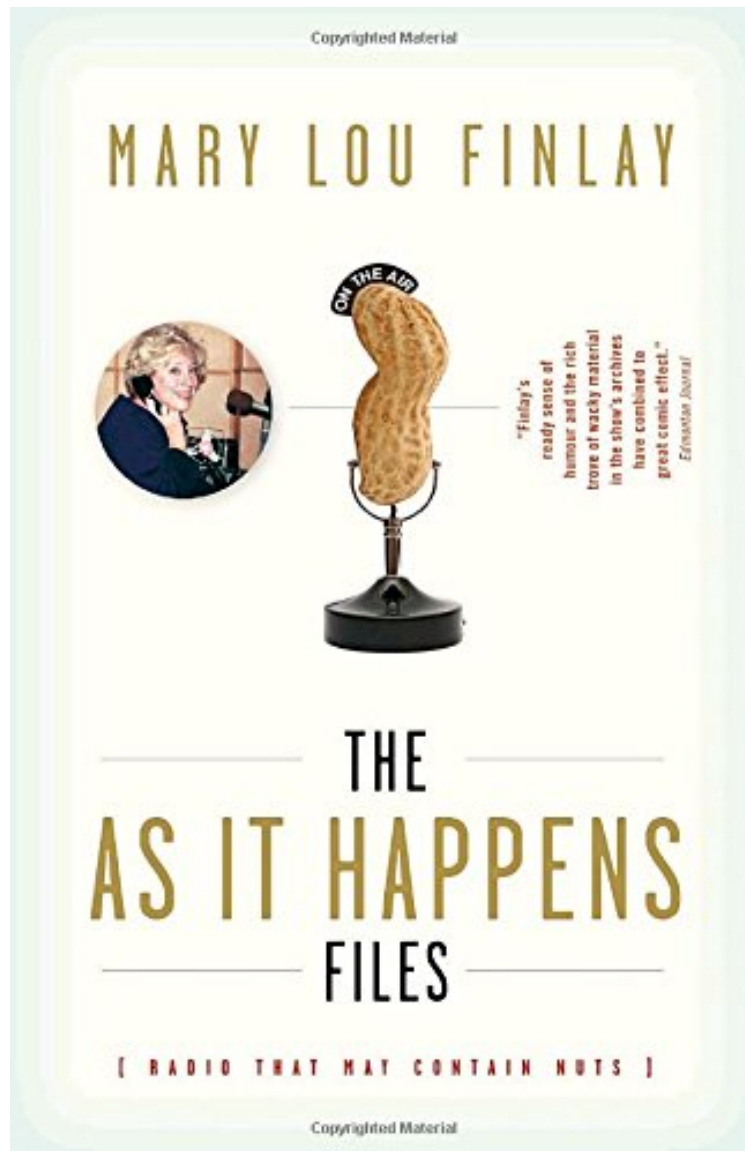


The As It Happens Files: Radio That May Contain Nuts

Mary Lou Finlay

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Mary Lou Finlay : The As It Happens Files: Radio That May Contain Nuts before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The As It Happens Files: Radio That May Contain Nuts:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Calling all CBC fans By Luanne Ollivier I first got hooked on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio when I met my husband over twenty years ago. The wealth and diversity of programming provides something for every listener. The second longest running show - 40 years - is "As It Happens";

on five nights a week at 6:30 p.m. They are an outcall show, broadcasting interviews conducted by telephone, seeking out the 'story behind the story'. It runs the gamut - from talking with world leaders to offbeat human interest stories. Mary Lou Finlay was the co-host of the show from 1997-2005. The human interest stories are the ones that stand out for Finlay - the 96 year old who took 75 years to get his university degree, brain surgery on pet goldfish or the man who spent twenty years building a bear proof suit. Human interest stories from England have been popular as well - the woman who has a garden gnome sanctuary with over 2000 restored gnomes generated lots of feedback. But the serious touch us as well. 9/11, the Air India crash, natural disasters and inside interviews from Darfur and Iran to name a few. The book includes transcripts from many of these interviews. Reading and remembering some of the stories from over the years just reminds me why this show is a Canadian icon - and why I love it.

In the tradition of Peter Gzowskis *The Morningside Papers* comes a book that celebrates the great stories and personalities behind *As It Happens*. For eight years, Mary Lou Finlay had the pleasure of being the co-host of one of CBC Radios most enduring institutions. On any given day she and Barbara Budd interviewed people on subjects varying from the Air India investigation to a man who invented a suit that would withstand an attack from a grizzly bear to a cheese-rolling contest in Cheshire. The *As It Happens Files* gives us the great stories the hilarious eccentrics, the audience favourites, the poignant moments that make up, for many Canadians some of the fondest, most vivid memories of the last decade. From the Hardcover edition.

If you loved the show, you'll love this book. Ruth-Ellen Soles, communications consultant and former CBC spokesperson Finlay's ready sense of humour and the rich trove of wacky material in the show's archives have combined to great comic effect. Edmonton Journal More than a gripping condensation of Finlay's favourite interviews and reminiscences. It's also an enlightening historical document, a testament to her appetite for a great yarn and evidence of her sharp wit and keen journalistic sensibilities. Toronto Star From the Hardcover edition. About the Author Mary Lou Finlay has had an illustrious 35-year career in broadcasting in TV and radio, for the CBC and CTV. She co-hosted *Live It Up* at CTV (1978-1981) and she helped launch the CBC prime-time news program *The Journal* in 1982. In 1988 she moved into radio to host *Sunday Morning*. From 1997 to 2005, she co-hosted *As It Happens*. This is her first book. From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Introduction A few months after taking my leave of the CBC and my job hosting *As It Happens*, I tuned in one night to hear this listener's phone call: The sale of a 36-year-old ham-and-cheese sandwich half-eaten by Richard Nixon: this is why I listen to the CBC. This is why I love *As It Happens*. The caller was expressing what thousands of people from across Canada and around the world have told us for years: however good we may be at covering the Big Story, it's the half-eaten-by-Richard-Nixon-ham-and-cheese sandwiches that really stick in their minds. *As It Happens* is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's second-longest running current affairs show (*Ideas* is the longest), and on good days it still sounds younger and brighter than almost anything else on the dial. I can say this because I don't claim credit for it; I think the credit is due mainly to the format devised in the early years by Mark Starowicz and exploited so brilliantly by a succession of producers and hosts, including Barbara Frum and Al Maitland. Basically, it's a phone-out show that daily chases down the stories the producers find most beguiling and delivers up people for one of the hosts to talk to. On any given day, the topics may range from war in Chechnya to a nettle-eating contest in Yorkshire and anything in between. Sprinkled among the interviews are bits of music and readings and recorded speeches and humour that add colour and texture. The show has been drawing fans to CBC Radio from around the world for 40 years. When I left, over one hundred U.S. stations were broadcasting *As It Happens*, and we were breaking new ground at home; the ratings at that time put AIH in first place in its time period in the very competitive Toronto and Vancouver markets. Not that markets are a prime concern since CBC Radio is commercial free, deriving its financial support from a government-mandated annual taxpayer subsidy. Perhaps it's because CBC Radio doesn't have to worry about advertising sales that it's developed into such a different animal than its TV cousin, or maybe it's because radio as a medium is so different. In any case, CBC's radio arm has been more successful at creating an identity that sets it apart from its competitors at the same time as it unites Canadians across the country. What people say they like about *As It Happens*, in particular, are its breadth and depth, its fairness, its sense of humour and its ability to take them immediately to the heart of unfolding events, be they regattas, riots or bank robberies. But above all, listeners seem to cherish the show's devotion to the odd and the eccentric. During our 30th and 35th anniversary years, when we invited the audience to tell us what they would like us to dredge up from our archives, the most common request was for Barbara Frum's Big Cabbage story, otherwise known as the Goddamn Cabbage Story (see Chapter 3). Now, as the show celebrates its 40th birthday, it seems like a good time to remember some of the weird and wonderful people I met while hosting AIH people like the Canadian inventor of the bear suit, the guy who walks naked across the U.K., and Mike the Headless Chicken from Fruta, California (not, strictly speaking, a person). I couldn't write about these exotics, though, without also remembering a few of the seekers, adventurers and heroes whose tales have thrilled and moved me over the years. Their names include Ignacio Siberio, the man who wouldn't drown; Canadian astronaut Roberta Bondar and Julie Payette; and Mike Stevens, who brought music and hope to a remote village where both were in short

supply. Sometimes the people make the story, and sometimes it's the story that brings forth the people. It was 9/11 that introduced us to Kathie Scobee Fulgham. As the daughter of the man who was in command of the space shuttle Challenger when it exploded in 1986, Kathie Fulgham knows what it's like to watch your father die over and over and over again on TV. The Air India crash, recounted in Chapter 15, brought us Anant Anantaraman, who planted flowers among the ashes of his life. And the war in Iraq led us to Salam Pax, the Baghdad blogger who provided a rare insiders view of the conflict. Combining these themes the silly and odd, the brave and pioneering, the big news events will result, I hope, in a kind of print version of the radio show. Of course, I've omitted more than I could include. To mention all the men and women, boys and girls, fish, pigs, turkeys and uncooperative parrots who informed and delighted me over the years would be to embark on a never-ending journey. I hope all the people who are not mentioned will forgive me. To all of them, from the bottom of my heart, a big thank you for being part of our great conversation. To CBC Radio, too, I owe a huge debt of gratitude for having provided the opportunity, in *As It Happens*, to air this conversation and for allowing me to burrow about in the archives to retrieve material for the book. Above all, I am beholden to my former colleagues at *As It Happens*. It's partly to honour them that I've written this, for without their dedication, patience, brains and perseverance, the show would not have lived up to the lofty standards set by its creators, and it wouldn't have been such a joy to host. I salute them and thank them. I hope I haven't misremembered too much.

One The Man Who Wouldn't Drown Radio to buoy you up

In December 2004, Ignacio Siberio, a Miami lawyer, was spearfishing alongside his small power boat when a stiff wind came up and took the boat away. For about an hour and a half, he did his best to catch up to it, but in the end he had to concede defeat. Ignacio figured he was going to die. He couldn't swim to shore, because the wind was against him; he would only use up all his energy trying. No one would miss him for hours, and by the time a search was organized, it would be dark and the wind would have blown him even farther out to sea. Then he spotted a buoy bobbing nearby. Clinging to it might just give him a slight chance of surviving. Ignacio knew that the forecast was for the wind to swing around to the north during the night. If he could get through the night alive, he could try swimming to shore when it got light. But how to stay alive until then without falling asleep and succumbing to hypothermia? He devised a plan. First he would review the cases he was working on go over them in every detail. He figured each case would take about two hours. When that was done, he started reviewing his life. It was amazing what he learned about himself during that exercise. In the meantime, the wind had shifted to the north and his muscles were now rigid with cold. He knew he had to keep them from knotting or he wouldn't be able to swim when the sun rose. Try to relax your right hand, he told himself. When that was done, he moved on to the whole arm, then to his left hand and so on until, to his surprise, he actually managed to get his whole body relaxed in the frigid water. Still, he realized that, for all his efforts, he was probably not going to make it through. He thought how sad that would make his family and friends, and just before Christmas, too. He thought he wouldn't like to make them sad. He thought, But I have it in my power to turn tragedy into happiness if I just don't die. And so he made up his mind not to. Around 10:30 the next morning, 20 hours after he'd gone into the water, Ignacio was fished out of the waves and delivered to shore. He was swimming for shore at the time. Oh yes and at the time, he was 80 years old. Ignacio Siberio told us this story in the most matter-of-fact tones on December 14th, the day after his rescue. He was well enough when he was pulled out of the water to be taken directly to his office back to all those cases he was working on. I asked him if he thought an angel had been looking out for him, and he replied, Something was. That buoy that popped up out of nowhere? It had no business being there. It was an abandoned buoy. And do you know, it had my birthdate on it! I was born on July 31; the number on the buoy was 731. A magazine show like *As It Happens* is a blend of many elements interviews, readings, music, commentary, debate but at the heart of the programme are the stories and the often amazing people who live them. Ignacio Siberio's adventure was pure gold, of course. It was the kind of story that would put a smile on your face for the whole day, even a Monday just before Christmas. The season of good fellowship and cheer was always hell around the office. The desire to give everyone a bit of extra family time in the week between Christmas and the New Year means you have to do a certain amount of prepackaging in the weeks before Christmas, which also happen to be the weeks of maximum shopping and maximum partying and cooking and visits from relatives. The result is maximum stress for everyone. By the time you bid everyone adieu on Christmas Eve and make way for Alan Maitland's reading of *The Shepherd*, you're whacked. You spend your extra time off recovering from the effort it took to get the extra time off. This is also the season when everyone else is partying or shopping or ducking work; sometimes news is scarce, and often it's gloomy. The show that featured Ignacio Siberio included an interview with Paul Martin about his first year as Canadian Prime Minister, but there was also a story about Viktor Yushchenko, the Ukrainian leader whose face had been ravaged by dioxin poisoning; a poignant tale about a Lethbridge, Alberta, man who was about to be reunited with the four brothers and sisters he'd lost when they were all sent to different foster homes as children; and a rather scary account of personal financial information from a Canadian law office winding up in a California jail cell. It was good to have Ignacio Siberio to remind us that amid all the misery and meanness and the pure, unadulterated evil that abound in the world, there are people who refuse to die because of the unhappiness it might bring to others. What god in his heaven would not be stirred to pluck him from the jaws of death and restore him safely to his family (and his clients)? More often than not, it is the suicide bombers, the assassins, the cheats and tyrants of the world who make headlines, along

with the train derailments, ice storms, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes and floods. Small wonder that people in the news business tend to have a rather gloomy view of fate and human nature. On *As It Happens*, we've told those stories, too. We bring you the world in your radio, we tell people. Its history-in-the-making told by the people making it: the lawyers and crooks, the teachers and bums, the doctors, victims, bankers, prime ministers, presidents, movie stars, singers, scientists and Nobel Prize winners. Its fun to have the movers and shakers at the other end of a phone line, and I know I'm lucky to have had the opportunity to chew the fat with Margaret Atwood and Judi Dench and Chubby Checker. But after eight years and more than ten thousand interviews, I find it's the Ignacio Siberios who stick in my mind even more than the big names; ordinary people more than celebrities ordinary people who surprised us, and maybe themselves, with their escapades or their extraordinary efforts in the service of a particular goal. I'm thinking of Donald Flickinger of Toledo, Ohio, for instance, who took 75 years to complete his university degree; he was 96 when he got his first degree an associate degree from the University of Toledo. The ceremony was awesome, he said, but he wasn't happy that it took him so long to get it. Why did it take so much time? I asked him. Well, he'd started in 1928. Then came the Depression; he didn't have the five dollars per credit hour he needed to pay for his courses. Then there was the war, and after that he got married, and he travelled a lot, programming computers. There was no time to attend class regularly. For a few years, he and his wife did attend classes together, but then he retired and they did more travelling together until she died. Now that he did have a degree of sorts, though, he felt he should get serious about his education and get himself a real degree, a Bachelor of Science maybe, or a B.A. Maybe even a new romance, I mused. Or how about Doug Stead, who spent over \$120,000 fighting a \$117 speeding ticket in British Columbia, because the ticket was based on photo radar, which he thought violated the principle of innocent until proven guilty? It was a principle that took precedence over more money apparently. The same perceived aversion to injustice and bullying led senior citizen Betty Hyde to crash a Royal Bank meeting in Ottawa so she could tell the President in person how outraged she was over the bank's decision to close her local branch in New Edinburgh. There were bankers to the left of us and bankers to the right, she said, making it sound like the Battle of Queenston Heights. But Betty Hyde was not cowed, and shortly afterwards bank officials announced that the branch would remain open. The day we got Mrs. Hyde on the phone to tell us about her victory was her 80th birthday, and the Royal had sent her birthday greetings and a bouquet of flowers. My Ottawa spies tell me, however, that Betty Hyde is now deceased and the Royal Bank has indeed closed its doors on the people of New Edinburgh. I don't know if there was a connection. From the Hardcover edition.