

Remember Rabbit Ears?

By Marilyn Reeves

I think it was around 1953 when the family got our very first black and white television set. The wooden case that enclosed it was heavy and cumbersome, the screen was rather small and sort of oval-shaped. There were a number of dials and buttons which we had to manipulate manually – no such thing as ‘remote control’ back then. The picture often came in somewhat fuzzy. At times the screen would produce nothing but black and white stripes, which would flip-flop up and down. At other times, all we saw was gray-toned static. That was where the ‘rabbit ears’ came in.

Dad would have to get up out of his easy chair and manipulate those rabbit ears, until we finally got a decent signal. Then the family would gather round to watch one of those early, early shows. Often the only thing that came through on one of the three networks – ABC, NBC, and CBS – was boxing. Somehow, I correlate all those boxing matches with ads for Gillette Blue Blades, which I found more interesting than the boxing.

I remember laughing at Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca, as well as Milton Burl. But I think I was in high school when a very young, up-and-coming comedian by the name of Carol Burnett made her debut on the *Gary Moore Show*.

We also watched some very good drama on programs like the *Armstrong Circle Theater* and *The Loretta Young Show*. We saw some great variety shows as well. We were first introduced to the King on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. Later, in the 60’s it’s where a little known group called The Beatles made their American debut. Dina Shore also had an excellent variety show and we enjoyed hearing her sing, “See the USA in your Chevrolet!” Remember that?

There were also lots of Westerns. Our favorite was Matt Dillon in *Gunsmoke*. And lots of cop shows like Jack Webb in *Dragnet*. Dum-da-dum-dum, DAH!

Every show we watched had commercial breaks. I believe it was Ronald Reagan who suggested, “If you’re smoking more now but enjoying it less, switch to Tarrington.” Or was it Viceroy? I’m not sure. And who was it that said, “If I have only one life to live, let me live it as a blonde!”

Many of those early commercials featured jingles that would stick in your head like an ear worm: “Brusha-brusha-brusha! With the new Ipana.” Or, “You’ll wonder where the yellow went if you brush your teeth with Pepsodent.” I guess those toothpaste ads beat all the prescription drug commercials we’re subject to today.

Nowadays I spend a big chunk of my monthly income on cable TV. For that, I have access to literally hundreds of channels. I get to watch a lot of movies, and a few good series offered by Starz, Showtime and HBO. But if I tune into one of the regular network channels, I’m still inundated with commercials.

At least I get good reception. And I don’t have to fool around with rabbit ears.