

The Big Story

The Big Story grew out of a real-life crime case.

On October 10, 1944, City Editor Karin Walsh of the Chicago Times handed a classified ad clipped from the Times to James McGuire, ex-private investigator turned reporter. "Might be a feature in this," Walsh said . . . McGuire read the ad: "\$5,000 reward offered for the killers of Officer Lundy on December 9, 1932. . . ."

That was how *Newsweek* summed it up in 1946. Bernard J. Prockter, an independent producer of radio shows, read the article, and a new idea for a radio show popped into his mind.

The story told how Reporter McGuire interviewed Mrs. Tillie Majczek, who had placed the ad. Her husband Joseph had served eleven years of a 99-year sentence for the murder of a policeman in a 1932 holdup. Mrs. Majczek was convinced that her husband was innocent, and McGuire became convinced too. He and another Times reporter, Jack McPhaul, worked on the case for ten months, writing more than thirty stories before uncovering evidence that led to Majczek's full pardon in August 1945.

Prockter took the case beyond its surface and began exploring it with the active mind of a radio man. How about a series built around reporters and their "big stories"? Would it work?

It worked. First heard April 2, 1947, *The Big Story* ran eight years on Wednesday-night NBC, and was also seen on early television.

In its first year, it leaped into a surprising nip-and-tuck ratings battle with Bing Crosby's popular *Philco Radio Time*. *The Big Story* actually topped Crosby in several alarming ratings reports, before the crooner changed formats and shifted into the time slot thirty minutes earlier.

In Prockter's eyes, "big stories" were crime thrillers, so that's what kind of show *The Big Story* was. Supposedly devised to honor reporters overlooked by Pulitzer committees, it concentrated upon old murder cases or other violent crimes against society. The material was culled from old newspaper files or by referral, and always involved closed cases to avoid charges of pretrial publicity.

Narrator was Bob Sloane, directors included Tom Vietor and Harry Ingram. Among the cast regulars were Robert Dryden, Bill Quinn, Bernard Grant, Betty Garde and Alice Frost. Ernest Chappell announced, calling the real reporters on stage after the play for the \$500 "Big Story Award" from the makers of Pall Mall cigarettes, longtime sponsor.