[Snap Judgment theme]

**Glynn:** Hey, Snappers, a quick favor. I really want to know what you think about what's happening at Snap, our storytelling, and everything. So, we're conducting an audience survey. And I would be super grateful if you could take just a few minutes to share your thoughts. Visit *survey.prx.org/snap* to take the survey today. It's short, I promise. That's *survey.prx.org/snap.* Thanks.

[suspenseful music]

I'm 12 years old. So normally, I don't care about the news, always talking about boring stuff. But this morning when I turn over under the covers, and see the snowdrift pile against my bedroom window, I run top speed to turn the TV on. And the weatherman is giddy. "It's coming down folks. Be sure to wear that extra layer long johns and stay home if you can, because the roads are treacherous." The screen shifts over, cars veer to odd angles and ditches. "Already school systems are reporting cancellations. Tennessee, Byron Center, Nealon, Caledonia [unintelligible 00:01:30] today, folks. Comstock Park just called it quits." And by now, my brother is sitting next to me on the couch and we suddenly both find our religion, praying to Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit to please, please, please, please say Kentwood, Kentwood, say Kentwood. Weber is like, "Grand Rapids School, including the East Grand Rapids area asks all of their students and faculty to stay off the roads today." Say Kentwood. "Allendale, Grand Haven, Kelloggsville." Everybody in the world could close their school and we'd still have to go, like they want us to slide out the icy roads and die. "Hudsonville, they're down for the count. Muskegon called in quits. Holland, Michigan, do I even have to say it? Keep under the blanket, nice and warm. And that's it for the school closings today, folks. Bob, your AccuWeather forecast." No, no, no, no, no, no.

"Well, thank you, Jim." "Uh, just a minute Bob. One last addition to the list. When the Kentwood school system comes in under the wire, you know it must be bad." Callooh callay, joy, joy, joy, joy. The feeling of having to go to school and then not having to go to school on a Wednesday, even today, I weep in memory of this elation. But my nieces, they tell me. My nieces who live not two miles from where I grew up. They tell me, "Uncle Glynn, we don't want to get many snow days." "What do you mean, why not?" "Because there really isn't a lot of snow. No snow in Michigan? What? Michiganders, brave and true, we live for the white stuff. We laugh in the face of blizzards and windchill temperatures and ice storms. What do you mean no snow? What turns out, what's actually happening, what's really going down has ramifications far beyond the Great Lakes state.

So today on Snap Judgment, we proudly present Thin Ice. A journey like no other. My name is Glynn Washington. Bundle up because it's about to get real chilly outside when you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

We begin our epic journey with Jennifer Hayes, a scientist and underwater photographer living in Northern New York, right around where Lake Ontario splits off into the St. Lawrence River. Snap Judgment.

[somber music]

**Shaina:** One day, in early January, Jennifer got a call from a biologist working in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, cold water to the north of Nova Scotia about 1000 miles downstream of Jennifer's home. The biologist, Mario, had an urgency in his voice.

**Jen:** He said you must come if you can. We have ice. We have harp seals.

**Shaina:** Jennifer had hired Mario as a guide to help her find and photograph harp seals, living in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

**Jen:** Just last year, there was basically no ice in the Gulf. Harp seals are an Arctic species. The pups must be born on ice to survive.

**Shaina:** Most years, in the fall, tens of thousands of harp seals migrate to the Gulf of St. Lawrence from the Arctic.

**Jen:** The pregnant females begin to search for ice that they're going to haul out on.

**Shaina:** The pups, once they're born, it takes them weeks to learn how to swim. If the ice is thin or sloshy, the pups can drown.

**Jen:** That was like a starter pistol going off.

**Shaina:** Jennifer knew that if she had any chance of photographing harp seals, she'd need to go now. She had less than one month to prepare.

[upbeat music]

**Jen:** Including getting a budget and approvals, getting the gear ready.

**Shaina:** Jennifer worked through the night.

**Jen:** Sending out emails, running spreadsheets.

**Shaina:** Gathering camera gear.

**Jen:** Long lens, short lenses, multiple cameras.

**Shaina:** Making sure her dry suit still fit.

**Jen:** Because if it doesn't, that means I'm going to be on the lowest carbohydrate diet ever.

**Shaina:** It sounds really stressful.

**Jen:** Yeah, it is. When I'm looking at the harp seal budget, and then the harp seal equipment and I'm working on it through the night, I'll notice that I'll look over at the bed stand and I'll see Diet Coke at the bed stands when I go to bed. And then, there's half of that there when I wake up. So, I wake up to Diet Coke and I go back to the list and go back to the spreadsheet and go back to the equipment room and realize, "Okay, we have this. We don't have this. We can't get this in."

**Shaina:** Finally, it was February. Time to go find the herp seals.

[upbeat music]

**Shaina:** Jennifer and her husband David packed up their land rover and drove across the Canadian border into Quebec.

**Jen:** So, one of the things is my-- it doesn't complicate it my partnership with David. And this is a whole new can of worms [crosstalk]

**Shaina:** Jennifer's husband, David, is also an underwater photographer, a kind of big deal underwater photographer.

**Jen:** David would have these wistful dreamy photographs. And when we teamed up, I bring logistics and science to the partnership, and he is the artist. He sees life. That's wrong, he doesn't see it, he feels it.

**Shaina:** In their partnership, David's work normally took the spotlight. But Jennifer, she knew this project would be different. She grew up on the ice, minutes from the St. Lawrence River. On ice, she was a natural.

**Jen:** Oh, my God, he's going to kill me. David, I'm sorry. Truth be told, David hates the ice. On the ice, he's a disaster. I throw on crampons or I don't, depending on what the ice conditions are, and I can walk miles on the ice. I'm in my element. I love the ice. This was, "If there was an expert between David and I, it was me on this story."

**Shaina:** And because Jennifer felt that the story was hers--

**Jen:** It turned out to be terrifying that we get it right. If I didn't pull my weight on this, then I would be a really big disappointment to myself.

[upbeat music]

**Shaina:** Jennifer and David broke the drive into two days. They spent the night in Quebec. The next morning, a gray windy day in February, they pulled into a parking lot at a port on Prince Edward Island.

**Jen:** We unloaded our car, and we loaded it onto this fishing boat.

**Shaina:** A small, weathered fishing boat that they'd share with a captain, a biologist and a small crew of fishermen.

**Jen:** Who were also at one point in their life, harp seal hunters.

**Shaina:** These were the guys who knew how to find the ice and get to the seals.

**Jen:** And we headed out into the Gulf looking for the ice.

**Shaina:** Day one.

**Jen:** I see nothing but open water, and I kind of wonder, since this is new to me, are we going to sea ice?

**Shaina:** Jennifer and David had help from a helicopter with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. They were also trying to find the ice.

**Jen:** David says, "Okay, we see the ice over here." And then, our boat would actually head off in that direction. There was that little ice that we literally had to chase the ice.

**Shaina:** Chase the ice before it melts.

**Jen:** So, after day one goes by, there's still no ice at all. I mean, blue water and you could waterski here. I look at David and I say, "Where the hell's the ice? There's no ice."

**Shaina:** Another day passed.

**Jen:** We have not seen one seal. We have not seen one piece of ice and the stress is, it's not subtle. You find yourself going snippy or even pretending you didn't hear a question because you're just sinking. You're sinking inside of yourself.

**Shaina:** Three days.

**Jen:** That's more than half of the trip and we still hadn't found the seals. I'm a Chatty Cathy. I talk endlessly.

**Shaina:** But Jennifer, she found herself dead quiet.

**Jen:** I go out on the back of the boat. I just kind of sit there consuming more Diet Coke. Not sleeping and, yeah, eating about 10 pounds of prepared raisin and peanut mix.

**Shaina:** As the sun went down on day three, the crew started to see brash ice, small floating pieces of flat ice.

**Jen:** And then, the ice gets heavier, and the ice gets heavier, and our boat begins to move slower.

**Shaina:** And finally, the boat slipped into the ice pack and stopped. It was evening.

**Jen:** That gray-blue dusk time. And I'm looking out over this ice, and I can begin to see the white pups. [harp seal pups wailing] When the engine shut down, you hear the mothers and the pups cry. And the pups sound very, very much like a human baby cry.

**Shaina:** The cries wafted across the ice.

**Jen:** And it literally is like a symphony. [harp seals wailing]

**Shaina:** Jennifer went to bed early that night, eager to start photographing as the sun rose. She bundled up in her bunk in the basement of the boat in the same cramped room as five fishermen. The hum of CPAP machines had reigned mighty the past few nights. But here, Jennifer fell asleep two sounds of ice scraping against the fishing boat and pups wailing.

**Jen:** You're actually waking up and drifting back off and they're seeping into your dreams.

[intriguing music]

**Shaina:** Jennifer was the first one up the next morning. Her goal, document the surface of the ice. But first, check the gear.

**Jen:** You just don't check it. You pull cameras off the chargers. You load batteries. And then, you put the cameras inside of the housings. Then, you load up batteries into the strobes and you check the strobes.

**Shaina:** She put her crampons on, her dry suit, her orange float suit, and then she walked down the gangplank and stepped on to ice, frozen over thousands of feet of water. She set off walking towards seals.

**Jen:** The herd looks like chocolate sprinkles on vanilla ice.

**Shaina:** Mom seals were sprawled out on the ice with their bright white pups. They're called whitecoats.

**Jen:** I've got a camera backpack on my back, and I've got two or three cameras clanking around my neck. I'm working through hundreds of these whitecoats that are crying and moving and sunning themselves.

**Shaina:** Jennifer spent most of the day laying on the ice, slowly crawling around taking pictures.

**Jen:** You never crowd wildlife. You let wildlife approach you on their terms.

**Shaina:** It took hours for the seals to trust Jennifer to let her close enough for a photograph. And even then, when she got close, the list of technical challenges was endless.

**Jen:** Are your strobes on half power? If they're on full power, you're going to overexpose. You're working in these giant, giant gloves that hit everything and they change your settings by accident.

[suspenseful music]

**Jen:** So, I'm sitting. Mothers coming and going from holes in the ice, coming up and greeting their pups with nose-to-nose kisses of recognition, literally like, [kiss sound] "Are you my mother? Are you my pup?" And I'm watching them nurse their pups and I'm literally laying on the ice photographing, moving--

**Shaina:** The next day, Jennifer had to dive underwater, under the surface of the ice.

**Jen:** We want to know more about what's going on in that world.

**Shaina:** She put her cameras into big housings and prepared to go underwater.

**Jen:** The ice is moving fast.

**Shaina:** So fast that when Jennifer's underwater, ice blocks could come together overhead and seal her exit without her knowing. She had to be quick and careful.

**Jen:** I had no idea what to expect. Trepidatious, nervous, excited.

**Shaina:** Jennifer slid off the edge of the ice into the water.

**Shaina:** Beneath a cathedral of ice, light is bouncing through it. It's green, it's blue. And then, the sound. [underwater harp seal sounds] What we literally did was drop the hydrophone down a few feet below the ice. It's like you're in a rainforest. There's chattering and whoop and squeaks and pops and wee and ah. Click, click, click, click, click. Those are all harp seals.

On the surface of the ice, they move in a very cumbersome, less-than-elegant manner. Underwater, they are magnificent swimmers that pirouette, twirl and just move with absolute--

**Shaina:** Jennifer story was coming together. She got photos of pups nursing, seals swimming, seals on ice, seals in sunset, seals in sunrise, portraits. And before she knew it--

**Jen:** Oh, my gosh, we're coming to the end of the assignment here. We only have one more day. And then, it was our last day.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** When Snap Judgment, Thin Ice returns, discover exactly where Jennifer's last day on the ice takes her. Stay tuned.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to snap judgment, the Thin Ice episode. When last we left, Jennifer had just one more day to wrap up her project with the harp seals, only one more day on the ice of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. An acknowledgment, this story does occur in the great outdoors, and Mother Nature is sometimes unkind. Sensitive listeners are advised. Snap Judgment.

**Shaina:** On Jennifer's last day in the ice, she ditched her scuba. She got into the water with a snorkel so she can linger around the edge of the ice and stick with a seal to photograph.

**Jen:** I swim around the edge of an ice floe. And I find my pup, he's a whitecoat. He's got his head in the water, and he's looking for his mama. His eyes are big, and his whiskers are long. And I swim to a polite distance, then I make a photograph of him. And he looks at me. I interpret that look to be, "You're not my mama." Well, mom is behind us. I can feel her. She's somersaulting in the water behind me. I turn around and she's not happy. She comes around the side of me. All I see is her big, beautiful flipper, feet go by. She greets her pup nose to nose underwater. "Are you, my mom?" "Are you my pup?" And once they establish, "Yes, you're my mom." "Yes, you're my pup." She begins to lead the pup away from that piece of ice. I keep an appropriate distance away, a comfortable distance. And she's swimming with her pup.

[suspenseful music]

**Shaina:** The pups that Jenn had seen so far had all been on top of the ice.

**Jen:** The underwater moments of mother and pups are very rare. And I'm photographing. And he kept looking and he kept looking and he was swimming and looking and he kept trying to swim over towards me. He would lean and he'd try to paddle over towards me. He's so plump with all that butterfat. He's a floating little cork. But he's trying to come and see me, and mom will have none of it. Literally uses her front flipper to physically restrain him. We're just going to keep swimming and he keeps getting curious and curious. And we're now swimming for a few yards and more time and more minutes and I'm photographing. The mother starts to get comfortable, and the pup gets closer to me. Mom's watching and she drops down a little below him in the water and is looking up at him. And then, he senses that I'm something solid, and he can climb onto me. So, he has gotten enough purchase on my elbow, where he's climbed up onto my chest, and I have become a human raft to this pup. The pup is now completely on my chest. He's not tiny.

**Shaina:** Jennifer's camera was dangling off her hand with a lanyard over thousands of feet of water.

**Jen:** And he starts to do this nose-to-nose recognition to my mask. The mother is looking at me, looking into my eyes, just cautiously observing. I'm concerned about her. She's concerned about me. My heart is beating fast. And then, he rolls off. He swims over to his mother. The mother checks him out from stem to stern. She's sniffing him from the tip of his nose to the tip of his flipper. She's reassuring him, she's checking him. I'm photographing like a maniac. And then, I feel a nip on my left ankle. And then, I feel a nip on my right ankle, and I look down beneath me.

**Shaina:** There were about 20 male harp seals.

**Jen:** Swimming in these lazy circles below me.

**Shaina:** Jennifer kept shooting.

**Jen:** I'm vertical in the water with my camera up, and I'm shooting the mother and pup. Before I knew it, I felt claws and there was this sound of fur meets rubber, rubber being my mask and the hood. A male, this 300-, 400-pound male harp seal was literally scrabbling up the back of my waterproof dry suit. He did it so fast and then literally went over my head, submerged me, and I feel myself pulled down. I remember seeing his flippers go by my eyes, but now my mask is off and it's blurry as heck because you can't see in seawater. I see my mask just dropping below me. So, I duck dive to get it and I get it with my finger with this fat blue glove on. And I get the thing squished back on my face, try to get some seawater out. I can see this male harp seal who has now turned around. He's about 10 or 15 feet away from me and he is-- well, he's regarding me, just in a moment of a stare-down. And that's when I felt this swell. I sensed it. I felt it. And it was that female going by.

**Shaina:** It was the mom seal. She swam down toward the male.

**Jen:** She was blowing bubbles and she was leaving this trail of bubbles that had formed along her skin. She looked like a silver streak under water. And she got to the male, and she just hit him. She just pummeled into him underwater. There was a flurry and bubbles and mucus, and both of them turning and cartwheeling. The pup came over to my side and we're watching this together side by side, both peering down at this battle. And she beat the crap out of the male. He just swam off. And the mother stopped and she just kind of hung in this suspension. And then slowly, she rose. She was blowing these really big bubbles, softball-sized bubbles. I was within shoulder-- like six inches from the pup. She came between myself and the pup, kind of pushed the pup over a bit and began checking the pup out again nose to nose. And then, she probably did ten 360s around that pup to make sure the pup was okay. Sniffing, looking, feeling, bumping, "Are you good?" And I was shooting again like a maniac, just trying to get the best picture I can. It was sensory overload, but I was still shooting not really knowing what I was shooting but trying to shoot.

**Shaina:** And then, the mom seal started to move the pup through the water.

**Jen:** She lay on her side a bit and she was nudging him out of the center of this open water towards the edge of the ice. And then, she stops. I watch and she comes back to me. She circles around behind me, and she starts to do the same thing. She uses her head, and she nudges me in the back. And she uses her flipper, like you would nudge somebody with your shoulder.

**Shaina:** The mom's seal was propelling her pup and Jennifer toward the surface of the water, toward ice.

**Jen:** She nudges the pup. She nudges me. And then, she nudges the pup, and she nudges me. I see where she's going. It's an opening between two pieces of ice, about the width of a door. I can't go there. Those pieces of ice come together, and you cannot keep them apart. It is not a safe place. So, I duck out. I watch as she goes out of sight. I am actually shaking so hard that I can't separate how much is cold, how much is excitement. I can't. My hands won't even respond to what I'm asking them to do. So, I go to the edge of the ice. And as I'm unbuckling my weight belt, a male harp seal comes from beneath the edge of the ice, and he bites me square in the groin, bang, and he lets go. And then, he bites me square on the thigh, bang, and he lets go.

**Shaina:** Jennifer sort of blocked the next moment from her memory. What she knows is that she has somehow managed by way of adrenaline or fear to lift herself out of the water like a rocket, and onto the edge of the ice with her gear and her weight belt.

**Jen:** I pick up my camera. I hear our boat blow its horn.

**Shaina:** She looked down. The mom seal and pup were out of sight. The fishing boat was pulling up by her pat of ice. Jennifer put weight on her right leg.

**Jen:** I realized, "Oh, oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. That hurts."

**Shaina:** And she limped back to the boat.

**Jen:** I walked up the gangplank as sturdy as I could without showing any kind of weakness or injury. I put the cameras down in the galley. I go down the ladder into the bunk room. I began to get all this heavy, dry suit underwear off and I looked down at my leg and I see this three-inch gash.

**Shaina:** The male seal had bit through Jennifer's inch-thick dry suit and moved his teeth across her skin. She didn't need stitches though. The dry suit had saved her. Jennifer covered her wound with a butterfly bandage.

**Jen:** And I sit on the edge of the bed. I sank my elbows onto my knees, and I put my head between my knees. I couldn't fully process what had just happened. I couldn't fully process it. I didn't even tell anybody what happened.

**Shaina:** Upstairs, the captain cranked the engines. A storm was coming.

**Jen:** The wind roared. Our boat pitched. I thought it was a normal storm. We were packing up gear and there were 13 cases spread out all over the galley. And I remember them kind of going back and forth, sliding across the galley. And we're doing our best and it was a heck of a ride.

**Shaina:** When the boat got back to Prince Edward Island, where Jennifer and David's car was, the captain didn't even take time to tie it up. He needed to unload the boat quickly and then get back to the Magdalen Islands where the boat would be safe.

**Jen:** Cases are flying off the boat onto the asphalt. The wind is whipping. The waves are crashing up over the side of the dock. It's a mess.

**Shaina:** Jennifer went to find her guide, Mario. She thanked him and said goodbye.

**Jen:** And he said, "We've just heard from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans that the ice pack has broken apart." "What did you say?" And he said, "The ice broke apart." I said, "Our ice?" "Yes, the ice pack broke apart." He said, "We have to go, Jennifer. We have to get you off the boat. We have to go. We have to go." And I said, "What does that mean?" And he said, "The ice broke apart. The seals are gone." "What seals are gone?" "They're gone."

When you begin to understand they're gone dead, dead is dead, dead is gone, the first thing you think of is, "Are some old enough to swim? Can some make it?" You're forgetting that it turns that ice into a blender biologically. Their ice nursery turns into a blender. Thousands of seal pups thrown in the water, crushed by ice looking for their mothers. Mothers trying to find their pups and--

**Shaina:** So, all the seals had died.

**Jen:** Yes.

**Shaina:** The seal you were just swimming with.

**Jen:** Yes.

**Shaina:** The pup and the mom.

**Jen:** Yes, hours before. The storm came through, demolished the ice pack and there was nearly 100% mortality in the Gulf that year. It still strikes, it's like being hit by a hammer. It was like being hit by a hammer.

[tense music]

**Shaina:** Jennifer got into the car with David. She was quiet.

**Jen:** I was still trying to absorb what happened only hours before in the ice with this mother and pup. I knew instantaneously that this had become a part of me, almost on a molecular level. I used to be anxious underwater. I was anxious to photograph, and I was equally anxious to get out and look at that card on the computer to see what I got. I couldn't think about anything other than the photograph. And now, especially in the ice, I linger. I take the time.

**Shaina:** Now, when Jennifer goes beneath the ice, she stops. She looks around. She takes pictures of things like light.

**Jen:** And the harp seals made me very, very, very, very aware of the unpredictability. You can never go back to what was. I try to stay as long as I can where I am. I stop. I listen. I shut my eyes. And I try to let what is going on in front of me be a part of who and what I am, and I can't explain it, but it started on the sea ice with the harp seals. So yeah, it has changed me.

Full disclosure. I'm a realist. I'm a trained biologist and scientist, and spent years studying sturgeon and doing research. And I've always been wary of the stories that you see where it might end with, "A dolphin saved me from peril." I know why the males nipped my ankle and came up over my back and bit me. I was with his potential mate. The female coming back, leading her pup and assisting me and pushing me through the water to the edge of safety, I don't know why she did that. I let it be what it is.

[pensive music]

**Glynn:** Jennifer has gone back to document harp seals every winter since 2011, to capture the bonding between mothers and pups and see if the ice will hold up long enough for the pups to mature and learn to swim on their own.

**Jen:** Often it does not. The trend is thinning to weak ice.

**Shaina:** The Department of Fisheries and Oceans called 2020 a catastrophic year for harp seals.

**Jen:** 2020, this past year, over half of the seals were lost.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Thank you, Jennifer, for sharing your story with the Snap. Special thanks as well to Jennifer's guide, Mario Cyr, and to her husband, David Doubilet. You can find Jennifer and David's stunning photographs of the harp seals in National Geographic magazine or on their website, *underseaimagesinc.com*, on Jennifer's Instagram, you have to see this. We'll have links on our website, *snapjudgment.org*.

The original score for this story was by Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by Shaina Shealy.

Now, in just a moment, Yeti, Sasquatch, Larry. It goes by many names, Snappers, but when we return, something's running around those woods. We're going to find out exactly what. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Thin Ice episode. My name is Glynn Washington. Now, our next story, it features a real forest, and it features a real guide. At least that much is real. Snap Judgment.

**Jeff:** Can you tell me what you ate for breakfast?

**Ben:** I had four raw eggs and five flapjacks with some espresso with a shot of whiskey in it.

**Jeff:** You're one of the most disgusting people on earth.

**Ben:** That's what I have for breakfast.

**Jeff:** What's your name?

**Ben:** Ben Becker.

**Jeff:** Tell me just something about yourself.

**Ben:** I'm 29, and living in Boulder, Colorado, for going on my third year. And trying to train to withstand anything.

[suspenseful music]

**Ben:** This is a weird story. Are you ready?

**Jeff:** Yeah, how true is this on a scale of 1 to 10?

**Ben:** Scale of 1 to 10? 8.

**Jeff:** Okay.

**Ben:** All right. I was living in Pumpkintown, South Carolina. Real place, and a flea market every Wednesday that everybody called the Jockey Lot. You could buy assault rifles there. I was living in a cabin with the dirtiest hound dog you have ever seen. And I was running this guiding outfitter. Well, a really good friend of mine, Brett--

**Jeff:** Brett.

**Ben:** --He lived in Pumpkintown too. But he ran an outfitter store, sold camping supplies, stuff like that, and it wasn't doing too good because of the recession. Once I'm hanging out there in the store, and he get this call from my lead guide. And he says, "Hey, man, we're having trouble with this kid. Can you come out tonight and talk to him? I might have to kick this kid off the course."

And I'd kick kids off courses, and always done like the right soft skills talk to him, but I was just kind of burned out. So, Brett's like, "Let me come with you." I go, "All right." He goes, "I got an idea." We get in my work truck. And before we go, he goes into his trash can and throws this bag in the back of the truck. "What's that?" He goes, "Don't worry about it." We run over to his house, and we cut out a perfect replica of whatever Bigfoot, we cut out a Sasquatch foot. It was big. It was about three feet. No, not three feet. Probably two and a half, two and a half feet long, it was big.

**Jeff:** It was a big Sasquatch?

**Ben:** Yeah, it was big.

**Jeff:** By Sasquatch standards.

**Ben:** So, we drive up the mountain. And then we drive nine miles in the motorboat out to where they're camped. And we get out there. It's pretty late, and all the kids are asleep. But my staff is still up. And he was like, "Man, this kid has been giving me a hard time," he goes in the story. I go, "Don't worry about it. We got an idea." So, we take the feet, and we make these marks all around the kids' tent. And then, Brett gets the bag that he threw in the truck, and it's filled with dog [beep]. And he pours it out right where the kid's head is on the outside of the tent. And then, we camped out.

And in the morning, we wake up and we're out there and the kid is awake. And he's not freaking out like I thought he'd be freaking out. Instead, he has this look on his face of like sheer awe. He's telling us all these statistics about Sasquatch. He's like "Oh, my God, size of this foot. I wish I had some plaster of Paris so I can make a mold, because this is definitely an alpha species. This is definitely alpha. I've never seen it this big. Oh, my God, I'm freaking out." And for the rest of the trip, he's just geeking out on the Sasquatch. "They've never been seen this fast south. Oh, my God." So, for every trip, they take pictures and then they do this big picture DVD. At the end of the trip, we're in our pavilion at the basecamp, we're showing it and then the Sasquatch feet show up in the kid's freaking out and the poop, everything. And I look at the kid's dad and he starts geeking out too. And they're just like talking to each other like these little bees. They're just like "Oh, my God." And his dad goes, "Can you give me a topographical sight of where this is or any longitude, latitude, GPS coordinates. And I also need a place to get gear."

And I get this call from Brett later that night, he goes "Did you send some guy here to me for the Bigfoot thing?" "Oh, yes, the kid's dad." "The guy spent $1,200 on gear. He bought GPS systems. He bought the most powerful scope I have." And I was like, "Great sale, awesome, cool." I come over for dinner. He takes me back down into his shop. And he has all these pellets and skins out on his wife's Susannah sewing machine with this huge needle on it. And he was like, "We're making a Bigfoot costume. You, me, and Suzannah know about this, no one else."

[intriguing music]

So, she helps us. She's actually quite a seamstress. And we make this thing. It took us about eight hours all night. Tons of coffee. It had cigar burns on it, it had tobacco juice on it, it was disgusting. And it was tailor made to me. Up close, it was pretty bad [chuckles].

**Jeff:** How so?

**Ben:** You just saw the seams and the different colors of the different pelts because it was made of four different animals. It was like black bear, deer elk, and something like rodents. If you saw me from 30 yards away in the shadows, it was Bigfoot.

[suspenseful music]

And so, the next morning, we get up real early. And we eat breakfast and he's like, "Let's try it out now." So, we go to this place called Twin Falls and it's a beautiful place. But the coolest thing about it is you can access the top. It's about 60 feet tall, 70 feet tall. You can access the top and everybody else is down below. So, I get up there early in the morning, and I get to the top of the falls and I kind of stand up and I look over, and it takes about two minutes. And then, someone screams, and they go, "Oh, my God. It's Bigfoot." And I make this like surprise motion. And I go like this I was like, [roars],"and I vanish.

[upbeat music]

And then, Brett picks me up down the road on an access trail. Then, we do like two or three more that morning on different trails. "Oh, my God, it's Bigfoot."

**Jeff:** Can I interrupt you here?

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** Did you ever worry about getting shot?

**Ben:** We'll get to that.

[upbeat music]

**Ben:** So, we know a couple of the trails where people go in early in the morning and I do Bigfoot run-by which is like just run by and I'm gone. "Oh, my God." And we put some tracks out. And then, we go hang on to the shop and there's some words going around like people are talking and so Brett's like, "Yeah, yeah I saw him last week here." And he has this new map up with some dots. And he gets some blurry pictures of me from like his backyard and stuff like that, and we put them up. So, a couple of weeks go by, he's making some big sales and he even takes a group of family out to go for a Bigfoot sighting and I do my thing.

**Jeff:** You're a con artist.

**Ben:** [dog snarling] This whole thing is going down. And our friend, Curtis, who lives on top of this mountain with the most untrained dog in the world named Motley Crue John Bon Jovi. It dug holes everywhere. It peed inside. It was a disgusting dog. Curtis comes in. Once he hears about it and he's freaking out. He's like, "Oh, my God. Bigfoot." And Curtis lived off of cigarettes, Red Bull, ice cream and homemade things he made. After about two weeks, he comes in one day with this big box of mason jars with this liquid inside and he goes, "Check it out. I'm going to make some money on this Sasquatch thing too." And he puts it down on Brad's thing and he goes, "Can I sell this here?", and pulls out one of the jars. It looks like a milky, orange paste with chunks in it. It tasted like if you boiled up milkweed and put chili peppers and mashed carrots, it was pretty much how it tasted, it wasn't that good. "Squatch Sauce. It's Sasquatch split up and flipped. Quatch sauce, Sasquatch. It's hot sauce made from real Sasquatch juice."

[chuckles]

**Jeff:** Quatch?

**Ben:** Quatch sauce. Well, it started to get really crowded out there and I thought, "You know what? Maybe I'll do like just a couple more and then it'll be over," because I was afraid someone's going to put a bear trap out. And so, I go to the Twin Falls one last time, the place to see Bigfoot early in the morning. And it's like misty. It's beautiful. And the waterfall's going and I'm at the top and a splash in. And there's a bunch of people down there with scopes and lights and I look over and, "It's Bigfoot." And I go, "[roars]," and I start backing up. And I'm backing up, and then I hear it behind me, the [shotgun cocking] shotgun. And I turn and it's Curtis staring me down with a shotgun. "Oh, my God, Bigfoot." And it's early morning, bad lighting. And he's like about 15 yards away. And he goes, "I'm going to kill you, you son of a [beep]".

[upbeat music]

And right before he fired, out of nowhere, Motley Crue John Bon Jovi, comes out of the woods in the air.

**Jeff:** No.

**Ben:** Gets me by the head like full force, this 80-pound dog. It wrestles me to the ground. It starts pulling on the top of the masks. [dog growling] And I'm like, "Damn it. Get this dog off me, Curtis." Motley Crue John Bon Jovi like rips it off. It comes off. Curtis still has this gun pointed at me. And I see this look on his face and it's just sheer disappointment [chuckles] Just really led down, is how he looks. And he goes, "It was you all this time? That's pretty smart. Brett's has been making a lot of money."

And then, he kind of helps me up. I looked down. Motley Crue Jon Bon Jovi was tearing my mask to shreds. And we hear like all this hubbub down below and he helps me out of my Bigfoot suit. We wadded up and put it in my backpack and we start getting out of the way before anybody can hike up there. And he's got his arm over my shoulder and he's just [unintelligible 00:46:50] "I almost shot you, man. [unintelligible [00:46:53]."

[tense music]

There are no more Bigfoot sightings, but the maps are still there. And every once in a while, they get together after hours and drink beers and talk about the time they saw Sasquatch. Curtis, he knows but he has this he tells a story about how he had me in his sights like he tells it Motley Crue got me, and I'd like kicked his dog real hard with my big foot and ran off. And he was like, "I had a shot. Just that my damn dog got [beep] way. And I would've be a millionaire" [chuckles]

[tense music]

**Glynn:** Now, I can absolutely verify that Pumpkintown is a real place. Everything else? I wouldn't cite it in a term paper. This story originally aired on the Here Be Monsters podcast. It's amazing. Hosted by Jeff Emtman and he has a brand-new season out.

[Bigfoot roar]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Yes, yes, yes, it happened again. If you're looking for more stories, more stories you shall have. The Snap stories of your dreams, they await on the amazing Snap Judgment podcast, subscribe because someone's story might change your life. I know it's changed mine.

And it's a new year where you can find new Snap T-shirts and Snap stuff at *snapjudgment.org*.

Snap is brought to you by the team that knows there's something running around those dark woods. We suspect it might just be the uber producer, Mr. Mark Ristich. Pat Mesiti-Miller, Anna Sussman, Renzo Gorrio, John Fecile, Shaina Shealy, Marisa Dodge, Nikka Singh, Teo Ducot, Leon Morimoto, Flo Wiley, Nancy López, Regina Bediako.

[upbeat music]

Well, this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, if you're on a special trip all by yourself camping in the woods for a month, like you've always wanted. No one around, no one's going to see you. Let your hair, your beard grow out like Mother Nature intended. Only to return to civilization to learn people next door swear they've seen Bigfoot and they posted a snapshot of your face as proof. All that and you would still, still, not be as far away from the news as this is. But this is PRX.

[upbeat music]

[*Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription*]