[Snap Judgment intro]

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Okay. So, one of my besties, Ray, moved to London. He and I and another friend, we're all talking. And Ray's, "Hey, it's not right. You guys haven't even visited me yet." It's a fair point. So, we're like, "All right." We get tickets. I've never been to London, so I'm excited, right? Trafalgar Square, fish and chips, Westminster Abbey. This is right around the time Queen Elizabeth passes away. Before I even get on the plane, Ray's sending me all these texts about how everyone in all the British colonies, from Nigeria to Sri Lanka, loved the Queen so much. So, I better bow the head and put some respect in my tone if I dare mention her name, whatever, whatever, whatever. Hey, hey, hey. I don't know anything about the Queen of England, but I do know this. I'm not just going to sit here and be lectured to by some guy from Michigan on the benefits of colonialism, just because he happens to live in London now. No. No.

So, I start badmouthing the Queen, badmouthing England. "Ray, Ray, why are the Great Pyramids in Egypt? Why? Because they're too heavy to carry to the British Museum. Oh, Ray, Ray, Ray. Why did the colonizer get a library card? Because he likes to borrow things indefinitely." "Stop it." Why do I do this? Why? Because I know it ticks Ray off. And ticking Ray off brings me such great joy.

On the plane ride over, I arm myself for the arguments. I read *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* by the Pulitzer Prize winning historian Caroline Elkins. And it's brutal. So, the moment we touch down at the London airport, begin our tour of all of England's loot, I'm ready. Ray tries to explain to me that any great power would have done the same thing. I'm not having a word of it. The monarchy is just a fancy machinery of oppression, and we squabble, fight. Sometimes, Ray gets red faced and sputtering rage through Oxford. Big Ben in front of the Beefeaters, we bicker. All in all, it's a fantastic trip.

Back home, pulling some papers in order, I see a document I haven't seen in over a decade. My last will and testament details, all kinds of stuff, including who gets the kids if I get hit by a bus. Yeah, it's Ray. And I almost feel bad then for tormenting him. I almost feel bad for all the wet willies and twist of the knife. Almost. Because if we didn't scrap, how would Ray know how much I care?

Today on Snap Judgment, stories of friendship, we're calling it, Shut up, Ray. No, no, we're calling it Shut Up Rick. The name of the episode, it's Shut Up Rick. My name is Glynn Washington. Don't be like Ray who, after my trip to London, absolutely refuses to listen to Snap Judgment.

Now then, friendship can be hard, especially when you're going through something. At long last, comedian and writer, Bucky Sinister, he thought he'd finally found his tribe at an AA meeting in San Francisco. The road back from addiction can be a hard one. And because of that, today's story does touch on drug addiction and references a death. And as Bucky began his journey, there was one guy, a tattooed, loudmouth ex-con who Bucky would do anything to stay away from. Snap Judgment.

**Bucky:** I had this little private ritual time of about an hour before the meeting started where I would go to a Pete's that was about to close down for the day. So, I'd be the only person there and I would just get this iced coffee and sit outside and watch the traffic. It's just a little island there of nonexistence. I could have my own little time. And then, Rick started showing up.

[upbeat music]

**Bucky:** We called him, Shut Up Rick, because we had to tell him to shut up a lot. He was kind of horrible. He said a lot of things that even for us were in bad taste and we would have to yell shut up, Rick in unison until he started just introducing himself as my name is Shut Up Rick, and I'm an alcoholic. [laughs] It became his name, but I didn't really know him.

At this point, I guess I'm about 10 years sober. I had these two guys that I always went to meetings with. We always rode home together, and we got really tight. And then, suddenly, one of them died of just this random heart attack. I'm sharing about it at this one meeting and Shut Up Rick comes up to me and he says, "I'm sorry about your friend." And he's like, "I used to have this pet rat and I love that little rat. And I used to feed it whiskey off a spoon. One day, that rat died and I was really upset. I said, 'God, why'd you let my little rat friend die?' And then one day, I realized that rat was so cool that maybe God needed a rat in heaven." And then, he just slapped me on the arm and walked away and I'm like, "That is the dumbest thing anyone could tell me right now." [laughs] It was like his best way. It was genuine.

I think by his logic, he's like, "Well, nice guy's down a friend. Maybe he's got space for me," which is right, because I did have a big hole in my heart. So, I treasured this time that I was like, "Hey, there's nothing else to do but sit down and read a book." A nice big cup of iced coffee here in my favorite Bay Area coffee place. And then, Rick started figuring out that's where I was and he would just show up. And the first time he did, well, this happens sometimes. Someone comes here while I'm trying to read a book or do some writing or whatever it was I was doing that day. And it happened again and again. It takes about three or four weeks before I realize, "Oh, this guy's going to show up here every week. He's intending on being here." At first, just, "Hey, this is my time. I'm a little bit perturbed." But here's the thing. I started thinking, "Well, this guy's called Shut Up Rick, because everybody's telling him shut up. What if I spent this hour just listening? Let's see what he has to say.

Shut up Rick liked to talk about loud things, first and foremost was conspiracies.

**Speaker:** Dallas, Texas, November 22nd, 1963.

**Bucky:** Did the Mafia kill JFK? Did the CIA kill JFK?

**Speaker:** Oswald didn't act alone.

**Bucky:** Did the aliens build Stonehenge? Did the aliens build pyramids?

**Speaker:** If you take the location of the great pyramid as a coordinate-

**Bucky:** He loved the show Ancient Aliens.

**Speaker:** -are these markers left for aliens?

**Bucky:** He said, "Hey, did you see the episode last time?" I'm like, "Yes." And then, he would describe it to me for the next hour. I was like, "I know, I saw it." Sometimes, Rick would talk at me, and sometimes it would be a back-and-forth conversation. I usually just talked about my family and my childhood. And then sometimes, I talked to him about how horrible people were to each other in the office where I worked. He would think it was kind of funny. He just couldn't believe that people would act that way to each other. And he also knows that-- Rick, a lot of times, didn't feel like he fit in either. This is a common thing with a lot of recovering drug addicts. We're between worlds, like Rick wasn't a criminal anymore. He was a good dude.

Rick spent a lot of his time volunteering, a lot of halfway houses, a lot of sober houses, anywhere he could. One time, I asked Rick why he volunteered so much at other places. He's like, "Well, I'm trying to outdo all the bad things I've done. How many good things do you think I have to do?" Wow. How do I answer that? There were a couple moments where I realized that Rick and I were becoming better friends. After six months or so, I can't wait to see him. I'm going down to Pete's, and if it's like 10:00 after 06:00, I'm looking up the street. I'm like, "Where is this guy?"

The most distinct thing about Rick was his walk. Really, he had his gate that no one else really had. There's kind of bouncing his walk that made him really easy to spot from far away. There was one time Rick told me that there was some skateboard company in LA that he wanted to be sponsored by. Rick's goal growing up was to become a pro skater. He said, "If I skateboard down to LA, will you sponsor me?" And I'm like, "Yeah, sure."

So, Rick gets a backpack, an extra pair of socks, an extra pair of underwear, a bunch of crackers, and some peanut butter, and a big old sack of weed, and he started skating. He's skating down. There's this one moment where he hits this place down in Southern California where it's downhill for miles, and he says, "You know, I sparked up this big doobie. Got really high, and I just coasted for seven miles straight and it was the most beautiful time of my life." When he talked about that, it was just really his best moment. Really, to know your best moment is something. If I ask you to think of your best moment, you'd have to think a while. I honestly have to think a while too. I don't know what mine is, but Rick knew his. Rick knew what his best moment was. It's just the moment he most loved being himself and where he was in life. It's such a beautiful thing.

The whole world doesn't exist. The world's just gone. We've created this temporary autonomous zone around us. We're like this little bubble of reality, like what exists here is me and Rick and two coffees. And that's the thing. It's like here's something in my life I needed. I needed a friend like this. I needed someone who's just a nice escape for me. This condition free friendship, just he just wants to hang. It's just really pure and nice.

But there was one time, he's like, "I need some money." And this is always a dangerous thing when you're talking to people, especially with people with heroin histories. When they say they need some money, it's a bad sign. So, I got very concerned. I don't know if I want to give him this money because I can't risk this guy not being here. And I thought about it a whole lot, and I could just see the way he looked at me and was like, "No one else believes in this guy. Maybe I'm the only guy who's going to believe him here." I got the money out of the ATM, we got the exact change together, and I loaned it to him. And he got his new glasses. He would tell everybody after that, "Oh, man, I got these new glasses. They're awesome. My homeboy loaned me the money so I could get them." And that was really like when he started referring to me as his homeboy or his buddy or his friend to other people.

At some point, I realized I spent about 250 hours sitting with Rick, and I tried to think of who else in my life have I spent this much time with. I don't think anyone. It was that realization of like, "Oh, my God, was Rick my best friend?" [laughs] And I think he is. What would I do without this guy? I don't want to lose him. This guy's important to me. I started noticing Rick wasn't showing up. And usually, he called me when he wasn't showing up. I did think, "Well, it's possible he relapsed," but it's probably not. But one of the things that he would do sometimes is that he would go off his meds, and he would not hang out when he was doing that. So, I figured he's off his meds, or maybe he's between prescriptions.

I call him, and his number is not working. A lot of times, he always had these burner phones, and sometimes they just stop working. And I was like, "Okay, well, he doesn't have a phone." Probably means he just doesn't have a phone. I was worried mostly about Rick doing some kind of crime and getting locked back up, because that would be the last we'd see of him. More than anything else, that was my worst-case scenario for him. But I was so preoccupied with myself, I couldn't really think about why Rick wasn't showing up too much. I definitely didn't have time to go look for him. I did have aspirations at the time of being a standup comic, and maybe being in some movies and TV. So, I decided to move to Los Angeles. I had a condo, and it was at the peak of the market, so I could sell that and just get a bunch of money.

So, I was really only thinking about myself the last few months. I was there, I would pack or just move stuff out of my house. I'm like, "Well, whatever he's dealing with, he'll figure it out." I kept trying to look for him best I could through other people. I was trying to call old San Francisco buddies, trying to figure out, "Have you seen this guy? What's going on?" Finally, one of them does touch base with me, and I've moved to LA, and someone says, "Hey, this guy with his halfway house told me that Shut Up Rick died." And I said, "I don't think he's dead. I think he's either relapsed or he's in jail. He's done something. [laughs] He's just sitting in county. We can find out pretty easily by calling the medical examiner. I'll call you right back."

So, I called the medical examiner and I said, "Hey, I'm looking for a Rick Lotty." And they said almost immediately, "We have a Richard." And I was like, "Oh." I said, "Early 50s, lots of jailhouse tattoos, missing most of his teeth." They're like, "Yeah, that's him. He died of pneumonia in August." So, he died actually right before I left. So, I said, "Hey, do you need help trying to locate his next of kin?" The guy said, "Oh, we called them, and they refused his remains." Maybe his family didn't have the money for it and that tore me up. I just didn't want him to be alone. If you're in this situation, they basically do an autopsy and then cremate you right away. And then, the county will keep you for a certain amount of time. If no one claims your remains, by that point, you're just buried in a mass grave.

I said, "Well, can I claim them?" And they're like, "Yeah, you just have to reimburse the county for the cremation cost." And in my mind, it's like $75. [laughs] And he goes, "$1,040." [laughs] Oh, the deal to sell the condo had just actually closed the week before. So, I'm sitting on this almost embarrassing amount of money. I'm like, "Well, guess I know what my first big purchase is going to be." And I said, "How do I pick this up?" "We'll mail him to you." And he says, "Hey, there's one more thing you could do for us. If you could help us fill out the death certificate, we'd really appreciate that." So, they sent me what they had. There was a blank on the death certificate for occupation. [laughs] I put professional skateboarder [laughs] because that was his dream. So, I figured on the records, he made it. [laughs] Congratulations, Rick, you made it. You're a pro.

**John:** Six weeks after Bucky gave Rick the job of his dreams, he received a package with stickers all over it saying, "Human remains." They were Shut Up Rick's ashes.

**Bucky:** I still have them. Of course, I thought aboutspreading them, but I was like, "You know what? I don't want to. I like having this guy around." I'll take him to a little coffee shop with me. I'll take him to Starbucks or whatever and sit there and have a little coffee. And remember, I'm never lonely. Like, I'm never without a friend. It's just really sweet.

[somber music]

**Glynn:** Thank you. Thank you so much to Bucky Sinister for telling us this story and rest in power to Rick Lotty. We want to shout out to all of our friends in the recovery community. Please keep coming back. Bucky is a poet, an author, a comedian. We will have a link to his Substack on our website, *snapjudgment.org*. There, you can keep up with all that Bucky is up to. The original score for this piece was by Clay Xavier. It was produced by Zahra Noorbaksh and John Fecile.

When we return, a friendly game turns not so friendly when the stakes are high. The Snap Judgment, Shut Up Rick episode continues. Stay tuned.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment. Now, there's a difference between being friends and being friendly. Large amounts of cash tend to reveal those differences pretty quickly.

Joe Rosenberg brings us a story involving a Japanese businessman, $20 million, and the most ancient and honorable form of ritualized combat.

**John:** So, our story is going to start with this guy.

**Jonathan:** Good Lord, I'm practically making love to this microphone now.

**John:** His name is Jonathan Rendell.

**Jonathan:** I'm a deputy chairman of Christie's in America who spent a lot of his time in the late 1980s, early 1990s selling material to Japan.

**John:** Material meaning art.

**Jonathan:** And in the mid-1990s s to the mid-2000s, going back to Japan to get everything back that I'd sold them ten years before. The extraordinary thing was you'd go to a trunk room, which looks like that last scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. There's things in boxes going on forever. And open a box, and in the box would be a work of art, or several works of art, and you'd pick the object up, and you'd look on the back of it, and you'd find your handwriting from 10 years ago.

**John:** That's so surreal. It really is like this weird ebb and flow of prestige between people. And so long as you're the middleman, you'll be all right in the end.

**Jonathan:** Yeah, absolutely. The beauty of the bubble market.

**John:** But, of course, Christie's did not have this wonderful pie all to itself.

**Jonathan:** It's a market that is really a duopoly between two auction house giants. There's Christie's and then there's the other place.

**John:** You mean Sotheby's?

**Jonathan:** Yeah.

**John:** It's like saying my opponent instead of-- Yeah.

**Jonathan:** No, that's actually how one normally refers to it, the other place. So, it's sort of a friendly-ish rivalry. I wouldn't say it was entirely friendly.

**John:** In Sotheby's and Christie's, you see, there was one collection they both had their eyes on.

**Jonathan:** The Maspro Denkoh corporate collection was a jewel in the crown. It had everything that one wanted to sell at that precise moment. The Cézanne, the Picasso, the Van Gogh, their trophy names.

**John:** And most importantly--

**Jonathan:** It was $20 million worth of business.

**John:** There was just one problem. Mr. Hashiyama, the CEO who had founded the collection, he was really chummy with Sotheby's. They'd known him for years. If Christie's wanted that $20 million worth of business, they were going to have to win him over.

**Kanae:** It was a very hard job for me, Mr. Hashiyama.

**John:** This is Kanae Ishibashi. She works at Christie's Tokyo office alongside Jonathan. Just think of her as the client whisperer. She'd been paying visits to Mr. Hashiyama since almost her first day on the job, but he'd been proving tricky.

**Kanae:** He really doesn't sort of talk about business. We talked about art, and music, and his great passion for dinosaurs. We could spend hours laughing. So, he told me that when his company was listed in a stock market, which was a very, very important incident, he chose the insurance company by throwing dice.

[dice rolling]

**John:** Yeah?

**Kanae:** Yes. So, when I heard that story, I found it really funny. He's a bit eccentric and all that, but we couldn't really read where his mind was.

**John:** First of all, over how many years were you doing this?

**Kanae:** I think we'd spent six years.

**John:** Um, six years?

**Kanae:** Yeah. Meeting with Mr. Hashiyama before the auction.

**Glynn:** That's incredible. And meanwhile though, you're not the only person meeting with him, I would take it.

**Kanae:** No, no, no. Sotheby's, they were there all the time.

**John:** And after both houses had finally given their big presentations on why Mr. Hashiyama should choose them and not the other place-

**Jonathan:** He came back with this extraordinary request.

**Kanae:** I received a call from Mr. Hashiyama in the office, and he said, "In order to determine which auction house to handle collection, I would like both of you, Christie's and Sotheby's, to play the game, rock paper scissors."

**John:** Yes, you heard her right.

**Background Voice:** Rock, paper, scissors. Shoot.

**John:** Mr. Hashiyama wanted the two biggest auction houses in the world to play a $20 million game of Rochambeau.

[upbeat music]

**Jonathan:** I think there was a moment of silence and surprise. And then, "What?"

**Kanae:** That's it. I didn't really reply back to him. I couldn't really answer him like, "Why are you doing this? We can't really do that." I couldn't believe it.

**Jonathan:** We didn't know what to do, but it was very clear that it was a very serious request from the client. And so, when a client asks you to do something, you just get on and do it.

**John:** Here's how it would work. Each side, Christie's and Sotheby's, would have the weekend to come up with their choice of "weapon." Then on Monday morning, they would meet at the Maspro Denkoh offices in Tokyo, and there they would duel.

**Jonathan:** This was one game, and Kanae's job was to write down one word on a piece of paper, and that word had to be either rock or paper or scissors. So, we started compulsively playing rock, paper, scissors, trying to work out, how do we win this? Is there some secret to this? How bad are you going to feel? How idiotic are you going to look in front of your colleagues when you've lost a collection for a child's game?

**Kanae:** I don't really remember those three days. I was under enormous pressure to think what would be the best strategy. But my struggle was always that I knew that there is no strategy because it's just a pure chance. So, constantly, whenever I had some moment on a train or walking in the streets, I suddenly thought about rock paper scissors. I had to contemplate between choices. I think it's paper. No, no, I think it's rock. Then I say, no, no, no, I shouldn't do it because there is no answer. There is no answer. Let's stop. But then, even though I tried not to think about it, I couldn't really forget about rock paper scissors from my mind.

**John:** Mr. Hashiyama, do you think he was just sitting back, rubbing his hands together mischievously?

**Kanae:** I don't know. I don't know. I really don't know.

**John:** Meanwhile, of course, she was getting all kinds of advice.

**Jonathan:** Every time I walked past, Can I--? I was constantly like, "Why do we go with the rock? It's the strong thing."

**John:** And then there was this guy.

**Nick:** My name's Nick McClain.

**John:** Her boss at the Christie's offices in New York.

**Nick:** Where we ran the Impressionist and modern art department.

**John:** Did you have an opinion about which to choose?

**Nick:** No, but obviously, the first thing I did when I got home, I was telling my wife about this and my daughters.

**Flora:** I'm Flora.

**Alice:** I'm Alice.

**John:** They were 11 then. They're 20 now. And the fun fact about them is--

**Flora:** We are twins.

**John:** Are you identical twins?

**Flora:** Yeah, very identical.

**Nick:** One's left-handed, one's right-handed.

**Alice:** Mirror twins.

**Flora:** And we were in the kitchen of our home in New York, and he was saying, "I've got a bit of an issue. Sotheby's is going to get this deal." We were like, "Oh, yeah, we hate Sotheby's."

**Nick:** They came back to me quite promptly and said, "Yeah, dad, everybody knows you start with scissors."

**Flora:** Yeah, scissors is a pretty standard move.

**Nick:** So, I said, "Well, how does that work?" And they said, "Well, most people like the idea of going with rock."

**Flora:** But because they were like super clever, Sotheby's, we're like, "Oh, they're going to bluff."

**John:** So, Sotheby's will choose paper.

**Nick:** But you then double bluff by going scissors and scissors cuts paper. And I said, "All right, that sounds good." I said, "What if they go scissors?" They said, "You go scissors again."

**Flora:** Because that's what I'd do.

**Alice:** Yeah, you just stick with scissors and see what happens.

**John:** At which point Nick called up Kanae.

**Kanae:** And he said, "Kanae, scissors. I think scissors is the thing."

**Nick:** At that point, we get into theater of the absurd. We're about to do this massive piece of business and we're listening to the advice of 11-year-olds.

**John:** Would you have been willing to go with Alice and Flora's choice, regardless of what it would have been? Would that have struck you as like--?

**Nick:** At least, I'd have had someone else to blame if it was wrong.

**Kanae:** But I wouldn't feel with my gut that scissors are the best choice, or rather I would say I reached the point where the situation got beyond my capacity. I think I didn't quite sleep a few days. But on that Sunday evening, I slept for a few hours, and then suddenly, my husband came up in my dream. He said, "Kanae," and he told me what choice I should come up with. Then, I woke up and I saw the window and the sky was beginning to light up. I didn't look at the time, but I felt really refreshed. Somehow, my husband's voice really struck me, and I didn't even think about right or wrong, but I felt that it was a choice for me, and I would go for it.

**Nick:** So, Monday morning, the car comes to pick me up with her in it and we start driving off towards the Maspro Denkoh office.

**John:** Did she tell you what she decided?

**Nick:** No.

**John:** She didn't?

**Nick:** No, she was keeping her cards very close to her chest.

**John:** Did you prod her like, "Oh, come on, can I? Just tell me." [crosstalk]

**Nick:** Yeah, of course. But you try and get a secret out of her, she won't tell you.

**John:** At that point, would you have--

**Nick:** Happily got out of the car and walked away? Yes.

**John:** Why would you want to walk away though? I feel like the tension might be unbearable, but how could you possibly not want to be there in that room?

**Nick:** Yeah, but it might be like watching a kitten being steamrollered as well, because if the pressure was big on me, it was absolutely massive on her. So, she had prepared herself and was entering a semi-Zen state.

So, we arrive, we're shown to a waiting room. Then, the two people from Sotheby's arrive.

**John:** Do you recognize the two people from Sotheby's?

**Nick:** Yeah. I knew who they were, but it's hardly the moment for, "Hi, how are you?" More sort of a grunt. So, we sit one side of the table, they sit the other side of the table, and there are two accountants and a fax machine.

**John:** And somewhere on the other side of the fax machine, Mr. Hashiyama himself waiting for the results.

**Nick:** We're told to write down the word.

**Kanae:** Jonathan actually looked at me and beneath the table, he showed me rock with his hand. His eyes were very sharp. He nodded to me once. I think he nodded to make sure that it was a good decision.

**John:** And she's just saying nothing.

**Nick:** Nothing. Nothing. She goes ahead and writes down a word.

**John:** Can you see what word she wrote?

**Nick:** It's in Kanji. I don't read Japanese but looking at the face of the accountant holding the piece of paper, you could tell nothing. He was totally inscrutable. He looks at it for what was probably 30 seconds and your heart's in your mouth.

**Kanae:** And then Maspro, a person opened the envelope and he said, "Sotheby's paper. Christie's scissors."

**Nick:** Then, they look at Kanae and say, "You won." It was like a huge weight had gone off her shoulders.

[somber music]

**Kanae:** But after we went outside the building, we screamed.

**Nick:** Saved by Kanae. Completely saved by Kanae.

**John:** Would you be Deputy Chairman of Christie's if you had gone for rock?

**Nick:** No, I suspect I might still be there, but I probably wouldn't be quite right where I am now.

**John:** Really? It really would have had that kind of effect.

**Nick:** It's a huge career block. You just lost a great big deal.

**Flora:** Obviously, he should have come to us first.

**Alice:** You never go paper. Paper just sounds like it's not going to win.

**Flora:** It's a weak move.

**John:** Wait, why not paper? Because the other person's going to stick with scissors?

**Flora:** It's just a weak move.

**John:** Whether Mr. Hashiyama himself would agree with that, we don't know. But Kanae would meet him again at the art auction in New York.

**Kanae:** Normally, clients, they demand the very best restaurants in New York. But he said, "Well, I want to have a steak." So, we went to the real New York steakhouse, having clam chowder and steak together. It was a very simple dinner, but it was very nice.

**John:** Did he ever talk about rock paper scissors again, or did you ever bring it up?

**Kanae:** No, he never brought it up, and I didn't talk about it. But two years later, Mr. Hashiyama passed away, and that was the last time I saw him.

**John:** Today, Kanae Ishibashi has quit the auction business entirely. She now runs a music school with her husband in Tokyo. And as for Nick's twin daughters, Alice and Flora, shortly after the art auction, Time Magazine ran a section called Quotes of the Week.

**Nick:** The Pope was there. Arnold Schwarzenegger. I think the president, and Alice McClain.

**Flora:** She has it framed.

**Alice:** Yep, it's framed [Flora giggles] in the house.

**John:** [laughs] What was her quote?

**Nick:** Everybody knows you go scissors.

[intruding music]

**Glynn:** A special shoutout to Carol Vogel over at The New York Times, who first reported on this story back in 2004. For a link to her original article and more, check out our website, *snapjudgment.org*. That piece is produced by Joe Rosenberg with sound design by Leon Morimoto.

Now, when Snap returns, a young college student has a chance encounter that changes his life forever. Stay tuned.

[intruding music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment. My name is Glynn Washington. And today, we're digging into the nitty-gritty of friendship. Next up, Snap storyteller extraordinaire, Mr. Don Reed, hits the stage for Snap Judgment Live.

[applause]

**Don:** I grew up on East 14th in Oakland, California.

[cheers and applause]

**Don:** When I was like 20 years old, I got recruited to UCLA on a speech and debate scholarship, a partial scholarship. But nobody told me that partial scholarship, loosely translated, actually stands for not enough money. Yeah, I was suffering that bad. I was really excited when I first headed off for UCLA. I hopped on a plane, [funky music] landed in LA, starry eyed, and realized I didn't have nowhere to live. Hadn't quite thought that part out yet. So, what I did was, every day after class, I went to a different dorm room, and I partied. Went to a different dorm room and partied every night. Party, party, party. Yay, yay, yay.

[funky music]

**Don:** Dancing white to fit in, "Hi, how are you? How are you doing? How are you? How are you?" And crash in a different dorm room every night. But they caught on to me. So, then I slept in the movie theater, and they caught on to me. So, then I got a brilliant idea to sleep in the girls' restroom at UCLA. They had those little couches. You know those little period couches? Those little "it's my time of the month, you might back up, I might choke you" couches? I sleep in those. Now, the building where the speech team met had a lot of those couches. Kinsey Hall built in 1929 with words of wisdom etched in stone over the doorway, but I never read it.

So, I sneak in there and sleep, but I never got good rest, because I didn't want anybody to walk in on me. So, I kind of slept with one eye open all night like [snoring] I didn't want some girl to walk in and said, "Suzanne, Suzanne. There's a Negroid in the women's restroom. Alert the authorities." I knew I needed somewhere to live, I needed a job. So, I went to the classifies and I found an excellent opportunity. "Seeking neat, clean college students to serve breakfast to the elderly in an upscale environment. Beverly Hills, Hancock Park, adjacent the Kipling Hotel for your busy, friendly, happy retirement." I waited tables some up here in the Bay, I'm like, "I got to get this."

I caught the bus over there. It was almost as if classical music was playing in my head as I passed luscious lawns and stunning mansions. This was going to be the next level of my life. We rode by a golf course. People waved at me. I was on the bus. But the bus went way, way past all that nice [beep], and I ended up in a nasty area with trash on the ground. Heard errant gunshots. pow-pow-pow, pow-pow-pow. Woo. Police helicopter. [imitates a helicopter[ A little scroungy dog ran by [imitates dog bark] Looked like he gave me the finger.

[laughter]

**Don:** How did he give the finger with a paw? I stepped off the bus, and there was the Kipling in all its non-fantasticness. I walked into the lobby, and I was immediately met by the scent of urine and log cabin syrup. Kind of nasty, but kind of sweet. I went through the interview. It went well. They told me they'd let me know. They did let me know, I got it. Serving breakfast to the elderly for room and board.

Now, every day after you finish your shift, you had to rush through the lobby, because the old folks will be camped out in the lobby, and they try to capture you with a long ass boring story, the kind that destroys your soul. The kind that while you're listening, you go, "Am I dying as I'm listening to this? Did you just reference Custer? How long have you been on the planet?" So, you had to do this little move where you jog through the lobby and point your watch like, "I got things to do. I got things to do."

But sometimes, I just slowed down, and I got to know some of them. I got to know this one old guy named George. One day, he was standing in the dining room, kind of Catskills-type dining room with a green linoleum floor and cheap curtains that wanted to be much nicer. And George, standing there 5'2" with his little dead things, he's like, "Don, Don, hold on just a second. I want to talk to you for a second. Don, I want to talk to you. I have a situation, and you're a smart guy, you serve me my breakfast each morning. I want to know if you think what I'm thinking about doing is a good idea. Okay, Don? Okay, look over here, okay? Look, right there, that's my seat. Every day, breakfast, lunch, dinner. Everybody knows that that's my seat. But now there's this new guy, an old guy, he just plops in my seat. He just plots his he plots his in my seat. He's giving me the schpilkas, this guy. This guy's giving me the schpilkas, okay? I'm thinking about doing something. I want to know if you think it's a good idea, okay? I'm thinking of going up behind him and stabbing him in the back of the head with a fork. You think that's a good idea, to stab him in the back of the head with a fork? You think that--? Look at him. Watch him. Look at-- Watch the son of-- Watch him chew, watch him chew, watch him chew. I hate that guy. I'm too old for this. I'm 92 years old, okay? My wife died 25 years ago. Every night I say my prayers. I say, 'Dear God, when I wake up, please let me be dead.' I wake up, damn it, still alive. So, how are things going for you?"

I said, "It's going pretty good, George, but I'm having a hard time staying in school financially, and I really just want to be a comedian." He said, "You could do that. You go to school and be a comedian. People can make it through anything. People can do anything. They're resilient. Trust me. I've been through a lot. I've been through a lot. Let me tell you a story, Don, okay?

I used to live overseas. One day, they marched into our area, and they say that we're going to be prisoners of war. We're like, 'Okay, we're going to be prisoners of war.' But what they did, Don, is they took us to this camp, and then they tell us that we're just going to be held. Don, you see these numbers on my arm right here?" He pointed to some numbers tattooed on his forearm. "They put those on me there."

So, one day, a soldier walks in dressed in all black and he says, 'It's time to take a shower.' Now, we knew some folks that headed off to these showers. We don't quite remember seeing them again. Didn't know if they were transferred. Confusing. But we change clothes, we get in line. It's almost my group's turn to walk inside these showers. And Allied soldiers, British, American, I don't know, they show up and pop-pop-pop. Shoot the guys in the block. pop, pop, pop. They shoot the SS guys in the block, and they freed us. That's why you'll never hear me say an ill word about a soldier that's fighting for good. They try to say all soldiers are murderers, they're all killers. But sometimes, you've got to do that. Sometimes, you've got to fight. When someone's trying to wipe out your entire culture, you've got to fight. You better fight. You got to fight, Don. But you don't have time to listen to all that stuff. You're real busy and you've got a lot to do."

I said, "That's okay, George." He said, "Don, did I ever tell you had a beautiful wife. She was beautiful. She had this song I sang it to her. I sing this song to her, go-- Hold on. I got it. Hold on. *You are the most beautiful girl in the whole wide world. You are a beautiful girl.* *Da-da, da-da.* It's a short song. I made it up. But Don, I tell you, I've lived a good life. I treat people well. I keep my word. That's a big thing. You've got to keep your word. You've got to keep your word, Don. But I've lived too damn long. 92 years old, every night I still say my prayers, 'Dear God, when I wake up, let me be dead.' I wake up, damn it, still here.

You know what, Don? You know what they still give me? I'm 92, you know what they still give me? My driver's license. You better watch out for me. I'll run you right down. I'll run you right down."

I lived and worked at the Kipling for five years, serving breakfast to the elderly and they served me stories. I left the Kipling and things went very, very well for me. Many years later, I got a big project working with a huge star. Her name rhymes with Moprah. [laughter] I wanted to remember being hungry because things were going so well. I wanted to remember being really hungry. So, what I did, I swear to God, I went back to UCLA to the very building where I used to sleep in the girls' restroom. The very building.

While standing outside, I looked up and I finally looked at those words of wisdom that were etched in stone over the doorway. They say, "Nothing is too wonderful to be true." It's a quote from a scientist, Faraday. "Nothing is too wonderful to be true." And guess what's etched in stone over the doorway of the Kipling Hotel? Not that. I think it's scratching with a butcher knife that says something like, "Lick my nuts," or something like that. But nothing is too wonderful to be true. Could be my old buddy, George, who grew to 92 and beat the Nazis. He beat the Nazis and finally happily woke up dead. [laughter] Or you could be me who grew up in Oakland, headed off to college, was homeless for a while, but battled through, and ended up here with you on this wonderful night, or something like that.

[applause]

**Glynn:** Don Reed, that story was performed at Snap Judgment Live in San Francisco by Don Reed. Music performed by the Snap Judgment players, Alex Mandel, David Brandt, and Tim Frick. See the full video of this performance in all of its technicolor glory, along with countless other amazing performances of Snap on our YouTube channel, Snap Judgment Films.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** There and back again. That is what it's all about. And you know what's better than hearing a story? Giving a story. And you can give the gift of story by sending your friends and your enemies a little taste of the Snap Judgment podcast. They will love it, I promise. Did I mention Snap Judgment's evil twin show? Spooked. It's available everywhere.

Snap is brought to you by the team that never takes their friends for granted. Except for the uber producer, Mr. Mark Ristich. He actually lets my phone calls, my phone calls go directly to voicemail. It's outrageous. There's Nancy López, Pat Mesiti-Miller, Anna Sussman, Renzo Gorrio, John Fecile, Shaina Shealy, Teo Ducot, Flo Wiley, Marisa Dodge, Bo Walsh, David Exumé, and Regina Bediako.

And this is not the news. No way is the news. In fact, you could travel all over a country you'd never been to before, loudly debating the country's history with a person just as ignorant as you are. And you would still, still not be as far away from the news as this is. But this is PRX.

[music]

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