

Please, Stay Tuned

By Molly Hale



I walk into my suite. A living space that contains eight people. As I open the door, the cerebral vacuum reaches out its thorny fingers, catches onto my person and pulls me into its black hole. What is the cause of this all encompassing void? The TV.

The first person of the day to touch the "on" button creates a black hole which, for the other seven occupants, is almost impossible to escape.

It is not the selection of a certain show to watch that upsets me. This is perfectly acceptable. If you love "South Park," and once a week turn on the tube to catch a new episode, so be it. I hope that it is a joyful form of entertainment and you get in a laugh or two. Laughing (some say) is a healing process. And we all need to be healed.

What bothers me is the Zombie Syndrome. Someone will turn on the tube to catch today's episode of "Great Chefs" and three hours later the television is still on. This is not because someone is interested in a particular half-hour allotment of air time, but rather everyone's soul has been sucked out of their bodies by the TV. The person holding the remote is simply clicking from channel 0-100, in a continuous effort to find that program that will fill their craving for more mindless entertainment.

Blind stares focus on a blinking screen where Coke ads and car commercials bounce around in the empty spaces of these people's heads where a brain once was, but is now absent.

And this entity that is the TV, has an ever reaching grasp. Say you were walking (in a suite) from your room to the

bathroom. You might make it there, but it's doubtful that you would escape that grasp on your attempted return to safety. It is a gravitational force that draws you in. But, the worst part is that most people don't understand its power. They never stop to rationalize why it is that they've just sat through a marathon of empty dialogue and canned laughter.

I am drawn to the example of a movie called "Stay Tuned" starring John Ritter. Now a few of you are saying, "My God, what a horrible movie!" However, there is an underlying message in this "piece." The plot dealt with a satellite dish that sucked people into the hellish world of TV. You see, this movie is not just a mistake made by John Ritter's agent, but a commentary on society. To make a really bad parallel: The television is the watch a hypnotist holds; instead of "You're feeling sleepy," the spellbinding phrase is "Please, Stay Tuned." And we do. We're not sure why, or what for. Maybe it's because they ask so nicely, but we sit and wait in constant anticipation for something marvelous to happen. And here's the thing, it never does! So we just keep on waiting and waiting and waiting, because it tells us to. Suddenly you're 85-years-old and you have no personal memories. But you can tell, in perfect detail, the life biographies of everyone stranded on Gilligan's island.

Well, our cable broke a few weeks ago and now we are unable to watch anything on TV, except for movies. Since the day it broke, a new life spirit has set into our lives. Now when I walk into the suite, the melodic sounds of conversation fill the air. We fill our time through discussion and we're actually getting to know each other again.

When somebody wants to watch a movie, we gather around as a family and view it together. And when it's done, the TV goes off and we continue on with our lives.

So here is what I say to you, the reader: You don't need to see the same episode of "The Simpsons" seventeen times. I know it's hard to believe, but you don't. Turn it off, shut it down and hide the remote. Pick up a book, talk to someone you've never talked to before, play a board game, write someone from home a letter, or try to rediscover the people around you by asking them about their moral beliefs. I don't care what it is you do, just step away from the TV's void and take control of your life again. •