[Snap Judgment]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Okay, so growing up as a kid watching the TV, I figured I learned adulthood consisted of two major problems. Number one, Quicksand. Number two, the Bermuda Triangle. So, you can imagine my shock and my horror to discover that the real concerns are far more nefarious than anything your Scooby Doo and the Gang ever faced. So today, on Snap Judgment, from KQED and Snap Studios, we proudly present Quagmire. My name is Glynn Washington. It's always the thing that you don't expect you better expect when you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

Begin with the adventures of an old friend of the show, Josh Healey. You may know him as a Snap Judgment live storyteller. He's a [unintelligible 00:02:10], a filmmaker. He's making big waves internationally with all of his projects. But Josh recently sat down. Josh told me a story about something very, very, very close to home, family. Snap Judgment.

**Josh:** So, when the pandemic hit back in March 2020, I was already stuck at home. And not because of a global virus, not because of the CDC mandates, but something far, far scarier. I was responsible for taking care of a newborn child.

**Glynn**: Uh-oh.

**Josh**: Yeah. So, I was literally on my last week of paternity leave with my then three-month-old son, Julius.

**Glynn:** I met Julius.

**Josh:** You met Julius. Good kid. Good kid. Gets it from his mom.

**Glynn:** Yeah.

**Josh:** Julius has an older sibling, Ezra. Ezra was four years old at the time. I love my kids. Julius and Ezra, or as we call them by their punk rock band name, the Blonde Jews of Oakland, I love them but I was supposed to go back to work now my paternity leave was over. We all remember how easy it was [chuckles] working from home with little kids running around.

**Glynn:** Good Lord.

**Josh:** Holding every Zoom call hostage like the sweet, precious little terrorists that these children are. We were so sleep deprived that it took us a couple of days to realize the pandemic was a real thing and not just another crappy movie we were watching in between bouncing our child to sleep at 03:00 AM, and again at 04:00 AM, and again at 05:00 Am. But really compared to a lot of folks, we had it relatively good when everything shut down. I could work from home. My wife, Esther, was only working part time, and we had her parents, God bless them, nearby, who helped out.

**Glynn:** Lucky.

[upbeat music]

**Josh:** Yes. But because were squatted up with the grandparents, and in particular Grandma Janice, who was very high risk for the virus, we had to be extra careful about who we linked up with which at that point was no one. Until, we got the call that changed it all. Another family from Ezra's old daycare said they got a nanny and would we like to join them in something called a shared quarantine pod.

**Glynn:** Yeah.

**Josh:** Sounds sexy, right?

**Glynn:** Yeah.

**Josh:** Yeah. I was not sure what it was, but I was down. So, Esther started asking all the questions good mom questions, the logistics, how would it work, how many days a week. But then I grabbed the phone, and I was, “Yes, yes, please. We'll do it. We'll do it. Yes. Whatever you need, we'll make it happen. Please, just take my children. Wait, who is this again?”

**Glynn:** Don't matter. This is the middle of the pandemic.

**Josh:** I didn't give up anything, so we started that next week. And that was when I met our childcare savior in the flesh, Terri. Now, Terri was a sweet 50-year-old Berkeley hippie with a big laugh and a bottomless thermos of echinacea tea. She was so warm, and she looked like she could have been one of my Jewish aunties from Brooklyn or Skokie or anywhere on the shtetl. So, when I met her, I said, “Hey, Terri, we missed you at the family Passover last year.” And without missing a beat, Terri came back with, “Well, hey, I'm game for four glasses of wine right now if you are.”

**Glynn:** Hey.

**Josh:** So, needless to say, with a response like that, I was a fan. So, after a little joking about heavy drinking at 09:00 AM, on a Monday morning, Terri started her job taking care of my two small children.

[music]

Every day for the next few months, Terri would come over and take Ezra, Julius, and their little toddler podmate, Quinn, to the playground, to the redwoods, up to the Mormon temple in the hills that they pretended was the castle from *Frozen*. And the kids loved her. Loved her. I was just happy to have a few hours a day to work, to rest, even enjoy a quiet lunch with my wife sometimes. I remember, sometimes we still like each other.

And then one day, Terri came back with the kids from the library. And now, this was fall 2020 by this point, still pre-vaccine. So, I was curious. I was just wondering if most of the other kids at the library were wearing masks. And casually, after I asked that casually, Terri responded, “Well, Josh, you know, there's two sides to the science around masks.” Now, I thought she was just joking, just playing with me again. So, I said, "Of course, of course. I mean, who trusts those damn scientists at the CDC anyway?" And that's when Terri leaned in and whispered to me, “It's not just the CDC, Josh. It's the whole government, it's the media, it's all of that.” Then, she turned and said, “Okay, say bye to the kids for me. I'll see you tomorrow.” And she walked out the door like nothing happened.

Meanwhile, I'm standing there with my jaw on the floor, “Nah, nah, there's-- nah, there's no way. No, no, I mean no. This woman who spent the last six months building Lego castles with my little kids in my own living room? She can't be. She can't be Glynn. Can she?”

**Glynn**: Ooh.

**Josh:** Ough. That night, I told Esther what Terri had said. Esther also thought that Terri was just messing around, just messing with me. So, of course, I did what anyone does when they want to find out the truth these days. I looked Terri up on Facebook.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Uh-oh. Uh-oh.

**Josh:** And that's how I found out that my beloved nanny was a QAnon conspiracy theorist, Berkeley hippie Jew. And if that sentence just blew your mind, welcome to the freaking club. That is not how the Venn diagram [laughs] is supposed to overlap. But here I was looking at her Facebook profile, reading her latest posts. Things like, “The virus is a media hoax.” “Lockdowns are totalitarianism.” And the presidential election, which, Glynn, it hadn't even happened yet, was going to be “a huge fraud”. And many posts with strange YouTube links calling out, “Global consortiums of child trafficking bankers and Hollywood stars and liberals out to destroy America.” I mean, Glynn, I learned conspiracies I hadn't even heard of before. Did you know that Joe Biden actually died back in 2017? And the person we think is Joe Biden is really just an actor wearing an elaborate face mask like Tom Cruise in *Mission Impossible*?

**Glynn:** I did know that. Yeah.

**Josh:** You did know that?

**Glynn**: I did.

**Josh:** Well, I did not, but Terri did. And here was the InfoWars link she had with proof. Holy shit, I realized I had a QANanny.

**Glynn:** Oof.

**Josh:** I had so many questions, how is this possible? And how did we not screen for this in the nanny interview? Shouldn't we have asked about international cabals right after getting her take on nap time routines? And, Terri, my last question that I wanted to ask, when you're reposting these conspiracies about George Soros and the Rothschilds and all these evil globalist bankers secretly controlling the world, who do you think they're talking about, homie? I don't think QAnon is inviting us over for a nice, peaceful, shabbat dinner. You know what I mean?

**Glynn:** No.

**Josh:** Argh.

**Glynn:** Don't blame yourself.

**Josh:** That's what I do.

**Glynn:** [laughs]

**Josh:** I'm a father. I take it. I take the hit. So, here we are looking at these posts, and my wife, Esther, turns to me and said, “What are we going to do, Josh?” And I was like, “What do you mean what are we going to do?” I mean, this woman might be a total nut job, but she's great with the kids.

**Glynn:** Right.

**Josh:** My kids, I've said this, they're kind of little haters. They're tough critics. They don't love everyone, and they adore Terri. I can't be happier with the childcare that she's providing. I finally have a little peace and quiet. Me and you can finally remember each other's name again.

**Glynn:** Dude.

**Josh:** We're able to get things done. We're able to be nice. We're better parents because of this time that we're able to have off from parenting.

**Glynn:** Better son-in-law, better daughter. She is the woman who's bringing you a little solstice.

**Josh:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** A little joy.

**Josh:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** A little space.

**Josh:** All of it.

**Glynn:** A little bit of freedom.

**Josh:** Yes.

**Glynn:** A little bit of time with your wife every single day. A little bit of time to get some work done, to pay for everything that's going on. This is the person who's leading you through the pandemic in the height of the pandemic.

**Josh:** She is, yes, a little crazy, but it's 2020. We're just choosing which type of crazy we want each day.

[intriguing music]

I wasn't sure what to do. Esther said, “Well, we've at least got to tell my parents because, remember, they're potted up with us, too.” Grandma Janice and Grandpa John. And when Grandma Janice, when she saw the Facebook posts with Terri's unique perspectives, shall we say, she was not as calm and collected as I was trying to be. Grandma was like, “Are you kidding me, Josh?” [laughs] Grandma's cold blooded. You know grandma. Grandma's cold blooded, and she does not play.

**Glynn:** Yes, yes, yes.

**Josh:** So, Grandma Janice is like, “Josh, this woman literally believes that Bill Gates and the Chinese military are installing microchips in your brain, my brain, mancy Pelosi's brain. And you still want her to let her watch my grandchildren?” And you know you're in trouble when Grandma says, "My grandchildren."

**Glynn:** My grandchildren, my grandchildren, my grandchildren.

**Josh:** Not your kids. My grandchildren.

**Glynn:** Oh, no.

**Josh:** And she says, “Look, this woman is she's probably going to Proud Boy rallies on the weekend maskless. We don't know what she's doing. She could bring the virus into our family. Is that what you want, Josh?” And she looks me dead, “Is that what you want, son-in-law?”

**Glynn:** Yes, yes.

**Josh:** And I get her reaction. I mean, Grandma Janice, she was high risk, and my baby Julius was still building his immune system. But Janice didn't know Terri. I did. At least I thought I did. I said, “Look, Janice, Terri's been with us for five months now. We check in every week about masks and the latest protocols. I just don't think she would maliciously lie to us like that and put us in danger. She's been great with the kids. She wasn't indoctrinating the kids. No. That's what Disney+ is for. [laughs] That's what regular Hollywood entertainment are."

**Glynn:** Yeah**.**

**Josh:** Only, let's be honest, that's our other childcare alternative. If it's not for her, it's sitting in front of the screen for 8 hours a day.

**Glynn:** Is that what she wants? Is that what granny wants?

**Josh:** I don't know. I mean, she's an adult. We're adults. Why don't we just talk to her like normal people? Can't we just ask her what she's actually doing? Just ask her if our concerns are valid? Like, "Are you doing this X, Y, and Z?" Don't we want to treat people like how we want to be treated? I mean, for me, it's like I don't want to blacklist this woman. I don't want to just go around here and put her off to the side without asking her side of the situation. My own family, people in my family have been blacklisted years ago. I'm not trying to be Joe McCarthy in 2020.

**Glynn:** Bring it home.

**Josh:** This is not what I'm trying to do.

**Glynn:** Bring it home.

**Josh:** This is everything I'm feeling, and here I am defending this woman. I'm scared of my mother-in-law. I'm scared of my wife. I'm scared of my nanny. Most of all, I'm scared of being left alone with my kids for three, four, five more months during this pandemic.

**Glynn:** Right.

**Josh:** What do you got to say about all that, grandma? What do you have to say?

[upbeat music]

Grandma Janice was not up for nuanced debates. She looks at me and Esther, but really at me and throws down the ultimatum. And she said, “It's your call. Look, it's your call. You can be with me and grandpa, or you can be with Terri.”

**Glynn:** No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

**Josh:** “You can be with me and Grampy, or you can be with Terri, but not both.”

**Glynn**: Oh.

**Josh:** Esther looked at me and she said, “Josh, you might be right about Terri, you might. But how can we be 100% sure? And do we really want to bet our lives on that chance in a pandemic?” So, on that chilly day in December, our four-person adult family, me, Esther, Grandpa John, and Grandma Janice, we put it to a vote. I lost three to one. [laughs] But because it was 2020, I of course asked for a recount. Somehow, I still lost three to one.

**Glynn:** Stop the steal.

**Josh:** Now, the best part is, even though I lost the vote, Grandma Janice and everybody else, but specifically Grandma Janice, decided I should be the one to--

**Glynn:** Oh, no.

**Josh**: --tell Terri because, and this is Grandma Janice's my favorite quote. She said, “Josh, you're good at talking and things like that.”

**Glynn:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, you be the one to deliver the knife in the back.

**Josh:** Go get them, son-in-law. God bless my in-laws. So, the next day, I called up Terri, and like any good breakup, I tried to let her down gently. [laughs]

**Glynn:** It's not you, it's me.

**Josh:** Oh, that was my line. I said, "It's not you, Terri. It's us." Because it was us. I said, "We just want to focus on our family for a little bit."

**Glynn:** Right, the lives of our family.

**Josh:** "We're not trying to pod with anyone else behind your back." We would never do that. I even offered to write her a letter of recommendation, and I could picture it. She's great with kids. She's a safe driver. Very vivid imagination.

**Glynn:** [laughs]

**Josh:** For her part, when I'm talking to her about all this, Terri was totally understanding. Totally cool, calm, collected, and she just said how much she enjoyed working with us. She asked me to give Ezra and Julius a big hug for her. When we hung up, I almost felt bad for her. I didn't know had I made the right call. Now I say almost, because a few weeks later, Terri came by the house to pick up a few things that she'd left. I wished her a Happy New Year. We made some dumb Hanukkah jokes, and then she told me to keep an eye out for “something big that was going to happen in DC tomorrow.”

**Glynn:** Whoa.

**Josh:** Yep. When we talked, it was January 5th, and tomorrow turned out to be January 6th, 2021, the day of the attempted coup at the Capitol where thousands of QAnon fanatics and white supremacists tried to violently overthrow the election and five folks ended up dead. Now, I don't know if Terri knew it was going to go down like that, but let's just say it made me glad I lost the family vote.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn**: Thank you. Thank you, Josh Healy, for sharing your story. Remember, Josh, where we go one, we go all and stop the steal. The original score for that piece is by Dirk Swartzoff. It was produced by David Exumé.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Now stay tuned, because in return to the Quagmire episode, I've got two words, thin ice. In just a moment when Snap Judgment continues.

[upbeat music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Quagmire episode. Next up, we're going back to my homeland, the Great Lake State, Michigan in the dead of winter, getting into a car with some friends, and driving up about 2 hours north of Detroit to the edge of Lake Huron, fast, frozen, deadly. From Interlochen Public Radio, All Points North podcast, we proudly present, No Ice Is Safe Ice, Snap Judgment.

**Daniel:** Jeremy Holman met Steve Geistel, Jr. Almost 30 years ago when they were both racing stock cars on dirt tracks across Michigan.

**Jeremy:** I mean, Steve is-- that's my dude, that's my best friend.

**Daniel:** Soon, they were spending all their time together, hunting and fishing. And when they weren't doing that, they'd be on the phone for hours sharing stories.

**Jeremy:** We'd talk three, four times a week, and we can talk to each other about everything. We don't judge each other. He’s my brother.

**Daniel:** Their favorite place to fish is Saginaw Bay in Lake Huron. It's located between Michigan's Thumb and Pointer Finger. That's where Steve grew up, fishing.

**Steve:** Beautiful walleye fishery. Yeah. Best around. Uncommon at all to get your limits every day, eight fish per man. I just target walleye. That's all I do. To me, it's the best tasting fish in the world.

**Jeremy:** The fishing in Saginaw Bay isn't so good. It's great. It's beyond great, and it just makes you want to come back. It's addicting.

**Daniel:** But the bay is also unpredictable.

**Steve:** The Great Lakes is the way it is. Sometimes you can fish, sometimes you can't. And that's the way it is.

**Daniel:** Like the time Jeremy and Steve were out fishing and a storm rolled in.

**Steve:** I said, "Homie, we got to get the hell out of here, man. This ain't [unintelligible [00:22:00] lake or White Lake. This is the Great Lakes, buddy." We already got three-or four-foot rollers.

**Daniel:** Even with big waves crashing into their boat, Jeremy didn't want to leave.

**Jeremy:** Steve was the most cautioned person that I've ever, ever fished with in my life.

**Steve:** It almost come to fish blows, man, because he was mad. And I got mad because he got mad because weren't staying out there fishing. But you got to be smart, you know what I mean?

**Daniel:** Steve won that argument, and they made it back to shore. But next winter when they're headed out to the bay for ice fishing, Steve gets cold feet.

**Steve:** I talked to a buddy of mine. He told me, "Do not by no means go on that bay. It's not safe." He said he had a couple buddies out there the day before and it was moving all over the place and not to go.

**Daniel:** When Saginaw Bay isn't all the way frozen, something as slight as a shift in the wind can send cracks in every direction.

**Steve:** We had a little bit of heated discussion about it, I'll tell you that, because I didn't want to go. I knew better, you know what I mean? I didn't want to go out there.

**Jeremy:** I already had paid for the hotel room over there. All my buddies are sending me pictures that live over there of all these piles of walleyes they were catching. It was stuck in my dome. I'm going.

**Steve:** Said, "All right, I'll take it homie and I'll take you. I'm going to drop you off ashore and I'm going to go check in that hotel room and I'm going to take a couple of hour nap and then I might hit the bar somewhere and have a couple of beers and wait for you guys to get up fishing. I'm not going."

**Daniel**: Caught up somewhere in the middle of all this is Telaine Bower, the third friend on this guy's fishing trip.

[upbeat music]

**Telaine:** We gassed up the truck, we loaded up our equipment, and we drove down. Jeremy's in the backseat sleeping. [laughs] He passed out. Stayed up, drove through the whole night. We get there at 6:30 in the morning. Everybody, they're loading up, they're getting ready to go fish.

**Jeremy:** They all looked at me and I thought I was the man. I was like, “I told you.”

**Steve:** Well, we get going and we set up day one.

**Daniel**: It's Telaine 's first time on the bay.

**Telaine:** Fishing was beautiful. It was a beautiful day. Not a lot of wind, good temperatures. Nighttime came and we got into the fish. We were hooking fish. We're just shy of our limit, and we called it a night. Everybody was packing up. So, we packed up. We rode out, went to the room, thanking Jeremy. "Thank you, man. We're so glad we came. It was such a blast seeing everybody for me, meeting the guys, it was an experience and can't wait for tomorrow."

**Daniel:** The next day, the three friends wake up and ride their snowmobiles about 4 miles across the ice to their shanties on Saginaw Bay. The ice is a solid 8 to 10 inches thick and the wind is blowing from the southwest.

**Steve:** It'll hold the ice on the east side of the bay. Hold it in there. So, I figured we're safe.

**Daniel:** By midafternoon, the guys are getting hungry. Telaine and Stev hop on the snowmobiles.

**Steve:** He followed me back to shore to get his lunch and we crossed this big patch of black ice.

**Daniel:** As they ride over it, Telaine looks down right through the ice, all the way to the lakebed.

**Telaine:** That's scary. So, I just have a tendency of just giving it the grip, just squeeze the throttle to the bar real quick, get over it, and then I can ease up.

**Daniel:** They get back to their fishing spot, cook some burgers. As the sun starts to set, they hook a few more walleye and call it a night.

**Steve:** Climbed out of my shanty to pack up when an unexpected east wind came in and I just knew were in trouble then.

**Daniel:** Was it a pretty strong wind?

**Steve:** About 15 to 20 miles an hour winds, probably.

**Jeremy:** I never paid attention to it. I was just packing stuff up and trying to get out. But Steve said he had noticed the wind had changed.

**Steve:** I said, "Hurry up boys, pack up, we got to get out of here right away."

**Daniel:** They head back to shore, Jeremy and Telaineone snowmobile, Steve on the other.

**Telaine:** When we were leaving, it was real dark. You got your headlamp, and you got your snowmobile machine, you got your light there.

**Jeremy:** Steve's in front. I'm following Steve, and he gets to that spot where he thinks it's just black ice.

**Daniel:** The patch of clear ice where earlier they had been able to look down and see the bottom of the lake.

**Jeremy:** So, we were just going to skip over it. Well, it was open water.

**Telaine:** I'd just seen Steve go down, man. Headlight underwater. And it was like a big wave come up and just boom. Steve was down.

**Jeremy:** And I watched my best friend sink. Like, I've never seen nothing sink that fast in my life. He was [snaps fingers] gone, quick. You didn't even see his taillights go down slowly. It went down fast. Whoom. Disappeared.

**Daniel:** The temperature of the water is 32.4 degrees. When you're submerged in water that cold, your blood vessels constrict, spiking your blood pressure, which can cause heart failure, if you don't drown first.

**Steve:** I've always been taught, you go through the ice out there, it's a death sentence. Chances are you're not going to make it. Its fear, that’s all I can say. It ain't adrenaline or nothing. It's just fear. Well can you imagine just thinking you're going to die? That's the feeling you got. You know you're going to die. I knew I was dying. They couldn't see me because it was so dark out.

**Daniel:** Jeremy and Telaine have stopped just short of the water themselves.

**Jeremy:** And I was almost in it.

**Daniel:** That's when the race car driver in Jeremy kicks in.

**Jeremy:** I turned the skis to the right on my snowmobile with Telaine on the back of it with me. And I pinned it to get away from Steve, cause all three of us didn't need to be in the water.

**Daniel:** He takes off.

**Jeremy:** If I didn't get up to safe ice, there was no way were ever going to get to Steve if were in there ourselves.

**Daniel:** But Telaine can't believe what Jeremy's doing.

**Telaine:** I'm hitting his back, man, "Steve's down. Steve's down." And he's just going 50, 60 yards away in the opposite direction. I mean, I just felt like he was leaving Steve. And I hit his helmet– wham! And I told him, "Steve went down," and he let off the throttle. When he did, I bailed.

**Daniel:** Telaine jumps off the snowmobile and starts running towards Steve, who's barely breathing. His winter face mask is soaking wet and stifling every breath, panic sets in.

**Steve:** Because you're trying to kick and paddle, and wasn't really doing no good, because of the weight. I'll bet you, I weighed 300 pounds more than my body weight just by water weight, my boots being full of water and suit soaked and all my clothes are drenched, of course.

**Daniel:** But Steve does have something helping him. His dad, who passed away in August, was also an avid ice fisherman. And before he died, he bought himself a new float suit, a bib overalls and jacket combo with built-in floatation.

**Steve:** So, when he died, my mom asked me if I wanted his new float suit. I said, “Yeah, I'll take it, mom.”

**Daniel:** It's not a life jacket, but it can help keep a person above water for a couple hours.

**Steve:** So, I think my dad had a hand in saving my ass that day. [laughs]

**Daniel:** Steve keeps kicking towards the edge of the ice. Telaine is crawling towards him.

**Telaine:** Steve's still about 15 yards away from the edge of the ice in the water. I get on my belly, and Steve hits the ice, and he's holding on.

**Steve:** I told him, "The ice ain’t thin here bro, it just broke apart." It’s eight inches thick. I can feel it. I'm right at the edge of the ice. I can feel how thick the ice is.

**Telaine:** I grab hold of Steve and I tells him, “I'm not letting you go brother”, and he's got me and he's like, “You got to get me out of here dude.” And I go to pull him. And Steve, he's a big guy. And now you got that big guy with all his equipment, his gear, his float suit, and his boots, his helmet full of water. He's even heavier now. So, I go to pull Steve like it's going to be easy. It was not. I could barely move him, and I got even more scared. So, I put myself on the edge, and I tried to pull real hard. Well, when I did, we cracked just that little edge, and I kind of fell and had a small wave go down my float suit. When that wave hit my skin down my coat, man, it felt like I got a million needles poked into me. It was so cold. It was immediate. [gasps] It took my breath, my power, man, I just felt myself instantly tense up. And I was like, “Oh, my God, I'm useless now.”

**Steve:** I looked over and I see my buddy, Jeremy, standing there about 50ft away, and I yelled at him.

**Jeremy:** He was screaming and hollering, "Get me out of here. I'm dying."

**Steve:** "I'm dying over here, man. It ain't thin ice. Come get me."

**Daniel:** Jeremy finally snaps out of it.

**Telaine:** And he grabs my feet and when Jeremy started to pull us, felt like it was forever. Honestly, it was probably three to five minutes of a struggle getting Steve out of the water. When we hit the ice with him, Jeremy let go of me, and I pulled Steve another couple feet. I got up and walked away. I had to breathe, man. And Steve's like, “We got to set up the shanty.”

**Daniel:** The shanty has a propane heater to keep them warm while fishing.

**Telaine:** And I'm looking, and it's laughs] not there. And I'm like, “Where is the shanty?” And Jeremy's like, "It's gone. It was on the sled with Steve's sled," and I'm like, “Oh, no.”

**Daniel:** Hypothermia will set in if Steve doesn't get warm fast.

**Telaine:** We're wide open, exposed. Steve's soaking wet. I'm wet. I didn't know if we were going to make it.

**Daniel:** But then, another ice fisherman spots them on the ice. He speeds over on his snowmobile, takes Steve back to his shanty and cranks up the heat inside.

**Steve**: Man, I was still shivering uncontrollably. I mean, it was a little bit of the fear, not knowing that I'm not safe yet completely.

**Daniel:** Just then, Jeremy spots another group of ice fishermen snowmobiling towards shore. They're heading straight towards the open water.

**Jeremy:** I was like, "Dang it, I need to stop these people."

**Daniel:** This time, Jeremy doesn't hesitate. He runs to his snowmobile and starts flashing his lights for them to stop.

**Telaine**: He stopped them guys. They stopped, right literally probably 3ft before Steve went in.

**Daniel:** All told, there's 14 of them trapped on this huge chunk of ice being blown out into Lake Huron by near gale force winds.

**Telaine:** It was chaos out there. We're speaking with other people that are a little bit further away from us and trying to assure them the ice in between them is good, and meeting with people to bring them over with the group.

**Daniel:** And they come up with a plan. Sit tight and wait for help to arrive. That's when Jeremy notices another one of the ice fishermen getting agitated.

**Jeremy:** Didn't really say nothing, just mumbling. You could tell he was upset.

**Daniel:** Then the guy hops back on his snowmobile and takes off.

**Jeremy:** And all of a sudden, he gets out their ways. And I just hear his snowmobile turn wide open, watch the headlights come. I already knew what he was doing.

**Daniel:** He's heading for open water. It's not uncommon for snowmobilers to cross water between cracks of ice. With enough speed, the snowmobile can skim right on top of it. But this is no small crack. It's about 400 yards of open water. [laughs]

**Telaine:** This is going to sound really bad, but I'm going to be honest with you. Like anybody, something dumb is going to happen. You're going to watch.

**Jeremy:** I know I'm in a bigger snowmobile than him. If he made it, and it did cross my mind, I'm like, “I'm going too.” He made it a long ways, ain't going to lie, probably three quarters away, he did. [laughs] I was like, “He's going to make it. He's going to make it.” All of a sudden, you heard the snowmobile just start dogging down, boooo. And I was like, “This guy, he's a goner.” I just watched somebody die is the first thing that went through my head.

**Daniel:** But suddenly, the ice fisherman bobs to the surface.

**Jeremy:** Eventually, we watched him get out of the ice. You could see him over there. He was so far away, he looked maybe he was a foot tall. He was that far away. And you could see his flashlight turn on on his phone. So, at that point, we knew at least he was out of the water. But your journey ain't over yet. They were going to find him curled up in a ball or standing up like a popsicle somewhere.

**Daniel:** Back in the ice shanty, Steve is still trying to warm up. His core body temperature has dropped.

**Steve:** It felt like my whole body's on fire. That's what it felt like, like you're burning. And then, all the ice is cracking all around you. And every time you look up that shanty and open water is getting closer and closer to you. You know you're not a danger yet. And I'm so exhausted and spent. I told these guys in the shanty, I said, "Man, if I go in the water again, guys, I'm a goner. I'm telling you now, I ain't be able to fight no more. I'm just, I can't. I'm exhausted." I really was.

**Daniel:** From the ice, Jeremy can see first responders assembling a rescue mission.

**Jeremy:** You could see the whole shore lit up. There were cops and ambulances from every town in the state of Michigan there. It looked like a city. You could hear the airboats up on the shore.

**Daniel Wanschura:** After about 2 hours of waiting, Huron County Sheriff airboat is the first to arrive on scene. Anybody out here?

**Daniel:** Then another boat arrives, piloted by a local guy who inadvertently makes things way more dangerous.

**Jeremy:** We all lost our breath screaming at him, telling him to get the hell away from us because all he was doing is breaking up ice. The ice at that time was our lifeline. That's all we had, was that ice, that little bit of ice that we were on. So, he didn't put us in no more danger. He backed out of it.

**Daniel:** But the sheriff's airboat is able to pull up close enough to Steve.

**Jeremy:** We got Steve on the boat. Well, actually, he ended up picking the guy up that-- we call him Jesus now.

**Daniel:** The fisherman who'd driven his snowmobile into the water.

**Jeremy:** Picked up Jesus before he got to Steve.

**Daniel:** On the slow ride back, one of the emergency responders starts talking to Steve.

**Steve:** He asked my name. I told him. “Steve, do you realize 90% of the time we come out here for rescues is usually to recover a body.” He goes, “You're a 10 percenter. And don't ever forget that.”

**Daniel:** Soon, US Coast Guard helicopters show up and they start scooping up the rest of the fishermen trapped on the ice.

**Jeremy:** I knew right then I'm going home. They dropped that basket, and I did a swan dive in that son of a bitch. [laughs]

**Telaine**: Those that were last rescued had reached a distance of about 6 miles. So altogether, we drifted about two and a half, three miles.

**Daniel:** Steve is the first to admit it. He's his own man. He made the decision to go ice fishing.

**Steve:** I was pissed. He knew it too. But if he just would have listened to me.

**Jeremy:** I think it was me being his best friend. I wasn't the first one to him. I think he felt like I should have been the first one to him to get him out, which he's probably correct. I guess I panicked. He's seen that I panicked. I was scared. But the way I see it, we got him out. Don't matter how we got him out. We got him out and that's all it matters. He's home, he's safe. He kept me up until 05:00 this morning. [laughs] Son of a bitch.

**Daniel:** Just chatting on the phone.

**Jeremy:** Yeah, we do all the time. That's how we hang out with each other. When he gets out of work, he'll call and he'll drink beer over the phone while I drink over the phone. [laughs] We're dumb. [laughs]

**Daniel:** Do you think you'll go fishing with Jeremy again?

**Steve:** Oh, yeah. Oh, that's never going to change. No, Me and Jeremy have been buddies for years and we raced together, we fished together, we hunted together. But I ain't going to let him talk me into doing nothing stupid again. [laughs] He'll know what I'm saying when hears this. I hope that he learned that you got to respect-- because I taught him how to fish out there. I took him out for the first time at Saginaw Bay and taught him how to fish. I always told him the same thing I was taught, "You got to respect her man, because if you don't, she's going to get you."

[music]

**Glynn:** Thank you. Thank you, Steve, Jeremy, and Telaine for sharing your story with us.

This episode was originally aired on Points North, a podcast from Interlochen Public Radio in the Lower Peninsula of the Great Lake State of Michigan. The original score by Clay Xavier, was edited by Nancy Lopez, John Fecile. It was produced by Dan Wanschura.

**Glynn**: Stay tuned because we're going from the cold of Michigan to the hot of the Playa. That's right. Burning Man. When Snap Judgment continues.

[upbeat music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Quagmire episode. My name is Glynn Washington. Now, you know this is not the news, but if you've been watching the news, you may recall breathless accounts of a semi-catastrophic event in the pages of the New York Times on NPR. It gave journalists something to do for a day, and I'm talking, of course, about the Mud Burn, Burning Man 2023. Snap Judgment special correspondent, Dr. Raymond Christian, tells us all about the trip that you thought about taking yourself. Snap Judgment.

[upbeat music]

**Dr. Raymond Christian:** Because this was my second time going to Burning Man, it pretty much evolved like I expected it would with just a huge number of people from all over the place, lights, the beautiful art cars. There's a full moon that comes out. It was just otherworldly out there on the desert. But there was a sniffle of a hint that there might be some weather. Clouds came over. The temperature dropped like 20 degrees, and then the rain started to fall.

I would say the first hour, there was quite a deal of revelry. There were people dancing. There were some naked people. But I'd say temperature has a lot to do with that. Then, the heavy rain came and wasn't long after that, people in my camp started breaking out bluegrass instruments. It was crazy. They were playing music. Of course, we had plenty of moonshine. And then, it's like it rained for another 10 hours. At that point, I was in my yurt, and what I did was I just laid back. I yielded to the rain.

But I could have been in there with some rubber ducks floating around because literally my hands on the left and right, I was splashing water. And I laughed like, “This is crazy, man.” With a cup, I shoveled out about what amounts to three ice coolers full of water. By the next day, people were trying to escape in a big way. And I knew what the disaster that was going to be. I already knew. It reminded me of my time in the army. I've seen 100 people stuck in the mud, and absolute exhaustion. It was like, “You ain't going to walk out there, and this ain't that much a disaster, stay your ass put.”

So, people immediately, their boots, it was all clinging to them. So, you got like dragging around, pounds on your feet and every step there's more of it as the rainfall. And it's very, very slippery because it's clay like, even finer than that. Slippery, clinging. From inside my yurt, I could hear people panic sticking in as people came out to investigate. And then, they couldn't walk. And then, they were falling. And then, they were getting too far away and didn't know where to go and getting confused. It was hundreds of vehicles stuck in the mud trying to get out. People tried to leave their vehicles. Big ass mistake. They were out there for hours trying to walk. They were trying to call for help. People couldn't get out. That all turned into the idea that we're all locked in, “We're stuck here, and we can't get out.”

And just dumb ideas and rumors being spread, if you can imagine. That there's some special mutation of COVID that broke out in Burning Man. So now, the federal government, as part of their diabolical plan, they got all these hippies and weirdos all locked into one place so they can't get out. By the next day, it was drying up, man, and people was coming out. We secured some wood. We got some pork butts, and they got wrapped in aluminum foil and put in a fire. And I would say, just metaphorically, we took in some refugees at the camp, people who were camping caveman style, fragile tents blown away, flooded with water, stuck out in the mud. They didn't have no extra water. They didn't have any foods, no MREs, no nothing. We got all in pork butts cooked up. People was eating. All the moonshine, that became like survival dosage.

Everybody got into the spirit of the ridiculousness of it all. You're stuck in a giant party. Of all the places you could be locked in it, you're stuck in a party. After it started to dry, the real irony is that the man burned. And I remember thinking to myself when I went out there, I saw as many people there as I had seen the first time I was there. Tens of thousands of people stayed. And it was just as magical as it was last year. And it'll be legendary in all the annals of Burning Man history because people will claim they were there. People will lie about this for decades, man. I was there.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Thank you, Dr. Raymond Christian, for sharing your story. The original score for that piece was by Dirk Schwarzhoff.

[upbeat music]

Now, Snappas, think about where you've just been. The Playa, the shores of Lake Huron and into a family's most intimate decision stories. You can give the gift of story by sending your friends a taste of the Snap Judgment Podcast. They will be forever grateful. If they're not, you should get new friends. Did I mention Snap's evil twin podcast, Spooked. It's available everywhere.

Snap Judgment is brought to you by the team that never demands luxury accommodations when they go to a festival in the middle of a desert. Except for Mark Ristich, who tells anyone that will hear him, he demands to speak to a manager. There's Nancy Lopez, Pat Mesiti-Miller, Anna Sussman, Renzo Gorio, John Fecile, Shaina Shealy, Teo Ducot, Flo Wiley, Marisa Dodge, Bo Walsh, David Exumé and Regina Bediako.

[applause]

This is not the news. Of course, you know no way could this be the news. In fact, you could try to become a professional yodeler. You could yodel and yodel and yodel where you live and around all the people you live about. And you would get exactly what you deserve and still, even then, not be as far away from the news as this is. But this is PRX.

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