**Russell:** Hello! This is Russell McGee, one of the producers of the *Ernie Pyle Experiment*, and I’m joined in the studio here with…

**Michael:** I’m Michael Brainard.

**Greta:** I’m Greta Lind.

**Russell:** Alright…yeah, Mike, so how did this whole *Ernie Pyle Experiment* come about? What drew you to Ernie?

**Michael:** Well, I’ve been writing on Ernie for about 30 years. I love Ernie Pyle and I love his writing. I suppose that’s why, you know.

**Russell:** And you shared a story about your time in New York and how you encountered Ernie Pyle, if you will.

**Michael:** Right.

**Russell:** So how about you share a little about that story as well?

**Michael:** Well, Ernie Pyle is long dead, right? I mean, he died during the war. So but there's a lot of people that don't know that, and there are people that do. We are here in in the hotbed of Ernie Pyle for sure, in Indiana.

And so most people are kind of introduced to him. I didn't know who he was. I was in a used bookstore. I had just gotten a part on *All My Children*, ABC soap opera. And this was 1988, 89. I had moved from Los Angeles and just picked up stakes and moved myself out at the age of 23 to New York City. I didn't have any friends or any, you know, infrastructure in a family way, in any way, shape or form. It was just myself. And in order to keep myself sane and not, you know, bored silly or whatever I read, I just read a lot. I didn't have enough money to do much of anything else and the books I was buying, I would buy it a used bookstore.

And there was this used bookstore in Lincoln Center, right near where our studio was, and so on the way home, I would always step in and one day I was there. And I was just pulling books off the shelves and I pulled this one book off and kind of stuck to that book was this other book, and that book fell to the ground at my feet. And, you know, you hear this happening. That was the Ernie Pyle book. I picked it up and whoa, what's this? And that started it. I was fascinated immediately.

**Russell:** Greta, so how did you meet this crazy guy who's come up with this whole concept?

**Greta:** Well, Michael and I knew each other from *All My Children*. I was on for a year, and Michael was my love interest.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Greta:** I was his love interest.

**Michael:** One of them.

**Greta:** Yeah, I yeah, I was the other…

**Michael:** Well, we all had multiple.

**Greta:** Yes, I was the virginal nurse that we were…anyway. He was married to someone else.

**Michael:** I know, I was married.

**Greta:** Yeah.

**Michael:** And your character was…hell bent on destruction.

**Greta:** No, no not at all. It's the sweetest thing. Yeah, so we knew each other from that, but I had taken several years off of Facebook and got back on and this was what, two, two and a half years ago. I get this message from this guy, Michael Brainard.

Greta, is that you? I said, yeah. And I was like, Michael, oh my God, my career. Yeah, *All My Children*. I was like, yeah, it's me. He said, Facebook strikes again!

I remember it was so funny. And you said, you live in Bloomington. And I said, yeah. And you said, I'm coming with my wife and going to meet an expert on Ernie Pyle and would you like to meet us for a drink? And I said, sure.

**Russell:** And what were you doing here then?

**Michael:** Well, well, I had written this play, *War is Coming Ernie Pyle*. And we had done it at a college in Missouri about two and a half years ago, which is why we came here to Bloomington, my wife and I, and that's when we saw Greta. So we were there in Missouri doing this production for about six, seven weeks and we had a week off. So we went to Dana to Ernie's, the state historic site there, and Museum of Ernie Pyle. And we saw that and we met some people there, really nice people. Came here to Bloomington to meet with Owen Johnson, who used to be a professor here at IU, and he taught a class on Ernie Pyle in the journalism school.

**Russell:** And actually does have a role in this.

**Michael:** And he does have a role. Yes.

Yeah, of course. I mean, he's excited and I'm excited to have him, too. And so I came out here because he had set up a Facebook page. That's how I got to know him from Los Angeles. He had an Ernie Pyle Facebook page. And so we became, you know, friends from that. And so I came here to – I call him the Pope of Pyle, so I came here to kiss the ring.

So he asks me if I want to come out to National Ernie Pyle day last year, which they had here on campus at IU in the… right next to Ernie Pyle statue. There's a big room in that building, the media building. And so there was Joe Galloway, who was a famous war correspondent from Vietnam. He was there as the keynote. And I showed up and they had me read two of Ernie's prewar pieces that are in our podcast, *The Wind Story and the Snake Story*. And it went over quite well, and essentially, by the time I left here, the folks here at WFIU got a hold of us and said, is there a podcast about Pyle? I said, no, well, maybe there should be.

**Owen:** I'm Owen Johnson. I've been studying Ernie Pyle for more than 20 years.

**Michael:** Yeah, yeah, he knows more about Ernie Pyle than any man alive. I'm a close second, but I don't even think that's close. We could talk just about anything, essentially about Pyle and we can go back and forth about obscure data, but what I want to talk about is, is Jerry, and I guess what we don't know is almost everything about her.

**Owen:** That's right, we do have one article that was published in an obscure Minnesota magazine by a member of her family. We have no way of knowing whether what they were writing was true or not. We have a little bit of testimony from her sister who knew that she had some mental health issues. We have some letters that she wrote to mutual friends of theirs in Albuquerque. He was the editor of the newspaper in Albuquerque and had known Pyle for a long time. And we have six columns, I think it is, that supposedly were written by Jerry. And perhaps she did the first draft and then he polished it because they were published in place of his column.

**Michael:** Hmm. Yeah, I mean, we talked about that over the years about. How much was she involved in his writing and it's just easy to say, well, it's possible that she sat in quite a bit. We just don't know. She knew how he wrote.

**Owen:** I think initially she was his muse. She inspired his writing.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Owen:** She critiqued it. And at the beginning, as with any beginning writer, his writing wasn't as good as it later was and…Most certainly she made some suggestions that he incorporated and eventually because of her declining health and he improved and he was able to do it on his own, he missed that.

**Michael:** Yes.

**Owen:** And I think the letters that he wrote to which he often received no answers when he was overseas during World War II, showed a retained affection for her. He knew that she was, what shall we say, three-sided and one part in which she made no sense that she displayed to him, but hardly to anybody else. Pyle was, Ernie Pyle…had a great ability to understand people, you see that in his writing, and I think part of that he honed his ability living with her.

**Michael:** Sure.

**Owen:** And she…They had to have had great repartee in the early years just playing off each other. She liked to do these double cross puzzles. She had a wonderful understanding of words. And in that sense, it's a real shame that she didn't write stuff on her own.

**Michael:** Yeah. Yeah, there's something missed there for sure. Yeah, I think that about them as far as having that long conversation about language and writing and just words in general and wordplay. You know, I think that was something that was probably in development for Ernie, his entire writing career. I mean, you read those early aviation columns and some of them are quite anemic, you know, and then some of them are really beautiful and in depth, you know.

**Owen:** Well, when you think he was writing, what, 900 words a day, six days a week, nobody can be great all that time. Just imagine if Hemingway had to do that.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Owen:** Or John Dos Passos or some somebody else.

**Michael:** Yeah. Yeah, that's right.

**Owen:** They understood each other, I think even in silence. If they were driving and they weren't talking, they understood that neither one of them really wanted to talk. Pyle may have been thinking about future columns in his head.

We don't know for sure what, what, what she was thinking. And then she would start to talk. She was manic depressive in a time that they didn't understand what that was. And I can imagine in manic times, she was full of life and energy and creativity. But unfortunately, the down periods became more frequent as time went on.

**Michael:** Yeah, yeah. She's a fascinating character, you know, and she's the dramatic structure of this piece, the entire piece, you know. You know, with Ernie, you would have to take him as a in a day to day way and really hunt for something as your dramatic structure, but with Jerry it's a slam dunk.

**Russel:** I know when we started the process of auditioning that you were concerned, maybe not the right exact word choice there, but we wanted to make sure that we found an actor that was of the right caliber to match Ernie and be able to play off against Ernie and find the right Jerry.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Russell:** And can you talk about that?

**Michael:** Oh, yeah. Greta was a blessing, how it happened. I didn't know she was going to be in this. You know, I didn't at all.

**Greta:** Me neither.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Russell:** So no favoritism?

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Greta:** No. It was this was very last minute actually.

**Michael:** There was there was another girl, who’s a friend of both of ours from *All My Children*, that I was going to try to get out here: Cady McClain. She had been a part of my writing process from the play to also doing these episodes and workshopping it in L.A.

**Russell:** Right.

**Michael:** So I would get to a certain point with these episodes and I'd have her show up with a few other actor friends and we'd read through these things. And it's part of the process of seeing what works, what wasn't working. And she was terrific. But she's also a director now, and so she has a couple of projects she's trying to get off the ground, she just couldn't come out and do it

**Russell:** Right.

**Michael:** So, you know, I reluctantly packed all my clothes in a suitcase and came out here for the casting process, not knowing if I was going to get somebody of her caliber.

**Russell:** And we had…just the audience at home knows this…The day of, we ended up having sixty-seven actors audition on one day. That meant that we extended the auditions twice and we went from 10 a.m. to 10:30 at night with just one break to see all of the actors that we could in that short span.

**Michael:** Yeah, I read with all of them.

**Greta:** Wow.

**Russell:** And what has it been like for both of you switching over into a completely different format? As far as like we've talked about this off and on, but like…

**Michael:** It's weird.

**Russell:** You've worked on stage, you've worked in film. What's it like to do radio audio?

**Greta:** Well, I think that the sound studio is my new happy place. It feels so…it's like this cocoon where we are here with one another in a very close way.

And I feel like anything that arises…I feel like I show up raw and I feel that…the guidance, actually, from each of you, Michael and Russell, at any given point just lifts me into a certain space and I can go there and then I can go there. It really feels immediate and alive and kind of freeing, actually.

**Michael:** Yeah, it's pretty cool. It's pretty amazing that we speak the same language, you and I.

**Russell:** Well, again, you're talking about method, we have that Meisner connection.

**Michael:** I know! We've ended up relying on each other. It's an amazing fit, you know. I really, truly hope that we're able to do this again.

**Russell:** I know I do, too.

**Michael:** It's a big learning process. Never done anything like this.

**Russell:** Mm hmm.

**Michael:** I didn't know what to expect. And, frankly, I was a bit intimidated by a lot of it. So I was writing these things, and when we first started talking about doing it, it was last year at August, September, and in the first idea was to get this in the can and by December that year.

**Russell:** And just for everybody at home, so because like I know, by the time you hear of this, this is actually October 2019. So when Mike was talking about August, he was talking about August of 2018. So we've already been over a year working on this…

**Michael:** And always talking on the phone. And you and I have been phone friends for, for the last year.

**Russell:** Yeah. And it wasn't until the auditions that we actually physically finally met.

**Michael:** That’s right, that's like a month ago. Right?

**Russell:** Yeah.

**Michael:** Maybe? About a month ago?

**Russell:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**Michael:** But we finally met in person.

**Russell:** I've been working on the Doctor Who audios in the UK, and that's part of the reason John knew I had the experience and asked me to come on and help out with Michael.

**Michael:** Yeah.

**Greta:** That’s great.

The trust level that I have in this process is through the roof. It is. I don't question anything. I'm completely present in this experience, and it's because you're each holding it with such clarity and vision and you know, you know, you'll have us come back and do it again in a different way. I just… I'm not worried one bit.

**Russell:** You guys have anything else you want to leave the audience with as far as closing thoughts?

**Michael:** Go read Ernie Pyle. You know, go read his pre-war stuff. It's a better entry point for Ernie Pyle. It's about America at that time, and go and read it because he's not political. He writes about the people in that time and really I challenge you not to see yourself in it.