]

**Glynn:** Oh, you've waited long enough. At long last, get your marshmallows and graham crackers, light the coals, grab a cold drink, stoke the fire, because it's time for Campfire Tales. A summertime taste of paranormal from Snap sister podcast, Spooked, to get you in the mood. And know this, the brand-new season of Spooked Season 7 returns to Luminary on September 9th, and to unlock the newest Spooked stories fresh from the tomb and regularly through the spring of 2023, subscribe to the Luminary channel on Apple Podcast or directly on Luminary. *luminary.link/spooked*.

[upbeat music]

People often ask, how it is I get to tell the stories I do on this show. All my people get mad at this glimpse behind our tightly closed doors. This peek behind the curtain, and the truth is, my family, they don't listen to this program. In fact, I doubt my mother and father know it exists. I'm not saying it's a secret. It's like anything else in my family. Just another thing you don't talk about. And the notion of me openly discussing the mystery diving into the very moments that make the least sense, wow. I know that mine is not the only family where this simply isn't done. A thing is or isn't. We do not discuss the shade in the chair at the dinner table. No. We simply pull up another chair beside it and ask someone to please pass the salad. That is enough. Don't look it in the eyes, talking words about it, naming it for what it is, not us. Uh-huh. That way only leads to ruin, to catastrophe. But I wonder sometimes, if perhaps we should ask who is that at the dinner table with us? What do they want? And why are they here?

[Spooked theme playing]

Welcome, welcome to Snap Judgment, The Campfire Tales Part 2 featuring stories from our sister podcast, Spooked, a Luminary original.

[Spooked theme playing]

Now then, this is special. This is family. Tell everyone to leave you alone for the next few minutes because unlike our normal modus operandi, Spooked producer, Annie Nguyen, she didn’t go too far afield for this story. Mm-hmm. No, not today. Because today, Annie asked her own father to tell her a secret. And now, we know where Annie gets it.

**Annie:** My dad's always really good at picking up the phone and helping out whenever I need him. He's there for any car problems, big house moves, and he's always there to make sure I have a steady supply of dried shrimp. I know that my dad loves and cares for me, but it really bothers me that when you get us both in the same room, he and I don't really talk much. I usually try to ask him about car mechanic work and his past life in Vietnam. But he gives me a quick answer, scarfs down some food and runs into the living room to check on the sports game. But one day, I started talking to him on the phone about Spooked, and I asked my dad about his experiences with ghosts. I thought it wouldn't go anywhere, but I was wrong. And he started talking.

[Conversation in Vietnamese with translation by George Q. Nguyen and Annie Nguyen]

**Annie:** Did grandma ever tell you any scary stories?

**Poppa:** Yeah, my mom told me once when she was walking alone late at night. She saw this figure and then she realized it was a ghost.

**Annie:** When you heard the story, were you scared?

**Poppa:** Me? No, I'm just scared of heaven and hell. [Annie laughs] I'm not scared of ghosts.

**Annie:** Well, how about now? Do you believe in ghosts or not?

**Poppa:** I don't believe in ghosts. But there is this weird thing that happened.

**Annie:** Hmm.

**Poppa:** In '95, I went home to Vietnam. My brothers, my sisters, we were all together at my dad's home. We're all sitting at a super long table. We're eating dinner. It was like a party. Big party, over 20 people. A lot of people.

**Annie:** Friends and family from all over the village came to celebrate my dad's homecoming. It's a big deal because it's a small village. At most, there were 20 homes there. So, everyone was really close. Like when there was a flood, most of the village huddled on my grandpa's place on the top floor. People looked out for one another, and they also partied a lot. In Vietnamese, there's a word just for eating, drinking, and hanging out, [foreign language]

**Poppa:** There's chicken, duck, pig, and shrimp. It's loud and chaotic. People are eating and drinking, talking, smoking, but I don't smoke. And then, at the end of dinner, the real reason that everyone is here comes up. Finding the lost caskets. My eldest brother says, "The graves that dad buried a while ago, they're missing. We don't know where they are."

**Annie:** What had happened was the Communist Party forced my grandpa to move the family graves so that the party could use the land to farm. My grandpa had moved three of our family's coffins. Auntie number six [foreign name], my dad's younger sister, [foreign name], and his older brother [foreign name]. My grandpa took care of the graves, but when he got sick, he had to stop. When he died, the whereabouts of the graves died with him. And this was a big problem.

**Poppa:** In our culture, we believe that the dead help the living and the living help the dead.

**Annie:** For the dead to do well in the afterlife, they need the living to do a slew of rituals, like taking care of the graves, lighting incense, and cooking their favorite meals. In turn, the dead protect the family. But because the graves were missing, the family started experiencing a series of unfortunate events.

**Poppa:** People say if you lose the graves, your kids can't make a living or do well in school. Like in my house, everyone is worrying. My sister, she is always sick. And my brother had a daughter that passed away in a freak accident. Then, other bad things happened. We often think back of the missing graves. So, my siblings went to a psychic and the psychic said that the [foreign word], the dead people, they hate us. They're upset that we're alive and not taking care of our dead ancestors. So, they curse us.

**Annie:** While everyone is arguing about what to do, my dad's eldest brother speaks up.

**Poppa:** "We need to find the coffins. So, let's split up." So, we go from person to person and divvy up the task. But I say to everyone, "If we don't know where the coffins are, how are we even going to bring anything home?" My cousin says, "There's this teacher who can help." Long ago, she was a regular villager, but one day the dead possessed her. Then, she had this ability to speak to the dead.

**Annie:** When my dad's cousin says 'teacher', he doesn't mean like a schoolteacher. In Vietnam teacher is an umbrella word for people who are deeply in touch with the spiritual world. You go to them to get back at your ex, curse your landlord, or find the dead. That's the kind of teacher my dad's cousin was talking about.

**Poppa:** My cousin says, "My son went to that teacher. What had happened was, he had just bought land. Then, he built a house and then, late at night, my son's wife had gone to bed. But she had been woken up by two shadowy figures that kept walking back and forth in their house. They seemed like two ghost children. She was horrified." My cousin met this teacher and the teacher said, "That house you build, there are two dead people buried underneath there. That's why they wander the house." So, my cousin asked, "How can I get rid of them?" And the teacher said, "You need to gather their remains and relocate their body somewhere else."

**Annie:** So, your cousin, was he able to dig up and find the bodies?

**Poppa:** Yes, two people. There were two corpses. They scooped them up and they buried them somewhere else. After that, the family never saw the two ghosts again. After everyone hears the story, we all agree that we should visit this teacher. And then, everyone says that I should be the one to go, because they say that I am lucky. But I also want to go, like, deep in my body, I am curious.

[moped sounds]

**Annie:** The next day, my dad hops on a moped and zips along the highway, passing rice paddies and tobacco fields. Then, he turns on to the long dirt road and finally, he arrives at the teacher's house.

**Poppa:** I arrive in the evening and her house is pretty shabby. There's a huge crowd. A lot of people go. A lot of people go, like 200 people. They're all waiting outside to go in. So, I have to stay overnight. I sleep outside. Then finally in the morning at 11:00 AM, they call my name, "[foreign name]."

Once inside the home, I start to think, "This is odd. She prays to so many gods." There are so many altars and incense, I can't imagine how anyone could pray so much. Then, we go upstairs, and the teacher tells me to pray. I start praying. She lights an incense. I do the same. She smiles. She looks so gentle and relaxed. Then, she asked me, "What do you need?" I tell her, "My dad has three coffins that were buried in the sand, but we don't know where they are. Is it possible for you to channel him so we can find the graves?" She says, "In your house, there is a special altar for one of your important ancestors. Why didn't you talk to her? Why did you come here?" I said, "I don't know. I just heard that you're the person that finds lost graves. But now that I know, I'll go ask [foreign name] but since I'm already here, can you give me some advice?"

She puts her hands together and prays and starts mumbling something. I have no idea what she's doing, but she keeps on mumbling. And then, her hands and feet start shaking. All of a sudden, her body just changes. I look into her face, and it isn't rosy anymore. So pale. Her eyes are bulging. It's not normal.

Then in my dad's voice, she says, "Son, is that you?" I say, "Yeah. Greetings, dad." Then, he asked me, "When did you come home to Vietnam?" Then, I wonder, "How does this lady know that I came home?" "Well, since you've come home, are you doing good?" I say, "I'm doing well." "Are your kids well?" I say, "They're doing good." Then I say, "How is mom down there? Is she well?" He says, "She's doing well. All my brothers and sisters are here too." "Okay. I want to speak to mom." But he says, "You can't speak to her. She's busy. She's not home. She's out having fun." Then, the teacher starts shaking, and my dad says, "All right then, I'm leaving." Then, the teacher returns back to normal.

She asked me, "You came here to find the graves, right?" I say, "Yes. Can you please show me?" She lights incense, and all of a sudden, she looks like she's getting possessed again. When I look into her eyes, they look off. They were bulging and they looked harsh and mean. Then, she asks, "Sir, what village do you come from?" The person talking isn't her. She's speaking very formally. She doesn't sound happy. I told her, "I come from [foreign placename]." She says, "You need to go to the village tomorrow. Go down the main road, and at the very end, make a right. Then, go down half a kilometer where you will see two huge tombstones. Turn right. There you'll see a giant palm tree. From the palm chain, step four, five steps. There, you will find the graves that you are looking for." She starts shaking again. And then, she is done.

After hearing everything, I was shaken. It all seemed so unexpected. It felt like I was sitting right in front of my dad.

**Annie:** With her body shaking and her face changing colors, weren't you scared?

**Poppa:** No, I was normal. Other people might be scared but I just sat and answer whatever was asked.

**Annie:** Oh, my God. You're lying. If a person gets possessed and their voice changes, aren't you a little bit scared?

**Poppa:** No. I'm not scared. My body is super awake. I'm not scared of that. That's me. But yeah, lots of people will be scared. [Annie chuckles]

I go home. I let everyone know what went on. Now, even though the teacher tells us that we should leave tomorrow, our stomachs are so hot and impatient that we want to leave right away. We leave at midnight on our mopeds. It's difficult to see, so we take our flashlights. We go to the exact spot the teacher described. We dig and dig, but we can't find the graves, so we go home. We go back to the teacher, and she tells us to bring her a handful of dirt from that spot. So, we bring her the dirt and she says, "Yeah, this is right. Now, go home and do it again, but first go pray to [foreign name]. She will possess one of your family members. And that person will help you out."

At 6:00 AM, five or six of us head to the spot. Before going out, we ask for help at [foreign name] altar.

[mopeds start]

Then, we take a few mopeds and head out. Your uncle's Honda has a sidecar, and in the sidecar, there are three new coffins. We drive along the path that the teacher showed us. On the way, I look around and I see cemeteries and palm trees. And finally arrive at the white sand beach. We find two tombstones. We look right, and there's that super big palm tree. We take five steps to arrive at the spot, just like the teacher said. We all huddle up and set up incense, candle lights, wine, fruits. We arrange it on the sandy floor and start praying. Then, I light incense and say, "We come here to find the lost caskets." We burn the paper gold and money. We sprinkle medicine and salt. Then, right when we finished praying, my nephew starts shaking. He looks like a crazy person. I think he got possessed by [foreign name].

Then, he jumps to a spot and he starts clawing at the dirt with his bare hands. He hits the floor. And we mark the dirt to remember that spot. Then, he calls out a second spot and we mark that spot. He scratches at the third spot, and we put something there as well. Then, [foreign name] leaves my nephew's body. She disappears and he looks normal again.

**Annie:** But after he was finished being possessed, did you even ask or check to see if he's okay?

**Poppa:** No. No asking or checking. Whatever he clawed, we just marked the spot and started digging.

[digging sounds]

**Poppa:** My sibling starts digging at the first mark. Someone else brings over one of the coffins, so it's ready to go. My younger brother digs about three feet deep and then he says, "Oh, Brother Hun, we dug it up. I can see the casket." I say, "Okay, let me see." Everyone crowds over. It looks exactly like a coffin. I said, "Keep on digging. Let's finish and find all three. Only then we will know."

Then we go to the second spot, we dig, and we hit a large plank. And that plank turns out to be another old coffin. When I touch it, it falls apart.

I said, "Okay, the third spot." We dig and find the third coffin, just like the teacher said. After seeing the coffins, I think the teacher was right. So, we finish up, we head out, and that night, we go to [foreign name] altar with fruits. [foreign language] And soon after, I returned to the US, and ever since my family in Vietnam, they've been taking care of the graves.

**Annie:** But isn't that maybe a chance that someone put fake caskets there?

**Poppa:** No. When we dug, we found the coffins. How could it be fake?

**Annie:** But how did you know that it wasn't someone else's casket?

**Poppa:** Well, we had to believe. If we didn't, what was the point of going?

**Annie:** So now that you're able to find it, was your family luck restored? Did anything change?

**Poppa:** Yeah. About a year and a half later, the house was finally peaceful. We had a sister that was sick and then she was no longer sick.

**Annie:** And did your life change?

**Poppa:** My life? It seems the same.

**Annie:** [laughs]

**Poppa:** But when I think about it, there is this weird thing. Whenever I run out of money, suddenly money comes in.

**Annie:** [laughs]

**Poppa:** And whenever I bet on football and lose all my money, the following week, there's tons of extra work that comes in.

**Annie:** My dad's usually super busy with sports, and it's hard to get facetime with him. So, I was surprised that we talked for over eight hours. And towards the end, I realized that one day, my dad would also die and that I'd need to take care of him. So, I asked him where he wanted to be buried. He said next to his parents in the village. Then, I asked him if he minded where I was buried. He said he'd love for us to be buried together so that we could stay together in the afterlife. But that ultimately, it was for me to choose. Shortly after--

**Poppa:** [foreign language]

**Annie:** He got antsy about the basketball game starting. "No, not yet. I need to ask one other question. Do you have time, or should I ask another day?"

**Poppa:** No, let's just do it once. You speak so much.

**Annie:** Are you hungry?

**Poppa:** No, not hungry. Just ask whatever you need and let's finish.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Big thanks to Poppa Nguyen. We sure love your daughter, Annie Nguyen, who produced this story. And love and thanks as well to our voice actor, George Q. Nguyen. Please understand that the translation was condensed for clarity. The original score was by Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by Annie Nguyen.

Now, if you want more Spooked, if you need more Spooked, be afraid. Spooked Season 7 drops this September 9th. Brand-new episodes arise from the ashes and will be released regularly through next spring. Available on the luminary channel on Apple Podcast or directly on Luminary at *luminary.link/spooked*.

[upbeat music]

And this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, you could wake up with a cloth over your head, wearing your best suit of clothes inside a box underground and realize that you didn't wake up at all. And you would still not be as far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.

If you need more Spooked in your world, more creatures, more ghouls, more things that go bump in the night, know this. All new episodes of Spooked return to Luminary, September 9th. And to get the newest Spooked stories as they're released, and regularly through the spring of 2023, subscribe to the Luminary channel on Apple Podcast or directly on Luminary. That's *luminary.link/spooked*.

*[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]*