

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*My Bag of Rocks: Gayle Keeney left behind a trail of broken promises and burdens of a lifetime of alcoholism – and found solace in a place some might call nowhere.*

### **Tony Kahn:**

Hi everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the Producer and Director of *Morning Stories*, WGBH in Boston. We're right outside here in the place we love to podcast from away from our office in the middle of Boston Spring. Last time it was Boston Spring, it was about, oh, I'd say about seventy-five degrees. Today it's week two of Boston Spring and it's closer to fifty. But hey, that's Boston. [chuckles] When it comes to the weather, you could be in the middle of nowhere in Boston.

Well, our story today is about sort of being in the middle of nowhere, believe it or not. A long time ago I was in a, a little town in Montana called Plains, Montana visiting with a friend who was recovering from alcoholism and having a hard time of it. In fact, he was looking pretty blue and I began to worry, "Well, we're in the middle of nowhere. How can I possibly be of some help to him?"

Well, he took care of himself. He went up to a lady at a counter in a little store and asked if there was an AA meeting nearby. The lady said she didn't attend them, but she knew somebody who did, so she gave us that lady's phone number. We called her up and the lady said, "Well, there's no AA meeting now but you can come over to my house anytime [chuckles] you want." So we did. And we sat down and my friend and that lady proceeded to have a two-person AA meeting that it was my privilege to watch. And it was my opportunity to see that, you know, if you reach out to somebody in the middle of nowhere, you can feel totally at home.

Well, our story today is from the lady that I met that day. A lady who, for a long time I knew only by her first name, Gayle. And it's the story of how she, in the middle of nowhere, found a place that felt like home to her. We call it: *My Bag of Rocks*.

[Somber classical guitar music begins here, continuing under the narrative]

### **Gayle Keeney:**

In the 1960s I knew an old cowboy who had worked the high desert ranches, married a country women, raised four children, lost two good ranches of his own; one to drought and one to stupidity.

The stupidity was in the bottle he carried with him everywhere. And in the miles he drove from one rodeo to another along the dusty roads of Nevada, southern Idaho and on up into eastern Oregon.

He had a big knot on the back of his neck and I asked him about it one day.  
“How did you get that lump on our neck, Bud?”

“Broke it,” he said, “riding a bronc.”

“Oh my gosh,” I said. “Did you have to wear one of those head brace things?”

“Never went to a doc. Don’t trust them. Besides, there was a rodeo in Carson the next weekend.”

He didn’t ask for sympathy. He wasn’t looking for anyone to share his pain. I went back to helping him count cows.

What I was then is still called a “flatlander;” someone from west or south of the Sierra Nevada. Flatlanders may be streetwise and school smart but they don’t know how to drive a pickup truck up a mountainside, or how to build a fire in the open, or how to be alone, or keep it simple.

I had come here hoping to keep things simple and I had found instead that I carried the mess of my own life around with me wherever I went. Unlike Bud, I did not know how to accept my failures or cut my losses.

[Guitar music fades briefly; then resumes in the middle of the next sentence, in a faster, but still somber mode]

Then one warm, clear day in October, I was driving alone when I was stopped cold at the crest of a line of desert hills by the amazing view before me.

I thought of Bud, and of all the men like Bud, and the women, too, who made this harsh land their own. They rode out across the open country on horseback or in pickup trucks with stock trailers on behind and they stopped to “Howdy” the neighbors and trade tales about their days and nights of tending their herds and getting them to market and starting all over again in spring. All around them were these hills, mile after mile, riding like islands on an endless sea.

I saw my needy, cluttered life as a bag of rocks that day. One I could drop anytime I really wanted to. It was my bag of rocks. I knew I had come home and that all the important things, just those few things, would be fine.

I have never gone back to the flatlands. Not that I stopped missing the opera and symphony performances; the road shows of Broadway hits, the poetry readings in the dim-lit cafes, and all the football games. too. But that was the day I gladly traded them for the simple joy of following a jackrabbit trail across a desert flat. And for mountains bearing silent lakes, and lush meadows bright with wildflowers in July. And for people like Bud, who never questioned their own sense of place.

The last time I visited Bud it had been a while. He was shoeing his horses in a peaceful, high-country valley where he had his trailer and his rope corral in the trees, and his pickup nearby. He waved as I drove into his camp, came over and shook my hand like time had never mattered. [Tambourine joins guitar] “Catch up that gray-mare girl. I’ve got something I wanna show you. Up over the saw mill divide.”

[Music continues alone for a while, then fades away]

**Tony Kahn:**

That was today’s Morning Story from Gayle Keeney of Plains, Montana. We call it: *My Bag of Rocks*. [I] Want to thank Gayle very much for sharing that part of her life with us and there’s actually quite a few people we’d like to thank here today Gary, right? First of all I would like to thank you for being there to pick up all of the little stitches that I, I drop along the way, but who else do we got the thank?

**Gary Mott:**

Well, thank you too for being my inspiration [Tony laughs] and my guiding light.

**Tony Kahn:**

I’ve set the example of loss of sort-term memory for you really from the get go, haven’t I? [chuckles]

**Gary Mott:**

You know, it’s, it’s nothing we can’t fix in the edits should we say.

**Tony Kahn:**

Uh, fix what? [Tony and Gary chuckle]

**Gary Mott:**

But now that you mention, there is one other gentleman by the name of Reza Manzoori. Reza is an artist that we found – a guitarist that we found on the Creative Commons website. Three of his tunes that are on his album called *Restrung* we used as a music bed in the Gayle Keeney piece. Three of those tunes, *Union*, *Origins*, and *Wave* we want to thank Reza for providing the music for this piece. And also check out the Creative Commons website, it’s got some very nice tools for, for podcasters in particular.

[Tony chuckles]

**Tony Kahn:**

I’m, I’m laughing with relief because there’s so much great stuff out there that we actually can use and until all of the rules get worked out in the universe of

podcasting as to what's fair, it's wonderful that there is a resource like that there. And it, it's wonderful there's also somebody out there in the blogosphere who's willing to help us, too, by supporting *Morning Stories* and WGBH. We want to thank them, too, and that's <ipswitch.com> a leader in file transfer software. If you want more information about them just go to their website, <www.ipswitch.com>. That's I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H.

**Gary Mott:**

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

**Tony Kahn:**

And be sure to stick those things back in your ear again next Friday to hear our podcast. We'll be there; we hope you will be too. See you then.

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Lorena Knight