

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*A Visit to the Village of New York City: Tony Kahn visits New York City within days of the attack of September 11, 2001 and listens to some of the stories of its survivors.*

### **Tony Kahn:**

Hi everybody! This is Tony Kahn the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. Today we're coming to you from our infamous Studio "P" for parking lot right across the street from our main studios. We're bringing you Part Two of our coverage of the events of September 11, 2001. Last week if you recall we heard from a woman named Laura Brody, what that day was like for her and how it changed her life.

Today we'd like to tell you a story told in many voices, recorded just a few days after that event in New York City itself. At the time I was working for a program called *The Savvy Traveler*, a Public Radio Program. They asked me to go to the city a few days after September 11th and just look around and bring back whatever impressions I could record, so I called up my friend Mark Grashow, who lives in Brooklyn, asked him if I could go see Ground Zero with him and spend the day hearing the stories people that day wanted to tell us. *A Visit to the Village of New York City*: recorded just a few days after the events of September 11, 2001.

### **Tony Kahn:**

[Sounds of trains] We got up at seven and armed with day passes, rode the "F" train to Manhattan, the "A" train to the site of the attack for a brief look, the shuttle to Times Square and a cross-town bus to the 38th Street pier in time to catch the 11:00 Circle Line Tour, back in business, and offering its newly popular two-hour tour of southern Manhattan three times a day. Over the years a microphone has been my way of getting close to strangers fast, but today just about everybody on board [sounds of peoples voices] seemed eager to talk without prompting, about where they'd been these past two weeks and what had brought them here.

[Sound of cruise boat and continues under the narrative]

### **Oscar Donez:**

I got an assignment to do a report on . . . [continues under Tony]

### **Tony Kahn:**

Oscar Donez is a documentary film director from Switzerland.

### **Tour guide talking to passengers:**

I was talking to a person yesterday, who told me that she thought that the American flag was not the right symbol for this moment because there were sixty-two different

nationalities represented among the people unaccounted for. Uhhh, I don't know, maybe the globe, the planet Earth would be at best a better picture.

I have a daughter, a ten-year-old daughter, and we've been here together in New York City this year in July and three years ago. And we had taken pictures of my wife and my daughter standing in front of the World Trade Center.

**Announcer on boat tour:**

Really the tallest building in mid-town, that small, dark, sleek, glass building right behind the U.N.- that's developer Donald Trump's latest project; it's called the Trump World Tower. And that building... [continues under the following narrative].

**Tony Kahn:**

On the other side of the boat I heard young voices speaking in Italian, a school group of some kind; like teenagers everywhere they sought their own company in groups of five or six. Like teenagers they also look periodically and gratefully toward two chaperones - a handsome middle-aged American man and a younger animated woman from Italy.

[Sound of cruise boat and tour guide talking continue under the narrative]

**Doug Sassi:**

My name is Doug Sassi, I'm from Severance School. Severance School has had an Italian exchange since 1987. What we do is go there in February and each of my students lives with a host family and goes to their school and of course we take side trips to Florence, Rome and Venice and other places. Then they come here in September and again, live with host families, go to school and I take them on side trips to Baltimore, Washington and of course, we come to, to New York. This year they landed on September 10th.

**Woman from Italy:**

Nice to meet you. We couldn't believe it. It seemed one of those bad disaster movies and I still can't believe it, you know; I keep shivering when I watch the play, the site I mean. At first the kids - they didn't even imagine that so many people were inside the buildings. We saw out in the streets the photographs of the people, of the missing people, with their age, name, and this kind of things and the kids read, you know, all the - the lines and they were very surprised because when you see that guy, his face, his name, his age, that he was married, he had children [inaudible] it's much different, you know, and now the kids are realizing everything. The parents were really worried; they wanted us back on the first available flight, you know.

[Sounds of passengers conversing]

**Tony Kahn:**

The Circle Line tour guide, Chris Mason, a native New Yorker was taking a break at the midpoint of the trip and had a few minutes to talk before the ship completed the turn

that brought Manhattan to our port side and pointed us back to the pier.

I would imagine you were back on duty as soon as you reopened, right?

**Chris Mason:**

Yeah, I was back on duty, umm, but I mean, yeah, management came down and said, "Stay away from the morbid side of the story; don't talk about so much devastation. Try to, you know, put a, as positive a spin as you can on it.

**Tony Kahn:**

What was that first day like, for you?

**Chris Mason:**

I've been doing this job for fifteen years, you know, and the first time I saw it, it was just like devastating, I was like tearing up every two minutes; I could hardly do the trip and I still do it sometimes when I see the, you know, that skyline. For me it was just a different cruise because my cruise is usually light-hearted, a lot of silly stupid jokes, which I think I, I tossed out a couple earlier which I might throw a few more in.

**Tony Kahn:**

What's a joke you think you'd probably be able to get away with today?

**Chris Mason:**

Well I mentioned: If you park your car illegally they bring it to this pier, and if you don't pay your fine they push your car into the river, which of course they don't do but people seem to get a kick out of that one. When Bush used to fly into town, you know, I'd throw a crack about his daughters, you know, looking for fake ID, that kind of stuff. [chuckles] Now that's out of my résumé for a while. Probably forever. How's the city surviving, where were you, how are New Yorkers handling it, um, those are the basic standard questions and...

**Tony Kahn:**

What do you think is behind those questions?

**Chris Mason:**

That's a good question; umm, I think maybe they want to know if the city's gonna rebound from this? What do you think?

[Sound of people conversing]

**Tony Kahn:**

As we were leaving the boat, I ran into a couples' therapist named Antra Borofsky from near my own home. After two weeks of trying to get to the city she'd found enough time free from work and family to drive in that day. Her job, she said, was helping

people learn to listen more compassionately. She realized the events of September the eleventh that had made everyone that day into a New Yorker, was, if not the single greatest outpouring of compassion in American history, then the greatest she was ever likely to see.

**Antra Borofsky:**

I mean I feel like this is an, an extraordinary moment in time where everyone is opening in them to what is most important in their lives, I mean everyone is, is reaching for the people that they love; I'm hoping people are forgiving each other. It, it's so significant for our world that I felt like I really needed to learn everything that I could, and how to help.

[Sound of cruise boat continues under the narrative]

**Tony Kahn:**

As we headed back to the pier I spent the last few minutes sitting with Mark.

**Mark Grashow:**

I don't think we understand what people's lives are in, in Palestine; I don't think we understand what people's lives are in Egypt and Afghanistan. I think unless we, we have some compassion for how we all live on this planet and understand that we all want our families to survive, to eat, to be healthy and unless we're all somehow getting that, that these things will continue to occur. This is certainly the biggest lesson we've ever seen in our history, I think, certainly on our own territory and I think when we hear of the expression "collateral damage" it'll never be the same again.

**Tony Kahn:**

Makes me think of that cover of *The New Yorker* that used to be The New Yorker's view of the rest of the world. You know?

**Mark Grashow:**

Oh, right.

**Tony Kahn:**

It would have to be seriously edited now, wouldn't it?

**Mark Grashow:**

[Chuckles] Yeah, I think so.

[Sound of a cruise boat and a voice saying: "Oh, my God! Oh, my God.]

**Tony Kahn:**

Early that morning as Mark and I had stood looking at the debris field of the Trade Towers, we both talked about our reluctance to be there.

[Sound of construction machinery and continues under the narrative]

**Mark Grashow:**

I think part of the, you know, you feel that there's a need that you have to come down and see this, so you can tell all the people what it's like, what you've seen, and there's part of you that doesn't want to see it at all. It doesn't want another one of these images to crowd your memory. When you go to sleep at night, close your eyes, it's what you picture – so many, too many pictures, really.

**Tony Kahn:**

I'd watched the towers burn and fall on television, far too many times, to make sense of what I was seeing face to face. The one unmediated view that Mark had had of the violence of September the 11th had been enough. He'd walked into the street near his home in Brooklyn and looked up; there were the Trade Towers, impossibly, burning and heaving black smoke, totally silent in a clear blue sky. All he could think of was the people surely dying at that moment so helplessly far away.

Looking that morning at the twelve-story pile of what had once been 220 separate floors, my impression was that it looked like every unearthly thing it had been called. A huge amorphous cancer cell picked at by giant cranes, a black hole that had turned everything within it featureless and flat and from which nothing would ever emerge. In its effect on passers-by, each of them rendered solemn and silent, it was clearly one thing only, the planet's biggest and freshest mass tomb. Now at the pier looking south I did what I'd seen everyone do that morning; I looked at where the towers had once stood, first down at the ground and then up. You could still see the towers there of course, no longer in space but in time, marking the divide between a "before" and an "after" for New York, America and the planet. The "before" is a lot easier to see; the "after" is still shaping up. Beyond the towers far more clearly than most Americans have ever seen it and far closer, was the rest of the world.

[Sound of cruise boat]

**Chris Mason:**

I want to thank you for takin', comin' out and takin' this trip today and enjoy your stay here in New York City and as I said, take advantage of all there is to do and there is still a lot to do. Good luck and have a good day.

[Sounds of light traffic]

**Tony Kahn:**

That was today's *Morning Story* Part II of our coverage of September 11, 2001: *A Visit to the Village of New York City*. I'm here with Gary Mott; not only is this the anniversary of what happened to New York, it's going to be the anniversary of what also happened to New Orleans.

**Gary Mott:**

Thinking about how I was going to speak to my children about this, just why – the why of it all. I just told them, you know there's a lot of things in life that we can't understand.

**Tony Kahn:**

Your kids and my kid are going to be growing up in a world where they're going to have a lot more information, I hope, than, than we ever did and a lot more of the sounds of individual voices responding to catastrophes and telling their story than we ever heard. A wonderful example, (I just heard today about this) a guy was telling me that he saw on the web a piece of footage, a home video that was shot by some guy, of a cop who was stopping a looter in New Orleans. The looter was holding up a piece of clothing and the cop came on this person and looked at that person, and he said, “Ya know, I don't think that shirt's your color.” And the guy looked right back at the cop, put down the shirt and walked away. That story lingers in the middle of a crisis; a million things are happening that are very human and how we understand them and what ideas they give us, have an awful lot to do what the outcome is going to be – good or bad.

**Gary Mott:**

It's a new media world that we live in and...

**Tony Kahn:**

And it al – it also means that nobody owns the story, right? I mean...

**Gary Mott:**

Absolutely!

**Tony Kahn:**

Heck, if this technology is going to give us a chance to hear all of those different points of view that go together to making up the world we live in then probably the better. Meanwhile we'd like to express our gratitude to Ipswitch, our sponsor – a leader in file transfer software. You can get to their website at < ipswitch.com >. That's I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H.

**Gary Mott:**

And as we always say please go to the WGBH *Morning Stories* website at <wgbh.org/morningstories> and send us an email; let us know what you think at <morningstories@wgbh.org>.

**Tony Kahn:**

See you next week.

[End of recording]

**Transcribed by: Lynn Relyea**