

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

The Promenade: Tony and Gary take a long walk to the Italian Riviera, Southern China, Singapore, and the donut shop across the street in search of old friends.

[Podcast commences with the sound of a metal door opening, then footsteps along a corridor. You can hear classical music in the background]

TONY KAHN:

Hi everybody, this is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH taking my block-long daily walk down the main entrance hall of our brand-new building, to the staircase to our office and the second floor at the end of this hall. [more footsteps] Actually most mornings, I keep on going, [sound of a beep and an exit door opening] past the staircase, right out the back. [now you can hear the sound of traffic] Across four lanes of traffic, to a little doughnut shop across the street.

[Background noise of a shop]

The only place so far where you can see a familiar face that isn't twenty or thirty yards away.

[more background noise of a shop] This tiny shop run by a small army of Brazilian immigrants is probably as crucial a part of the architecture of the new GBH as the fifty-foot main support concrete columns.

[Sound of change being given]

Whether or not architects plan for it, most people need a daily place to gather, for a fix of the familiar, a little unstructured conversation, the press of a friendly crowd. A place where they know you as "Mr. Medium-black, No Sugar."

[Sound of a door opening as Tony returns across the street to the office]

It'll be interesting to see what other little neighborhoods pop up as the thousand or so employees here begin to shape the space to a human scale. In the meantime though we've been reaching out to some of our friends from the *Morning Stories* community and encouraging them to stay in touch and when they can, to come by.

TONY (to Erica Ferencik):

Thanks for coming in to our new building.

ERICA FERENCIK:

I know it's incredibly impressive and that's just the parking lot. [laughs]

TONY KAHN:

And you ended up in the wrong parking lot?

ERICA FERENCIK:

I was in the wrong parking lot!

TONY KAHN:

If you had only one adjective to use for this place, what would it be?

ERICA FERENCIK:

Long, it's a long, long walk.

TONY KAHN:

Our old friend Erica Ferecik dropped in the other morning with a couple of houseplants, one for Gary Mott, one for me.

ERICA FERENCIK:

I'd been sitting doing my email and I think I'd answered one email too many and I just felt lonely and I suddenly remembered this moment with my dad – so, all of a sudden it came to me.

TONY KAHN:

You also brought us a poem.

ERICA FERENCIK:

Shall I read it ?

TONY KAHN:

Please.

ERICA FERENCIK:

The Promenade.

I just recalled as I stare at my screen, my eighty-year-old dad explaining to me why he was so lonely in America.

Every night, after dinner he and his family used to walk along a promenade that bordered the sea - a two mile long boardwalk in San Remo, the Italian Riviera.

[background sound of guitar and sea shore]

He said it was no big deal this talking to each other and visiting this old friend, that nephew, an uncle, a new face. "What does one do after dinner in this country, turn on the TV? Where is the promenade in America?" he would ask me in my thirties.

"Dad, we don't have that here, we have Starbucks. We have email. Come on, I'll get you online."

But he was losing his sight slowly by then, until there was just a pinprick left to get around by, which is how finally I got to see him.

So I miss him, when I sit here after one email too many. You know that feeling when you can't wait to get to it, your inbox after hours away - there must be something good there by now. And you finally do, and after you have answered everyone and done everything, that emptiness surges in.

[Sound of water lapping on the seashore]

And I see him right in front of me, his balding head, his big gentle hands shaking slightly as he butters his bread, sips his wine. And I get it ... How perfect it would be to promenade like that, the ocean on my left, the people on my right as the day wanes and night washes in.

[The poem ends, followed by the sound of telephone ringing.]

JANIE GAO:

Hello.

TONY KAHN:

Janie, is that you?

JANIE GAO:

Tony?

TONY KAHN:

How are you?

JANIE:

Fine.

TONY KAHN:

Another old friend we hadn't heard from in a while was Janie Gao. Janie, you may remember from an earlier *Morning Story*, was studying for her S.A.T's in China and facing disapproval from her teachers for her decision to apply to college in the United States. We wanted to know how she was doing now that the tests were over.

How long has it been since we last talked?

JANIE GAO:
Probably half a year.

TONY KAHN:
Tell me what you've been through.

JANIE GAO:
I took my SAT examination.

TONY KAHN:
How did it go?

JANIE GAO:
I've never taken a test with so many students, more than 400 students at the same time in a Badminton hall in a junior college. Some of my classmates told me that the test is very easy, but I don't think so.

TONY KAHN:
After you finished your test, did you celebrate?

JANIE GAO:
Yes, I went shopping.

TONY KAHN:
So, you shopped your brains out?

JANIE GAO:
No actually I bought five books, that's it. Five novels. That's it, no, nothing more.

TONY KAHN:
Is your heart still set on colleges in the United States?

JANIE GAO:

Yes, Washington University, University of Chicago, Georgetown University, Notre Dame, Wisconsin and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

TONY KAHN:

How do you go about deciding?

JANIE GAO:

You have to understand yourself completely, your strengths and your weaknesses.

TONY KAHN:

I'm 62 and I'm still learning about my strengths and weaknesses.

JANIE GAO:

Most of my classmates work a lot harder. Maybe a little bit tired, I think.

TONY KAHN:

How many children are there in your family, Janie?

JANIE GAO:

Just one.

TONY KAHN:

Just one. It was better luck for a family to have a son, than a daughter. Has that changed?

JANIE GAO:

Not changed much.

TONY KAHN:

So do you feel under more pressure because you are a girl and not a boy, to do well?

JANIE GAO:

It is becoming better and a girl will be easier to communicate and not so naughty as boys.

[Tony laughs] Most girls study hard and they know what they want, and then boys always skip a class or run away to play basketball, or something like that!

TONY KAHN:

Aha!

JANIE GAO:

Yes. I think I am not a person that, that like to stay in one place forever. If I go to United States, I will be alone – that's a huge problem. Maybe I will feel more free; life is full of challenges.

TONY KAHN:

I think you will make friends very easily. Gary and I would be very happy to hear from you. If we can help in any way I hope you will feel free to call us.

JANIE GAO:

Oh, I really appreciate that. That's great. Maybe I will work in the United States for two or three years, but after that I will come back. This is my home; I grew up here; I'm a Chinese – that's my identity. Yes.

TONY KAHN:

Since we last spoke, what's the biggest change that's happened for you?

JANIE GAO:

Biggest change... When I last time spoken to you I feel I am under unbearable pressure – too anxious, but now, but now I am more relaxed.

TONY KAHN:

You have mellowed out?

JANIE GAO:

Yes, mellowed out! [Tony laughs] Yes, this is the first time I heard this word! Uh, huh, that's the feeling. [laughs]

TONY KAHN:

Will you let us know once you hear from these colleges?

JANIE GAO:

OK, OK. I like happy endings, bye-bye.

[Chinese music, followed by the sounds in the coffee shop]

TONY KAHN:

So here we are back at the coffee shop, by way of Italy, a little place outside Hong Kong where Janie lives, and Singapore where she ended up taking the tests. I'm here with Gary Mott.

GARY MOTT:

I'm also a medium-black.

TONY KAHN:

The things you can find out when you have a chance to have little unstructured conversation.

GARY MOTT:

Maybe that's why we work together so well.

TONY KAHN:

For so long too, you know neither one of us can get to sleep apparently!

GARY MOTT:

So long, right, didn't we just surpass our three-year anniversary?

TONY KAHN:

That's right, our third year as a podcast was October 7th, 2007, so we're a little bit past three years old. We can walk now; we can talk.

GARY MOTT:

So what have we learned?

TONY KAHN:

Podcasting is a blast. Podcasting is conversation, and it makes it fresh every day, like the doughnuts here, hopefully!

GARY MOTT:

It's great to hear from Erica again,

TONY KAHN:

Oh, yeah . . .

GARY MOTT:

because she was one of our first --

TONY KAHN:

She was.

GARY MOTT:

- contributors with her nude beach story, *In the buff*.

TONY KAHN:

Have you noticed little things people have been doing to add little personal touches to their space, a little hallway or in front of their office?

GARY MOTT:

When we first moved into the building we were told we could not put any posters or any pin-ups or anything, and we're going, "Wait a minute, this is me, this is who I am, I got to put my Eileen Ivers, you know, Celtic music poster up, I just... I gotta..."

TONY KAHN:

That's you...

GARY MOTT:

Pictures of my kids. The lady in the cubby next to you, ah -

TONY KAHN:

That's amazing, yeah; she put up a little picture of her husband and also a picture of her monkey.

GARY MOTT:

Her monkey, she has a monkey!

TONY KAHN:

Turns out she has a monkey.

GARY MOTT:

She used to be a monkey trainer and she has a monkey in her apartment.

TONY KAHN:

This monkey apparently was only into her, so she took it home.

GARY MOTT:

That is a story right there; it tells you volumes about this lady.

TONY KAHN:

Well, to our third year of just a wonderful community, it's been fantastic. Three more years would be terrific, maybe with fewer doughnuts but I hope you all keep on supporting us the way you have, because I'll tell you, not only does it mean the world to us, in a way it is our world so, thanks a lot for that.

GARY MOTT:

<wgbh.org/morningstories> Listen, learn, now you can watch some videos; we've got a page on YouTube...

TONY KAHN:

Right. Total experience.

GARY MOTT:

Watch, listen...

TONY KAHN:

If you're gonna be run over watching something on your iPod, why not make it a *Morning Story*?

GARY MOTT:

Why not!

TONY KAHN:

OK. So, we'll see you soon with our next podcast. Take care.

(Podcast ends with background chatter within the doughnut shop)

DOUGHNUT SHOP ASSISTANT:

Good morning, how are you?

TONY KAHN:

I'm back.

DOUGHNUT SHOP ASSISTANT:

Still a medium black?

TONY KAHN:

You know, this time I think I'll take a small black, and a chocolate coconut doughnut.

(Sound of beeps from cashier's till)

[End of Recording]

Transcript by David Keight, January 20th 2008.

Notes from transcripator:

The promenade reminds me of visits to the Mediterranean coast, both in Italy and also other countries in the area. It is very common in these Mediterranean countries for whole families to take evening strolls along their local promenade. It is also quite normal to see parents pushing babies and toddlers along in their pushchairs (strollers) at ten or even eleven in the evening, during the summer months. Families tend to eat during the mid-evening and then go for a walk, maybe for a mile or so, taking in the fresh sea air and having light conversation with their families and friends. In some

places such as Malta, it is common for the sea front promenades to be busier at ten in the evening than at six, such is their devotion to the evening “promenade.”

After the pressures of a busy day, the hustle and bustle of work, home life, or maybe just being stuck inside, getting outside for just half an hour is the best way to unwind, have a little conversation with those around you and have your own promenade. I recommend it.