[Snap Judgment intro]

**Glynn:** Snappas, listen to me, listen to me, over the years, I've watched enormous amount of television. Hundreds, maybe thousands of shows, *Cops 'n Robbers*, *Espionage*, *Corporate,* *Skullduggery* being amongst my favorites. And through this meticulous research, I've learned that if you're going to go undercover, cloaking dagger, plausible deniability and all that, there's no almost, there are no half measures, no breaking bad. Once you're in, you're in. And that's why today, Snap Judgment proudly presents Subterfuge.

My name is Glynn Washington. Always remember and never forget, the delivery guy is never ever, ever, just a delivery guy, when you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[children screaming]

[Upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Now that as you might imagine, our first story begins in the big city with brash, young reporter, Zay Smith, who's working for the Chicago Sun-Times. Snap Judgment.

**Joe:** Zay had dreamed of being a reporter for the Sun-Times, his entire life. And in 1977, he was still a cub reporter, a rookie, stuck covering the suburbs. But then one night, he was in the office working late.

**Zay:** It was in the evening, and I was working on a story, when suddenly I was called into managing editor, Stu Lori's office. And if you called into the office late at night, I was worried that this was not good news. I didn't know what it might be. But Stu's first words, and he was smiling when he said them, and he said, "Zay, have you ever waited for tables?" And I said, "Yes." And they said, "Can you hold your liquor?" And I sensed something was happening here, and I decided I was going to answer yes to every question, no matter what it was, and I said, "Yes." And they said, "Are you good at talking to people?" And I said, "Yes." “Otherwise, can you keep your mouth shut, if you have to?" And I said, "Yes." And then he asked, "Can you write 50,000 words in a big hurry?" And I said, "Yes."

And at that point, Stu leaned back in his chair and smiled and said, "Zay, I think we're going to detach you from the city room for a while." The end of the meeting, Stu Lori said, "Do you have a nickname?" And I said, "Well, my college friends call me Norty." And he said, "All right. Well, good luck, Norty the bartender."

[somber music]

**Joe:** That's when the editor read Zay in on the plan that the Chicago Sun-Times had bought a bar.

**Zay:** And the story needed a second reporter to work with Pam, and I said, "Yes."

**Pam:** Pam Zekman, Z-E-K-M-A-N. And I'm an investigative reporter now with the CBS station in Chicago.

**Joe:** Pam Zekman was a senior investigative reporter at the Sun-Times. She and the editor, Stu Lori, had come up with this idea. The idea was for the paper to buy, set up and operate a working bar. This would be a undercover bar to catch Chicago officials in the act of corruption. Normally, what would happen is that people would call into newspapers like the Sun Times with complaints about things that they thought needed to be investigated. And then Pam and the other reporters would go out and, well, investigate.

**Pam:** But one of the most difficult tips that we got was tips from small businesses that said that they were sick and tired of having to pay bribes to all kinds of inspectors that would demand payoffs and keep coming. It never ended.

**Joe:** In other words, a city inspector would come to an establishment like a restaurant and say, "Oh, geez, you're out of code. What can we do?" And then shake them down for a little money. And to be clear, this wasn't something that just affected a few businesses. It affected thousands.

[upbeat music]

**Pam:** People would say, everyone does it. It's systemic. You'll never be able to do anything about it. It's just the Chicago way. And we wanted the tipsters to go public with us. And understandably, they would not.

**Joe:** And that's when Pam and her colleagues came up with the idea.

**Pam:** Well, what if we buy a bar?

**Joe:** And this was back in the day when a newspaper could afford to buy a bar. No sooner had they made their grand plan than they realized exactly how unprepared they were to buy, manage and run a bar in the middle of Chicago.

**Zay:** This was a big project with all kinds of things that could go quite terribly wrong.

**Pam:** My biggest fear was that we would have something terrible happen in the bar and that it would become a horrible mistake.

**Zay:** Well, aside from the fact that the cover could be blown and the whole project could just be collapsed, someone could be killed in our tavern. I mean, it's a tavern in Chicago, and you're always careful. There were so many ways it could go wrong.

**Joe:** So, they did three things. First, they partnered with an investigator from the Better Business Bureau named Bill Recktenwald to help them run the operation. The second is, duh, they hired a bartender. They figured they needed at least one professional who could pose as the owner. His name was Jeff Allen. But like them, he was new to the ways of the Chicago bar scene. Then came the third order of business, to actually find a bar, preferably one that wasn't sparkling clean and up to code.

**Pam:** We looked at dozens of places, tried to find a bar that was in our price range. We were looking for a place where we could conceal our photographers.

**Joe:** Finally, they found a 731 North Wells Street.

**Zay:** I remember very well one of those moments in life you remember. Corner of Wells and Superior, parking my car, not really knowing quite what I'd be called upon to do. Opening the screen door and going in. There's a bar along the left, some booths on the right, and a jukebox and this is a shot and a beer kind of place.

**Pam:** Most important of all, from the get go, it had a lot of obvious violations. There were drain boards behind the bar that were rotting. There were bar sinks that dumped water directly onto the floor. There was a pool of water in the basement that we thought had maggots in it. It looked like maggots. There were electrical wires hanging down from all sorts of places. One of the toilets didn't flush.

**Joe:** In other words, it's the perfect place for what you wanted to do.

**Pam:** It was wonderful. And incredibly, the owner said, in five years, he'd never been cited for a single violation. We couldn't believe it.

[intriguing music]

**Pam:** We had just started fixing the place up, minimally, when the first inspector that came in was a plumbing inspector, older man, very heavyset. He was looking at behind the bar. He wound up being unconcerned about water that was like a waterfall practically, dripping from the sinks. And he said, "Nothing here is up to code." And then he made a comment about probably we didn't have enough money to fix it, "So, leave it," he said. That's not something an inspector should say, “Leave your code violations.” He said, "Don't worry about it. We'll work something out."

**Joe:** This happened a few times. An inspector would come in, hem and haw and leave, saying they'd be back to work something out. So, all that Pam and the rest could do was carry on with the business of getting the bar ready and wait to see what would happen next.

**Zay:** We're trying to figure out what to name the tavern and came up with any number of, well, half joking, like the golden scoop or the Sunny Times tap. But these professional writers, we could not come up with a tavern. Bill Rectenwald, a gifted investigator, finally just said, "Why don't you call it The Mirage? That's what it's going to be." [laughs] And he was right. It was perfect.

**Joe:** Tell me what you remember about opening day.

**Pam:** Fear. I did not expect that we would have a lot of business in the neighborhood that we were in. I was wrong. On opening day, I was having trouble pouring beer. And a customer had wound up giving me a lesson in pouring beer without having it foam and out of the glass and gave me a pat on the back and said, "That's very good."

There was another time when somebody asked me for a Drambuie, and I said, "A, what?" And he said, “A Drambuie." And I said, "I don't think we have that." And the customer said, "What do you mean you don't have it? It's right behind you." I Had no idea. One guy came in one morning and wanted a shot and a beer, and I poured the shot in the beer.

**Joe:** But even before the bar opened, they also had to figure out how to find graft. They had no idea how it worked. How would inspectors ask for handouts? What words would they use, and how are they expected to hand over the bribes exactly?

**Zay:** What the owner is supposed to say, “Isn't there some way we can avoid this aggravation?” That's a key word in Chicago. That sentence has been spoken so many times. "Isn't there some way we can avoid this aggravation?" At which point, you start negotiating.

**Pam:** But we were very concerned about never being accused of entrapping these inspectors. We did not want to do that.

[upbeat music]

**Zay:** In order to avoid entrapment, and if you have an inspector who's obviously fishing for an envelope of money, we just stood there like the dumbest kids on the block. We didn't make a move to the point where some of the inspectors were almost-- You could tell they were almost frustrated having to move this thing along, get their payoff. We looked like just dumb beginners, which is, what we were.

**Pam:** We weren't going to say, "Well, can we pay you off in order to ignore the violation?" That was absolutely not going to happen. We needed to either have them ask for the money or hint that they wanted the money. The language and dance of the game was, "Well, we really want to work with you and oh, your nice people and we want to help you,” and things like that.

**Joe:** But they didn't know the dance. They didn't know the language. But luckily, they had found this accountant.

**Pam:** He was straight out of central casting.

**Joe:** His name was Phil Barasch.

[upbeat music]

**Pam:** Phil Barasch is a very colorful character. He drove a Rolls Royce, and he bragged about his gambling habits in Las Vegas. He was constantly talking about how much money he had. He had to tell us that he gets lots of sex, lots of trips, nice trips. He also had a criminal record.

**Zay:** He was the most honest, dishonest man you'll ever meet. He was of the city of Chicago. He taught us, "You've got to follow the rules if you're going to break the law."

**Joe:** And Phil Barasch showed them the exact steps of the corruption dance. The bribes were small, but they were coming in from hundreds of bars across the city. So, they added up.

**Pam:** He said, "Okay, I want you to put $10 in an envelope for the fire inspector, $15 in an envelope for the building inspector, along with my card. And when they come in, give them the envelope, tell them that Phil Barasch told you to give this to them.

**Joe:** In other words, he wasn't just their accountant. He was also their corruption broker.

[upbeat music]

**Pam:** That was extraordinary, because that was an easy way to get ourselves into the corruption angle without being accused of entrapping the inspectors.

**Joe:** So, the photographers climbed up into a hidden loft positioned behind a fake air vent, and they waited.

**Glynn:** When Snap Judgement returns, don't go in that room. When the Subterfuge episode continues, stay tuned.

Welcome back to the Snap. When last we left, Joe was perched behind an air vent, waiting for the bad thing to go down. Snap Judgment.

**Joe:** And in the fire and plumbing and building and liquor inspectors came to take a look at the bar even before opening. And remember, before it opened, the bar had serious code violations, things that really were dangerous. So, the first big test came with the fire inspector's visit.

**Pam:** I was outside the bar, waiting. This was the date and the time that our Mr. Fixit, Phil Barasch, had told us to expect an inspector. And he came just as Barasch said he would, and he was the fire inspector, a lieutenant. He came in and he looked around. I don't know what he was looking for, but it certainly wasn't fire violations. He asked about the condition of the basement. And Jeff Allen told him, "Well, we never use it." And the fire inspector said, "Well, as long as it's clean, no trash, no junk down there," which was laughable because it was a fire hazard. There were all kinds of open ceilings that plaster had fallen off the ceiling, a fire could have gone right through there. He never went near the basement.

And then out of nowhere, he started talking about how much he liked beer and how he loved, loved beer. And it got to the point where we thought that maybe what he was hinting at was that he wanted beer or a keg of beer as his payoff. At that point, it was obvious that the inspection was done, if you call it an inspection. And Jeff Allen had the envelope that we were supposed to give to him, according to Barasch. And there was some hesitation, nervous hesitation, and then he just scooped it up and acknowledged that he was done, and he was leaving and he wasn't citing us for any code violations. And he walked out, he said, "It's a beautiful day," and walked out.

We wanted to make sure that we got a shot. So, we put bar stools up on the bar, so that they would have to do their business, fill out their reports, do whatever it is that they do at a key spot where the cameraman could get a picture. And you can see in the picture of the building inspector, you can see the bar stools up on the bar behind him.

**Joe:** Yeah, I can.

**Pam:** At one point, he looked up at the grill that our cameraman had put in the loft, so that they could shoot down on top of the bar and capture what was going on. He looked straight up at that ventilation duct, and the cameraman thought that they were spotted. I mean, they froze. They didn't want to make a move. They wound up though getting the picture that we wanted of him scooping up the envelope. That was, yes, one of the iconic photographs is he took the envelope. The same thing happened with the building inspector that followed.

**Joe:** I should have, say, both the fire inspector and the building inspector-- the fire inspector is in his uniform, but he's got the cigarette dangling. There's a huge amount of-- It's a very smoky cigarette. And then the building inspector has got the world's perhaps most amazing haircut.

**Pam:** You like that, huh?

[laughter]

**Pam:** But he's also got a cigarette dangling from him too. They both did. We were very excited about those photographs. And of course, the cameraman told us that-- Right away, they told us that they had nailed it. It happened over and over again. You asked me at what point did I think that we really were accomplishing or proving the point that this was systemic. My wow moment came as we progressed through the different specialties and the ventilation inspector and the plumbing inspector. And then the liquor inspector just telling us, "Go to the cash register and get some cash." Did I imagine, going into it, that we found all the things we did? No, it was incredible.

**Joe:** There was something else that Pam and Zay and the Sun-Times were able to document. Not only did they find and prove incontrovertible government graft over and over again, but in creating a bar, they had also created a tiny new world. And that tiny world was peopled with stories.

**Zay:** A tavern is a city. The whole city come in off the street for a beer. You're caring for a community every day.

**Joe:** There quickly grew this cast of regulars at The Mirage.

**Zay:** We called them The Mirage menagerie. They ranged from cheeky, the gun runner, a little old guy who suddenly came in one day, a handgun he was trying to sell, wrapped in newspaper.

**Joe:** There was a guy named Cowboy Don.

**Zay:** Well, Cowboy Don, you could tell from a distance that he was a cowboy. He'd have buckskin jacket and a cowboy hat.

**Joe:** There was a guy they named Football Hero.

**Zay:** But I remember one moment when he looked down at a bourbon he was drinking and said, "Sometimes all I can remember are football plays and my serial number," and that was Football Hero.

**Joe:** Then there was the guy they called Lost Weekend.

**Zay:** Well, Lost Weekend was the most intellectual member of the menagerie by far. He was very smart, and he said he was a writer. He said he wrote a piece for the New Yorker once, but he hasn't written anything else. We couldn't find any record of the piece he said he wrote for the New Yorker, but he had a little problem with liquor.

**Joe:** And then, of course, there were fights because it's a bar.

[upbeat music]

**Zay:** There had been a full-blown bar room brawl. And what happened was it started with a simple argument about, “Can I dance with this girl?” That developed into a fistfight. And suddenly, everybody in the place has a reason to punch out the person next to him. And we had a guy smashing the beer bottle repeatedly [chuckles] on the bar trying to get it to break and it wouldn't do it the way it would in the movies. Everything settled down, and then we noticed that there was an old tippler sitting quietly in one of the booths, and he had somehow managed to remain unnoticed, sipping a martini throughout the brawl and he just said, "Can I have another drink? The service in here is terrible."

In our bar, we had a jukebox and a pinball. Our pinball was an Evel Knievel pinball. And one night, I looked up from the bar because I heard some commotion at the pinball, and there was this young fellow just shouting at the pinball machine as he played, "You, scurvy dog. I hate you." [laughs] I had to go over and check out the scurvy dog and made his acquaintance and found out that he was a young man who just about turned 22 years, very respectable young man, but he had this thing about pinball machines, and he couldn't rest until-- When he met a new pinball machine, he could not rest until he'd beaten the high posted score.

High posted score on this pinball was 242,050. 242,000. And he was a very good pinball player and he said, "For some reason, this machine, I hate it. I hate it." I could see something was developing, because he was back every night for hours on the machine trying to conquer the 242,050.

I made friends with him, and he started teaching me about pinball. People would gather because they realized what was going on, the drama. And he'd come close, and the ball would go down the chute and we'd hear the shout of, "You, scurvy dog."

But finally, on the night of September 16th, it was a Friday night, and he came in and he played a game. He had a bag with his flight suit with him because he was getting ready to go up to naval reserve weekend training.

First of all, he said, "I just missed the 06:20 train, but I'll get the 07:20." And then he, "I just missed the 07:20 train, but I'll get the 08:20." And then, he finally said, "Can the reserve. I am going after this machine." And so, he did. And crowd gathered, and he went after it and lost, and went after it and lost. And then suddenly, he was up in the 200,000 with a free ball left. And the place fell quiet as he went with the last ball, and he did-- You could tell he was just doing everything he knew how to do, intense concentration, flipper action, and finally, bang, he was past 242,050.

[applause]

**Zay:** And his first words were, "I love this machine." [laughs]

**Joe:** Some people came in looking for something more than a drink or a game. There were two brothels across the street, Suzettes and the Bowery. And one of them, the Bowery.

**Zay:** Let's just say the girls were not well treated. They were treated like cattle. They were treated like they were sex slaves who got tips.

**Joe:** And one otherwise unremarkable afternoon, one of the women from the Bowery stepped into the doorway of The Mirage.

**Zay:** And suddenly, there was, in our presence, Angel, a young woman with long brown hair, smoking a filter cigarette with a small tattoo that I couldn't read on her upper right arm. It faded and smudged. And Angel was a big girl and she was trying to escape. She was after not a heavy mixing joint, but a light mixing joint, which was some go, go dancing, some mingling, maybe some hugging, but no more.

And the first thing she basically said is, "Hell, this place is almost perfect just the way it is." And she was seeking to turn The Mirage suddenly into a light mixing joint. In other words, she was already envisioning it. She said, "You know what? I'll bet there used to be a stage up there behind the bar. Look how some of those lights are pointed." Well, what she didn't know was the lights were pointed to maximize our photographers work from the back loft.

She walked over to the jukebox at that point and said, "They have my favorite on it, my song." She put a quarter into the jukebox, and suddenly, Angel was climbing up onto one of the tables in the bar booths. And it wasn't very steady. It was teetering badly, but she started dancing.

[somber music]

**Zay:** Even though we pretty much told her this was not the way we were prepared to go, she started dancing just to show how well she could dance. It was her tryout. It was her big chance.

**Joe:** Angel would come in a few more times after that, always pitching the same idea, the same angle.

**Zay:** I was feeling an immense sadness because a good way of putting it, she was trying to escape, and whether she's successful over the long-term, I couldn't tell you. We never saw her again.

I go back to the line. It's a city come in off the street in need of a drink. I think that's what I would have found on any number of neighborhood taverns. And it would have been quirky in the sense that people are quirky.

**Joe:** But The Mirage was never meant to last. Once they had their story, it was time to close the doors and say goodbye to the menagerie.

**Pam:** Finally closing up, we wound up having to take down some of the decorations we'd put up. It was not depressing. It was the end of a huge, huge effort that had gone successfully, and a huge sense of relief and of accomplishment in what we had done, but there was so much more to do.

**Joe:** Therewas one last hurdle. They had to write the story.

**Zay:** We ended up, when it came time to write it, [chuckles] which is quite a moment, suddenly say to yourself, "My goodness, I have to write this now." This pile of memorandum was taller than Pam. But you asked me whether I felt scared at the start of the project. If I felt scared at all, I felt scared at this point. There's an old saying in our business. “If you've got a good story, tell it. If you don't have a good story, write it.” This is a good story. All I had to do is tell it.

**Joe:** Three months later, on January 5th, 1978, an article appeared on the front page of the Chicago Sun-Times.

**Zay:** It looked like any other tavern in the city. The beer was cold, the broth was hot, but The Mirage 731 was never quite what it seemed. I was down in the sitting room, and the papers came up and hot-- It's always called hot off the presses, it's actually wet off the presses, because if the papers or anything are released of the press run, they're a little wet. But the papers came up and after one story, I was walking down. It was placed a row in a desk in the sitting room we call murderers row because the columnists [chuckles] were in a row and they were all reading The Mirage story, because the papers had just come up. And they all looked at me and gave me a thumbs up. And I thought, "Gee, that was nice, they really liked. That was terrific." I later found out they were giving me the thumbs up, because I got the word, ass, into the paper.

**Joe:** The article was a hit. And four days later, another article appeared. And then one the day after that and the day after that, Zay and the team would end up writing a 25-part series.

**Pam:** It became like a soap opera. People were buying the paper, and sitting there and reading it on the train and following it very closely. And it went from the corruption to the tax skimming, to the vendors, to the features and the characters in the bar.

**Joe:** And it turns out, while the mayor and city council might be able to duck one bad article, a 25-part series is a little harder to gloss over. In the next election, the mayor was voted out office, although Zay says it wasn't all thanks to The Mirage.

**Zay:** The blizzard of 1979, which paralyzed the city in ways that it became obvious the city was not delivering services. They say that was the one-two punch. Corruption, yeah, it's corrupt. And now the mayor wasn't even able to keep the streets plowed. And that's why he went down.

**Joe:** There's still a bar at 731 North Well Street. They knocked on a wall, but the old back bar is still there. And there are pictures from its days as a sting operation.

**Pam:** I still have in my closet Mirage jacket and t-shirts that say I inspected The Mirage. And I have matchbooks that we had made for the mirage.

**Joe:** The night The Mirage closed, there was a rap party. All the reporters went, the fake bartenders, the real bartender, the photographers who had been cooped up in the ceiling boards. And even some members of the menagerie showed up.

**Male Speaker 1:** And we were part of it. We were members of the menagerie.

**Male Speaker 2:** They were generally good people that I enjoyed knowing.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** Thank you, Pam Zekman and Zay Smith for sharing your story with the Snap.

Pam is currently an investigative reporter for CBS 2 News in Chicago. Zay Smith, he's worked as an investigative reporter, a foreign correspondent and as a humor columnist. Find a link to his work, including his book about The Mirage, his humor column and a new novel, all on our website, *snapjudgment.org.*

The original score was by Leon Morimoto. That piece is produced by Joe Rosenburg and Anna Sussman.

Now then, on Snap Judgment, the Subterfuge episode continues. The birth of a modern-day legend. Snappas, stay tuned.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Subterfuge episode. My name is Glynn Washington. Now in sports, you hear incessantly about the legendary players that define the game. This hero worship is supported by a rabid base of fans. But you've got to be a pretty hardcore fan to become a legend in your own right.

**Steve:** I love football, which is American soccer to you, guys. It's our national game. I fell in love with a game when I was about six, seven years old. I left school, take a ball, take it up to the road, play in the garages with my mates, pretending I was scoring a winning goal at Wembley, which is every schoolboy's dream.

I remember in 1975, I watched a Cup Final on the TV. It was a game between West Ham United and Fulham. And West Ham went on to win two nil.

[TV playing]

From that day on, I decided I was going to follow West Ham. It became a bit massive love affair. I went to every game, home and away. I have tattoo on my right arm. It is a massive West Ham emblem with West Ham till I die written on it.

It was July in 1994. I'm 22 years old. I'm a self-employed courier. And it's a pre-season fixtures for West Ham.

[phone rings]

And my mate, Chunk, he called me up and he said, "Steve, do you fancy going over to watch the game tonight?" "Yeah, why not? You know, any chance to go and watch the Hammers." "I'm bringing Kelly, which was his missus and--" "No problem, I'll bring Kelly, which is my missus too, which is quite funny because Chunk's real name is Steve and I'm Steve too."

So, we got into the car, had a couple of little cans with us, picked up a packet of cigarettes and off we went to Oxford City. We arrived at the game and then we found ourselves a little spot right next to the dugout where the managers sit and the team were warming up. And manager at the time, Harry Redknapp, he was on the sidelines directing a few bits. It's at times like that when you look at them you think, "Oh, I wish I was out there with them." They're tanned, highly paid. You wish you were a professional footballer then. But sometimes you have to think back and say, "The only reason why I'm not playing out there because I wasn't good enough." So, you have to settle for that, really.

[somber music]

**Steve:** Then the team went down to get their full kit on for the game. It's traditional by West Ham supporters that we sing our famous, "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles."

[fans singing and cheering]

**Steve:** Then they come along with Oxford City, they all come out together and they all set up to kick off. West Ham started off quite well, and we went one nil up in the match quite early on.

Even though it's a pre-season game, the players do go in hard as it were, and they tackle hard and they fight for every ball. We had an attack, and our left winger went down the left wing and he crossed the ball. Lee Chapman was going up for it. Lee Chapman's our striker for West Ham, and he's around about the six-foot mark and he went up against the defenders, probably about five foot four.

The defender beat him in the air. And as Lee Chapman come down, he fell on his knees. Now, this happened probably two, three times in the first half. I think after about the second time is when I decided I must tell Lee how he's playing football. "Come on, Chapman. Get off your backside. Chapman, why are you falling over so much? Get up, Chapman, you [beep] donkey. You're useless. There you go"

And then I did catch the eye of our manager, Harry Redknapp. He caught my eye and I said, "What are we playing him for, mate? Come on, get him off the pitch. So, I ain't coming again next season if he's playing. He's rubbish, heavy." But I'll just give him a hard time. Even when he went near the ball, I booed him. "Don't touch the ball. It's not for you." I personally didn't think he was trying. And if a player doesn't try on a football pitch, he deserves the wrath of a football fan, I think.

Then, the first half ended, and the team went off into the dressing room for refreshments and a pep talk. Chunk ran back to the car and grabbed a couple of cans of beer that was left for us for our refreshments for halftime.

And all of a sudden, the team started coming out for the second half. Within about two minutes, Chapman went in for a ball. He actually went in for a tackle, I was quite surprised. And he came off second best and he had a nasty bang on to his shin. He was hobbling off. it was at that point, I gave a big cheer, "Yay, see you later, donkey." And as I do that, look out the corner of my eye, Harry Redknapp turned around, was started walking over to me. He goes, "You can play as good as you talk?" What do you mean? "Do you want to play? Do you think you can play better than Chapman? You can come on." And I thought he was calling me bluff. “Yeah, no problem. I'll do it.” But no, he dragged me over the barrier, sent me down the changing rooms to go and get changed. My friend, Chunk, couldn't believe it. And a few other West Ham fans around there were like all open mouth going, “What the hell's going on?”

I went down there with a kit man, got me full kit on, and he said, "What size boots are you?" I said, "Size nine." So, he took some boots out of this big basket. I put my boots on, I put my shim pads on, and I thought, "No, this can't be. I'm not going to be playing for West Ham." I got West Ham tattoos all my life. Everything I do, I lived and breathe West Ham. Is this going to happen? Am I going to play for West Ham?

We came out of the dressing room, quite a big cheer from the West Ham people. My friends are all laughing, because they've seen me play football before. But even then, even when me and the kitman come out the dressing room, I didn't think I was going to go out and play football for my team. I walked up to where Harry Redknapp was and he said, "Where'd you play?" “I normally play defense, right back defender.” And I said, "Well, I'll play striker." He said, "Right. You're on then." That was it. He called the ref. The ref was Roger Milford, the famous referee in England at the time. He signaled to the ref and the ref said, "Come on in." Redknapp patted me on the back, "On you go, son. Do your best."

As I went on, we got radio reporters for Oxford City Football Club, and they did the announcing. And this guy ran up to Harry Redknapp and he said, "Harry, who's the lad you just put on?" And Harry Redknapp turned around and said to him, "Ain't you been watching the World cup? That's a Bulgarian Tittyshev." And this Oxford chap said, "Oh, I thought it was him." And off he went.

**Radio Reporter:** Striker, the Bulgarian Tittyshev.

**Steve:** And as I stepped out onto the pitch, the crowd noise disappeared. It's true what the players say when they say, "Did you hear the crowd chanting your name?" And they say, "Well, no, you don't." It's really weird. I did not hear any of my friends at all after that. And all I kept thinking to myself was, "Don't [beep] up, Steve. Just don't [beep] up."

[upbeat music]

**Steve:** So, the play started. I went in for a tackle. I didn't win the tackle. The defender downed me. Lee Chapman missed the ball up a dozen times in the first half, so I think we're quite equal on there. And then I think it was about 10 minutes into the game, our center half, Alvin Martin, he is a big six-foot free bloke, he struck a ball, probably went about 50, 60 yards, and it came at me like a rocket, four or five foot up in the air as it got to me, and all I kept thinking, I've got to stop. I've got to trap this all in a split second. And I did. I trapped it underneath my foot, and then I pass it on to Trevor Morley, our striker shot wide.

Imagine playing flag football with your friends on a Saturday morning in America. Then on a Sunday evening, you go out and play professional football with Miami Dolphins. That's exactly how it was for me. It was then that hit me that I was actually playing for my beloved West Ham. I thought, I'm only going to do this once. Let's go and enjoy it. And yeah, I did considering, I've been smoking and drinking before the game, I thought I was doing okay.

[crowd cheering]

**Steve:** I played a couple of passes to our strike partner. At the time, Trevor Morley, received a pass from Joey Beauchamp, our million-pound players, not every day you get to do it. And, yeah, and started to get into the swing of things.

And then a big moment appeared. Our left winger ran down the left wing and kicked the ball into the penalty area, which went close to the goalkeeper. It seemed a bit slow motion to me, but I thought, this is my chance. And I ran on, ran between the two defenders, and suddenly found myself in front of the goal with the goalkeeper in front of me only to beat. The ball landed right in front of me. And I thought, this is my moment. This is my moment to score for West Ham. There's only one place this ball is going, top left-hand corner. I pulled my right leg back, my calf tensed up, my foot connected sweetly with a ball. And boy, have I never hit a ball so hard. I put it straight into the top corner.

[crowd cheering]

**Steve:** That's probably the only time I did hear the crowd. They did cheer. And I was gone. I was up around a corner flag, [laughs] which was right near where my friends and my partner were standing. And I ran over to them, arms aloft, and I'd done the little jig, jumped up in the air, punched the air. It was just all surreal. I've just scored a goal for West Ham. I could not believe it. That was probably the best feeling in the world.

[upbeat music]

**Steve:** As it's for football, we have to restart the game and crack on. And West Ham went on to win 5-2. And the full-time whistle went, I started shaking players' hands for the opposition, and got into the dressing with all the players. It was a bit surreal. Some of the players, especially Alvin Martin, he come up and he smacked me on affectionately saying, "Well done, Steve." But most of them were quite surprised that I actually scored the goal.

Harry Redknapp came up to me, pat me on the back, said, "Well done, son." I said, "Am I going to get a contract?" And he laughed at me. I took my boots off, threw my boots into the boot basket. I asked the kitman if I can have my top. And he said, "No, we need it for the next game." So, I grabbed my shirt that I had on before the game and put it over my West Ham shirt and kept it. And I left in a hurry. Yeah, and said goodbyes and they said thank you and walked up the side of the pitch where my friends were.

Chunk, he gives me the biggest man hug cuddle I have ever had. He's so buzzy that I've just played for West Ham. And we got back into the car and drove back home. Got in and went to bed, because it was work the next day. And that's the reality of being a professional football for just one half.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** And that is the legend of Steve Davies. Next on Snap Judgement-- Just a moment. Just a moment.

**Steve:** Well, actually, that's how the legend goes. But the truth in the matter is, when I ran away to celebrate my goal, I looked over and saw the linesman with his flag in the air and the referee signaling it wasn't a goal. I was actually two yards offside when I scored that goal. When I ran over to the referee, I put my arm round him, I said, "That was my moment, you [beep]." And he gave me a big smile and off we went to kick off again. That's the true legend of Steve Davis. Extraordinaire.

**Glynn:** Thank you, Steve Davies, for sharing your story with the Snap. And a special thanks to Jeff Maysh for bringing us that story. For more on the halftime hero, we'll have a link to Jeff's story in Howler Magazine on our website, *snapjudgment.org.*

That story was produced by Davey Kim.

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** It's that time. So, revel in the knowledge that you dear listener are one of the few, the chosen who know what's happened. Let the record reflect you're one of us. And if you missed even a moment of Snap Judgment storytelling, subscribe to the incredible storytelling podcast with stories that will leave you wandering around a field in the middle of the night wondering, how did I get here? I know how you got here. Remember, with all that's going on in the world, Snap Judgment battles evil one story at a time. *snapjudgment.org.*

This Snap was produced by the team with more secrets than scents, especially this guy, our uber producer, Mr. Mark Ristich. Stop-Shoot Pat Mesiti-Miller, Anna "Multilingual" Sussman, Renzo "Black Box" Gorrio, Code Breaker Eliza Smith, Nancy "Too Tall" López, [unintelligible 00:48:18], Liz "Can't Not Quit" Mak, Leon "The Mass" Morimoto, John "Cat Burglar" Fecile, Teo "Slingshot" Ducot, and Jazmín "No Prisoners" Aguilera.

And even though, even though this is not the news, no way this is the news. In fact, you can hide from the bad guys in a secret closet only to discover, oh no, it locked from the outside. And you would still not be as far away from the news as this is. But this is PRX.

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