

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

A Little Bit of Shelter. It took Lois Frazier 51 years to find a way out of the street.

Tony Kahn:

Hi, everybody. This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*, from WGBH in Boston.

Somebody once told me, "A good measure of how much you don't understand somebody else is how critical of them you are." Today's *Morning Story* comes from someone who gave me a sense of how ignorant I really am of life without family to grow up in. Our storyteller, Lois Frazier, also made me realize that maybe the worst thing about being in a bad place is not even knowing there's a way out. We call her story *A Little Bit of Shelter*.

[Sound of city bus in movement and making stops in the background]

Lois Frazier:

I'm from San Francisco. I'm not original Bostonian. My mother, she, you know, sent for me. I loved her and I needed her. I don't think she had any idea of that type of love – to take care of me. She wasn't raised like that herself.

[Lois gently laughs]

When you're a young girl, you don't know who's the good guy and who's the bad guy. The only reason anybody would want to give you any shelter on the streets is to get what they want. That's about it. You know, nobody tried to take me under their wing, take me out of the club, take me off the street and say, "Here's a life for you." My mother did her little thing: the party life, the drinking life, smoking life...the gangsters, the pimps, the prostitutes.

[Sound of rap music begins and continues under narration.]

We partied together and stayed out all night at the clubs downtown, after the job was over. Walk home from work, late at night, drunk, you know. We had, we had a drunk relationship...you know? And I learned her way of life.

I raised five kids like that and I would sit at the window with my bottle of vodka and say, "God, please! Get me back to like a normal family, like you see on TV: you know, dolls, dates, elementary school, high school, just happy, you know?"

And now, they're stuck in that and the pain hurts me so bad to see the damage that I've done. You know what I mean? My son, who's twenty-four years old, he's getting ready to go to jail for three years. He's been in out of jail all his life! The twenty year old is in and out of jail. I got a thirty-two year old. His girl kicked him out because he won't stop thuggin' it and now he's on my couch.

It's like a never-ending story. Then they won't go get any help. They won't get any therapy. They say, "Oh, ma, you were like us! You taught us like this. You taught us." They're stuck, where I was stuck... in that lifestyle.

Love, all that type of stuff [Lois laughs regretfully], they don't trust that. They don't want it. Before I go, I want to see my kids happy. You know, education, a decent relationship, marriage maybe, so that their children don't have to grow up like my mother, me and them.

I'm fifty-one years old now! It took me this long to understand that there's a way out.

[Sound of city bus in movement and random conversation in the background.]

Maybe if I stay strong, they'll start seeing that I'm really serious about changing my life around. I gotta keep doing what I'm doing: help them out food-wise; give them some lectures on life, how it's supposed to be; a little bit of shelter. I'm not going backwards anymore. I'm not. Nope.

Sometimes I don't know if I will ever have a decent relationship. Unconditional love, you know, that – that kind of love. But I'm gonna work on it...

...Out there in them streets.

[New (more somber) music begins, followed by sound of three bullets being fired]

Tony Kahn:

Lois Frazier with today's Morning Story, *A Little Bit of Shelter*. [music fades out] Thanks to Elizabeth Ross, one of the producers here at WGBH who brought Lois to our attention.

I'm sitting here in the listening room with Gary.

Gary Mott:

It made me think about my time on the school bus, you know, driving...

Tony Kahn:

In Chicago...

Gary Mott:

In Chicago. [Tony agrees, "Yeah."] That's really the closest I've got to you know, the gang-bangers, the, the drugs on the street, the, you know, the prostitutes. A, a middle-class white guy from the suburbs of Texas [Tony agrees, "Right, yeah."], on the bad side of town.

Tony Kahn:

It's all about surviving. I asked her, I said, "What was, what was your understanding of love?" [somber background music begins again]

'That's easy, ' she said, ' Love was money. You want to feel that you are worth something? You want to be taken care of. You go and get somebody's money. You hustle. Period.'

Gary Mott:

And Lois was able to break three generations of, of sort of... despair.

Lois Frazier:

Can't fall backwards. I can't.

[Music slowly fades out]

Tony Kahn:

We got some e-mail. Mikhail Bragoria wrote, "Hi guys, I'm hoping that you can provide me with the source for the statistic at the beginning of your *Trigger Happy* episode." (which was just the episode before this one).

He says, quoting me [Tony laughs and Gary joins him], " If you were to put together a film out of every scene in an American movie where someone was shooting somebody else, it would run ten times longer than any film where hands were doing something nice." He says, "I tried to find the source. My *Google* searching led me in a circle right back to WGBH *Morning Stories*, [both Tony and Gary laugh heartily] which then led me to say a few curse words!"

Mikhail, *Google* seems to be working perfectly! [Both Tony and Gary laugh again] I took that statistic out of thin air.

Gary Mott:

We don't believe in sources.

Tony Kahn:

□ Laughing □ "However," he writes, "I did manage to find a more reassuring statistic. The word "'ove' appears on *Google* 1.88 billion times, while the word 'hate' appears

only 280 million times. Perhaps this planet is a little less lame than we were led to think."

Mikhail, I did a little research after that. I happen to think that the opposite of love is maybe not hate, but indifference. So, I checked out "indifference." Well, "indifference" appears only 6,920,000 times, far less than "hate." And "understanding"? Get a load of this: 231 million mentions.

The angels of our nature, as they say, are maybe winning out.

Gary Mott:

Gotta love the Internet, right?

□Both Tony and Gary laugh again□

Gary Mott:

Do you ever Google yourself?

Tony Kahn:

Oh, never!

Gary Mott:

Never.

□Tony breaks into a hearty laugh□

Gary Mott:

Heard from Brooke. "I'm an American living in Singapore. I recently subscribed to your podcast through *iTunes*."

Tony Kahn:

Ooo, a new listener!

Gary Mott:

"Your pleas for listener comments has prompted me to contact you. Listening to your podcast has helped me to feel reconnected, in some small way, to the way Americans think and act. Usually, I listen to your podcasts while I'm working in my studio.

"I'm still thinking about the *StoryCorps* podcast I listened to recently."

Tony Kahn:

That was just a couple of podcasts ago, right?

Gary Mott:

Yep, yep. □continuing to read Brooke’s e-mail□ “I found myself in tears during part of it, and I was riding public transportation at the time; not exactly corresponding to the cultural norms here.... □Tony murmurs in agreement□ I can assure you. Oh well, thank you for putting this podcast out. You are being heard and appreciated. Brooke Lamb.”

One more letter, from Bonnie in Ann Arbor, Michigan. “Thanks so much for your *Morning Stories* podcasts. I listen to them each night, before I go to sleep – just like a bedtime story, a rare and precious gift, for an adult.

I’ve been listening for a few months and had imagined how each of you looked. Surprisingly, you both look exactly how I imagined! □Tony starts to chuckle softly□ Thanks so much for the work you do. Your podcast brings me joy, everyday.

Tony Kahn:
Surprisingly!

Gary Mott:
Surprisingly!

Tony Kahn:
She could have picked another adverb. That’s all right, you know; it’s diplomatic.

Gary Mott:
“Regrettably, unfortunately.” I look so much taller than you.

Tony Kahn:
Well, you are!

Gary Mott:
But, I’m really not.

Tony Kahn:
You’re not?

Gary Mott:
Not really.

Tony Kahn:
Are you standing on somebody that I don’t know?

□Gary and Tony both break out in hearty laughter□

Tony Kahn:

So Bonnie listens to us in Ann Arbor, Michigan when she goes to sleep. And Brooke, in Singapore listens to us when she gets up in the morning and that's pretty much probably the same time.

So, Bonnie, goodnight, sleep well. Brooke, good morning, have a great day.

And we'll see you all soon. Take care.

□End of recording□

Transcribed by: Kate Magovern

Notes from transcriber:

This story reminds me of your comments from another podcast in which you describe your interview with a very smart young girl. I wish I remember exactly how you articulated the question, but the gist of it was, "What would you do if you had the power to make anything happen?" That little girl's answer was that she would want every person to have the opportunity to experience, for three days, what it is to live like another person – for people to really understand what it means to be in someone else's shoes. If her wish were to come true, the world would be a very different place, wouldn't it?

At least *Morning Stories* helps get us pretty close to really understanding "the other". Thank you for this.

As for when folks listen to *Morning Stories* and where...I think of that a lot.

During a recent flight over the Atlantic, towards the United States, I was listening to a Morning Story – in fact, I was transcribing it at 35,000 feet. At a certain beautiful point in the story, I paused and shifted my eyes from my laptop screen and looked around the darkened cabin. I wanted others to share in the joy I was feeling then. I thought, "I wonder if anyone else is listening to a Morning Story up here?" Most people were disconnected with each other and just fixed to the mini screens embedded in the seat in front of them, letting the stream of pretty poor popular entertainment numb them from thinking about the long flight.

I wanted to get up and ask if I could plug my saved *Morning Stories* episodes into the in-flight audio options. I smiled, thinking how pleasant the long flight would be if passengers were listening to (or now reading) *Morning Stories*! People would turn to each other, share their thoughts about the stories, exchange their own.

For me, the image is sort of a surreal one, but one of hope – a group of perfect strangers, forced to share limited space in a swiftly moving magnificently engineered steel cabin high in the sky (that common space where there are no borders) but nonetheless be in tune with both the world’s many special voices and consequently, with each other!

There’s an idea for expanding the *Morning Stories* outreach: approach airlines about getting the podcasts plugged into in-flight entertainment!

I’ve also imagined a kind of Google “*Morning Stories*” map indicating where and when people are listening to *Morning Stories* at a given time. I see the world dotted with these little lights burning steadily: some light up dark homes where folks are enjoying the podcasts as bedtimes stories; some are in schools where students are feeling inspired to write their own stories; others are lights that track across the map, like satellites against the night sky - slowly making their way south on a train from Rome to Sorrento, or in a truck making a long overnight delivery across the wide mid-west.

I know that map blinks brighter every day. Thanks, *Morning Stories*, for “lighting up” our lives!

Notes from Liz:

Wow! Wasn’t that a beautiful set of thoughts, from our “Italian”? Wonderful! (I’ve blue-highlighted an idea of hers that might be really neat, on the *Morning Stories* website.)

On less lofty matters, I am “dying” to know more about Ms. Frazier. Does she now drive a school bus? How did she get to the state of mind/set of values she expresses now – so different from her earlier years? Is somebody actively helping her with the next steps?