

RADIO ACTIVE

BY J. NORTH CONWAY

WHY WE LIKE IT: 'Mother's Day is coming and I want to kill myself.' *We think 'Radio Active' is worth publishing for that line alone but there are lots of other reasons it rocks. What starts out as a parody of late-night radio for insomniacs gradually opens in another window to reveal the troubling angst of the dispossessed during the wee hours when the soul is most vulnerable. It's comedic theatre both poignant and stark and like the best comedy transcends its genre to unflinchingly mirror our darker intricacies. Five stars.*

RADIO ACTIVE

A Ten-Minute Play

by

J. North Conway

(Jack Conway)

Synopsis: A late-night radio talk show host gets more than he bargained for.

Setting/Staging: A radio station in an unnamed city. Center stage is a desk, chair and microphone where RON sits taking phone calls into his late-night radio talk show. Stage left is a chair and a telephone. Stage right is a chair and a telephone. The characters alternate between these two chairs when they call in. Chair, stage left, is where the first caller, BEN sits. Chair, stage right, is where the CRANK CALLER sits. Chair, stage left, is where BETTY sits. Chair, stage right, is where the PRESIDENT sits. Chair, stage left, is where BOB/BEN sits.

Characters: RON, a late-night radio talk show host fielding calls to his show.
 BEN/BOB, a caller who has a big secret.
 CRANK CALLER, an annoying caller.
 BETTY, mistakenly calls into the show.

PRESIDENT, calls into the wrong show.

Props:

Table
Three chairs
Microphone
Two telephones
One cell phone

CURTAIN RISES:

RON

(Speaking into the microphone, talking to the telephone callers, looking directly at the audience.)

Hello out there in radio land. This is Ron 'Til Dawn, on your radio dial. Broadcasting live from WU812, your all talk radio station. You've just been listening to Mark 'Til Dark. We're

brought to you tonight and every night by the Fabulous Kielbasa Brothers, Cosmos and Thaddeus, makers of the Polish Polka Party Platter, with its six-foot-long kielbasa. If you're serious about the size of your kielbasa then there's no other place to go than the Fabulous Kielbasa Brothers. Looks like we've got our first caller. Hello. You're on the air with Ron 'Til Dawn. Let's talk.

BEN

(Seated stage left, talking on the telephone.)

Hi Ron. This is Ben from Dover. Longtime listener. First time caller.

RON

Welcome Ben from Dover. You're on the air. Let's talk.

BEN

I don't want to talk. That's all everybody does. Talk. Talk. Talk. And it's not getting us anywhere. Nobody listens anymore.

RON

Well, Ben from Dover, you're on Ron 'Til Dawn. Broadcasting live from WU812. All talk. All the time. Brought to you by the Fabulous Kielbasa Brothers, makers of the Polish Polka Party Platter with its six-foot-long kielbasa. If you're serious about the size of your kielbasa then there's no other place to go.

BEN

See? Talk. Talk. Talk. Just like everybody else. How could anyone be serious about kielbasa? I'd like you to play some music. Hank Williams.

RON

Ben from Dover, we don't play music here on Ron 'Til Dawn. We're all talk radio. All day. All night.

BEN

Well, you should play music. I'd like to hear some music before it's over. I'm radio-active, Ron. I wanna hear Hank Williams yodel. I'm hotter than Chernobyl.

RON

That's what we like to hear, Ben from Dover, that you're active on the radio. And while you're active, maybe you should take time out and order the Fabulous Kielbasa Brothers' Polish Polka Party Platter.

BEN

I hate kielbasa. You know I wrote to the Dover Nuclear Power Plant Commission and warned them that they needed to beef up security at the plant because anyone could break into the place and steal the uranium and then the whole plant would explode. It would be an environmental disaster. A melt-down. Would they listen to me? No. All they did was talk. Talk. Talk. Talk.

RON

I'm sorry to hear that, Ben from Dover.

BEN

Nobody listens until it's too late. See what I mean?

RON

No. I meant about you not liking kielbasa. You should try the Fabulous Kielbasa Brothers' Polish Polka Party Platter. It will change your mind about kielbasa forever.

BEN

I don't want to change my mind about kielbasa. I want people to listen. Could you just play some music? I'm radio active. I wanna hear Hank Williams yodel. I'm hotter than Chernobyl.

RON

Sorry, Ben from Dover. We don't play music here at Ron 'Til Dawn. We're all talk radio. All the time.

(Hangs up on BEN.)

Next caller. Hello. Let's talk.

CRANK CALLER

(Seated stage right, talking on the telephone.)

Hi Ron. I've been reading all about Henry David Thoreau. You know who he is?

RON

Yes. The philosopher and environmentalist.

CRANK CALLER

That's right Ron. Did you know why he refused Novocain when he went to the dentist?

RON

No. Why?

CRANK CALLER

Because he wanted to transcend dental medication. Get it? Hey, I'm reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* too. It's got me in stitches. I got a million of them. Why don't ducks fly upside down? Because they might quack up.

RON

Enough of the comedy routine.

(Hangs up on the caller)

Next caller. Who's calling?

BETTY

(Seated stage left, talking on the telephone.)

They said I didn't have to give my name.

RON

Okay. Let's talk.

BETTY

Mother's Day is coming and I want to kill myself. All my children have abandoned me. They hate me. I'm all alone. I want to go out into the woods and hang myself. Then, maybe, when they find my body hanging from a tree, they'll all love me again. I just want to end it all.

RON

Geesh. Things can't be that bad. You need to buck up. Look on the sunny-side of the street. I've got an idea. Maybe if you had some delicious kielbasa from the Fabulous Kielbasa Brothers it would cheer you up.

BETTY

Buck up? Look on the sunny-side of the street? Have some kielbasa? That's your advice? Who are they hiring these days to answer the phones?

RON

You're on Ron 'Til Dawn, all talk radio, transmitting from radio station WU812, brought to you by the Fabulous Kielbasa Brothers.

BETTY

All talk radio? This isn't the suicide hotline?

RON

No. This is Ron 'Til Dawn...

BETTY

(Cuts him off.)

Oh, forget it. I'll just kill myself.

(Hangs up.)

RON

Well, sorry for that mix- up, listeners. Looks like we've got another caller. Hello. You're on the air. Let's talk.

PRESIDENT

(Seated stage right, talking on the telephone.)

This is the President. No collusion. No obstruction. Witch hunt. Fake News. Enemy of the people. Mexico will pay for it.

RON

Well, thanks for calling in Mr. President.

(Laughing.)

PRESIDENT

I've got the best words. I'm the greatest president. Greater than Lincoln. Obama was born in Kenya. Kim and I fell in love. She's not my type.

RON

That's great Mr. President.

(Laughing.)

PRESIDENT

There's no climate change. It's a hoax. Immigrants are stealing our jobs. We'll build a wall. (Pauses.)

Sean? Hannity? Is that you? Is this Fox News?

RON

No, Mr. President. This is Ron 'Til Dawn.

(Coughs to clear his throat.)

PRESIDENT

Is somebody coughing? I don't like coughing. You're fired. I want a hamburger. GOB BLESSE THE UNLIGHTED SHATES.

(Hangs up.)

RON

That was interesting. We have another caller. Let's talk.

BOB/BEN

(It's BEN calling again and trying to disguise his voice. Seated stage left, talking on his cell phone.)

Hi, Ron. It's me, Bob.

RON

Your voice sounds awfully familiar, Bob? Are you sure this isn't Ben from Dover, again?

BOB/BEN

You got me Ron. How did you know? I mean, I'm using my cell phone this time.

RON

It's on your caller I.D.

BOB/BEN

Bob's my real name. I just changed it to Ben because I had dyslexia for years and didn't know it. You know what I mean? B-O-B. No matter how you spell it. I thought Ben would be better. Anyway, I feel bad for that woman who wants to commit suicide. But she doesn't have to worry. It'll all be over soon enough.

RON

You mean the show? Well, Bob? Or Ben from Dover. We're on until dawn so we've got a few more hours before we go off the air and make room for Mark 'Til Dark here on WU812.

BOB/BEN

No. I mean the world. See, you're not listening. I told you. You should play some music. I'm radio-active. I wanna hear Hank Williams yodel. I'm hotter than Chernobyl.

RON

I'm glad you're an active radio listener but I told you before. We don't play music. This is all talk radio, all the time. I....

(Stops abruptly.)

I apologize. I have to interrupt our regularly scheduled programming for this late breaking news. It's being reported that someone broke into the Dover Nuclear Power Plant and stole the uranium that powers the plant. The plant is reported to be in full melt down. This is a major disaster of epoch proportion. People are being told to evacuate for a 200-mile radius. Geesh. That includes this station. Bob? Ben? You're in Dover. What do you hear about the melt-down?

BOB/BEN

It was me, Ron.

RON

It was you, what?

BOB/BEN

I broke into the plant and stole the uranium. It's in the trunk of my car right now. The whole plant is going to implode.

RON

Why'd you do it Bob? Ben?

BOB/BEN

I told them it was a danger to the environment but they wouldn't listen. Now they'll see. All they wanted to do was talk. Talk. Talk. Talk. Just like you, Ron. I told you. I'm radio-active. I wanna hear Hank Williams yodel. I'm hotter than Chernobyl. Now, will you play some music before the world ends?

RON

(Stuttering, nervously.)

I don't have any music. Wait. I've got the theme song from the Fabulous Kielbasa Brothers' Polish Polka Party Platter promo.

BOB/BEN

That's it? How's it go? Sing a few bars.

RON

(Sing-song voice.)

If you're serious about kielbasa, there's nothing that will make you gladder, than the Polish Polka Party Platter.

(LOUD BOOM on the other end of the telephone line.)

Bob? Ben? Are you there?

(LOUD dial tone on the other end of the line. Fade to black.)

END.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I wrote 'Radio Active' after listening to endless talk radio programs and was first compelled by the absurdity of the callers and then in Buddha-like enlightenment, felt deep compassion for the callers and the hosts whose job it is to listen to many of these sad, sad stories of lonely people calling all through the night. It is intended as a bittersweet comedy of errors.*

My lifelong influences include: the writings of Don Passos and his 'USA Trilogy' published in 1938. Structurally, it is one of my favorite books. It is a series of three novels, The 42nd Parallel (1930), 1919 (1932) and The Big Money (1936). It encompasses a variety of experimental techniques that I adapted for my books. They include: fictional narratives telling the of the people and events associated with the Portland; collages of various newspaper clippings, song lyrics, poems and even recipes, brief biographies and people.

I have been greatly influenced by Herman Melville's Moby Dick. Melville interspersed his novel with intercalary chapters that broaden the overall theme of the of the book by providing, for instance, chapters describing details about whaling, harpoons and various types of ships that make it seems like an instruction manual at times. The third book whose style, structure and format I have adopted is Truman Capote's In Cold Blood. Capote relies on historical facts, with true characters and storylines but experiments with telling the story through various narrative voices. Within this genre of 'creative nonfiction' the narrative sounds trustworthy and, 'the fact that the events themselves are not someone else's creation further invites readers to believe they are the 'truth.' And lastly, I have drawn on the style, structure and format of one of my favorite books, Candide, by Voltaire, insomuch as it tells a story with each chapter propelling the distinct narrative: just plain, good, old-fashioned storytelling. I have applied these to all my writing including Radio Active, despite its short play format.

BIO: *J. (Jack) North Conway is the author of 15 nonfiction books on a variety of subjects including a history of the Gilded Age in New York City, true crime and a New England History. He received the John Curtis Award for Lifelong Learning in honor of an entire body of work. For 25 years he was a newspaper and magazine reporter and editor and also served as an adjunct English professor at several New England colleges and universities. He is an accomplished poet whose publications include Poetry: The Norton Book of Light Verse; the Columbia Review; In a Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare; Folger's, the flagship publication of the Folger Shakespearian Library in Washington, D.C. and The Antioch Review.*

Books

Soldier Parrott, Lyons Press, Fall 2020. *The true-life story of nineteen year old Union soldier Jacob Parrott who was captured behind Confederate lines during a daring raid and sent to prison. Battered, starved and half dead, when he was released in a prisoner exchange, Parrott went onto to become the first Medal of Honor winner in 1863.*

Wreck of the Portland, Lyons Globe Pequot Press July 2019. *The true-life story of the tragic sinking of the steamship 'Portland', off the coast of Cape Cod during the 1898 'storm of the century' where all 200 passengers and crew were lost at sea, earning the disaster the nickname 'The Titanic of New England'.*

New England Rocks: Historic Geological Wonders, History Press, April 2017. *The book examines the history, the legends and the people associated with forty-five noted geological wonders.*

Attack of the HMS Nimrod: Wareham and the War of 1812, History Press, June 2014. *A history of the June 14, 1814 invasion of Wareham by British troops during the War of 1812.*

Queen of Thieves, Skyhorse Publishing, Fall 2014. *The non-fiction story of America's most infamous woman crime figure, Fredericka 'Marm' Mandelbaum, who rose to power in New York City during the Gilded Age. Optioned as a television series by Gaumont Pictures, USA.*

Bag of Bones, Globe Pequot/Lyons Press, May 2012. *The third and final book in my trilogy on New York City during the Gilded Age, covering the rise and fall of the A. T. Stewart retail empire.*

The Big Policeman. Globe Pequot/Lyons Press, November 2010. *The book covers the rise and fall of America's foremost detective, Thomas Byrnes in New York City during the Gilded Age. It was optioned by CBS television for a series.*

King of Heists, Global Pequot/Lyons Press, August 2009. *The story of the greatest bank robber in American history, George Leslie, who rose to fame and power in New York City during the Gilded Age. It was chosen as one of the top five books of the summer of 2009 by Reader's Digest. It has been optioned for a feature movie starring Jeremy Renner.*

The Cape Cod Canal: Breaking Through the Bared and Bended Arm, History Press, South Carolina, 2008. *It is in its seventh edition. A history of the building of the great New England canal.*

Head Above Water, Publish America, 2005. *The story of New York financier, August Belmont Jr., who undertook the building of the Cape Cod Canal, financing the construction with much of his own money.*

Shipwrecks of New England, Douglas Charles Ltd., North Attleboro, MA, 2000. *A history of some of the most dramatic shipwrecks along the New England coast.*

New England Visionaries, Douglas Charles Ltd., North Attleboro, MA, 1998. *A compendium of men and women whose vision helped change forever the world we live in.*

New England Women of Substance, Douglas Charles Ltd., North Attleboro, MA, 1996. *A collection of true-life stories of New England women who helped change American culture and society. It is being used as a textbook for a course on women's contributions to America at Yale University.*

American Literacy: Fifty Books That Define Our Culture and Ourselves, William Morrow, New York, 1994. *A compendium of books and writings that changed our culture and society.*

From Coup to Nuts: A Revolutionary Cookbook, Quinlan Press, Boston, MA, 1987. *An illustrated humor book depicting the favorite recipes of the world's most infamous revolutionaries.*