

Ally McBeal and TV kill brain cells

LETTERS

I used to watch Ally McBeal regularly. But after watching last week's childishly provocative and blatantly offensive episode I decided it was time to give it a rest. I pondered the idea of using my editorial to tear the show apart a bit, but then I found myself thinking more about television in general — all the time we waste on it, all the bad things it does to us — and I wondered if I could find any way to convincingly justify its presence in our world.

This has actually been on my mind for a couple of weeks, ever since someone told me that if they could do anything they wanted, they'd go around and blow up everybody's TV. That struck me as fairly sensible at the time, and it's not the first time I've heard the suggestion that TV is the biggest downfall of our society, that it's blinding us and desensitizing us and leaching away our ability to think for ourselves.

Admittedly, there's so many unoriginal shows out there, shows that don't even begin to address the problems they raise with any depth. They stitch the world together in a way that looks marvellous, but as soon as you start to look closely you realize what they're giving you is as unstable as a cardboard house. Some of us watch these shows because we get a kick out of them, but we should also remember there's a generation of kids growing up and not knowing what's wrong with the picture they're getting. They're seeing a world the producers of a consumer culture want them to see, and if they don't fit into that picture they too easily assume there's something wrong with them.

It takes effort to think for yourself. I guess the whole danger of TV is that it offers you a way out of that. How many times have you seen a friend come into a room after a long day of classes or work, collapse in front of the TV,

and say with a huge sigh "I just need to veg for a while!" How many times have you wasted two hours of your evening on the couch because you just didn't feel like thinking any more? Do you ever wonder what people did before they had that option? Did they just go on thinking all the time, or what?

EDITORIAL

Perhaps I'm exaggerating the issue a bit — I'm not sure. My hope is that I am, my fear is that I'm not. I think about two cousins I have who are 16 and 14 who grew up without television. For them "vegging" was reading, and after-school life was not spent on the couch but going out and doing things like soccer and music lessons. Certainly they're two of the neatest teenagers I know, but then I'm a little biased — and truthfully they're the only people that age I spend any amount of time with. And then, too, I grew up watching Family Ties and Growing Pains and even (this I am ashamed of) Full House, and I don't think it's really damaged me all that much. I could be wrong — I'm a little biased there too.

What it all comes down to for me is that, even though I know all the things that are bad and dangerous about TV, when I ask myself whether or not I honestly think it's going to destroy us I still think the answer is no. In fact, I even think, amidst all the crap, there are shows out there that have something valuable to offer us, shows that are really funny without being mindless. The Simpsons springs to mind. And a few years ago I would have added Cheers to the list.

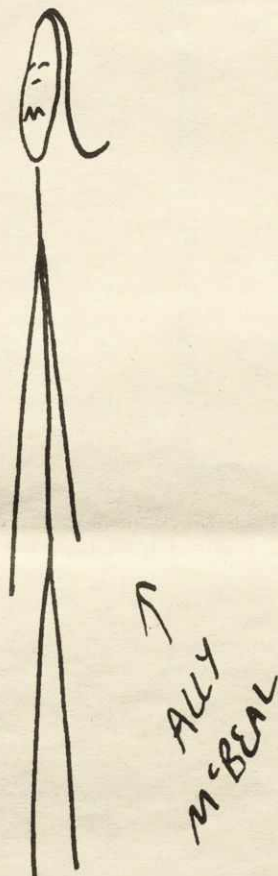
The other thing is that I know all kinds of people who grew up watching all kinds of TV who turned out just fine. Why? Because they did other things too. They went away to summer camp.

They played with their friends. They didn't forget how to read. And sure, you hear lots about the people who didn't turn out so fine, but for them I think too much TV was only one part of a much bigger problem.

What I want to end off with is that TV is certainly something we should be careful of, but maybe we don't need to go around blowing up everyone's set just yet. If we're going to hand it down to the next generation — and really, what choice do we have? — we should make sure they know about and can participate in the world outside of TV.

I think tonight I'll give Ally a break. Maybe I'll head over to the Grad House for Monday night Irish fiddle jam. Or maybe I'll switch to Buffy.

Katie Tinker



Hunting, gathering and losing

Dear Editor:

Another camping year has passed quickly, marked for me by the unmistakeable sound of gunshots.

Yes, it's the beginning of another season of small and big game animal hunts. The meaning of the word "hunt" in these days of modern technology has changed greatly from our "hunting and gathering" days. For the most part, gone are the days when the hunters had to stalk within close range to make many of their kills and feel the life leaving the animal. Weapons were extensions of the hunter's body and in most cases made by the hunter. The hunter would have had a deep connection to nature and the natural world. Many would have had a deep personal relationship to the being whose life he or she was about to take.

In these days of modern technologies, we believe that we have moved forward as a people, but in doing so we have also lost many important values that hold communities together. Inside all of us lies a deep respecting love of nature and the natural world. But for the most part, it is buried in levels of fear within us. As human beings, what we tend not to understand, we usually fear. These levels of fear have resulted in our greatest wars, which are not people against people, but people against wild nature.

The nature war presents a great threat. I feel that it is deeply connected to the many human wars throughout the world. The war against nature is taking place in all of our communities and is in most cases accepted by the people that live there. What many fail to see, however, is that the root cause of the human wars cannot be separated from the war against nature, for their causes are the same.

In the dictionary, the definition of the word "sport" is a game or some kind of active play done by one or more parties for exercise or pleasure. Today we call sport such things as trapping, small and big game hunting, and chasing bobcats, foxes and raccoons with trained dogs. But no one stops to ask the animals if they wish to play, or least of all to play fair. This is but one small example of the many ways in which we mask the ongoing assault on nature.

Healing our relationship with nature can play an important role in healing ourselves and in the way we relate to each other. It will also play a major role in whether or not our communities survive or die.

Breast cancer awareness

To the Editor,

After reading the article "Beyond Pink Ribbons" in your October 28 issue of the Gazette, I felt compelled to respond. The authors of that article were warning of the connection between environmental hazards and the rising incidence of breast cancer. The article was highly speculative in nature; there was little or no research to support the author's claims.

In particular, I took exception to the following passage: "In

premenopausal women, mammography screenings can cause more breast cancer than they detect." This is a misleading and dangerous statement. Many women dislike mammography because they find it awkward, uncomfortable and embarrassing. Some women decide not to have mammograms for the same reasons. Readers of that article might go away with the notion that mammograms are also dangerous because they cause cancer. This is not true. Mammography uses low amounts of x-rays to obtain an image of the breasts. The film used is very sensitive so only very small amounts of x-rays can be used. The amount of radiation exposure (less than one rad) is not sufficient to cause cancerous mutations.

If women want to protect themselves from breast cancer they should perform breast self-examinations (BSE) on the same day each month after the age of 20. Their family physician should examine their breasts at least once every three years. Many women decide to do this once annually when they have their PAP test done. However, BSEs only detect tumors that are greater than one centimetre in diameter. The most effective method of detecting smaller tumors is mammography. A woman should have a baseline mammogram done between the ages of 35 — 39. This should be done earlier in women with a family history of breast cancer.

Females with no history or symptoms should have a mammogram every year or two between ages 40 and 49 and every year after fifty. Women who have a family history of the disease should work out a schedule with their family physician.

In conclusion, BSE and mammography will not prevent breast cancer but can detect it earlier. The early detection can save breast tissue and lives.

Ron Zinck

Uncondemned

To the Editor

After reading Kimberly Baigent's letter to the editor regarding the Take

Back the Night march (Nov.4), I felt compelled to write and offer an

alternate view.

Although I have some very real issues with her claim that "very few" men on this planet have violated women, I felt really puzzled by her assumption that by marching alone all women are rejecting or alienating men.

In my mind, we are not condemning all men — or rejecting the fact that there are supportive and sensitive men — but rather demonstrating what it would be like IF women didn't feel unsafe walking ALONE at night; what it would be like, for example, if Ms. Baigent could walk alone fearlessly with her keys in her pocket instead of clutched in her hand.

Yes, of course, there are sympathetic men and those men are gladly invited to participate in the rally before the march — but instead of taking it as a personal attack, I would tend to think that supportive men (and women) would understand that women's symbolic act of hope and independence is exactly that — a symbolic act of hope and independence.

Rebecca Shatford

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