

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Heal This Book: *In this week's podcast, an act of desecration in the San Francisco Public Library ends up healing a whole community. Also, a few audio clips from Ravi Jain's Drive Time podcast.*

Tony Kahn:

Hi Everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. You know that phrase, "One good turn deserves another"? What about the opposite? Does one bad turn deserve another bad turn? Maybe. Maybe not. Today's Morning Story explores the possibility that maybe the best thing to do with a bad turn is something nice. We call our story, *Heal this Book*.

[A violin plays, melancholy notes]

Jim:

Slowly, [page tearing] one by one, two by two. [page tearing] Books started being discovered. [scissors cutting paper] There would be these weird eye shapes carved out of either the cover of the book, or deep into the text. This person used the card catalog and did a subject search and found books about gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues, books about H.I.V. and A.I.D.S. and books about women's health issues generally. And some false hits – almost comical things– a book about the Enola Gay, a book by Peter Gay, so this person was determined.

[Sound of miter saw shredding material]

Jodi Alexander:

I love ripping books apart. I, I really get into it. We have a, a session called "Book Mutilation Therapy," and then I bring in all my power tools. [Sound of miter saw]

[Somber violin music]

Jim:

I'm Jim Bambufkirk and I'm the program manager at the San Francisco Public Library. It was pretty nerve-racking. This was a person who was very angry and had a very sharp object. And I personally, didn't think it was that big a leap from carving up books to carving up people. We had made inventories of the books which now totaled 600 and the next step was to throw them away. And I just couldn't do it. I couldn't complete the perpetrator's goal of removing this material from the San Francisco Public Library. I couldn't do it. So I started talking to some friends who were artists and we started brainstorming. And they said, "Well, you know, we make artwork out of altered books."

Jodi Alexander:

I'm Jodi Alexander and I'm a book artist. And the way I get my students into it is, I have them bring a book that they hate, maybe an old algebra book or, you know, a teen romance that's just really awful or a – and, and it's, it's amazing. It is therapy; you should see some of these people just, you know, getting a lot out, on these poor books. [Mitter saw grinds, people whoop and cheer].

Everett Olson:

My name is Everett Olson and I'm a curator here at the San Francisco Public Library. When the artwork started coming in, we saw how much of it there was and how much effort and thought – just passion went in to creating these things. This comes from a Jodi Alexander from Felton, California. "Sometimes in order for something to get better, first it needs to get a lot worse. Before I could heal this book I needed to take the destruction much further than the vandal did and then stitch it back together and make it something good again. In putting it back together, I chose to focus on the most human element of the book which is the inscription of a – [Jodi Alexander's voice overlaps]"

Jodi Alexander:

– The inscription on the title page, the author of the book had inscribed it to somebody named Richard, and it said, " – to Richard with good warm wishes from Robert Cromey." I felt that was that was most human part of, of my book, and the slash happened to go right through it. It's just such a hateful thing, it affected so many people from, you know, the librarians to the public.

[Violin plays]

Jim:

His name was John Perkins. He was arrested. He pleaded "No Contest" to the crime, with a hate crime enhancement. He was required to pay restitution to the library, to do community service, and mandatory counseling, but he was not incarcerated.

I think when I walked into the galleries, when everything was all installed and under the lights and in the cases, I was just blown away. I was practically in tears because what had been hateful and disgusting and creepy was now joyous! And celebratory! So it felt like each artist had done an act of activism, [music conveys metamorphoses] – had transformed the piece they'd been given. And so now the room was filled with positive energy.

[Mitter saw grinds]

Tony Kahn:

That was today's Morning Story produced by Peter Crimmons, called *Heal This Book*. I'm here in the studio with Gary Mott. Hi Gar'

Gary Mott:

What a great story!

Tony Kahn:

It's a very little interesting gift that we got from Peter Crimmons. I ran into him at a seminar that was discussing how to make a pitch for your story to one of the big public radio programs like *This American Life* or *All things Considered* or whatnot and Peter was gutsy enough to stand up in from the whole group and pitch the idea of this series of interviews that he had done with people at the San Francisco Public library. As soon as he sat down, three of us popped up from the audience! Me, a guy from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and a third person. And we converged on him! We said, "Peter this is a great story, can we work with you on it"? He was kind enough to accept my offer; he sent some tapes over and we put it together.

Gary Mott:

It was a great exercise for us because, you know, normally we are on the prowl for people we know that would be good storytellers and then we bring them in and then we school them in the art of what we're all about and then we record them. But in this case, you know, Peter had done all the real legwork for us.

Tony Kahn:

It was great. It was a real pickup. And, speaking about real pickups, I got one myself the other day from a fellow in Boston named Ravi Jane.

[Drone of car engine]

Ravi Jane:

Well, right off the bat I can say it's such a pleasure to meet you!

Tony Kahn:

Ravi!

Ravi Jane:

You are the dapper guest we've ever had on *Drive Time*.

Tony Kahn:

Oh thank you! Well, coming from you that's a compliment. Shall I give you my first impression of your studio?

Ravi Jane:

Sure, please do.

Tony Kahn:

Which I've seen already on my iTunes.... [Tony Kahn voice overlay]

Robby produces this video podcast called *Drive Time*, Gary, you've seen that haven't you? Downloaded it from iTunes?

Gary Mott:

I have!

Tony Kahn:

I gather he has several cars. The one he drives around most in is an old Audi and he calls it his studio "A" and as long as you are on his work route in the Boston area and are interested in talking to him, well, he'd seriously like to consider having you as a guest.

[Sound of wind sheer on a fast moving car]

Ravi Jane:

Hi! Welcome to *Drive Time*. Although sometimes I do bike to work, I don't know if I'll try to videotape while I bike, that may be a little too dangerous. [muffled wind sheer and indistinct noises]. But the basic premise is I'm gonna' try to shoot these during the week and post Friday morning. I would love to have some guests, but I really can't deviate from my commute so if you do need a ride from Jamaica Plain to Allston, or I'm passing through Coolidge corner right now, Brookline to Allston. I could even stop in Harvard Square, or the reverse of that. Let me know! If you've got something going on [voice fades]...

Tony Kahn:

Each episode is different, Gar, I mean what he ends up doing with it, how he uses the car space, what happens around the car. So, I just can't wait to download this stuff.

Gary Mott:

I wish I would've known him back when I lived in Jamaica Plain some years back.

Tony Kahn:

Mmmm

Gary Mott:

Watching his podcast, I can identify the, the roads between JP and his workplace.

People are saying, you know, "a video, I know what a video means," or "I know what an audio means when it comes to a podcast – it's just like, say, television or it's just like radio." But we're learning that it's not! It can be something used in a whole new way! You go driving down the street and all of a sudden there's this car next to you, and there're lights on inside it and a guy's got a camera and he's talking to somebody. It's a

studio!

We're certainly grateful for the arrangements that put the air in our tires. That's Ipswitch. Ipswitch, a leader in file transfer software. Our sponsors pretty much since we became a podcast. Many, many shows ago.

Gary Mott:

That's I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H. And our website, <wgbh.org/morningstories> And our talkback mechanism, our email address, that old fashioned email, <morningstories@wgbh.org>

Tony Kahn:

Don't hesitate to send some story ideas of your own. Maybe you've got something that, that this particular story today reminded you of and if not, maybe next week's story. In any event, we'll see you then next Friday on the podcast. Take care. Bye!

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Gregory P. Culmer

Notes from transcriber:

Old fashioned email! I'm just twenty-three and email is old fashioned! [looking under my seat for the teleport button - ha]

Notes from Liz:

The book story has stood out in my own mind since I first heard it as an unhappy story, whatever way one looks at it. I was so glad someone else chose to transcribe it, because it was one I didn't want to spend more time than absolutely necessary on. I guess the combination of my life as a library lover, then a librarian, and perhaps my own inability to appreciate the plastic arts as much as other people do, made for this reaction.