

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPTS

***You Just Don't Know the Whole Story:** Psychologist Tom Cottle tells us about a conversation with his mother that has haunted him for years.*

Tony Kahn:

Hi! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and the director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. And actually, I'm coming from Arlington, Massachusetts today because I'm recovering from some surgery and I'm at home.

Gary Mott, my right-hand man, is here with me and just for the sake of authenticity, Gary, I'm gonna ask you to record a little bit of the beautiful fireplace going on in the background: a log, you know a little crackling and stuff like that so that they'll know that I'm really on location at home [chuckles], OK?

Gary Mott:

Can you feel that potheads?

[Tony chuckles again]

Tony Kahn:

So, how about today's Morning Story? Well, there's a phrase in the, in the Jewish prayer for the dead, the *Kaddish*, that says that we all live on in the memories of those who knew and loved us. And I suppose another way you could put that in more vernacular English is that when we die, we all become three anecdotes [laughs heartily] in the memories of those who knew us and it's totally surprising what those anecdotes are going to end up being.

I, I remember going to a memorial service where someone said that the most unique and lovely thing about the person who had died was the way that she sliced bananas, because it showed her personality and her love of cooking. Who knew? Or another person who said, "Well, I loved so-and-so because every time she came to visit me, she would find all my socks that needed darning and she would darn them in the night and never tell me. Well, aren't those lovely moments that carry with you about who somebody really was to you? Now, when that person is a parent, we can end up being touched by so much more than just darned socks or, or sliced bananas. Something that they said or did or that they didn't say or do that's played with you all of your life and you maybe didn't appreciate about them till they were gone.

Well, Tom Cottle, who's a Boston based writer and psychiatrist has one of those memories for us today. It's a story we call *You Just Don't Know the Whole Story*. Now, I'm not sure that this was a story that Tom himself was planning to tell me at first. But he came in for me to interview him about his latest book about this mother, who was a concert pianist and a child prodigy. And suddenly as I listened to Tom and as Tom listened to Tom, and his memories of her when he was sixteen years old, a story started to emerge about her, that I got the feeling he was telling me for the first time: *You Just Don't Know the Whole Story*

Tom Cottle:

We are in Europe. I'm a fifteen-year-old boy. We're going from northern Italy, the mountains of northern Italy, to northern France by car, to make the boat back. Talk about a rich man's story, huh?

Hairpin turns. At each turn is a new ravine, a new crevice, a new precipice, is the word I'm hunting for, of thousands of feet, way down.

"OOOOOooo, " we're screaming and yelling. [sound of car in motion] And I turn around from the front seat where I'm sitting and I see my mother sitting, be-, between my father and my sister. Her hands are in her lap. She's looking down and she's weeping. [Horn blast of a passing car] And I'm thinking, "What a pathetic person. This is the most gorgeous drive. People pay millions of dollars to drive through the

mountains of northern Italy and my pathetic mother is so screwed up in her life, that she's crying."

[Piano music begins - slow playing of notes in upward scale]

She was a child prodigy. [Piano music continues and lingers in the background] Who by seven was concertizing with orchestras and by nineteen was an international sensation. All of her life she was held back by these damnable demons – resentment, depression.

I can remember this as if it's yesterday. My mother used to say to me [inhales deeply], "As my son, I have to love you, but I don't have to respect you." And her nostrils would flare, then I would say something horrible back like, "Well as your son, I don't have to love or respect you."

"No no," she'd say, "you just don't know the whole story."

"So, tell me the story!"

"No, no, you just don't know the whole story"

And so, I would come home. My mother would say, "What happened at school today?"

"Nothing."

Three weeks later she would find out that I was elected President of the Student Body. "What happened at school today?"

"Nothing."

A month later, she would find out that I'd pitched three no-hitters in a row.

[Piano music starts again]

This is the way it went. Did I want to talk? Oh, yes. So why didn't you? I knew....you're not to speak.

[Sound of car in motion in background]

I keep coming back to that scene in the car. There's a rail strike and to make the boat back, we're forced to either fly or to go by car.

My mother has had a terrible car accident. Terrible, near Gary, Indiana. Fl-flung out of a – open car. Hit by a car and literally flung out. No seat belts in those days. In a hospital for a year. She cannot, she will not go by car. She's phobic beyond all belief.

[Sound of car passing and car in motion]

Her son, me, is phobic about air travel. We end up going by car, but I knew – it hit me right in my heart, that she had made an amazing sacrifice for me. She had revisited the fundamental trauma of her life – that car accident.

And I'm lying to myself, lying to myself, 'cause it was better to sit and look at her and say, "What a pathetic woman. How was I so cursed" (whatever the heck I was thinking in the front seat), than to say, "My God, what she does for me – that's a real sacrifice." Was there ever a thank-you for that? Was there ever an acknowledgement of that?

Never.

[Piano music resumes and continues under the narrative]

Now, I'm telling you. Now there is. Now I miss her. Now I really miss her. Somebody asked me once, "Do you think she ever expressed her love for you through her music?" I know that she did. That's right, she did. You just don't know the whole story.

"No no," she'd say, "you just don't know the whole story."

Tony Kahn:

That's Tom Cottle with today's Morning Story, *You Just Don't Know the Whole Story*.

Morning Stories is podcast every Friday from WGBH in Boston. Be sure to check out our website, too, at <www.wghb.org/morningstories>.

On a personal note, I'd like to thank all of you who've been kind enough to send me your good wishes for a speedy recovery. The recovery is definitely speedy. It's all up from here. And the worst part is past, which was ten straight days of the hiccups! Something that not only made me want to kill myself, but made those who love me want to see me dead, too.

But now [laughsg] we're all past that and it, and it's all uphill from here.

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This being a podcast, we'll also be hearing in a very personal way from some of the folks behind IPSWITCH dot com and who they are and why it is they think it's worth putting their time and effort into supporting podcasting.

So, join us next time and let's keep the party going. Bye.

[Fire crackling]

End of Recording

Transcribed by: Kate Magovern

Notes from Transcriber:

By real chance, this was the first Morning Story that I listened to, a couple of years ago. So, it remains unique for me as being my "introduction" to WGBH's *Morning Stories*. I think what struck me -in particular- about this podcast is that *in it* sits the idea that a story's "real" life emerges when it is shared.

Tom Cottle articulated this memory from the quiet of his heart. In putting his own spoken words around those feelings and sharing them with us, that moment from his past becomes something even more important, something real for him. In varied ways, it becomes something important for those of us listening, too, because his feelings resonate with our own different memories.

There's something magical about how a story is hatched, kind of like the way a photo emerges from the memory of light captured on film and hidden in the dark until it emerges in the chemical process.

Remember “old fashioned” film, the kind that is rolled up in a little canister and gives you a maximum of 36 “blind” tries -- because you have no chance to actually “see” the image until after processing? Some of us still use this technique, although convenient digital is (most unfortunately) pushing “old fashioned” film into the realm of unaffordable and forgettable.

We’re all like old-fashioned film, I suppose. Something important happens in our life – our souls are exposed to intense feelings – like film is exposed to light. Film will hold onto that memory forever in that dark canister, protected from anyone else’s knowing what’s inside, until it’s “processed”. Our hearts do the same thing. Most of the time we “process our film” immediately and share the photos, the good ones and the bad ones – the good feelings and the bad. Sometimes, we let the canister sit, or we forget about it all together.

What an extraordinary moment when that 1/100th of a second flash of light invisibly memorized on celluloid actually becomes a photographic print. In that magical transfer, that once quiet memory takes on a new life, ignites emotions and promotes possibilities to connect in new ways with those around us.

Thanks to *Morning Stories* for being such a welcoming place for stories to be “hatched” and shared!