

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

***Hat in Hand:*** *What's with Erica and Speedy? A story with two different endings.*

**Tony Kahn:**

Hi everybody. This is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. "You know," my father used to say to me, "you've met the right person when the time is right." But what if you think you found the right person and the timing is wrong? Well, that's the story that I think Erica Ferencik has to tell us in today's program. We call her *Morning Story, Hat in Hand*.

[Party conversation in background]

**Erica Ferencik:**

I noticed him at my friend Joanna's wedding outside of Nashville – a small sun-leathered man, scrubbed clean, with a too-tight collar and frayed sleeves. I towered over him as I introduced myself. He shook my hand, nearly crushing it, gazing up at me with a smile. "That's Speedy," Joanna said. "He lives next door." The next time I looked for him he was gone. [party sounds end]

When I got back to Massachusetts, Joanna gave me a call.

**Joanna:** [as if over the phone.]

Speedy just told me you're the most beautiful woman he's ever seen. I think he's in love with you; he won't stop talking about you.

**Erica Ferencik:**

How many women has he seen?

**Joanna:**

Not too many. He's never left the farm. He can't read or write.

**Erica Ferencik:**

And how old is he?

**Joanna:**

Eighty.

[Erica screams. Joanna laughs.]

**Erica Ferencik:**

I thought, "Wow, an eighty-year-old illiterate man in Nashville is in love with me. Times are tough." I told my husband, and he laughed too. But part of me,

way off in the distance, felt – thrilled, adored. That spring, I planned a visit with Joanna for an entire week. She said Speedy couldn't wait to see me again.

My first morning there, I showed up at the breakfast table in my jogging pants and tee shirt, hair uncombed, face unwashed. "Surprise!" Joanna said. Speedy sat hat in hand. "I brought you a turtle shell," he said. A gorgeous black and yellow bowl, big enough to eat cereal out of. Later, Joanna asked me about my husband, our problems. I said the good outweighed the bad. I didn't elaborate. "But, Speedy, doesn't he have a family?" I asked.

**Joanna:**

He lived with his mother until she died. He's never been to Nashville.

**Erica Ferencik:**

Every day, Speedy brought me something -- an abandoned great blue heron's nest, the shedding of a snake that made me jump, and near the end of the visit, baskets of fresh berries from his garden. [sound of door sliding and closing and birds cooing] On the last day he took me to a barn filled to the rafters with birdhouses he had made. Each had a little drawing on it, hours of detailed work like a child's drawing, without perspective. "Oh Speedy, I can't accept this."

**Erica as Speedy:**

You took the snakeskin and the turtle shell. No one has enough presents.

**Erica Ferencik:**

Then:

**Erica as Speedy:**

This is for the birds, not for you. Your husband won't be mad. Will you come back? Will you come back?

**Erica Ferencik:**

His shoulders sagged. "Well," he said, "I have to get back to Miss Joanna's mowing." And then he walked away. I felt sick. At home as I was unpacking, I found the birdhouse wrapped in tissue paper, with a little note from Joanna that said, "Sorry E, he made me do it."

Well, Speedy, I ran into the yard and hung it in a tree outside our breakfast table. [Slow, wistful violins play in the background.] The next morning twigs and leaves showed from the opening, and I counted at least two finches flying in and out of it. I wanted to tell you how the birds fought to be in the birdhouse, how pretty it looked in the trees, but I remembered you don't have a phone and you can't read what I write. So I'll have to tell you in person, bring you something of mine, I guess, from the cold and snowy North. I don't know what it's going to

be yet, but I know it'll be something that could tell a story without words, just by holding it in your hands.

[Sad music swells and concludes.]

**Tony Kahn:**

That was Erica Ferencik with today's Morning Story, *Hat in Hand*. Whenever I, I finish a piece, including the music, I let Gary Mott listen, get his take and see if he agrees that it works as a story. And, uh, Gary, you surprised me.

**Gary Mott:**

I was expecting a, a much more hopeful, sweet, poignant, a happy piece of music, I guess.

**Tony Kahn:**

Hmm, something hopeful.

**Gary Mott:**

I felt this was a story about a friendship pursued and established. Speedy, I see his world being very small. This wedding brought them together, and she gave him the time of day; she accepted him, the turtle shell, the snakeskin.

**Tony Kahn:**

His world.

**Gary Mott:**

His world.

**Tony Kahn:**

Yeah . . .

**Gary Mott:**

And, while other people may have rejected him, she gave a little bit of herself.

**Tony Kahn:**

For me, it's about missed opportunities. You know, you walk down the street and every once in a while you'll establish eye contact? [Gary murmurs in agreement] With one person. It's not easy because most people choose to remain a stranger. But, if you do get eye contact, all of a sudden, even for just a second or two, you suddenly realize that person could have been, if fate had chosen, a friend, a lover, a family member. And maybe it *is* a little bit sad. You know, it's like looking up at the stars. Stars are beautiful and each of them is clear to see. But the darkness between them is also part of the beauty. You chose

some music that you thought might express more what you had in mind. [Gary murmurs in the affirmative] So let's listen to that.

**Erica Ferencik:**

Speedy, I ran into the yard and hung it in a tree outside our breakfast table. [Different music starts – quicker tempo, guitar, plucked – and continues to the end of this spoken passage] The next morning, twigs and leaves showed from the opening and I counted at least two finches flying in and out of it. I wanted to tell you how the birds fought to be in the birdhouse, how pretty it looked in the trees, but I remembered you don't have a phone and you can't read what I write. So I'll have to bring you something of mine, I guess, from the cold and snowy north. I don't know what it's going to be yet, but I know it'll be something that could tell a story without words, just by holding it in your hands.

[Guitar music gets louder and concludes.]

**Gary Mott:**

This is our first podcast with an alternate ending.

**Tony Kahn:**

[Laughs] That's true. You saw spring, and I saw winter. I'd like to think we're both right.

We got a lot of email this week as well. There is one that I did get, that you don't even know about, Gary, that just came at about six o'clock this morning and I just wanted to read it. This is from a gentleman named Robert, who lives in Tamarack, Florida. He writes, "Dear Tony Kahn, I just listened to your Hollywood Blacklist program," which we have a link to on our website, "with deep emotion and respect for you and your parents, especially your mother. Barbara Kahn was my English teacher at Alvin High School, 1963-1964, and I remember you picking her up after school. As I recall you drove a Jaguar XKE [Tony and Gary laugh] which I thought was spectacular. I admired your mother very much. She was a dedicated, compassionate teacher. Though I never met your father, I admire his feisty resistance to the McCarthy era witch hunts. I grew up in Hudson, New Hampshire and feel privileged to have known your mother. She was proud of her sons and told us stories of your family ordeal without bitterness or resentments. Her positive attitude has stayed with me all these years. Thank you for preserving an incredible struggle against horrific odds. And the memory of a wonderful person, best wishes."

Well Robert, thank you. I, I hate to break the news that I never drove a Jaguar XKE. [Gary laughs] It may have been my father, who picked her up after school one day when he was driving a demonstration model of that car that was loaned

to him by his good friend who owned the place and who let my father have a spin in some of the, in some of the faster cars just for kicks, but ...

**Gary Mott:**

I, I was going to say Tony, you know where ... I didn't know this about you!

**Tony Kahn:**

Yes, we were poor and disadvantaged but somehow we had a Jaguar XKE that I drove around [laughing]. But, do you know what I love? Robert made it his story too. He also held on to something very precious to me, the memory of my mother and my father, and he gave them back to me in that letter for that moment. Thank you very much.

**Gary Mott:**

That's terrific. That's a keeper.

**Tony Kahn:**

I think I've learned the value of looking back on things that were miserable with more understanding than anger. I'm not sure that I learned how to live without regrets quite as well as she did.

**Gary Mott:**

There's still time, Tony.

**Tony Kahn:**

[laughs] Thanks, Gar.

**Gary Mott:**

Well, speaking about, you know, looking back with fondness, our website, <WGBH.org/morningstories> and please get in touch. <MorningStories@WGBH.org>.

**Tony Kahn:**

And we'll catch you next podcast. Take care.

[Tony's choice of music followed by Gary's]

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Susan MacLeod.

Notes from Liz:

First, I'll reproduce my email here from when I first heard this story and reacted to it:

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AMAZING, Gary and Tony -- your discussion about the music in *Hat in Hand* (which I just listened to)! As it concluded (the first time), I actually thought: "Woah! What got into Gary on that one????!!!"

So, I was tickled to see that Gary had actually chosen something that would have gone with what I've come to expect from him, and that the somber accompaniment was Tony's doing. Gary's choosing that other would have signaled a worrisome change in his countenance <grin>!

It was a wonderful story --

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and upon listening to it again while checking over the nearly camera-ready copy Sue sent so quickly today, I started to wonder about the possible meanings the two of you built in to this one about for the changes about to take place for all of us in the *Morning Stories* family. Could you have been trying to show us all how to adjust? To remember to be understanding rather than miserable? And was Gary's happier "take" on the music a way to help us see that things that might seem gloomy now may very well have a happier side we just don't see yet?

Liz