

# The Hollywood Gossips

*Feudin' 'n' Fightin' On the Air and in Writin'*

by Jim Cox

While pursuing research for another project I was mesmerized by the sizable number of individuals operating within early radio that were tell-all insiders on what transpired behind the gilded gates of Tinseltown. They are sometimes referred to as showbiz reporters, rumormongers, tattletales and just plain gossips. Whatever their descriptive handle, nonetheless, they included informed experts on the intimate details of the rich and famous as well as the machinations occurring behind the cloistered walls of the studio moguls. Certainly not coincidentally, their revelations were timed to scoop rivals whose prestige rose and fell with how much and how soon they divulged to a salivating public.

It's my intent to offer an introspective into the lives of the principal providers of that information. Most of the names of those who were at the top of their game are familiar to anybody who lived through the era and even to some who recall hearing about their flamboyant escapades a few decades after their

passing. The time frame of the period under study is roughly from the early 1930s to the early 1950s, unofficially the heyday of radio's golden age, when Americans tuned in and were turned on.

The strain was typified by a couple of sparring queens who made names for themselves in a proliferating genus of showbiz reporters while openly clawing at one another to protect their hard-fought status. Their names were synonymous with the form, in fact – Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons. More than anyone else, the pair influenced a model that became standard practice, one that legions of lesser-knowns pursued in their own ambitious efforts to grab hold of the brass ring. Space was definitely limited at the front of the line, however: it was clear that Hopper and Parsons separately and together inhabited those coveted spots. Both fought tooth and nail to retain them in ongoing attempts to solely occupy the catbird seat.

Like several in the breed who cultivated newspaper columns that thrust them into radio, Hopper worked that conventional formula quite well. Early in the game she began penning a syndicated column that *The Chicago Tribune-Daily News* distributed to other papers. At the zenith of her print journalistic manifestation, some 30 million readers were exposed to her ponderings. That achieved for her “near-equal status” with Parsons, the latter also having gained widespread notoriety in newsjournals several years prior to her radio gigs.

Hopper was born Elda Furry at Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania on June 2, 1890. By the time she reached radio and newspapers she had already been a

chorus girl, a stage, silent screen and sound motion picture actress as well as a real estate peddler. Married for nine years to comedian DeWolf Hopper (nicknamed “The Husband of His Country,” having divorced five of his six wives), Furry – who altered her forename to Hedda – never remarried. When she later ascended into radio she was often confused with Edna Wallace Hopper (one of DeWolf Hopper’s earlier spouses), who delivered beauty tips on the ether to milady during the medium’s formative years. Hedda Hopper, on the other hand, appeared in 149 motion pictures and in so doing gained a multitude of contacts within the industry, people who were helpful throughout her lifetime. While most of her cinematic performances were in forgettable B-movie productions – *Women Men Marry* (1922), *Her Market Value* (1925), *Such Men Are Dangerous* (1930), *Downstairs* (1932), *Doughnuts and Society* (1936) – as a subsequently recognized celebrity, a few cameo appearances added to her acclaim – *Breakfast in Hollywood* (1946), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *The Patsy* (1964), *The Oscar* (1966).

In an attempt to conquer territory held by the reigning sovereign of broadcast gossip (Louella Parsons), at 46 Hopper hired her own manager, West Coast entertainment guru Dema Harshbarger. As some historians have correctly opined, however, Hopper’s placement didn’t come easy. Appearances on Rudy Vallee’s variety hour and a brief local series plus some NBC fashion commentaries led her to the role of heroine in *Brenthouse*, a daytime serial carried by the NBC Blue network. She also turned up in succinct celebrity gigs on a

myriad of audience participation shows like *Double or Nothing*, *People Are Funny* and *Welcome Travelers*. It took Harshbarger three years to achieve what Hopper really wanted, however: Sunkist Farms agreed to underwrite Hopper in her own three-a-week quarter-hour Hollywood gossip series on CBS starting November 6, 1939. Her contract was eventually extended to three years. She had finally become a major player among the handful of renowned tattletales.

It wasn't long before a pronounced disdain for archrival Parsons reared its ugly head. The feeling was unmistakably mutual. The two women battled in public and private for years. Parsons lost some of her coveted turf to Hopper upon the latter's emergence. Not until 1944-51, when she made a successful comeback in a Sunday night quarter-hour following Walter Winchell's newscast, did Parsons recapture the ground that had eroded after Hopper moved in. Between the two ladies, Hopper appeared to gain greater immediate public adulation in popularity polls. Just as importantly, *Life* magazine noted that Hopper was "infinitely more liked by the movie colony than her ruthless rival."

Parenthetically, on May 12, 1985, CBS-TV offered its viewers *Malice in Wonderland*. Starring Elizabeth Taylor as Parsons and Jane Alexander as Hopper, the made-for-TV film portrayed the feuding twosome and their cutthroat attacks as each sought one-upmanship against the other. Hopper's popular radio gossip column (frequently under the sobriquet *Hedda Hopper's Hollywood*) persisted through 1947 followed by some recurring appearances elsewhere on the dial.

Toward the end of the 1940s, as gossip began to fall out of favor with many who

were preoccupied by it earlier, Hopper turned her series into a variety feature. She prattled, offered music and introduced movie narrative vignettes starring real actors. Her chitchat reflected a spirited conservative bent. She wound up as a “right-wing Red baiter like Winchell,” a critic obsessed.

Hopper turned up in an occasional television role in successive decades. Meanwhile, her son, William Hopper, played private detective Paul Drake in the longrunning CBS-TV courtroom drama *Perry Mason* (1957-66). Hedda Hopper, whose public appearances were trademarked by a line of audacious wide-brimmed millinery, published an autobiography, *From Under My Hat: The Fun and Fury of a Stage, Screen and Column Career* (Doubleday, 1952). She died in Hollywood on February 1, 1966.

Her chief rival for the top spot among gossipmongers, Louella Parsons, launched the nation’s very first enduring movie gossip column in 1914 in *The Chicago Record-Herald*. (Notice the parallel with her chief competitor in their origins as wordsmiths in Windy City papers.) Born Louella Rose Oettinger on August 6, 1880 at Freeport, Illinois, Parsons grew up at Dixon, Illinois, gaining her first paid assignment as a scribe quite early in life. She was drama editor of *The Dixon Morning Star* while still in high school, in fact. Following her nuptials to John Parsons, she settled into small town family life at Burlington, Iowa. She despised it. When wedded bliss fell by the way she left her husband, taking their only child, Harriet, to Chicago to live. She found work scripting for a movie producer, Essanay Studios. Harriet, who later became a film producer and was

ultimately a Hollywood gossip reporter like her mom, appeared in celluloid several times, too, billed as “Baby Parsons.” At least one of those early films was penned by her mother, *The Magic Wand* (1912). Parsons was still writing screenplays as late as 1927 when *Isle of Forgotten Women* was released. She, too, played in bit parts in a handful of nondescript motion pictures, among them *Show People* (1928), *Hollywood Hotel* (1937), *Without Reservations* (1946) and *Hollywood Glamour on Ice* (1957). But it was as a Tinseltown rumormonger that she earned lasting fame.

Four years after initiating her landmark column in *The Chicago Record-Herald* in 1914, Parsons found herself without a venue for telling her stories after veteran newspaperman William Randolph Hearst purchased the Chicago dispatch. Nonplussed by that turn of events, Parsons moved to New York City, instituted a similar column in *The New York Morning Telegraph*, and carried on with her life. She was surprised by Hearst himself when, in 1922, he asked her to provide movie news for one of his major papers, *The New York American*. It was the beginning of a mutual admiration society that was to persist throughout her professional life. Their working relationship became so strong, in fact, that on more than one occasion she resorted to blackmail to advance Hearst’s personal and political quests, according to a biographer.

By the mid 1920s Parsons wed and divorced a second mate and then contracted tuberculosis. Told by a physician she had but six months to live, in seeking a better climate she briefly relocated to Arizona before moving to Los

Angeles. With her disease in remission, in 1926 she married a third spouse, a surgeon, and never remarried following his death in 1964. In the meantime she returned to work, by then becoming a syndicated journalist for Hearst again. Originated in *The Los Angeles Examiner*, her popular column was eventually reprinted in more than 600 papers around the globe, possibly second only in number of outlets to Winchell's 2,000 during his halcyon days. Nevertheless, it was estimated that more than 40 million readers followed Parsons at the apex of her writing career. She was particularly cited for "an uncanny ability to scoop her competitors with the juiciest stories and for knowing all the secrets of everyone in screendom."

An authority affirmed: "Parsons established herself as the social and moral arbiter of Hollywood. Her judgments were considered the final word in most cases, and her disfavor was feared more than that of movie critics. Her column was followed religiously and thus afforded her a unique type and degree of power."

The column poised her to get into radio at precisely the right time. Sunkist Growers put her under contract in 1928 for local radio interviews of celebs, most often of the silver screen strain. Three years later Charis foundation garments underwrote a second local aural venture featuring her. By 1934 CBS added her to its matinee schedule with a sustained quarter-hour weekly series. With only a brief interruption, from 1944-54 she presided over a national hookup

that offered her commentary under her own name. By then she was considered “the country’s top purveyor of gossip.”

A decade earlier, beginning October 5, 1934, the Campbell Soup Company had put the nasal-tongued Parsons on the air as hostess of its *Hollywood Hotel* featuring Dick Powell as master of ceremonies. Shows originating from the West Coast cost more to produce in those days due to the distance of telephone line charges. Parsons got around it by convincing a plethora of local luminaries to appear on her shows without compensation. A pundit observed: “Parsons was then the most feared and powerful newspaper columnist in Hollywood. Her column ... was widely seen as a maker or breaker of films and careers.” Thus she was able to sway movie screen idols who normally received \$1,000 for a radio outing to show up for nothing. In fact, on every Campbell’s program five or six icons appeared at her microphone, saving the sponsor \$5,000 to \$6,000 weekly. (They presented a case of soup to each one, nothing more.) In four years more than \$2 million worth of movie talent appeared gratis, thanks to the powerful persuasion of Louella Parsons.

*Hollywood Hotel* evolved into one of the most enchanting series of that epoch, incidentally, predating the legacy that was established by the *Lux Radio Theater* a short time later. It readily became a basis for major antipathy with filmdom. Some of the stars found it demeaning to work without pay and they refused to appear. The professional careers of those who did perform seemed, in general at least, to prosper handsomely, infused by the “free” plugs and



favorable public relations generated by giving up an evening's time. "Parsons was known for ruthlessness and a long memory," allowed a radio historiographer. Those who refused to cooperate might pay for it by being snubbed in her column and on the air. Some lingering targets of her displeasure included Joan Crawford, Louis Mayer, Ronald Reagan, Frank Sinatra and Orson Welles.

It wasn't until 1938 when the Radio Guild openly revolted that the practice of "free" broadcasts ended and Campbell began paying the megastars what they normally received on corresponding features. By then both Dick Powell and Louella Parsons had departed. A critic acknowledged, "If she had done nothing else, Parsons had opened the West to radio." As the 1940s ensued, Los Angeles originated much of the audience participation entertainment heard in American homes, including Ralph Edwards' *Truth or Consequences*, Art Linkletter's *House Party* and *People Are Funny*, Groucho Marx's *You Bet Your Life* and numerous counterparts. Meanwhile, *Lux Radio Theater*, *Kraft Music Hall* with Bing Crosby, *Shell Chateau* with Al Jolson and similar noteworthy series shifted from the East to the West Coast. Parsons figured decisively in that development.

The arrival of Hedda Hopper on CBS in late 1939 as chief competition, in the meantime, was a cause of sudden consternation to Parsons. Both females were initially underwritten on their national series by Sunkist Growers, perhaps a bitter pill for Parsons to swallow since the firm had introduced her 11 years earlier. Until 1939, of course, she had been virtually unchallenged as the

predominant tell-all monarch of Hollywood gossip. That was changing as Hopper carved out a niche for herself. The two women instantly disliked one another. They spared no opportunity to undercut each other while acquiring and delivering eye-opening disclosures under each others' noses. For a few years in the early 1940s it appeared that Parsons might have been toppled from her lofty perch, at least for a short while. But by 1944, all that began to change as she slowly regained some of the battleground she had lost.

That year she signed with the Andrew Jergens Company for a quarter-hour program strategically situated in the ABC Radio Sunday night schedule following popular newspaperman Walter Winchell. He had a quarter-hour for the same sponsor. He delivered an audience in the millions to her doorstep every week. A funny thing happened on the way to the forum, however: Winchell's combative attitude was easily as determined as that of the two women, and possibly more so. He took special delight in intimidating Parsons. He ferreted out choice morsels of Hollywood tidbits and divulged them only moments before Parsons intended to make the same revelations on her own show. It was cutthroat competition and she quickly found that not only was she fending off the barrage of verbal and ink attacks of one journalist but of two. "Her hatchet was unsheathed," conceded a biographer. Over the next seven years, Parsons apparently stemmed the tide, nevertheless, gradually regaining—according to some reviewers—the tarnished title of queen of the Hollywood gossipmongers. It had been an at-times debilitating struggle.

She penned her final column in December 1965, seven years before her death, although colleague Dorothy Manners continued producing it for a while. Actually it was speculated that Manners had been authoring the column for some time before officially taking it over. Meanwhile, Parsons released not one but two autobiographies during her lifetime: *The Gay Illiterate* (Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1944) and *Tell It to Louella* (Putnam, 1961). Although she died December 9, 1972 in Santa Monica, California, she is today remembered by dual stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame – one for motion pictures and one for radio. The prima donna of the gossipmongers is aptly considered *The First Lady of Hollywood*, the title of a contemporary biography by Samantha Barbas (University of California Press, 2005).

Speaking of callousness and abuse, did anyone represent those twin themes more demonstrably than Walter Winchell? A contemporary assessor averred, “Today, looking back at the period of Winchell’s greatest popularity in the 1930s and 1940s, it is hard to imagine the power he possessed and the ruthlessness with which he used it.” A freewheeling Winchell could make or break a Broadway play, a political candidate or a stock offering. The sixth grade dropout could react with acumen to international affairs while concurrently revealing the most piddling snatches of Hollywood pillow talk. A lot of his material seemed lacking in taste as it capitalized on gossip and innuendo. He didn’t focus his newscast on a single entity, by the way, regularly divulging behind-the-scenes goings-on in the spheres of government, business,

entertainment, sports and the underworld, of all things. While beholden to innumerable wags with loose tongues who tipped him off, there is no evidence that he ever paid any of them for their service, and surely not so in cash.

Winchell, born under a spelling of Winchel in New York City on April 7, 1897, was left in the care of an 80-year-old grandmother after his father died and the rest of the family moved to Virginia to dwell with relatives. As a boy he joined street gangs to make his own way. At 12 he sang with a trio of chums, George Jessel and Jack Weiner, at the Imperial Theater. Not much later Eddie Cantor joined them and the quartet performed on tours for a couple of years. With the exception of a brief time-out for Navy service, Winchell remained in Vaudeville until he was 25. In 1922 *Vaudeville News* hired him as a reviewer, precipitating a career as a print journalist. Intermittently he contributed to *Billboard* and in 1924 he was engaged by *The New York Graphic* as a reporter.

Winchell moved to *The New York Daily Mirror* five years later. Not long afterward he acquired a column that was circulated to other newspapers, attracting legions of readers who perused it for more than three decades. His incredible following was directly tied to his shameless snooping into the private lives of others. Nonetheless, he sanctioned no attempts to inquire into his own personal life, including that of his family. According to a pundit, it was one of the many oddities that swirled around a man who made a reputation for himself by being peculiar.

Winchell's first shot at a radio series occurred in 1929 when he went on the air locally with a feature titled *New York by a Representative New Yorker*. Other pithy series followed. In 1932 his most famous radio program debuted, *The Jergens Journal*, which aired nationally for 16 years. (As he signed off each week, he bade listeners farewell with "lotions of love," a link to the sponsor's product.) *Walter Winchell's Journal* succeeded that series, from 1949-57. He became "the most important and powerful reporter in the nation" as a result of those broadcasts, a pundit pontificated. Often reaching the coveted 10-most-listened-to programs on the air, Winchell's 15 minutes of fame peaked at 33.1 in the Hooperatings in the 1941-1942 season, exceedingly high, especially for a news program. ABC claimed he drew 33 million listeners on his strongest nights.

On both shows he delivered a multitude of rapid-fire, staccato-style dispatches which enveloped Hollywood gossip as well as the multidimensional areas aforementioned. He launched into those quarter hours with: *Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. North America and all the ships at sea ... Let's go to press! ... Flash! ... New York ...* (and that would lead him into a juicy attention-grabbing tidbit at the inception of the show). "His newscast was an act," said a modern author. "He was an entertainer, too sloppy and careless to be taken seriously by so-called serious journalists, but far too powerful to ignore."

His news flashes were delivered in a steady attack mode clocked at 215 words per minute and underscored by the chattering keys of a telegraph device that he maneuvered throughout the broadcast. In classic journalistic pose,

Winchell rested before the microphone sporting a fedora on his head, tie loosened and shirt partially unbuttoned, a script in his left hand and his right hand jiggling the telegraph machine.

Like some of his peers, he seemed to take delight in crossing with public figures. Although he favored the liberal policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, he disdained FDR's Democratic successor, Harry S Truman. Winchell fanned the flames of mistrust of the venerated as well as ordinary citizens who might be Red sympathizers. He assisted Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wis.) in helping to find communists in every alley. Thus he differed widely from the positions he had taken only a few years before. For a while, some of his criticism of New York radio personality Barry Gray put the entertainer on the unemployment roll. Winchell also took on fellow columnist and radio interviewer Ed Sullivan who, critics maintained, "hated Winchell." An intense feud between them erupted on the public airwaves. "If Winchell showed some small ability to make friends of newspapermen, his skill at making enemies of them showed nothing less than blazing genius," according to a scholar.

In regard to his disparagement of Louella Parsons, while "this unholy alliance began chummily," according to a recently published assessment, "hostility soon set in. Parsons was jealous and protective of her West Coast turf, and she would sit tensely through Winchell's show, fretting that he might beat her on some Hollywood item. This he did often enough to keep their relationship chilly."

As his radio act began to wane, Winchell invaded television in the 1950s, initially on ABC, then NBC, back to ABC and then into syndication. But his brash hyperbole was never as popular with the viewers as it was with the listeners. From 1959-63 he narrated ABC-TV's popular gangster melodrama *The Untouchables*. With the public's dwindling interest in Broadway in the mid 1960s, he ceased writing his newspaper column. He died at Los Angeles on February 20, 1972.

According to a modern critic, the namesake host of *Jimmy Fidler in Hollywood* displayed "a lot of the bitchy Rona Barrett" [sic] typically characterized by "an opinionated mouth." Fidler was one of the leading and more durable members of the breed – certainly so among the masculine set of the celluloid press corps – and readily distinguished from his major contemporaries. "Unlike Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons," wrote one observer, "who treated Hollywood and the stars with respect, Hollywood columnist Jimmy Fidler was considered radio's most threatening menace to movies and movie people. He called bad movies 'stinkers' and had a rating system never before equaled: four bells for a top film, one bell for a stinker! He read open letters to the stars from his 'little black book'; condemned them for their 'bad' deeds." A reviewer noted: "He was imbued with a moral fervor against divorce and similar shady doings among the movie crowd." A newsman likened him to a small-town blue-nosed biddy, clucking over failed marriages and inebriated spouses. Fidler, meanwhile, was "more feared by some studios and stars than either" Hopper or

Parsons, affirmed another scholar. And another added that “he was hated by those he wrote about.” It appeared he was genuinely and almost universally disliked.

That never fazed Fidler, nevertheless, who persevered with blunt and caustic commentary as he ploughed through relentless diatribes. Banned from the studio backlots, screenings and soundstages as a result of his frequently stinging disclosures, he remained unwavering, as if the studio bosses and the legendary luminaries who appeared in their pictures loved him without hesitation. Following a model proffered by venerated radio-columnist Winchell, Fidler derived much of his material from a hand-picked coterie of tipsters. His aides were strategically-placed insiders and more observers on the outside who fed him behind-the-scenes tidbits about the motion picture industry and its people, including matters from private as well as professional lives.

Furthermore, Fidler copied Winchell’s staccato delivery style, belting out as many as 3,000 words in a quarter-hour in rapid-fire dispatches. It would have been difficult to have missed the master’s “scoop-crazed mentality” exhibited in the succinct news flashes Fidler divulged. A source cited him as “the brash, Winchellesque Jimmy Fidler.” The comparisons were obvious.

Born August 24, 1900 at St. Louis, Fidler arrived in Hollywood with a silver screen career in mind. Although he turned up in cameos in a couple of 1938 B-flicks and was the subject of a forgettable 1947 film (there is some speculation, never confirmed, that he appeared in a few silent films earlier), he



eventually realized he'd be earning his livelihood elsewhere. Fidler drifted into journalism after World War I and, by 1920 – at age 20 – he was editing *The Hollywood News*. That brought him to the attention of Sid Grauman, for whom he managed publicity. Simultaneously, Fidler took on responsibilities as a press agent for several stars and studios. His business flourished for awhile but was among the failures of the national economic collapse of 1929. He turned to freelance writing for newspapers and fanzines to sustain him, reporting on the budding film trade. Like several of his colleagues, he instituted a syndicated newspaper column which – by its peak in 1950 – appeared in 360 newsjournals. As a sideline, he contributed to Fox Movietone newsreels in which he reported the same type of gossip he was divulging in print and on radio.

Fidler's ethereal debut occurred with *Hollywood on the Air* in 1933. He was among a miniscule corps of reporters breaking ground there and, according to one authority he persisted to 1983, a full half-century. (Some other radio historiographers claim he aired for four decades, still an exceedingly long haul.) In his prime years he broadcast on 500 stations and was heard by an estimated crowd of 20 to 40 million listeners. Not many showbiz reporters could lay claim to such impressive figures.

Fidler's collective efforts in various formats and mediums (including occasional television gigs between 1952 and 1974) brought him a tidy income exceeding a quarter-million dollars annually during his maximum productive

years. His sign-off became one of his characteristic trademarks: “Good night to you – and I do mean *you!*” He died August 9, 1988 at Westlake, California.

Sheilah Graham was among the second tier of movietown’s rumormongers: capable and arresting, at the same time she never acquired the notoriously commanding followings enjoyed by the likes of Jimmy Fidler, Hedda Hopper, Louella Parsons and Walter Winchell. That foursome was in a league of their own while a few also-rans like Graham captured a segment of an addicted crowd that hung onto every fragment of mud-slinging crumbs she dished out by imitating the techniques of the established pros. Graham’s syndicated newspaper column (to be sure, all the highly successful radio columnists had one) reached but a fraction of the papers served by the others, just 178 journals at its pinnacle. But Graham was also an author of a few tell-all volumes, one revealing a personal romantic liaison with a wedded F. Scott Fitzgerald, an author who devoted his final years to screenwriting: *Beloved Infidel, the Education of a Woman* (Holt, 1958). “I won’t be remembered for my writing,” she once allowed. “I’ll be remembered as Scott’s mistress.” He died of natural causes while at her home in late 1940, incidentally.

Sheilah Graham (nee Lily Shiel) was born of Jewish descent in Leeds, England on September 15, 1904. Between the ages of six and 14 she lived at a London orphanage operated by Jews. It’s likely that her experiences then influenced a later decision to disavow her ancestry, which was seldom publicly acknowledged. After becoming a chorus girl in her mid teens – the equivalent of

a Ziegfeld Follies dancer – Graham emigrated to the United States at 28. Married young, she divorced young, was left with two offspring and raised them as Episcopalians. Her daughter, Wendy Fairey, later penned a memoir of her life in Tinseltown with her famous mother: *One of the Family* (W. W. Norton, 1992). For a long while she was unaware of her dad’s real identity, believing him to have been Fitzgerald.

A few radio historians got it wrong when they stated that Graham “replaced” Jimmy Fidler. Although the latter departed the Mutual network on July 3, 1949, he returned on May 21, 1951 for a brief fling before continuing another one or two decades in a syndicated audio format. While Graham first appeared under her own moniker on her own series in 1949, she was a recurring guest on radio’s *Heinz Magazine of the Air* as early as 1936. She subsequently dispatched insider tips on several other audio features and then enjoyed a brief run co-hosting NBC-TV’s *Hollywood Today* (aka *Hollywood Backstage*) in 1955. She was a frequent guest celebrity on the 1963-70 syndicated TV series *Girl Talk*. On one occasion on the latter show, actress Natalie Schafer told Graham: “I’m so glad to meet you. You were the cause of my divorce.” Resentment, it seemed, went with the turf. Graham died on November 17, 1988.

There were multiple others, of course, who fit the profile of a showbiz reporter, at least for a portion of their performing careers. A few names are well known like Hy Gardner, Dorothy Kilgallen, Harriet Parsons and Ed Sullivan. Others are not as well remembered, including Paul Carson, Walter Dudley,

George Fisher, Erskine Johnson, Nellie Revell, Frances Scully, George Sokolsky, Diane Stephanie, Virginia Stewart, Stella Unger and Danton Walker. All had network or syndicated gigs at varying times in which they disclosed the sometimes shady secrets of heretofore protected public figures. It could be a nasty business. Yet with Americans' voracious appetites for intimate details hanging on the choice morsels they delivered, their revelations invariably found a receptive audience waiting to be titillated.

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