

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*Spacing Out*: Mark Jenkins celebrates the joys of "inner space" on Martha's Vineyard; Tony Kahn tries to help a frightened visitor from outer space on Cape Cod.

TONY KAHN:

Hi everybody, this is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*, from a snowy WGBH in Boston. We got our first snowfall the other day, and of the sixteen forms of snow known to people in Massachusetts I would definitely call this "Glark." That's sheets of sleet with little chewy chunks of hail freezing underfoot into craters of slush, that you see everywhere – oh and patches of black ice that you can't see anywhere that can flip you on your back like a giant tortoise.

Maybe the greyest place to be in weather like this around here is on summer playgrounds like Cape Cod or the offshore islands. By the end of fall in these places about nine-tenths of the population has disappeared, leaving shuttered stores and houses, very few jobs, skim-milk skies, and plenty of empty landscape to 'space out' in. To get by, people there tend to "detach."

We're going to bring you two stories today about that state of mind: one from the island of Martha's Vineyard, and the other from a bridge over Cape Cod Canal. The first is from Mark Jenkins and the second, I'm embarrassed to say, comes from me. We call today's podcast *Spacing Out*.

MARK JENKINS:

It finally happened the other day. Four people in line at the coffee shop and I knew every one of them. [dog barks] It's that time of the year again when life in this part of the world, as it does in most summer communities in the winter months, gets pretty cozy. There are folks among us who prefer the term "stifling." That same person I was standing beside at the coffee shop is the same person who pumps my gas later that day, who is the same person who is "J-Lo'ing" it at karaoke night at the pub where I grab a burger for dinner.

[Background noise of flag whipping in the wind]

Most stores are padlocked and windows boarded up here on Martha's Vineyard in this, the off, off season. No tumbleweeds here, but when the wind picks up a common site is

a ball of dried seaweed whipping down Circuit Avenue in Oak Bluffs, past the muted carousel and several deserted ice cream stores.

[Sound of ferryboat horn]

Getting to the big wide world, where no one knows your name or the name of your dog, or the name of your ex-wife, involves time, money and inconvenience, and it's easy to develop a mental block about leaving this rock. Though it's not a state of mind I fight very hard.

I admit it; I love the winters on Martha's Vineyard – that very sense of isolation appeals to me. OK, I'm not going to get too carried away, we get the same bazillion-and-one cable stations everyone else does – and we're not stranded. The isolation we experience here is, in large part, a state of mind.

When the ferries stop running at about eight in the evening, you might stand on the harbor and look out over Nantucket Sound at the lights twinkling on the mainland so far away, and think to yourself "If the worst thing about living on Martha's Vineyard is the five miles of frigid water between the island and the mainland . . .

[ferryboat horn]

it's also the best thing.

[Story finishes with sounds of flag whipping in the wind and a dog barking]

[pause]

[Sound of telephone ringing twice]

TONY KAHN:

The call came in the early evening from a payphone, as my wife and I were sitting down to eat. "Please..." whispered a young man, "don't hang up, I dialed your number at random. I need help." The high breathless pitch of terror in his voice sent a chill right down my spine.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I just escaped from a UFO. The last time I was here was 1924."

Calmly I reassured him, he was going to be OK, and started looking for the phone number of the Samaritans, an organization with a hotline that I remembered from the late Sixties. Unlike me, the Samaritans would be qualified to give not only short-term sympathy, but some long-term help. "Listen" I said calmly, "If I give you a number that can help you, could you dial it?"

He thought he could. I led him through the drill of dialing, step by step. Did he have a dime? Yes. A dime, not a nickel – phone calls cost a dime now. He was sure. Did he see the buttons on the phone below the slot? Yes. The buttons were what we dialed with now; did he understand that? He understood.

I gave him the number of the Samaritans and asked him to repeat it. Haltingly, he did, then again with more certainty, and a third time with confidence. I couldn't help feeling proud of us, as slowly we moved across the broken glass of his nightmare to the shelter of the Samaritans. I had him repeat the number a final time, said "Goodbye" and hung up.

I looked at the phone book one last time and saw that the number I had given him was not for the Samaritans, but for Samaritas, a benevolent society one name below the Samaritans in the phone book. What had I done? I had built him a bridge back to safety with an enormous hole in it. I grabbed the phone and quickly called Samaritas. A woman answered.

"Listen" I said, "This is going to sound crazy, but you're about to get a phone call from someone who is going to tell you he was on a UFO since 19- "

"He just called" she interrupted.

"What did you say?"

"I told him there was nothing I could do, and hung up." She seemed genuinely sorry; something in his voice had touched her, too.

"You didn't give him the number of the Samaritans, did you?" I asked. She'd never heard of them.

Every summer now, on my way to Cape Cod, over the Sagamore Bridge I see the sign: "*Feeling desperate?*" it says, "*Call the Samaritans.*" They have two numbers, it turns out – both of which I now know by heart.

[Finishes with sound of water lapping on the shore]

TONY KAHN:

I'm here with Gary Mott

GARY MOTT:

Why did you feel equipped to help this guy?

TONY KAHN:

That's a good question ... I remember why!

GARY MOTT:

Yeah, why?

TONY KAHN:

I had been talking to a "shrink" at a party, about how do you treat somebody who tells you that he just came from Mars?

GARY MOTT:

Oh!

TONY KAHN:

Do you say "You're out of your mind" or do you say "Oh, what was the weather like?"

[Tony and Gary laugh]

GARY MOTT:

That's the *Morning Stories* treatment right there. Meeting people on their level, you know.

TONY KAHN:

I feel just awful.

GARY MOTT:

But, but your heart was in the right place, Tony. Telemarketers -- we just never answer the phone --

TONY KAHN:

Right.

GARY MOTT:

We just don't, you know -

TONY KAHN:

It's a call for help!

GARY MOTT:

Yeah, sort of a call for help. I -- [Tony laughs] One time a telemarketer called up and he, he gave me the full, you know, "How you doin'..."

TONY KAHN:

Oh, you went the whole ride!

GARY MOTT:

... and I stayed with him, waiting for the opportunity to jump in and say "Not interested." Ten minutes into the, the *spiel* I hung up on him. I just hung up on him. He called me back and said "Dude, that was really uncool."

[Tony laughs]

GARY MOTT:

I felt bad.

TONY KAHN:

So the moral maybe is: No kindness is better than half a kindness

GARY MOTT:

Uh, I think so.

TONY KAHN:

Before there was telemarketing, you know, you'd get solicitation mail that would have like little pencils or something in them. My father would get these envelopes. He'd open them up; he'd find the little pencils in there, and then he'd take a sheet of paper and he'd write a letter to them, saying "Thank you very much for the pencils, please, send more!"

[Both laugh]

TONY KAHN:

And then he would send it off!

GARY MOTT:

You know, interestingly, whenever I get a call that shows up on the caller ID: "unknown name, unknown number," the one time out of ten that I get one of those calls that I choose to pick up, it's the Red Cross asking for a blood donation, which I'm always happy to give. It's uncanny!

[pause]

TONY KAHN:

You are probably one of the weirdest people I have ever met!

GARY MOTT:

That's what my kids say!

TONY KAHN:

Anyway, we do make a connection every day, 'cause we have the figures with people out there who are listening to this podcast and, and believe me, if you want to call in we will take your call. But since you don't have our phone number, you might want to try an email instead 'cause we'll definitely answer that. We'll get right back to you, and in fact we may even call you.

GARY MOTT:

<morningstories@wgbh.org> Our website <wgbh.org/morningstories> Lots to see and do.

TONY KAHN:

We've got video, our whole archive of podcasts.

GARY MOTT:

We've got the link to flickr, our flickr page.

TONY KAHN:

Our flickr page, and you know what else we have?

GARY MOTT:

What do we have?

TONY KAHN:

We have this lovely little link. It's modest but it's heartfelt, saying, "Please contribute."

GARY MOTT:

That's right!

TONY KAHN:

Anything you contribute we definitely put immediately to use, and right back into the show.

GARY MOTT:

And we love getting comments, along with contributions. Comments from listeners that say "You know, *Morning Stories* really makes a difference in my day."

TONY KAHN:

So Gary and I will be back real soon with another Morning Story. Take care.

[Podcast finishes with the sound of water lapping on the shore, plus a phone ringing.]

[End of recording]

Transcript by David Keight