

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPTS

*Not A Mean Bone In His Soul: Anthony Williams, the first black member of Boston Ballet, talks about his life of dancing, on and off the stage.*

### **Tony Kahn:**

Hi everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*, from WGBH in Boston. We're sitting way outside our studios today, at the Harvard Business School Park. It is a beautiful spring day, getting close to the 90's and not a droplet of humidity, yet.

Today's Morning Story, is something we call: [Not a Mean Bone in His Soul](#). Our storyteller is Anthony Williams, who is the first black member of the Boston Ballet Company. Now, I'm guessing that you've already started to form an image in your mind of what it means to be a black dancer in a white company. Well, try to set those images aside, 'cause we're going to give you a different experience. Anthony Williams' experience. What it means for him to be crossing boundaries of race. It's a dance as he tells us, that just goes on and on and on.

### **Anthony Williams:**

[Sounds of footsteps on sidewalk]

I was raised in the projects, in Boston. We were a gang and we were a "band of brothers." We looked out for each other; we took care of each other. You know, maybe we only had enough to buy one Coke and we would share it. You know, take a swig, wipe off the top of the bottle, pass it around. If you were in the gang, you put the belt buckle on the side. If, if you had it in the front, you were a fag, if you had it on the side, you were a "Ruggie", you know, that's what we called it, a Ruggie.

[Sounds of pedestrians walking through wet city streets]

My father was an alcoholic, a drunk. You feel shame as a kid, when you have a father that you see inebriated a lot, you know, kinda crazy. I was around fourteen, then. We have nine kids; we're poor; he's not helping us and you know, I said, "I just wish he would drop dead."

[Sounds of footsteps on pavement; piano begins to play]

Going for the first time into that dance studio, really was enlightening, for me. I saw this other world that had been going on for centuries, that I had no clue. Just like a gated community, that somehow, some people get into, through - [laughs] through, luck or happenstance or -- And, and I was able to walk through those doors, 'cause I had talent. I said, "This is what I wanna do." So I remember, distinctly, that I was going to cross over and I was going to leave.

[Piano continues]

When you look at me, you know, some people don't think I'm Black. They think I'm sort of

Egyptian, Italian, Sicilian, Indian, Moroc--, you know, "What are you?"

I had a friend in the company that says, "Don't tell anyone you're colored. You won't make it unless you say you're white." So I said, "Okay, I'll pass for white." But, I was, I had an apartment, in the Fenway, and my father came around once and I wasn't there, and so, he says, "Where's my son? He's not here (Blah, blah, blah)." So they said, "Oh my God, you know, he's, his father's Black!"

[Piano gets louder, then softens, replaced by soft guitar music]

My father was a soldier during the War, stationed in Italy, came up through North Africa chasing the German Army northwards. At, at some point he ended up in Naples, where my mother lived and, and she says, the first time she ever saw a black person, was of these soldiers [chuckles] and they got together, they got married and I was born in Naples.

[Soft guitar music continues]

I don't know when it was, '72, when I went back to Naples and I was kind of shocked! My aunts and uncles and cousins there, they remembered me. They loved me. And they all talked about my father, how he was such a great guy and when, during the war, when they had no food and my father would come over with food and cigarettes and candy, 'cause that's, you know, he was the "Supply Officer". [laughs]

And I got this other side to him. They just remembered that he was always a very warm person, you know, not a mean bone in his soul. And loved my mother [soft piano begins] and loved his kids. Loved his kids.

[music]

Towards the end there, he had dementia, which means you're hallucinating a lot and you're in and out of consciousness. And and I remember he was brought to the Emergency Room and, and I came in and he was sort of out, out of it and I took his hand. And I remember the look that he gave me. It was just, you know, just melting love in his eyes and it was just really, we connected there and it was good, you know. It was good.

[Piano continues]

You know, it's amazing, I look in the mirror sometimes and I see my father. I feel Black, I feel Italian. My father was a great guy; my father was an alcoholic. When I was younger, you know, I said, "I just wish he would drop dead." I'm in my fifties now and I wish he were here. But I do believe in reincarnation; I believe we're going on. We all go on. [Anthony pauses] We all go ... on.

[Sounds of footsteps on pavement]

[Piano continues and fades]

**Tony Kahn:**

That was today's Morning Story, from Anthony Williams. We call it: *Not a Mean Bone in His Soul*. And we're grateful to Anthony for sharing so much of his life with us. And as always, we're grateful to Ipswitch, our sponsor for *Morning Stories*, here at WGBH, in Boston, at [<ipswitch.com>](http://ipswitch.com) that's I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H, dot com.

**Gary Mott:**

And if you can't get outside and enjoy the beautiful weather, wherever you are...

**Tony Kahn:**

Yeah! It could be evening in Tokyo.

**Gary Mott:**

Could be evening in Tokyo. Surf on over to [<wgbh.org/morningstories>](http://wgbh.org/morningstories) check out our website and all the stories that we've broadcast on [WGBH radio](http://wgbh.org) and...

**Tony Kahn:**

How many of 'em do we have now?

**Gary Mott:**

Like sixty-five, somethin' like that? Please send us an email, too and let us know what 'cha think at [<morningstories@wgbh.org>](mailto:morningstories@wgbh.org).

**Tony Kahn:**

In fact, we got some – some letters here.

**Gary Mott:**

People like John: "The highlight of my podcasting menu is *Morning Stories* podcast."

**Tony Kahn:**

A "Dear John" letter! [laughs]

**Gary Mott:**

A "Dear John" letter. Also we heard from Steven: "I just recently got into podcasting and I must say, that you guys do some amazing work. I'm purely a listener at this point and I love your show!" Thanks!

**Tony Kahn:**

Wow, thanks.

**Gary Mott:**

Thanks, Steven!

**Tony Kahn:**

We got a letter, which – my favorite kind – begins with a compliment and then ends with a

very gently put criticism. [Tony laughs] What does, what does he write? He says, he says: "Dear Tony Kahn, Gary Mott and whatever invisible horde makes *Morning Stories*, possible...."

Well, folks, this invisible horde –

**Gary Mott:**

You're lookin' at 'em.

**Tony Kahn:**

You're listening to them, right now! [laughing]

**Gary Mott:**

And listening to them.

**Tony Kahn:**

"I've been exploring the world of podcasting for several months," he writes now, "and I burn them onto CDs and I listen to them in my car on my way to and from work. Then –"

(This guy's like Johnny Appleseed!)

" – Then I hand them out to my wife and my son and point friends to stories that may be of particular interest to them! Finally, if I may say a few words of feedback first, **Keep the Introduction Short! Tony!** You have a slight tendency to draw out the introductions. I feel that I can tell you this because we're about the same age. [Tony laughs] Yes! I Googled you and as you can probably tell by this email I have somewhat the same tendency when I give a talk."

Well, you're being far too generous, David. Everything you say is to the point. Second he writes: "I thought Tony and Gary were wrong, in their post-story discussion about bits and bytes being transient compared to paper."

We talked about that after we had done Dan Watt's story about the, the Spanish Civil War [[I Got Her Back-5/27/2005](#)]. He says: "In fact, I think it's much easier to save electronic forms of communication, than paper forms. I have email going back fifteen years and never throw any email away, anymore."

Listen David, whether or not emails last forever, that's the way we really hear from you guys, so both for, for praise and for constructive criticism, make sure you keep the email coming to [<morningstories@wgbh.org>](mailto:morningstories@wgbh.org).

**Gary Mott:**

Tony, we'll be back, uh when? Next week?

**Tony Mott:**

Yeah. No matter whether or not we hear from you, you'll be hearing from us, next Thursday

or Friday, with our next Morning Story, so keep plugged in. We'll be there, hope you'll be there, too. Bye bye.

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Lynn Relyea