

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*His Name was Cosmos: From Jordan, Peg Clement sees light in the African darkness. Also, we honor our transcribers' "prolifigancy."*

### **Tony Kahn:**

Hi everybody, this is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*, from WGBH in Boston. People in over 200 countries have been hearing *Morning Stories* and many have sent us some of their stories back, but hauntingly, over the last three years, there's one country that speaks to us again and again, not in its own voice, but through the voices of people that it's touched, from all over the world.

It touched Mark and Sheri Grashow, for instance, a schoolteacher and health worker from Brooklyn, New York, who told us the story of how it changed the course of their lives. It touched Dr. Carlo Spagnolli from Italy, who told us on *Morning Stories* how it taught him what it means to be a doctor. It even held Bonnie Lee, from China, a hostage, literally, for months and still offered her, as she said, "kindness and companionship" that she never forgot. And as we learned in an e-mail just last week, it showed a listener of ours, named Peg Clement, who's now in Jordan, what it means in the midst of the AIDS pandemic in that country, to face death, with dignity.

Well, the country is Zimbabwe and the story that Peg tells us is about a man who knew how to help and how to ask for help as his time ran out.

[Soft Zimbabwean string music begins and continues through narrative]

Today's *Morning Story*: *His Name was Cosmos*

### **Peg Clement:**

Cosmos was sitting on the edge of his cot, at the hospice. Clothes hanging off of him, head down... dying of AIDS. His first wife had died last year, "after a short illness," newspaper-ese in Southern Africa for this disease that no one will pronounce or spell, or even write down. He also had lost one daughter to "unknown causes." Three children remained from his first marriage: ten, eleven and thirteen – not currently in school.

Cosmos told my friend, Anne, that he had three last wishes. He wanted to know if she could help. The first wish was to make sure his children got back into school. They would be losing their father soon and their new mother would be unable to care for them financially. He wanted them to become wards of the state. "Can you see to that?"

Cosmos' second wish was that his children could meet his grandmother. He said he would take them on a bus with some savings – if he had the strength – to ensure that she could pass on family lore and traditions for the kids.

Finally, Cosmos wanted a job just long enough to be able to earn the money to pay for his own funeral: the coffin, the meal his family should provide the mourners and cemetery plot – about \$8 in all.

Anne managed to get his three kids enrolled in school in record time, probably because she was a white woman with enough persistence and ... gall to keep returning to the ministry with explanations and pleas. The kids are now officially wards of the state, living outside the small home Cosmos and his wife were not able to keep up.

Anne bought four tickets for the Friday evening bus to the grandmother's village. Jammed up in his seat, by the crush of his kids and dozens of other travelers, Cosmos managed a wan smile out of the window at his benefactor... And off they went.

[Background street conversation mingles with music, fading to only music]

When he returned on Monday, Anne placed Cosmos as a janitor, for four days at a small school for AIDS orphans on the north side of the city. He spent one hour on the bus going, another hour sweeping out the classroom and another hour returning to the hospice, which took every ounce of his remaining strength. He earned \$1.75 for each of those days, still short for the funeral, due to the bus fares. He got up the fifth morning and went back once more.

Cosmos fulfilled his three wishes in three weeks. The last week of December, he died. He was thirty years old.

Anne told me that two minutes after he was born, Cosmos' mother gave birth to a twin. Maybe because there was so little left to give, he was named Osmos, without the "C." No one knows what has become of him.

[Music changes – soft humming voice joins guitar]

**Tony Kahn:**

*His Name was Cosmos – today's Morning Story.* I'm here in the studio with Gary Mott.

**Gary Mott:**

Heartbreaking whenever you hear a thirty year old dying.

**Tony Kahn:**

The number of years that defines a generation – if you want to figure out how many generations have passed, divide by thirty. You’ve got the society collapsing with the grandchildren and the grandparents having to take care of each other.

**Gary Mott:**

In many cases, it’s the children taking care of the children.

**Tony Kahn:**

Peg also gave me another detail that I didn’t put in the story but that, that she told me in a conversation that we had over the phone about how she really began to understand that AIDS in Zimbabwe was for real.

**Peg Clement:**

People took down the road signs – the metal street signs – to use as handles on the coffins, [Tony groans in disbelief] so nobody could find their way around. There were almost no more street signs anywhere in any of the neighborhoods. I met this guy who was a painter and what he had decided to do was paint the names of the streets in white paint on the pavement so that at least people could see what street they were on.

**Tony Kahn:**

Anne, who is this person?

**Peg Clement:**

She did a lot of volunteering there. Just a lot. When she first came, she was a little lost as to how to be helpful in the country. The more she got into this, the more townships she went to, the more orphanages. She did teaching; she worked with AIDS grandmothers, who were taking care of the grandchildren; she tried to hold hands and hold orphans and just very very compassionate words, as any dying person would need, I think.

You know there were tons and tons of, of big-hearted people who arrived at the borders and at the airports to come and try to help. We became a bit of a smaller global village by working alongside and going to the funerals and you know, maybe it’s good for the Americans and French and Japanese and all these people that came in to help to have held these people...[sighing]. Yeah, maybe that’s the good of it.

In the Peace Corps, I was ready to change the whole world wherever I went, but now I’m in my fifties, I count my successes one person at a time now.... Yeah.

**Tony Kahn:**

That image, just holding these people (Gary murmurs in agreement) as something that makes them a part of your life, for good.

**Gary Mott:**

That's something I think we, in America, we don't touch each other. You know, in the workplace, I would love for someone to just come up and grab my shoulder and you know, say, "How ya' doing Gar?" or, "Gar, that file is waitin' for ya' on that thing." Or...

**Tony Kahn:**

Or, "Wake up, Gar!"

**Gary Mott:**

[Laughing] "You're drooling on your keyboard!"

**Tony Kahn:**

[Laughing] I hope the people whose stories we've told from Zimbabwe, sort of in the same neighborhood with each other, get in touch with each other. I suspect they will. We've been seeing that in our transcript project.

**Gary Mott:**

Absolutely.

**Tony Kahn:**

We now have over nine people, from around the world and they have formed a community. They, they can't wait for more people to join, but the people who are already there are in touch with each other in a way that just is absolutely ... reassuring! [Tony laughs]

**Gary Mott:**

And the transcripts provide a whole 'nother dimension to these stories. [Tony murmurs in agreement]. You were looking back at some old transcripts of some older stories and -

**Tony Kahn:**

It's amazing how much we've forgotten.

**Gary Mott:**

<[www.wgbh.org/morningstories](http://www.wgbh.org/morningstories)> We've, we've been furiously plopping these transcripts up there, but believe me, our...the...the... pro..prolifigancy! [Tony laughs hard] Is that a word?

**Tony Kahn:**

It is now! [Tony and Gary laugh]

**Gary Mott:**

The uh...

**Tony Kahn:**  
Prolificery!

**Gary Mott:**  
... from Liz and Bev and Georgia and all the other volunteers. [Tony adds, "David"]  
It's tremendous! Find out more about our transcript project by e-mailing Liz directly  
<transcripts\_liz@bellsouth.net>.

**Tony Kahn:**  
Right. And you know where to find us. We'll be back soon with another Morning  
Story. Take care.

[Same background music begins again]

**Peg Clement:**  
I'm glad your series is named *Morning Stories*. I'm really liking starting off the day like  
that. Gosh, it's nice. You know what I'm worried about, Tony, is that I only have about  
seven or eight more left in my podcast and then I'm gonna be out of 'em. Is there a  
store of them anywhere else where I can get some more? I think I only have about  
fifteen.

**Tony Kahn:**  
There are about 160 of them.

**Peg Clement:**  
Woo- hoo!!!!

**Tony Kahn:**  
That is the most beautiful sound I think I've heard all month!  
[Both Tony and Peg laugh]

[Music fades out]

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Kate Magovern

Notes from Transcriber: We begin life shocked and afraid, literally screaming for the  
comfort of an embrace. Similarly, how essential it is to be comforted by the company  
and embrace of another as we face life's end.

What an important contribution these volunteers make by just being present for those who would otherwise have no one to accompany them in their letting go of this world.