[Snap Judgment]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Okay, so there's a story that I wanted to tell you. It's a personal story. An odd story for sure. And I've worked on this story for probably two weeks. Rewriting, refining, tweaking. Then finally, I go into the studio. And I performed the hell out of this story, if I do say so myself, bam. And I know that you are going to love it. But then a few days later, my partner and all things Snap, the uber producer, he wants to have a chat. Okay.

First starts talking about the old days. We've known each other since we were in school in Michigan many, many years ago. He asked me, "Yeah, where do you go on that college trip with your daughter?" And I started to get a little suspicious. "What is it? Where's the knife?" He's like, "Well, I was thinking, that story you did?" "Yes. That story. Yes." "Well, that story, [pause] it doesn't work." "What? What do you mean that story doesn't work?" And I argue, I disagree, but he knows me well enough, as a friend, to tell me his truth in a way that I can hear it. Like I said, we've been through some things together, he and I. One of my oldest and dearest compatriots. So, he's already anticipated how I'm going to react, what I'm going to say before I even know myself. It's one of the universe's greatest gifts to have someone like that.

[upbeat music]

Not someone like that, to actually have him in my life, because what if instead the person that knows you most of all better than your mama, better than your spouse, what if that person, what if that person's not your friend at all, but your enemy? Today on Snap Judgment, we proudly present The Wedding Guest, an amazing chronicle of two men with the very closest of bonds. My name is Glynn Washington. Please, tell everyone to go away and leave you alone for the next few minutes. Go on ahead, let them know they can wait, because you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

We begin in Australia, a place where a refugee thought, at long last, he could finally stop running. And this story, it does recount real events that happened to a child soldier with graphic scenes inside a prison camp. And as such, listener discretion is advised. Ruby Schwartz has a story.

[upbeat music]

**Ruby:** In late 2004, Ayik Chut Deng was on the road. He was driving to a church in Brisbane, a city on Australia's East Coast. He'd been invited by a friend to the wedding of a South Sudanese couple. He didn't know them all that well, but he still had that kind of giddy excited feeling get before wedding, which drove him to formalities he might not otherwise subscribe to.

**Ayik:** I'm not a suit person. So, I like to wear a Polo shirt, but I think I was wearing a nice button-up shirt, just for respect of the wedding.

**Ruby:** In the church, the 70 or so guests milled about making small talk before taking their seat on one of the wooden pews.

**Ayik:** And then, the bride and the groom got married. Everything went all right. People ate food and all that. It's all the Sudanese food. Lamb stew, fish stew. Because we are Dinka, so it's all stew. And then at the end of the service, I was sitting to the left side of the building of the church. I was just looking around.

[suspenseful music]

**Ruby:** And Ayik recognizes this guy off to the side on his right.

**Ayik:** He was just a few seats in front of me. He was talking to someone. I said, "This guy can't be here. Nah, no way. That’s not him." I look again, I just say, "No, it can't be right." I've thought maybe something's wrong with me in church. I just couldn't believe that. This guy's gone years ago. "That can't be him. He's not here. He's in Africa, he's dead." And I look again just to double check to make sure that it's him and it was him. Honestly, just the eye, it was the thing I'll never forget, the look. His face never changed. After I realized it was him, my brain was about-- It's just like a bomb just about to explode. I felt so angry.

**Ruby:** Ayik had always thought that if he ever came face to face with this man again, he'd kill him. But at this point, many years had passed, and he was a different person now.

**Ayik:** I said, "This time, I can do anything to him, and he can't do anything to me because I'm not a kid anymore. I'm not that skinny child anymore." So, what I did, I walked straight back to my car, jumped in the car, went home. While I was at home, everything started pouring back in my head. I went back to when I was a child again, when I was a child under his power. I never went through so much pain in my life until I met Anyang.

**Ruby:** Ayik last saw this man, Anyang, about 10 years ago, when he was just a 13-year-old boy. He was living in Sudan, which at the time was experiencing at second civil war. And Ayik had just been enlisted in the children's army. That first day, when he arrived at the base, this sprawling encampment with tents started all over the red dusty earth.

**Ayik:** I look around, children everywhere. There were hundreds of them, I felt like, "This is good. Now, I'm going to get trained. I'll get my uniform, I'll get my boots, I'll get my gun." I wasn't really scared. I was excited.

**Ruby:** But it didn't take long for Ayik to realize that the children's army wasn't what he'd expected.

**Ayik:** The training was hard.

**Ruby:** He had to train from 4:00 AM well into the afternoon's hottest hours.

**Ayik:** You run 20 meters that way, 20 meters back. And if you make a little mistake, you get whipped by the trainers from the back. There might be two of them or three, and you just run. You just have to get it right or you pay for it.

**Ruby:** There was very little food to go around. Usually, just ground maize or corn if they were lucky.

**Ayik:** I was just sick of the punishment you get from training.

**Ruby:** But the thing is, once you join the children's army, there's not just packing up and leaving. You're stuck.

**Ayik:** Once you join, yeah, that's it.

**Ruby:** The only way to get out is to escape. So, Ayik started asking himself, "How can I get out of here?"

**Ayik:** Because I can't go back to my auntie, because my auntie is hours away toward Ethiopia.

**Ruby:** He also couldn't go back to his village in Sudan.

**Ayik:** Unless you go as a group and you got guns, yeah. But if you're a child, nah, no way you're going to make it.

**Ruby:** His only option was this nearby refugee camp called Dima about two kilometers down the road.

**Ayik:** Because we were in Ethiopian jungle. There's nowhere to run. You can only run there.

**Ruby:** So, one night under the blanket of darkness, clutching a metal plate and rocks for protection, Ayik ran out of the camp towards the dirt road to Dima.

**Ayik:** From leopards, from hyenas, lion. I didn't think I can make it.

**Ruby:** He kept looking back expecting to be caught or attacked. But 15 minutes later, panting, sweating, the refugee camp was finally in sight. He'd made it.

**Ayik:** And then a few weeks later, the refugee camp, the army comes at nighttime. They get a bunch of grass, light it up. They walk into this little hut, light it, looking for boys.

**Ruby:** Every few days, the buses from the children's army camp would do a sweep through the refugee camp looking for children that might have escaped. During one of those sweeps, they found Ayik. They pulled him out of the hut he was sleeping in.

**Ayik:** And they caught me and took me back to the camp, to the Red Army camp. We got thrown into this-- it was a makeshift little prison made out of branches of tree. During the day around 12 o'clock, they bring you out.

**Ruby:** That's when Ayik met the army's prison guard for the very first time. The guy responsible for punishing those who tried to escape.

**Ayik:** And his name was Anyang.

**Ruby:** Anyang was 16 years old. He was solid and he towered over Ayik.

**Ayik:** But I didn't take him as just this is going to be a bad person. I thought he was doing his job, and he's probably going to punish us today, and that’s it.

**Ruby:** First, Anyang put him in a hogtie.

**Ayik:** Your elbows are tied to your ankles. And you're just on your chest, and you're in the sun, lying in the sun.

**Ruby:** After a day of almost nonstop beatings, Anyang threw Ayik back in the prison. Ayik begged him for water. By the end of the day, Ayik was so thirsty that he had no choice but to drink his own urine.

**Ayik:** So, what happened was I escaped. I escaped.

**Ruby:** That very same night, Ayik broke out of the prison and ran back to the refugee camp.

**Ayik:** I thought I'll disappear into the crowd, and they'll forget about me, because there's others, hundreds of child soldiers coming from Sudan every night as refugee. They can go and take them and then I got caught again.

**Ruby:** So, he tried escaping again, a third time.

**Ayik:** Some night around 3 o'clock, I'll just go and climb the tree, because when they come, they didn't know there'll be someone on the tree.

**Ruby:** Then, a fourth time--

**Ayik:** And then again, the same guy with this group come and get me, come and get me.

**Ruby:** And a fifth time.

**Ayik:** I came up with a plan that I used to sleep between the girls, because when the rebels come in the morning, they were only looking for boys. They didn't take the girls.

**Ruby:** But each time, Ayik was caught and delivered back to the prison camp and back into the hands of Anyang.

**Ayik:** Every time I come back, it's him and then he realized, "This is the guy that won't listen. This is a guy who thinks he knows everything."

**Ruby:** So, the punishments got worse.

**Ayik:** When the skin starts peeling off from your elbow or your feet, he'll rub chilly in there. He just had a hate for me. He hated me. Other times, he had a big boss ahead of him. When his boss is there, fair enough, you can go as hard as you want.

**Ruby:** To some extent, Ayik knew that Anyang was just doing his job and following the orders. But then, Anyang would torture Ayik and the other boys in the prison camp even when the superiors weren't around.

**Ayik:** Every time he sees me, he punished me worse than any other person in that prison. I asked myself, "Why is he doing it? Is it for his own pleasure? Why? Why?" Other people like him suffer like this. Why is he doing it? There was an anger inside me. All that time, I became very angry.

**Ruby:** But that still didn't keep Ayik from that same cycle, escaping, getting caught, escaping, getting caught again.

**Ayik:** I lost track so many times. I lost track, probably 15 to 20 time. And I thought they'd get sick of me let me go and that's why I keep doing it. But after a while, I just got sick of it and I just said, "There's no point. I might as well just give up." I stopped running.

**Ruby:** Ayik was eventually deployed and spent more than two years fighting with the Sudan People's Liberation Army. He finally got out when his sister, who was married to an army captain, managed to organize a passage for him to travel from Sudan into Nairobi, Kenya.

**Ayik:** When I came to Kenya, we went to this hotel, and I just felt so saved. Nothing felt like that. I swear to God, I never felt like that.

**Ruby:** From there, they applied for resettlement. And not long after, they were on a flight to Australia.

**Ayik:** To get away, go somewhere where you can eat, you fill up your belly. You sleep peaceful. You're not going to hear weapons. You're not going to run. I felt like, "This is it. This is a new life." I was very awful.

**Ruby:** Now, as a grown man back at his apartment in Brisbane after the wedding, Ayik was pacing around his living room.

**Ayik:** To me, I felt like, "This is crazy. So, why him to where I am? Some of my best friends live in America, Canada. Why not one of them? Why bring my enemy next to me?" I thought of that. I thought of him so many times.

**Ruby:** Even though Ayik was living this new life in a new country at peace, these thoughts about Anyang and all the pain he inflicted on him, they kept coming up in flashbacks. It was like this movie rolling in front of his eyes that he just couldn't press pause on.

**Ayik:** Sometime, when I was in the kitchen, because there were three of us in my family that I used to cook for everyone, me and my sister and my cousin. Sometime, when I was in the kitchen, I'll have a look at these trays sitting in front of meat, my mind will start thinking, "Oh, okay, if you cut into the meat, it'll be like you're cutting into your nephew and nieces." All these things, crazy thoughts come into my mind. Sometimes, I'll just stick the knife in this steak and go to the park and then come back. And my sister will say, "How come you didn't do that?" I said, "Because I don't want to." I didn't want to tell her what I was going through. I didn't want to tell her that thing reminded me of the war when I was a soldier.

**Ruby:** Ayik's life in Australia had not gone how he'd planned. He couldn't hold down jobs. He got a taste for drugs and booze, and eventually, he became a low-level drug dealer.

**Ayik:** I went through in Australia going to prison, having a fight with a girlfriend, having fights with the police, having fights with people at the pub. I was diagnosed of posttraumatic stress disorder. [sobs] Sorry, Ruby. [sighs]

**Ruby:** He says for almost a year, he couldn't stop thinking about Anyang. So, he had to keep reminding himself he's not 13 anymore. He's not a child soldier. Anyang can't hurt him anymore. And then--

**Ayik:** I had a little boy. I had a child. I had my son. So, I had something to live for.

**Ruby:** He called his son, Freeman. And Freeman totally changed the way Ayik saw the world and his place in it.

**Ayik:** Children, if you have a child, you think different and not do the thing that you would do.

**Ruby:** And this man, Anyang, while still there, faded back into the recesses of his mind.

**Ruby:** So, I was just trying to focus on myself. I've got a child now and I want to live. I want to move on with my life. I tried to find a career or something just to prove that I can do something in my life.

**Ruby:** And that's when he started pursuing his childhood passion.

**Ayik:** The first time I saw a movie, I was in the jungle. What happened was that the bodyguards came with a TV. It was just as big as a microwave. It was black and white. And I just see these white guys jumping out of the plane, doing all this crazy stuff. So, when I came here, when I came to Australia, I tried to get to the bottom of it, how they make movies.

**Ruby:** And he got into acting.

**Ayik:** I was in *Scooby-Doo,* the movie. I was in *Between Us Two*, which is a [unintelligible [00:18:41] is a comedy sort of like. *In Between Us*, remember that movie? There's *In Between Us One, In Between Us Two,* I was in that.

**Ruby:** One day, Ayik was scrolling through StarNow, a website that matches producers and casting directors with actors and performers. He came across this call out for a TV show called *Look Me in the Eye*, which would be broadcast on SBS all across Australia. The premise of the show was to reunite two estranged people by placing them in a room, where they look at each other in the eyes for five minutes to see if eye contact alone can bring people back together. Think long lost father reuniting with his child or best friends coming back together after a fight, that kind of a thing.

**Ayik:** So, what I did, I wrote to them about a guy who I helped save from a leopard. When I was a child soldier, we had a leopard that were raising. That leopard got big, one day attacked this guy, nearly killed him. So, I helped save him from a leopard and it'd be good to see him.

**Ruby:** A few days later, he got a call from the show's producers.

**Ayik:** They say, "Okay, you're telling us that you helped save someone a from leopard. Okay, and how did you get to have a leopard?" I told them I was a boy soldier in Sudan. And then, they told me, "Okay. Who can prove that you were a child soldier?"

**Ruby:** It had been more than 10 years since Ayik has been Anyang in church that day. But at that moment, for whatever reason, Anyang was the first name that popped into his mind.

**Ayik:** I said, "I didn't want to talk about it. But the guy that used to torture me, I ran into him years ago in church." And they said, "Okay. So, what did this guy do to you?" I said, "This guy, he ran the prison. He was the boss of the prison. Then, he tortured me when I was in the war."

**Ruby:** As soon as he said those words, he knew what the producer was going to say. Of course, that's the story they wanted to hear, not the one about Ayik saving a boy from a leopard. But the one about Anyang, the man who had tortured him.

**Ayik:** "We think this story is more powerful than that." I say, "Yeah, it's more powerful but there's so much pain in that one.

**Ruby:** When the producer asked Ayik if he'd be willing to confront Anyang on national television, he wasn't sure what to do. He didn't know what to say.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** When we return, will Ayik go on national television to confront Anyang? Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment, The Wedding Guest episode. This is a real story, an amazing story that recounts disturbing memories. As such, listener discretion is advised. Ayik was on the phone with the TV producer, who wanted him to go on national television to finally look his childhood tormentor in the eye. Snap Judgement.

**Ayik:** "We think this story is more powerful than that." I say, "Yeah, it's more powerful but there's so much pain in that one."

**Ruby:** When the producer asked Ayik if he'd be willing to confront Anyang on national television, he wasn't sure what to do. He didn't know what to say.

**Ayik:** It was something that I've been keeping to myself. Even the mother of my child, she didn't know much. She knew that I was a child soldier, but I never got into detail. So, anyone, any close friend that knew me, they knew I was a child soldier, but not in detail.

**Ruby:** He also honestly wasn't sure what he was capable of, if he'd be able to control himself in front of Anyang.

**Ayik:** And I say, "I've got a boy now. If I snap, then I'm going to do something bad to this guy and I'm going to spend the rest of my life in jail."

**Ruby:** Ayik told the producer that he had to think about it. And so, he did. For weeks, he went back and forth about whether to confront Anyang on national television. And finally, one morning, he woke up and decided that yes, he would do it.

[intriguing music]

**Ayik:** I decided to just go with coming face-to-face with Anyang. Because he's the only person that can tell me what he was thinking at the time, why he did what he did to me. I wanted to do it for myself, because all these years, I was in Australia with-- It was like a ticking bomb.

**Ruby:** A few months later, Ayik found himself on a plane to Sydney, where the show would be filmed.

**Ayik:** I was just really nervous.

**Ruby:** That night in his hotel room, he barely slept.

**Ayik:** It was just a mixed emotion. I wanted to forgive him, at the same time, I was angry.

**Ruby:** When he woke up the next morning, he put on a pink shirt, khaki trousers, and tan leather shoes. He was picked up from the hotel and driven to a large studio with polished concrete floors and bright lights.

**Ayik:** Which is like a warehouse. It is huge and in that studio, I got told to sit there.

**Ruby:** The show is set up so that participants sit facing one another, staring into each other's eyes for five minutes. After that, they have to make a decision, either in the relationship there and then or decide to talk and reconnect.

**Ayik:** I was shaky. Everything was very blurry.

**Ruby:** At this point. Ayik didn't actually know if Anyang would be turning up to the filming. The producers hadn't told him. It seems that in true reality television fashion, they wanted Ayik to be in as much suspense as their audience would be in.

**Ayik:** After a while, you get told he's to all these in the building, but we're not sure, if he's going to come or not. What about if he doesn't come? What are you going to do if he missed the shoot?

**Ruby:** Eventually, a producer led Ayik to the center of the room and sat him down in one of the chairs. The lights dimmed. The question of whether Anyang would turn up loomed large.

**Ayik:** When I heard the footsteps, someone coming, tick, tick, tick, tick. And then, sit right about two meters or three meters in front of me.

**Ruby:** Ayik has his head down. Anyang, tall and lean, wearing glasses and a black suit takes a seat in front of Ayik. He looks directly at him and Ayik still has his head down.

**Ayik:** And then, I look up and there he was, Anyang, sitting right in front of me looking to me, looking at me. The first moment when I was looking at him, what I saw was the Anyang in the rebel. The Anyang, the prison guard, the boss. What came back to my mind was just what I saw when I was in Ethiopia, in the training camp. It’s just a blank face just looking at me just about to deliver his orders. He still looked the same as when I was in that dust on the ground looking up at him. That's all I saw in his eyes. I didn't see any sympathy. His eye was just so blank and just staring at me.

**Ruby:** Ayik looks away, but Anyang keeps a steady gaze on him.

**Ayik:** I was hoping to see some changes in his face, but I didn't say it. I was just thinking, "This the same guy. He's the same person." People learn, grow, and change but I haven't seen any change.

**Ruby:** Suddenly, the lights brightened, and the five minutes were up. Anyang was the first to stand up and walk out. But Ayik, he doesn't move from his chair. It's like the weight of those last five minutes keep him in the chair. Eventually, each man is directed into a separate room to consult with their producers. And Ayik had a decision to make.

**Ayik:** The eye contact was the beginning. But I wanted to know, the way he was looking at me, what was in his mind, what was he seeing? Because what I was seeing there is hard to read.

**Interviewer:** So, you definitely want to go and talk to him.

**Ayik:** Yeah, I want to talk to him.

**Ruby:** But of course, reality television producers are kind of known for their pushiness, that sort of 'nothing gets in the way of good TV' kind of an attitude. Was that really a decision for you when you were talking to the producer? Was there any chance that you wouldn't actually talk to Anyang after?

**Ayik:** I wanted to talk. I wanted to talk, and he wanted to talk too.

**Ruby:** Back in the studio in their seats, Ayik began asking questions. He says he ended up talking with Anyang for quite a while, but only a few minutes of that conversation was actually aired. The most tear-inducing minutes set to a dramatic, melancholic orchestra of strings in piano.

**Ayik:** Just going back to the training, you put me in jail a few times.

**Anyang:** Yeah.

**Ayik:** There were a lot of other child soldiers there. I wanted to know exactly. Did you ever kill anyone in there, whether it was a mistake or what have you done? I want to know.

**Anyang:** Yeah, actually, I didn't kill any one there. See, to be honest to you, I knew what I did is something wrong. I understand the feeling in your heart. Because every single night when the memories come up, what I did, it is there in my mind throughout. So, when I revise what happened, I don't feel comfortable when I'm going to sleep. It hurt you and you went through it all these years. I knew it is still in your heart there, but please, I'm asking you can you forgive me? Let us start a new chapter of life, please. Ayik, please?

**Ayik:** Before I came here, I went mental. And then-- [gasps] When I was here, my life changed. You say you are sorry, yeah?

**Anyang:** Yeah.

**Ayik:** You're really sorry?

**Anyang:** Yes.

**Ayik:** I'll forgive you in a minute. So, I'm finished with this today here, just to move on. Now, I wish you the best in everything you do. Go on with your life and be good. Be good to everyone. But I've forgiven you.

I broke down and there are tears of someone who is angry, tears of someone who wanted to forgive. And after that, he just couldn't take it anymore. I thought, "Oh, his past is catching up with him." So, he just took off. He said, "I'll have to leave."

**Ruby:** After embracing Ayik, Anyang says to him in Dinka, "I'm going. I'm going," and walks out of the studio.

[soaring music]

**Glynn:** Is that the last we've seen of Anyang? Find out when The Wedding Guest episode continues. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment, The Wedding Guest episode. My name is Glynn Washington and when last we left, Ayik had just confronted Anyang, the man who had been his tormentor for years as a boy, as a child soldier in Sudan. The meeting took place in Australia on national television with him tearful and emotional under the bright lights of a TV studio, but the moment was cut short, and Anyang left the set. Snap Judgment.

**Ruby:** After embracing Ayik, Anyang says to him in Dinka, "I'm going. I'm going," and walks out of the studio.

I'm wondering because I know that Anyang apologized to you on the show, he said, "I'm sorry." And you said to him on the show that you forgive him. I'm wondering, did you really mean that? Because that feels to me-- it feels unbelievable that such a brief moment and something so public could, I guess, lead to that.

**Ayik:** Some people say I'll never forgive anyone like that. I forgive so I'll move on with my life, because if I don't forgive, I'm the one suffering. I found myself that to forgive is the only way to make me move forward.

[cell phone ringing]

**Anyang:** Hello.

**Ayik:** Anyang, [unintelligible [00:34:33]

**Anyang:** Ayik, how are you, bro? [laughs]

**Ayik:** [unintelligible [00:34:37] I tried to contact you a while ago, because I was going to hang out with you, but you've been busy. Did you get my texts?

**Anyang:** No, I didn't get your text to be honest to you.

**Ayik:** Ah, all right. So, how's the family, anyway?

**Anyang:** Oh, all that being good, bro.

[music]

**Ruby:** A few weeks after the show aired, Ayik went searching for Anyang. He found his number through a mutual friend. He wanted to see him again.

**Ayik:** I just wanted to see and just get to know him as a person and see more about him, if he's changed. Is he really sorry for what he said on national TV, or does he mean it?

**Ruby:** So, Ayik was really nervous that first time he dialed Anyang's number. And he couldn't believe Anyang's reaction. Anyang said, "Yeah, sure. Come to my place. Hang out."

**Ruby:** I went there, parked my car, walked to the unit. "Here's water. Do you want tea? Do you want coffee. Yeah, have a seat."

**Ruby:** At first, it was mostly just small talk. But pretty quickly, they started opening up to each other.

**Ayik:** He talked about his own family that he's got children, what he's doing with his life. And then, something just connected. And he says, "Are you going to stay?" I say, "Yeah, I want to stay here tonight."

**Ruby:** One night extended to two and then three.

**Ayik:** I was sleeping at his house for a week.

**Ruby:** Every evening that week, Ayik would finish work, pack a bag, and drive to see Anyang. They shared meals, they watched TV together.

**Ayik:** I even learned his humorous side. He's got humor. I felt I was close to him. And from there, he said, "Bring your son." So, I took Freeman there.

**Ruby:** Ayik says that seeing Anyang with his son felt oddly natural, comfortable.

**Ayik:** It was just good to see him just hugging Freemen, walking, playing. Playing like it's kids play, "Can you do this, Freeman?" It was good, it was good. And it made me realize, "Okay, this guy has changed. He's not the same person he was back then."

**Ruby:** Eventually, Ayik got up the courage to start asking Anyang questions about the war.

**Ayik:** He said he was a child too. And he was worried about his life if he doesn't do what he was supposed to do. I even told him, I said, "If I was in your shoes, I would have done the same but not as bad." I know he had his own anger that he was taking out of us, and I can tell why because he said his father and mother were killed when the war first started. Maybe that's the anger that he took on to pass it on to us. He suffered himself in the war as well.

**Ruby:** Ayik, I have a question for you, which is, the show *Look Me in the Eye*, it sets up a kind of oppressor versus victim narrative, basically where Anyang's the bad guy and you're the good guy. And it makes the situation seem really black and white. But I'm wondering, what would you say to that? Because it does seem more complicated than just that.

**Ayik:** Maybe he was a victim, but I don't know how bad he was, who punished him, like what he did to me. That's why I see him as a bad guy, but the bad guy became a good guy.

[music]

**Ruby:** But Ayik says that knowing this, knowing how Anyang also suffered during the war, it made him realize something.

**Ayik:** Because he's the only person I can talk to about the war, is Anyang.

**Ruby:** And at that moment, he knew that what he thought he'd come for, an apology wasn't actually what he'd come for.

**Ayik:** I feel he's the only one that knew about me when I was a child, the person I was. If I was good or bad, then he knows. No one knows. I don't even know what kind of person I was when I used to run many times. But Anyang will tell you that 100% exactly who I was. He was like a friend, but an enemy friend. I don't know if I'm making sense. So, he knows me, he knows my personality back then, and he knows my personality now. He probably knows me better than anyone.

**Ruby:** Over the years, the two men have spent quite a lot of time together. But these days, it's more Ayik reaching out to Anyang.

**Ayik:** See-- Yeah, we do talk, but I think he's going through a lot right now. That thing, probably him being through the war and all that is catching up with him.

**Ruby:** Sometimes, Ayik does reach him on the phone, and they catch up like they used to.

**Anyang:** How are you doing, bro?

**Ayik:** I'm all right, Anyang. Man, it's just hard with the baby. That's about it. But everything is-- [crosstalk]

**Anyang:** Oh, yeah.

**Ayik:** It's just still a ride. Juststruggling. Just struggling.

**Anyang:** Yeah.

**Ayik:** But everything will be all right. Everything will be all right.

**Anyang:** Ayik, there's two things.

**Ayik:** Yeah.

**Anyang:** To be alive is good, but living is hard.

**Ayik:** Okay, Yeah, I got it. I like that saying.

**Anyang:** Yeah, it's part of the life. Yeah.

[music]

**Ayik:** Yeah. When are you going to come from [fades away]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** A very big, big, big thank you to Ayik Chut Deng for sharing his story with Snap Judgment. Ayik and Anyang are still in touch and remain friends. That story was produced by Ruby Schwartz and edited by Nancy López. Special thanks as well to Windy Love.

Now, there is no way we came even close to covering all of Ayik's story. You can catch Ayik on *Harrow*, a crime drama now airing on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ABC. He appears as a biosecurity officer. In between acting and parenting, Ayik has also managed to write a memoir. One of those stories in that memoir, you may be familiar with, called The Leopard Story, the one that one of those fancy TV producers in Australia turned down. Now, it's a bit graphic, sensitive listeners are advised, but let's give you the chance to judge for yourself. Ayik is going to take us back to his days as a young boy soldier in Sudan.

**Ayik:** When I was a child soldier, we had a leopard that we were raising. Somehow, some of the child soldiers went to the bush one day and found and brought one of the cubs home, and then we raised that cub. We tie the leopard under the tree, and it got about maybe 10-meter rope. So, the leopard can climb on the tree to have a sleep there at night, because hyenas attacked him a few times. And then in the morning, it will come down and run around. Yeah, what was crazy, because if a leopard attacks you, that's it, you're dead because you will die straightaway. And I used to worry about that. And then, one day, the leopard got big.

One day, he attacked this guy now, his name is [unintelligible [00:42:30]. The guy was coming, walking. We didn't see him. Well, he walked past us, but we're playing card, some traditional stuff. And I was playing cards 15 meters away from where he was. All I can hear is just a guy screaming and the leopard on top of him. I load my gun, and I ran toward the leopard. I was just about to shoot. One of the guys said, "No, don't shoot, don't shoot." So, what I did, I turned the back of my gun around and started hitting the leopard on the head. This leopard is probably about 100 kilos, because we fed him too much.

By the time the leopard let go, the blood was pumping out of the guy's throat. Every time he was breathing, there's a bubble. One of the guys took a shirt and tied it on his neck just to keep the blood in there. And then, the guy was transferred to another-- I think it was maybe an hour drive, because this place where we only keep weapons. So, there wasn't good doctors there. But if you drive an hour, there's United Nation there, there are real doctors, what you call white doctors. They're the ones that can save him. So, he got there. I never heard from him. I thought he was dead. Until three months or six months later, I ran into him, and he was alive, and I said, "Oh, you made it." He says, "Yeah, I made it." I just couldn't believe it, but it was him when I helped save him.

It's true, it's true. I swear to God. In the war, there's a lot of child soldiers who I'm friends with now, here in Brisbane as well. When they tell me their stories, I get goosebumps. I shake, I shivered, because every one of us got a story. So, I thought, if we tell my story, mine not be a good one, but I can learn from a funny story, I can learn from a bad story. So, we all got stories, any story you learn something from.

[music]

**Glynn:** So, if you want more stories from Ayik, check out his memoir, *The Lost Boy,* with the link on our website, *snapjudgment.org*. The original score for this piece and the entire episode was by Renzo Gorrio. In fact, so many stories on Snap are scored by Renzo Gorrio that we got to give him some love. He produces under the name, Hydroplane and has a new album is called Rockets. It's out right now via a special collaborative released by Schematic and Nebleena. Here's a taste of the first track called *Rocketeer*.

[*Rocketeer* plays]

**Glynn:** That's just a sample. The latest track from our own amazing, irreplaceable, inhouse musician genius, Renzo Gorrio. He goes by Hydroplane. From the brand-new album, *Rockets*, it's out right now. It'd be available digitally, on vinyl and cassette. We'll have a link to Renzo's work at *snapjudgment.org*.

Oh, yes. We did it again. We got here together. If you missed even a moment, subscribe to the Snap Judgment Podcast. More stories, more music, more adventures await. If you want to join the conversation, follow Snap on the Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Don't miss a beat. Yes, there is swag. *snapjudgment.org*. Yes, more stories. You have a story you need to share with us, we'd love to hear it. Send it to us, *pitches@snapjudgment.org*.

Snap is brought to you by the that knows to run away from leopards. Except for the uber producer, Mark Ristich, of course. Nancy Lopez, Pat Mesiti-Miller, Anna Sussman, Renzo Gorrio, John Fecile, Shaina Shealy, Teo Ducot, Flo Wiley, Marisa Dodge, and Regina Bediako.

But this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, as a youngster, you'll see a pet leopard attack a gun-toting militant and recount the incident as just an interesting childhood memory. And you would still, still not be as far away from the news as this is. But this is PRX.