

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Old Friends: *Mark and Sheri Grashow traveled round trip from Brooklyn to a little village in Fiji. It took them 28 years.*

Tony Kahn:

Hi, Everybody. This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. One of the real pleasures of getting older – and, and there are a few – is having old friends. Today's story comes from Mark and Sheri Grashow about a round trip they took to a very special place in the Fijian Islands. It took them ... oh ... only twenty-eight years to complete. We call it *Old Friends*.

Mark Grashow:

"When we finally rounded Mount Washington, the seas turned rough again. Sheri began to really feel the effects. She put her head in my lap and cried a little. I just held her...." [reading continues under the following narrative]

Tony Kahn:

In the kitchen of his brownstone in Brooklyn, New York, Mark Grashow reads from a journal he kept twenty-eight years ago. Rocked by choppy seas they come ashore on the island of Kadavu and started walking.

[Sea sounds]

Mark Grashow:

There was a pretty village tucked neatly among the palms. Children everywhere...

Tony Kahn:

The villagers took them to the home of a man called Nathani, who was the son of the local chief.

Mark Grashow:

The men sat on one side of the room and the women sat on the other, and we all...

Sheri Grashow:

We sat with the chief.

Mark Grashow:

We sat in the front with the chief and they give us bowls of kava and we clap our hands...

Tony Kahn:

And so began a four-day visit that they never forgot.

Mark Grashow:

I felt like I was a king. I was... Everyone was friendly, everybody was open.

Sheri Grashow:

People wanting to touch me or talk to me or say hello or just the graciousness and the caring. I remember that more than anything.

Tony Kahn:

They had no television, no radio, no electricity, and as far as Mark and Sheri could tell, no interest in the wider world beyond the sea.

Sheri Grashow:

What did I cook? Where was my kitchen? That's [Those] were the kinds of questions they asked.

Mark Grashow:

I don't recall any questions on the war in, in Vietnam and Cambodia. I don't recall any questions about the Watergate hearings.

Sheri Grashow:

Life was simple there. You just took care of your basic needs and the rest of the world did not affect you.

Tony Kahn:

Mark and Sheri showed me some pictures that they'd taken back then. Surrounded by smiling Fijian faces with the blue Pacific at her back, Sheri looks like the happy village kid that never left.

[Sound of Fijian music]

Sheri Grashow:

It was amazing to me that life could be so different and yet so familiar. You had to figure out food, you had, entertained yourself, you talked about what the women wanted for their children.

Mark Grashow:

We had such an extraordinary time in this village that the idea of going back and revisiting some of these people and actually standing in the same place was an enormous attraction.

Tony Kahn:

Last month, with nothing to guide them but their snapshots of the village and the surrounding mountains as landmarks, Mark and Sheri found their way back.

Mark Grashow:

One man who actually lived in the village, when he saw the pictures said to us, "When the chief sees these pictures, he will fly." He takes us back into the village, back to the house that we lived in twenty-eight years ago and there was Nathani, the, the chief now, in front of a huge kava bowl with about ten to twelve men sitting around and . . . we were back.

[Sound of birds]

Sheri Grashow:

We walked in and we greeted him and he kept saying "Old friends, old friends!" and as we passed around the pictures, we would hear someone say, "That's my brother! That's my brother! That's me! That's me!"

Mark Grashow:

The chief's son. He was seven at the time and now twenty-eight years later he's thirty-five and it was the same face. The same smile and it was – it was, was wonderful.

Tony Kahn:

Changes had come to the village. There was a landing field now with a grass runway, two small hotels and the children walked around in t-shirts emblazoned with emblems of North Carolina State University and images of Beavis and Butthead. But the clothing was second- and third-hand, part of the flow of goods that had always moved through the docks and markets of the island, further and further from the world where those logos made sense. And the cooking house where Nathani's wife had once made their meals now looked neglected and run down as if, like her, it had sickened and died.

[Sound of cicadas]

Mark Grashow:

I, when I tell the story to other people about going back to Kadavu, I always tell it as a wonderful story. But there is a piece of it that was upsetting. A lot of it has to do with me. Not them, with me and how I view what's important to my life. Intellectually I know that you should be able to find peace within yourself, but for myself, that's not what my life was about and to see this village was still in the same place it was twenty-eight years ago and perhaps a little bit poorer, you know, more holes in their clothes and ... was, was a bit of a letdown.

Sheri Grashow:

I would have liked to have seen a new school, a few better look-... newer cooking pots would have made me feel like they were doing better. We came back to a village that said it's not a question of doing better. We're doing. We live our lives. Our lives are simpler. They have fewer expectations. But it does need to move forward. It's a debate that I'm not comfortable with. That I don't know the absolute answer to. The most

important thing that traveling has given me is the ability to see that the goals that I base my life on are not shared by the entire world. That people value other things and that I have the choice of saying, "Yes, this is what I'm aiming for," or maybe there are other options.

[Sound of whistling and a tool hitting the earth]

Mark Grashow:

What keeps coming back to me is that people in a lot of ways all want the same thing. And in the craziness of the world, we forget that it's just people with families and, and a lot of us – in that way we're all the same. [sing-song sound of women] There are moments that are such, such big highs that to suddenly stand in this village and see him again was – was almost overwhelming. To be in another little village somewhere and meeting people and them greeting us and us greeting them, it just fills me up. And in some ways that has always been within me and that hasn't changed much. much at all.

Sheri Grashow:

And when I sat down with Nathani again at the village and I went to him and I said, "I wanted to come back and thank you once more for taking us in all those years ago," and he took my hands in his and we just stood there and looked at each other and remembered each other from twenty-eight years ago. It transcends other things. It fills your heart. It's just a moment of joy and delight and it's magic.

[Sound of Fijians speaking; birds singing]

Tony Kahn:

Old Friends, from Mark and Sheri Grashow. I caught up with them the other day in a little corner of the world where the phone service could have been better, their home in Brooklyn, New York.

Sheri Grashow:

Hi, Tony. I can barely hear you.

Mark Grashow:

You're very loud, Sheri.

Sheri Grashow:

Oh.

Mark Grashow:

Sheri, are you doing something in the kitchen?

Sheri Grashow:

No.

[Buzzing sound]

Mark Grashow:

Now there's a buzz on the line.

Tony Kahn:

Can you hear me better now?

Mark Grashow:

No.

[Buzzing sound]

Sheri Grashow:

I'm gonna try another phone. Hold on. Yeah – I'm on the, on the second floor phone.

Tony Kahn:

Oh good. Ok. Ok. You had one of these cheaper phones?

[Buzzing sound]

Mark Grashow:

They're all cheap.

Tony Kahn:

I asked them, since that trip to Fiji, now that they're both retired, if they've been on the road much.

Mark Grashow:

Our son married a wonderful Japanese woman. We had a wedding here and then a wedding in Japan.

Sheri Grashow:

So we spent three weeks in Japan, traveling around, and then had the glorious experience of a Shinto wedding in a small fishing village in the north.

Mark Grashow:

Unbelievable. We hardly even recognized our daughter-in-law.

Tony Kahn:

[Laughs]

Sheri Grashow:

We were fed wonderful foods. We were given exquisite kimonos to wear.

Mark Grashow:

They took us out on fishing boats and we caught raw, you know, oysters and ate them on the boat, and scallops, and had barbecues. And -- it was extraordinary. Sheri took Japanese lessons just so she could speak to them a little bit and she actually gave a, a speech in Japanese at the wedding, which was well received.

Tony Kahn:

Wow!

Sheri Grashow:

Although I'm not sure exactly what I said. [Tony laughs] For about a year I studied Japanese in an attempt to bring the families together, but it's a very difficult language.

Mark Grashow:

She was terrific.

Sheri Grashow:

It was just a wonderful adventure in another culture that was very different and yet very welcoming, so it was a fabulous trip once again.

Tony Kahn:

What is it about you guys that seems to make you welcome wherever you go?

Mark Grashow:

I have no idea! [laughs]

Sheri Grashow:

I'd like to think that it's a basic tolerance for differences.

Mark Grashow:

I think then, we're also pretty open and honest and what you see is what you get.

Tony Kahn:

A lot of people change the world, or try to, through institutions of one kind or other. You tend to do it one person at a time.

Sheri Grashow:

Exactly. Yeah.

Mark Grashow:

Tell him what happened in Zimbabwe.

Tony Kahn:

What's with Zimbabwe?

Sheri Grashow:

Oh ... we've started a whole...

Tony Kahn:

I'm going to, I'm going to stop them right there. I'm here with Gary Mott in the studio and I'm going to stop them, Gar, because, well, I feel a *Morning Stories, Part 2* coming on: The Grashows in Zimbabwe.

Gary Mott:

These people, you know. I don't have friends like that.

Tony Kahn:

Aren't they amazing?

Gary Mott:

None of my friends go to Fiji, going someplace where there are no trappings of modern life – money, clothes, and escape. I just want to go there, just to be someplace where the only focus is on the next meal.

Tony Kahn:

They have no idea what they're going to do next, but as we'll hear in next weeks's story, *Zimbabwe, The Grashows, Part 2*. A little trip has really turned into a massive project for them that may end up influencing the lives of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people.

Gary Mott:

Speaking of ripples, one little ripple that rippled across the screens of iTunes users, the WGBH splash.

Tony Kahn:

Now wait a second. Better tell people what a splash is, if they don't know.

Gary Mott:

A splash is one of those tiles at the top of iTunes.

Tony Kahn:

OK – the big ones.

Gary Mott:

Yeah. The big ones.

Tony Kahn:

Three ones that keep on, well, rippling, right?

Gary Mott:

They, they fade in and out.

Tony Kahn:

And then underneath them there are other things and, and those are known highly technically as...

Gary Mott:

As swooshes.

Tony Kahn:

Swooshes.

Gary Mott:

Why?

Tony Kahn:

Why. [laughs]

Gary Mott:

Well, because when you click on the arrow, they swoosh on, on by.

Tony Kahn:

They swoosh. And then underneath them there is yet another category of things, aren't there?

Gary Mott:

Well, the brick.

Tony Kahn:

The brick.

Gary Mott:

Those are bricks.

Tony Kahn:

And they just ... stay there. We are a splash.

Gary Mott:

We are a splash. "WGBH Public Broadcasting" is what it says. You click on that and you're taken to the WGBH Room, which houses all of the podcasts that emanate from

our mother ship here.

Tony Kahn:

Nova, The World Technology Podcast . . .

Gary Mott:

American Experience, video, audio ... hours and hours of ... tremendous programming.

Tony Kahn:

New stuff coming out of this “Room” all the time. But no. no furniture.

Gary Mott:

Lots of opportunities to subscribe and enjoy.

Tony Kahn:

Well, I make this promise. If ever there is going to be furniture in the WGBH room, one of the people who is going to make it possible is the benefactor who’s made our podcast possible from the start, Ipswitch, a leader in file transfer software. That’s I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H.

Gary Mott:

And check us out on line as well, <wgbh.org/morningstories> and we love the feedback, <morningstories@wgbh.org>.

Tony Kahn:

And we’ll be back with another *Morning Story, The Grashows, Part 2*, next week. So see you then.

[Sound of birds]

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Bev Sykes