

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Making It Out Alive: Mark Grashow, a high school teacher for thirty years, talks out of class about some amazing students who had what it takes to survive adolescence. Also, a clip from Swedish National Public Radio's recent story on podcasting.

Tony Kahn:

Hi everybody. This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. Our regular listeners may be familiar by now with the name Mark Grashow. This man goes everywhere – Fiji, India, most recently, Zimbabwe. He finds stories in the most unlikely places. Today, he's going to take us back, some of us way back, to the dark and dangerous headwaters of the American high school. Mark taught high school for thirty years, just retired, and along the way, he got to know some amazing kids as they struggled to survive their own teenage years. So I asked him to come in with some stories about some of the kids that he met in those classrooms and hallways of the last thirty years, and I put them together into a single walk down the hallways of an average high school. We call his Morning Story *Making It Out Alive*.

[Skateboarding sounds]

Mark Grashow:

Iggy Paris loves to skateboard. He can do three-sixties, one foot ollies and backside lip glides. But something strange started to happen when he fell. He got lots of black and blue marks that did not go away. He showed them to his mom, who got concerned, and took him to a doctor. They told him that he had something called leukemia. Iggy had treatment for three months. At first he just felt weak and nauseous. And then all his hair fell out. But slowly, Iggy got better and his strength returned. [sounds of school hallway] He was nervous about going back to school without hair. He thought the kids would laugh at him. So his mom got him a wool cap that Iggy would pull down over his ears.

[School bell]

On his first day back at school, the principal walked him back to his class. Iggy took one last big breath before pushing the classroom door open. He could hardly believe what he saw. Every boy in the class and two of the girls had shaved off all their hair – even Mr. Peterson. Iggy smiled the biggest smile of his life, and then with a big bow and a sweep of his arm, he took off his cap.

[Bell and hallway sounds]

Jason Swann looks pretty ordinary. His nose is of average size. He wears baggy jeans and his cap always sits backwards on his head. His family just moved from California and rented the big Noonan house, up on the hill. At the end of his second day, Jason

headed for the pool. He asked the coach if he could try out. The team captain showed him where to change. Jason took off his shirt, folded his pants carefully on the bench, and then, took off his leg. The coach pretended not to notice. The rest of the team did nothing but notice. By the time Jason made his way to the starting blocks, there wasn't a swimmer left in the pool. Jason steadied himself on the block, the whistle blew, and he was off. [pool deck sounds] Jason was fast, very fast. Jason and the team worked hard together and the friendships came easily. He helped other kids with their strokes and they helped him develop a unique racing dive. By February, a strange thing happened; the team forgot about his leg. The other teams took a little longer.

[Bell and hallway sounds]

Cici Bimbolini is fat and ugly and she's my best friend. She knows the best games, the scariest stories, how to whistle, how to keep secrets, how to do real magic, and how to give a hug. I used to be afraid that people would hurt her feelings and make fun of her size. But then, one day, we were walking down the street and a stranger approached. [sounds of traffic passing] He asked Cici how she got like that. Cici looked at herself up and down and then at him. "Just lucky, I guess," she replied. I love Cici Bimbolini.

[Traffic sounds and footsteps]

Melvin Mook knows he's doing something wrong, but he doesn't know what it is. Kids keep bumping into him in the halls, and knocking his books to the ground. In classrooms, they think it's fun to bounce chalk, gum, and wads of paper off the back of his head. And in the bathroom, he finds his name scribbled on the walls with nasty comments written underneath. He doesn't understand it, and he can't make it stop. He thinks it might be because his body is soft, or the pimples he has on his face. But maybe it's because he has trouble running, or catching a ball. But whatever it is, Melvin can't seem to make a friend. There seems to be a language of friendship he doesn't speak, rules he doesn't understand. His parents signed him up for a karate class to toughen him up, but after the third lesson, they let him quit, after they found him crying in the locker room. So, for the thousandth time, Melvin walks home alone. Maybe tomorrow, will be different and he will make a friend. [sounds of skateboards] Or maybe tomorrow, he'll start to think about how to get even.

Tony Kahn:

Today's Morning Story from Mark Grashow, *Making It out Alive*. Gary Mott ...

Gary Mott:

I harken back to my high school days. And I was cool by the transitive property.

Tony Kahn:

Cool by association.

Gary Mott:
Oh, absolutely.

Tony Kahn:
Cool by connections.

Gary Mott:
Oh yes.

Tony Kahn:
That's very important in high school.

Gary Mott:
And I was in a band with some very studly, cool guys. So, you know, it didn't really matter that I was skinny and bumbling. I was in a band.

Tony Kahn:
Yeah.

Gary Mott:
And I was best friends with Mark Barenblatt, ...

Tony Kahn:
Yeah.

Gary Mott:
... the president of the class.

Tony Kahn:
Do you realize you just got two inches taller just by saying his name, [Gary laughs] all these years later? So you were, you were well connected. You were well connected.

Gary Mott:
Definitely.

Tony Kahn:
You were not a Cici Bimbolini.

Gary Mott:
Deep down inside, I was. I was sitting around the dinner table with my three children, and we were having a discussion about self-esteem issues. And I said, "Let me tell you a story about Cici Bimbolini. She was fat, ugly, but she knows the best stories, and the best games," and I made my way to the punch line, "just lucky, I guess." And my six-year-old son looked at me and said, "That's not very interesting." [laughter]

Tony Kahn:

Now, he had a choice. He was at a crossroads. He could have said, "Dad, this is a moment I'll never forget. You've given me the gift of story and I will treasure it forever." Or, he could have said, "Huh?" and he chose, what I think is the noble path, as a son to a father at that age. He had to say, "What are you trying to do – tell me how to live my life?" Right? So I'd like to turn this, this horrible defeat into a victory [laughs] and say that the story worked because he had to reject it at that point.

Gary Mott:

"Cici Bimbolini, who, who's that?"

Tony Kahn:

Give him another thirty years.

Gary Mott:

Another thirty, at least.

Tony Kahn:

Well, you know, it is amazing, though, that even the best storytellers have a hard time appreciating their own stuff or being appreciated within their own families. What else came in over the transom today? [In background. radio announcer: *Morning Stories* from Boston's W...] Oh, I know, I got an email from a guy who had interviewed me for Swedish National Public Radio. They have their own NPR and he had talked to me, and a number of other people, about podcasting. And so he sent me a link to the audio and I downloaded it, and guess what? It's in Swedish. I'm however speaking English pretty well. [sound of Swedish announcer and Tony Kahn saying "I would like this to continue for at least another six months ..."] And, it was just amazing to realize in a whole other way how international podcasting is. [radio announcer introducing *Morning Stories* in Swedish] *Tak su mike* Klaus Rasmussen, and if I've mispronounced his name, we'll provide a link for it as well for those of you ...

Gary Mott:

And if that's not his last name, you know, double apologies. [Tony laughs heartily]

Tony Kahn:

Anyway, thank you very much to, to Klaus. And who else do we have to thank? Well, only the most important people in our lives as a podcast these days, Ipswitch, a leader in file transfer software.

Gary Mott:

Indeed.

Tony Kahn:

Just check out their website at <www.ipswitch.com>, I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H.

Gary Mott:

And just like all of the other podcasters, we have a website, too:

<WGBH.org/morningstories> and send that email: <morningstories@WGBH.org>.

Tony Kahn:

You'll hear from us again next Friday with our next podcast. Take care.

[Swedish ending to a podcast - mentions Tony Kahn's name, among other words.]

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Susan MacLeod