

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

***U Turn in the Sand:** AIDS nurse and author Richard Ferri meets the man he fears most on the beaches of Cape Cod, Massachusetts*

Tony Kahn:

Hi everybody. This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*, for WGBH in Boston. In our Morning Stories, you may have noticed, if you've been listening the last few months, we talk a lot about seashores. Maybe it's because it's the one place that people go to get away from it all, a million miles away from the office or, or from everyday life at home. For some though, the beach is actually the office, in a way. Richard Ferri, who's worked with us before, is an AIDS nurse in Cape Cod, and for him, the many beaches there are places where he often runs into some of his clients when they're on a walk, [peaceful ocean sounds] enjoying the energy that their illness hasn't robbed them of. As Richard tells us in today's WGBH Morning Story, which we call *U Turn in the Sand*, some of these people on the beach are a lot easier to run into than others.

Richard Ferri:

I was walking along the beach outside my Cape Cod home when I saw Tim. He was gaunt, [cough in background] his gait unsteady, the unmistakable look of a man with full-blown AIDS. Tim said he had read an article I had recently written about what it was like to be an AIDS nurse. "Ah," he slurred, his speech already affected by the disease, "a wounded healer." I had written that I had been diagnosed as HIV-positive for eight years myself. "A wounded healer," he repeated, "the best kind." Then he walked away, stumbling down the beach, poking holes in the sky with an unlit cigarette in his hand.

Soon after, my own symptoms started to appear. I developed lesions in my mouth that made swallowing sheer agony. I lost weight. And then – I lost face. I remember the look in my pharmacist's eyes the first time I handed him my 'scripts. I had been sending him HIV patients for years, and now, the name on the prescription was mine.

[Sounds of beach, a small plane passing overhead]

When my energy let me, I still found comfort walking the beach, 'til I spotted Tim again. He looked even worse. He was thinner, more disheveled, and staggering like a drunk. "Damn him," I thought, "for succumbing to this virus, for being such a loser. Damn him for crossing my path in the first place." I had been symptom-free for eight years, 'til the day I first saw him here. Had he been responsible for my condition? I turned my back and rushed away, certain he hadn't seen me, or would ever know I had been there.

[footsteps in the sand, walking away]

That night, I couldn't sleep. Of all the symptoms of this disease, the worst had been the latest, my U-turn in the sand. I had let the fear the disease caused, and the hate I had for it, poison my soul.

The next time I saw Tim, I smiled. I walked toward him, ready to help, and have him help me . . . cross the sand.

[Sounds of footsteps in the sand; waves crashing on beach]

Tony Kahn:

That's Richard Ferri's WGBH morning story for today, *U Turn in the Sand*. I'm here with my right-hand man, Gary Mott. We could also have called this story, I suppose, the, the term that Richard himself uses, which is *A Wounded Healer*.

Gary Mott:

We all need people. We all need someone, and particularly, I imagine, for someone with AIDS, it can be so terribly isolating. That can kill you as much as the illness can.

Tony Kahn:

Fear isolates us. But the kinds of fears that we tend to run away from the most, are the fears that maybe are things that are closest to us that we don't want to look at. It's only until Richard himself becomes ill, that he begins to look at somebody else with the illness as something he wants to run away from. As long as he is relatively healthy, he can be a giver. But, how hard it is to give when you're afraid of that very thing yourself. I think Richard was very honest and very courageous in that he admitted to himself that he was panicked, that he was ashamed of his panic, but he was panicked first. It's scary. You've just got to admit that. Unless, until you admit the fear, you may not be able to do the next best, good thing.

You know, there's another message in this for me that, it's a, it's a hard lesson, but I think it's true that you can't really help somebody without also letting them help you.

You know, we assume that somehow in a world that's divided between those who have and those who, who have not, that the "haves" should give to that "have-nots" and that that should be what makes them feel good, and that's what also makes the "have-nots" feel good. But frankly, if a "have-not" can't give something back to the "have," and if the person who has something, can't really feel like an equal to the other person by being helped by them, then it's not a fair

exchange. It's not as close as it could be. We all want to help; we all want to be helped. And sometimes it takes some pretty extreme experiences before we understand that. But I think that that's something that Richard does touch on in the story and that's what makes him such a, such a fine writer, a writer of many kinds, by the way. He does a journal about AIDS that you can find on line....

Gary Mott:

Yeah, <numedx.com>.

Tony Kahn:

And he also just came out with a novel recently, something called *Confessions of a Male Nurse*.

Gary Mott:

Confessions of a Male Nurse. What I hear is a dark, comic, novel.

Tony Kahn:

And hopefully, we'll also be hearing more from him on, on another *Morning Stories* to come. In the meantime, speaking about help, we want to acknowledge the help that we get every single week from Ipswitch, a leader in file transfer software. They make a huge difference to us, and hopefully, it's an equal relationship, in that we're giving something back to them, but in any event, guys, thanks a lot.

Gary Mott:

And our website is <wgbh.org/morningstories>. All of our stories that we've broadcast on WGBH radio are there, and <morningstories@wgbh.org> is our email address.

Tony Kahn:

Not to mention at iTunes, under the podcast "new" section, look for *Morning Stories* there, and if you can't find it, just do a search in "podcasts, new" for either WGBH or *Morning Stories*, and baboom, there we'll be waiting for you.

[In a scary voice] You cannot avoid us. We will be back to haunt you next Friday.

Gary Mott:

And, we will get to you, next Friday.

Tony Kahn:

[Chuckles] Take care. Bye.

[End of recording]

Transcribed by Sue MacLeod