

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Mother Duck Revisited: Tony Kahn tells of a devoted mother duck who led her babies down the straight and narrow path...to disaster. Also, a surprising offer of help from a devoted listener

Tony Kahn:

Hi everybody. This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*, from WGBH in Boston. Depending upon when you download us, this will be our last podcast of 2007, or our first podcast of 2008. Either way, it's a time to let you know how grateful I am from your appreciation of *Morning Stories*, your stories for *Morning Stories* and your support. You make this program what it is.

And thanks to a listener named "Liz Cooksey," we're gonna be able to start bringing you selected transcripts of our Morning Stories, maybe eventually all of our Morning Stories. People learning English as a new language and people who can no longer hear will be able to read our podcasts. Any of you interested in helping with this project you can contact Liz at <transcripts (underscore)_liz@bellsouth.net>. That's transcripts "underscored" -- not a dash -- transcripts (underscore)_liz@bellsouth.net>.
<transcripts_liz@bellsouth.net>

We're going to be making the first transcript our podcast "Ah, My Brother" with Oliver Sacks available at least for now on our "Flickr" page. Right Gar?

Gary Mott:

<Flickr.com/wgbhmorningstories>.

Tony Kahn:

Right, and they should look for that picture of Oliver Sacks.

Gary Mott:

Yeah, and double click on the picture and they'll be taken directly to the full transcript.

Tony Kahn:

This is a great tool. Help us with it if you can. I asked Liz why she picked Oliver Sacks' story, and she said it was one of her favorites and I asked her if she had any others and

she mentioned one of our very first Morning Stories, *Mother Duck*. About three years ago we did that one, so for today's podcast we'd like to bring it back and dedicate it to you, Liz. I think the story fits this time of endings and beginnings pretty well. And since I happened to write it, Liz, we've already got the transcript so you can put your feet up, put your keyboard down and enjoy. Today's Morning Story: *Mother Duck*.

Tony Kahn:

My wife and I took time off the other day to sit on our porch in the suburbs and watch the world go by. We were amazed at once by the sight of a mother duck leading her ten ducklings in an orderly waddle down to the pond to the bottom of the street. The other end of our block intersects the town's main commuter lane running east and west. To get this far, we'd realized, she'd had to negotiate four lanes of rush-hour traffic and the babies still couldn't fly.

[Sounds of traffic]

Tony Kahn: We were marveling at the accomplishment, as she led her brood along the curb and over the grate of the gutter opposite our house. Three of the ducklings, no bigger than your palm, dropped right through the openings into the sewer. Sensing the loss, the mother stopped at once and sweeping her babies behind her, retraced her steps up the street and back over the grate. In horror, we watched as the remaining seven ducklings, every last one of them, fell into the sewer, too. It took the mother a moment to realize she was alone. In confusion she looked first one way down the street, then the other, and then by instinct up at the clouds, the home of hawks and all calamity for a duck. And in a heart-rending shriek, she let out the cry of every mother who's ever seen her babies ripped by the sky or swallowed by the earth.

My wife rushed inside to call the Animal Rescue League and I ran to the garage for an old golf driver, to pry off the sewer lid. As the mother squawked in circles around me, I jimmied the club into the cast-iron opening and felt the shaft snap in my hands. In anguish I looked up at the sky myself, and saw two men approaching from the apartment across the street. It's the cheapest rental property on the block. The two men were strangers to me, in their mid-forties, their eyes red and bleary from a night of hard work or hard drinking. If I'd seen them coming any other time or place, I'd have crossed to the other side of the street. I told them what happened, and a second later

we were on the ground, our thirty fingers wrapped around the grate and pulling hard. As the mother duck circled us alternately squawking her encouragement and shrieking at the sky, we yanked off the lid and stared into the black, silent hole of the sewer.

The taller of the two men, at around six feet, lowered himself into the hole, bracing himself against the sides. The sewer was about ten feet deep there and the ground around him relatively dry. He squatted slowly and felt around in the dark and then, gingerly, he found and lifted every one of the lost ducklings up to us on the street. As soon as their feet touched the ground the ten cheeping babies plugged back into line behind their mother like an extension cord and without missing a beat, resumed their trip to the pond at the bottom of the street. The three of us looked at each other in silence, stunned by our success and sudden bond. I noticed tears forming in the bloodshot eyes of the man who had gone into the hole. "I love animals," he said.

[Sounds of birds, insects]

That evening I went back on the porch. The apartment across the street was dark and quiet again. But the incident that morning had left me with a gift, a temporary heightened sense of awareness, that I was eager to experience before it faded away. Like an enhanced sense of touch it seemed to bring everything closer, opening a new dimension of sights and sounds, hiding in the wrinkles of ordinary things. With it, I could sense that the apartment across the street though dark, was warm with life. And the sky above me rippled with invisible wings and the pond at the bottom of the street already thickening with cold, had a voice speaking in short sounds and long silences of the vastness of the unknown and of small miracles at the dead end of the street.

[quacking]

Tony Kahn:

Mother Duck. I'm here as always in the studio with Gary Mott. I listened to that story and my first thought was, "Gee, sounds like I've got a cold".

Gary Mott:

Hmmm.

Tony Kahn:

And then I thought and very soon after I did that piece I had to undergo heart surgery
[laughter]...

Gary Mott:
That's right.

Tony Kahn:
...for a completely hidden condition, three years ago, and guess what, it got rid of my
cold.

[Laughter]

Tony Kahn:
Life's full of surprises. You've got your own three little ducklings, running behind you .
..

Gary Mott:
I have my own three little ducklings.

Tony Kahn:
Yeah.

Gary Mott:
Always at risk of falling into a pit somewhere but ...

Tony Kahn:
Well, not with you around.

Gary Mott:
Well, that's just it, ya know, I'm -- I'm going and coming and -- work stuff...

Tony Kahn:
Take the rest of the year off.

[Laughter]

Gary Mott:

Look, my, my eight year old said, "Hey, let's build an igloo!" but then ya know, my four year old started having a crisis and...

Tony Kahn:

Aww.

Gary Mott:

...my ten year old wanted to write about it, I..., ya know.

Tony Kahn:

Writing the story of her sisters'...

Gary Mott:

That's, yeah...

Tony Kahn:

... despairs. Oh my gosh. I expect a "Morning Story" from your daughter one of these days.

Gary Mott:

Something great, I'm sure.

Tony Kahn:

Bring 'em around next year.

Gary Mott:

Sure, why not?

Tony Kahn:

So anyway, Gar, listen, it's only been three years, I hope it's at least another three more. It's just terrific doing this show with you, so hang in there. Don't let your kids make you go down the gutter.

Gary Mott:

They lift me up.

Tony Kahn:

And in the meantime, we'll be bringing you *Morning Stories* on a regular basis, the next one real soon before you can say... 2009.

Gary Mott:

Please send us your stories, your ideas, your comments, your gripes, you know, why not? <morningstories@wgbh.org>. Our website, <wgbh.org/morningstories>.

Tony Kahn:

You know what you can make out of gripes?

Gary Mott:

What's that?

Tony Kahn:

Whine. We'll make a whine out of your gripes.

[Laughter]

Gary Mott:

Is that the first joke of 2008?

Tony Kahn:

I'm afraid that's the first joke of 2008. Anyway, catch you soon, take care of yourself, have a good new year and we'll be back soon. Bye, bye.

[Music]

Tony Kahn:

Oh, we forgot to thank Alan, shoot!

Gary Mott:

Oh, that's right.

Tony Kahn:

No wait, wait! How can we do that?

Gary Mott:

The Uber engineer, he'll take the compliment for his colleagues.

Tony Kahn:

Alan Matthes, thanks a lot, Alan, have a happy new year, too.

[Music]

[End of Recording]

Transcribed by: Lynn Relyea

Notes from Liz:

Thanks again for the dedication! And I loved hearing the story again.