[Snap Judgment intro]

**Glynn:** Okay, so I live in beautiful Oakland, California. Home of the Black Panthers, Lake Merritt, and some of the best folk in the world. And here, in this wonderful not paradise, marijuana is legal.

[upbeat music]

And it seemed like it was legal for a long time, but now it's really legally legal. In fact, in the glorious before time, a few weeks ago, when you could greet people, friends or strangers with hugs and kisses and stuff like that, back when only robbers wore masks, back then, one day, before the holidays, I could think of no better gift for my loved ones than what these newly legal marijuana stores were selling. Of course, you know, I'm not a smoker myself, but perhaps some of my fucking patriots, you know, they might appreciate some of that CBD oil that apparently heals whatever ails you.

So, I roll to the spot. And this store, it looks like an Apple store. It's beautiful. Clean lines. Nice, really nice. But a line out of the door onto the street. Dynamic. So, I get in the line, and this line, it's a mixed crowd, some old, some young, every color, race, all the various genders, wonderful. Oaklandy. I get in this line, and the guy in front of me says, "Wait a minute. Are you that storyteller guy with that Snap Judgment outfit? I love that show." "Hey, man, thanks for the love." The woman in front of him, "You Mr. Snap Judgment?" "Yes." And another woman, the guy further up the line, "Hey, the Snap Judgment guy is back there. Hey, can you tell us a story?" "Hey, can you take a picture? I want to send it to my wife." And it's crazy, all these good people showing me crazy love. And yeah, it's thrilling to be occasionally recognized. It's wonderful. But I'm on the radio, and this is weird, "That's the guy, the storyteller guy with that Snap Judgment. You know the Snap Judgment."

When it occurs to me this is not just some random line, this is a self-selecting line. A line with a bunch of people who had the same idea I did. That's why they're here. And I can't lie. A tear, a small tear, at least from my eye, have to wipe away because right here, right now, in this line, at long last, I have accidentally tripped across the thread that connects us all. I have finally found my tribe.

[funky music]

Today on Snap Judgment, perhaps we can help you find your tribe too. We're calling this episode Buds. Amazing stories from real people, finding their real people. My name is Glynn Washington, and the good news is that if you're listening with someone right now, you've already found your tribe, right here on Snap Judgment.

[funky music]

Now, our story comes out of San Francisco, late 80s. And it reminds me of kind of the times we're in today, when higher powers have been slow to respond to the AIDS crisis sweeping through America, and everyday folk, they pitched in to do what they could do to help out. Now, this story does mention the use of drugs and contains graphic scenes, sensitive listeners should be advised. Our hero, Alia, was just in the fourth grade. Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

**Alia:** We were going to the cafeteria because we had a special guest.

**Shaina:** The special guest was a cop.

**Alia:** Like a cop-cop. There was a moment of wondering if he was there for me or my family. Like heart pounding terror. He tried to be chummy with the kids and authoritative at the same time. And then, he tells us that we're going to be spending a lot of time together that semester to learn how to just say no to drugs.

**Shaina:** The program was Drug Awareness Resistance Education or D.A.R.E. It was part of Nancy Reagan's Just Say No campaign. The idea, to educate kids about the perils of crack, heroin, and marijuana.

**Alia:** The cop would say, "What do you say if someone offers you a cigarette?" "Just say no." "What do you say if someone tells you all the kids are doing it?" "Just say no."

**Shaina:** Every time the cop came, the students would break into groups to basically roleplay, which was stressful for Alia.

**Alia:** And I was always the last kid picked. Always the last kid picked. I was into cat sweatshirts and horse sweatshirts. I know I was weird because other kids treated me like I was weird.

**Shaina:** Alia remembers being assigned the role of the drug dealer.

**Alia:** We get a printout with the line that we're supposed to say, "Hey, kid, want to try some dope? It'll make you look really cool." "Do you want to try some pot?" I'd never seen anything like the deal that was on the paper. I'm sure it was tempting to say, "Look, this isn't how it works."

**Shaina:** But Alia wasn't going to say that.

**Alia:** My mom was a drug dealer.

**Shaina:** Alia knew if anyone found out about her mom's work, her mom could go to prison.

**Alia:** Good friends went to jail.

**Shaina:** And if Alia's mom got caught, Alia could end up in foster care.

**Alia:** It was a life-shattering proposition. My entire world would be destroyed if anybody found out. It wasn't just police, it was all authority figures. If a teacher found out what my parents did for a living, they could end up in prison because the teacher could tell a cop. If another child my age found out, they could tell a teacher who could tell a cop, or they could tell their parents who could tell a cop. So, there's nobody who is safe to tell. My mom was really beautiful and warm. She had this great asymmetrical kind of Sheila E. haircut, dyed burgundy, short one side and swept up and then fell over her eye. Part of her attitude was being this outlaw, was being a badass outlaw. That had always been something that she was really proud of. When she did her deals, people would come over to the house and stay and hang out. She was just really good at advice. I always felt like I had this incredibly beautiful world that nobody could see.

**Shaina:** When Alia went home from school, she hung out with her mom in the kitchen.

**Alia:** My mom in the kitchen is a disaster. She burns toast and eggs. She can't really boil water. The only thing that felt really wholesome and warm was making brownies.

**Shaina:** Alia and her mom would make four or five batches at a time.

**Alia:** There would be eggshells and the chocolate would get splattered on the wall and the flour would end up anywhere and we'd just laugh. My first task was pulling out the Saran wrap, ripping it on the edge, and just making a huge sticky pile of Saran wrap squares that the wrappers could then use to wrap the brownies. And then, you sit around the table, and it was something that had always been a ritual going on in the family where my mom and good friends would sit around a table together and wrap. I loved it.

And then, that fantastic, fantastic smell. The smell is something that really sticks with me. There's a particular smell of marijuana, good outdoor grown California marijuana and chocolate cooking together. It's a very, very specific smell. It's like earthy and sweet. It's this really comforting smell, which is funny because it was something that also put us in danger.

**Shaina:** The D.A.R.E. program was just one of Reagan's antidrug initiatives. He had also launched a campaign targeting California growers. As a young kid back in Mendocino, where people grew weed, Alia heard helicopters thundering over the nearby fields.

**Alia:** U-2 spy planes swooping over our house. Tanks would come through the town. There were over hundred agencies involved by the mid-80s, and they were dedicated solely to eradicating growing in California. They would use military equipment, infrared photography, and people would get busted. They would be people that my family knew, who were a part of the community, who were good people, were just mountain hippies. It scares your parents, and it scares their friends. You get ingrained with this idea of who's good and who's bad. And when you're raised with the idea that you're an outlaw, the bad guys are the cops.

**Shaina:** I feel like as an adult, it's hard to keep a secret. But as a kid, it must have been so hard to keep that secret.

**Alia:** A friend of mine was just saying the other night that it's like giving a child a gas can and matches and telling them not to burn the house down. I guess that's true in a way, but I felt-- how can I explain this? I felt so much on my mom's team. She just trusted me.

**Shaina:** Did that feel powerful?

**Alia:** Yes, I think so. It is special to be part of a secret.

**Shaina:** As time went on, Alia got more comfortable with the D.A.R.E. cops.

**Alia:** As I relaxed into the idea of, "Oh, this is a joke. This is a big joke."

**Shaina:** Alia brought her mom D.A.R.E. pens and folders.

**Alia:** And bookmarks. I had a t-shirt at a point, and I think I won it by giving right answers. The D.A.R.E. logo was just "D.A.R.E. To Keep Kids Off Drugs."

**Shaina:** Alia's mom cracked up at Alia's new D.A.R.E. swag.

**Alia:** That's, of course, in the period where D.A.R.E.'s funny, and then the novelty wore off, and it stopped being funny.

**Shaina:** The next year, when Alia moved on to fifth grade, her mom had started making a lot of house calls.

**Alia:** Well, by this point, 1988, people were getting too sick to come out. The cannabis was helpful with nausea, insomnia, pain, and depression and a lot of symptoms that just had no treatment at the time.

**Shaina:** One day, Alia's mom picked her up from school. She had to make a delivery.

**Alia:** We went into the Castro and up this steep side street. It was one of these frilly wedding cake Victorians and had a view over downtown. You could see the Bay Bridge crossing to Oakland. We go to the door, and there was a man standing up on the landing. He greeted us. We start climbing the stairs. He was on either the second or third floor, and it was backlit. It wasn't until we got closer that I saw the condition he was in. He was shirtless and wearing pajamas, and the pajamas were just hanging off his hip bones. He had that really hollowed out look, like he'd been hit with a bowling ball. His chest curved around this hollowness, and you could see every bone. He had this huge lesion where lesions had grown together into the shape of a butterfly. He was so sick, it took my breath away.

He was maybe surprised to see a kid. My mom said, "Don't worry. She's cool." He let us out into a big, airy living room. Over by a bay window was a hospital bed that looked empty to me at first. But as we got closer, what had looked like a tangle of blankets was a person, barely there. I remember looking at his face and seeing the shape of his teeth through his cheek. I remember looking at the needle going into his hand, the top of his hand, and all the bruising around it. What we had was a very sick man taking care of a very sick man, which was not uncommon in those days.

The first guy's name was David. David bends over his lover and he touched his cheek. "Honey, I know you're not feeling good, but I want you to meet a friend of mine. She's brought the magic brownies that I told you about. It'll help you feel better." And his lover just couldn't even talk. He couldn't even talk. As a kid, I knew he was dying. I knew he was about to die. I was really struck by the tenderness between these men. Even then, that was what crushed me.

I walked around while they were doing the transaction, and I remember really clearly seeing a photograph on the mantle of a dark-haired man and a beachy blonde with their arms around each other on the beach. They were tan, muscular, and they had sand on their skin and smiling and young and in love. My mom who had this amazing ability to be upbeat without being abrasive, she was able to make a joke that, "Don't eat too much. They'll have to peel you off the ceiling." David smiled and he laughed. There was just this moment where he looked like the same person. You could see that vitality, the intensity in his eyes. His laugh was rich. It was really hard.

My mom and I went out to the car, and she started crying pretty quickly. I think she was really freaked out about having brought me in. I'm gritting my teeth, "I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine." Of course, I wasn't, because I never forgot that. It wasn't funny anymore. I had always felt like I was hiding this rich world, but now it was a rich and terrible world. When you talk about the burden of a secret, it was much more of a burden to know about the way that people were dying. That was a burden. At the very least, I maintained the secret. That stays the same. But the sadness, the emotion that is underneath it changes. The secret stays the same.

[contemplative music]

**Glynn:** Special thanks to Alia Volz for sharing her story with the Snap. For more, while Alia's mom's business selling weed brownies, order her book, *Home Baked*. Original score for that story was by Doug Stuart. It was produced by Shaina Shealy.

After the break, dreams ain't always what they seem. Snap judgment. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

From Snap Judgment's underground studios, welcome back to Snap the Buds episode. My name is Glynn Washington. And next, we're going to bring back Nyge Turner, Snap Judgment's resident young'un, an Adult ISH podcast host. Now, before the story begins, know that it does mention suicide. It contains graphic body imagery. Sensitive listeners, please be advised. Now, back in the late 90s, ever since Nyge had his pacifier and his diaper on, Nyge had one dream. And that dream was to become a firefighter. But Nyge had no idea what his dream had cost. Nyge, take it away.

**Nyge:** "Nigel, get up," my mom yells from downstairs. It's 07:00 AM on a Saturday, I'm 15. And again, it's 07:00 AM on a Saturday. "Nigel, come on. I got a surprise for you." When she says surprise, I was out my room in under a minute. "What is it? Just get in the car, boy." And 10 minutes later, we pull up to a huge yellow wooden tower in the middle of a gated area. The wall is covered with overgrown vines, so you can't see what's in or out. But once we get in, I start to see high schoolers my age walking around in these navy-blue uniforms, some doing pushups and others racing each other while pulling a firefighter water hose. I'm so excited because ever since I was a little kid, there was only one job I could ever see myself doing. I'll just have my dad tell it.

**Nigel's Dad:** When Nigel was a baby, we had one of the most difficult problems in keeping clothes on this young boy. We would come in, he would have no diaper on, and he would always have this fireman's hat on. Be just naked as a jaybird and walking around the house just as happy as he could be with his fireman's hat on. So, we knew early on that he was going to be a fireman.

**Nyge:** Firefighting also runs through my bloodline. My grandmother's brother was the first black firefighter in our city. Everyone in my family still talks about him to this day, especially my dad. When he was younger, he was this close to becoming a firefighter, like job offer in hand and everything, but my mom wouldn't let him. And here, 21 years later, that same woman was driving me to the Firefighter Youth Academy, growth.

The fire chief meets me at the door. "What's your name, son?" "Uh, Nigel." "Last name, son?" "Uh, Turner." "Cadet Turner from now on." "Uh, okay." "Okay what, cadet?" "Okay. Thank you, sir." "That's it? That's it." And like that, this place becomes my second home.

The first thing that we would do is line up and drill. You know that. "Right face. Left face. At ease, cadet. Are you looking at me crazy, cadet?" That kind of stuff that you see in every military movie. I complained about it a lot, but secretly I loved it.

Another reason I loved going to the academy was because my best friend was also there.

**Greg:** My name is Greg Hill. Nyge is my bro. We go back since, sheesh, forever it seems like.

**Nyge:** Greg's dream to become a firefighter began when he had a literal dream about becoming one in middle school. He was two years older than me, and he had already been training for a year.

**Greg:** My favorite thing that I like to do personally was just cook. It was mainly breakfast. My eggs are always fire, and my bacon is too. Word to Nyge.

**Nyge:** He was cool. Even Fire Academy aside like, Greg knows. Ask Greg about my grits.

**Greg:** Hey, his grits are fire though. [laughs] That was always my favorite, aside from cleaning or doing drills. Just knowing they had Nigel and me, and it just made it even more fun. And I was actually selected to be one of the best drill people to represent our group of fire academies.

**Nyge:** We also learned how to triage.

**Greg:** They brought down real actors with like real blood, and all the clothes were like cut up.

**Nyge:** Fireroom simulations.

**Greg:** They started like a fire in the room. So, we had to walk in and crawl on our hands and knees and stay together though at the same time, and just search around to find people inside the fireroom. So, it was just super intense.

**Nyge:** Even though the instructors were always yelling at us to run through walls and crawl through fires, they also became our mentors.

**Greg:** There was one instructor that we liked that was different from the others that we-- I wouldn't say that we loved just because he helped us to understand and really made it a lot easier just to get through the academy and not be so nonchalant about it and just know how serious this is.

**Nyge:** This instructor was by far my favorite as well. He was serious, but like a fun serious. He also took time to ask us questions and check in about how were feeling about the box.

**Greg:** As a firefighter, we're always the first of the scene. It could be a medical scene, it could be a shooting, like an impaling or something like that. So, this instructor really got to us in having us understand that whatever situation that we get in, we never want the people to know that we're panicking. So, whatever emotions that we have, we have to put that in a box and shove that away and focus on what the job is. And then later on, once we get home, maybe we can go-- we go to that one person that's always there for us, that's a good listening ear, and we just let open that box and just flow out our emotions about what's been going on and stuff like that. So, that's what really stuck with us most, especially going through life too.

**Nyge:** For the next two years, Greg and I gave our blood, sweat, and tears to this dream of becoming firefighters. Like when the counselor at my high school would ask me, "What college are you going to?", I'd proudly say none, because after I graduate, I'm going to follow Greg to EMT school, then to the actual adult firefighter academy.

Did you know that I looked up to you in the academy?

**Greg:** Stop playing.

**Nyge:** Do you remember that picture that you had posted?

**Greg:** What picture?

**Nyge:** At the Folsom Festival.

**Greg:** Oh, yeah.

**Nyge:** As a part of his EMT training, Greg would work festivals and events in the Bay Area in full uniform and--[crosstalk]

I think you were like standing there and you had like your earpiece in your ear. You had the whole pants, boots, like the whole setup. I remember you posted that and everybody in the academy was like, "Yo, Greg made it." I want to know, how did you feel like in that moment when you went to Folsom Festival and posted that pic?

**Greg:** So first off, that Folsom Festival was wild. It's a fetish festival, so that involved a lot of crazy things that you would think that you need medical attention to. But people often denied that. So, for example, there was a tent where they had sharp things that they cut each other with, like the sensation of losing blood turned people on. So, you would sometimes have people that would pass out and we would have to run over there and work on them and get them back conscious. I've seen a live birth. My first ever live birth I've seen at a festival, that just blew my mind.

So, how I felt when I was in that suit was, you just felt like you were here to protect and serve, like you were there to help. Like, okay, they respected what you were in, and they said hi to you and gave you things and stuff like that. So, just knowing that you were there for the people was a great feeling.

**Nyge:** Then one Saturday, I show up and I can't help but notice that our favorite instructor isn't here. After class, I ask about him and all I can get from anyone is that he had a really bad emergency call where things just didn't work out and he lost someone. I think, "Okay, well, that happens time to time. I'm sure he'll turn up when he's ready." But next week, nope. And the Saturday after that-

**Greg:** We could just tell in the other instructors that something was wrong, you could just tell just the way they looked, the way they talked. It wasn't as much yelling as it normally is, so everybody knew something was wrong. They sat us in the room, and that's when they told us the news.

**Nyge:** Our favorite instructor had passed away. No other details were given.

**Greg:** That was a guy that made us happy whenever he came into the door, he changed our whole mood of seeing him. So, that hurt.

**Nyge:** We all stand in a moment of silence for him, and then we're dismissed.

**Greg:** What hit us so hard about the news was, this was the instructor that obviously told us about the box, but he took it very hard, and they put him on leave. And unfortunately, he just took a bad turn.

**Nyge:** Did that make you waiver from your decision of being a firefighter at all?

**Greg:** No, not at all. Instead, it just wanted us to strive to be even better for him. It sparked a fire in us to remember the key things that he told us. For example, the box. So, whenever we felt the emotion of missing him, we would go to one another and talk about it and just motivate each other, just to keep going strong and to never stop.

**Nyge:** I'm on kitchen duty that day, making eggs and bacon for everyone, and all I can hear is the other cadets whispering about the announcement. I can't make everything out, but one word I keep hearing is "suicide." I try my best to ignore it, but I don't know. Instead, I just add these feelings into my box.

Eventually, it's my senior year of high school. Greg has now graduated from the academy and is on the EMT training. I have to do what are called ride-alongs with a local fire station. Almost every hour, we hop into the truck and we head on a call. And the rush when you climb into the truck, sirens blasting while you're talking to your crew through your headset is like nothing I can explain. Except, most of the calls are for small things, like, "No, Ms. Brown, it's not a fire. You just need new batteries in your smoke detector."

One morning, we hop in the truck, and almost instantly, I can tell that the mood is a lot more serious. Once we arrive at the home, the firefighters ask me to follow them to the scene, but they also motion for me to hang back a little bit. So, we inch into the backyard, and we find a man just sitting there in his hot tub, very still. I can only see the top of his head. I'm like 20 yards away, so I can't really smell much but I see everyone's face scrunch up as they approach him. I see a firefighter check the man's pulse. Nothing. Then, the captain says, "Let's get him out." So, the three firefighters position themselves around the man to pull him out. As they lift the body, the man's skin slides right off. I throw up.

The captain sits me in the truck while the rest of the group carries on with the job. On the way back to the station, we grab burritos and we move on with the day like nothing happened. When I walk back to my car from the station after the day is all over, I don't think I can ever build that box, not truly. And just like that, I was done. But for Greg, the dream went on. He tells me that he didn't pass the EMT test, but that's normal, and all he's got to do is retake the test in a few months, and that we'd celebrate when he graduated.

A couple of months later, I get a text from my friend Micah. "Yo, check Greg's Snapchat."

**Greg:** So, I had Snapchat rolling, and I was on my computer looking at my test results and just going down slowly, looking at each category, because it was four categories. The first category was a pass, so felt excited about that. Second was a pass. Third was a pass. So, I was like, "Cool, just one more. Just more," and I'm like, there. And the fourth one was a fail.

**Nyge:** What I didn't know was this was Greg's fifth time failing the EMT test. He was just one or two questions off, just like in his previous attempts.

**Greg:** And that's when I lost it. I just felt like I was just worthless, like I had nothing else to give.

**Nyge:** A few minutes later, Micah drives to my house with my other friend, Abe. Once I hop into the car, Micah takes off, going over the limit, making sharp turns. I say, "Yo, why are you driving so stupid? You about to kill us." "Bro, check the group chat." As soon as I open it, I see a message from Greg saying-

**Greg:** "This was the end of me. This is my dream, and I can't do it. I can't do it." I didn't feel like living. I wanted to crash my car. I was going maybe like 120. I just couldn't do it for some reason, but I really wanted to. That's just how I felt.

**Nyge:** We pull up outside of Greg's place, and we call his phone, he doesn't answer. We start banging on his door, and his mom lets us in, and we run up to his room.

**Greg:** Then, Micah and Nyge bust in our door, and I'm like, "What the heck?"

**Nyge:** We slowly walk in, and we see Greg on the edge of his bed. We sit on the floor, and we just talk. We talk about all of our failures.

**Speaker:** Bro, I spent thousands of dollars on trying to build my own business. It blew up right in my face. I just had to keep going.

**Nyge:** How we all shot for the moon.

**Speaker:** You remember the cement mason apprenticeship? I tried that for 10 months every day trying to work it out, but I just didn't make the cut.

**Nyge:** And landed flat on our butts. Out of all of us, none of our original plans worked out. And that's a heartbreak that was probably the most difficult to swallow. But we have to.

**Greg:** A lot of times when I go through situations, I don't say I need people. I rarely ever say I need people there. So, just knowing that you guys didn't really ask what's happened, you guys just instantly just came by, and that's what really helped me a lot, just to get a grip and get control of this emotion.

So after we talk, Micah just comes out of nowhere and just tackles me. And then, Abe jumps on top, and then Nyge is there just laughing. And by the way, these guys came from basketball, so it was smelling, stinking. So, when they tackle me, I'm mad. So, I'm just like, "Bro, y'all stink. Come on, y'all, get off me. Y'all smell like sweat." I'm trying to feel bad. I'm trying to have my self-pity, but these guys aren't letting me. But that's when I knew that even though I may be done with my dream, I know that I'll never give up on them, no matter what.

**Nyge:** Firefighting stayed just a dream for us. And I guess that's what it's meant to be.

**Greg:** Because there's other moons you got to shoot for.

[inspiring music]

**Glynn:** Thank you, Nyge, for sharing this story. This piece is brought to us by Adult ISH, a fantastic, culture, advice, and storytelling show created by Snap alum, Davey Kim and YR Media. It's hosted by 20 somethings. Nigel Turner and Merk Nguyen. They just dropped their third season with our fine friends at Radiotopia. So, stop whatever you are doing, check them out, Adult ISH, the podcast. Music for this story composed by the young artists at YR Media, including Clay Xavier, Marcel Angelo, and the young enough Davey "Triple Threat" Kim.

[upbeat music]

After this short break, our friends, they are dropping incredible advice from all over the world. You got to hear it. Snap Judgment, the Buds episode continues. Stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

From Snap Judgment's orbiting hall of justice, welcome back to Snap the Buds episode. My name is Glynn Washington. And we know right now, right this moment, it's a tough time for many of us. So, we're going to shift gears, going to do something a little bit different. We're going to share pieces of wisdom from people all around the world. First up, we have Majd Al-Waheidi. And Majd has lived through a lockdown more times than I'd[?] even like to think about. Snap Judgment.

[pensive music]

**Majd:** My name is Majd Al-Waheidi, and I'm a freelance reporter from Gaza, currently under lockdown in Washington, DC. My experience in lockdowns and quarantine actually happened many times when I was living in Palestine. The only difference between this current lockdown and what I experienced back home is here. I wake up and hear birds and ambulance sirens. In all the wars I have seen and survived in Gaza, the sound of air strikes and rockets was much louder. And my movement was completely restricted by curfew hours, which means supermarkets, essential services were not open. You couldn't look from the window or walk in the street. And if you had electricity, you were told to keep your distance from windows and turn off the lights after sunset.

The longest lockdown I have experienced was in July 2014, during Israel-Gaza war, and it lasted for 51 days. In the first weeks, I used to sit at the foot of my bed to read poetry out loud.

[reciting poetry in Arabic language]

Saying poetry out loud in different ways to myself when the bombardments were too hard to ignore is how I coped with things. I also loved reading poems by Naomi Shihab Nye. It was called *Kindness*. "Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must know sorrow as the deepest thing. You must wake up with sorrow. You must speak to it till your voice catches the thread of all sorrows."

My advice to people dealing with coronavirus now is to do something that involves reading something out loud. I think of poetry as a kind of protest or action against fear and sadness. "Only kindness that ties your shoes and sends you into the day to gaze at bread. Only kindness that raises its head from the crowd of the war to say, 'It is I you have been looking for, and then goes with you everywhere, like a shadow or a friend.'"

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** Go ahead, pick a book, a poem, a song. Belt it out. Next piece of advice comes from another part of the world. A small village in northern Myanmar where sometimes women are isolated during their menstrual cycles. Snap Judgment.

**Nandar:** My name is Nandar. I'm from Myanmar, a small village in northern Shan State. I'm 25 years old now, I feel very old. [laughs] When I hear about this COVID-19 and how people are managing to not get infected, I had this feeling that it's like a revisiting, the kind of trauma that I had to go through when I got my first period. I was at the house and I told my mom that "I think the blood are coming out of my vagina." And I remember she looked at me feeling really sad. She said, "Now, you have to pack some of the things. Please stand there. Do not enter the house. You are considered as dirty." She took me to auntie. She prepared a space for me in the very dark corner without a window. We are not allowed to use the bed. We are supposed to use the floor.

First day, I told that auntie that, "I want to pee so bad." [chuckles] She told me I cannot go pee unless the sun goes down. I was scared, so I was like, "Okay, fine. I will control it." I control it for a few hours. Then, I realized my vagina cannot control it anymore. [laughs] On a serious note, we are not supposed touch any books during period as well, so I couldn't study. When I bleed, I was on grade 10, and grade 10 in Myanmar is a big deal. And I had a really, really high expectation that I will be passing grade 10 with a lot of distinction.

Being isolated due to bleeding had kind of like, this increases anxiety that maybe I will lose my marks. That's the thing that was troubling me the most. I thought that someone who is my competitor would go ahead of me and get higher marks. It was so unbearable that time.

And I was sitting there day by day and night by night, hoping this bleeding would stop. I was isolated for five days. I was doing a lot of bad thinking, and I started like hating my body. "Is it this hard and this terrifying and this ugly to be a woman?" But I realized that's not the kind of practice that I want to inherit to my sisters or my daughters or my great granddaughters. So, that's when I stopped it and tried to pursue and create a new path where I can belong.

Feminists are not born. They are made. You learn through your experience. And I feel like it's the unjust world around me that shaped me to become the feminist that I am today. My advice to people who are in isolation would be, ask one question to yourself. What could you do as a person, as an individual, to help the situation, rather than thinking how the situation is terrible.

**Glynn:** Today, Nandar she runs a feminist organization in Myanmar that produces feminist literature and holds workshops that address women's issues, including menstrual taboos. She's a writer, an activist and performer, and runs The Vagina Monologues in Myanmar because she's all that.

So, most folk, this kind of craziness happens too. But some people, they're wild enough to put themselves into this situation. Like for instance, Martin, The Shadow.

**Martin:** There are definitely challenges when you're working in a confined ship. Everybody has to get along. I've worked on container ships, large ships that are bringing random containers to international ports. My longest run was six months at a time. Typically, there are about 22, 23 people on the ship with me. Some of the ways that I deal with the monotony was just to make little things to sort of brighten up my day. Like around Christmastime, trying to take an old tarp and make a Christmas tree out of it, and then finding sailors, they love Christmas and are totally down to carve out ornaments and help decorate the tree and stuff. Or also trying to take notes and put them in a bottle and drop them in the sea. You kind of get into this like *Groundhog Day*, where you're living every day over and over, and I think just finding those little comforts to make it seem like you're a person. [chuckles]

I mean, another example, I'm not like a graffiti person, but I kind of made up my own little moniker. And a lot of times when I would be working, I would just try to graffiti as many of the containers as I could. My moniker is Singapore Sal. It's basically like a face, but the mustache is made up of waves and then he's got like a beanie and his eyes are like seagull's eyes. The key is that you can do it really quickly and once you learn those motions, you just are like you can jam it out fast and get on to do another one. The first time, climbing up in the rig of the ship, the stacks of containers and trying to find places I could hike up myself, it was liberating, yeah.

There was this one time when I'm hanging on the side of a container and an officer walked underneath me and I looked down and saw him, and if he had looked up at that moment, I would have been in trouble. That was frightening and definitely exciting and kind of led me to do it more. It was like my little secret, so I don't think anybody really even noticed. But it was again something I could do to make it feel like they don't have me completely. [laughs] This was a way that I could kind of again feel like I had this human voice. I mean, maybe it's kind of childish, but it's satisfying to sort of look down a row and see your little character thing or whatever, and I guess I'm in control or yeah, I have a voice. I'm not just like this robot.

Hi. My name is Martin Machado. I'm a merchant mariner and sailor and a commercial fisherman. And I am sitting in quarantine in San Francisco, California.

**Glynn:** You heard the man. Be sure you're doing something for yourself, something that makes you feel powerful, something that brings you joy, even if it is silly. These stories were produced by Naomi Zeveloff, by Shaina Shealy, Liz Mck, and Anna Sussman. Our team is going to find more pieces of advice from all over the world. Stay tuned for that on future episodes. Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

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