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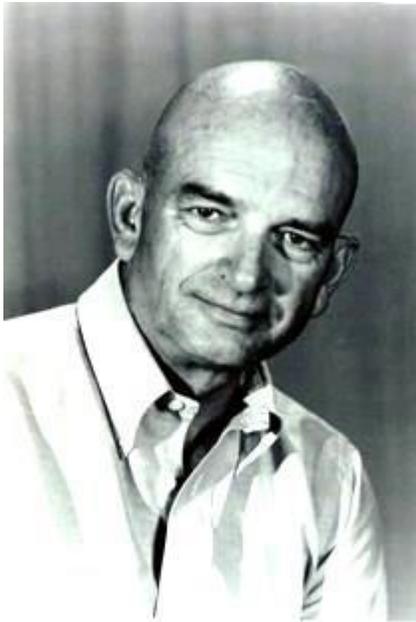
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## Dick Estell, WKAR's "Radio Reader" Dies at Age 90 <sup>[1]</sup>

Monday, May 9, 2016, 9:58 am

**By:**

Ann Nichols



East Lansing lost an icon of literacy, public service and public radio when Richard "Dick" Estell died May 6, at the age of 90.

Long before there were audio books on cassette, CD or services like "audible," it was possible to tune into WKAR for half an hour in the morning and get the next installment of a book read in the calming, gentle voice of Estell, WKAR's "Radio Reader."

The "Radio Reader" program, which originated at WKAR and eventually aired on public radio stations across the country, ended on March 10. Although Estell retired from WKAR in 1986, he had continued to record the show at his home in Haslett until the beginning of March 2016 when he became too ill to continue recording. The final installments of the last book, John Grisham's "Rogue Lawyer" were read by Estell's long-time friend and former WKAR-TV General Manager Bob Page.

Estell, who began his career in public radio in 1948 was among the original founders of National Public Radio, and read over 1,000 books <sup>[2]</sup> in half-hour increments from 1964 until his retirement

in March of this year. According to an article <sup>[3]</sup> written by WKAR's former communications manager Jeanie Croope, Estell did not read books before reading them on the air, choosing instead to do a "cold" reading which sometimes resulted in an audible pause after an emotional passage.

In addition to his years as the Radio reader, Estell spent many years as Station Manager at WKAR Radio and established the Radio Reading Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

The program was deeply ingrained part of the daily routine for many East Lansing residents even as decades passed and listeners traveled or relocated to other states. One of our reporters told me the story of listening to "Radio Reader" when her son was a baby, because Estell's voice soothed and engaged the infant while giving her 30 minutes of what felt like adult conversation.

East Lansing residents Ed and Jane Marin remember travelling cross-country with their family in a trailer in the mid-1970s with Estell as a daily companion. "It was before the satellite radio," recalls Ed, "and he was on across the country from here to California or from here to Florida."

My own family listened to "Radio Reader" in the morning, before school, and on summer trips to Maine. Years later, as a homesick college freshman in Boston I was moved, literally to tears, to find Estell's familiar voice on WBUR. Just like home.

A funeral service for Estell will be held at 12:00 noon on Wednesday, May 11, 2016 at the Peoples Church, 200 W. Grand River Ave., in East Lansing,

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