[Snap Judgment intro]

[country music]

**Glynn:** I've been lucky. Not Elon Musk lucky, but lucky-lucky. A lot of things I've had nothing to do with-- sort of kind of fell into place for me. Recently, I got to visit Birmingham, Alabama. Some dear friends, beautiful wedding. Arrived in town a few hours before the ceremony. So, I get in line for a ticket to walk through the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. It's an amazing place. Chronicles the history of racial struggle some are trying so hard to stop our kids from learning. The bombings, the lynchings, Martin Luther King, Jr's notes from a Birmingham jail.

You feel the bravery, the power of even small children standing up to fire hoses, attack dogs with the full authority of the state arrayed against them. Regular people. Watching the news footage, hearing the interviews, a weep, just witnessing a glimpse of their courage, their conviction of which I am a direct beneficiary.

And of course, seeing this, feeling this, it occurs to me that it's not really luck at all that's led it my way. It's sacrifice. So many heroes, so much suffering. They sacrifice, not just for me, but for us. And sacrifice, the placing something ahead of yourself, it's a theme. It's woven into our most important stories. What is the whole of Christianity if not the story of a sacrifice? You see it in Islam. You see it in Buddhism. And one question is, if someone makes a sacrifice for you, what do you owe them?

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** Today, on Snap Judgment, we proudly present The Ledge, an adventure like no other. My name is Glynn Washington. Please, please remember to visit your local museum before they come for that too right after you've listened to Snap Judgment.

Now, Jim Davidson. He grew up in New England. His dad ran a painting business, and the family, they didn't travel much. But Jim was born with that wanderlust. When Jim relocated to Colorado, he fell in love with the mountains, the adventure, the beauty. And sensitive listeners should be advised that our story today does contain graphic content, including an accident, because it wasn't long before Jim discovered another side to this landscape that he loved. Snap Judgment.

[somber music]

**Justin:** Jim Davidson started climbing mountains with his best friend, Mike Price when they were in college in Colorado. They got serious about it, trying bigger and bigger peaks across the Western US. After graduating, Jim stayed in town, where he got a job and married his wife, Gloria, while Mike started leading Outward Bound expeditions.

**Jim:** But anytime, Mike came back to Fort Collins after teaching one of his Outward Bound classes, he would call up and leave a short message.

**Mike:** Hello,Jim and Glo, this is Mike Price. I'm in town and over my brothers. Just wanted to say howdy, see if you wanted to drink beer.

**Justin:** After this particular call, in the summer of 1992, they met at a bar, had a few drinks, and talked about their next climb, Mt. Rainier in Washington State.

[somber music]

**Jim:** Deciding to go to Rainier together was definitely a step-up for me and Mike. It was going to be a multi-day climb on ice and snow to a pretty high altitude of 14,410ft. Big packs, climbing bad rock, and ice of unknown conditions.

**Justin:** During their first couple of days of climbing, they didn't get much sleep.

**Jim:** We would roll out our sleeping bags on small ledges that we chopped into the ice, and we would wear our climbing harnesses inside our sleeping bag and attach ourselves to the mountain.

**Justin:** This is so they wouldn't roll down the mountain while they were sleeping.

**Jim:** It's not very restful. Our second day of climbing was the longest. We had to climb for about 14 hours. By time we got in our sleeping bags at night, it was about 10:00, 10 30 at night.

**Justin:** It was totally dark. They had no idea what the terrain looked like around them.

**Jim:** So, the next morning, finally the sun starts creeping over the horizon, and I heard Mike go, "Wow." So, I scooched over my sleeping bag a little closer and looked past his feet. And on Mike's left side was a 2,700-foot steep wall. We were on a little tiny perch, and that just really brought home, what a steep and beautiful alpine climb this was.

**Justin:** They reached the summit on the fourth morning. Jim and Mike embraced each other, took a photo. Both men are smiling into the camera, exhausted, but happy. Then, they started back down the mountain. It felt like they were coasting into port. They'd eaten the food they'd brought, so their packs were light and gravity helped them along. The weather was gorgeous. Gemstone skies, rippled snow, and they were feeling good enough to rag on each other a little.

**Jim:** Mike said, "Hey, Jim, whatever you do, don't think about a hamburger right now." It's been three and a half days of eating granola, and dried cheese, and gorp. I waited about an hour or so until were really thirsty, and we both needed a water break, and I turned back to him, and I said, "Mike, whatever you don't think about a big frosty beer. Don't think about the foam running down the outside of the ice-covered glass."

**Justin:** All the while, the two men were roped together by their harnesses in case one fell in a crack, then the other could dig in with his ice axe and catch him before it was too late. Mt. Rainier is covered with glaciers. These blankets of ice hundreds of feet thick. When it gets hot, the ice shifts around and cracks, crevasses open up that could go down farther than you want to think about.

**Jim:** We're making pretty good time. It's about 11:30 or so. The snow was kind of soft.

**Justin:** It was getting warm. They were alternating the lead, and now, Jim was out front, farther down the slope. That's when Jim took what turned out to be a critical step.

**Jim:** My foot sank in up to my ankle, and then my shin, and I sunk in past my knee. And that's when I realized, We're standing on a weak snow bridge spanning across a big crevasse. So, I yelled to Mike, "Fall away."

**Justin:** He expected Mike to dig in and anchor him.

**Jim:** By the time I got that word out, I'd already sunk in up to my waist. I swung my ice axe hard on the surface to try and set the pick of my own ice axe and catch my fall. I watched the pick just cut through the wet snow like a knife through butter. Everything went dark, and right about then, my head went below the surface of the snow and into that big crevasse.

**Justin:** It happened so quickly, he almost couldn't believe he was falling through the surface into a giant crack.

**Jim:** I couldn't see anything, but I could hear the ice scraping against my helmet, my face. The noise and the squeezing stopped. I waved my arms and legs around, and I realized I'm in free space.

**Justin:** He's dropping faster and faster.

**Jim:** I'm thinking, "Come on, Mike. Catch me, catch me." I began to feel the rope at my waist tugging a little bit, and I realized that was Mike slowing me down. I knew my partner was on the surface digging with his ice axe into the snow. I thought, "Oh, good, I'm slowing down." But I wasn't stopping.

**Justin:** There was only 50ft of rope between them, so he knew that if he fell any farther, it meant Mike wasn't holding him anymore. Jim waited for the decisive tug that would halt his fall, but he never got it. Instead, the rope loosened. He started falling faster. Jim knew that Mike had gotten pulled down into the hole with him.

**Jim:** Seemed like the wall was coming closer. I put my hand out, still couldn't see anything, and I could hear this high [makes rapid slipping sounds], that was the sound of my nylon glove dragging on the ice wall, and then boom. It was like somebody hitting me between the shoulder blades with a baseball bat. I had landed on my back in the snow, and I was stunned. I waved my arms around. Both of my arms bumped into the wall, I started to look up and I saw a little spot of light far above me. That was a light pouring in through the hole in the snow bridge. And all of a sudden, that light started to flicker on and off like somebody flipping a light switch. A clump of wet snow fell onto my lap. I looked up again and I saw the light flicker, and then more wet snow fell onto my legs, and I realized that the snow above me was starting to collapse in right on top of me.

At that point, I was so scared out of my mind that I was about to get buried, I assumed that Mike was in the crevasse with me somewhere, but I didn't know where yet. Out of the darkness, I saw something even bigger and darker coming at me. And then, the light far above went out, and this time, it didn't flip back on. My brain warned me, "Something big's coming. Cover up." When that big thing hit, boom. It pushed me down into the soft snow, and then everything went dark and I couldn't move at all. And I thought I've got about 10 minutes to live.

**Justin:** Jim figured Mike had to be in a better position than he was since Mike had fallen later and wouldn't be buried by as much debris.

**Jim:** I pushed and pushed the snow. First, I couldn't get out. Eventually, I managed to push really hard with my right hand and it burst free of the snow. I waved my hand around in the air. I was hoping that Mike would be on the surface and see my hand, and grab it and pull on it, but all I felt was air. So, I started digging with my one free hand towards my face. Finally, I got down to my own face. It was like wet, cold, moisture-laden air just rushed into my lungs. Finally, I was able to talk, so I yelled, "Mike. Mike."

When I heard him yell back, it was a muffled moan and it wasn't words. When I realized that somehow, he was in worse trouble than me, I changed my tone. I was trying to project a little confidence and let Mike know that I know he's there and I'm trying to get to him. And in the middle of all this, all of a sudden, I realized I'm peeing my pants. So, I just decided to ignore it, decided it didn't matter, and just kept digging.

**Justin:** They were near enough to each other at the bottom of the crevasse that Jim listened for more sounds from his partner.

**Jim:** I could hear Mike's breathing, and it went slower and raspier and slower and raspier. I was still talking to Mike, and I could hear the panic in my voice.

**Justin:** "Hang in there, Mike," Jim was saying. "Hang in there."

**Jim:** I was just about at the point where I was ready to free my left arm out of the snow, and I heard Mike exhale, and I didn't hear him inhale. So, I just froze there, just holding my arm in space and listening, and I didn't hear anything. I waited and waited, and just this rush of panic just surged up from my stomach to my brain. I started thrashing my arm wildly at the snow in front of me trying to reach him.

**Justin:** Finally, Jim got himself free.

**Jim:** That's when I found Mike. He had been trapped underneath the snow. I hadn't heard him breathing in 15 minutes, maybe more. I cleared the snow off his face, and I checked for vital signs, and I didn't find any. I was still hoping that just a few puffs from me and he'd wake up and he'd be fine and everything would be fine. So, I just gave a couple of puffs, and I stopped and looked at him again, and he still wasn't breathing. You're supposed to do CPR nonstop until somebody more skilled relieves you or until a doctor declares them dead. So, I just had to keep going.

**Justin:** He went on and on, pumping Mike's chest far longer than made rational sense. In all, he did close to 40 minutes of CPR on a man who wasn't breathing.

**Jim:** I'd knocked Mike's glasses off, and I could look into his eyes. He was staring above my head, further up the cross towards the surface, and I realized he was gone. And I stopped. I was feeling this terrible sadness and overwhelming grief that Mike was gone, and this little voice in the back of my head's telling me to get out of the snow before the wet snow freezes into a block of ice and traps us both in this block of ice. And then very slowly, I started to lift my head up, and I began to look around down, and I started asking myself, "Where are we?"

**Justin:** Rising on both sides of him were two enormous walls of ice.

**Jim:** I looked up and the ice walls flared up at about a 70-degree steepness and angle, maybe getting steeper to 80 degrees. And as they went up and up and up, then they were dead vertical at 90 degrees. I looked further up, then they started closing together at the top. When those two sides of the overhang came together, there was a little spot of light there. I realized that hole was 80ft above my head.

I'd fallen in 80ft. And the reason I had survived was because of my friend, Mike. The first 50ft as I fell in, Mike was digging with his ice axe and slowing my fall. Mike fell the full 80ft without anybody behind him. And that's how it always been with climbing partners. You're roped together because you trust each other so much. In this case, the rope had allowed my partner, Mike, to save my life, but it cost him his life. And so, now the duty was on me. We were on this small snow pile about the size of a small meeting room table, and I got down to my knee and looked down.

**Justin:** As Jim understood it, they were on the floor of this huge crevasse. But now, looking around, he saw there was more space and darkness below them that they were on this little bridge only partway down a crevasse that went even deeper. If that bridge collapsed, who knows how far they'd fall? Jim had an ice screw in his pocket, and he hurried to drill it into the wall. He tied their rope to the screw to catch them if the bridge collapsed.

**Jim:** At some point, I felt something on my lip, and I thought it was just snot, and I blew it out, and all this blood went onto the ice wall.

**Justin:** It was alarming, obviously, but Jim kept going.

**Jim:** I thought maybe someone saw us fall in. So, I yelled a bit, but my voice was echoing around the chamber, and I realized nobody saw us fall in. The only way I was going to get Mike out was if I got out first. If I don't get out before the day is done, I'm going to be done too.

**Justin:** So now, Mike's body is tied to the screw in the wall so he won't fall further. They have about 150ft of rope total with them, and Jim gathers everything except what's holding Mike in place. Jim understands now he's going to have to climb out on his own while Mike stays in the hole.

**Jim:** I needed to do one last thing. I didn't have my helmet on.

**Justin:** He looked down at Mike, who was still wearing his.

**Jim:** Said, "Sorry, Mike, but I need your helmet," and I put it on my head. I cinched it down really tight. It was time to jump on the wall.

[somber music]

**Glynn:** When Snap returns, Jim faces the hardest climb of his life, and an even harder choice. Stay tuned. Welcome back to Snap Judgment, The Ledge episode. When last we left, two climbers had fallen down an 80ft hole in the ice, only one survived. Now, Jim has to find a way out. Snap Judgment.

**Justin:** About 90 minutes after the fall, Jim started climbing. He had an ice axe in each hand, and these spiked boots called crampons on his feet. So, he was attached to the wall with all four limbs, like a bug.

**Jim:** So, for the first 20ft, I made really fast progress.

**Justin:** But then, as the wall got steeper, Jim realized he wasn't strong enough to keep climbing like this. Instead, every time he got up another step, he drilled an ice screw into the wall to keep him from falling.

**Jim:** I'm now only moving up 2ft for every 5 minutes or 10 minutes of effort. My body's winding down, I'm still spitting up a little blood now and then, and I thought, "You know, why don't I just stop? I'll just go back down to the ledge and crawl in one of the sleeping bags next to Mike, and just go to sleep tonight when it gets dark." But I realized I couldn't do that. And also, I owed it to Mike to explain to his parents what had happened to him. And that actually brought a calmness to me.

**Justin:** It was the most intense physical effort Jim had ever made, pulling his whole weight up again and again by his arms. But at last, shaking, he cleared the steepest part of the overhang, and he was amazed to discover that the angle of the snow and ice eased back. He had a straight shot right to the hole he had fallen through that morning.

**Jim:** I started climbing that steep snow. I began to feel the surge of excitement. And finally, my head bumped underneath the underside of the snow bridge. I put my ice axe into the sun, and I reached over the top and I slammed my ice axe into the top surface of the glacier, and I pulled and I got myself through the hole, and I felt the sunlight hit my face, and I flopped my belly onto the surface of the snow, and I crawled forward about 2ft, I'd made it out of the hole. I could feel it behind me. It was like a tiger was sitting just 2ft behind me. I looked around again and I just said once, softly, I said, "I'm alive." I was stunned. I said it a second time, and then I just collapsed and started crying in the snow.

**Justin:** So, this is where the story might end. Jim had gotten out of the hole. Up a wall, it seemed impossible he could climb, and it was an amazing moment. He can still hardly believe it. But there was another story that was just beginning in those moments he lay there crying in the snow.

**Jim:** I began to think what happens from here. I felt crushed by the loss of my friend, and truly scared about what it means to survive after surviving.

**Justin:** Jim got up, started yelling, and eventually, a mountain ranger saw him. It turns out there was a ranger station about 1,200ft down the slope from where they fell. The rangers put a coat on Jim. One gave him a hug. They took him back to the station. By the following day, they'd recovered Mike's body. Jim got checked out by the local doctor who determined he didn't have any life-threatening injuries. They put Jim up one more night at the lodge at the base of Mt. Rainier. It was late when he got there, and nowhere was open to eat.

**Jim:** By 09:00 PM or so, I staggered into the bar room, and the bartender said, "What do you want?" And I thought about it for a minute and I said, "I'll take two beers, one for me and one for Mike." I took alternate sips back and forth. Some lady was sitting next to me, two bar stools over, and she looked at me. I'm still in my wet, smelly climbing clothes, and looked over me and she said, "Were you on the mountain?" And I turned to look at her.

**Justin:** Jim was unmoored, unaware how he must have looked in dirty clothes with blood all over him, sipping back and forth between two different beers without explaining.

**Jim:** Her eyes got wide and she just stopped asking questions.

**Justin:** He got through the next day, gave the rangers a statement, and boarded his plane home to Denver.

**Jim:** I knew that my wife, Gloria, would be meeting me at the gate. When I came down the ramp, kind of like that lady in the bar, I saw the look in Gloria's eyes, and I knew I must be quite a mess and must look pretty bad because I could see the fear in her eyes.

**Justin:** Jim started going to therapy. He got together with climbing friends, told the story of the ledge over and over, partly to memorialize Mike, but also to lift some of his guilt, wanting his friends to say, he'd done everything he could that it wasn't his fault.

**Jim:** Then one night, I was telling the story and I was getting very upset. And Gloria put her hand on my arm and said, "Jim, you're talking in the present tense. It's in the past."

**Justin:** But it didn't feel past tense to Jim, not when he made a commitment to telling it all again to the audience he dreaded most, Mike's parents.

**Jim:** I think I was more scared going to their house than I'd been climbing the wall. I'd never met these folks, and I'm coming over to tell them how their son died.

**Justin:** Jim and his wife arrived at Mike's brother, Daryl's house, where Daryl and Mike's parents had agreed to meet.

**Jim:** I didn't know if they would be upset with me, if they would hate me. I had no idea. When the door opened up, Mr. and Mrs. Price stepped out onto the concrete steps and so did Daryl, and it took all the courage I had just to walk up to him and say, "Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Price and Daryl. I'm Jim Davidson." It was really weird to be that afraid to tell somebody who I was. We spent a little time just drinking tea and trying to get a little comfortable because we had to have a difficult conversation. But there came a time, naturally, where it was time to turn to what happened on Mt. Rainier. Some people looked at the floor and some people looked away. But as I started to tell the story, Mrs. Price moved down the couch and held my hand. I said, "I'll tell you as much or as little as you want to know."

I told them the story for over an hour of what happened on Rainier. And the whole time, Mrs. Price held my hand in both of hers. At the very end, when I wrapped things up, Mrs. Price gave me a hug, and Mr. Price shook my hand in a very honorable way, and so did Daryl.

**Justin:** Jim's fear always was that people would blame him. His meeting with the Prices lifted that fear briefly, but it kept coming back.

**Jim:** How do I enjoy life but not feel bad that I'm enjoying life? After a couple of months, my injuries of crushed disc in my neck, and twisted knees, and everything went away. And so, I started doing some very light exercise again and started asking myself, "Will I go back to the mountains?" It came back in very small doses. I was up backcountry skiing with a friend. We got up high, and all of a sudden, I got to the ridge and got ready to do the descent back down. I looked out, and I saw all these snow-covered high peaks. There was a slight breeze coming out of the west, and the sky was blue, as it often is in Colorado. I just said out loud, "Beautiful day, huh, Mike?"

I could just hear his echo in my mind. So, when tearing down the slope, I let out a wahoo and I was skiing. Snow was awesome. It didn't feel sad at all. Instead of Mike's presence pulling me down and making me feel doubt filled or sad, it instead amplified the joy. That's when I realized that I had a choice. He had given me a gift of continued life to just give into blackness and sadness and doubt that would be wasting the gift that Mike gave me on Mt. Rainier.

**Justin:** During those old conversations with Mike, the late-night ones, over beers, dark bars, the two friends used toss out names of mountains they'd one day climb. Mike, of course, never got the chance to try most of them. But as Jim's life moved forward, he kept the names of those mountains etched in his brain, especially the big one, Mount Everest. When Jim reached his 50s, with his two kids out of the house, he realized that if there was a good time to try it, now was it.

**Jim:** That last one big dream I had of maybe someday climbing Everest, there wasn't going to be too much longer for me to do that. But I also felt like I was closing up a package, bringing something home for me and Mike.

**Justin:** He bought the tickets.

**Jim:** As I got ready to leave for Everest, I knew there were going to be all kinds of challenges, avalanche risk and sickness and high altitude and homesickness. I got all those challenges, and also something I didn't expect.

**Justin:** Jim's Everest expedition began at Base Camp 17,598ft in the air. He brought his camera to document the trip.

[Nepalis performing puja]

**Justin:** You're hearing the Nepali climbers at Base Camp performing a puja, asking the Gods to bless their climb. Everest, for almost everyone, is not a straight shot up. You go up and down these sections of the mountain over a series of days and weeks as your body acclimates to the altitude. This allows you to survive the highest part of the mountain at an altitude known as the death zone, where there's 70% less oxygen than at sea level.

**Jim:** I was climbing in close proximity to my guide, PK Sherpa from the town of Phortse. He spoke a little English, I speak a little Nepali, so we got along great.

**Justin:** Jim set off into the first stage of the climb from Base Camp to Camp 1.

**Jim:** So, after six hours of nerve-wracking work, PK and I finally cleared the last ladder and walked into the edges of Camp 1. Midmorning, I sent my wife, Gloria, a text, "Safe for Camp 1. Feel real good. By moving steady, I got here fast in five hours." I sent that text to Gloria on April 25th, 2015 at 10:51 in the morning.

**Justin:** Shortly after he sent that text, Jim and his tentmate lay down in their tent to recuperate.

**Jim:** About an hour after Bart and I laid down for a nap, we started hearing a rumbling noise from our right. Now, we figured it was probably an avalanche, but this one was different. This one was loud and close, and it started rumbling and it started growing and growing in noise. And Bart goes, "That's a big one." Bart sat up and I sat up, and we're listening more carefully now because it seems to be fairly close, as is avalanche noise is starting to make me nervous, a second avalanche started off to the left-hand side. Two avalanches at the same time on opposite slopes. So, I said out loud to Bart, "Get out. Get out of the tent. Something's wrong."

I reached towards the tent and tried to grab the zipper. Just as I reached out, the tent shot up into the air about 8 inches or 10 inches, hovered for about two seconds and then dropped back down. Bart and I looked at each other, and then the tent went back up again, hovered for a few seconds and dropped back down, and that's when I knew it was a giant earthquake.

**Justin:** Jim and Bart were doing their best to get out of the tent.

**Jim:** If we're inside, the avalanche could use the tent surface like a sail and drag us underneath the advancing debris. Eventually, Bart gets outside and I ran out of the tent. It was totally cloudy, and we could hear the avalanches coming from both sides, but we couldn't see them. You don't know where to stand to be safe and where standing might get you killed. And then all of a sudden, the wind started showing up from one side and then the other. It wasn't wind because the weather changed, it was wind because the avalanches were so big, they were bulldozing away the air in front of them. I knew that meant were right directly in their slide path. And then, all of that pulverized ice dust started falling out of the sky. I hit my camera and started recording.

Then, so much ice dust started coming out of the sky that I was choking and gagging on it. I dove back into our tent, and I wiped all the ice dust off my eyes and looked around, and Bart wasn't there. By now, both avalanches were just roaring across camp, and the tent would lean one way and shake like crazy, and the winds would shift and the tent would go lean back the other way and rattle like crazy. Eventually, after about three minutes, the wind died, and the ground stopped shaking, and the ice dust stopped falling. We made it through, and I started yelling for Bart, and eventually I started hearing voices from other tents. I turned the camera on myself and talked to the GoPro camera a minute. "That was a huge avalanche and a huge powder blast. We all got out of the tent to see the avalanche, and we got powder blasted from both sides. Shit." The lens was covered with ice dust. So, it's a blurry image, but you can see in the picture my eyes are about as big as saucers.

Bart came at me from the other side of camp. We gave each other a little hug, and we realized that nobody in our camp was missing, nobody was hurt, nobody was killed. It was amazing. Up at Camp 2 above us, nobody was hurt or killed. Then, we called down to Base Camp. Base Camp is normally the safest part of the mountain, but in this case, there was a lot of screaming going on the radio.

**Justin:** The reason for the screams was that the avalanches at Base Camp had rocks in them. They tore through the camp, wounding 70 people and killing 18, making it the deadliest day ever on Mount Everest. That afternoon, the atmosphere in Jim's camp was chaotic. The route down the mountain had been entirely wiped out. Snippets of information on the earthquake's destruction came in over the radio. The climbers and Sherpas wandered the camp, trying to figure out what to do.

**Jim:** We were certainly in a tough situation. We were basically marooned at Camp 1, but we had food, we had warm clothes, and we had fuel to last a couple of days. And so, what we try to do, at least what I try to do is to be patient. As information kept trickling in over the hours and days ahead, we actually found out that thousands of people had been killed across Nepal.

**Justin:** It turns out there was a 7.8 magnitude earthquake. In fact, it was the biggest earthquake in Nepal in 81 years.

**Jim:** There were villages that had been buried elsewhere, buildings collapsed in Kathmandu. In the end, it turns out that over 8,900 people lost their lives in the earthquake, and all the avalanches and landslides all over the country. Those are the people that suffered the most in this earthquake because they lost their friends, and family members, and their villages. We realized that were only a small part of a huge, huge tragedy. And so, about 40 hours after the quake, our turn came to get on the helicopters early in the morning.

[helicopters approaching]

**Justin:** The choppers would only take them to Base Camp, not all the way down, since high altitude flying uses so much fuel.

**Jim:** After a minute and a half flight, I stepped out of the helicopter, and I heard my boots crunch against the gravel, and I was so glad to be off the glacier. As we got into the edge of the debris zone, I began to realize how massive the destruction was. First, it was just little bits of trash scattered on the ground that the wind had distributed. Then I noticed that tents were flattened. As we got closer into the core of the damaged area, I noticed bent tent poles, laptops bent into U shapes. There was money in several denominations just blowing around camp.

**Justin:** Jim and his group were still stuck. And worse, the climbers weren't unified on a plan. Some dug out medical supplies and tried to recover belongings. Others thought they could actually continue to climb the mountain.

**Jim:** I thought that was a silly thought. There's no way it can happen. All our Sherpas and high-altitude porters need to go back home and check on their families and start cleaning up their villages.

**Justin:** In the middle of all this, Jim hears a frantic shuffling of feet behind him.

**Jim:** I looked back and there were six men coming down the trail very quickly. I saw they were carrying a tarp. And clearly inside that tarp was a body. So, the carriers were walking over rough rocks, and bent tent poles, and debris, and it looked like they were going to drop the body. So, I rushed in and I grabbed the feet of the body. And as we're scurrying down the trail, I had a moment to look at the body and recognize the shape of arms and legs and hands underneath the tarp.

**Justin:** Jim had a flash of an image of this person's family wondering where their loved one was. He helped lift the body onto a platform to be carried off by a helicopter. But then, the other men left.

**Jim:** It was just me and the body at the helicopter pad. So, I decided just to sit with this person, and I was just keeping them company. I was conversing with them in my mind a little bit and I said, "I'm sorry this happened to you."

**Justin:** Soon, the group of men returned carrying a second body. Jim backed up and gave them room. After a helicopter retrieved the bodies, Jim realized there wasn't much more he could do to help here or at Base Camp in general. And that was when the inevitable question arose. How is he going to get out of here? The airport was closed. According to reports, there wasn't any long-distance transportation in the country.

**Jim:** When we had a little meeting about it, our team leader, Greg, said, "We might have to walk all the way to Jiri."

**Justin:** Jiri is the largest village between Kathmandu and Everest, and the best chance they had of eventually getting transportation.

**Jim:** one of my teammates said, "Where's Jiri?" It's about 115 miles from Mount Everest all the way down to Jiri. Walking out 115 miles through mountains after avalanches and landslides and more earthquake aftershocks still coming seemed like a pretty scary thing to do. But if that's the only way out, that's the only way out. It became obvious that climbing Mount Everest was absolutely unimportant. We were in the middle of a disaster in Nepal, and that was much more important than climbing any mountain. I would do whatever it took to get back to my wife and kids. If that means walking to Jiri, fine. If that means walking another hundred miles from Jiri to Kathmandu, fine. I loaded up my pack, I put it on, and I stepped outside the tent. I took one last look at the summit, and I turned my back on Everest and started walking home.

I'm a little nervous to listen to it. All right, well, fingers crossed. So, I'm just going to hit play and see where we are.

**Mike:** Hello, Jim and Glo. This is Mike Price. I'm in town and over at my brother's. I just wanted to say howdy, see if you wanted to drink beer.

**Jim:** Wow. Oof, it's tough to hear Mike's voice after all these years. Wow. I haven't heard his voice in a long time, but it's good to hear his voice.

[somber music]

**Glynn:** Big thanks to Jim Davidson for sharing his story with the Snap. Jim wrote a book with Kevin Vaughn about surviving the fall of Mt. Rainier. It's called *The Ledge*. You can find links to his work at our website, *snapjudgment.org*. The original score was by Renzo Gorrio. It was produced by Justin Kramon.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** When Snap Judgment returns, a real, honest-to-God magician cusses me out for a very good reason. Stay tuned.

Welcome back to Snap Judgment. My name is Glynn Washington. And next up, I get to rock a story of my own back from high school days.

I was in a high school library, getting my little Mac on. I pulled a book off the shelf to draw attention away from my good-looking buddy, Chris. It worked. The book was called *Hypnotism*. "Let me hypnotize you," I said to the pretty girl next to me, Carrie. Beautiful Carrie. "You can't hypnotize anybody." "We'll see." I begin to read. "First of all, I want you to relax. Relax. Everybody, shut up, shut up, shut up. Like I said, first of all, I want you to relax. Inhale, exhale, every sound you hear, every breath you take, you will find yourself becoming more deeply and deeply relaxed. Inhale, exhale. And deeper, and deeper, and deeper, and deeper, and deeper. You are now hypnotized."

I looked up and there, pretty Carrie sat rocking just a little bit back and forth, back and forth. Her eyes almost closed, looking at nothing, nothing at all. Hypnotized, baby. People started shouting, "Carrie. Carrie, stop playing. Carrie." I'm like, "Quiet. Quiet, fools. I'm in the middle of something." I turn the next page. "Now, Carrie, close your eyes. Close them. Imagine that your eyelids are so heavy, so very, very heavy that you could never open them. Now, Carrie, I want you to try to open your eyes." She tried, but as much as she struggled, she couldn't do it. Awesome. "Carrie, wake up, darling, because you was hypnotized." The crowd went wild. I was going to be a hero. Witnesses and everything. I couldn't wait to go to school the next day.

It turned out though, my buddy, Chris, figured to put a monkey wrench in my plans. The library had two copies of the book. So, at school the next day, Chris successfully put one of the jocks under and had him barking like a dog all over the gymnasium. I see him and countered by hypnotizing three people at the same time and having them cuddle together for warmth convinced it was 30 degrees below zero.

Chris came back later the same day, reports were that several people were begging for water as they were so very, very, very thirsty. I came back and I came back hard. Holy Grail. Age regression. "Okay, I want you to imagine yourself growing younger. Do you understand? Younger. 12 years old, 10 years old, 8 years old, 5 years old, 4 years old, 3 years old. Now, James, come up here. Come up here and write your name on the blackboard." "I can't." "Why not?" "I don't know how to write my name." Screams, the shock, the respect was palpable. Then, news from the drama class. Chris. Chris had done the unthinkable, the unbelievable. The unholy past life regression." I ran to see for myself, 10, 8 years olds, 5, 3 years old, 2 years old, 1, zero.

"You are surrounded by a sea of warm water, darkness, darkness, darkness. Now, if you see a light, swim. Swim towards that light. Swim." Some claimed they can reenter the bodies of former selves through the aid of concentrated focus. "Concentrate with me now on account of three. One, two, three." Wouldn't you know it, the girl stood up, blinked her eyes wide and started speaking in gobbly-goo, blady-blah-blah, as if it were a real language. I was so pissed, but it was so cool. So very cool. Chris, I had to hand it to a man, that was hot. That was hot.

He tells me that I'm coming with him to see Mr. Tom. Mr. Tom, Mr. Tom was only the baddest, coolest stage hypnotist we had ever just heard of. Dude, the show was amazing. Mr. Tom was amazing. He hypnotized 40 audience members at a toss. And then, the fun started. People stormed the stage with secret messages. Others screamed in alien languages. Still others leapt up to translate. Make no mistake, for us, this was the highest form of high art.

After the show, Mr. Tom was mobbed, but we bid our time because we're not groupies. "Thanks for coming out, fellas. How can I help you?" I told him everything about all the tricks we had done, and about how badass we were, and I was about to say something else cool about us, and Mr. Tom exploded, "You idiots. You idiots. This is not a toy. This is not something that two jackasses can play at. You, listen to me. Listen. This tool short circuits all the protective covering people have built up over lifetimes. You clowns want to fool with age regression? Did you see how I asked everybody if they had a happy childhood? A happy childhood? If they hesitated for even a second, I made them sleep."

"Only the happy got to play the good time games. But what if I brought someone to age three in their house when they were three, maybe things weren't going so well with the new stepdad. Maybe they were locked in a closet. Maybe whatever. People are carrying around stuff, just barely holding it together, and they don't need you bastards screwing with them. I want you idiots to promise me, right here and right now, you're going to knock this crap off." "Yes, Mr. Tom sir." "Right now." "Yes, Mr. Tom sir." The next day, I was there at the library to do something I have never done before or since. I actually returned a library book early.

The original music for that piece is by Dirk Schwarzhoff.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** See, see, life is a story, and stories are life. If you need the magic of storytelling to change your world, get the Snap Judgment podcast. The Snap podcast, wherever you get podcasts, and did I mention Snap's evil twin, Spooked, is now available everywhere. Snap is on the Twitter, the Instagram, the Facebook.

Snap is brought to you by the team that far prefers their adventures to involve room service. Except for the Uber producer, Mark Ristich, because if he doesn't get to rassle something, ours starts to get nervous. There's Nancy López, Pat Mesiti-Miller, Anna Sussman, Renzo Gorrio, John Fecile, Shaina Shealy, Teo Ducot, Marisa Dodge, Bo Walsh, Flo Wiley, David Exumé, and Regina Bediako.

And this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, you could join your mountain-climbing friends at Base Camp for an epic Everest adventure. When they wake you up the next morning to begin the ascent, you could decide right then with absolute conviction and unbreakable certainty that, "No. No, I'm good right here in the bed. Thank you." 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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