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THE AFFAIRS OF STATE

by Time Steele

Chapter 1 – Prologue

Michael Audray was nearly eighty-nine years old when he died on June 30, 2004. His death, although sudden, was not completely unexpected at his age. He died in his sleep, a seemingly peaceful end to a life that had been anything but ordinary.

The recipient of three Peabodys, two Marconis, countless local awards and a member of the National Museum Radio Hall of Fame for more than 20 years, Michael Audray was familiar to most Americans as the host of The Midday Conversation with Michael Audray on the Betz Radio Network for more than forty-five years.

From its inception in 1939 until his retirement in 1984, Michael Audray conducted more than 20,000 interviews with more than 9,000 guests. Everyone from powerful politicians and regal royals to insufferable actors and trend-setting designers sat across from Michael Audray in the BRN Studio on D Street, Washington DC. But in all that time, he never once had a one-on-one, on-the-record interview with a past or present president of the United States.

That had everything to do with his involvement in the resignation of Franklin Roosevelt on November 7, 1941.

Michael Audray grew up in Carmel, Indiana. The Depression was an overarching experience for everyone

in Carmel. His dad had a job selling shoes, which was more than anybody else in their neighborhood could say. Michael was fifteen when things really got tough in 1930. He and his seventeen-year-old brother Pete swept up in the barbershop, delivered groceries, and washed windows. But Michael found his calling when he went to the newspaper office and became a copy boy.

His boss at the newspaper, John Dubosh, was nothing like the newspaper boss from *The Front Page*. Dubosh was really a kind old guy who saw a spark and encouraged Michael to give newspapers a try. Dubosh was fond of telling his young employees, “The press is the most powerful tool on Earth, so you needn’t be afraid.”

Dubosh knew a journalism professor at the University of Michigan and told Michael to send him a letter, and to use his name. Michael won a scholarship and soon was in Ann Arbor.

After graduation, Michael Audray left Michigan for Washington, because that’s where all the action was. Europe was in turmoil, the country was slowly coming out of the Depression, there was hope in the air. He left Ann Arbor on a Tuesday, got to Washington on a Thursday, and by the next Wednesday had a job.

He was hired by the Washington Herald to follow the Congressional delegation from six key Midwest states. The Herald had five Congressional reporters, each covering a different region. Because he was from Indiana, they gave him the Midwest.

He got to know all the congressmen from his home state, Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin and Kansas. He learned how to read between all the congressional double talk they’d put into bills and amendments, and, in the tradition of hard-hitting reporters, he learned how to drink. He got his share of stories, an occasional scoop or two,

and learned how to write crisp copy on deadline. He was also making enough money to start dressing well.

While working at the Herald, he met Lorena Hickok. She'd been a reporter for AP, but at this point she worked in the White House crafting their policy field reports and helping Eleanor Roosevelt with her newspaper column. He'd see her from time to time at White House functions, where they'd pass the time briefly

In 1938, Peter Betz announced plans to launch a new radio network. He was sixty-two years old and had the energy of a man half that. Peter Betz had not only survived the Depression: he had thrived during it. The word on him was Bootlegger, and though no one ever proved it, he never denied it either. Besides the booze, Peter Betz was a tobacco wholesaler, a textile investor and a Ford automobile dealer. On occasion, he invested in movie productions and was one of the early, silent investors in *Life* magazine. Betz told anyone who would listen that his new network would revolutionize the way people reacted to the radio and electronic news.

He based the Betz Radio Network in Washington and put out the word that he was looking for young bucks to come join his network. Radio experience was not necessary, only a desire to do good work, work long hours, get paid a fair price and come back to do it again. Michael Audray applied, and to his incredible surprise, got a call back the very next day. Peter Betz chose him to host a daily talk show. Peter wanted a show that could cover both government and entertainment issues, featuring interviews with newsmakers and stars. The time slot and the name of the show would be determined. The salary, \$30,000, was a huge raise for Michael Audray.

The first person he told was his girlfriend, Sharon Tozzi, a legislative aide to New Hampshire's Senator Paul Buckfield. He didn't know how to tell his editor at The

Herald, Stanton Blanchard. Sharon suggested he walk into Blanchard's office reading his last article out loud, then tag it with, "This is Michael Audray reporting for Betz Radio News."

He did. Blanchard threw him out of the office, and threatened to break his legs if he ever came crawling back for a real reporter's job. Michael knew he had made the career choice of a lifetime.

For the next few months Michael studied the craft of radio, came to understand the differences between radio and newspapers, and began to figure out how to get people to pay attention to an upstart network.

Over the years, Michael Audray came to be included on all the A-Lists in official and unofficial Washington. He was recognized as a smart and canny interviewer, able to extract unintended information from his guests. He was a shaper of public opinion in both the political and entertainment spheres, and over the course of his career, he made more than a handful of celebrities simultaneously squirm and squeal.

He was the subject of numerous profiles over the decades, and was generous with his time and comments on any number of topics. But he steadfastly refused to grant any on-the-record interviews related to the FDR resignation, maintaining that history and historians would interpret the events any number of ways.

In 1984, he left his daily one-hour program, but he continued his association with BRN. At seventy-one, he signed a sixteen-year contract with the network to produce a daily five-minute interview segment. Five Minutes with Audray ran each weekday at 12:30 p.m., right in the middle of the time slot he held for those forty-five years. His goal was to continue broadcasting into 2000, and then he'd retire. He reached his goal, and as usual, put BRN in an enviable position. Although the network

had over 800 affiliates, not all of them took all the programming offered. But Five Minutes with Audray not only cleared all 800 BRN stations, it also aired on 500 more, making it - and him - the most listened to program on radio. At eighty-five, still spry and sharp of mind, but getting weaker in voice, Michael Audray retired for good on July 4, 2000, exactly sixty-one years after his auspicious network debut.

Michael Audray was the reason I got into radio. As a high schooler, while everyone else was listening to Duran Duran and early Madonna, I was listening to the last few years of his daily show, and then each five minute segment. If I couldn't hear a particular five-minute show, I'd set up my tape deck to record it. I didn't always agree with what he said, but I was completely taken with how he said it, how he did it, and how he got people to talk.

I went to the University of Missouri and became a Journalism Major. Most of my friends wanted to become TV reporters or anchors, a few wanted to become Woodward and Bernstein, but I just wanted to go into radio and talk with a lot of people. I graduated in 1986 and landed on my feet as a reporter with KMOX, the 50,000 watt giant in St. Louis that gave the world Harry Caray, Jack Buck and Bob Costas, to name a few.

Shortly after I began at KMOX, I began writing letters to Michael Audray. Not fan letters, but letters asking for an on-the-record interview about the one subject he refused to discuss. He always wrote back, always politely declined, and as the letters continued, he replied with more good-natured encouragement for me - but he wouldn't grant me an interview.

I wrote more than fifty letters to him between 1988 and 1993 to no avail. Then, in 1996, he wrote me a letter out of the blue. He told me if I was still interested in discussing FDR with him, he'd talk with me after he retired in 2000. He

also laid down three conditions. One, he wanted everything recorded on both audio and video tape. He didn't want final editing control, but he wanted a complete copy of each tape for his family, just in case they didn't like the way I put the story together. Two, if I told anyone at all he had agreed to this interview at any point along the way between 1996 and 2000, the interview was off. No questions asked. And three, he wanted me to wait to air and/or publish the interviews until after his death.

I agreed to all three conditions, although truth be told, it was difficult not telling anyone I had snagged the Interview of the Century...or at least, the Interview About The Story of the Twentieth Century. But I had a few conditions that I asked for as well. I wanted to meet with him soon and often, in order to establish a relationship before the actual interviews began. He agreed. And I didn't want to do these interviews in a studio. I wanted them to be recorded in his home in Georgetown. After thinking about that, he agreed.

We began our discussions on Monday, July 10, 2000, just six days after he officially retired. By this time, I was a correspondent for CBS Radio based in Washington. I took a two-month leave of absence, and met with Michael Audray nearly every day. Some days, we'd talk for hours on end about the FDR Scandal, and on other days, we'd talk about Tiger Woods and drink Molsons while watching The Golf Channel. Most of the time, though, he was focused and anxious to tell his story, a story he had kept inside him for nearly sixty years.

What follows are his words. Shortly after FDR's resignation, he wrote everything down, and kept those notebooks in a safe deposit box in Carmel. He took great pains to keep them private, and although his wife and children knew of their existence, they never read them. In his will, he stipulated that if he hadn't granted an official

interview about the FDR story before his death, these notebooks should be published. When we began our interview, he allowed me to read his original notes. In some instances, I have used quotations and cross-checked dates and people from his notebooks to supplement his remarkably few memory lapses. I've also cleaned up some confusing attributions and made it more clear to whom he was referring. And because our conversations stretched over a two-month period, I've put them in a chronological order, but have taken great pains to keep them in context. By and large, though, what you read is what he said in the way he said it about one of the most compelling stories in American history, and his part in it.

And if you don't believe me, both his family and I have a complete set of audio and video recordings. This is Michael Audray's story about what is known as The Affairs of State.

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