Jack Hester- First Draft of Podcast Script on “Jimmy’s World”

**SCRIPT DRAFT:**

Music Fade In

Intro: Hello. Today we’ll be discussing the story of a young boy, stuck in a horrible life of drug addiction and family problems. The story is so good that it won a Pulitzer prize. “Jimmy’s World” is coming up next.

Music interlude

Welcome back. You’re probably intrigued by this sad story, or perhaps you’ve heard of it before. Here’s the thing: it’s all made up. This story was one of the most successful hoaxes in recent history, and the author won a Pulitzer prize in 1981 before the truth came out.

In late 1980 the author, Janet Cooke, published this story in the Washington Post. At the center of the writing was an eight-year-old heroin addict named Jimmy. It detailed his family situation, absence from school, and his utterly heartbreaking reliance on heroin.

The article concludes with Ron, the father, injecting Jimmy with heroin, and stating "Pretty soon, man," Ron says, "you got to learn how to do this for yourself."

The fact that a hoax gets so far that it wins a Pulitzer prize in literature begs the question of how a story that is completely made up can be so convincing.

The answer is found in the emotional and textual or technical appeals to the audience, as well as the fake credentials that the author provided.

The story definitely invokes feelings of sadness and pity for the boy and his family. People know that drugs are becoming more and more of a problem for younger and younger people, so the fact that an 8-year-old can be addicted does not seem unreasonable. The fact than an author is bringing this subject up in such an emotionally convincing and appealing way creates a compelling story.

In addition, the author makes up seemingly realistic quotes and presents the reader with a real life situation and scene. When people are directly quoted, there is a whole new layer of believability to the story, and the addition of names to Jimmy and those close to him contributes as well. Jimmy’s family has its own sad story before he was even born, and the fact that they have a backstory adds credibility to the claims.

Read excerpt: "A lot of these parents (of children involved with drugs) are the unwed mothers of the '60s, and they are bringing up their children by trial and error," says Linda Gilbert, a social worker at Southeast Neighborhood House. "The family structure is not there so they [the children] establish a relationship with their peers. If the peers are into drugs, it won't be very long before the kids are, too. . . They don't view drugs as illegal, and if they are making money, too, then it's going to be OK in the eyes of an economically deprived community."

[possible more detail about story, i.e. family specifics, see on timing]

Finally, the author created fake credentials for themselves. She claimed she had a degree from Vassar College and a master's degree from the University of Toledo, and that she had received a journalism award while at the Toledo Blade. This contributed to her credibility with the Washington Post, and since her article was published in such a credible newspaper, people thought that it must be true.

With us now is [name], an avid newspaper reader, who believed the article to discuss what made it so convincing.

Me: Welcome [name]

Them: Thanks, it’s great to be here.

Me: You were definitely not the only one who believed this article. Thousands of people believed it and it won the Pulitzer Prize. For you, what do you remember from the article that made it so believable?

Them: I remember some of the quotations in the article. I think there was one about the family structure and how, for them, drugs were not illegal, especially since they were making money. This quotation really seemed to get inside of their paradigm and it just seemed so real and uncut that I didn’t think twice about the truth of what I was reading.

Me: was there anything else that really stuck out to you or really convinced you?

Them: [pause] I can’t think of anything else specific but since I was reading the Washington Post I thought nothing more about the validity of the claims. Since it was such a trusted source, I just assumed I wouldn’t be reading a hoax.

Me: Well thanks for your time. We don’t have much time left. Thanks for coming on the show.

Them: Thanks for having me.

This hoax really goes to show you how careful we have to be when we’re reading something. In this case, it was almost impossible to see that this article was a made up until people went searching for the boy and then the truth was revealed. Whether or not it’s strictly a hoax, we need to be careful when reading articles in any paper, especially papers like the Emory Wheel, and need to examine the articles and their credibility.

the full article can be found at (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/09/28/jimmys-world/605f237a-7330-4a69-8433-b6da4c519120/)> - give abbreviated version

[credits]

Music fade out

**AUDIENCE:**

The audience would be people who read newspapers, and could maybe be refined to those who read publications like the Emory Wheel. The purpose is to ask what people should believe and not believe, and what makes an article successful. It could be targeted at both the people who want to write, and the people who read this newspaper. As I revise this script, I hope to make some more direct appeals/comments to the specific audience, and teach them what to look for.