

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*Shipment Number Six: Mark Grashow and Sheri Salzburg prepare containers of ideas for African kids.*

**Tony Kahn:**

Hi everybody, this is Tony Kahn, the Producer and Director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston.

I know a man from Tanzania named Beston. He came here to the United States when he was very young. He's done very well and he has a great future here, but he doesn't have much of a past. The village that he grew up in Tanzania is a ghost town. Of the fifty-four kids that Beston went to school with, fifty-one of them are dead; of AIDS, and so are two of his sisters and a brother; leaving eleven nieces and nephews that he sends money to. For years Beston has been looking for a way to do more than that. He wants to offer something like a future to all of the kids there, but how? Well, that's when he found a man he calls his Moses, Mark Grashow. You may remember Mark and his wife Sheri; about three years ago they started a program of sending school kids in Zimbabwe shipping containers that were full of tens of thousands of unused or discarded books and school supplies from New York City high schools.

**Mark Grashow:**

When Beston contacted us, he had been searching for about five or six years to get help to some of the villages around where he grew up. We basically sat down with him at our kitchen table and said. "Look this is kind of a simple concept. If we can find fifteen schools in the New York City area that will all contribute \$400 towards a container, and they're willing to give their textbooks, we're in business." And as of today we have twenty schools that have signed up and we, we've already started filling his container. When this container arrives in Tanzania, it'll change thousands of lives.

**Tony Kahn:**

Mark and Sherry sent their first shipment of supplies to Zimbabwe little bit more than three years ago and when I spoke to them recently they had just landed shipment number six, packed with all sorts of things that we take for granted but that fall on the ground of the poverty there, in rural Zimbabwe, like magic seeds. I asked them how shipment number six is different from shipment number one.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

It's night and day. First of all the container arrived by rail. Oh, God, it was terrible. We stood at the edge of the road waiting for days and days and days for it to come. [Mark laughs]

**Mark Grashow:**

It was...We were coming in a truck and by the time we got there the workmen had started to unload it but instead of breaking it down by school, uh, were just piling it up in the middle of the room. I saw what was happening and leaped out of the car yelling, "Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop!" And I was kind of a little bit out of control. [Tony and Mark laugh] So I'm trying to not make everybody feel crazy.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Now the program is theirs. They know how to do it.

**Tony Kahn:**

How important is a sense of humor in doing the kind of work that you're doing?

**Mark Grashow:**

Ah, crucial. The currency has really completely collapsed. Our bill this time was eighteen billion dollars, Zimbabwe dollars. Every two weeks everything doubles in price. A pair of shorts cost 163 million Zimbabwe dollars. If you don't, uh, aren't, be able to somehow, you know, keep your spirits up, I don't think you can survive day-to-day.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

You're talking about rural areas where there's no postal delivery. Some of them, it's a long, long distance from any kind of bus service; if people can afford the buses.

**Mark Grashow:**

In some schools, half the staff have left South Africa for Botswana where they can make ten times the amount. But in our schools where they have books and they have supplies and they have sports equipment, very few of the staff have left. At least the teachers feel that they can teach.

**Tony Kahn:**

You did come to the attention of Bill Clinton who was writing this book about giving and who decided to use you guys as proof that individuals can make a huge difference. [Sheri murmurs in agreement]. What kind of difference did his noticing you make on you guys?

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Suddenly, a box would arrive full of pencils, from South Dakota. One of those imprinting companies and they had put the wrong telephone number on a thousand pens, would we like it?

**Mark Grashow:**

One of the best things I've gotten in the, the last go around was a huge box, at least sixty barrels of Play Dough. [Sheri laughs]. You know, of, of different colors. So like five Play Doughs in a set and there's like fifty sets of them. I can't wait till that gets to a school in Zimbabwe.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Oh!

**Mark Grashow:**

Kids who have never colored in their life, they've never had clay in their life so all of a sudden to have all this stuff they can make shapes and animals and . . . that's got to be fabulous. One of the big things that we had no appreciation for was toys. Kindergarten, you know, fifteen students, we bought them dolls and trucks, Legos and puzzles. They had no toys in that class at all. So we came back six months later, same class. It went from fifteen kids to eighty kids. Every kid in the village wanted to come and play with those toys. A good lesson in how important toys are to draw kids into schools.

**Tony Kahn:**

This project opens up tons of doors.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

With, I mean, whether you are walking around a school and you see a young girl sitting under the tree, she's fallen in love with a series that arrived called *The Babysitter's Club* and she tells you that not only is this her favorite book in the world, there's still another one left in the series!

**Tony Kahn:**

Oh, wow, anticipating the next book.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Yes.

**Tony Kahn:**

A feeling that I am sure she never had before in her life.

**Mark Grashow:**

Yeah. I, I think we have no real conception of what the ripple effect is of what we're doing. We get a taste of it and occasionally a story will come back to us, but I think in some ways it's a hundred fold of, of what we know and what we understand.

**Tony Kahn:**

The final payoff may not come for centuries [laughs] you know. Where you'll suddenly discover that because you got a particular book or a writer read in a part of the world that never would have heard about that author --

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Exactly.

**Tony Kahn:**

-- that you will be spreading ideas as well.

**Mark Grashow:**

We certainly like a good surprise.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Absolutely!

**Mark Grashow:**

Our life is exploding.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Where do you begin Mark?

**Mark Grashow:**

I mean, I, I thought we were retiring. [Everybody laughs] Today I went up, uptown to meet a guy who is trying to set up a program in South Africa. We have someone coming to the house

on Thursday who wants to set up a program in Burundi. We have a container that's going to Tanzania for the first time. Who knows what's gonna happen? [laughs] I don't know.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Kiss what's left of my retirement goodbye. [Tony laughs].

**Mark Grashow:**

It's exhausting. It takes over almost too much of your life. [Tony murmurs in agreement.]

**Sheri Salzburg:**

I also have other interests that I have been saving for this period in my life: my grandchildren, my quilting. So you have to remember not to let go of that.

**Mark Grashow:**

I guess Sheri and I are both risk takers. You know, seeing some, a need and then trying to do something about it. I appreciate that she puts up with me [they both laugh].

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Yes.

**Mark Grashow:**

I mean sometimes, you know, I kind of lose myself. Sometimes my clothes are still laying around where they shouldn't be.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

I appreciate that we no longer use the living room as a storage facility. That you really try to get the boxes out of our house as quickly as they go. I appreciate that. Once you say I'm gonna give it a try and take the risk of going out there and doing it, think big! [Tony murmurs in interest.] You can accomplish much more. You can't send a box to a school in Kenya, but you certainly can send a container.

**Mark Grashow:**

I would just like to add that my wife has a cell phone and she has yet to tell me the phone number.

[Tony and Mark laugh.]

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Well, that sort of, -- Yes. I'll work with him anytime, but I have to tell you, there has to be some limits to communication.

**Tony Kahn:**

I think you got a really good marriage going. [Everyone laughs]

**Mark Grashow:**

We've been working at it.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

A long time. [laughing continues] Bye, Tony.

**Tony Kahn:**

Talk to you soon.

**Mark Grashow:**

Bye bye.

**Tony Kahn:**

That was Mark Grashow and his wife Sheri Salzburg with today's *Morning Story*, *Shipment Number Six* or should I say *Shipment Number Seven*, which is on its way. I'm here in the studio with Gary Mott. How are you doing, Gar?

**Gary Mott:**

I always thought that when I retired that would sort of end my opportunity to change the world [Tony murmurs] but clearly, Mark and Sheri are just getting started.

**Tony Kahn:**

If there's a law of the universe, the more important the work the less it's going to earn you [Tony laughs] in dollars and cents anyway, especially Zimbabwe dollars and cents.

**Gary Mott:**

I was talking to my eldest daughter, Olivia, the other night. She reads *The Babysitters Club* [Tony murmurs]. She said, "You know, I just wonder what it's like to not be able to read." Loaves reading.

**Tony Kahn:**

Mark was telling me there are a lot of kids now who, who go to the schools where they have been able to send books and who have been able to qualify to go on to college from some of these schools. And for the first time, kids are seeing some of their classmates or their upper classmen go to college. And now they are beginning to realize maybe going to college is something I can do and they may never have opened a book yet, but that's another one of these knock on effects. I hope that we'll be around to tell some of these stories because they'll be wonderful. They'll be, they'll be totally surprising.

I think it's also appropriate that we're telling this story about the difference that one person can make because as many of our listeners know, *Morning Stories* is also very much in need of help. We mentioned a couple of podcasts ago that at the end of the fiscal year here at WGBH, on August 31<sup>st</sup> we will no longer have any funding to continue with *Morning Stories* and a lot of you have been writing back saying, "Is there anything we can do to help? Please don't go away." Which is very nice to hear. We agree with you completely, we would like not to. "What can we do? How much do you need to, to keep *Morning Stories* alive?"

In dollars and cents, producing *Morning Stories*, here at WGBH, costs about \$240,000 a year. Now if you want to break that down, that's about \$20,000 for a month, \$20,000 or its equivalent. We've had to cut back to half time here recently, so I figure we have about six podcasts left that we can still bring you till the end of August. I wish it were more, but during those six podcasts, please know that the door is wide open. Money in any amount would be extremely welcome.

But ideas too, especially ideas – bright ideas from you. Pull up a chair; help us figure out how we can keep *Morning Stories* coming to you. As Sheri has said, think big; think freely. Anything is possible. The conversation starts now. If you would like to get in touch with us with your suggestions, with your contributions, with something that can help us put together a plan that works for you, that can even give public broadcasting a notion about how we can continue to grow, then get in touch with us. And in the meantime, if you want to get in touch with us about anything else...

**Gary Mott:**

Our email address, <morningstories@wgbh.org> and our website, <wgbh.org/morningstories>.

**Tony Kahn:**

We'll catch you next time. Take care.

**Sheri Salzburg:**

Once you say I'm gonna give it a try and take the risk of going out there and doing it, think big!

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Lorena Knight