

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

***Robbed:** Betsy Bunn finds an unexpected gift in an empty wallet, while Simon Rich ponders another desperate situation.*

Tony Kahn:

Hi everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. In the five years that I lived with my family in Mexico our house was broken into five times. After we got over the surprise the following morning, we were just as surprised by what had been taken. A pair of pants, two pairs of socks. One time a kilo of rice from the pantry. Another time a single hubcap, from the set of four on our car. This wasn't so much theft as a redistribution of property by our neighbors. They had taken only what they needed to get by. Even the hubcap; I saw that a few days later, sitting over a fire in one of our poor neighbors' front yard, cooking tamales for his family. Oh, and did I mention that each of these robberies took place on Christmas Eve? Well, here with her own personal story of a crime revisited is Betsy Bunn. We call her tale: *Robbed*.

Betsy Bunn:

We were hiking up near the Canadian Border, out from a little town called Bellingham, Washington, and we were at the trailhead where no one else had come, walking down to a little tiny patch of water.

[Crows cawing and birds chirping]

Betsy Bunn:

Beautiful day. The sun just streaming in. We saw a man walking toward us on the trail, his cheeks were rosy red, his face was wrinkled and wizened. He was wearing a baseball cap and he nodded his head and tipped his cap to us as he walked on by. And we nodded to him and said, "Good Mornin'." He was pushing a wooden cart, it was an old wooden cart, and it had on it probably all of his worldly goods. Household goods, clothes, had a blanket. There was a tarp mostly covering it. And I turned to my friend and said, "He looks like the woodcutter in a fairytale." She said, "He's homeless. This is the last stop before the Canadian border. If they cross the border, they get picked up. They get off the train here, and take their chances."

[Birds singing]

Got back to the car and settled into the seat and pulled out my bag. I noticed that my bag was unzipped. I thought, "Well that's odd, I'm sure I zipped it." My wallet was there; my credit cards were there; my license was there. A blank

check was there, but my money was gone. About a hundred dollars. It was the old man with the cart. I was sure. There was no one else at the trailhead, no other car. It was the old man. I could see his dirty gnarled hands, rummaging through MY things. Stuffing them into his cart and slipping back into the cover of the woods. I was enraged! Enraged!

I've thought a lot about it. He could've just taken the money and run. He could've thrown the wallet in the undergrowth a hundred yards down the road. He could've stuck the wallet on his cart. He didn't have to stand there next to a Subaru with three car seats and carefully lift my wallet, take the money out of it, fold it back up and put it back in the car. What if we'd come back? What if somebody had come along into that trailhead? He clearly didn't belong there. And he couldn't run away. He'd have been caught. He could've run down the road, thrown the wallet in the underbrush. He could've traded my credit cards. But he didn't do any of those things. I won't have to make a police report. I won't have to cancel all my credit cards. I won't have to file for stolen identity. He didn't do the easy thing. He kept my money, but he thought of me. Hmm.

[Music]

Betsy Bunn:
I can fly home.

[Airplane sounds]

Tony Kahn:
That was Betsy Bunn with today's Morning Story: *Robbed*. Here I am, safely, in the studios of WGBH with Gary Mott. Hi, Gar

Gary Mott:
Tony, do you really think the guy was thinking of her when he only took the money?

Tony Kahn:
For me it's less about whether he cared about her or not. She cared about him. What I'm amazed by is Betsy's own spiritual detective work. You know, you look at all the clues and they finally lead you back, NOT to the person who committed the crime, but a human being whom she understood.

Gary Mott:
I don't think this, this guy cared a lick for her.

Tony Kahn:

Well, we'll never know unless this guy wants to call in and tell a morning story of his own. Perhaps he's listening out there. But she came out of that a better person. I have been in situations where, the way I've responded has made it twice as bad. When I lived in Cambridge, I was robbed repeatedly, it was like a...

Gary Mott:
Oh, yeah?

Tony Kahn:
an open-air ventilation system.

[Chuckling]

Tony Kahn:
'Till it finally got to the point where I started getting smaller and smaller things that I could hide. 'Cause what they generally wanted to take was electronics. So, I got a tiny little television set that I could hide behind the garbage! [Laughs]

Gary Mott:
Okay.

Tony Kahn:
That was not, I think, a healthy adjustment.

Gary Mott:
Forgiveness, it's, it's healing, it's purifying and it's something that I'll learn to do someday.

[Laughter]

Tony Kahn:
I love stories that take something that we take normally for granted and look at it in a whole new way. Sometimes it's very refreshing, and sometimes it's funny. We had a visit not so long ago, you may remember, from a young man named Simon Rich?

Gary Mott:
Very funny guy.

Tony Kahn:
All of his humor is based on taking things we normally take for granted and looking at them from the point of view of the people who are stuck in that situation. We thought it would be very appropriate to have him reading a story called: "Ant Farm" from his first book of very short, very funny pieces called: *Ant*

Farm and Other Desperate Situations.

[Drum roll with fife and drum corps.]

Simon Rich:

Officer:

All right men, listen up. As you know we've built seven tunnels and we still haven't found a way through the glass. I can tell you're discouraged and I don't blame you. Tunnel seven was our most ambitious project to date and you all risked your lives to make it happen. But rest assured. We'll be out of this hellish wasteland soon enough. I have a plan: an eighth tunnel... through the sand.

NCO:

I don't know, sir, we've been diggin' tunnels ever since we got here. We always end up hitting glass. We lost ten men on the last tunnel. Brian, Jack, Lawrence. Why don't we just give up? I mean, seriously, what's the point?

Officer:

The point? The point is we have no food or water. The point is we're trapped in this crazy desert and if we don't find an exit soon, we're going to suffocate.

NCO:

What kind of God would put us here? Sand to the left, sand to the right.

Officer:

It's a test, William. He's testing us.

[Drum roll with fife and drum corps.]

Officer:

We can do this. We just have to work ten times harder than we have ever worked before.

[Men grunting and straining]

Officer:

You wanna know something? I've got a good feeling about this one. A really good feeling.

[Men continuing to grunt and strain with fife and drum playing]

Tony Kahn:

Simon Rich with his story: "Ant Farm."

Gary Mott:

The book is hilarious. I read the book. It's so off the wall. Simon is the former editor of uh, *The National Lampoon*?

Tony Kahn:

The Harvard Lampoon.

Gary Mott:

The Harvard Lampoon.

Tony Kahn:

The Harvard Lampoon, right.

Gary Mott:

The Harvard Lampoon, yes.

Tony Kahn:

Right.

Gary Mott:

Our website, please go there. Please listen. <WGBH.org/morningstories> and please get in touch. <Morningstories@wgbh.org>.

Tony Kahn:

We'll be back very soon with another Morning Story. Take care.

[Fife and drum continue to play]

Tony Kahn (from the distance, off microphone, struggling to open radio studio door):

Aw, come on, pull it, pull it! Pull it open! Ah! Ah! Who put us in this studio? My god, there's glass; there's glass all around us! Aw!

Gary Mott:

Yeah, don't hurt yourself.

[Fife and drum]

End of recording

Transcribed by:

Lynn Relyea

Comments from Liz:

I have had a day or so to think about this story. When I first heard it, months ago, I was completely in agreement with Gary's first thought - "Oh, come on, now. Surely the thief had no thought of Betsy at all." But now that I've heard it again and had a little more time to think about it, I find myself thinking that what Betsy did by showing the thief a little love in her analysis of the situation was akin to what Malvina Reynolds advocated in her song, "Magic Penny" --

Love is something if you give it away,
Give it away, give it away.
Love is something if you give it away,
You end up having more.

It's just like a magic penny,
Hold it tight and you won't have any.
Lend it, spend it, and you'll have so many
They'll roll all over the floor.

<<http://www.wku.edu/~smithch/MALVINA/mr101.htm>>

By reacting to the thief's actions with some love, Betsy started the "penny" rolling. Tony reacted with love, and your discussion together for the *Morning Stories'* audience passed it along to a much wider audience.

Lynn's choice of this show among the first she transcribed indicates to me that it meant something special - and obviously good - to her, so I'm assuming she agreed with Tony. And so the love goes on!

