[Snap Judgment intro]

**Rund:** At a time when information continues to come at us faster and faster, sometimes you need to hit pause and rewind. NPR's Throughline takes you back in time to the source of the new stories filling your feet. Find NPR's Throughline wherever you get your podcasts.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** When we here at the Snap Judgment, we're preparing for this show, which is a stunning episode, by the way. I can't wait for you to hear it. One of our producers, whose name, Regina Bediako, I will not mention, she said to me that given this show deals with one person's struggle with weight. Perhaps, I should start with a personal story of my own journey. What do you mean?

[upbeat music]

**Glynn:** And she said, “Well, you know how you're-- You know.” No, I don't know. What is it, Regina Bediako, you're trying to say? Just that you aren't a stranger to a robust body type. How dare you? Are you trying to call me fat? No, no, no, no, no, no, just that you would understand, "Oh, now I'm fat enough to understand fatness." Is that what you're trying to say? And she said, "Please don't use this conversation as the opening of the show." I assured her that of course I wouldn't. But the fact that we're too scared even to say the word fat to each other is something I will also avoid mentioning in the open. I'll just say this. You should know that this episode does get heavy in more ways than one. Snap Judgment proudly presents Weight For It.

My name is Glynn Washington, and that sound you'll hear is me refusing to loosen up another notch on my belt, when you're listening to Snap Judgment.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** Yes, I'm excited. Our guest today, I met him a long while back. Good dude, one of those guys you wish you lived closer to, and you think you have a good sense of someone, who they are, how they think. Then they lay themselves bare in a highly personal podcast that touches one of the most visceral subjects of all, fatness, weight, body appearance. And you realize there are so many, many layers to this onion that is Ronald Young, Jr.

His podcast, Weight For It, is a show that deals with how we see our bodies losing weight, gaining weight, eating disorders, weight stigma. And if these topics are triggering to you, please take care while listening, because today, Ronald, he tells us just a little bit of his story. Snap Judgment.

[somber music]

**Ronald:** As a church teenager, I often felt the allure of wanting to just be a teen, but was riddled with the guilt of doing the wrong thing. I didn't feel free to explore my youth. I snuck in all of my firsts. My first kiss was after school while waiting on the late bus. My second real kiss was after a band concert in the hallway while teachers and parents were milling about in the auditorium. So, college was going to be quite the opportunity for me, and I was eager to get out of my parents’ house.

When I arrived in college in 2002, I was a very different Ronald. I was 5'9” and 200 pounds. I was often described as stocky, but never fat. I had created a list of standards for an imaginary woman that I would meet, fall in love with, marry and then lose my virginity to. They had to be black with a nice body, good looking, church going, high achieving, supportive of my ideologies and goals, family minded, a wife type. That's who I was supposed to be with. Then I met Caitlin.

**Caitlin:** We met in class. I think he took a liking to me right away.

**Ronald:** Caitlin had long brown hair, a face full of freckles and a cute smile. We were in English 101 together. We met during the first two weeks of school at Virginia Commonwealth University, or VCU, in Richmond, Virginia. We were constantly talking and laughing together in class.

**Caitlin:** I remember I liked your energy. You were very out there, very boisterous. You got attention. You spoke up, you weren't shy, I liked that. I thought you were cute.

**Ronald:** We discovered that we lived in the same dorm building. And while I don't remember the exact moment that started it, I do remember that we started hooking up. It was great. We would talk on aim, remember aim? And I would go from my third-floor room to her seventh-floor room, and more firsts for me would happen. This was all very exciting for me, because we really liked each other, and we had great chemistry, both in our conversations and physically.

**Caitlin:** When it was just the two of us, it was great. We got along. We were compatible. I think our sense of humor worked well together.

**Ronald:** And it did. But this isn't a love story.

**Caitlin:** He'd always sneak down to my room. He'd always be late. When you could sneak down there when nobody else was around, even my roommates or my friends, like, you didn't want them to know either, because then it would get out.

**Ronald:** Caitlin was fat, and I didn't want anyone to know that I was attracted to her. About two weeks before I met Caitlin, before classes even started, I became friends with a group of guys who mostly all lived in my dorm. We were always ranking the girls, who was the hottest physically, who compared against who, all of that. Being 18, that bit of comparison can get messy. It's not as refined as she's not my type, or I prefer brunettes. What actually ended up happening was "Eww, her? Are you serious?" To be attracted to someone fat was an indicator that something was wrong with you. You weren't normal.

When I met Caitlin, I was immediately attracted to her, even before we started talking. Her weight was a non-issue for me. But talking to and hanging out with my friends had an impact on me. I really wanted to fit in, to be a normal guy, hanging with the fellas. So, despite really liking Caitlin and loving how she made me feel, she fell short of the standards I set for myself.

**Caitlin:** Even though our groups didn't really-- We didn't really associate. When we see each other in public and you were with your guys or I was out, there was no real interaction how we normally would alone.

**Ronald:** I was used to keeping secrets, especially about anything I'd done sexually. In high school, there was always the risk of my parents finding out. But now, I didn't want my friends to find out. Maybe I had talked to her too long in the dining hall, or maybe they caught us exchanging glances on the patio of the dorm. But once they noticed that some connection between us existed, the teasing began.

There was random laughter and not explaining what was funny. Then her name became a bit of a trump card in our conversations. If we were talking about women and I said anything, that someone would mention her name or, but "You like them bigger, don't you, Ron?" And everyone would laugh. And the problem wasn't just the teasing, but I wasn't exactly sure what I was supposed to do with it. I never felt like we were laughing together. And despite them saying, "Hey, man, we're just kidding," I never exactly knew how I was supposed to be in a relationship when everyone seemingly close to me was making fun of me for being in it.

**The League Host:** So, are you and the Village people going to the reunion? And by village people, I mean, your-- [crosstalk]

**Ronald:** There was a television show out in those days, and one of its earlier seasons called *The League*. It depicted a group of adult friends who played in a fantasy football league together. Generally, it was a bunch of horrible people being horrible to each other. But there was one episode about their high school reunion in which this exchange happens.

**The League Host 1:** You know, this guy in high school, he loved bigger girls.

**The League Host 2:** I don't know what he's talking about.

**The League Host 1:** You know, what we used to call this guy in high school? We used to call him the herdsman, because the girls were so big, they actually resembled actual cattle. Here, run around-- [crosstalk]

**Ronald:** I remember when this episode came out, because me and my friends used to watch it, and one of them suggested that they started using that nickname, the herdsman for me. It was kind of a running joke, Ronald likes fat girls. I tried to hide Caitlin. I only saw her at night. I tried to limit my time around her if I thought I would run into friends. But despite my best or worst efforts, my friends knew. And every chance they got, they teased me for it.

As freshman year continued, Caitlin and I spent a lot of time together. But eventually, that time began to dwindle as we focused on other things, like going to class and maintaining our friendships with other folks.

**Caitlin:** I actually left freshman year with a 3.2. So, I did well. I went to class. I was on campus, and so I had this group of girls, we were really close and we decided we're all going to move in together. We found a place.

**Ronald:** By our sophomore year in 2003, Caitlin had moved off campus. Caitlin and I talked, and sometimes still hooked up, but not as regularly. By that time, I felt a little more adjusted to college life.

**Caitlin:** I went to class most of like maybe a couple of weeks, maybe a month or so, and then I just stopped going. My insecurities of walking into a room and finding a seat, everybody staring at me because I was a big girl and I just was so embarrassed of how I looked and being out in public, that self-confidence was just super low. So, I stopped going to class. I stayed in the house and was a homebody. And then grades started coming in, and I was going to get my shit together and I didn't-- And then I had the VCU ask me to leave.

[somber music]

**Ronald:** I didn't realize Caitlin had left school until one time I texted and she mentioned that she was gone. She said she was taking a semester off, but she didn't come back.

**Caitlin:** I went back up to my parents in Maryland. Online dating was easy and I was shy. I didn't do the bars, because I didn't drink at that time, really, hardly at all. And so, I met a man that put all this stuff that he was so great out there and come to find out he was a drug addict who was living with his mom, and was abusive, and stole and cheated, all kinds of stuff. But I still couldn't let go of that, because he showed me the love that I felt I needed at that time.

My mom wanted to go to this conference, I guess they were putting on a presentation. I went with her, and I was 20 years old, really young, but I was very heavy, I was at my heaviest. And she was going for her, so I was just there to support. And the doctor saw me, and he pulled us both aside, and we were all talking. I was basically a perfect candidate. My BMI was super high, I don't remember exactly what it was, but I had no other health issues. I got approved for weight loss surgery.

**Glynn:** When we return, Caitlin, the young lady our host, Ronald, only loved in secret. She contemplates making a major life change. Stay tuned.

[somber music]

Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Weight For It episode. When last we left, Caitlin, Ronald's former secret girlfriend is going through it. Dropped out of school, living with her parents, struggling with her sense of self-worth, that's when she meets a doctor who proposes what for her is a radical plan. Snap Judgment.

**Caitlin:** I wanted the surgery to look good. I wanted to look good, because I thought it would make me feel good on the inside. And I had the surgery. I'm losing weight like crazy. Like, I dropped weight so quick, because I was in great health, young, active. I knew I looked good, and I knew I was like, “This was the person I was meant to be. This is what I should have looked like all along.” And then, I decide I don't want to live with my parents anymore. I got a job at a restaurant, and I looked great, and I was skinny, and I was young and pretty, like my body finally matched my face I felt like.

**Ronald:** I watched all this unfold on Facebook. Seeing that Caitlin had lost a lot of weight made me feel even more guilty about the way I treated her when she was fat. Some of this was me projecting. By this time, it was around 2007, and I had just left college. I was thinking about my own weight all the time, because I wasn't as small as I used to be, and people loved to remind me. I remember at church this one time, one of the mothers stopped me and said, "How could you get so round?" Another one stopped my mom and said, "You need to put that boy on a diet."

By 2008, Caitlin had lost 130 pounds, met a marine and married him. Every time I saw her pictures, it felt like she was saying to me, "I'm not a secret anymore."

My outlook on life was quite different than what it used to be. I didn't feel like I had much direction. And with every pound I gained, I started to feel a palpable sense of shame, not just from looking in the mirror, but also from everyone around who kept reminding me that I was gaining weight.

By 2016, I was fully a fat person and struggling with that realization. I thought about weight the same way I thought about race. In moments of rejection or exclusion as a black person, race always came up in my mind. It was a regular running background anxiety in my head. "Did I not get the job because I'm black? Are they staring at me because I'm black? What does it mean that I'm the only black guy here?"

And after a breakup, the ultimate rejection, there were similar questions, but all about my weight. "Would it have happened like this to a smaller person? Did they give me a shot because of my personality and then couldn't get over how fat I was? If I weren't fat, could this have gone the distance?" It seemed like everywhere I looked, people were finding the love of their lives, getting married, buying houses, having kids.

I'd been laid off from an IT job and temporarily started working as a coffee barista. I felt like a loser. I was 32 years, in a retail job, basically broke depending on public transportation. Everything I learned from TLC as a teenager dictated that I was indeed a scrub. None of this is stuff I posted on Facebook. It was embarrassing, why would I post that? So, I tried to stick to good news or uplifting posts.

Caitlin had two kids and seemed really happy on Facebook. I saw her pics and remembered how I treated her when we were together. Caitlin and I have known each other for just over 20 years now. We're friends. By the time Caitlin and I were more regularly checking in with each other, I was in a different place with my body. I had begun to engage in more fat liberation spaces. I was trying to give myself grace and think differently about what it was to be fat. I didn't always get it right, but I was trying to better for myself and everyone around me. I was working full time as an audio producer. I bought a car. I didn't feel like a scrub nearly as much as I did before.

But even though Caitlin and I had talked on and off over the years, there was one topic we never really gotten into. Why it didn't work out for us back in college? So, I called her up and asked her to share her thoughts. I wanted to know how she felt about her relationship with me and her relationship with her body. When did she first become aware that people were treating her differently?

**Caitlin:** Probably, like, second for second grade, I felt bigger than the girls. Even though I wasn't huge at that time, I had roles that the other girls didn't have. My father was very critical of my weight pretty much my entire life, until this day, he'll still say stuff.

I was very conservative with how I dressed. I didn't like wearing bathing suits, although I loved the water and swimming. And I wore these long jean skirts that covered my-- I had no shape, but I thought that hid me.

**Ronald:** She went to a private high school, and there were a lot of well to do folks and people who just cared about the way they looked. Comparison quickly turned to judgment. And not only judgment of skinny folks, but of other fat folks.

**Caitlin:** So, when I cover myself and I see somebody that's dressed with their legs showing or stomach, or I'm like, "Why are they wearing that?" especially somebody of size, it makes me judge them. It makes me look at them like, "Why aren't you covering that?" I'm like, "Oh, girls shouldn't have been wearing that." It makes me uncomfortable because-- Maybe it makes me jealous, honestly. I wish I had that confidence. Like, I wish I felt good enough about myself to show myself off.

**Ronald:** That was who Caitlin was when she met me, a Ronald that was measuring her against his unreasonably specific standards. A Ronald who was so occupied about his own experience that he had no room to be concerned with how Caitlin felt.

**Caitlin:** I felt like a secret. I felt you were ashamed of the way I looked. And that was why. Because I was cute. I knew I was cute. I knew I was pretty in the face. I knew I had a good sense of humor. I knew I had a good personality. I figured it was all physical. That's the whole-- So, I felt ashamed of how I looked. And I always had. That wasn't something that was new.

**Ronald:** That wasn't the first time Caitlin has said that to me. The first time she said it, we were on the phone catching up. I remember she said, “You were ashamed of me.” I was quiet for a while, because I didn't know what to say. I didn't know if an apology would be enough.

**Caitlin:** But you weren't the first man that made me feel like a secret. So--

**Ronald:** Do you remember the earliest time that you felt like that?

**Caitlin:** I was 15 years. I was working at SplashDown Waterpark in Manassas, and I was hooking up with my boss. So, obviously, that was not okay. But he was a college kid, and he wanted me, and I was a sophomore in high school. He was this soccer star, and I was this fat girl. So, that was the first. That was the first time. You were the second.

**Ronald:** When Caitlin said I wasn't the first guy to make her feel like a secret, it felt like a reprieve at first, because it's like she was already familiar with the reasons why she was being mistreated. Like, “Ronald, don't worry about this, I know what was happening, and you didn't originate this behavior.” That's not who I want to be, but it's also not who I want to have been. And listening to Caitlin now, I'm noting the way that she talks about herself. Like, earlier, when she mentioned she was pretty in the face, or just down when she called herself this fat girl. It's not different from the way that she talks about other fat people either.

**Caitlin:** Nobody wanted a relationship with me. People knew I was weak and would take what I could get. There's one guy that I met-- We had a relationship going for a little while. It wasn't anything serious. It wasn't anything exclusive. It was what he would give me, bits and pieces at a time. He didn't take me out with his friends. Obviously, I went back internal, and it was like, “Well, it has to be the way I look.” Because I know I'm funny and I know I'm cute, and so I settled. I settled for what I could get for just the little scraps. And I looked for the attention and affection of men to validate how I felt, to validate that I was good, and I was pretty, and I was okay. And it was always the wrong man.

**Ronald:** And then, Caitlin got her weight loss surgery.

**Caitlin:** Looking in a mirror, I could physically see that I was thin. But I felt almost 300 pounds still, because the weight dropped so quickly, and I never took the time to deal with any of the emotional issues I had based on the weight. I had my second daughter in 2010. And there was a lot of complications, and I was prescribed a pain medication. And that's where, other than food being my first addiction, that was a substance addiction for me, and I abused it when I could get it.

**Ronald:** Over the next few years, Caitlin would begin abusing prescription drugs, then alcohol. She would divorce her husband and enter a tumultuous relationship with a new man. She got a few DUIs, and her kids were taken away from her. She was even homeless briefly. I didn't know any of that was going on. I had noticed that she was posting a lot less frequently. But in what I did see, Caitlin seemed happy. She's smiling, everything seemed perfect.

**Caitlin:** I couldn't look myself in the mirror. I couldn't remember the last time I had looked in the mirror at myself. I had an apartment at that time, like I could have. One day, I woke up, and I looked in the mirror, and it was after like a three-week binge where I thought I was going to die in my apartment. I looked in my front door, and people had left flowers. It was like my gravesite. I looked in the mirror and I said, "I can't fucking do this anymore." And so, I started working a program.

**Ronald:** How do you reconcile those memories now? Whether it be me or anybody else, where you felt like it was, you were getting scraps from folks, what's your relationship with those memories now?

**Caitlin:** So, I'm an alcoholic and I'm in AA. And in AA, we do steps. So, you work through your damage, your defects, your assets, all that stuff. So, what I've done, the way I'm reconciling that is it's a fourth step, and it's where I write down everything, every resentment to anyone I've ever had. You're on that list.

**Ronald:** What would have happened if I weren't ashamed of being associated with Caitlin, a fat girl? How could our lives have been potentially different?

Looking back on it, I always felt like I was treating you in a lot of ways, the way most people treat fat people, which is like they're not—Like, you're not--

**Caitlin:** Less than.

**Ronald:** Yeah, you're less than.

**Caitlin:** Mm-hmm.

**Ronald:** And your life isn't going to start until you lose weight.

**Caitlin:** Okay.

**Ronald:** How significant are those moments in your life between you and I? How significant are they when you compare them to the rest of your life?

**Caitlin:** I have thought about it. Throughout the years, you'll post something or I'll see your name somewhere, and I'll be like, “Oh, that could have been good.” We could have had-- How many years? 19 years?

**Ronald:** 20 years.

**Caitlin:** Almost 20 years. We could have been married with how many kids? And obviously, we weren't dating-dating. We just whenever we get together. But I think there could have been potential there. But no, you didn't ruin my life. [laughs] You didn't destroy Caitlin, but you were definitely-- When I wrote down my resentment list, you were definitely part of a pretty big pattern I had. But I do think there could have been potential there, if we had actually dated and not just been hookups. Yeah.

[somber music]

**Ronald:** Sitting in front of Caitlin as a fat person, I can't help but feel at my most insecure. I couldn't foresee that the tables would turn and that my feelings on weight and love would change, and someday we'd be sitting here talking about it. We're not dating, no romantic intentions between us, but these are the feelings that weigh on me when I'm sitting in front of Caitlin now.

I'm going to ask you a very tough question, but you have to answer honestly. And it might be at the expense of the person sitting in front of you. So, when I met you I was thin.

**Caitlin:** Mm-hmm.

**Ronald:** Now sitting in front of you, I'm fat. How do you feel about that?

**Caitlin:** How do I feel about you? Like, physically?

**Ronald:** Being fat. Like, how do you feel like there's a guy that's on your resentments list who is now sitting in front of you as a fat person? Do you have any feelings about that? And my hypothesis is that you do, but I don't know if you would actually say it, which is why I wanted to ask.

**Caitlin:** Okay. So, about you, I don't feel differently as far as friendship or anything like that. I worked through that. But physically, I wouldn't date you now. I wouldn't be attracted to you. I think I said last time, I'm not attracted to overweight men, and that's just how I feel. Like, I would not see you out and be like, "Ooh, yeah." I just wouldn't.

**Ronald:** That's okay.

**Caitlin:** I'm sorry.

[laughter]

**Ronald:** No, it's okay.

**Caitlin:** You just said to be honest.

[laughter]

**Ronald:** Yes.

When I was younger, I thought that the opportunity to love and be loved came far more often than it actually does. I bear the full responsibility for every opportunity I let slip away, because I was a coward. I feel like I'm getting exactly what I deserve. Caitlin is much happier now. We still talk from time to time.

**Caitlin:** I am happy with my life. I have a supportive partner that I have a healthy relationship with. I have a relationship with all of my children now. Life is good today. It's a little boring, but boring is way better than the chaos I was wrapped up in. And I have people in my life that are going to tell me the truth, not just sit on a bar stool and tell me what I want to hear. And they don't care what I look like. They really don't. It's all in my head.

[somber music]

**Glynn:** Don't go anywhere, because in just a moment, I sit down with Ron and things get real, real quick. Stay tuned.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** Welcome back to Snap Judgment, the Weight For It episode. Oh, you just heard his podcast. But right now, I get to talk to him in person. Ronald Young, Jr., welcome to Snap Judgment. So glad to have you here, brother.

**Ronald:** Glynn Washington, it is amazing to be here. I'm giddy. I'm holding it all down. Snap Judgment has been one of my favorite shows for over 10 years. So, I'm just excited to be sitting down here with you to talk about Weight For It. This is wild. This is a dream come true.

**Glynn:** Stop, Ron. Stop, stop, stop.

**Ronald:** [laughs]

**Glynn:** Yes. Go on, Ron. Go on. Before we even get into it, let me just say this. Ron, I feel like I am fat adjacent.

**Ronald:** What's that?

[laughter]

**Ronald:** Say more about that-- [crosstalk]

**Glynn:** Maybe it's just wishful thinking, but I see it just this year, my weight has fluctuated by about 50 pounds or 60 pounds. Hearing you be so open, it gave me the scaffolding to reflect on my own experience.

**Ronald:** Mm-hmm.

**Glynn:** And this whole thing is like, at the core was, do you like you?

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** I want to be a better me. I want to read more.

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** I want to travel more. Maybe I've given up the idea of being able to slam a basketball.

[laughter]

**Glynn:** Butwhen does it go too far, and what's the difference between trying to do better for yourself and not accepting yourself for who you are?

**Ronald:** [sighs] Man, there's a lot of messaging that we get from society that we are supposed to love ourselves. That we are supposed to love ourselves , and we also get the same messaging from the same society that we have to be the optimal version of ourselves in order to love ourselves.

**Glynn:** Right.

**Ronald:** Then we get the same messaging from the same society that the only way to become our optimalselves is to love ourselves. Recently, what I've been playing with the idea is that I don't think you need to love yourself, not physically, really at all. You really just need to accept and understand who you are. You really have to accept and understand your body. I think with that acceptance and with that understanding comes this idea of staying more present and thinking about the things that you need in order to be happy in the moment. Not to be happy at some distant point in the future, not to be striving for some goal that may never come, but rather, what is it going to take for me to wake up in the morning and be happy with myself today? And that's what I've been using to survive. And it's the only tool that has worked for me in terms of divesting myself from the number on the scale.

Because if I'm thinking about the beach in the summer, [laughs] I think it dictates ways in which anxiety becomes present in my life every day. And it puts me in a space where I'm thinking so far ahead that I'm not thinking about the ways that I want to be happy right now and the ways that I'm depressed right now. I think that's what this adherence to weight kind of does to us. It puts us in this constant state of improvement when the idea is like, you can just accept who you are right now and just think about what it takes to be happy today. Not tomorrow. Today.

**Glynn:** Hmm. Maybe the beach is a metaphor.

**Ronald:** Yeah. [laughs] I like that.

**Glynn:** Because it's not just the beach I'm waiting for.

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** Or, preparing for. The thing that makes the world go round are relationships. The beach can wait. I'll give that, but I don't want everything else to wait with it.

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** I want to show up for life, no matter if I'm optimal, if I have to hit that-- I don't know. Maybe there are some people who have been optimal. I've seen some optimal people actually walking down the street. I wonder if they know they're optimal.

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** I've never been optimal.

**Ronald:** I'm sorry to interrupt. I guess the thing that gets me is like, sometimes I think about what you and I do for a living. We talk. We have shows. You know what I mean. We'll command a stage. We have a presence when we come into a room. And sometimes I wonder if the most physically optimal people, the ones who are in shape, who have flat stomachs, whatever, they ever look at us and be like, "Yo, if I could do what Ronald or Glynn does, I would be perfect. I would actually be optimal." You know what I mean? I think we put so much weight, [chuckles] pardon man, no pun intended, [Glynn laughs] we put so much weight on the physical that it really starts to beg the question of what are other ways in which we are optimal in life.

**Glynn:** Ronald, in the story we just heard, you asked a former girlfriend, if she found you attractive, and she said no, and you took it like a champ.

**Ronald:** [laughs]

**Glynn:** But I wonder how you really feel about that.

**Ronald:** First of all, it was devastating. It was devastating. When she said it, it was devastating. You can probably, if you've heard in the clip, I tried to recover. There's a nervous laugh in there. But I also knew that she had a right to say and feel the way that she did. And so, it was--

**Glynn:** Forget the right. Forget the right. Everyone's got a right,-

**Ronald:** [laughs]

**Glynn:** -Ronald. Everyone's got a right. Everyone's got a right to say. You asked the question. She gave your answer. That was cool.

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** Your feelings, your real feelings.

**Ronald:** Yeah, I'm devastated, man. In the moment, I remember just being like, "Wow." It felt poetic in a way, because here was this person that I mistreated, and here she is saying the thing that we always say about our high school bullies or our high school crushes. When we see them at the reunion or on Facebook, and they gained a little too much weight, we say, "Yeah, that's why you fat now." I was on the receiving end of that, and it felt uniquely hurtful. I felt like both like I deserved it. I deserved the pain, and I also didn't deserve any sympathy in that moment.

I remember packing up my stuff. Even her sensing that it had hurt my feelings, and her going to apologize, and then me being like, "Nah, don’t." It was hard to even try to accept an apology from her, because I'm like, one, I don't think I'm old one. And two, I think that you were okay to say what you said. But I still couldn't shake the hurt from it. So, I drove home, like, hurt. I was dating someone at the time, text to her, just like, “Man, this was devastating.”

And the producer of me was like, “Well, this is going to be great for the show.” But the human [laughs] that was making the show, yeah, it hurt. It was almost like she voiced the feelings of every other rejection that I've ever had that I imagined in my mind was due to my weight. She voiced that rejection. So--

**Glynn:** The story that you made about your relationship with Caitlin, you said something to the effect that as a young person. You thought that you had the opportunity, that the opportunity to love and be loved comes far more often than it actually does. Boy, that hit me hard. What do you mean?

**Ronald:** Yeah, I'm glad you touched on that, because I think about that all the time. I was actually writing that episode while I was processing a breakup with someone else. When I wrote that line, I wrote that line because I was thinking about her, this new person that was not Caitlin. But I also knew that the line applied to Caitlin. Because the truth is, when you are a young person, they tell you that you're going to fall in love hundreds of times and fall out of love hundreds of times.

We say it so flippantly, especially to young people, especially when you get to your 40s--Actually, your 30s, your 40s and beyond, you start to realize, “Wow, these opportunities in which everything is aligned, i.e., I like this person, they like me. I get along with them, they get along with me. We want to be together.” All of those things happening at the same time, they just don't happen as often as we think.

**Glynn:** Right. Right now, there is an earthquake, and at least in the Western world, about body shape, because now, there's a whole new class of drugs. On some people, they actually work.

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** It brings into question everything that we've been talking about for the past few decades, you finally get to the point where big people are like, "Look, I love me for me."

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** Here's a pill.

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** Do you take it?

**Ronald:** Oh, my God, Glynn, that's a question. I think the way I can answer that is thinking about in Episode 4 of Weight For It. It's called Decision. And it's with an opera singer named Tracy Cox. And at one point in it, she says something that really took me for loop. She says, "Hey, if you got to do bariatric surgery, if you got to take GLP-1 drugs, if you want to hit the gym and lose the weight, and that's what you have to do, you feel like you need to do to escape oppression, then do what you need to do." And I believe in her too in terms of that bodily autonomy. Like, “Do what you need to do to escape that oppression.” Because we live in a fat phobic society that really-- it just doesn't want us-- laughs] You know what I mean? It's not built for fat people, it doesn't love fat people.

**Glynn:** But what about that though, Ron? What about that, Ron? I'm feeling the oppression from coming from inside the house.

**Ronald:** Yeah. The calls coming from inside the house.

**Glynn:** The call from inside the house.

[laughter]

**Glynn:** I'm fortunate I have people who care about me. But I feel oftentimes like, I got some work to do. I'm not done. Is my supposed self-love fake?

**Ronald:** No. Acceptance doesn't always mean that you wake up every morning and love yourself, which I think is a bit of a task. I think a lot of people, they say it as if it's not a luxury. And if you look at all the things that we're dealing with that are in society right now, it makes it very difficult to love yourself when the world is actively. And Glynn, we're black. You know what I mean? The world actively tells us not to love ourselves. You know what I mean? It actively tells us to do things like that.

So, like, how do you wake up in the morning and accept yourself when the world keeps telling you, you're deficient? You know what I mean? You can't actually do this, until we could change that messaging out in the world, until we could cast off like kind of, I don't mean to get all too biblical, but cast off the chains of oppression until we could actually do that and change society.

**Glynn:** [laughs]

**Ronald:** It feels like they are going to keep making pills, they are going to keep making drugs, they are going to keep giving you a weight loss plan or a workout plan, because they want you to stay in this cycle of constant improvement and trying to do it. I think for me and you, the only way we combat that is by staying as present as possible and accepting who we are. I mean, buy a bigger shirt. [laughs]

**Glynn:** Ron. Ron, Ron, I don't know about you, but right this moment, today, as we speak, I'm on a diet.

**Ronald:** That's okay, if you want to do it for you. I think the hardest part about all of this body positivity and acceptance and all that is the idea of demonizing weight loss. The most important thing I would challenge you to say is like, when you wake up in the morning, say, "How do I feel? Do I feel okay? And what would it take for me to feel okay today?"

**Glynn:** But Ron, what about you?

**Ronald:** Yeah.

**Glynn:** You've been really open about your own struggles. Are you on a diet right now?

**Ronald:** I'm not. I'm eating the things that make me feel good, which tends to be a lot more vegetables. Some good proteins. I don't really restrict myself if I want something sweet or if I want to eat a little bit more. I really don't restrict myself in those ways. But what I monitor is like how I feel about the stuff that I'm eating, knowing that maybe if I'm eating too much melted cheeses three or four days in a row, I don't feel so good. You know what I mean? And maybe I need to think about what is actually going in.

But I think the ideas of diets, and the ideas of whole 30s, and keto, and Atkins and all that stuff that has to behind me and off the table for me, because I was just finding myself in a place where I just wasn't enjoying my life. You know what I mean? And I felt like there is—

And it's funny, Glynn, because every diet that exists, there's another diet that says that diet is the wrong diet. Because I remember at one point I was dieting, and I remember I had some yogurt, some like Greek yogurt for the protein or whatever, and somebody said, "You can't be eating that. It's too much sugar." And I said, "This yogurt makes me feel good, and I like eating it." And I think at that point, my mind started to break. I was just like, "I can't do what you all are doing anymore." I need to eat the foods. I need to eat what my mother fed me growing up. I felt great, and I was full. So, that's how I try to eat now.

[laughter]

**Glynn:** Ronald Young Jr., thank you so much for being on this show. Brother, I really appreciate you. The podcast is Weight For It as in Heavy Weight For It. It's available wherever you get podcasts. I highly recommend it. Ronald, thank you.

**Ronald:** Thanks for having me, Glynn. This has been amazing. It’d been a dream.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** Now, you have to understand that what you've just heard is but a taste, an appetizer of Ron's show, Weight For It. The first season is out right now on podcast apps everywhere. It has my highest recommendation. And on the DL, I heard a rumor that even now Ron is working on Season 2. I cannot wait, Weight For It. It's a production ohitsBigRon studios, and is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX. It was an official Tribeca selection. Also picked by the New York Times as one of the best podcasts of the year.

The original episode was produced and written by Ronald Young Jr. with editing from Sarah Dealey. And the version you heard today was edited for Snap by Regina Bediako. Sound design and mixing from the Reverend John DeLore of Starlight Diner. Theme music from Jay Redd, with additional music from Mass Potential, the artist DT, and the mysterious Breakmaster Cylinder. Special thanks to Caitlin Scanlan, Jessica Taylor Dickin, Myra Mejia, and Dr. Caitlin Gunn. You can find all things Ron and Weight For It at our website, *snapjudgement.org*.

[somber music]

**Glynn:** You can put on your jacket, put on your shoes, but where can you put on someone else's skin, live in someone else's world? Right here, my friends. The Snap Judgment storytelling podcast. Share with someone you love and listen for free. Everywhere there is a podcast.

[intriguing music]

**Glynn:** Please understand, this is not the news. No ways this is a news. In fact, you could bump into your old flame from a long time ago, and thank your lucky stars it didn't work out even as you know, they're looking at you and thanking their lucky stars for the exact same thing. And you would still, still not be as far away from the news as this is. But this is PRX.

[intriguing music]

*[Transcript provided by* [*SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription*](http://www.speechdocs.com/)*]*