1a. INT. NPR STUDIO – DAY

(MUSIC: NPR like chime. SFX: Small studio ambience.)

**CARY ONANON:**

WFIU, Bloomington Indiana. Where you don’t need to be an expert, if you learn something new everyday.

(MUSIC: Newsbreak transition.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT:**

Never let it be said that Ernie Pyle didn’t like visiting home, back in Dana, Indiana. But, sometimes a visit home can cause a person to want to run out the back door screaming. The roads of home have old grooves that are meant to catch a tire and throw you in a ditch.

For Ernie, his parents were a moral anchor…tied

around his neck. He and Jerry were no longer country people. They were of the big city now, with big city responsibilities, and a big city routine. He never let his parents forget it, either.

A visit home was always brief, with a lot of time spent alone writing. They didn’t stay long enough to fall back into old habits, or to let regrets and confessions spoil the moment. Or to let his folks feel sorry for themselves about such things.

Especially his mother.

**MUSIC SEGUE:**

(MUSIC: WASHINGTON POST MARCH – THE ERNIE PYLE EXPERIMENT MAIN TITLE THEME.)

**ERNIE:**
Hello, I’m Ernie Pyle, the Hoosier Vagabond, and this is that girl who rides with me.

**JERRY:**
Here we go again.

(MUSIC: Main theme begins to fades out.)

**1b. INT. NPR STUDIO - PRESENT**

(SFX: The ambience of a recording studio fades in.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT:**

Welcome to The Ernie Pyle Experiment! Episode 3. The

Snake Story.

Let’s listen in as Ernie introduces the recording machine to his folks:

(MUSIC: Main theme finishes fading out.)

**CROSS TO:**

. INT. PYLE FARM KITCHEN - NIGHT

(SFX: A small Midwestern kitchen with a General Electric "Monitor-Top" refrigerator, the window is open so the birds and cows may be heard outside. The Pyle clan is seated round a wooden table in wooden chairs. NOTE: The scene should start with the mono vintage wire recording SFX over the WFIU radio.)

**MOM (D):**
So where...what do I...what am I even looking at here?

**DAD (D):**
Maria. Maria, listen. Put your lips on that thing there.

**ERNIE (D):**
No! Don’t put your lips on anything.

**MOM (D):**
What am I supposed to do?

**ERNIE (D):**
Just talk.

**JERRY (D):**
Just say something like it weren’t even here.

(SFX: Slowly cross fade into a full stereo mix of the kitchen. NOTE it is vital that this transition take at least three seconds and you will need to pan the mono recording this time so the dialogue is coming through the speaker of the recorder as if they are in the Kitchen listening to it live. This one will be tricky but it is doable.)

**MOM (D):**
That doesn’t make any sense.

**JERRY (D):**
It takes getting used to.

**DAD (D):**
You say we can hear ourselves talking?

**ERNIE (D):**
Yes, in a minute. Just keep talking.

(LONG PAUSE.)

**DAD (D):**
I can’t hear anything.

**MOM (D):**
Well, I don’t like it.

(SFX: The recorder cuts out and the wire plays for a second, before there is a scrap of a chair on hardwood and Ernie turns the recorder off. Everybody is laughing, just absolutely cracking up.)

**MOM:**
That was NOT ME!

**ERNIE:**
Oh, yes it was!

(SFX: Ernie sits back in his seat.)

**JERRY:**
Who else could it be?

**MOM:**
Well, I don’t know. I’ll be! Will! Will, is that what I sound like?

**DAD:**
Well, sure. But, I’m a little concerned about who that old man talking to you was.

**MOM:**
Well, I tell you. I don’t like it!

**JERRY:**
I’m with you, Mom. It’s a pain in the neck.

**MOM:**
Well, a person ain’t meant to hear themselves like that!

**ERNIE:**
It’s the future.

**DAD:**
It sure is something. I just don’t see the practicality in something like this.

**ERNIE:**
I think folks might like to hear what each other has to say.

**DAD:**
Since when?

**JERRY:**
(Laughing) Yeah, since when?

(SFX: Mom reaches in her chair and rewinds the recorder. Over this...)

**ERNIE:**
Ma, don’t touch the knobs, don’t touch th...

(SFX: Ernie starts to get up from his seat, Mom hastily releases the button and settles back in her chair as the record begins to play again. Mom’s first line should playback like it is coming out of rewind, slowing into a normal pitch.)

**MOM (D):**
What am I supposed to do?

**ERNIE (D):**
Just talk.

**JERRY (D):**
Just say something like it weren’t even here.

**MOM (D):**
That doesn’t make any sense.

(SFX: Ernie gets up from his chair and turns off the recorder. Everyone is cracking up again.)

**MOM:**
That is not me! It is just NOT ME!

**DAD:**
Where in the heck did you get this?!

(SFX: Ernie sits back down. Over this...)

**ERNIE:**
One of the muckety-muck big-idea-thinkers at Scripps.

**MOM:**
Does that sound like me? Do I *really* sound like that?

**JERRY:**
You sort of do, Maria.

**MOM:**
Why didn’t anybody ever say anything? I sound like a squirrel in a hole.

**DAD:**
That muckety-muck some kind of genius?

**MOM:**
I don’t like it one bit, I tell you. Not one bit. You’re not doing it again, are you?

**ERNIE:**
Something like that, Dad. …Mom, please don’t touch the machine.

**MOM:**
Well, it’s moving so I know you’re doing it to me again.

**JERRY:**
Nobody is doing anything to you, Mom.

**ERNIE:**
You’re doing it to yourself, if you’d just stop talking...

**DAD:**
Oh, I’ve tried that. Been saying it for years.

**MOM:**
Oh, Will!

**DAD:**
Maria, please calm down.

**MOM:**
Let me hear myself again!

(SFX: Ernie rewinds the recording. Ambience fades out completely into the music.)

**MUSIC SEGUE:**

a. PYLE FARM KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

(SFX: A small Midwestern kitchen with a General Electric "Monitor-Top" refrigerator, the window is open so the birds and cows may be heard outside. The Pyle clan is seated round a wooden table in wooden chairs.)

**MOM (SOBBING):**

**JERRY:**
What is it? Oh, Mom! What happened?

**MOM:**
I just don’t understand why nobody ever told me I sound like a mean old crow!

(SFX: Mom gets up out of chair and leaves through the hallway, her footsteps trailing off into the distance. Jerry gets up and hurriedly follows her.)

**JERRY (OFF):**
Oh, turn that off now. Maria, come back...

(SFX: Dad gets up and crosses to a cabinet. Over this...)

**DAD:**
Well, I’m glad we got that out of the way.

(SFX: A cabinet door opens, moves a cloth flour bag then pulls out two drinking glasses and a mason jar from the cabinet then closes the cabinet. Over this...)

**DAD (CONT’D):**

Got something for you. Want some?

**ERNIE:**
Say, Sure.

(SFX: Dad unscrews the mason jar full of moonshine. Over this...)

**DAD:**
So, you’re still a drinking man, I suppose.

(SFX: Dad pours the moonshine for them both.)

**ERNIE:**
I suppose. So, you got this to keep me in the house, then?

(SFX: Dad sits back in his seat and hands Ernie a glass.)

**DAD:**
I know nothing of what you say, drink up.

(SFX: They both take a drink. Then Ernie puts his glass down on the table. NOTE you should insert drinking sounds and glass handling where appropriate until they finish their drinks throughout the scene.)

**ERNIE:**
Say, this is Granddad’s Cherry Pie!

**DAD:**
It’s going around.

**ERNIE:**
It’s so good.

**DAD:**
Bobby stopped by earlier. Word got out you’d be here, you know.

**ERNIE:**
I bet.

**DAD:**
We need to skip before they come back. Your Mom sees this in the house I’ll get into trouble. She doesn’t know Bobby stopped by yesterday. He had to park out behind the barn and I met him there for the transaction.

**ERNIE:**
Ha!

**DAD:**
I hide it in plain sight here, because she knows all my hiding places out in the barn. Your Mother hates to bake so...I put it behind the bag of flour in plain sight.

**Ernie (LAUGHS):**

**DAD:**
I used to hide it behind the molasses jar, we both hate molasses, and that jar hasn’t moved in twenty-five years. But she found it. So, I know that’s the first place she’d look if she saw Bobby Webster come by.

(SFX: Dad gets up from his chair and exits out a back screen door from the kitchen, grabbing the moonshine. Ernie follows him, grabbing the two glasses. Over this...)

**DAD (CONT’D):**

C’mon! You can drink this out in the barn.

(SFX: Re-enter Mom and Jerry from the hallway.)

**MOM:**
They’re gone. You want a little sneak drink?

**JERRY:**
What? Why, I’d love a little sneak drink.

(SFX: Mom crosses to the cabinet. Over this...)

**MOM:**
Don’t you dare tell Ernest.

(SFX: Mom opens the cabinet door opens and she moves a jar of molasses pulls a drinking glass plus the Mason jar full of moonshine. Over this...)

**JERRY:**
I never tell him anything anyway.

**MOM:**
I think you might like this.

(SFX: Mom closes the cabinet door then unscrews the moonshine and pours it into a glass. Over this...)

**MOM (CONT’D):**

I hide it behind the molasses, or Will would find it.

(SFX: Mom hands Jerry a glass.)

**MOM (CONT’D):**

He hates molasses.

(SFX: Jerry takes a sip. NOTE they stay standing and do not sit throughout the scene.)

**JERRY:**
Well, that’s Grandad’s Cherry Pie.

**MOM:**
Cheers.

**JERRY:**
Cheers. Well, aren’t you having some with me?

**MOM:**
Oh, honey, you know I won’t. But, I knew you were coming, so.

**JERRY:**
So, you got it to keep me in the house?

**MOM:**
I’m not saying anything. Just enjoy it.

**JERRY:**
I will.

**MOM:**
Anyway, How do you know about Grandad’s Cherry Pie?

**JERRY:**
We saw Bobby Webster earlier. I mean yesterday.

**MOM:**
Bobby came by here yesterday. Will doesn’t know it. I don’t let him sell it to Will.

**JERRY:**
Why not?

**MOM:**
He doesn’t drink, but if it’s around he’ll start inviting the neighbors over.

**JERRY:**
You don’t want the neighbors over?

**MOM:**
Oh, no. I just want to be at home. Nothing like getting to a moment of the day when you get to sit and stare out the window, maybe find a few moment without yourself making you think yourself isn’t worthy of sitting there and staring out that window...that you should be pulling your weight somewhere. You have to let yourself into those moment...you have to steal them and hold them, and don’t give them away so easily...because we don’t let each other have them. Whenever we see someone sitting there staring out the window we judge them harshly for it, ‘they should be doing something, boy aren’t they lazy’, and all that. Then that Ol’ Judge comes out... when *WE* take a moment and...well, we’re just too hard on ourselves, that’s what. Let yourself have it, that’s what I say.. If I have to work all day, and I don’t get to stare out any windows, and Will invites the neighbors over, and I haven’t swept the porch and dusted and straightened? Forget it! I get ornery. And what do you mean you saw Bobby Webster, *yesterday*?

**JERRY:**
Yeah, that’s right.

**MOM:**
You didn’t get in until this morning.

**JERRY:**
Oh.

**MOM:**
Fess up.

**JERRY:**
We were here yesterday afternoon.

**MOM:**
So, let me get this straight. You never stay a day later when you come, no matter how I plead. The day you leave is set in stone. And when I could have had Ernie here on the day he said he’d be here, and have a full three days with him? Boy! Why would you decide to come to town and *NOT* come to the house right away, as fast as you can?

**JERRY:**
I don’t do the driving, Mrs. Pyle.

**MOM:**
Don’t ‘I don’t do the driving, Mrs. Pyle’ to me, Mrs. Pyle. You do the driving. You *do* the driving. Don’t you?

**JERRY:**
From the passenger seat?

**MOM:**
From the passenger seat.

**JERRY:**
Hmm. I suppose. But, Maria, He’s composing. He stopped us out nearby a creek, past town. One that he used to fish.

**MOM:**
Mr. Websters pasture.

**JERRY:**
That’s right. When he starts composing he’ll walk around and talk to himself, and when that starts I don’t get in the way of it. He might ask me some questions, maybe a definition of a word or something like that. He tries other things out on me, once in a while; a turn of phrase or what-not. When he used to be copy editor, back home, he would...

**MOM:**
This is ‘back home’.

**JERRY:**
Hmmm, well… When he was copy editor that meant he had to come up with the headlines on everybody’s stories. I used to help with that. That was fun. “Off Beat Cop Drums Wife”, stuff like that. That was mine! So, much fun.

**MOM:**
Well, whose team are you on? You should have steered him here.

**JERRY:**
You know how it is. He gets here and he forgets about writing.

**MOM:**
Well, he should… for a time, at least. I got ways to make him work when I need him to, you know. I can get him to write here, too.

**JERRY:**
I know.

**MOM:**
He can write here.

**JERRY:**
I know.

**MOM:**
So, I don’t want to hear it. ..Anyway, have you thought about where you’re going to end up when all this moving around gets old?

**JERRY:**
Well, *he* does. *I* don’t think about it too much.

**MOM:**
He wants to move back here sometime, doesn’t he?

**JERRY:**
Ummmmm....

**MOM:**
I’ve got some ideas on that. There’s a place on the other side of Dana, with two hundred acres and all the sheds, coops and lean-to’s one would need.

**JERRY:**
You don’t say.

**MOM:**
Why not? He can write here, just as well as anywhere else.

**JERRY:**
True, but the whole job is predicated upon being out on the road in America… each story from a different place.

**MOM:**
Everybody needs a home to come back to... keep your stuff, winter clothes and things.

**JERRY:**
We have a place in Washington, Mom.

**MOM:**
Now look, I’ve been thinking about that. Washington is all the way on one side of America. You and Ernie drive all over, North, South, East and West. Well, don’t you? Wouldn’t it be nice to have home be located dead-center?

**JERRY:**
Don’t get logical on me.

**MOM:**
There’s the old Wilkerson place on Parkwood Avenue, it has two stories and a carriage house, big enough for a family? Hmm? And the carriage house can be made into an office for Ernie to write in. That way the kids would stay out of his way.

**JERRY:**
Kids...

**MOM:**
Or one. Just one is fine.

**JERRY:**
Myeeeah....

**MOM:**
I get it, in town is too close. Heck, there’s Montezuma if you don’t want to be too close, there’s a whole bunch of homes for sale in Montezuma.

**JERRY:**
I’m not ready.

**MOM:**
Not ready?

**JERRY:**
I’m just not ready to do the dishes.

**MOM:**
Oh, are *you* judging me, now? Don’t worry about those. Will was supposed to get those. Here, I’ll get to them.

(SFX: Mom take a few steps to the sink and turns on the spigot. Over this...)

**JERRY:**
Not now, I mean ever.

**MOM:**
Oh, sure. I can hear you judging me, ‘it’s nine o’clock and she hasn’t done her dishes’!

(SFX: Mom turns off the spigot and begins scrubbing a dish.)

**JERRY:**
You can leave them to rot, for all I care.

**MOM:**
Left for who?

(SFX: Mom takes a towel from the stove and dries the dish she had been cleaning. Over this...)

**JERRY:**
It’s the idea of the thing, Mom.

**MOM:**
I know the idea. But you have to have both. You work, you rest. You want to be at rest all the time?

(SFX: Mom places the dish on the counter.)

**JERRY:**
It’s not that I want to be at rest, it’s that… I don’t want to be at work.

**MOM:**
Oh, you!

**JERRY:**
Here, let me help you.

(SFX: Jerry take a few steps toward Mom.)

**JERRY (CONT’D):**

I can practice.

(SFX: Jerry picks up a plate from the counter.)

**MOM:**
When is the last time you did dishes?

**JERRY:**
Oh. I don’t think I can answer that. I don’t rightly know.

**MOM:**
Well, then sit. I can’t have you breaking anything.

(SFX: Jerry crosses and sits down at the table and continues drinking her moonshine.)

**JERRY:**
As you wish.

(SFX: Mom starts scrubbing another dish. Over this...)

**MOM:**
I hate doing the dishes.

**JERRY:**
See? You understand me.

(SFX: Mom takes dries the dish she had been cleaning. Over this...)

**MOM:**
Ain’t supposed to admit that though. Don’t you know anything, girl?

**JERRY:**
I do. And I just don’t care.

**THEY LAUGH**

**MOM:**
I’d rather drive a team of horses in the field than cook a dinner. Will had a pretty good idea one time, when we were married. He said if I did the cooking, he would do the dishes. Since it’s nothing to boil up some onions and carrots and green-beans with some meat in it, I said yes. So, we shook on it. But he started pining for his mothers cooking, roasted chickens and meatloaf and fried chicken and cracklins and dumplings. And pies and cakes, too. Heckfire! YOU can get in here with all that! I’ll raise chickens! I love to raise chickens, hate to bake cakes. So, I made the roasted chickens and the meatloaf and the fried chicken and the darn dumplings and cracklins. I’d cook spinach in butter and leave it on a little too long, brussell sprouts- I’d cut them in half and fry them with just-not-enough grease! Hahahaha. I boiled milk for the heck of it too, once, and let it evaporate...

**JERRY:**
Oh, no!

**MOM:**
Next thing you know, Will is complaining to me about all the dishes he has to do and why do I have to burn the bottom of every pot, pan and skillet in the house every time I cook? He got used to boiled onions and potatoes *real* fast. Still, all told, I think he got the better of that handshake.

**JERRY:**
Don’t they always?

(SFX: Jerry finishes the last of her moonshine.)

**MOM:**
Yes. Strange how we want to rest when we’re working and when we rest, can’t think about nothing but working. But, I think you’ve escaped this fundamental predicament.

(SFX: Jerry gets up and pickups the moonshine. Over this.)

**JERRY:**
Now you know.

(SFX: Jerry unscrews the moonshine and pours herself another glass. Over this...)

**MOM:**
Maybe you’re onto something. I don’t know. When I was young I’d have had nothing to do with you. Now, I think, with the world changing like it is...and a day of work gets you just another day of work...what am I doing this for? I tell you I just like to do this, now. Sit here and talk, and if you and Ernie were nearby...

(SFX: Jerry takes a drink of the moonshine before this.)

**JERRY:**
I’ll talk to him, how’s that?

**MOM:**
Will you? I’m the one made Ernie so ambitious. I made him hate farm work. Made him feel like the whole world would end if he didn’t get the chores in. I’d threaten with a switch. Only had to whip him a few times though. He learned.

**JERRY:**
He certainly works hard now, Mom.

**MOM:**
There was one time I whipped him for the worst of reasons. A little boy. A baby almost. He got scared and I thought it was how you’re supposed to raise boys. Put the fear of god in them and they won’t be so scared all the time. What a backwards way...a backwards way. I whipped him without getting the whole... story. That sweet boy. That sweet, sweet boy.

(SFX:Ernie and Dad re-enter through the screendoor.)

**DAD:**
Dollars to donuts they’re talking about you.

**ERNIE:**
Hey, no talking about me.

**MOM:**
Ernie, do you remember the time I whipped you because you wouldn’t walk through the weeds?

**ERNIE:**
And, the horses are approaching the gate!

**MOM:**
Let me tell you the story. I better put my apron on...

(SFX: Mom begins to cross as Ernie moves to the machine.)

**ERNIE:**
This machine running the whole time?

**MOM:**
WHAT!

(SFX: Ernie turns off the recorder.)

 **MUSIC SEGUE:**

**5b. INT. NPR STUDIO - PRESENT**

(SFX: Small studio ambience.)

**DAN V PRESCOTT:**
Sure enough, Mom told her story, the one that everyone had heard before, and many times over to boot.

But, there was just something about that story that needed some context; that would be Ernie’s side of things. He went and attached that side to it later that very night.

**CROSS TO:**

. INT. ERNIE’S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - LATER

(SFX: Room ambience of Ernie’s childhood bedroom. Ernie types slowly. The window is open and the wind from the previous episode rolls in subtle gusts from time to time. Ernie finishes a sentence and stops typing.)

**ERNIE:**
Would you listen to this for me?

(SFX: Jerry stirs sitting up in bed.)

**JERRY:**
Go ahead.

(SFX: Ernie doesn’t use the lock release and instead pulls the paper, tearing it from typewriter roll. He gets up from his wooden chair, scraping across the wood floor and takes a few barefoot steps toward Jerry. Slowly pacing as he reads. This should pan back and forth in the stereo field as he paces.)

**ERNIE:**
There’s another impression that has come up with me out of childhood: I have a horror of snakes that verges on the irrational. I’m not afraid of being killed by a snake. It isn’t that kind of fear. It’s a horrible, unnatural mania for getting away, and it is induced equally by a six-inch garden snake and a six-foot rattler.

Ask my mother. She’ll tell you the snake story, probably. In all the years, she never failed to tell it over again when I came home on a visit.

**ERNIE (CONT’D):**

I was a little fellow, maybe four or five. My father was plowing at the far end of our farm, half mile from the house. I was walking along behind the plow, barefooted, in the fresh soft furrow. He had just started the field, and was plowing near a weedy fence-row. Red wild roses were growing there. I asked my father for his pocketknife so I could cut some of the roses to take back to the house. He gave it to me and went on plowing. I sat down in the grass and started cutting off the roses.

Then it happened in a flash. A blue racer came looping through the grass at me. I already had my horror of snakes at that tender age- it must have been born in me. I screamed, through away the knife, and ran as fast as I could. Then I remembered it was my father’s knife. I crept back over the plowed ground till I found it. He had heard me scream and had stopped. I gave him the knife and started back to the house

I approached the house from the west side where there was an old garden all grown up in high weeds. I stopped on the far side and shouted for my mother. When she came out to see what I wanted, I asked her to come and get me. She said I should come on through by myself. I couldn’t have done that if it had killed me not to. She ordered me to come through, and I began to cry. She told me that if I didn’t stop crying and didn’t come through, she would whip me. I couldn’t stop, and I couldn’t come through. So she came and

**ERNIE (CONT’D):**

got me. And she whipped me- one of the two times I believe that she ever whipped me.

That evening when my father came in from the fields, she told him about the crazy boy wouldn’t walk through the weeds and had to be whipped. And then my father told her about the roses and the knife in the snake. It was the roses, I think, that hurt her so. My mother cried for a long time that night after she went to bed.

(SFX: Ernie stops pacing.)

It is been more than thirty years since that happened, but to this day when I go home my mother sooner or later will say do you remember the time I with you because you wouldn’t walk through the weeds? And then she will tell me the story, just as I have told it here, and along toward the end she always manages to get the hem of her apron up around her eyes, just in case she should need it, which she always does.

(PAUSE. Ernie lets the paper fall to his side in his hand.)

**JERRY:**
Why do you want to make me cry?

**ERNIE:**
You crying?

**JERRY:**
Maybe.

(SFX: we should move from the stereo mix slowly cross-fading back into the mono sounds of the vintage wire recording.)

**ERNIE:**
Good. You like it?

**JERRY:**
Maybe.

**ERNIE:**
Just maybe?

**JERRY:**
Of course I like it. Do you need my approval?

**ERNIE:**
Maybe.

**JERRY:**
Just come to bed, before I whoop you.

(SFX: Ernie sets the paper down on his desk and crosses then gets into bed. The recording cuts out.)

 **MUSIC SEGUE:**

**7a. INT. NPR STUDIO - PRESENT**

(MUSIC: Continues to play under this.)

(SFX: Small studio ambience.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT:**Next time on The Ernie Pyle Experiment:

 **CROSS TO:**

**7b. MONTAGE**

A preview cuts and sound bites from episode 4.

 **CROSS TO:**

**7c. INT. NPR STUDIO - PRESENT**

(MUSIC: Continues to play under this.)

(SFX: Small studio ambience.)

**DAN V. PRESCOTT:**See you next week, folks. Until then, I’m Dan V. Prescott reminding you that the good road will never end, if you only stay on it.

**FADE TO:**

(MUSIC: “THE WASHINGTON POST MARCH”.)

**CREDIT ROLL**

(MUSIC: Continues to play under this.)

**CARY ONANON:**

WFIU Bloomington, Indiana. A short editorial from Cary O*nan*on. This is Cary O*nan*on. Recently, one our own, Cary O*nan*on, has been harassed on the streets of Bloomington, Indiana, by young kids, some college students too smart for their own good, and an old man on a bicycle. “Cary On-and-On” they call out to him. We here in the newsroom have it on good authority and popular opinion for this to be a cheap heckle, and not funny by any modern standard. Cary O*nan*on wishes for this to stop, and for such childish antics be questioned. Have we Bloomingtonians stooped to such a level where….?

  **FADE MUSIC**