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Living Arts

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A public relations disaster

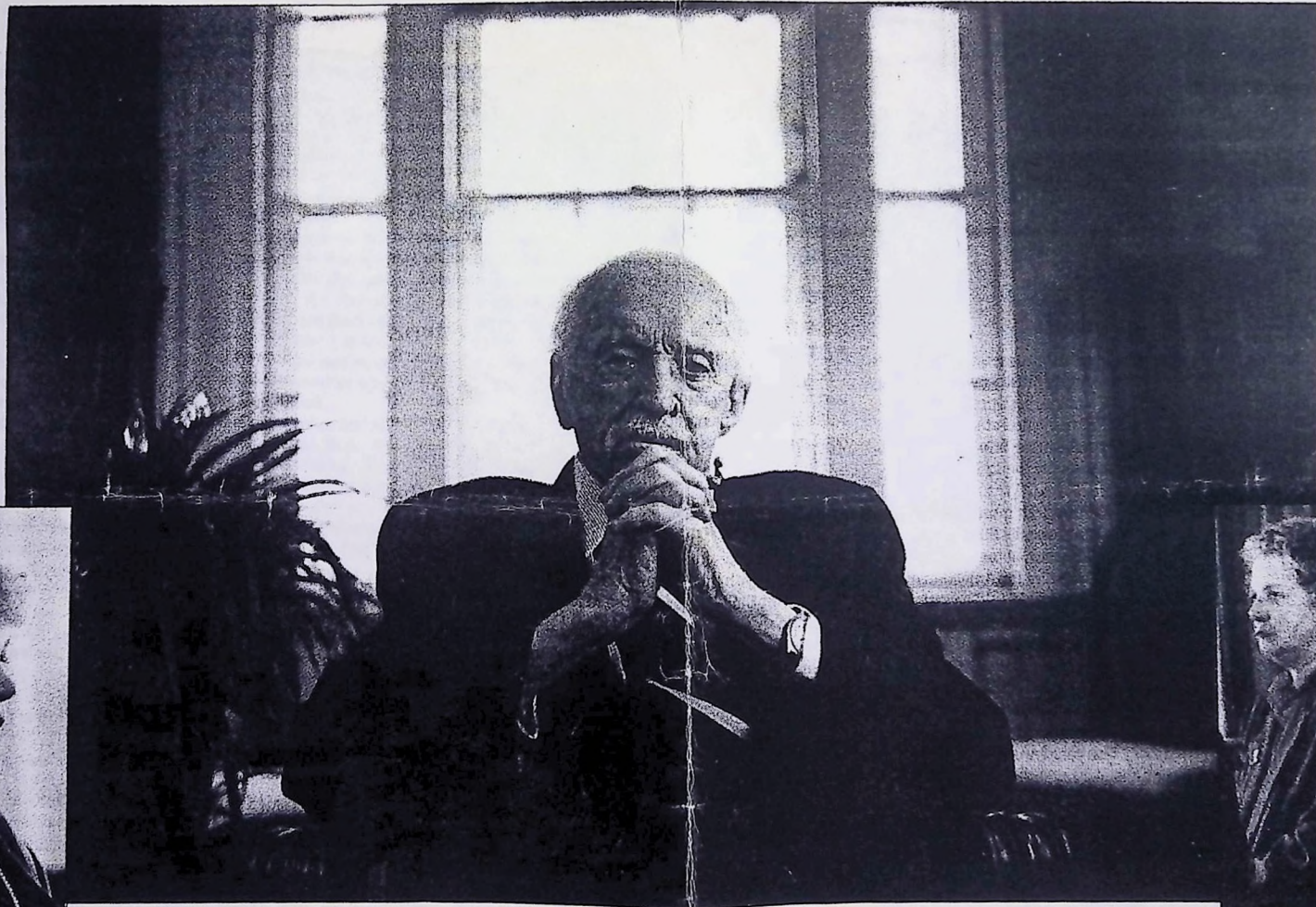
Edward Bernays, the 'father of PR,' finds himself powerless to quell a feud over his future

*'I'd like to
meet the
person who
can [have]
undue
influence
over
Edward
Bernays.'*

JOAN VONDRA
Bernays'
ex-housekeeper

*'He has zero
memory. He
will call me,
say, five times
within an
hour to leave
the identical
message.'*

DORIS BERNAYS
HELD
Bernays' daughter



Edward Bernays, above, is caught between the claims of former housekeeper/companion Joan Vondra, left, and his

around the house with the money,

to avoid a photographer in the
courtroom, both she and the Ber-

Bernays' daughters feud with ex-housekeeper over his future

■ BERNAYS

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Highgas Jr. in what the clerk referred to as "the Bernays matter."

Because the Bernays daughters believe that Vondra has mismanaged Edward Bernays' money, and because a doctor has judged him incompetent to handle his own affairs, the court yesterday granted a request of the Bernays daughters for an extension of a restraining order that forbids Vondra from any contact with Edward.

...

The Vondra side

"You do not live with the master of public relations without learning something from him," Vondra says, in explaining why she had alerted the news media of yesterday's court appearance.

It was one of the lessons learned in a class she took at Boston University in fundamentals of public relations.

"I've grown under Edward's auspices," she says.

When Vondra was hired, she says, Anne Bernays used to call her a weak sister.

"I used to let Edward dominate me a lot," Vondra says.

It's safe to say that Anne Bernays no longer thinks of Vondra as a weak sister.

In exchange for a \$47,000 salary, Vondra says, she often worked till 11:30, and on days when Edward would see three clients she might drive 150 miles.

"I always tried to protect Edward's image, as befits the father of public relations, but I think that Edward Bernays' sense of virility must have been greatly flattered with the highly dramatic article about us that appeared in the Sept. 4 Globe."

She was referring to a story that said she and Bernays had left Cambridge Sunday, Aug. 29, without notifying his family and been found two days later at a motel in Woburn, where she had registered under an assumed name.

A kidnapping, says the family.

Not so, Vondra says. It was an attempt to get away from the daughters who were harassing Edward and Vondra.

"They say I've abused him. I've never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life. What the family did was contrive to have him declared incompetent. He's the one who con-

trols most situations. Isn't it funny that after he was declared incompetent by his doctor in this contrived effort, NBC and CBS interviewed him on the same day for documentaries? Edward had scheduled one, and I had scheduled the other, and he also just did one for the BBC that will be aired in 1995."

The daughters' side

"The story that appeared in the Globe made us look capricious," complained Anne Bernays, and she's right.

Assumptions are premature, for it is the court that will judge Vondra and determine Edward's competence, although his daughters insist he cannot manage his affairs.

"He has zero memory," says Doris. "He will call me, say, five times within an hour to leave the identical message, and he cannot remember my younger son, whom he adores, and each time he calls, he will say, where's Andrew?, and I'll say he's at work, and he'll say, oh, he has a job? A thousand times that's happened, and I don't mind. I'm patient, but he has no memory."

Appearing in court yesterday on behalf of the daughters was attorney Nonnie Burnes, who told the judge that as conservators, the Bernays daughters had been notified last summer by Sotheby's that Vondra - to whom Edward had granted power of attorney - had expressed an interest in selling a piece of art.

What brought the police and the publicity, however, was, first, the daughters' attempt on Friday, Aug. 27, to fire Vondra, followed two days later by what they describe as the kidnapping of their father from his Cambridge home to motels, first in Amesbury and then, under an assumed name, in Woburn. Further complicating an already tangled legal web was a report that the district attorney's office is investigating allegations of forgery and larceny.

The romance

Asked about the delicate subject of sex, Vondra is, at first, elusive.

"Anyone who knows Edward's reputation would know the answer," she says. "When Doris interviewed me, she told me to set limits for Edward, and make my bedroom off limits. I couldn't believe what she was saying because, at the time, I was 47 and he was 97, but I wasn't there



Attending yesterday's hearing were, from left, Anne Bernays and Doris Bernays Held, Bernays' daughters; and Joan Vondra, far right, his former housekeeper.

two weeks when Edward was running after me.

"But over time, the relationship grew into something more personal and it was definitely intimate."

Does that mean it was sexual?

"Well, you're not intimate unless you're sexual. We were committed partners. He said to me, what do I have to do to keep you? Do I have to marry you? I said, Edward, if it was married I wanted to be, I wouldn't be here. Marriage is not something I have had on my mind for one hell of a long time. I have been married, and my second husband is deceased and my first husband and I were divorced.

"When Edward was being interviewed by a doctor from Harvard Medical School who was doing a study of centenarians, Edward made me leave the room because he wanted to answer the questions without me there, and in the driveway, the doctor told me what he said, and I could have kicked Edward. He said that Edward was bragging about having sex three times a week.

"Later, I asked Edward why he had even addressed that, and he said, 'Joan, this is a study about centenarians, and I want to give them hope.' I could have wrung his neck."

Vondra says that Bernays takes multivitamins, along with vitamins E and C and beta carotene, and that he eats health food, as well as meat; that he never smokes, and that he drinks wine daily, and sometimes liqueur or even straight gin, which, he says, gives him energy.

One night, she says, he poured six drinks of strong liqueur. "I can't

do that, but then, I can't do a lot of the things Edward can, and I don't have the immune system he has."

Neither of the Bernays daughters was impressed with Vondra's claims about their sexual relationship.

"That's what she claims," says Doris. "But we don't know. And she had men in the house all the time. She had one living there last summer that [Edward] didn't know about and we didn't, until someone told us."

Vondra says that although she and Edward were registered at Cambridge City Hall as domestic partners, Bernays remained fancy free.

"Just because we were in a committed relationship, he wasn't the faithful type. You had to tolerate Edward's interest in other women. He was a womanizer. If I had met him when he was 50, we wouldn't have lasted three minutes together."

...

The wild night

The long-simmering animosities within the Bernays household erupted on the last Friday in August.

As Vondra and Edward were to leave on a trip to Hillsboro, N.H., to visit friends in the public relations business, she telephoned to let them know they were on their way.

"The phones," she now says, "must have been bugged - don't forget, they've been trying to get rid of me for three years, and Edward wouldn't permit it."

"A few minutes after I hung up, just as we were getting into the car -

zoom! - Doris pulled up behind us with her son, Edward's grandson, Andrew, and they blocked our car. I ran into the kitchen and called the attorney, Dennis Liakos, and asked him what to do, because they were having a battle royal. But he said to let Edward handle it. I told him he ought to come over, because it was getting nasty, and he told me to go out to the driveway and tell them they have conservatorship over the money and the property, but not his person.

"So I went back out, and she was trying to get Edward into her car, but he wasn't going anywhere with her, and he told her that she was his daughter, and not to forget that he was her father, and Doris said, Edward, that's true, but I'm in control now, and you're not."

"Finally, I said, Doris, Edward doesn't want to go with you, and I repeated what the attorney said, and she said, 'Joan, you're fired!' And Edward said, no you're not, Joan, and he got louder, and it got louder."

After another call to Liakos, Edward made his way into the kitchen and bolted the door, and then, according to Vondra, Doris called the police.

"Because it was a Bernays calling, or because Edward Bernays was involved, four policemen came in the first car ... and then another car with four more, so there were eight policemen outside, and Edward was running from window to window."

"Dennis Liakos had said he'd come over the next morning with coffee, and Edward was already dressed in his suit by 8:30. He's from that ilk. Don't forget, he's transcended two centuries."

"But who shows up but Doris and a legal representative, and they came to reiterate that I was fired. So the soap opera continued, and Doris wanted to know what I planned to do, and I said I didn't know. The legal representative said, don't worry, we'll find some legal loophole to get rid of her."

"Doris said, Joan, if you walk amicably, I will pay for 10 days at a motel, and I told her this was unnerving and that I was not going to make a decision until I talked to an attorney, although I didn't have an attorney because I didn't think I was guilty of anything. I know what I've done. When Edward gave me power of attorney, I started doing things around the house with the money,

continues. "I didn't know what the hell I was going to do. I knew that when Monday came, that little whippersnapper was going to have one of his legal loopholes to get rid of me."

"I called my niece and her boyfriend and my sister who lived upstairs and her daughter and they came and helped me pack my essentials, two cars full, and we took what we could fit in our compact little cars, and I took off with Edward late Sunday afternoon."

"At this point, I didn't know they would engage the FBI."

"Where did we go? My head was spinning. I had Edward to think about. He'd take a few medications, and I didn't want him to have a minor [stroke], because I knew he was stressed out."

"I drove around. I didn't know where the heck I was going. I would start in one direction and say, no, that's not good. Should we go to the Cape or Maine? So, after a while, I was heading to the Cape, and then I turned and started heading toward Maine, and finally, I said, god, I'm too tired to drive to Maine, so I found the closest turnoff from Route 128, and that's how I got to Amesbury. I just stopped at a gas station to ask for the nearest motel."

"We were so tired, the two of us, stressed out, and he really didn't get a good night's sleep that night. We were up the next day early. I have a blood condition that requires oral chemotherapy, which I've been doing for 13 years, and I was out of it, so I couldn't go too far from the Lahey Clinic. So I went there to pick up my meds, and as long as I was there, my allergy shots, and then I stopped in to see a travel agent, and she said, why don't you just stay right here in Woburn, close by. She said she could get a good rate, and she told me not to stay under my own name, so I used the name Linda Parks."

In the corridor of Middlesex Courthouse, Doris Bernays Held shakes her head.

"What she didn't tell you is that the day she took him, she also had her boyfriend call and ask for his passport. Make no mistake. This was a serious abduction."

In court

Vondra is 5 feet 8, with short blond hair. At the hearing, she wears a purple jacket and a black blouse with white pearls.

To avoid a photographer in the courtroom, both she and the Ber-