

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

You Don't Look Jewish: Tony Kahn goes trolling with his tape recorder on the sidewalks of Provincetown, Massachusetts and finds the mother of all Morning Stories. Also, a visit with Dan Klass of *The Bitterest Pill* podcast.

TONY KAHN:

Hi, everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. And we're sitting right underneath two guys hammering furiously on a new building for the Harvard Business School. We thought this would be a quiet location, but we'll, we'll deal with that. It's a nice human sound; it's the sound of industry. So let's say we're from Studio C today, "C" for the Crypt of Capitalism here in Boston, Massachusetts.

People often ask me, "How do you decide on what is going to be a Morning Story?" Well, I think it's time we finally told you the secret. Our process is pure serendipity. This all began about three years ago during a vacation that I was taking on Cape Cod when I decided to get a small tape recorder, a little bridge table, a couple of chairs and an umbrella, and a hand-lettered sign saying, "What's your story?" And sit in three public places in the area and see who came by. My idea was that everybody's got a story to tell, and if there's somebody there who really seems interested in listening, well that story is going to just take shape.

I remember the first day that I sat there, I was outside the library in Provincetown, Massachusetts and I saw all these people go by. Bikers, tourists, day-trippers, gay couples, skateboarders, world-famous artists, dogs with tattoos! How was I gonna stop them? Who was gonna come by? What was I gonna say? Would they like me?!

Well, any doubt I had that people didn't have stories to tell me was completely blown out of the water by the very first person who came by. She was a woman in her late sixties, I would guess, walking on the other side of the street. We caught each other's eye and she toddled right over. And I sat there in awe as she spilled out story after story about her life right there on the bridge table! So today, on, on the anniversary of that day (as far as I can tell), and, and as we near the first anniversary of this podcast I'd like to offer you just a few selections from that raw tape that I recorded that day with that wonderful woman.

My first conversation, the "Mother of all Morning Stories" something we call, *You Don't Look Jewish!*

WOMAN:

I think it's nice, the name Tony!

TONY KAHN:

Yeah?

WOMAN:

It's different, for a Jewish boy to have it.

TONY KAHN:

Now you looked at me, you thought "Jewish" right away, right?

WOMAN:

By your last name. But then again you can't tell, because, you know, the Jews changed their names a lot, especially during the Hell-o-caust in Germany. People – a lot of 'em – didn't want to tell people they were from Germany.

TONY KAHN:

You knew people who had been through that?

WOMAN:

Oh, right! I used to own a beauty salon at Sidney Hill Country Club. It's a Jewish club! I was the only Gentile that was, had a full membership there! From that I joined Histadrut, which is the labor movement of Israel, and then I joined the American Jewish Congress. And then my daughter married a Jewish boy, and she converted! I have two Jewish grandchildren. I love the Jewish religion; that was one of my main reasons why I went to Israel. I wanted to see where it all started.

TONY KAHN:

Did you convert, yourself?

WOMAN:

No I didn't. I'm Catholic. I've strong feelings towards my faith. But if it wasn't for the Jews we wouldn't have the Ten Commandments. "The Jews are my chosen people." God the Father said that. So if He could choose them, why can't I choose them?

TONY KAHN:

What do you think about people who say, "This is what the Bible says and this is exactly what it means. This is the way you should feel about gays; this is the way you should feel about people who do one thing or another."

WOMAN:

I believe the true gay was born that way! Just like a mor-pho-dite who is part male, part female. Were they made that way? Or do they make themselves that way?

TONY KAHN:

How did you grow up to be such an accepting person?

WOMAN:

Well, I studied the life of Jesus. He was kind, "Love your neighbor as yourself;" "Be forgiving;" and most of all "Love everybody if you possibly can." And I'm a senator for the Silver-haired Legislature. I, I'm an advocate for the Seniors. For instance, I got the

Diabetes Bill put through. Now diabetics can get free needles, free strips, and a free machine to test their blood.

TONY KAHN:

So if you were to, to die tomorrow, would you feel that you'd pretty much done everything you'd wanted to do, or would there be something still you, you regret, that you hadn't gotten around to saying or doing?

WOMAN:

Well, I've come close to death, but I prayed very hard to get back my health, which I did. God saved me for a reason. And I'm down P-Town now, and I'm looking around to see how I can kind of help in counseling or helping at -- . I am a minister of the Holy Eucharist in the Catholic Church, and we pray over people that are dying, or to heal them, or to give them self-confidence. And prayer can overcome an awful lot! I noticed when I lived in Israel, at the Wailing Wall, people went there every hour on the hour – the same person just praying in that Wailing Wall. And Moslems did too, in the mosque.

TONY KAHN:

I heard someone say once, "All prayers are answered, usually with 'no.' "

WOMAN:

[Chuckles] That's not true. But you have -- if you really concentrate on it; you meditate on it, and turn yourself over. If you don't believe in God, but the "higher power" or whatever, you'll see your life turn around.

TONY KAHN:

Was there any big turning point in your life?

WOMAN:

Yes, and if I told you, you may say I'm crazy. But I was in my business, and I remember doing my work at my desk and a strange voice came to me and it said to me, "Put your work down! This part of your life has ended!" And the second time was when I was in the hospital having two tumors removed from my lung. Again, I saw His image, and He said, "Give this message to My people!" And He repeated, "Give this message to My people!" and I was looking at him saying, "What? What?" And then all of a sudden He was gone. And then a breeze came up – a big breeze. And it said to me, "The word! The word!" Not "thu," "The."

So I called my priest up the next day. I said, it's overwhelming, but this is the second time that I heard that voice! Well, he says, He wants you to go out and talk to people (like I'm talking today to you, Tony) and say, "There is another world!"

TONY KAHN:

Does that make it easier to live with the loss of the people that you love?

WOMAN:

Especially when I lost my mother. I had a deep love for her and she died in her middle fifties.

TONY KAHN:
Hmm!

WOMAN:
And I thought I would never get over that death. But this isn't final. This is only the beginning.

TONY KAHN:
In the biggest sense, what is your story?

WOMAN:
I got the message. [laughs] I tell you. Being at peace.

TONY KAHN:
Thank you so much.

WOMAN:
Okay, Tony! Sei gesund! Sei gesund! [Yiddish phrase meaning Be Well]

TONY KAHN:
You too!

There we have it: What I guess you could call “The Mother of All Morning Stories.” I must've interviewed maybe, forty people that summer, three different locations – in the little one and only convenience store in Truro, Massachusetts called “Jams,” at a flea market in Wellfleet, and outside the library in Provincetown. And I was never disappointed. People always had something amazing to say about themselves. I was talking to this young lady, must have been about, oh, fourteen or fifteen years old; her mother dropped her off and gave her ten minutes to, to just be interviewed. And she started telling me about – you know, all the problems that she had at that age. How nobody understood her; nobody liked her. I, I sort of wanted to encourage her that this wasn't always going to be the case, that she would grow out of this, and so I, I asked her, I said, “You know things are bad now, but if there was any one thing you could think of that would make your life maybe just a little bit better right now, what would it be?” And so she looks at me without a moment's hesitation. She says, “Twenty minutes in another body!”

GARY MOTT: [Taking a deep breath] Ah, yes, that's a ---

TONY KAHN:
How do you like that?!

TONY KAHN:

– that’s adolescence.

GARY MOTT:

That’s a refrain that I think I’ve heard before, but not quite in that way. You know? Well, in thinking about the, the P-Town lady,

TONY KAHN:

Yeah . . .

GARY MOTT:

I think that the one line that struck me, coming out of her story, “Jesus chose the Jews. Why can’t I?” Anyway –

TONY KAHN:

Anyway, we had a, a visit recently with a – well, you can’t call him the “father of podcasting,” but I think you can call him the “stay-at-home father of podcasting” [laughs]. His name is Dan Klass. He’s the host of a podcast called *Bitterest Pill*. And he’s an actor, which means that 98% of his time is at home, waiting to get a call to go to work and audition. And that’s where we caught Dan just the other day, at home.

[Dan is on a phone line]

DAN KLASS:

The driving is an hour and fifteen minutes one way, and then an hour and fifteen minutes the other day, and this is only to go, you know, twenty miles. And then the audition’s, you know, two seconds!

TONY KAHN:

So work often involves driving incredibly long times to cover not necessarily long distances, so that in between you can spend seconds to try to earn enough to last you the whole year. Dan, my question for you is, “How come you’re not nuts?”

[Both men laugh.]

DAN KLASS:

I am nuts! But also – I’m in, you know, I’m in a unique position in that my wife works. You know, we’re not in peril.

TONY KAHN:

Can I ask you a little bit about you and podcasting?

DAN KLASS:

Who, who am I to deny you, Tony?

TONY KAHN:

You’re an estimable figure in the middle-aged phenomenon of podcasting!

DAN KLASS:
Is podcasting already middle-aged?

TONY KAHN:
Internet time, it's like dog years!

DAN KLASS:
We've been at this for a long time now, and, and we haven't even come up on a year!

TONY KAHN:
Tell me why it feels like a long time to you.

DAN KLASS:
I think because, you know, it keeps changing! But maybe that's how it feels when you're producing and editing and hosting and writing and doing everything yourself. And my kitchen is under reconstruction –

TONY KAHN:
That'll kill you.

DAN KLASS:
– and my kids are home. Upheaval! I mean, I still love it. But in, in a lot of show business, the best thing to do is to kind of pick a persona, or a shtick, or whatever and, and then stick with it. And I'm still tryin' to operate, and perhaps naively, as a person instead of a brand.

TOULOUSE:
[Young child's voice babbles]

DAN KLASS:
It's my daughter Toulouse . She's brought her piggy bank in to see me. [addressing child:] That's right! The coins go right in there!

I had a little TV show on for her. But they're between programs. Where'd she go? Hmm – I lost her! Wow! Where'd she go? We have a 200 square foot house and I can't find my daughter.

[Toulouse exclaims]

DAN KLASS:
Oh, there she is!

TOULOUSE:
[Inaudible: Watch me?]

DAN KLASS:
She's wearing a cape now.

TONY KAHN:
Ooh!

TOULOUSE:
I got my cape.

DAN KLASS:
You've got your cape? You look absolutely ravishing!

She's a superhero. Devastating beauty. She wields it like a Samurai sword. [Tony and Dan laugh] Yeah, I'm really nutty about my kids.

TONY KAHN:
That's one of the great things about your podcast! You are a dad who shows it!

DAN KLASS:
You bring up such a great point about what it is we're trying to do. Am I trying to create this perfect-sounding quote-unquote "broadcast style" thing, or am I just trying to be honest, like how I'm reacting to my kids that second, or whatever. Do I want to have more of a guarantee that people are gonna like the show, or more of a guarantee that it's just off the cuff? You get that one email, you know, where a person says, "I don't know, man, you're kinda slippin.'" [chuckles] And it's – oh, like just now I kind of chuckled? They make fun of me for chuckling like that. [Tony laughs] So now, because I'm a baby, I'm actually aware of when I do that! It's ridiculous!

TONY KAHN:
Well, there you go! Now, see, I –

DAN KLASS:
I'm a mess!

TONY KAHN:
[In amiable tone] You are a mess. Maybe I should worry more. Are you about to jump?

DAN KLASS:
Yeah.

TONY KAHN:
Really?

DAN KLASS:
No.

TONY KAHN:

Okay. I'm just checking.

DAN KLASS:

I may have a breakdown, but I won't jump. You know, you agonize over it; you may be involved in this great new thing – you better now lose any footing! Better now lose any audience members. You better not, better not [la-la-la-la] – uhhh! It drives you nutty!

TONY KAHN:

At the same time, iTunes is giving us all a boost, and *The New York Times* zeros in on you as an important personality. Now, does that make a difference?

DAN KLASS:

Part of me loves it. 'Cause we're not getting paid, and we're not doing this and we're not doing that. But it creates expectation. Because I always feel like I have to steal the time to do the show, I have to be really kind of clearheaded when I sit down to do the show? That, that stuff becomes kind of a distraction and kind of just – I don't know – overwhelming.

TOULOUSE:

“Daddy! Look at me!”

TONY KAHN:

You got an adorable daughter.

TOULOUSE:

[Inaudible: draw with me?]

DAN KLASS:

I got to answer a question. Hold on. “Sweetie pie, what did you just say, you want to draw?”

TOULOUSE:

You wan' choo-choo?

DAN KLASS:

Oh, you want to play with your choo-choo? You want to put the track together?

TOULOUSE:

Yes!

DAN KLASS:

Let's put the track together! All right. Tony, while we talk, I'm going to put a track together. You know, we get caught up in the future of podcasting.

TONY KAHN:

Hmm mm.

DAN KLASS:

I mean, the truth is – and, and I probably speak for most podcasters – I’m still kind of thrilled and humbled by the fact that people go out of their way to listen to the show. I mean, I never lose sight of that. Or I try. I shouldn’t say “never.” I try. You know, I just remember so vividly how excited I was to get my first email. I got one pretty early on from Germany. And it was just mind-blowing! You know. That was the power of podcasting, and and it’s still the power of podcasting. Some, you know, knucklehead like me can sit in his backroom with a microphone and suddenly, “Yeah, you’ve got little tentacle that goes from you know your hard drive all the way across the country, and across the ocean, and all through Europe to Germany! And then another one that goes to the Philippines, and another one that goes to Australia. And yeah! It’s just – I don’t know – it’s kinda mind-boggling, Tony, don’t you think?”

TONY KAHN:

Dan Klass, host of *The Bitterest Pill*, the little podcast that could. We’re grateful to Dan, as we are to Ipswitch, our sponsor for lo, these many internet weeks! Check ‘em out at <ipswitch.com> I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H. Right, Gar?

GARY MOTT:

Absolutely. And we have a website too: <wgbh.org/morningstories> and feel free to send us an email while you’re there: <morningstories@wgbh.org>.

TONY KAHN:

See you next week.

[End of Recording]

Notes from transcriber:

It would be fun for you to replay this one on the next anniversary, interviewing Toulouse and her father again.

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