

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*Malcolm: Carol Henderson takes her parents and son wherever she goes.*

**TONY KAHN:** Hi everybody! This is Tony Kahn, the Producer and Director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. Carol Henderson is a writer and a writing teacher and the mother of two daughters. One of her favorite warm-up exercises for her memoir class that she teaches is to ask her students to think of a family photograph, choose one person in it and write down what they have to say to you. The amazing thing, as she keeps learning, is that people in our lives always have something new to report. And that the conversation about what it means to be a family can continue and deepen 'til the day you die. We call her *Morning Story, Malcolm*.

**CAROL HENDERSON:**

[We hear the sounds of birds chirping.]

My parents loved home improvement projects. On Saturday morning, "Let's re-grout the bathroom! Let's paint! Let's go to the lumberyard!" Oh, there was always all this doing and doing and doing. We even did work when we stayed in people's summer houses. We used to go to this camp kind of place up in the Adirondacks. I can remember we would do things like re-web the lawn furniture – those things that had that like plastic webbing or maybe it was canvas back then. I remember weeding brick patio at somebody's house and just, ugh, just hating all that. I said, "Maybe they like all this mossy stuff between the bricks. Maybe they like their old broken- down chairs." [soft music begins to play] But no, we always worked. Worked, worked, very hard. Anything to avoid listening to those voices in our heads.

I could imagine my father bemoaning the fact that he never finished his dissertation. Always in jobs that weren't satisfying enough. Why hadn't he become the architect he always wanted to be? And then my mother would be saying, "Why the hell hasn't he made enough money so we could pay somebody to be doing this?" And we always moved because my Dad would change jobs or lose jobs or something would happen and she would have a lot of social concerns. I remember when, when we moved to Princeton, New Jersey which -- when I was seven she painted the front hall inside and set out a little antique table with a silver tray for calling cards so that when the neighbors came we would look as though we had a house. If something ever bad happened to people what my family did was you don't ever reach out, squeeze somebody's hand, look them in the eye, "I'm just so sorry." We just couldn't do that. Everybody just – everything disappears.

[We hear the sounds of a busy hospital in the background.]

When our son Malcolm was three days old my whole world just fell apart. This problem showed up in his heart. [start of solo clarinet, thoughtful, sad] When you get into

that medical world it's all about how do we...we've got, we've got to cure it. Maybe there was some little thing they could try or see what had gone wrong with the first repair. I mean, just, there was always this...we gotta save, save, save. But they were brave enough to come see him in the hospital. That was something. Intensive care unit – how terrifying it was, how incredibly hard that had been for them. Almost more than they could bear. Take their shoes off and wear these masks and put these things on. And I, I just wanted to curl up in a ball and just die for them.

I remember my father broke down in front of one of the doctors and was ashamed. I sort of held his hand and said, "That's okay. People cry a lot around here. It's really okay." I knew it was hopeless. Why didn't we just take Malcolm home and let him die in our arms instead of dying in surgery. And . . . I didn't even have the wits about me to have this time together and make the most of it. I just didn't know any better. I did what I could do at the time.

Now when I go to see them, my parents – they live in this retirement community and when I go up to see my mother there's a lot of, you know, bathing her and helping her clean herself up. I mean, we all, we're all born, we all die. Who's to say that it's any less valuable to help an old person who doesn't even know you anymore who happens to be your mother. Why is that less valuable than helping a child grow up?

I'm in relationship with Malcolm all the time when I'm working with people. All of the work that I do – all of the, the writing and the coaxing and trying to help people access what it is that they want to do with their writing. All of that is connected to Malcolm. I can say to him, "I'm so sorry what had to happen to you, but what a catalyst you are. I see the power that you have in this world even though you're not of it the way we are. [softly] Yeah. Hmmm... The relationship remains. It changes and grows as you change and grow. You bring those people – or that person – along with you. We leave each other behind, but in some way we are always still at each other's side.

[Music fades.]

**Tony Kahn:**

That was Carol Henderson with today's *Morning Story, Malcolm*. I'm here with Gary Mott.

**Gary Mott:**

A child dies in infancy. You don't have the opportunity to develop sort of parent-child relationship. Is that easier than at age five, age ten?

**Tony Kahn:**

We can't figure out the meaning of our own life necessarily, but what Carol is saying to me is that the meaning of other people's lives is what you make of them.

**Gary Mott:**

I take out of that story the opening sequence about work. (Tony murmurs affirmatively throughout.) That resonated because I worked as a kid. I washed the car every Saturday. And we lived in Texas. It never rained. It never snowed. The car was never dirty.

**Tony Kahn:**

So what was the dirt you were cleaning off every week?

**Gary Mott:**

I think it was dust.

**Tony Kahn:**

[laughing]. No, I meant in a more metaphorical sense! You're not going to get away that easy, Gary Mott.

**Gary Mott:**

Hmmm...interesting.

**Tony Kahn:**

We've been getting some wonderful mail as always. We got a really nice telephone answering machine message the other day from one of our listeners and one of our storytellers, Ginny Mazur. Ginny, you may remember, told a story, *Losing My Hearing*, and also asked us if we might be able to come up with transcripts for our show which we've now been able to do. This is what she had to say:

**Ginny Mazur:**

Tony, I just wanted to say "hello" and let you how much I appreciate the *Morning Story* transcripts. I just got a new computer and rigged it up with a listening system directly to my hearing aid so I combine listening to the, the broadcast along with reading the transcript at the same time which I didn't realize I could do. And I love it. I'm really savoring all those stories. They're just amazing because they're all so different and unique and wonderful. And it wouldn't happen without you there. I hope you're doing well and I think of you and Gary often and just wanted to say how much it means to me to be able to tune in visually and auditorially [laughing] – what's left of that! It's a huge difference. Thanks again. Bye-bye.

**Tony Kahn:**

I'm not the only person responsible for making those transcripts happen, believe me. There were transcribers themselves. What an amazing project they got going and one that goes on and on.

Another one of our storytellers is Bonnie Lee. She's told us a number of stories about her adventures translating from Chinese to English in different parts of the world.

[on the phone] Bonnie, hi, how are you? It's Tony!

**Bonnie Lee:**

Oh, I'm good!

**Tony Kahn:**

How are things in Xi'an?

**Bonnie Lee:**

So far, so good.

**Tony Kahn:**

You just got there?

**Bonnie Lee:**

Yes.

**Tony Kahn:**

Where from?

**Bonnie Lee:**

United States. North Carolina.

**Tony Kahn:**

North Carolina?

**Bonnie Lee:**

Yeah. I work as translator for a Chinese company there.

**Tony Kahn:**

You never called.

**Bonnie Lee:**

I was planning to call. [laughs] Actually in North Carolina I also did a volunteer job. I went to WUNC.

**Tony Kahn:**

Oh, one of our public radio stations?

**Bonnie Lee:**

Right. They need a volunteer just to take the phone from the people who want to make contribution. I told them I am from China and I listen to American public radio so I want to do something for the radio station but I cannot spell people's names --

**Tony Kahn:**

How to spell their names, yes. [chuckles]

**Bonnie Lee:**

– and so I was horrified. Sometimes the phone rang and I just jumped! [both laugh]

**Tony Kahn:**

Oh, Bonnie . . .

**Bonnie Lee:**

What I did is not perfect.

**Tony Kahn:**

We have learned new listeners have been finding *Morning Stories* and more than half come from guess where?

**Bonnie Lee:**

China?

**Tony Kahn:**

China.

**Bonnie Lee:**

I understand that. Most young people in China are open-minded now. They want to learn more new things from outside of China. Chinese radio is too commercial. Too much advertisements and very awful shows there. *Morning Stories* is totally, totally different.

**Tony Kahn:**

You know, unless we can raise money we will have to end *Morning Stories* in another six podcasts.

**Bonnie Lee:**

I cannot believe that. What a shame. People really need that. I got idea – come to China! *Morning Stories* are perfect not only for young people, even for the older people. Even people don't know anything about English if they read the Chinese ones, they get inspired.

**Tony Kahn:**

*Morning Stories* in Chinese?

**Bonnie Lee:**

Right. Right. Why not to try?

**Tony Kahn:**

And you could help us with that?

**Bonnie Lee:**

Definitely.

**Tony Kahn:**

If you were to send us a translation into Chinese of a story, a *Morning Story* that you wanted to work on maybe we could take that to a publisher here in the United States and--

**Bonnie Lee:**

Oh, it's brilliant! I, I can do that. I can. I really want to! I can do the translation. I send back to you. I will pick one.

**Gary Mott:**

In fact Bonnie did send a translation of *My Little Purple Stapler*.

**Tony Kahn:**

Go to *My Little Purple Stapler* which is in the archive and we will have Bonnie's Chinese translation attached to that. Those of you who speak Chinese check 'em out, or if you have any other languages you'd like to bring to bear. . .

**Gary Mott:**

Or any corrections.

**Tony Kahn:**

In fact we keep on getting wonderful suggestions from our listeners to help us out. I'd like to read one of them. This comes from Liz Cooksey whom you probably already know as the head of our transcription project and a great advisor for how we can keep this show going. She writes, "Tony, It strikes me that you might do something like this: At the end of this and every other podcast have someone, if you're too shy yourself, come on with a brief message, something like this: And I quote: 'If this story moved you in any way, we hope they move you to contribute something to keep *Morning Stories* alive. Go to your computer. Check out our website at:'

**Gary Mott:**

<[wgbh.org/morningstories](http://wgbh.org/morningstories)>'

**Tony Kahn:**

[Aside to Gary] See, she even wrote in a part for you.

'And send us a few dollars right now before daily life can distract you.'

**Gary Mott:**

We have two links in the upper right-hand corner of our homepage, <[wgbh.org/morningstories](http://wgbh.org/morningstories)>.

**Tony Kahn:**

Give to *Morning Stories*.

Liz, I think I overcame my shyness. Please folks, contribute whatever you can. Five dollars, ten dollars, fifteen, twenty-five, fifty. We really need it so that we can keep *Morning Stories* coming to you and keep our website thriving past the end of August. And we'll see you next podcast. Take care.

[End of Recording]

Transcribed by Carrie McBride.

Note from Liz:

Here's to a long and fruitful relationship with Bonnie Lee and her fellow Chinese listeners/readers!