

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*One Last Time:* Cape Cod, Massachusetts resident Richard Ferri tells us of a trip he took back to his childhood home and of how long it can sometimes take to say goodbye.

### **Tony Kahn:**

Hi, this is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* on WGBH in Boston. Today's Morning Story is about a condition that maybe you could say is the opposite of homelessness, homefullness. Robert Frost once said that, "home is where, if you go there, they have to take you in." For some, home is a place that won't let you go even if you leave it far behind. Richard Ferri is one of these people, a fellow I met in a writing class I was visiting last summer on Cape Cod, and he explores some of the territory of what it's like to go home, maybe one last time.

[Door creaks open and slowly creaks closed]

### **Richard Ferri:**

My parents were gone from the house they had lived in their entire married life. My mother had been failing for some time, and her years of cigarette smoking finally took their toll. Five weeks later, after fifty-one years of marriage and a lifetime total of maybe sixteen drinks, my Father died too, of a rare form of liver cancer. The air was thick, not with the smells of Italian cooking and strong coffee, but with a tired silence. My father had to drop out of school in the third grade. My mother never finished high school. Behind these sturdy walls, against these still shiny surfaces, my parents and I had lived very different lives, colliding sometimes with tension, anger, and tears. I felt like I was intruding on sacred space and about to hand it over, like Judas, for cash. I had no wish to hold on. [Sound of steps in an empty hallway] With the rest of my family scattered, after I left here, I was gone for good. [Sound of key locking a door]

[Instrumental Music (classical guitar)]

I don't remember what brought me back one day, but I do recall that I was compelled to walk past the old place. The new owners had taken down the stone wall in the front yard. And what happened to the enormous holly bush near the chimney, planted on the day that I was born?

Through the windows I could see traces of a new landscape inside the house too, the familiar walls and furniture had been replaced with unfamiliar things. [Wooden gate swings opens and slams on its steel lock fixtures] I walked around to the back door, where I had always entered as a kid. I looked down and realized that somehow, that kid's hand was now middle-aged. My hand paused at the knob, hovered, and then slowly moved back from the knob and into my jacket pocket. Something had been standing their waiting for me - waiting like a spirit till I was ready to press my hand one last time, say goodbye, and with a gentle push, send me on my own. [Slow

thoughtful footsteps, sound of wooden gate lamenting open and gently closing].

**Tony Kahn:**

That was Richard Ferri with today's Morning Story *One Last time*. I'm here with Gary Mott, my, my right hand man on *Morning Stories*. You know, I, I was listening to this, Gary, and I was struck by the details that Richard put into his story. You know, those moments that finally make you realize that something has changed, the bush that was planted when he was born, it's gone -- his own hand on that backyard gate realizing that his hand was now the hand of a middle aged man.

Have you, have you ever had the experience of going back to a, to a home that you hadn't seen in a long time and having a moment when you suddenly realized, "Oops, something is really different here"?

**Gary Mott:**

Hmm. Well, I grew up in San Antonio, Texas -- which is a world away, both literally and figuratively, from my life here in Boston, and every time I go home, I, I'm struck by some very powerful memories of smells. [Tony affirms with "mmm"] Um, walking off the plane and smelling the air. And so it just, it's, it all comes rushing back.

**Tony Kahn:**

And what was the smell?

**Gary Mott:**

Heat, cedar, a, a certain thickness.

**Tony Kahn:**

[Laughing] That old Texas thickness?

**Gary Mott:**

[Laughing] That, that, that old Texas thickness, deep in the heart.

**Tony Kahn:**

[Laughing] Whatever it is. You know what it was for me? You know I, I spent my childhood in Mexico and I came back to the States. When I, I came to the States, I smelled industrialism; I smelled money, progress, cement, sidewalks, and -- but when I went back to Mexico, ten years later, what I smelled and realized I was smelling for the first time was the smell of deep-frying in hub caps. There's people who're making their tamales on the street and also the smell of dirt floors because this was still a poor Mexico. And, and, and even a little bit the smell of, of bodies that didn't get a chance to be washed as often. The smell of rural poverty too, and I'd completely forgotten about that.

**Gary Mott:**

Yeah, I mean, walking into the home that I grew up in, instantly I think of, you know, the smell of, of my mother's baking – you know, her, her famous sticky bun.

**Tony Kahn:**

Mmmm!

**Gary Mott:**

[Chuckling with nostalgia]

You know, the meat and potatoes we had every Friday, you know, um, the worn green carpet, several scorpions over which I stepped in my years growing up.

**Tony Kahn:**

Scorpions?

**Gary Mott:**

Scorpions, yes.

**Tony Kahn:**

We have that in common then, in our childhood.

**Gary Mott:**

Yeah, well sure.

**Tony Kahn:**

Every night we'd have to check to see if a scorpion had gotten under the bed sheet, and then we'd look up at the ceiling and make sure there wasn't a scorpion hanging directly over our head, this is part of the, "good night, sleep well" ritual!

[laughing]

**Gary Mott:**

Yes! Oh, well, a, a scorpion ran across my mother's foot in bed one night.

**Tony Kahn:**

Ahh.

**Gary Mott:**

You learn to develop a sort of respect for such things.

**Tony Kahn:**

Was that the moment you lost your Texas accent? [laughs]

**Gary Mott:**

[Laughing] I said, "That's it"! I mean every time I go home –

**Tony Kahn:**

- It comes back.

**Gary Mott:**

- eventually it, some of it resurfaces.

**Tony Kahn:**

-Yeah

**Gary Mott:**

You know, I'll throw in a y'all or a -

**Tony Kahn:**

- Well that's the other, that's the other side of this, isn't it? That if you do go back to the old home, some of its spirit can begin to haunt you and you can begin to fall back into certain ways of feeling and noticing things that you'd totally forgotten about.

**Gary Mott:**

Yeah!

**Tony Kahn:**

So that there is magic, it's black magic. And I, I do remember one thing that Richard Ferri, which - said in the class, which I wish we'd included in the story, but I completely forgot about it until now. He said that when he was growing up in his family, they always kept the front door locked, but they always left the back door unlocked. He said, "made no sense" to him in terms of security, but that was just something you did. And it's striking to me that, you know, he realized by going to the back, I guess, that it was his turn to realize he couldn't go in.

**Gary Mott:**

Uh huh.

**Tony Kahn:**

You know, that, unlocked or locked that was no longer his back door. That, that I'd had forgotten about that.

**Gary Mott:**

I think you know, each time I do go home, while I love being there, it's clear to me that I've really moved on.

**Tony Kahn:**

Yeah. Maybe someday your, your kids will feel that way about the Boston area.

**Gary Mott:**

It's going to be a sad event as it was for Richard when the day comes where, where I need to go home again and I need to maybe sell my parents' house because they've moved on. I mean, that, that will be a powerful day if that happens. And --

**Tony Kahn:**

And if it does, you know exactly where to come, don't you, Gary?

**Gary Mott:**

Yes! You, because you're a part-time realtor? [Laughter]

**Tony Kahn:**

No, because I'm the producer and the director of *Morning Stories*! [Laughter]

**Gary Mott:**

[Laughing] Oh yes, yes, yes!

**Tony Kahn:**

I want you to come back with a story, not with filthy money!

[Tony and Gary both laugh]

I guess this is as good time as any to say "goodbye," don't you think, Gary?

**Gary Mott:**

I, I think so.

**Tony Kahn:**

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**Gary Mott:**

And be sure and check out our website at <[wgbh.org/morningstories](http://wgbh.org/morningstories)> and thanks again for downloading the podcast, 'cause we'll keep on coming to you.

**Tony Kahn:**

See you next week!

**Gary Mott:**

Bye!

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Gregory P. Culmer