

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

E=mc2: From Brooklyn, Mark and Sheri Grashow tell of a simple act of kindness that thousands of Zimbabweans won't soon forget.

Tony Kahn:

Hi, everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. On last week's podcast, we were talking to our globetrotting friends, Mark and Sheri Grashow and I stopped them just as they were on the verge of telling their latest story about a trip that they took to Zimbabwe. Well, here is Part 2 of that conversation: a story of something that they did that led, you could say, to a chain reaction that's affected tens of thousands of lives. So what else could we possibly call this tale of the liberation of tremendous energy, but $E=mc^2$ ("e" equals "mc" squared) on a human scale. Today's Morning Story, from the Grashows:

Sheri Grashow:

In 2003 we were invited to a wedding in Zambia, and while we were there we went to visit some friends in Zimbabwe. And there, while we saw all the tourist sites and went to the markets and things like that, we also asked to see some schools. And we discovered, in the southern part of Zimbabwe, they had nothing. No textbooks, no teaching supplies, no school supplies for the children. We decided that maybe there was something we could do.

Mark Grashow:

Having been a teacher for thirty-five years, I had memories of huge dumpsters full of thousands and thousands of books that schools discarded –

Tony Kahn:

– in American schools.

Mark Grashow:

– in America. And it became very clear that it would become possible to transport these books to Zimbabwe.

Tony Kahn:

They didn't have something that there was an abundance of.

Mark Grashow:

An abundance of.

Tony Kahn:

That was in fact was treated almost like garbage.

Sheri Grashow:

In New York. Absolutely! And we've launched on a whole new program.

Mark Grashow:

We go into a school and we say to each department, "Do you have books that you no longer use?"

Tony Kahn:

Mmm, hmm.

Mark Grashow:

They give that to us. Then we go and we ask the students to donate pencils, pens, soap, children's books that they loved as, you know, when they were children. Sports equipment. And we send that all in a forty-foot container.

Tony Kahn:

One of these big things you see stacked up on the docks in New York.

Mark Grashow:

Right. We can put about a thousand boxes in one of those containers.

Tony Kahn:

And how much did you collect?

Mark Grashow:

Probably 20,000 textbooks, 10,000 children's books, lots of sports equipment, toiletries. Right now we're collecting bicycles.

Tony Kahn:

What happens to all this stuff?

Mark Grashow:

It's all off-loaded into, basically, classrooms, and it's broken up by school. We put it on trucks ourselves, with help, and we deliver it to the schools.

Sheri Grashow:

And we were able to see children, reading, sitting under a tree, suddenly having books to read. A library to take books from, with pencils and paper, writing their assignments out. In one school, a woman came over to me to tell me that school had received some of the sneakers that were discarded at one of the high schools in New York –

Tony Kahn:

Uh-huh.

Sheri Grashow:

And she came to me to say that she was raising her orphan nephew; he had not had shoes in two years. And today was the first day that he had walked to school wearing his sneakers.

Mark Grashow:

These schools are very rural. And some of them are three hours away from any, any town. They have no electricity and basically no books. So imagine all of a sudden you deliver 200 *National Geographics*. And kids who have never, you know, really watched TV suddenly see what the world is like, through all these books! It's all pretty astounding. One of the other things that we, you know, we did not think about or realize, I mean, a lot of the kids there were not playing sports, because they only owned one outfit.

Tony Kahn:

Hmm, mmm.

Mark Grashow:

They had basically the school uniform and that was the only thing that they owned.

Tony Kahn:

Yeah.

Mark Grashow:

So, they would not play sports in fear of, you know, getting it dirty, tearing it. But now that they have the uniforms – what they call uniforms – you know, all these tee-shirts, and shorts, and sneakers. they will play sports, join teams, and the enthusiasm is, you know, very, very high.

Sheri Grashow:

One school that we heard about, they had about fifteen children in the preschool class. As a result of our bringing toys, their enrollment has jumped to eighty! Now the children go to school; they have toys to play with, and they're much more excited about being there! [Tony laughs.]

Mark Grashow:

And the parents have started libraries that they, they go to at night – the ones that have electricity. You know, they had tiny little closets, basically, was their library. Now they have whole rooms where people come in and read, and kids can actually borrow a book and take it home. Where they were never able to do

that before.

Tony Kahn:

What's in it for you guys, personally?

Mark Grashow:

For me, it just, it's, puts me, leaves me sky high! It's I, It just fills, fills me up – I don't know. To see what you can do and how you can change lives. Basically, what a lot of teachers go into the profession for!

Sheri Grashow:

It just makes you feel it, that whether you've helped one child, or ten, or 18,000 (as we seem to be doing with this project), just that you can have a positive impact on these children's lives. And on their communities' lives! They have so little.

Mark Grashow:

This, this one touching little thing. Someone had donated 200 suits for us to bring up there. And again, we took 'em because somebody donated them, and we didn't really think very much about the consequences. But the, the suits were incredibly popular. And we went to one school, and they had a very nice principal there who showed us around. And we met with the staff, and we met with the students, and we had about an hour planning session with the teachers, and it was a wonderful visit. And as we're about to leave, the principal motions to me, so I come over, and he says, "Can I talk to you for a minute?" And I say, "Sure!" So he brings me into his office and we sit down, and he informs me that he's retiring at the end of the month.

Tony Kahn:

Mmm-hmm.

Mark Grashow:

And I said, "Well, that's wonderful! Congratulations! You must be so proud; you did a wonderful job." And he says, "No, no no. Does this mean I don't get a suit?" [Tony and Mark laugh] So, I reassured him that absolutely, he'll get a, he'll get a suit. So, but the people there are absolutely extraordinary. They're, they treasure their children, they treasure education; they work incredibly hard.

Sheri Grashow:

As we were unloading the boxes, the primary school that was nearby came marching over. About 300 children of ages, probably six to ten or twelve, came marching to greet us. And it was wonderful! And they were all excited to see us. And I immediately pulled out a book! I wanted to show them what we had brought. At which point, 300 children circled around me, and each one was

raising a hand to tell me they recognized an animal, or a shape as I pointed out the pictures. Once we finished going through the book, I started singing that classic children's song, "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands!"

Tony Kahn:

Mmm, hmm.

Sheri Grashow:

And there I was, with 300 children I had never met before, who certainly had never attended school, and we were singing along, and it was one group. All of us together. And that was a pretty special moment for me.

Tony Kahn:

I have, I have a feeling they're gonna start naming a school or two after, after you guys, there.

Mark Grashow:

Oh, [inaudible]

Tony Kahn:

Maybe a statue. And that'd be great, but in a way I, I kind of hope they don't, if that means that it'll become easy then for someone to forget that first and foremost you guys are just wonderful human beings.

Mark and Sheri Grashow:

Well, thank you, Tony. We try to fly under the radar.

Tony Kahn:

Well, more power to you!

Sheri Grashow:

Let's just say one thing, and that is that the organization – the non-profit organization that we've formed, the U.S.-Africa Children's Fellowship, is just the beginning, and I think it can really have an opportunity to impact on children's lives, and keep us busy in our retirement, that's for sure.

Tony Kahn:

Have you got a website?

Mark Grashow:

It's coming up!

Tony Kahn:

You know, you've gotta have a website; it's the 21st Century.

Mark Grashow:

I know - [laughs].

Tony Kahn:

And here we are podcasting, so we want to have something that people can link to. So you got - you gotta get hip enough to get yourselves a website, okay?

Mark Grashow:

Okay!

Tony Kahn:

And let us know what it is.

Mark Grashow:

Sheri and I agree 1000%

Tony Kahn:

Okay, and then we can pass it on.

Mark Grashow:

Okay!

Tony Kahn:

Okay, thanks a lot, guys.

Sheri and Mark Grashow:

Okay, thanks, Tony!

Tony Kahn:

Talk to you soon!

Mark Grashow:

Bye!

Tony Kahn:

Bye!

Tony Kahn:

So, that was today's Morning Story from Mark and Sheri Grashow, on the Physics of Giving: $E=mc^2$. I'm, I'm here in the studio with Gary Mott. You're smiling, Gary.

Gary Mott:

You know, it sure beats golf. [Tony laughs] At least, I think it would.

Tony Kahn:

Yeah, or –

Gary Mott:

I mean, what a great feeling, to effect such change in the lives of, of people.

Tony Kahn:

And also, they're in, they're in a position where they can give the people whom they're helping an opportunity to express the gratitude, and in a sense give something back. You know, Sheri told me that when that woman told her about the, the kid she was taking care of who was able to wear sneakers for the first time in three years, she said that woman stayed there and waited for her to come (Sheri) for at least four hours. She had no idea when Sheri was going to show up. But it meant something to her; the gift wasn't complete until she had a chance to take Sheri by the hand and say, "Thank you! And I want you to know exactly where that gift went, and the difference that it made." I mean that –

Gary Mott:

Yeah.

Tony Kahn:

– that, what a reward that is! Always happy to hear from the Grashows. It's always a lift to know what they're up to.

Gary Mott:

And it's always a lift,

Tony Kahn:

Yes? . . .

Gary Mott:

to hear from –

Tony Kahn:

Oh! To hear from some of our, our listeners!

Gary Mott:

You bet! "T2 Muser," I – (might be – an email address): "I listen to a wide variety of podcasts, but if I had to unsubscribe to all but five, this would be one of those that remained. Try a couple, and see for yourself!"

TK

[Laughing] Well, you know, I'd like to know what the other four are, because we're always on the lookout for podcasts that people enjoy and are willing to take with 'em to a desert island [laughs]. We got an email from Hawaii, from someone whose first name is Candle. She says, "I love downloading the *Morning Stories* and listening at night in Hawaii while I work at my computer. Thanks for the good work. I really enjoy them. It makes "book work" a lot easier."

Gary Mott:

We also heard from Paul here in Massachusetts. "I found *Morning Stories* on iTunes about six months ago and have enjoyed it ever since. I listened to the beautiful music accompanying –

Tony Kahn:

Oh, that Caleb Smith story, walking through all of New York, yeah.

Gary Mott:

The Caleb Smith story. Actually, *One Foot in Front of the Other*. I heard the credit to Leeanne Westover and Diedre Rodman. Can you tell me the name of the cut and the album from which it is drawn?

Tony Kahn:

They're two of the four, just delicious Lascivious Biddies, and I was visiting with them. And I heard this song, which they hadn't recorded yet, so I asked them if they would record it for us, and it just so happens that I think their latest podcast, which is at – Gar?

Gary Mott:

Ah, well, the URL for their website is <biddies4ever.com> –that's the number "4."

Tony Kahn:

And their latest podcast, actually, is about the recording of that song, which is called *Ozone Haze*. They are so good. Can't get it out of my mind! Also, we have been getting some information just in general about the number of people who've been downloading *Morning Stories*, and just wanted to pass on some information about you guys!

Gary Mott:

12,000 downloads from China, 13,000 from Japan, and you know, Korea, UK, Spain, Ireland, Malaysia, the list goes on. Over a million and a half downloads.

Tony Kahn:

You know, it's nice to hear those numbers. But you know what I would love to hear, is where we are on you, when you download us! Where you're dragging

us to in the course of your day. The more we can hear from you and where you're getting us, frankly, the more inspiring it will be. One group that must remain faceless, but what a human institution – Ipswitch, a leader in file transfer software. The people who have been funding this podcast pretty since we got started. That's I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H dot com <ipswitch.com>. Their website, if you want to know more.

Gary Mott:

And I just sent Ipswitch a group of letters from listeners who wrote in to <morningstories@wgbh.org> –

Tony Kahn:

Right.

Gary Mott:

– our email address. And they said, “I checked out Ipswitch, and they've got some great products out there!” They were thrilled beyond belief.

Tony Kahn:

They said, “I not only listen to you, but I appreciate Ipswitch's help.”

Gary Mott:

That's it!

Tony Kahn:

Thank you so much! [Tony and Gary laugh appreciatively] You have no idea how helpful that is.

Gary Mott:

You really have no idea.

Tony Kahn:

Keep doin' what you've been doin' all along, in the – I guess – over millions, now; keep listening, and we'll be there for you next Friday. See you then! Bye-bye.

[End of Recording]

Notes from transcriber:

Everything the Grashows do in Africa appeals so much to my own sense of

wishing I could make a difference the way they do. I know exactly what Mark means, when he describes the feelings of fulfillment he gets from doing that work, except in my own case it's little by little, as I help local people learn to use computers, etc. Mark and Sheri's emphasis on educating children is the most attractive part of their effort. I wish a lot of American children appreciated the education they get, the way their counterparts in the Grashows' projects do.

Transcribed by Liz Cooksey <transcripts_liz@bellsouth.net>