

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Passage to India: Leo Tolstoy once wrote, "All happy families are the same." But then he never met the Grashows of Brooklyn, N.Y. or heard their story about the year they spent in India.

Tony Kahn:

Hi everybody. This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston with today's Morning Story. What else? Sometimes they say you need a village to raise a child. Well, we discovered that the same is true for stories. Some kinds of stories actually need more than one person to tell them, especially if it's a story about an entire family. The family I'm thinking of is the Grashows of Brooklyn, NY. I've known the Grashows for many, many years. There's Mark, the father, who is a retired high school math teacher, his wife Sheri, who works in public health, their two children, Alexander and Rachael, both of them now in their twenties.

Many years ago, they got a chance to go to India, the last minute. And I'd heard pieces of this story, I'd even seen pictures of it, but I realized that I'd never heard them all tell me the story of what happened during that year that they were away. So one day, a while ago, and some fifteen years after they took that trip, I sat them down and had them tell me the story of what happened that year, but individually, so that I could get every person's own impression not, not affected by the others. It's, it's sort of like *Rashomon*; you know that Japanese movie, the same event told from many different points of view? Well you can call this *Grashomon*. So let's hear what I came up with, and what they thought was, you know, a very interesting collective story of their trip in India. The Grashows, today's *Morning Story* – what are we calling it?

Gary Mott:

[In the background] *Passage to India*.

Tony Kahn:

Today's *Morning* ... Thank you Gary. [laughter] Today's *Morning Story*, *Passage to India*.

Mark Grashow:

I was due for a half-year's sabbatical and, the last second, I decided to apply to teach in India, and, lo and behold, a month later, the New York City Board of Education said, "go ahead."

Sheri Grashow:

It was at that point that our daughter lay down on the floor and said her life was over and she wasn't going.

Rachael Grashow:

I started to cry because I got so scared, and I didn't even know where it was on the map. My brother waved them away; you know like, "Let me take care of this." And he did.

Alex Grashow:

Well I told her she'd never have to take piano lessons again if she went. I, I know that.

Sheri Grashow:

We all needed shots. We needed school records so the ...

Alex Grashow:

In some ways, in some ways it was so quick. I wanted to know what classes I would be taking; whether we'd live in a big house? What the food was like? You know, whether we would travel around? Whether there ...

Sheri Grashow:

We didn't know how our lives would be like in India. We had fantasies, and some things come true and of course, as always, you can't anticipate everything.

[Music]

Rachael Grashow:

When we arrived after, I think it was, a forty-eight hour trip, it was really sort of an attack on the senses. All of a sudden, there were cows and cucumber carts and watermelon sellers and peoples on bikes, and there were very few traffic rules that people follow ...

Mark Grashow:

What they did is they found us an apartment, and it was an amazing apartment. But it - one of the best things about it was that we had an unobstructed view to the horizon. I would get up in the morning, and there was that sun. It would come up, and you could almost feel the entire planet rolling towards the sun, and it, it was extraordinary. And we would watch all of India kind of go down the street - funeral processions, people going to work, people in trucks, and oxen, and the cows, ...

Sheri Grashow:

No television, no radio, no telephone, and it was amazing to watch the children develop ways of amusing themselves. We had family card games; they would create bowling games out of pairs of socks rolled up.

Rachael Grashow:

I think I feel bad for Alex. He was a fourteen-year-old boy sharing a room with his ten-year-old sister. But the thing is that me and Alex have been close all the way through so

we still spent a lot of time together, which was my fear that we would get out there, and he would make tons of friends ...

Sheri Grashow:

Everything is different. Everything is different. [Classical Indian vocal music] Mark and I went off to the market, and I came back and had only found one vegetable that looked familiar, and had to wash all of the vegetables in potassium permanganate, purified water, rinse them again, and then dry every string bean. This was going to be my life in India. And there was the one night, when I first sat down and just cried and said, "What have we done? What am I doing here? Am I crazy?"

[Indian vocal music]

Rachael Grashow:

As a ten year, I think the last thing I wanted to do was stick out and, all of a sudden, we were the rich Americans, and that really took me by surprise.

Alex Grashow:

We went to a middle school for, it was an Indian school, and I was also a foot taller than almost anyone in the entire region so not only was I white and American, but almost a foot, foot-and-a-half taller at that point. It was a funny time for me. [laughing]

Sheri Grashow:

When we got to India, and he finally wrote to his friend. At the age of thirteen, he wrote and said life is very different here; I'm now married with two children.

[laughter]

[Indian instrumental music]

Mark Grashow:

But then came a trip to a bird sanctuary. On the way home, all the kids were crowded into the back of the bus, and they started telling stories. And suddenly, there was my son, mixed in with all these kids from India, telling his story, telling things about himself, listening, and he suddenly felt that he was indeed a member of this place. And from then on, I think things were much easier for him.

Alex Grashow:

I had some good friends there, and there were some great young flirtatious moments, but I didn't have a girl friend and I was happy, I think. People weren't rushing into the girlfriend/boyfriend status that we had here, and and I think there was a freedom to sort of be myself more and not have to worry as much about who I was.

Mark Grashow:

We went white water rafting for three days on the Trisuli River. We rode elephants and chased rhinoceros. We went up...

Rachael Grashow:

Eating with our hands, that was the best part; you know, you would take sauce and rice, anything, chicken ...

Sheri Grashow:

We took them to ride camels out in the desert, and as we were riding camels....

Mark Grashow:

We rode horses up to glaciers, ...

Alex Grashow:

The first time it rained, certainly, [sounds of rain] after the five months that we were there. Me and my sister ran up to the roof in joy and danced around in what was a light drizzle, and that was certainly great and a memorable moment.

Sheri Grashow:

But it was always, always a wonderful thing.

[Indian instrumental music]

Alex Grashow:

The most depressing thing was coming back after India, more than anything else, and having this incredible adventure and coming back and really finding my friends sitting in the same places doing much of the same thing from before I left.

Rachael Grashow:

I don't think I'd realized how much I was going to miss it until they threw us a surprise party at the very end before we left. Friends of my parents threw us all a surprise party and were, were considerate enough to invite Alex's and my friends without our knowledge. I realized how close I'd become with all these people and how we'd built a life there and how much we were going to be missed and how much I'd miss.

Alex Grashow:

Living in India was awful, I mean it really was. Mostly for the fact that I had good friends, which by the end - and I never knew when I would see them again - and I was crying, and life had been very rich and new every day ...

Rachael Grashow:

I think India cemented us in a way that has changed our relationship even today. We had this experience where we only had each other ...

Alex Grashow:

My sister knows me better than anyone else in the world right now and that's a great gift to have.

Rachael Grashow:

We had no idea we were getting into. Who knew where we were gonna live or what was gonna happen. And that we came back in one piece, I think, really delighted us and made, I think, our family feel like a team. That really imbued in me the excitement of travel.

Sheri Grashow:

It enriches you because it gives you other visions, and so it changes you when realize that you can look at things differently, or you can experience things differently, and that's very subtle. It's not one day you come back and you say you're a changed person.

Alex Grashow:

It transformed me, you know. I have to give it to my kids.
[Indian vocal music]

Sheri Grashow:

When I was nineteen, I went off to Paris. That was a wonderful, incredibly important experience. Then Mark and I went around the world, and that was magic. That was truly a gift. Then, then, on the first trip around the world, Mark and I had ridden elephants in Nepal once in a game preserve, and we had said how wonderful it would be to take our children there. When we went to India those years later, we did! How could anything be better than that? - to discover something, and then be able take your children and say, "Here. You can have this too." But, no, and I can't wait to see what's happening next.

[Music]

Tony Kahn:

So, that was today's Morning Story from the entire Grashow family, *Passage to India*. It's been great hearing from all of you people. Gary, you've got a set of emails there.

Gary Mott:

Sure I printed out a few emails that we've been receiving. Andrew H. writes in, "just got interested in podcasting," found many of our stories to be amazing for different reasons, and he was very touched by our Spaulding Grey story,

Tony Kahn:

Oh, *Goodbye Spaulding*. Yeah, Harriet Reisen's story.

Gary Mott:

He was lucky enough to see him perform several times. So – Jason writes in from Pawtucket, Rhode Island. “*Morning Stories*,” and I quote, “are delightfully casual, like an outtake or not ready for broadcast clip, [laughter] similar to underground radio and spoken word; thanks for the effort. They are inspiring.”

Tony Kahn:

Brian, I just want you to know that it takes thirty-five years of experience in broadcasting to be able to make something sound not only casual, but incompetent.

Gary Mott:

I’m sure Brian would love to know that as well as Jason, from Pawtucket.

Tony Kahn:

[Laughing] Oh, this is Jason from Pawtucket!

Gary Mott:

“As a new iPod owner, I was intrigued by the concept of podcasting. I found *Morning Stories*. Terrific program, what a great addition to my digital companion.” That’s Dave writing in from, where’s Dave from? University of Wisconsin. In response to our story of last week, *Hi, Kevin*. the Nancy Cahners story ...

Tony Kahn:

Carrying along the ashes of her friend.

Gary Mott:

Right. A gentleman was in line with a woman who was in possession of her grandmother’s ashes in Germany, in an airport security line.

Tony Kahn:

You got a passage there that – ? It’s pretty vivid.

Gary Mott:

This gentleman writes, KH writes, “As with Miss Cahners, it went through the X-ray machine and immediately raised all kinds of red flags. Airport Security insisted on opening the box. Inside was the sealed urn. The woman objected desperately and tearfully. Deborah, this gentleman’s companion, tried to intervene. The head of Security arrived, more objections, and finally, they took the urn, broke the seal, ...

Tony Kahn:

Oh, wow.

Gary Mott:

... and stirred through the ashes in search of ... whatever. The woman nearly fainted in Debbie’s arms.

Tony Kahn:

Agh. Pretty grim. Usually when we tell a *Morning Story*, we hope that it will resonate with you in some way and at least give you a feeling, though it isn't your life, of what it's like to be the other person. But, when almost detail for detail, it is your life, that's, that's amazing. Anyway, thanks so much for letting us know and . . . thanks for listening and all of your support, just as we appreciate the real financial support that we get every week. Podcasts of WGBH's *Morning Stories* are made possible in part with support from Ipswitch, a leader in file transfer software. Further information is available at their website. That's www dot I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H dot com.

Gary Mott:

And our website is <WGBH.org/morningstories> and our email address is <morningstories@WGBH.org>.

Tony Kahn:

Keep writing; keep listening.

Gary Mott:

Please.

Tony Kahn:

See you next week

Gary Mott:

Bye.

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Susan MacLeod