

Our Families in Reruns?

My daughter and I watch *Brady Bunch* reruns every chance we get. She is so impressed that I know all the *Brady Bunch* episodes by heart - not my proudest accomplishment. (No, my proudest accomplishment is knowing all the *Diff'rent Strokes* episodes by heart).

I have actually come to the opinion that these shows are actually good for my children. Think about it. First, they are about non-traditional families. Second, many of the episodes revolve around the second class citizenship of the girls in the family and how they fight to be included. We have had many conversations while watching reruns together, about how things were when I was young or when Grandma was young.

She sees the ridiculousness when the Brady boys insist that girls cannot build a clubhouse or go fishing. We talk about how back then people thought cooking or sewing were only for girls. A recent repeated episode of *Diff'rent Strokes* that we watched was about an all boys club at the school that girls were trying to become members of. The show has spurred talk between us about episodes focusing on the single dad, mixed race household and how they handle reactions to their non-traditional family.

So, I look at these reruns as more than just a cheesy way to relive part of my childhood. I see them as teaching opportunities. Instead of me just telling my kids how things were when I was young, these programs give them a peek at what society was like then. And that gives me a chance to remind them that some people still think like that today. I also like how these shows demonstrate that different families are nothing new.

On one level it is great that my daughter does not have any idea why shows like *Will and Grace* or the WNBA bring tears of joy to my eyes. To her it is normal to see gay characters on TV (she was born the week *Ellen* came out on her show) and she expects that female athletes are front and center. However, it is important for her to know that it took a long hard struggle to get to where things are today and that there is still a lot of room for improvement. These old shows are a great tool.

But it's not only children that can learn from these old reruns. The other night, I came upon an old *All in the Family* episode that revolved around a transgender male to female. Unlike shows today, she was not the brunt of easy jokes. Instead, in the scenes with Archie, the joke was on Archie and she was in on it. Of course the show is dated and she was referred to as a drag queen throughout the show, but she was a man who Edith had always known and loved and considered family and his decision to seek his true identity did not change the way Edith felt about him. Leave it to Archie to say that the problem was that this person was different and that is why everyone should work hard to be the same. When her friend was beaten to death down the street from the Bunker house, it devastated Edith and she was angry with God and bigotry. Archie came through as he always seems to in his own way. He hugged Edith as she cried and admitted this was a good person who did not deserve to die.

(continued on page 2)

Newsletter

Our Families in Reruns?

(continued from page 1)

I don't see shows like that on TV today. There was recently a reality show where a woman had to figure out which men were straight or gay in order to find someone to marry. I saw another one where a woman had to pick her biological father out of a large group of random men in hopes of having a relationship with him. That one turned out well. She picked the right guy and by the episode's end, they seemed to be getting along great.

My partner makes fun of me for watching these TV relics, but in this day of reality shows and predictable TV, I find lessons and truth - as well as entertainment in decades-old reruns.

Now if I could just find some redeeming value in *Gilligan's Island*.....

Karen Armstrong lives in Vestal New York with her partner of 16 years and their 3 children