

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Cool Customer: From his early days in television advertising, cameraman Ralph Toporoff tells of one commercial spokesperson who lost his cool.

Tony Kahn:

This is Tony Kahn the producer and director of WGBH's *Morning Stories* in Boston. What a bea-u-tiful day, unless of course it's an evening, wherever you happen to be in the world for a Morning Story! It is spring here in Boston and I'm sitting here nose-to-nose and bud-to-bud with it and before my allergies kick in I'd better tell you about today's morning story. [Chuckles]

Now you know in the past we've heard from people from many different walks of life, psychiatrists, house cleaners, homemakers, students, doctors, nurses, but rarely have we heard from someone on the cutting edge of the culture. Where you don't just mold minds; you shape the entire national psyche, a place where one false move can mean the difference between realizing a great idea and suffering a sudden horrible death.

Yes, folks. I'm talking about television advertising. Well, that changes with today's morning story because our storyteller is a man who used to make television commercials. His name is Ralph Toporoff. He visits us often here, in Boston, from New York and he tells us a story of a commercial he worked on, not so long ago, that nearly tore him limb-from-limb. If there are any children present, we advise you to make sure they hear this one too, 'cause I think they're really gonna like it. It's called: *Cool Customer*.

[Music]

Ralph Toporoff:

I was working as a cameraman in those days, doing commercials, and I was asked to come do a shoot. Automobiles just started to have air-conditioning and there was a company around that decided well, what, we're gonna cash in on this process and produce a portable air-conditioning unit that could go into later model cars that didn't have air-conditioning. [Music] They were gonna get a polar bear and put it in the back seat of an automobile, the camera would move in, when you would see the polar bear sitting back there and across the screen it would say, "Cool enough to keep a polar bear happy." [Laughs]

So they called all the animal handlers in the business and the answer was, "A polar bear? Oh no. [chuckle] They're mean and vicious and dangerous." So they called around and called around and they finally found a zoo that said, "Oh, yes. We have a polar bear that was born in captivity and our trainer says, 'Absolutely no problem.'" So, we go to the studio the next day, a brand new Lincoln

Continental, an enormous vehicle, was driven onto the main stage. We put up all the lights. The back door of the studio opens, in walks the trainer with the polar bear, opens the back door of the car, the polar walks into the back seat of the Lincoln and sits down.

[car door slams]

Ralph Toporoff:

Uh, the assistant director says, "OK, we're ready to go." The lights go on.... [drum roll]...and the bear goes totally insane.

[Pow-wow drums beating]

The first thing the bear tries to do is go from the back seat to the front seat. [Chuckle] And totally collapsed the front seat.

[Sounds of drums, cymbals]

Then handed the trainer the steering column and the steering wheel, kicked out the side windows, and proceeds to basically break [glass shattering] the front windshield out of the car. [laughing] And starts to crawl out the front of the, the window.

The thing about a polar bear is that it's sorta built like a triangle. It starts small in the front and gets wider towards the back, so the bear manages to get about two-thirds of himself out of the Lincoln and then got his rear end jammed in the back of the window, putting bear marks down the hood of the vehicle. [sounds of glass shattering and metal falling to the floor] [Toporoff chuckles.] The trainer actually calms him down and uh, takes him away.

[Horns trumpeting]

Well now the assistant director has the job to take this vehicle back to the rental car company, this brand new car. So he called a tow truck, the tow truck came and dropped him and the car on the street in front of the rental car place. And the assistant director just walked in and said, "I brought your car back." [chuckle] As the guy from the rental car company started to walk out, he said, "Wait a minute. I forgot my chart." So that he can mark down any little scratches that might have happened to the vehicle. So he walks outside, and does a classic triple take, right out of a Marx Brother's movie, when he looks at this car. [car door slams, Bronx cheer] A brand new Lincoln Continental with its front seat collapsed, both side windows removed, the steering column and the steering wheel on the floor, large paw marks down both fenders and the first thing he says is, "What's that smell?" [laughs] Uh, the bear had as a final gesture,

[laughing] relieved himself in the front seat of the car.

[Animated drive-in theater voice says: Mmmmm, refreshing!] [Music]

The guy from the rental car company says, "Wait a minute. Stop. Here's the deal. [flutes playing] You have now purchased a Lincoln Continental, [laughing] you will be sent a bill and any time you want it, it will be in the back lot. [laughter] You can pick it up, any time you want." [Laughter]

[Animated drive-in theater voice says: "Yes, fun to see, fun to drive, fun to buy!"]

[Music]

[Clanging metal]

Tony Kahn:

That was today's morning story from Ralph Toporoff: "Cool Customer." Very good advice on how NOT to buy a Lincoln Continental.

Gary Mott:

It's clear to me. The point of this story: stay away from television advertising.

Tony Kahn:

Stay away from television advertising.

Gary Mott:

Get involved with public media... [Tony chuckles] ...public broadcasting

Tony Kahn:

Vote with your wallet.

Gary Mott:

Support you local station.

Tony Kahn:

[laughing] Support your local station. When I was doing the research for this, and looking for commercials that I could use as the background, I actually saw some of the commercials that had most influenced me as a kid, including the one for - you may be too young to remember this one - but it's the one for Ajax Cleanser. It has among other things, three animated little elves, circling a huge drain that they're cleaning with Ajax, the foaming cleanser, and they're singing as they're basically going down the drain. [laughing] And one of them is singing: [Tony Kahn singing] "Use Ajax, the foaming cleanser, bum, bum-bum, bum, bum, bum, bum".

Gary Mott:

So Tony, they had advertising back in the late '30's or? ...

Tony Kahn:

[laughing]

Gary Mott:

Speaking of our origins ...

Tony Kahn:

Oh, you're not going to speak of this, are you? Oh, no.

Gary Mott:

I'd like to take this opportunity, on this bea-u-tiful spring day, to, wish our very own Tony Kahn, a very happy birthday.

Tony Kahn:

Gary, just out of respect, if for nothing else, you're not going to mention which birthday.

Gary Mott:

I'm not gonna do that.

Tony Kahn:

Thank God.

Gary Mott:

You know, my 102 year old great-grandmother -

Tony Kahn:

Hmm.

Gary Mott:

- who passed away, some years ago, right before she died I asked her, if she could be any age again, what would it be and she said, "Fifty!"

Tony Kahn:

Fifty? I knew your grandmother, I went to school with your grandmother...
[Gary laughs] ...and I totally agree with what she says. The only drawback is that by the time you turn my age, you've forgotten what you knew at fifty.

Gary Mott:

I know what fifty looks like, and you ain't no fifty, but, hey, you're looking good.

We're glad that you're still with us, 'cause without you, there, you know, there would only be me and... [Tony laughs] I don't know, I, I just don't know about that.

Tony Kahn:

Not only am I grateful to be around still but I'm also grateful to our sponsor for podcasting, without whom we wouldn't be seeing you every Friday like this or even Thursday. Podcast of WGBH's morning stories are made possible in part with support from Ipswitch, a leader in file transfer software. Want more information about the guys at Ipswitch, check their website at <www.ipswitch.com>.

Gary Mott:

And right after you go to the Ipswitch website be sure and surf on over to the WGBH *Morning Stories* website at <wgbh.org/morningstories> and send us an email at <morningstories@wgbh.org>.

Tony Kahn:

And we'll see you next Friday!

Gary Mott:

All right, Tony.

Tony Kahn:

Bye.

Transcribed by:

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