

The House Guest

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A few months before I was born, my Dad met a stranger who was new to our small Tennessee town. From the beginning, Dad was fascinated with this enchanting newcomer. He soon invited him to live with our family. The stranger was quickly accepted. He was around to welcome me into the world a few months after he moved in. As I grew up, I never questioned his place in my family. In my young mind, he had a special niche. My parents were complementary instructors: Mom taught me the word of God, and Dad taught me to obey it. But the stranger was a different kind of teacher.

He was our storyteller. He kept us spellbound for hours on end with adventures, mysteries and comedies. If I wanted to know anything about politics, history or science, he always knew the answers about the past, understood the present and even seemed able to predict the future! He took my family to their first major league ball game. He made me laugh, and he made me cry. The stranger never stopped sharing his ideas and viewpoints, but my Dad didn't seem to mind.

Sometimes Mom would get up quietly while the rest of us were shushing each other to listen to what he had to say. Then she would go to her room and read. I wonder now if she ever prayed for this houseguest to leave.

Dad ruled our household with certain moral convictions, but the stranger never felt obligated to honor them. Profanity, for example, was not allowed in our home... not from our friends or us. Our long-time visitor, however, got away with four-letter words that burned my ears, made my dad squirm and my mother blush.

My Dad was a teetotaler who didn't permit alcohol in our home, not even for cooking. But the stranger encouraged us to try it on a regular basis. He made cigarettes look cool, cigars manly and pipes distinguished. He talked freely, much too freely in retrospect, about sex. His comments were sometimes blatant, sometimes suggestive, and generally embarrassing. I now know that my early concepts about relationships were influenced strongly by the stranger. Time after time, he opposed the values of my parents, yet he was seldom rebuked. Sadly he was NEVER asked to leave our home.

More than fifty years have passed since the stranger moved in with my family. He has blended right in, but he is not nearly as fascinating to me as he was at first. Still, if you were to walk into my parents' den today you would find him sitting over in his corner, waiting for someone to listen to him talk and watch him draw his pictures.

His name? We just call him TV.

Sent to us by Don.