

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPTS

A Member of the Flock: *Buddy was a genius, a compulsive-obsessive, and a parakeet. He changed Chloe Leamon's life.*

Tony Kahn:

Hi everybody! This Tony Kahn the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH, in Boston. I love dogs; I adore cats; I'm even open-minded about ferrets, but birds, hmm...I don't think so. Then I met Gabriel. Now Gabriel was a small grey bird that an old friend of mine had bought to keep herself company. I barely noticed this bird at first, she was so small, that she could and did hide under my friend's jacket lapel. But Gabriel had a personality that was as big as the room. Two minutes after we met she was nibbling at my earlobe; she was singing to me from my shoulder; she was making eye contact from both sides of her beak and, I don't know, she just made me feel very flattered for her taking an interest in me. Turns out that birds have their own dialects; they can problem solve as well as a chimpanzee, and on an emotional level they don't just love you; sometimes they get angry and they express it, too. Now, I don't know how many people are born bird lovers but I do know they can be made and one of them is today's storyteller: Chloe Leamon. We call her account of a life changed by birds, *A Member of the Flock*.

Chloe Leamon:

One day I walked into a pet store, knowing I was gonna get a bird. I said to them, "I want a sweet bird, I want an easy bird, it's my first bird," and I took this parakeet home. We went to the circus, my son and I, and we rushed home that night, [bird singing] and he was outside the cage. I don't know how he didn't hurt himself. Buddy! He didn't even care if he choked himself, he would just wedge his little body through the bars. He was just the busiest bird I've ever seen; he had things to do and if I wasn't getting him out of the cage by seven o'clock in the morning, he was pushing his way through the bars.

[Sounds of Buddy flying, flapping his wings] He would fly up and down the hallway, like ten, twenty times, manically, and then fly to a mirror somewhere and crust that surface with, you know, bird seeds and then he'd run back to his cage and stock up on new food and he would do the faucet, anything that was remotely shiny or mirror-like. There's a term for it; parents do it to baby birds, it's called "allofeeding." Feeding himself, feeding the image that I guess he thought was another bird. [sounds of parakeet chirping] Buddy would look at an image of my son and tell him that, Caleb was "a good boy." He would look at my cat and tell her, "Susie step up." I would hear him from the office making up new sentences from words he had learned, saying, "Buddy, Buddy, Buddy is the best, best, best, best, best boy," clear as a bell. "Good boy! I love you," all day.

He was incredibly smart and perceptive and he was just completely insane by the end. He was afraid of nothing ... nothing. He would go up to birds three times his size and be like, "Hi! Wanna play? Hmm? I'm here!" And he'd just start chatting at them; nothing intimidated him at all which is eventually why he got eaten by this cat that I adopted. I was not vigilant one day and he got out of the office where his cage was and he went into my bedroom where the new cat got him in like a

second. I was devastated, just devastated – as much as if I had lost a child, I think.

[Parakeet singing, chirping]

During the time I had him I got another parakeet, Chip. He was more like a napkin, actually. He didn't do anything except be in awe of Buddy and follow Buddy around wherever Buddy went. Chip had begun to talk a little bit, learning from Buddy and he immediately stopped talking. He didn't talk at all. Then I got Frankie, who you see here; he was my first big bird and he was a comfort to me. [sound of bird trying to talk] What are you saying, Stella? That's Stella, the green and grey "Quaker." She talks not, not clearly but she says lots of things. They're together all day. My budgie and my parakeet, their cage is open and they have complete freedom in the office. These guys I put in their flight suits or diapers first thing in the morning, you know, they don't love it but I don't have to take it off them to change it, so look at, look what they get! They have freedom all day. They go from her cage to his cage, eat the food wherever they want, then there's bath time in the bathroom where Jer-, Frankie goes under the faucet and Stella goes in a tiny little bird bath; they, they love that. I, when I got these guys and the two of them would sit on me while I was working on the computer or they would both groom me at the same time, I realized they were letting me in on something special between them, you know, and I know that's special when they let you do that. It's more like, they let me be part of their flock, They let me in. [loud bird chirp]

Before, everything had to be in its place, everything was completely immaculate; [sounds of birds chatting, chirping and singing, throughout the story] I, I couldn't leave for work unless everything was just so. Now, furniture is chewed; there's bird feathers and bird down and bird food all over my bedroom floor because they throw it out of the cages and I don't vacuum it twenty times a day. There are cages on my floor, there are cages on counters; in the morning when I wake up it's filled with birdsong, when I hear Stella yapping at the, at the radio and everybody's – awww...chirping and I'm happy because I wake up – in the "Amazon"! [loud chirping of several birds]

Tony Kahn:

Today's *Morning Story* from Chloe Leamon: *A Member of the Flock*, and watch out for the anaconda on your way out of the jungle [laughs]. I'm here in the studio with Gary Mott. Your official position on birds?

Gary Mott:

I like birds!

Tony Kahn:

Good!

Gary Mott:

I see them as real companions.

Tony Kahn:
Mmm, hmm.

Gary Mott:
Creatures that light up a room. I have a rather somber bird story to share with you.

Tony Kahn:
Uh, oh.

Gary Mott:
Much along the lines of what was shared by Chloe.

Tony Kahn:
Crushed underfoot? Gobbled by a cat?

Gary Mott:
Well, yeah. A number of years ago I purchased two doves for Lori, my wife.

Tony Kahn:
Mm, hmm.

Gary Mott:
Representative of my love for her. Some months later we mistakenly left the cage out on the back deck.

Tony Kahn:
Mmmm.

Gary Mott:
And the next morning, sure enough, the birds were gone; there's a few feathers; there's a little bit of blood - Butch the alley cat.

Tony Kahn:
Mmm.

Gary Mott:
There was a void there that lingered for a while, and then, you know, we got an iguana, we got a rat, we got a bullfrog, we didn't go back to the bird thing. Maybe because it was too painful to consider.

Tony Kahn:
Birds and cats do tend to be a question to which the answer often is: one cat.

Gary Mott:

Ha, ha.

Tony Kahn:

You know.

Gary Mott:

What's your opinion of Chloe?

Tony Kahn:

I love Chloe and I think she's a delightful human being. As I recall you had a somewhat different opinion.

Gary Mott:

My initial opinion was, you know, this woman is nuts! But I think you did a fine job of focusing in on the story. Her growing love for her birds and how they've really enhanced her life and I think that's what the story's about – connecting with a pet and making your life richer.

Tony Kahn:

So we also have some email, right Gar?

Gary Mott:

We've been getting some fantastic little notes from listeners of *Morning Stories*. We heard from Bradley in West Hollywood, California.

Tony Kahn:

Mm, hmm.

Gary Mott:

"I love the unique and often times uplifting stories. I especially like the discussion you two have after each story. Each story in discussion feels like I'm listening to an intimate conversation among longtime friends. I love to save up a few shows and go jogging. It really makes the miles fly by." Thanks Bradley. One more from Laura: "There's nothing like connecting to people all over the world through their stories. I cried over the guy who had to give up horseshoeing." (That was our story [My Last Nail](#) , one of the early ones.)

Tony Kahn:

Hm, mmm, right.

Gary Mott:

"And the Brazilian woman who left this country for a deeper family connection." Fatima, [A Better Life](#) .

Tony Kahn:

Yeah, which is a big favorite. Yeah.

Gary Mott:

Yeah. [continues reading] "This is what the media's supposed to be about. I believe your program will grow into an instrument for real good in the world. I'm never so happy as when I am hiking with my dog and listening to your program."

Tony Kahn:

Lest you think that we have not also been hearing from the rest of the planet, "Dear *Morning Stories*, I am a born and raised Bostonian," Jennifer writes, "now living in the tropical heat of Singapore. I was thrilled to find your podcast on iTunes. It's like getting a personal postcard in the mail every Friday." Thanks Jennifer! And this! "You asked in a recent show: 'Who listens and how.' So here we go! I'm from the U.K. originally, but have lived in the Gulf of Arabia for six years, three years in Kuwait and three years in Qatar. So *Morning Stories* is downloaded onto my Mp3 player and broadcast through the car radio on my journey to work in Doha. Or Doha. I'm the only person you see smiling in Qatar's terrible traffic jams."

Well, Paul, from your iPod to hopefully other people's ears, 'cause I do know that's part of the world, where besides just the traffic jams, there's a lot not to smile about, so thanks for writing. That was Paul, from Qatar. It's about time to wrap up but certainly not without the ribbon that makes this package stay together and, and hopefully look so nice and that's the good people at Ipswitch, our sponsor, a leader in file transfer software. Check out their website at ipswitch.com > I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H.

Gary Mott:

And check us out on the web as well, at: wgbh.org/morningstories > and please get in touch: morningstories@wgbh.org >.

Tony Kahn:

We'll be back with a new story on Friday! See you then.

[Sounds of domestic birds chatting and chirping]

Chloe Leamon:

Buddy! There was a world in that bird that fascinated me so much. It was as if you go scuba diving for the first time; and you just think it's the ocean and there's a world going on under there. And I adored him. As crazy and neurotic as he was, I adored him. I couldn't leave him in a cage. I would always let him out.

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Lynn Relyea