[Snap Judgment]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Okay, so you might not believe this, but in the brashness of ill spent youth, I went to law school. I actually liked it. But in law school, they try to trick you. They tell you that this wrath of completely different Supreme Court decisions is some sort of cohesive whole. They pretend that there is such a thing as judicial logic, that all these contradictory judgments and philosophy throughout power, and who gets to decide what, but it all makes some sort of sense. Perhaps, you just aren't smart enough to get it. And then maybe, if you're lucky, someone suggests you read some the other books, the ones they don't teach in class, the ones on the back shelf, the ones that ignore the happy talk, and instead we count what really goes down. The ones that let you know, all this supposed judicial analysis is noise. Lipstick on a pig. Judicial opinions don't determine who has power, judicial opinions follow power. Judges follow power like dogs follow whoever is holding the treats. And if you want to predict a judicial decision for fun and profit, first determine where the power is. Don't waste time trying to parse legalese, just figure out who has to choose and act accordingly.

So, look about our current landscape. If you place corporate interests against, I don't know, the environment, who's going to win? I know where I place my bet. And if you hear that a long-established judicial opinion, a supposed bedrock of modern American legal jurisprudence, like Roe v. Wade, is going to be relitigated, ask yourself who's going to battle? Who has the power? And the opinion writes itself, the words are noise. No right in America has ever been granted. They have all been seized, and some of them are being seized right back.

So today, on Snap Judgment, we very proudly present Power, the winning, the losing, the taking, the fighting, the wielded stealing. My name is Glynn Washington, and you're choosing to listen to Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

Now, the story you're about to hear was produced for BBC Radio 4, by Falling Tree productions. And, as you likely know, people, especially women, are increasingly being threatened for simply speaking from their perspective. And this story does mention the threat of sexual assault. The piece traces a line of connection between four women who explore the unexpected consequences of speaking openly about abortion. Snap Judgment

**Anonymous:** You kind of lose all sense of time. I didn't sleep. I couldn't sleep because I was afraid I'd oversleep and wouldn't make the flight.

[PSA announcement]

There was a queue for security, and I just had this really strong sense of standing in that line and looking at other women thinking, "Is it here where you traveling into?" All the clinics required you to stay overnight for the abortion pill, and I couldn't do that. Which meant I knew I was facing into a surgical abortion, to be back and forth in one day.

[inflight passenger announcement]

I just felt angry. I was so angry, so angry all the time. I wanted to get it over with. I wanted to just be home on the other side. And that anger, I think, that's what drove me all the way through.

[channel flipping]

**Reporter:** Now tonight, much of Ireland will be transfixed by the final of the Rose of Tralee International Festival.

**Reporter:** The annual festival crowns one young woman the winner following a week of judges assessing how well she behaves and represents her home country.

**Reporter:** If you don't know anything about it, features about 30 women with Irish heritage competing for the title Tralee Rose.

**Reporter:** Sydney Rose, Brianna Parkins was writing about her experience in the Irish Times recently, where she said that being the Sydney Rose was both the best and the worst year of her life. Well, she joins us live now from Sydney.

**Brianna:** My name is Brianna Parkins, I was the 2016 Sydney Rose of Tralee, or as many people remember me, "You're one who gave out about abortion." The Rose of Tralee is a pageant without being a pageant. It doesn't have a swimsuit competition. You're not judged on looks. There's no world peace. There's no patting. There's no posing. There's no modeling. Millions of people watching, big live TV event. It's sort of like Eurovision in a lot of ways because it's so cheesy, but everyone watches it. The backstory to this whole thing is when I landed in Dublin, the Repeal Mural, the Maser art one had just been taken down. Dublin City Council said it was too political. And that's sort of when the Repeal movement got a big social media boost, and you had these women with jumpers and these t-shirts.

[protesters chanting]

**Reporter:** Now, thousands of people are expected to take to the streets of Dublin as part of the Rise and Repeal March which calls for abortion to be made illegal.

**Brianna:** I just wanted a t-shirt. I hadn't meant to wear the thing at all. It was just sort of, I might wear it at the end of it, I'm planning out going, "Hi, Sydney Rose. [unintelligible [00:06:45]." At the very end, it was a small personal thing rather than like a big statement. And I'm reading more and more about repeal when I'm there, and I'm getting angrier and angrier about the situation in Ireland where we basically said to women, "We don't trust you. You're irresponsible. You can't make these decisions for yourself." Women who also had wanted to have children and had had nonviable pregnancies and then had been forced to go to England and then bring the remains of their child back in a shoebox in the boot of the car to have a burial. Women who have been made to miscarry over days and days and days, almost turning septic because the doctor can't just do a D&C. So, this is just bubbling away inside me, and I start to think how can I be a women's rights activist if this thing is happening before me, in front of me in this country? What kind of hypocrite would I be if I got up and then just didn't mention the very obvious elephant in the room?

**Moderator:** This year's Sydney Rose is 25-year-old journalist, Brianna Parkins, whose mom's family hails from Dublin's --

**Brianna:** I remember going out on stage and they make you wave to the camera, like, "I'm Sydney Rose," and you do this really [unintelligible [00:07:56] wave to the camera. I thought, "Right now, I can't. I have changed my mind. I can't do it, not happening."

**Moderator:** Sydney Rose, Brianna Parkins.

[applause]

**Brianna:** Get through the whole interview, not even thinking about, I'm like, "God, I backed out." Women power and I'll do like a lame tweet about that later on about like, "Oh, but actually I meant this." This is fine. I can live with myself. I'll just go home, and it will be fine. But then, he asked me about the women's rights question.

**Moderator:** You're also a campaigner for women's rights, focusing on domestic violence.

**Brianna:** I am because in Australia, we just had our funding cut for domestic violence.

I just it remember coming out of my mouth. I tried taking a deep breath and be like, "We should do better in Sydney."

And it's just not on, and I think we can do better. And I think we can do better here in Ireland. I think it's time to give women a say on their own reproductive rights, and I would love to see a referendum on the Eighth.

Time stopped. It just felt like the collective intake of breath, "Did she just say that?" You can feel your heart beating, you can hear it in the blood rushing.

I think it's time to give women a say--

To me, it was deafening silence.

I would love to see a referendum on the Eighth coming up soon. That'd be my dream.

[applause]

But when I watched the tape back, I can hear applause. So, there must have been applause, but I couldn't hear it. I just turned to the host with a smile. "Right, yeah, I've just done that. And you're going to have to now wear this." And without taking a breath.

**Moderator:** You'll have had a very busy time with your hair.

**Brianna:** I have.

He had the smoothest transition I have ever seen from abortion to let's do a samba dance.

**Moderator:** So, you are a great samba dancer.

**Brianna:** I wouldn't say great, say competent.

"Oh, you like samba. Let's do that now."

**Moderator:** We've only rehearsed this once or twice and apparently, it's [unintelligible 00:09:49] three, one, two, three, so it should be fairly straightforward.

**Brianna:** Yeah. If you can count to three, you've got it.

Didn't miss a beat, like a consummate professional.

We are stepping back on our right foot.

**Moderator:** Okay.

**Brianna:** And we're going, one, two, three, one, two, three.

And then the next day, of course, I was on the front page of every newspaper. "Sydney Rose yells about abortion." Twitter is just going off, "Go back to where you came from. You're not Irish. Go home. You're happy to send a baby-murdering girl over. Is she a plant? You'll play. You will be sent to hell. We will send you there, so we know what hotel you're in," because they do, like we stay in this one hotel called the Rose Hotel. We're all on one floor, we had our names outside on the door, so I took my name off. Threats keep rolling in. The most upsetting ones are probably rape threats, really graphic details. "I'm going to do this, this, and this to you." "I'm going to rape you and you're going to love it," and X, Y and Z. I'm just getting bombarded, and I thought, "I'm not going to let them show that I'm afraid," and so I put up a photo. I dug out the t-shirt, put the t-shirt on and said, "You know what? Repeal the Eighth. Thanks for the support."

I remember watching the dawn break over some back street in Tralee, and thinking that, "It's going to be okay. You'll move on. They'll forget about it. It's a 24-hour news cycle. You're just a contestant. You said a thing, people get out of it," and they didn't.

[birds chirping]

**Anonymous:**  There is a sense of [sighs] quietness about the today. In the waiting room first, I heard one Irish accent. And then, you move to a second waiting room and there were a number of us with the wheelie cases. And then, you hear people talking on the phone, or you hear them asking a nurse a question. And you're aware that you're one of six in that clinic on that day, and that was shocking to me. I shouldn't have been because all the statistics would have backed it up but to be actually there on that day on a random day with five other women was just-- It was devastating.

At one point, the nurse went through asking what our flight times were so that they could line us up according to surgery to give us the maximum amount of recovery time. One of the women said, "I can't believe I booked the Tampa 6 flight, what was I thinking? I was expecting to be delayed." And she got to go first, sayings it's ridiculous, because we weren't queuing for a fun fair ride. But she was taken in first for surgery. The nurse was going through everything that we could and couldn't do after a general anesthetic, and one of the things that she came up with was, "You can't drive because you've had a general anesthetic."

We were all driving back to various parts of the country. I mean, I was lucky I was going to Dublin from the airport. But there were other women who're going to Limerick, going to [unintelligible [00:12:59]. There was this one girl who was very young and very quiet and just kept herself to herself. And then, when that other woman made the comment about her flight time, I just said something to the effect of, "I can't believe this has happened to us. This is ridiculous that we're having to think about this." And I never forget I was sitting right next to her, and she had blonde hair [unintelligible 00:13:27] kind of interface[?]. I said something like, "We have to do something about this when we go home. This can't go on." But she looked up on her hair kind of fell away from her face and she looked at me in horror. I mean in horror, as if I was mad and said, "Are you kidding me? I will never speak about this to anyone as long as I live."

[somber music]

**Siobhan:**  I'm Siobhan McHugh, and I come from Dublin originally. And I live in Australia, in a place called Austinmer which is a beautiful place by the ocean.

I'm a radio documentary maker but also an academic who teaches journalism at the University of Wollongong. Bree Parkins was a student of mine, and so I saw this stuff erupting on Twitter. I got really emotional. I got really moved because I couldn't believe that, what is it, 35 years after I had essentially lost my career in Irish radio for having the temerity to have a woman on who would even articulate and offer opinions about women's need to control their own reproductive rights. 35 years later, a young woman I had taught, she had gone back from Australia to Ireland, and she had stood up in public and she had claimed the space and just said so beautifully and so strongly, and with such conviction, that what she wanted to see was women to get the rights over their own bodies, and to see a repeal to the Eighth Amendment.

In 1983, somebody had the idea that abortion, although it was already completely illegal in Ireland, was not illegal enough. And they thought that it should be actually written into the Constitution, that the right of the fetus was equal to the right of the pregnant woman, which would ensure that nobody could give precedence to the woman and allow an abortion. A referendum campaign began from the point of view of those who were against abortion, it was to put an amendment into the Constitution.

**Reporter:** Meanwhile, in the Irish Republic, a fierce political argument is increasing the divisions between the Catholic and Protestant communities. The controversy concerns the emotive social issue of abortion.

**Person:** Who in Ireland wants abortion? There are just a few misguided and evil people who, under the guise of greater freedom, would allow the same laws to be introduced into our country that have led to murder of millions every year throughout the world.

**Reporter:** Abortion is already illegal, but some Conservative Catholics are now seeking a referendum to make it impossible to change the law on abortion without a further referendum. In other words, they're trying to make the ban on abortion virtually irreversible.

**Siobhan:**  And it divided the country like nothing since the Civil War. So, there were families split down the middle and people not talking to each other. I had been living away from home for 10 years at that stage. So, all my friends were very much in the anti-amendment camp. But I was aware in the radio station, and obviously, from debates in the newspapers and all the rest of it, of how divisive the issue was. We had a policy at the radio station at the time about what you could do, balance, objectivity. And certain items, if they were subject to upcoming votes, you couldn't discuss them, except in a news format, within a certain period of time in before the referendum.

To recognize that, but also to recognize the interest in the people on both sides of the debate, my radio show had a format where between 9:00 AM and 10:00 AM, we had somebody come into the studio, play three of their favorite records, and use that to discuss their life history. And so, I had proposed that one week, we would have Anne Connolly as our guest who had founded the Well Woman Center, who could speak broadly about the new wave of feminism and women's rights, but she was not overtly identified with abortion. She was identified with women's rights to all kinds of reproductive and health rights.

The following week, for balance over the longer term, we would have Mína Bean Uí Chribín, who couldn't have been more different and would speak pro amendment. And this, we decided at our weekly production meeting where we would all put forward our guests and it was approved by the boss. In came Anne Connolly. We couldn't discuss the actual referendum, but we discussed all the other background things to it. Somewhere before 1 o'clock, I was called into the boss office. And I was informed that I was being suspended that I was, "not fit to produce programs with serious editorial content," and I would be reassigned. And I said, "What have I done?" It was vaguely framed. Somehow, it was to do with the guest I'd had on. And I said, "But you approved her." There was just this kind of almost a smile, "No, I didn't."

[sentimental music]

**Glynn:** Don't go anywhere, Snappers, when we return, the consequences. Snap Judgment.

[protestors chanting]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Power episode. Sensitive listeners are advised. When last we left, Siobhan McHugh, an Irish radio host, just had Anne Connolly as a guest on her show.

**Anne:**  Okay, well, my name is Anne Connolly. Back in 1978, I set up the Well Woman Centre in Dublin.

**Reporter:** While abortion is illegal in Ireland, referring women to clinics in Britain is not. Anne Connolly runs a Women's Health Center in Dublin and meets great many women who come to her wanting abortions.

**Reporter:** What is done as far as abortion is concerned?

**Anne:** Well, the policy of this particular clinic is that we believe the decision of the woman is [unintelligible 00:21:40] and we offer a counseling service. And if at the end of counseling, she decides she wants to have an abortion, we are prepared to help her.

**Reporter:** But she can't have it here?

**Anne:** She can't have it here. I know the penalty for abortion here is life imprisonment, no matter what the circumstances are.

**Reporter:** Life imprisonment.

**Anne:** Life imprisonment, even if it's a teenage rape case.

We couldn't get a landlord to give us a premises because of what we were doing. So, the first challenge was finding somewhere. The second was finding doctors willing to work with us. We had a number of doctors at the very beginning, but about a week before we opened, they were told by the gynecologists they reported to in the main acute hospital that they could choose between a career in that hospital or in the Well Woman.

Two nights before we opened, they told me they couldn't come to work. And I literally vomited from about 2:00 in the morning, and my nerves were completely shot. I was 23 at that stage. I knew nothing about employment, the sort of legalities of setting up a company. Ugh.

We also then had an opening which attracted no media attention. So, our first morning we managed to get one doctor, but no patients. And then later that afternoon, a group of people from an emerging group called Society for the Protection of Unborn, SPUC as we used to call them with emphasis, picketed outside our clinic. And we rang the media, and the media are outside the door in five minutes, and we were the front page of the evening papers and the following morning's paper. And the rest was history because we had been launched.

We had advanced bookings for 100 beds every weekend. If a woman was deciding on a termination, the pressures on her were considerable, timewise and financially. And because of the travel involved, it meant that most women wanted to be able to have the termination on the Saturday so they could travel over Friday, come back Sunday, be back at work, be back at home as though nothing had happened. Sometimes, they would have told literally nobody. Literally nobody. What we would inevitably do is to say, "Look, we want one of the nurses here to stay with the Irish girls all the way before and spend a bit of time with them afterwards." So, all of the clinics will go to trouble and find an Irish nurse. But it just meant that there was somebody to talk to in that period beforehand, and somebody to be there afterwards that was there to look after them.

**Anonymous:**  The one thing I do remember is the kindness of the nurses, the kindness of the staff and the normalcy of it that it was-- I think I was expecting kind of hushed tones and the staff speaking to you with their eyes averted and darkness and secrecy and there wasn't. There was openness and warmth and care. And because I'm so terrified of needles, they went over and above what they probably normally do to help me, and they held my hand when I had to get the cannula in and stuff.

It was complication free, and it was relatively straightforward, but you're still sore. And to have to do that, and then just get in the taxi and get in the airplane, it was horrible. Because you're so hungry, you have to eat, so sitting in the airport restaurant, eating with the bruise from the cannula on your hand, and you're kind of thinking and wonder, "Does everyone see this and know what it is?"

[somber music]

My flight was late. So, I was just scrolling on Twitter and catching up on emails, and that was when I saw the #RoseTralee hashtag. And I remember seeing the link with the hashtag #RepealThe8th, and I actually do remember what got me because you had that intake of breath when she said it.

**Brianna:** I would love to see referendum on the Eighth coming up soon. That'd be my dream.

**Anonymous:**  And then, you heard the applause.

[applause]

**Anonymous:**  And that applause was just like, "Oh, my God, the applause." I remember, wanting to go to people beside me, "They're clapping, they're clapping. In Kerry, they're clapping." That applause, it was like a balm to me that day. This is other people saying, "It's okay." I don't need other people to say it's okay, but it's nice today to know that. Plus, I want to buy that woman pints. [chuckles]

[inflight instructions]

I emailed Brianna to say thank you and to tell her where I was when I learned of what she'd done and how bizarre it was to be traveling back from my own abortion while she was lighting up the stage in Tralee.

**Brianna:** And I read it and I cried. [laughs] And then I, of course, emailed her straight back. "Oh, my God, thank you so much. Your letter, it really meant a lot to me."

**Anonymous:**  She wrote back about how important that had been to receive my email because she'd had so much personal hassle over what she'd said and professional hassle and coming at it from all angles, and that my email and story made her feel like it was worth it.

**Brianna:** And I just watched her go from anger to hope to action, and it was just so beautiful watching this woman who wouldn't even use her real name when she first emailed me because she was so scared of even publicly admitting that she had an abortion.

**Anonymous:** A week after I traveled, I had to go back to the UK with my family for a family occasion. I remember being in the airport and looking, actively looking to see who's traveling today? Who's making up the numbers today? My husband and the kids off somewhere in the shop buying something. And I remember sitting and I had to take the two sides of the chair in the airport in the terminal and hold it and grab them so tightly to stop myself from standing up on the chair and screaming at people. "Do you know what people are doing from here today? Do you know? Do you know?"

[sentimental music]

Five months later, I had to travel through the airport again. So, I printed out, I don't know, 60, 80 stickers, and I plastered the airport angrily in them and they were in the gents, they were in the women's, and I plastered Stansted Airport with them and the tube stations, on the plane. It started with, "Traveling for an abortion? You're not alone. These are photos of shadows of the tens of thousands of women who've traveled before you. We see you. We offer you strength and solidarity on your journey. We support you. Be well and get angry. They can't keep doing this to us. #RepealThe8th." It just made me feel better, and it's something I've done a few times, and I've traveled since.

[protesters chanting]

[inspiring music]

It was like a lifting. I remember driving in and seeing the big Dublin Game Center or whatever, I'm thinking, "I don't want to be anywhere else in the world right now. You could offer me any money." But after that exit poll last night, I want to be here today, with my people, with [unintelligible 00:30:42]me together for years[?] people. Everyone just coming in and waving and smiling and hugging.

**Person:** Votes in favor of the proposal, 1,429,981.

[applause and cheers]

**Anonymous:** It was phenomenal.

[applause]

And then, to meet Brianna then.

**Brianna:** And the vote count, when the vote came through yes, and we just hugged, and it was just the nicest meeting.

**Anonymous:**  She was emotional. I was emotional. It was just a lovely moment with someone that I don't know but I'll always be connected to it, like always. Always.

[dramatic music ends]

**Glynn:** The story, A Sense of Quietness, was originally produced by Lights Out, a Falling Tree production for BBC Radio 4. It's produced by Eleanor McDowall and features Brianna Parkins, Siobhan McHugh, and Anne Connolly along with a woman who asked to remain anonymous. With additional recordings courtesy of Zoë Comyns and Regan Hutchins. We'll have links to more documentaries from Falling Trees, Lights Out series at *snapjudgment.org.*

Now, when Snap Judgment returns, a war between two grandmothers. Stay tuned.

[protesters chanting]

[somber music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Power episode. My name is Glynn Washington. We've got the lights, the cameras, 3000 screaming Snappers at BAM, the beautiful Brooklyn Academy of Music, and for you, of course, the very best seat in the house. Sensitive listeners are advised. My dear friend, Mr. Josh Healey, on Snap Judgment Live.

[applause]

**Josh:** There's a famous story in my family. When my parents got married, there were two family members who were supposed to be kept as far apart from each other as possible.

[chuckles]

My great-grandmother, Barbara, and my other great-grandma, Henrietta. Barbara and Henrietta, two little old Jewish ladies, two feisty, powerful giants, each standing tall at 4'10" in the Babushkin heels. And they were supposed to be kept as far apart from each other as possible, but there was a mix-up at the reception, and somehow, they got seated at the same table. And when they did, they proceeded to play every immigrant's favorite game, "who's had a tougher life."

[laughter]

Barbara came out swinging. She said, "Well, you know that my family, we had to flee Russia when I was five because the army came and burned down our whole village." Henrietta was like, "All right, we're going to fight? Let's play."

[laughter]

Henrietta's like, "Oh, yeah, well, the boat my family came over on, it was so bad, my little sister almost died before we got to Ellis Island." Barbara, she comes back flexing. She's like, "Oh, yeah? Yeah? That's all you got, son?" And obviously, this is how immigrant Jewish women talk. Like bad battle rappers. Straight out of the shtetl.

[laughter]

She's like, "Yeah, well, you know, I had to drop out of school when I was 12 to work at a sweatshop on the Lower East Side." Henrietta is like, " I wish I worked at a sweatshop."

[laughter]

"My whole family was unemployed during the Depression. We survived 10 years of spam and matzah balls. No soup, just the matzah balls." And by this point, a whole crowd has formed around, all the families at the table, even my newlywed parents. They want to see the heavyweight bout. It's Ali v. Frazier. It's Nas v. Jay-Z. It's Barbara Rosenbloom v. Henrietta Goldblatt, and Barbara goes in for the knockout punch. She stands on top of her chair, and in front of 150 guests at the party of my parents wedding, shouts out, "I had 12 abortions."

[mixed reactions]

"All self-performed."

[laughter]

And that's the story that popped into my head when my girlfriend told me she was pregnant. [laughter] And I'm not proud that was the first thing that popped into my head. But given what happened next, it was kind of crazy. I was 19 years old, a sophomore in college. So, I was smart enough to know that when your girl tells you she's pregnant, the first sentence out your mouth should probably not contain the word 'abortion'. So instead, I went for something far more sensitive and mature. When she told me, I was like, "Ah, for real? Like for real for real? You sure you're not just a little late?" She said, "I don't think so. It's been 15 days." 15 days, man. I know nothing about women's bodies. But I thought I would be able to notice if she was preggers. Like she smelled different.

[laughter]

Maybe like applesauce.

[laughter]

Or every time she breathed, there'd be a little more air coming out.

[laughter]

Her name was Esther. We'd been together for six months, and I said, "I love you," to her every night. But I also said, "I love you," every night to my couch. So, I wasn't really sure what this was. Well, I say there's only one way to find out. We go to the store, come back, and before I know it, I'm looking at this pregnancy test I just bought at Walgreens for less than a super burrito. I opened the box, the cardboard cracking like thunder. I'm 19. I can't even legally have a drink to celebrate if it comes out positive. I mean negative. I mean, we go the bathroom together. It's the first time I've seen a woman pee.

[laughter]

It feels like she's going on forever.

[laughter]

Like she's been storing the Pacific in her bladder for just this moment.

[laughter]

Finally, the trickle stops. She hands me the stick, eyes closed. "You look." "Ladies first," I say.

[laughter]

She does. She takes a breath. [breathes heavily] "Looks like I'm going to be drinking for two from now on. I'm pregnant." "For real?", I say, "For real for real," she says, picking up her pants. "So, what should we do?" And I know what I'm supposed to say, right? I'm supposed to say something supportive and strong and sensitive and sweet and serious all at the same time, which is really easy in the moment. So, I say, "Maybe we should try another test?" But I can tell that is not the answer she is going for right now. So, I say, "Look, look, look, look. You know I'm here for you. I'm here with you. And whatever you want to do, I've got your back, and apparently your belly." What I'm really thinking is, "Please say you're not ready. Please say you're not ready." I don't want her to do anything she doesn't want to do. But I do want her to do what I want her to do it for what she wants to do.

[laughter]

You know what I mean? Esther sits down. She takes a breath. She takes my hand. She puts it on her belly. She says, " I know we're not ready. I'm too young. You're too dumb."

[laughter]

It's a direct quote. "I know it's not right right now, but I've always wanted to be a mother. I've always wanted to have a daughter." I say, "You'd be a great mother whenever you think the time is right." She says, "It's funny. Ever since I thought I might be pregnant, I started thinking about baby names. If it was a boy, I was thinking Dominic. And if it was a girl, Barbara."

[laughter]

Barbara. Barbara? I never told Esther about my great grandma before. Last month, I brought her home to meet my family, to meet the women who raised me. Strong women with old names, like Dorothy and Deborah and Francis, my grandma, my mom, my aunt. I'd fallen in love with an Esther, a name so old when you're born, it comes with an AARP card.

[laughter]

I was raised by strong women. Women who taught me how to show respect, do my own dishes, say my daily prayers to Audre Lorde and Billie Jean King. It was my Aunt Fran who taught me how to roll a condom onto a cucumber, I was not paying close enough attention apparently. And it was my mom who first told me about the strongest woman in our family history. The woman who stole the show at her own wedding, my great grandma, Barbara. Who fled Russia and worked in sweatshops and had 12 abortions, all self-performed.

[laughter]

No birth control, no clinics on the Lower East Side. She almost died in a tenement bathroom on Avenue C. But she lived. She lived and she fought for women and workers and immigrants and everything a nice socialist Jew used to do. She danced in the streets. She danced in the streets when they passed Roe v. Wade. She lived a long, hard, beautiful life like her. Barbara. When Esther said that name, I started to change my mind about what we should do. I said maybe this mistake wasn't a mistake after all. Maybe we're supposed to have a daughter." She said, "Yeah. Maybe not."

[laughter]

"Maybe not right now. I still need to become who I am to become a woman. And you, Josh, you definitely need some time to become a man." And so, a couple of weeks later we went to the clinic, and it was quick, it was safe. One with a man with the picket sign outside said he'd pray for Esther's soul. She said, "Hey, good looking out."

[laughter]

[applause]

I held Esther's hand from when the doctor went in until the doctor came out. And yes, there were tears, pain, sadness, relief. All of the above. When it was done, I asked her how she felt, she said, "I feel kind of hungry. Let's go get some lunch." And there were more tears over that meal. But when it was done, she was good, and we were good. At the end of the day, it was just a Wednesday at a doctor's office, no hangers, no back-alley botch jobs. We were able to go on with our lives and graduate. And now, and now today, 10 years later, I'm still with Esther, ah--

[applause]

You can clap for that. I do.

[applause]

And she is my wife. She is my midwife wife. Her job is to help bring babies into the world. And she helps women find their power, helps them heal, helps them make their own decisions, their own choice. And last month, Esther told me that she's ready now. She wants to have kids. She needs to have a daughter. There are lessons she needs to pass on. I agree. And I know someone else who would too. And we don't have any kids yet. Sorry, mom.

[laughter]

We don't have any news yet. But we're already talking about names. And if it's a girl, there's one name, one heavyweight champ at the top of the list. Thank you.

[applause and cheers]

**Glynn:** Joshua Healey. Holler.

[upbeat music]

Josh Healey performed at Snap Judgment Live in New York. The original music was composed by Alex Mandel, and performed by Alex and the Snap Judgment Playaz, Tim Frick and David Brandt. It was recorded and mixed by Pat Mesiti-Miller.

[upbeat music]

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And this, this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, you could stand on the table to make your big announcement only to discover that the commercial is over. They're now spinning the wheel now, Pat's babbling something and you lost your big chance. But you would still, even then, not be as far away from the news as this is. But this is PRX.

[upbeat music]

*[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]*