

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPTS

*Marshall Jr. and Louise: Betsy Bunn recalls her first day of school, and some lessons she wished she never learned.*

### **Tony Kahn:**

Hi everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH, in Boston. And I've got to tell you, we're creating another first. As you may know, we've adopted a cutting-edge technology. Basically it's a baseball cap, with a tiny little microphone put into the visor [laughs], which we've discovered – is the perfect microphone – for the *Morning Stories* style. Well now, the inspiration behind all of this, our engineer Antonio Oliart, has suggested that, since we've got the hats on, why should we even go in to the studio? Let's just record here in the editing room.

Anyway, today's story is about "firsts," the kind of firsts in our lives that we never forget. First love, first heartbreak, first day of school. Today's storyteller, Betsy Bunn lives in Boston and she came in the other day to tell me of her first day in school, long ago and in another place. A day for her, of first love and also of first heartbreak. We call her Morning Story: *Marshall Jr. and Louise*.

### **Betsy Bunn:**

We always woke up to the smell of coffee and bacon. I remember waking up to that and gettin' out of bed and brushing my hair, a hundred times, 'cause that was what ya had to do. Mama had helped me put up my clothes the night before, so I got into my little blue checkered dress, I remember this day as if, it's carved in my head, and put on my shoes. Mama put ribbons on my hair. I was the youngest in the whole family, even counting the dog and my cousins. I was so excited!

Goin' to school was gonna be, entering a big world, being able to cross the street, being a big kid, at last. You know, and that I'd walk with Meg and Jerry and Marshall Jr. and Louise, and we'd all go to school, and I wouldn't be the little kid, left behind. Marshall Jr. was a year older than my brother and Louise was a year older than me. And we were best friends.

We lived on a college campus. We were allowed to go to these big bonfires twice a year, at the college. And afterwards we could sleep over at each other's houses. We played Cowboys and Indians; Louise and I always had to be the Squaws, but it was the way we got to play.

And Mama said, "Now, Missy, you look just fine! And Daddy'll walk you to school." [birds chirping] So I handed Daddy my hand and we went off to school. I remember too, because I had to run to keep up, because my Daddy had big, long legs. And I didn't wanna run, because that wouldn't look like I was a big kid, so I skipped. I can remember skipping because that looked okay, that looked like I was having a good time.

And we skipped to school and he took me in and introduced me to my teacher. Her name was

Miss Wilcox, and she smelled like roses. And I had my own desk and I, I looked around the room and I knew about half the kids, because they either went to our church or their parents worked on the faculty. So I could hardly wait for recess and Miss Wilcox came and she told us that we could go down and that we would play with half of the first and second and third grades for twenty minutes.

So I started to walk around to look for Marshall and Louise, I thought they'd be in that half. [sounds of children playing on a playground]. But I couldn't find 'em. So twenty minutes went and I went back into class. And we did spelling, and that was exciting. It was a good day, things were going well. Then lunch came, and I thought, "Okay, I can find Marshall and Louise, now." Well, I walked all around the playground; it was really hot! The sun just blistered down from the sky and it came up from the concrete, too. I remember just feelin' squished. I saw a couple of the church kids, but I couldn't find my friends, Marshall and Louise.

So the bell rang and I went back in. And then it was 2:30 and my sister was there to walk me home, 'cause she was twelve, and then we got almost home, and I said, "Meg! I didn't see Marshall Jr. and Louise. Can we stop at their house?" She said, "No, I don't think so. Besides, I have to go to the bathroom. Come on, let's race." And so she took off. And I remember I ran after her and then I felt all hot and tired and little again, and I tripped going up the stairs.

And I got in the kitchen and Mama was there and there was lemonade, in this pink bubbly pitcher. And Mama said, "Well, well, here's my big girls! Tell me all about your day." So I did! I said, "Oh, Mama, it was fun and I'm the best speller in the class. But, Mama, I never found Marshall Jr. and Louise. Can we call them to come over now?" And the kitchen just got real, real quiet. And Meg said, "Mama, she doesn't know. We didn't tell her."

And this little baby girl in me, just screamed, screeched and cried and said, "Didn't tell me what? I'm not a baby! Tell me! What is it?" And then Mama said, "Baby, white children and colored children, don't ever go to school together. Marshall Jr. and Louise will never be in school with you." And I remember, I was just stunned, then I started to cry. And Meg, who didn't always try to comfort me, did then. And she said, "Oh, baby, it's all right. They go to another school and they don't mind. They have other friends and you'll have other friends, too. You don't need them anymore. You just wait. You'll see. It's okay."

And I just remember running out and I went into my closet, it was dark and little and curled up in a little ball and I just thought I was never coming out again. It's not okay. It was not okay. I thought going to school was gonna open up a great big world to me, and instead, it started to close it down.

I feel stunned all over again, just talking about it. Even all these years and years and years later. I remember, Tony, when I had young children myself, and it was when all the whites were boycotting the schools and setting up private schools, in the South. My sister had older, school-age children and she said – she said, "My children will walk the line." And I said, "Meg! They could miss years of school." And then I wasn't at all sure that I would have the belief that it would take, to have my children miss two or three years of school while they walked a picket line. That I probably would send them where they could get an education, where they would

learn to read. They're only gonna get that time once. I didn't like myself very much.

[birds chirping]

You know, I did hospice work for many years and one woman I cared for, I left on a Friday afternoon, and I said, "Bye, Mrs. B. I'll see ya Monday." She took my hands in hers, and said, "Stay well, my dear. Be clear and do the best you can." Sometimes, the best you can do is not enough. If there is anything that is primally important in the world, it's the ability and willingness, to be part of each other's lives. [sounds of children playing in a playground] I don't think we try very hard. I wonder if we ever will.

[Sound of a school bell, children running, followed by soft guitar music]

**Tony Kahn:**

That was today's Morning Story from Betsy Bunn: *Marshall Jr. and Louise*. I'm sitting here with Gary Mott. I've got a question I want to ask you, Gar. What would you say was the most important thing that you learned in school? And did it have anything to do with the curriculum?

**Gary Mott:**

No. I'd have to say that most of what I remember, lessons I learned, were learned on the schoolyard.

**Tony Kahn:**

Mm, hmm.

**Gary Mott:**

I learned in fourth grade not to play chess in math class. [Tony bursts out laughing] 'Cause I got busted one time for that. Developing relationships with friends, with girls... .

**Tony Kahn:**

Mm, hmm.

**Gary Mott:**

I mean, all that happened in the context of school. You're out there, on your own, trying to decide, "Is what I'm hearing – Is this what I believe? – "

**Tony Kahn:**

Yeah.

**Gary Mott:**

"– Is this what I should believe?"

**Tony Kahn:**

Right. Betsy is a Southerner and the school system that she's talking about was in North Carolina and curiously enough one of the emails that we got this week was from someone in

North Carolina, right Gar? You have that handy?

**Gary Mott:**

[Reading email] “I’m an African American male, living in what’s called a part of the “New South,” in Charlotte, North Carolina. But most of all I’m just a human being and this is what attracts me to your podcast. Stories about people in the daily walk of life. We all want and need the same things in life. Love, understanding and laughter. Keep up the good work.” Mark Turner

**Tony Kahn:**

A postdoctoral fellow at the Yale School of Medicine writes: “All stories are great but some stay with me longer than others. One story in particular makes me happy and sad at the same time. This story is *Can’t Let Go*, by Sonny Dufault, the story of his own relationship with diabetes, which he’s had most of his adult life. She writes, “When I first heard this story, I was crying hard. Emotions were strong. My mother had died of diabetes at the age of forty-eight, three years ago. This story helped me to understand what she was thinking and how she felt, those last years, since she always tried to hide how sick she really was. I miss my Mom a lot, and when I’m feeling sad, I listen to this podcast and remember her and her life. I hope she’s in a better place.”

Angela is the name of our correspondent – and Angela, as we told you, we sent a copy of your letter on to Sonny Dufault, who is delighted to know that, you know, his story spoke to something in your experience, too.

**Gary Mott:**

Tony, we also heard from another professional story listener: “I’m a chaplain at a hospital, in New York City. One of the rewards of this job, is that I am blessed to hear people’s stories throughout the day. Like Tony, I am paid to listen to stories and chose this line of work exactly for that reason. As I went through a period of job-related malaise recently, I listened to my first Morning Story, rolling underneath Manhattan’s West Side, on the Number One train. I found the teller’s candidness and Tony’s joy in listening so inspiring, that I bounded the rest of the way to work, eager to once again enjoy the blessing of hearing people tell me their stories. I just wish I needed file transfer software, [Tony bursts out laughing, while Gary tries to restrain himself] so that I could support Ipswitch.” That’s Rabbi Mark Popovsky.

**Tony Kahn:**

Thank you so much for reminding us of the value of listening and also for the value of having Ipswitch near you, if not directly involved in your life. We thank them, every week, for helping support this podcast. Ipswitch, a leader in file transfer software, as the Rabbi says. I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H dot com.

**Gary Mott:**

And be sure to get in touch with us personally at <[morningstories@wgbh.org](mailto:morningstories@wgbh.org)> and we’ve got a web presence as well at, <[wgbh.org/morningstories](http://wgbh.org/morningstories)>. Spend some time with stories; they’ll do you some good.

**Tony Kahn:**

And listen, now that there's not a piece of glass between us and Antonio Oliart, Antonio can actually be heard. Say hi, Antonio.

**Antonio Oliart:**

Hola!

**Tony Kahn:**

Hola! Antonio Oliart. And “adios” from us and we'll see you next Friday with another Morning Story. Catch you then.

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Lynn Relyea