

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Home Alone: 7-year-old Harriet Reisen learns her parents have gone for the whole summer with everyone but her. Also, Pam Mandel reads a story from her blog, from a sunny balcony in Austria.

Tony Kahn:

Hi everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*, from WGBH, in Boston. I can think of a number of frightening experiences that I had as a kid, that my parents never heard about. Why? Because I didn't tell them, that's why. Like most kids, while my parents were busy taking care of me, I was trying to take care of them. They didn't complain when things got rough, so why should I? And I know I'm not alone.

I've hear plenty of stories from my friends (all of them former children) about scary experiences that they had as kids that they kept to themselves, for years and years. It turns out that my wife, Harriet Reisen, had one too. About ten years after we were married, she told me a story of something that happened to her, when she was seven. And I asked her if she'd be willing to tell the story to us on *Morning Stories*. Don't worry; the child in Harriet is doing very, very well. So today's Morning Story from my wife, Harriet Reisen: [Home Alone](#).

[Sounds of birds, singing]

Harriet Reisen:

That was the summer I was seven years old. Every year we would decamp for a house down at the Jersey shore. My friend Peggy Spencer was going to church that Sunday and I wanted to wait and say goodbye to Peggy. So I waited for Peggy, came back home, and there were no cars in the driveway. We had two cars and they were both gone.

I knew that they'd been packing and I knew I was supposed to be there and I was always off in my little dream world and I wouldn't show up and I'd get in trouble for it. And so I thought, okay, you know, got to take my medicine. I'm spending the summer by myself. So I went into the house which was unlocked (as houses were at that time) and I proceeded to live my life, you know, [laughs] as a kind of bachelor seven-year-old.

I don't think I even read in the library, usually, but my father did so I think I thought, I'll read my book like a grown-up. And I was okay. And then I thought, hmmm, I'm hungry. And I went into the kitchen and I looked around and I had no idea how to get myself anything to eat. And then it hit me. I couldn't take care of myself; I -- I was going to starve.

That anyone might be able to come back and get me was just beyond my ability to imagine. You know? Just at that point, this young woman who did housekeeping for us (I remember her name was Addie Mae Perry), she came up from the South. She came into the house. She said, "Why are, are you here? What happened to you?" And I just, I probably said, "I, you know, I was being punished. I was bad." And I cried, just sobbing to poor Addie Mae about how I was left alone. She telephoned my father's business and a plan was made that I would be picked up by my uncle, after work.

Meanwhile, my parents had packed up a whole lot of stuff and four -- they thought -- children and had made an arrangement to get together at Howard Johnson's [a highway restaurant chain at the time]. Then they went through an entire lunch without noticing that I was missing. My mother said to my father, "Aren't you gonna bring anything to Harriet in the car?" And my father said, "I thought you had her!" Each had thought the other had left me sleeping in the car. And by the time they called the office, Addie Mae had made this arrangement.

And my uncle took me to his home at the shore where I'd never been before and I spent the night with him and my aunt and their four children. And that was an awfully long time to wait. The next morning at around 11:00 my father came in to pick me up. [sounds of seagulls] Then I was reunited with my family.

For years I thought, I thought about it the way they thought about it. Wasn't it funny that I thought I could actually live by myself and take care of myself? And then, wasn't it funny that they had lunch all together and didn't notice that I was missing? What a funny mistake.

[Sounds of birds, singing]

I guess four was a lot of children. I guess they were preoccupied. [soft guitar music] They never thought I was ever lost. No, but, I did. I'll never forget Addie Mae. I think she saved me from complete desolation. Can't imagine what -- I think I might've gone crazy, [chuckles] and never recovered ... in a way that nobody else really saw, she looked at me and she saw I was lost.

I, I've often wondered how things went with Addie Mae. She called me a princess. And I do wish very much, for Addie Mae, that it came out okay. [said tearfully]

[Soft guitar music]

Tony Kahn:

That was today's Morning Story from my dear wife, Harriet Reisen: *Home Alone*. And I'm here in the studio with my dear friend, Gary Mott.

Gary Mott:
I know how crazy things can get.

Tony Kahn:
Yeah . . .

Gary Mott:
And I have three kids and I can just see myself, you know, leaving my daughter in the car... . [chuckles]

Tony Kahn:
Should that ever happen -- and God forbid it does -- what do you think she'll be thinking? "Oh, I did something wrong. Daddy left me in the car." Maybe she'll think that?

Gary Mott:
Not, my children, no. I would never hear the end of it. [Tony and Gary laugh]
I would never recover. It would be a daily badgering.

Tony Kahn:
I see!

Gary Mott:
Dad, remember that time you left me in the car?!

Tony Kahn:
The most important lesson we get from our families: how do you handle emotions? We did a story not so long ago from Ilona Kuphal, (*Now, Show Me the Opposite* -9/8/2006), who told what it was like to grow up in her family with her father, being a Nazi. And that's had amazing responses.

Gary Mott:
A lady named Pam heard Ilona's story and she wrote us --

Tony Kahn:
-- within minutes of hearing it. Right?

Gary Mott:
Within minutes, we called her up:

Pam:

I just started listening to podcasts, and your show was one of the ones that I started to load on to my iPod. So I was listening to her show and I'm sitting here, and you know, I'm sitting here in Austria and it's a beautiful and sunny afternoon and there are cows in the meadow next to our balcony and this story ... oh, it just was so personal. You know?

And it made me think immediately of my parents. My husband is Austrian, so I've been coming back and forth to Austria for almost ten years now, but this is the first time for my parents. My family is Jewish and there are no Jews here. This farmer up on the hill, was 88 and he, he lived through the war, so you can't help but think, "Oh, where were they when this happened?"

Tony Kahn:

Mmm, hmmm. Pamela, would you read us your blog entry?

Pam:

I'd be happy to. This would've been the day after they arrived: For many years my parents and sister, they would never visit Germany. We're Jewish and the history, well, you know. They've extended that ambivalence towards Austria, but since I married an Austrian, they wanted to see his homeland and have moderated their views a little.

The parents are staying up on the hill at a farmhouse. After we got them settled in, we were invited to join the family for coffee. While we were sitting there the old man came in. He's eighty-eight and still farming.

As a much younger man he was a POW. He got picked up in Northern Africa and sat out almost all of the war in a fenced yard in Texas. He picked cotton as prison labor. When he was finally released and transported back to Austria, the Red Cross shipped him a guitar that they'd given him, when he was a prisoner.

He still has his guitar. He likes Country Music. And he says he's going to take it out and play it for us sometime while the parents are still here. [Pam bursts out laughing and Tony joins her] When he was finally released, he actually wanted to stay in the U.S, but they tossed him out.

"Sure they did," said the woman to his right. "They had to throw out all the Nazis!" She whacked him on the arm and laughed. And his son said, "So much better than having to live with the memories of what happened during the war."

Tony Kahn:

Mmm.

Pam:

The old man said that during his time in uniform, he sat in a bunker holding a rifle, but he never shot the thing. Never shot it at anything or anyone. My stepfather reached over and patted him on the arm, as a way of thanks.

On day two we had coffee and cake with my mother-in-law and went for a lovely walk by the lake. The only past we talked about was what the family had been doing with their summer.

Tony Kahn:

Wow. If you were to tell the story of that touch and how long it took to finally land on the shoulder of an Austrian, from the finger of a Jew. . .

Pam:

It was very moving. I felt really honored to be the person doing the translation. I've been struggling with this language for years; it's a very difficult language. And to be able to be sort of a conduit for this interaction was for me -- this was an incredible experience. I work as a freelance technical writer -- how to use software.

Tony Kahn:

Is that what got you to your own iPod?

Pam:

I actually won it in a contest. [laughs] Pretty exciting, you know, people, people go out and they spend a lot of money on them. They're quite expensive.

Tony Kahn:

Yeah.

Pam:

But I love radio and when I travel I can't listen to the, the kinds of things I like to listen to, and I was looking at the NPR stuff and I found your show and I found a bunch of classic recordings of, you know, 40's and 50's radio shows. And, oh, I love that stuff and now I can have it with me, even though it's really far away, and we're, we're looking at maybe having to pay extra fees for our Internet

Tony Kahn:

[Laughs]

Pam:

-- this month, 'cause I've just been My husband keeps asking me, "What are all these downloads?" [laughs]

Tony Kahn:

Don't tell him we have about a hundred, in the archives.

Pam:

I know! I saw, and I'm just, I'm just at the very top of the list! I don't have any doubts that there's more stuff in there for me to love.

Tony Kahn:

It's very forward of me to say this, but I think I love you.

[Tony and Pam laugh]

Tony Kahn:

Well...

Pam:

I'm flattered.

Tony Kahn:

I, I am honored to hear from you, so, thank you so much.

Pam:

You're so very welcome; I'm just delighted.

Tony Kahn:

Pam, I don't even know your last name.

Pam:

It's Mandel.

Tony Kahn:

Mandel. Pamela Mandel. Thank you, Pamela.

Pam:

Thanks a lot, Tony. All right, take care.

Tony Kahn:

You too.

Pam:

Uh huh! Bye, bye.

Tony Kahn:

Bye.

[End of phone call]

Tony Kahn:

Well, my feelings for Pamela have only deepened [Tony and Gary laugh] since I last talked to her. [music begins] I've gotta tell you, Gar, just like Pamela, I feel really privileged to be in the middle of somebody's story while somebody else is hearing it. It's amazing what a story can do to bring people together.

Gary Mott:

Podcasting it's just, you know, it's revolutionary.

Tony Kahn:

Listen guys, out there, all of you who've been supplying us with stories. Please, keep it up. And as your example, look toward, well, Ipswich. [Tony and Gary laugh] Their website is <Ipswich.com> I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H and they are a leader in file transfer software, as well as being a really good friend.

Gary Mott:

If you'd like help Ipswich, in their support of *Morning Stories*, <wgbh.org/morningstories>, a couple of ways to do it, credit card or if you prefer, PayPal.

Tony Kahn:

Listen, the important thing is if you're feeling for *Morning Stories* is positive and you'd like to help us keep bringing them to you, then we would certainly appreciate whatever help you can send.

Gary Mott:

And as always we appreciate email from our listeners.

Tony Kahn:

Absolutely. That's priceless.

Gary Mott:

<morningstories@wgbh.org>

Tony Kahn:

And we'll see you soon. Take care. Bye-bye.

[Soft guitar music continues and fades]

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Lynn Relyea