

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Island Time: When household projects loom large, Martha's Vineyard resident Mark Jenkins requires help from someone with a sprightly step

Tony Kahn:

Hi everybody. This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. You probably heard the saying, no man, and I guess we should say no woman either, no person, is an island. Well, we have a, a local variant of that. No man is an island, especially Martha's Vineyard, because if you were the island of Martha's Vineyard, you'd be a little nuts. The island of Martha's Vineyard has kind of two seasons. It has the winter, when you've got just a few thousand residents, and then you've got the summer when the place is absolutely inundated by jetsetters.

So, it's, it's an island with kind of two volume controls, "off" and "loud." No money and tons of money pouring in. And, somewhere in between these two seasons of winter and summer is this thing called spring, which is probably the weirdest season of all, because, on the one hand, you've got this new surge of life with the possibly of profit, but you still have this persistent vegetative state of winter, and you have this incredible sense that your chance of making a profit has just arrived. And these two states of mind kind of coexist in a very weird way in the minds of everybody who's trying to get a job done on Martha's Vineyard. So, today's story is less about a person than it is about a place and the person who's caught in the middle of that on Martha's Vineyard, a dweller there named Mark Jenkins. Today's *Morning Story, Island Time*.

[Bird sounds]

Mark Jenkins:

It's springtime and the air on Martha's Vineyard is filled with prospects of renewal, growth, and change. So I'm doing what a lot of island residents are doing this time of year. I'm thinking, "Where the hell is that guy who said he'd show up a week ago to work on our house?" Martha's Vineyard is known for its less than obsessive attitude toward punctuality - what locals refer to as operating on "island time." Besides, with its fishing and farming heritage, the Vineyard has a strong tradition of working in trade. "Hey Doc. Take out my daughter's appendix and I'll give you a chicken."

[Sound of hammering begins and is heard intermittently under the following narrative]

When help does arrive, not a word is spoken about the tardiness or the inconvenience to the customer. I heard a story the other night about a couple that waited three years for a fellow to install some light fixtures in their house. When he finished, he just kind of shrugged and said, "Okay, that's that." and wandered off. When someone does show up on time, homeowners can dissolve into a puddle of coquettish flattery. "Oh my, that's a lovely van. Wow, I didn't know they made ladders that big. Heavens, have you been working out since we last saw you, or it just the cut of those new overalls?" The truth is, they've got us over a barrel, or the kitchen sink, the kerosene tank, or whatever it is we're desperately hoping someone will some day attend to.

I figured out the ultimate revenge. I learned how to do some things myself. For a city boy like me, this is no small thing. Okay so the trampoline isn't quite level, [boing, wheeeee, crash] and I assembled an arbor back to front, but I'm getting the hang of things. I can now count among my accomplishments an only mildly treacherous flagstone path, [collapsing structure] a retaining wall that won't collapse this week, and some crocuses and day lilies that will perhaps grow at some point. My better half warns me, "If he shows up and finds out you've done it, boy, is he going to be ticked off." My response, "Well I called him six months ago about this. What's he going to do if he gets mad at me? Stop showing up when he's supposed to?"

[Sounds of truck driving away]

Usually we must resign ourselves to looking plaintively out the window, hoping against hope for a glimpse of our hero in his trusty white pickup, his toolbox at his side, an unfiltered Camel dangling jauntily from his lip. Hark! I hear a sound in the distance [sound of passing vehicle]. Could that be him? Alas, 'tis but the UPS man. Come to think of it, island time on Martha's Vineyard is a contradiction in terms. Around here, it seems as if the clock has stopped. Still, there are worse places to sit around and wait for it to start back up [sound of vehicle backing up]. Hold on, do I see the first of the crocuses I planted coming up? [sound of retaining wall collapsing, or of truck backing into a wall]

Tony Kahn:

That was today's Morning Story, spring on the Vineyard from Mark Jenkins. One of the things that makes Mark such a great storyteller about Martha's Vineyard is that he's an outsider. Mark Jenkins has an accent you wouldn't exactly call Martha's Vineyardian. In fact, it's an accent that's hard to place. This guy comes from everywhere. He can really see something that other people may take completely for granted. And that's one of the things that I love about outsiders and about the fact that I'm probably a bit of an outsider myself. They truly get a fresh take on places. And, well in a way, you're kind of like an outsider to our culture here in Boston,

Gar, right? Cause you're, you're - a Texas boy, not born and bred, but bred and, and barbecued.

Gary Mott:

[Laughing] Born and bred. I was born in Texas.

Tony Kahn:

Oh, you were born in Texas too?

Gary Mott:

Oh, yeah.

Tony Kahn:

Oh, I didn't know that. Oh.

Gary Mott:

Yeah. I, I would have to say, you know, in my journeys here in New England, Martha's Vineyard is one of those places that you really feel like you're not from there.

Tony Kahn:

You can really feel poor on Martha's Vineyard.

Gary Mott:

You, you can really feel poor and out of place. There's a lot of beautiful people on Martha's Vineyard.

Tony Kahn:

Right. One of the reasons why it is so attractive is that it is an incredibly beautiful place. Anytime they would like to invite us over there for any reason whatsoever, bring podcasting to Martha's Vineyard if they don't happen to have it, we're ready.

Gary Mott:

And we'll bring a hammer, too. There's a need, there's a need for some good help.

Tony Kahn:

There are a lot of guys with hammers on Martha's Vineyard, real men who not only wear a hammer but know how to use it.

Gary Mott:

Not many of them are working, as Mark found out.

Tony Kahn:

[Laughing]. A very interesting point you make, and that Mark makes with you. You are so right. And, we would like to express our gratitude to the organization that makes it possible for us to go from one week to the next like this and that's Ipswitch at <Ipswitch.com> www.ipswitch.com. They are a leader in file transfer software, and they are sponsors for the WGBH *Morning Stories* podcasts. That's I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H dot com. Thank you guys so much.

Gary Mott:

And right after you go there, head on over to the *Morning Stories* website. That's <WGBH.org/morningstories> and our email address is <morningstories@WGBH.org>.

Tony Kahn:

See you next week.

Gary Mott:

Okay. Thanks.

Tony Kahn:

Bye.

Gary Mott:

Bye.

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Susan MacLeod