

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*Such a Good Boy: Hiteshkumar Hathi's life of privilege as well as persecution has given him an appreciation of life's real treasures and an eye for finding them in the most unlikely places.*

### **Tony Kahn:**

Hi everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*, from WGBH in Boston. And I'm here with Gary Mott in our Studio "O." "O" for outside, where we love to be on a beautiful spring day. I'm looking up at gorgeous blue skies and there's a prediction, a little bit later this afternoon, of hail. So, welcome to Boston. When it comes to the weather, there's absolutely nothing like it.

We had an incredible guy come to visit us not too long ago, named Hitesh Hathi. He is a world-class outsider. Hitesh was born in Africa, in Uganda, into a wealthy Indian family that had fled to Uganda and then fled from Uganda to a working-class community in the United States, in New York. And then he transplanted to Boston.

So, this man has been a prince, living in a very upper-caste Indian family; he's been a pauper, in a working-class community in upstate New York, and he came by a little while ago to talk about some of the differences that he sees between Indians and, and Americans. And like the best outsiders, he was able to talk about something that maybe a lot of us would just take for granted, because we see it all the time. So this is his story. We call it: *Such a Good Boy*.

### **Hitesh Hathi:**

[Sounds of people conversing in a restaurant]

There's a place to which I have been going, a little corner restaurant. Greek-American, very working class, where you get your pizza and your subs and so forth. One of those places you go when you're in graduate school. The food is good; it's cheap and the people are pleasant. I've been going there for years and years.

Then I started dating this tall white girl and I was not sure how they would take it. But, you know, it was the regular place, so Rachel and I went there. And the owner's mother, who was a friend of mine, so to speak, came over immediately when I was in the bathroom and said to Rachel, [whispers] "He's such a good boy." [then says louder] "He's such a good boy!" You know, there was none of that racism or anything that you were afraid of.

And I got to know this family very well. The father passed away; the son was the owner of the restaurant. And, I, I learned what extraordinary effort it took them to make the life they had. The son who owned this restaurant worked out, I mean he could give Arnold Schwarzenegger a run for his money. But, the mother told me, with the son there, that until he was twenty-five, he used to sleep in the bed with his parents, 'cause he couldn't sleep in his own bed by himself. And this gentleman is now married with children, very happy. This man had tried a bunch of different jobs; nothing had succeeded. And finally, the family pooled all of its resources, said you have so much experience in restaurants where he had worked as short-order cook and so forth; they opened this place.

This man would get up every morning and go to the Chelsea Market to buy his vegetables, show up, start preparing and leave at eleven at night. And he left home at five and he had two young children. And I said, "Do you get to see them very often?" Because the restaurant, this was a seven day a week affair. He said, "You know what we do? At 4:30 every morning, my wife and I wake up our children. And I spend—" [Hitesh's voice begins to waver] He spends half an hour, every day, reading the Bible with his children. He said, "That's the only time I have. I want to teach them something good, and I don't know anything good, but I know . . . that the Bible is good." And so he spends this half an hour. The children read the Bible, they go back to sleep; his wife wakes them and they go to school. How moving is that?"

[Indian classical music, sitar]

I know that life. That's how my parents worked, you know. And when I think of the American family, and the threat to the American family, I think of how hard people have to work to make their life. And how desperately they want to relate to their families, to give to their families and to other human beings. And what, at what cost they achieve that.

[Sitar continues]

We live so much surrounded by myths of the American dream and American success, but what extraordinary effort it took them to make the life they had. [chuckles softly] How admirable that is. "He's such a good boy." [whispers] "He's such a good boy."

[Music continues, then fades away.]

**Tony Kahn:**

That was today's Morning Story from Hitesh Hathi called: *Such a Good Boy*. And it was such a wonderful experience working with Hitesh. You met him, Gar, right?

**Gary Mott:**

I did and you know, listening to him talk, it, it was music. This guy comes from all these different places, Uganda, from an Indian family, educated here in the U.S. He had a touch of a Briton in his voice.

**Tony Kahn:**

Mmm, hmm, mmm, hmm.

**Gary Mott:**

And the guy was just so empathetic.

**Tony Kahn:**

Yeah. You know, sometimes people come in with an idea of the kind of story they want to tell on *Morning Stories*, especially if we do it as an interview. But every once in a while, a story just happens, because they, they connect with something that all of a sudden they're reliving again. And maybe even experiencing, really with their minds and hearts for the first time and that was that kind of story. Those, those are special stories and they're kind of at the heart for me of what *Morning Stories* is about, you know, those moments of significance where no matter how different we are from each other, we really are touching on something that anybody else can understand. And as an outsider, he sees some amazing things about the U.S. that I think, maybe, you have to leave the U.S. in order to be able to see

yourself, you know. As, I just came back from a trip and, and I always notice things about the States when I return that I completely take for granted, when I'm living here. Some of them good and some of them kind of sad. Like, you know what I'm struck by?

**Gary Mott:**

Running water? [laughs]

**Tony Kahn:**

That you can drink? [laughing] And bathe in also? I mean, what a luxury. Things like, the extent to which, Americans it seems to me, spend a lot of time alone. Yooou know, Americans sit alone in public places, they sit alone in parks, they drive alone in cars, much more than other people in other countries that I've seen. You know, we don't have that sense of family, for instance, that I, I think a lot of other people take for granted.

**Gary Mott:**

Many people define themselves by who's around them, who they spend time with.

**Tony Kahn:**

Mmm, hmm. For us it may be friends in work but not necessarily, Grandma and Grandpa.

**Gary Mott:**

Right.

**Tony Kahn:**

Hitesh told me a wonderful story, which, which we didn't include about the kind of life that he had in India. I said, well, he would occasionally go back to see his family that's still in India and it's apparently a very well to do family. And I would say, "Well, what's life like there?" He said, "Well" he said, "There are many castes, of course, but we're much more, mixed in than we are in the States." I said, "Really? I mean, this caste system, how can you not be living apart?" He said, "Well, we all live together in the same community, so for instance, a tailor, who comes to see us might be able to come into our house, but a shoemaker, might not. And we have to go to his shop. Now, a lot of rules about who can see whom, where. Nevertheless, in the course of a day, we see everybody and everybody sees us." And in the States," he says, "you live in separate communities." He said, "You have a working-class town and it's working-class people; you go to a condo and it's young couples. Couples hang out with couples; children aren't seen in restaurants where adults are."

**Gary Mott:**

Right. He did make the comment that wherever you go there's children. Children with grandparents.

**Tony Kahn:**

Right. I would love to be able to have more children around me as part of my daily life instead of having to act like one, far too often. [laughs]

**Gary Mott:**

It's, it's an education, believe me, it's...

**Tony Kahn:**

Yeah.

**Gary Mott:**

As someone with three young kids, at home, every day is, revelatory. You forget that you have needs, too.

**Tony Kahn:**

Right. Well, we're grateful for many things and, and as part of our podcast, we're especially grateful to "you know who." <[ipswitch.com](http://ipswitch.com)>, a leader in file transfer software. If you want to know more about 'em, just check out their website at <[www.ipswitch.com](http://www.ipswitch.com)> I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H.

**Gary Mott:**

And right after that, go to the *Morning Stories* website, <[wgbh.org/morningstories](http://wgbh.org/morningstories)> and send us an email, please, at <[morningstories@wgbh.org](mailto:morningstories@wgbh.org)>.

**Tony Kahn:**

You can stream the stories there. For those of you who are, like, to-ta-lly into podcasting . . .

**Gary Mott:**

[Mimics Tony, with a Valley Girl accent]

To-ta-lly.

**Tony Kahn:**

[Talking like a Valley Girl]

We'll like be back next Friday. See you then!

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Lynn Relyea