

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Hi Kevin: Brookline, Mass., resident Nancy Cahners waits anxiously as airport security guards examine her traveling companion.

Tony Kahn:

Hi, everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*. We got a very nice email the other day from somebody who likes the podcast and said that he enjoys many things about it, including "my warm, friendly tone" [chuckles], which he says, "sounds like a grandfather's." So, for this broadcast, or this podcast, anyway, I'm, I'm going to identify myself as the – not the father of podcasting – but the grandfather of podcasting. Which I think is a much nicer job: you don't have to raise the kid, all you have to do is spoil it. [laughs] Which I'm, I'm happy to do, so, so thanks for the suggestion.

Anyway, you know, here at *Morning Stories* we try to take on the big questions of life, and also raise questions about things we normally take for granted. And maybe one of the biggest things that we tend to take for granted is that phrase – I'm sure we've all heard it: "You can't take it with you."

Well, Nancy Cahners, a lovely lady from Brookline, Massachusetts, decided to take on that truism head on. No, I – I don't mean that she died and she took it all with her. She's very much alive and in great health. But what she did was she took the remains of somebody else to – well, why don't we let her tell the rest of the story? Today's *Morning Story: Hi, Kevin* by Nancy Cahners.

Nancy Cahners:

I knew things were off to a strange start when Kevin's widow offered to give me some of his ashes. Kevin had been a sweet friend, and I missed him. As his wife poured half a cup of his ashes into the little box I held in my palms. She said, "There you go, Kevin. She loved you too."

[Thoughtful piano solo begins, playing under the narrative.]

I slipped the gold-plated case into my purse and there it stayed. After a while, it seemed a logical place. I carry all kinds of valuable things in my purse. Things I need, things I don't want to lose. Why not what was left of a dear friend? I was sane enough to know to keep it a secret, of course, but I liked catching glimpses of his little port-a-crypt when I'd reach for my wallet in the grocery store. "Hi, Kevin." [crowd cheering at sports event] And sometimes when I was in places I knew Kevin would have enjoyed, like those terrific seats at the Celtics game, I'd sprinkle a pinch when no one was looking. I knew it was odd – maybe even illegal. But it seemed harmless, sort of. [airport public address system announcing "... announces the arrival of flight 722"] I

never thought it would be a real problem, until the day I got into the security check line for a flight. Too late to do anything about it, I placed my purse on the conveyor belt and watched it disappear into the X-ray machine. I moved like in a bad dream to the exit end of the box. I watched the guard in front of the screen rise to his feet to get a closer view. The belt stopped, inched in reverse, stopped again. Then the woman marched over and lifted my purse, pinching the handle between her thumb and forefinger. "Is this yours?" she said. "Yes, it is mine. I'm sure you'll want to have a look inside, which is fine with me. Go right ahead. Let me know if I can do anything to help."

By now a group of travelers surrounded me. [we hear Nancy in background saying to a guard, "I mean, this is ludicrous . . ."] I wondered if terrorists jabber too. "What's this?" she was holding Kevin's cannister. The size of a pack of cards. I'd been practicing my answer since I got in line. I leaned toward her, mouthing the words more than saying them, "These are the ashes of a dear friend." She stared. So did the coat-grabbers. Seconds passed in silence. "He was a really nice man," I tried to explain. [background P.A. system calling for help, "Agent Wilson, Agent Tom Wilson"; sound of airport crowd] The coat-grabbers moved away. The guard lifted the lid, peered inside, shut the lid, handed it back, spun on her heel and marched away. I stood, frozen, with Kevin's box in my hand, afraid to move. I was certain she'd be back with handcuffs for me and the bin of confiscated nail clippers for Kevin.

Nothing happened! "Excuse me, Miss? May I leave now?" I slipped Kevin's ashes back into my purse and made my getaway. As I began to breathe again, my relief gave way to another feeling. Couldn't she have been a little nicer? Would it have killed her to say, "I'm sorry for your loss?" That's when it hit me. I was expecting condolences from Homeland Security? [P.A. voice: "*Agent Tom Wilson, Please return to the Security Desk*"] This whole thing has taught me that I didn't have to let go of Kevin. I just had to figure out how to hold onto him! These days, he's in my heart. And his ashes? Well, they're resting peacefully above my computer. I can see them now as I write. "Hi, Kevin. We made it!"

[Piano solo resumes and then fades out.]

Tony Kahn:

That was today's Morning Story, from Nancy Cahnners of Brookline, Massachusetts. "Hiya, Kevin." Saying "goodbye," is not an easy thing to do.

Gary Mott:

You know, I think – I think about the conversations that we had with Nancy, you know, before she did this story. [Tony murmurs in assent.] And her, I guess her primary concern – she was afraid that people were going to think that she's weird. But I tried to assure her that I've got Grandma in my pocket, here!

Tony Kahn:
You're kidding!

Gary Mott:

Yes, I'm kidding. [Tony laughs, then murmurs assent throughout this part] But I think a lot of people – and she seemed comforted by this – are gonna hear this story and say, "Well, I've got Grandma in my purse, too!" You know? What's so strange about keeping the ashes of, of a dear, departed loved one, close to you? I mean, some people throw ashes out of airplanes, some have them sprinkled over their favorite athletic stadium...

Tony Kahn:

One of the most beautiful ceremonies that I ever saw was the scattering of the ashes of my father-in-law in the waters off the Jersey shore, where he and his family of many children had spent wonderful, wonderful summers, as had his grandchildren. It was a beautiful day. We opened the ashes; we scattered them. Those kids who were far too young to feel the sadness of that event felt all the joy. They were laughing and leaping in the water, and in the midst of all of this, my son came up to me with a tiny little piece of what must have been his grandfather's ashes. And he gave it to me! He was so happy to have a piece of his grandfather, whom he loved, that he gave it to me! And without even thinking about it (I just saw the smile in his face) I put it in my pocket. I thought that was an awfully lovely way not only to say "Goodbye" but to hold onto the memory of him and the love that surrounded him forever.

Gary Mott:

Yeah. You put someone in the ground, and years go by, and you don't think about 'em every day. [Tony murmurs assent here frequently] But if you put someone in your purse, you would see that person's ashes every time you opened your purse. So, I mean, that's something to think about. That, this – the effect of this story might cause someone to say, "You know, it's not so weird. It's not so weird to take, you know, a little cigarette lighter full of my loved one's ashes around with me."

Tony Kahn:

See, Nancy? You, you were worried that you wouldn't make us laugh, but you made us laugh and you also made us think. Which I think you wanted to.

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Gary Mott:

Check out our website too, at <wgbh.org/morningstories>. Our email address is <morningstories@wgbh.org>. We love hearing from you!

Tony Kahn:
Take care.

[End of Recording]

Transcribed by Liz Cooksey

Notes from transcriber:

This was honestly one of the funniest of all the shows I've listened to, and I've listened to almost all of them! I had a big smile on my face all through her reading of it. I kept thinking about how very clever Nancy Cahners was, to write it. In a way, I was hoping it was completely fictional, as it had such a clever plot. Has she written anything else?