If TV’s So Good For You

by Jeff Plude (May 2019)

Interior Milton Keynes, John Keane, 1979

“What! You don’t have a TV!” the longtime attorney booms across the large round table as we are eating our salads at the firm’s Christmas party.

The half-dozen other people at our table look at me and my wife. I stare down at my plate wishing I could crawl into it like Alice through her mirror, sort of how I used to think that people lived in the TV itself when I was a little kid. That was back when the screen was black and white and many shades of gray, but it still seemed like magic. Eventually we upgraded to a floor model set, which had a dark brown wood cabinet and a wire that was connected to the antenna on the roof and the glass tubes in the back that our TV repairman, a bald, soft-spoken man with black-frame glasses, used to fiddle with as he knelt behind the TV.

The same thing had happened at the firm's Christmas party the year before. That time the stunned person was a retired salesclerk, the husband of one of my wife's colleagues. The couple was also sitting next to us the night the lawyer outed us.

I don't remember exactly what sparked the latest instance, but it's usually from the same general question: do you know such-and-such program or show or game or commercial? We're often asked this, sometimes even after we explain that we don't own a TV.

I've suggested to my wife that perhaps she avoid revealing that we don't have a TV, which makes us seem almost unpatriotic. Television, if not an American invention, is thoroughly and quintessentially American; one of the oldest television stations in the world, WRGB in Schenectady, New York, broadcast the first daily programs in 1928, and TV became one of the United States' most influential exports.

Though my wife tends to see it as a worthy cause, I tend to see it as a lost cause.

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