

How to Live a

# Sitcom Life

A Guide to  
TV Etiquette

US \$23.95  
Canada \$34.95  
With black-and-white photos

"Basically, a book that shows you how to turn a life of doo-doo into a chocolate soufflé."

— Mark Bennett

**A**fter his acclaimed first book, *TV Sets: Fantasy Blueprints of Classics TV Homes*, California author and artist Mark Bennett has quickly found his niche as not just another TV buff, but an expert on life on the screen. He has achieved celebrity status with appearances on "The Today Show," "Good Morning America," and "Entertainment Tonight."

Now, in Bennett's follow-up volume, *How to Live a Sitcom Life*, we are offered a practical and offbeat guide for living life the way television characters live. This hilarious romp through TV etiquette's do's and don't's is the perfect gift for those who need a fantasy lifestyle when all their other choices have failed.

Mark Bennett, the impassioned maestro of proper television decorum, gleefully shares with us what he has gleaned from twenty years of television addiction. *How to Live a Sitcom Life* shows us what to wear, the right car to drive, where to work, and how to conduct ourselves in high television style in all social occasions, including parties, weddings, and funerals. It even includes a handy, illustrated address book of some of our favorite sitcom stars.

Loaded with the rules, scenarios, tips, and quizzes that cover all of life's unexpected circumstances, this is the book to turn to whenever a question of social grace arises.







# **How to Live a Sitcom Life**

Mark Bennett

**WILEY**

New York

Also by Mark Bennett

*TV Sets: Fantasy Blueprints of Classic TV Homes*

How to Live a

# Sitcom Life

**A Guide to  
TV Etiquette**

Mark Bennett

**TVBooks**

New York

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## To Christopher Ford

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**T**wenty years ago, my goal had been to become a famous artist. I had been focusing on two large bodies of work, one of which was my architectural floor plans for the homes of more than fifty of my favorite TV sitcoms. I documented every detail by studying these shows relentlessly. I had no access to real studio set designs. Instead, I drew these plans out of my love for the shows—and kept them secret, stashed under my bed.

When I did try to show the blueprints, they were not always well-received. I was threatened with expulsion from one municipal show because the judge deemed them “not art.” After that, I sort of gave up on them. I just wanted to sell enough of my other work to pay off my outstanding credit card debt, move to Arizona, and change my name. I thought “Mark Martinez” sounded nice.

In August 1995, a chance to show my art at the Cobalt Cantina restaurant in Silverlake presented itself. The owner



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asked if I had enough work to fill the walls of the dining area and bar; I lied and said yes. The only way I could fill the space was to use my blueprints, now long cardboarded and shrink-wrapped for protection against the elements at those outdoor art festivals. They were kind of beat-up, having been shoved in the storage locker above my car space in my garage.

I hung the floor plans anyway, placing a sign on the wall (the same way Lucy and Ethel sold their Aunt Martha's Old-Fashioned Salad Dressing on TV) with a twenty-five dollar price tag on each piece. When Christopher Ford, the curator at The Mark Moore Gallery in Santa Monica, called to say he might possibly like to represent me and my blueprints, I was less than enthusiastic, I was numb. For many years, I'd knocked on gallery doors and applied for juried art shows: now, I was finally getting used to lying stagnant in my apartment, learning the joys of Prozac.

"Just send a check for twenty-five plus postage," I said. "I'll send you any drawing you want."

"Hello?" Christopher asked. "Do you know what I am offering you?"

This was my golden opportunity, the one every artist dreams of, and all I could think of was the best way to pack my station wagon for the big move to the desert so that, in my mind, my TV buddy, Ethel Mertz, wouldn't have to say to me, "Honestly, I could have arranged it better with a pitchfork."

I agreed to meet Christopher the following Monday



evening. I wasn't too excited because A) I didn't think anything would come of it, B) I would have to clean my apartment, and C) I would have to bathe. At this time, all I was doing was walking through my day job, coming home, and going to bed (alone). It was too hard to talk, much less take off my wristwatch. There was no food in my refrigerator because I didn't want anyone to know anything about me, even what I ate. I was losing my mind, and I knew it.

But I had been taught, in the best Southern tradition, to always offer your guest something to eat. So I ordered in a chopped salad and a container of iced tea, and served it on a plate when Christopher arrived. Later, he told me that this simple act was the turning point in his decision to represent me. God knows what he had thought he was going to meet that Monday night. But ever since then, Christopher and the Mark Moore Gallery have pulled out all the stops to present my work to the public. He has nurtured my art career and made me feel like I belong somewhere outside of a TV set.

This book is dedicated to him, with love and thanks.



## Introduction

by Frank DeCaro

.....

**T**here are a lot of things you should know about Mark Bennett, but none more salient than this: the magazines in his bathroom are forty years old. His furniture and his Los Angeles apartment are of that vintage too, and so is he—give or take a few months—but the magazines are the clincher. They are the mad little touch that is the key to his genius. As an artist, as a person, and especially as a TV viewer, he doesn't miss a thing; the more obscure the detail, the better. Who else would know where Mary Richards keeps her luggage (walk-in closet, top shelf, right-hand side) or the precise location of Granny Clampett's moonshine still (go to the cement pond and make a left)?

Knowing all this stuff is Mark Bennett's true art. The fantasy floor plans he has created, using information gleaned from hours of watching TV, are but the physical manifestation of his passion. They're the evidence that he is just like

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you and me and every other member of the Nick-at-Nite generation...but worse. We watch TV Land; Mark Bennett lived there. In the years before cable unleashed our viewing choices and before the VCR tamed them, Bennett was a broadcast teleholic. "If they were showing *Dick Van Dyke*, I'd call in sick," he remembers. "I used to run three red lights to get home to see *I Love Lucy*. That's a dangerous way to live."

And yet so many of us did and do.

Today, we define our lives not by actual experience, but by viewing experience. We learn by seeing, not doing. We are Armchair Everymen. Like Rosie O'Donnell—the poster child for random-access TV memory—we fill our brains with trivia, memorizing every “shlemiel” and “shlemazl” of the *Laverne & Shirley* theme song, reciting *Mary Tyler Moore* dialogue like scripture, and dressing like *The Brady Bunch*, but with better hair. These rituals bind us together as a generation. Our “in” jokes are shared by millions of baby boomers who know exactly where they were the night Mr. Grant took three helpings of Veal Prince Orloff and had to put two back.

Caught in a warp of collective nostalgia—“classic TV” that has been kitschified for our protection—we attempt to recapture the *Happy Days* of our youth. Of course, they weren't really happy days. But when we were watching TV in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, everything seemed right with the world. No problem was so big that it couldn't be handled in twenty-

six minutes. A hug from June Cleaver made everything OK. A love tap from Fonzie could fix any problem as easily as it fixed Arnold's jukebox.

Growing up in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Mark Bennett turned to television to cope with a childhood that wasn't nearly as perfect as the Beaver's. Between station breaks, he realized that he liked the families he met on TV—the Cleavers, the Clampetts, the Cunninghams—better than his own. And so these fictional characters became his family. Everything they did, he noted on whatever piece of paper was handy. Every shred of information he could catalog he pieced together into a world more hospitable than his own reality. “I figured if I knew enough about these people, I could become part of them.”

Instead, they became a part of him. Mike and Carol Brady's split-level contemporary, Herman and Lily Munster's decrepit Victorian, Gilligan and the Skipper's desert island hut—over the years Mark Bennett has lived in all of them. His drawings of these homes, as meticulously crafted as any draftsman's, were his secret, though. Sure, he sold them occasionally at art fairs, but he never really planned to share them with the world.

What would the world see in them anyway?

Bennett's goal was always to build a utopian neighborhood. “Instead of a Spanish Villa or a Ranch Modern, you could order a Samantha Stevens or a Mike and Carol Brady,”

he says. He wasn't kidding. He once went so far with the project as to make a balsa wood replica of Ward and June Cleaver's Pine Avenue house. That was at the University of Tennessee, where he studied art. "I wanted to be in that show, so I made the house," Bennett explains. It's still his favorite. When Mary Richards bought a yellow 1973 Mustang on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, so did Mark Bennett. "I really went over deep for her," he says. Things got so bad that he once arranged his furniture as if he were living a sitcom. "I said, 'The couch has to go here because the audience will be there!' My friends thought I was nuts."

There is a certain madness to this man. He does, after all, earn his living as a postman. His route—naturally—is in Beverly Hills. Then there is Bennett's other obsession—serial killers. Before moving to California, he studied for a time at New York University, but, as he tells it, his paintings of mass murders scared the entire faculty. On his way to California in a borrowed car, he zigzagged from the site of one famous slaying to another. If you ever meet him, ask him to tell you the story about his afternoon at Sharon Tate's house. As Hazel would say, "It's a doozie."

Ironically, Bennett's obsession with television is a thing of the past. "I'm living life now," he explains. In fact, the last show he watched was *The Golden Girls*, and that was only so he could draw their house. His latest art isn't about TV, at least not explicitly. It's a series of large-scale collages called

## Introduction

*The Effects of Fords on Barbara.* Begun in 1982 and planned as a series of 137 works, these colorful, narrative works explore one woman's fascination with automobiles. But really they explore Bennett's fascination with popular culture, his obsession with the idealized images of life depicted in vintage advertising and media. These images, as much as his floor plans (collected in *TV Sets: Fantasy Blueprints of Classic TV Homes*), show us lives shaped by television, lives like Bennett's, yours, or mine.







## Welcome to Your Sitcom Life

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**N**one of us is given a road map to living the perfect life. If you were like me, you relied on TV to learn the best way to sell lemonade as a kid, dress for the prom as a teen, even what to name your dog.

No, my mom did not wear pearls. My dad did not have a garage full of gardening tools. We didn't have sidewalks or corner mailboxes. The city didn't hose down the streets once a week. There was no late-model station wagon in the driveway and no one in my family wore black to funerals. That was all done on the twenty-inch, black-and-white Magnavox that was enshrined in our wood "entertainment center" with French provincial legs. To this magic box in our darkened living room in Chattanooga, Tennessee, I was glued from age five on.

Robby Douglas's loafers were never scuffed. Why were mine? How come when Kathy Anderson got a "D" on her report card, she went to her dad and talked about it, whereas I was compelled to stage an elaborate forgery scheme using carbon paper to endorse my mother's signature? Everyday events shown on television—like the terrifying Phys-Ed class—were always less cruel than the version I experienced in reality.

Why? Was it because they had better lighting? It just didn't seem fair that all the troubles in my life weren't resolved in twenty-two minutes. And I had no commercial breaks, either.

When other fourth-graders would say, "Hey, did you see *I Dream of Jeannie* last night?" my heart would ache. They might as well have been talking about my mother. "That's *my* show," I would think, not realizing that millions of other people watched *Jeannie* too.

See, I had personalized TV to the point of intimacy. Like the relationship Rhoda Morgenstern had with food, television was the first thing I loved that loved me back.

I know I'm not alone.

I'm not knocking it. I mean, who could sleep at night if Lucy Ricardo hadn't been kind enough to show us that she did fulfill her neighbor Mrs. Trumble's request for "My Sin" perfume on her trip to Europe? But real-life problems don't always come in nice, neat packages, easily gift-wrapped. Nothing prepares any of us for a death in the family, the loss of a

job, the breakup of a love affair, posting bond for “hanging paper” (writing bum checks), or the spilling of chocolate ice cream on that just-purchased white cotton jacket.

Where I come from, a “fur piece” was not a mink stole, but the distance between two widely divided points. The grass always seemed greener in Mayfield. Or Hilldale. Or New York. Anyplace but where I was. To sit, for hours and hours, year after year, in the glow of the TV did for me what light boxes do for depressed people in the Northwest during the rainy season. Or maybe electro-shock therapy.

I guess I was bored. Tennessee didn’t offer, so far as I could tell, the kind of life I wanted. If only I had stopped a moment to think about my actions, maybe I wouldn’t have spent half my high school years in the principal’s office, defending myself against trumped-up drug possession charges and bogus pay-telephone bomb threats to the school’s secretary.

Still, I’ve always felt that my years of television addiction should be put to some good use, that my loss could be someone else’s—maybe even your—gain. This book may not keep you from a life of crime, but it may lead you down an alternate path to a happy existence in the real world. Honestly, knowing that Frederick Hobart Mertz once lived in Steubenville, Ohio, will not impress a potential employer reading your job application. Believe me, I’ve tried it.

So, as the Partridge Family might croon, come along with me, a sort of Mary Margaret McMertz, if you will, of the TV

etiquette set, to a world that many have thought about but too few have traveled. If you are currently a TV addict like I was, or even if you just bought this book because all the true-crime thrillers or tell-alls were sold out, settle into your favorite Andy Taylor armchair, slip on an Aunt Bea bed jacket or Rob Petrie golf sweater, and learn how to present yourself to the world, not as a frump or a freak, but as:

- \* a character in real life
- \* a non-speaking townspeople
- \* or, if you are really obsessed, the star of your own real-life sitcom.

You don't have to be a full or even one-quarter doll. Looks aren't everything. All you need is your willingness to change, and to know your best angles for the imaginary camera that will be with you every waking moment from now until... well, until your life is canceled.

I can't promise that you will become a future Ted Baxter. That's okay. We all aren't meant to sit at a desk or wear a tie, and we can't all be Clampett rich. You should, however, take pride in your profession—strive to be the hottest go-go dancer of any strip joint in your city, or the most impeccable cafeteria worker for miles around. My grandmother often boasted about her high-profile position at a downtown department store, and she was “head of gift wrap.”

I'm not saying if you follow the principles laid out in this book that you will automatically be hoisted onto the back of

a shiny convertible for a ticker-tape parade down Fifth Avenue. I can't guarantee miracles. But if you are reading this book because all your ideas—in real life, I mean—have so far failed, then I proudly salute you.

## *Fantasy or Reality: The Choice Is Yours*

**W**e each have a role to play in this world. Have you not noticed that Archie Bunker always seemed to have some kind of dramatic part in his life, while Edith Bunker preferred to play a more passive role? Together, they created a dilemma for their son.

It's only too easy to what to do when you're faced with a crisis, but let's look at the Bunker situation. Edith, in her gentle way, chose to take in the kitchen while Archie for an outside world as "big as my" New York. I'm not saying you have to choose Archie or Edith's way. Your own gut feelings are important and should always be given the run of the show. The advantage of the no-run way is that it puts you in control, which is the only "free" handling with any guarantee that will

nothing was so common as to find a young man of  
means, it only stands for a certain amount of  
book learning as well as the ability to do things  
which is not to be despised. The view of the world  
which is held by most of us is that a young man  
who is not a success in his career is not a success  
at all. It is not a success at all.

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## Fantasy or Reality: The Choice Is Yours

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**W**e each have a role to play in this world. Have you noticed that Archie Bunker always seemed to have some kind of drama going in his life, while Edith Bunker preferred to take a more passive role? Together, they created a definite *sit* for their *com*.

You may not know what to do when wife-swappers come a'callin', but let's look at the Bunker solution: Edith, in her gentle way, chose to hide in the kitchen while Archie flat out told the couple to "hit the road." Now, I'm not saying you have to choose Archie or Edith's way. Your own gut feelings are important and should always be given the time of day. The advantage of the sitcom way is that it gives you an instant, visual, no-brainer "base" for dealing with any situation that arises.

## How to Live a Sitcom Life

Remember:

*You are your own prop master, set dresser, make-up, hair, and wardrobe mistress,*

and, more importantly,

*You choose your own director (usually yourself).*

I'm not going to Bible-thump here, but whether we like it or not, we all answer to someone, be it a boss, wife, husband, lover, grandmother, pimp, or God. It's not my business how you conduct your life. But I have learned that, in the scheme of things, what you put out there does come back to you.

When I was going through what I call my "Green period"—not bathing, sitting in the dark, etc. (diagnosed with severe depression), I loved to give away cherished things because I figured that if I gave them away to friends or co-workers, I'd always know where they were. There was so little that I cared about, it made me feel better to give to others instead of holding onto things. This proved a real growth tool for me because (now, don't gag) the more I gave, the better I felt, and the more good came my way.

I'm not gonna lie to you. I've never been in a gang, or been arrested, or convicted of a felony. I am the kid who was too scared not to turn in homework, no matter how haphazardly done. I don't know what it feels like to be homeless or handicapped.



Or, until recently, applauded.

Life can deal some stressful blows. I have had my share of trials and tribulations. I always dreamed of living the sitcom life because it seemed so much more orderly. I thought all it took was correct furniture arrangement and the right wardrobe.

In art school, I used to be in awe of a fellow student, an adult lady who was never, *ever* mussed. Even during a blizzard, when everyone trudged in all disheveled and wet, this woman would enter fluffed, pressed, and totally prepared in galoshes for her pumps, her artist's smock *sans* any paint splatters, with her hairdo of forty-five degree angle curls snugly encased in a winter hat.

I can't say for sure that she was already consciously living *a la* sitcom, but she was definitely on another plane of existence. The one time I had the nerve to dialogue with her, she gave me the key to her sitcom-ready lifestyle: "Do not procrastinate." Granted, it ain't quite as simple as these three little words make it sound, but there's truth to her creed:



*Your life's no dress rehearsal.*

So instead of talking about removing the two years worth of candy wrappers in the back seat of your car, why not just pull over at your favorite convenience store dumpster and toss them? (NOTE: Try to be subtle about this. I have experi-

## How to Live a Sitcom Life

enced first-hand the tongue lashing you will receive from the irate store owner if he/she sees you making the drop.) You can follow this same motto if you want to go back to college, get a divorce, finish the great American novel, or get a haircut. Even if you find out your decisions were wrong, at least you didn't sit on your hands.

Of course, it takes a lot of inner work, too. Outside you may have colored contact lenses, but your eyes will always be the color God gave you, and a bout with pinkeye can bring you down fast. How we respect ourselves and others is where some of us get lost.

So,

*Stop and think a moment before you throw that lead ashtray at a loved one,*  
and

*Ask yourself how you personally would feel if someone chose to throw something at you.*

You don't forget a lick on the head from a cast-iron skillet at five paces. Believe me, I've been there. It hurts and can create permanent motor skill damage. Pain may be a sign of growth, but sporting a RevereWare cookware emblem imprinted on your forehead is not only traumatic, but also embarrassing. You don't want *that* kind of pain on your conscience.

And, really, isn't it better to get rid of your rage by playing

tennis or feeding your azalea bushes than by beating another, usually smaller, person to a pulp? Hands down! Even if you can't talk to your housekeeper the way Carol Brady talked to Alice—and you really *want* to press charges for the disappearance of your silver service—just take a deep breath and survey the situation:

Maybe you didn't hire an "Alice" type?

Maybe you aren't being very "Mrs. B."?

If all constructive sitcom guidelines fail, and you are compelled to inflict bodily harm on your maid, remember, as a last resort you can always yell "cut" before you get too aggressive.

I have often thanked television for teaching me so much, although most of it was pretty distorted and confusing. When bourbon was my best friend, I would check in with my TV families on a daily basis. You see, all my life I felt I was in the wrong place at the wrong time and I didn't fit. No matter where I moved, that feeling of isolation and apartness would return. I never even considered taping these shows for a later viewing; that would have been cheating. No, I watched them as they came on, night after night, like private visits.

But while the family members on the screen were well-known to me—I could tell you all their birthplaces—they didn't know squat about me. I could observe and study and draw the whole lot, but I couldn't have a dialogue with any of

## How to Live a Sitcom Life

them. Talk about safe. It was failure-proof. There was no challenge, no goal, and no reward.

I've lived in Los Angeles going on twelve years now, and, up until last year, had never once been to Mann's Chinese Theatre, that landmark of Hollywood history, home of the hand- and footprints of the stars. To be honest with you, it was my love for alcohol that kept me at home. I had a hard time getting off the kitchen floor, much less to any local attractions. But going to the Chinese became a goal for me. Not too hard, but for a time, a real stretch due to my fear threshold.

If you want to begin living the sitcom life, just pick a date to start. My date was August 21, 1989. When I took the steps to stop self-medicating and to face my fears, incredible things started happening. I'm not saying that it was easy. But getting into action is imperative to reaching your goal.

Ask yourself:

- \* What is the most important unaccomplished thing in my life?
- \* What have I always wanted to do, but never had the nerve to try?

Be careful what you ask for: it just might happen.

It took seven years of therapy before I could get up the nerve to actually do something as simple as join a gym. I have always been afraid of people, places, and things. But through

practice—or “rehearsals,” if you will—I’ve learned that what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. To live “solo,” without the help of any chemicals, is hard but rewarding. I began to say “yes” to anything asked of me. I rented an art studio space. I went to Mann’s Chinese Theatre. Twice. And I began to show my art, in restaurants, bars, and city parks.

Up to this time, I’d never been successful at selling my artwork. So nothing prepared me for the media onslaught after I was taken on by my gallery: over fifty interviews in newspapers and on radio and television. (And now, a shameless word from our sponsor: *TV Sets*, a book of my sitcom blueprints, is also available from TV Books.)

Recently, my work was exhibited at The Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., and when I saw all the institutional marble and stone lions flanking the entrance, I was sure that, once again, I was out of place. You see, up until my sobriety, I’d always considered myself an insect, or at least a member of the insect family. So I nervously paid the three dollars to enter the Corcoran, and what a kick the curator and the staff got out of my buying a ticket to my own show. What can I say? That is who I am: a scared, forty-plus-year-old kid from Tennessee. It just wouldn’t be any use being high falutin’.

Still, I have to constantly pinch myself and thank God for all this attention. It’s been a dream come true. Yes, I did create the floor plans out of pain and loneliness as a child, but it wasn’t until I “gave up” and let go emotionally that I could

accept the drawings as art and myself as a valid human being. And even if it all ends tomorrow, I can proudly say that I did what I set out to do.

The lesson in all this?

*You don't have to be Richard Crenna to be a real McCoy.*

After reading this book, I promise you will know the correct way to conduct yourself in high Phyllis Pruett (of the Pruett's of South Hampton) style. This isn't brain surgery, or even advanced trig, but a step-by-step plan to rethink the way you are portrayed in the world. From the best way to do mundane chores, to the right half-room for a heart-to-heart talk, it's all here.

So: All quiet on the set!

Take One!

## Your Screen Test

.....

**L**iving your own sitcom life offers many rewards, but just like a bodybuilder, the grueling hours in the gym must take place before the posing panties come on. This may be a game for some, a religion for others; you decide how far you want to go. I was raised by a television, so it's second nature to me to synchronize my wristwatch when I hear a big explosion or blood-curdling scream, in the hope that I will be called to testify as a material witness before Perry Mason in Los Angeles Superior Court. Do you have a similar knee-jerk reaction? If so, then you are well on your way to living in sitcomland.

The basic formula is simply to follow what you already

know. It's like osmosis, a diffusion of what you have seen on the small screen your whole life that *can* really happen to you. And unless you've been a missionary in some obscure country for the last thirty years, then you've probably watched an American television show or two. If I throw out a current, well-known character name, and you reply, "Murphy *who?*" then I say you've been in the daylight too long. Double up on your re-runs—or, in your case, first runs—and take notes. There is no sadder word in the English language than "disqualified."

Let me make one thing perfectly clear: This is not about emulating a star or an actor on the tube who happens to be getting paid to portray a character. If that were your goal, you'd spend all day in dark glasses, running from photographers. This is a guidebook to incorporating the manners, beliefs, lifestyles, and/or personalities of the fictitious characters you most identify with into your own daily life. If you loved Mork from Ork but would rather not know intimate details about Robin Williams then you understand what I am talking about. We are all searching for someone to believe in, even though such exemplary figures don't usually exist offstage. But hey, that's what makes this quest so different!

Before we go forward, stop and take the simple test below. (There will be occasional pop quizzes in case you get confused about who you are, or who you would like to be....)



# T.V. QUIZ

INSTRUCTOR:

MARK BENNETT

COURSE:

HOW TO LIVE A SITCOM LIFE

LESSON:

## "FOLKS TO DEFINE YOURSELF BY"

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

GRADE

Circle one:

1. **Are you anal-retentive and have a slight overbite and an unnatural fear of used clothing?**

M: Barney Fife

F: Mary Richards

2. **Do you hate sports and children but love chocolate cake?**

M: George Wilson

F: Gladys Porter

3. **Are you ornery? Spoiled? Devoid of real emotion?**

M: Archie Bunker

F: Phyllis Lindstrom

4. **Are you young and stupid and can't carry a tune?**

M: Theodore "Beaver" Cleaver

F: Tracy Partridge

5. **Are you a liberal Democrat and a boozehound?**

M: Uncle Arthur

F: Cousin Maude Finlay

- 6. Are you a neurotic worrywart, suspicious and meddlesome?**  
M: Andrew "Squiggy" Squiggman  
F: Gladys Kravitz
- 7. Are you an endearing parent with the patience of a lobotomized Job?**  
M: Dr. Cliff Huxtable  
F: Marion Cunningham
- 8. Are you confrontational, physically fit, and spunky?**  
M: Bud or Sandy Ricks  
F: LaVerne DeFazio
- 9. Are you skinny, like to make people laugh, and live in Chicago?**  
M: James "J.J." Evans  
F: Carol Kester
- 10. Are you cool as a cucumber and live in black leather?**  
M: Arthur "Fonzie" Fonzarelli  
F: Agent 99
- 11. Are you semi-retired, happy to cook and clean, but otherwise grumpy?**  
M: Michael Francis "Bub" O'Casey  
F: Sophia Petrillo
- 12. Do you already live in suburbia and possess supernatural powers?**  
M: Grandpa Munster  
F: Samantha Stevens

“But,” you may be pouting to yourself, “I don’t look like any of these characters.” Well, there is still hope. I don’t care if you want to be Gilligan of Gilligan’s Island but are currently confined to Riker’s Island, *you can recreate yourself*. And for all you whiners out there who say you can barely manage your own lives, I say, *phooey*. What are you hanging onto your life for anyway?

We are not here to focus on mundane activities like diaper changing or shoe polishing. No, I want you to be able to put something in your daily journal besides, “Went to post office, bought stamp.” I realize that TV does not always deal with real life issues, so let’s examine a couple of real life scenarios, and their best TV sitcom solutions:

## **SCENARIO**

**1**

You’re in your favorite department store.

The store detective has handcuffed you, having accused you of stealing, and a small crowd gathers to gawk. It’s humiliating, very unattractive. You can’t very well wave for photographers with your hands bound behind you. And truth be told, you do have an expensive pair of sunglasses inside your top, with its scan bar code digging into your skin.

What do you feel is the best thing to do in this situation? You could:

- ✱ Get real loud, like Lt. Quinton McHale (*McHale’s Navy*) from PT Boat 73,

or

- \* Spew invectives and threaten to sue the store in a subtle, Dr. Niles Crane (*Frasier*) way,

or

- \* Start telling jokes to your “audience” *a la* Vivian Bagley (*The Lucy Show*).

The best bet? Why not pull a Daisy (Granny Clampett of *The Beverly Hillbillies*) Moses, and start clogging? It will both distract and entertain the mob while you gyrate the stolen merchandise right out of your clothes. Who cares if the merchandise gets scratched, at least it's not on your person. Remember, possession is nine-tenths of the law.

More importantly: Who knows which bemused shopper might be a Hollywood talent scout who “caught your act, admired your spunk,” and wants to sign you to star in your own series. It could happen. I mean, just look at Jenny McCarthy.

## SCENARIO

2

You are enjoying an intimate evening of bondage and discipline. Suddenly, your sexual partner goes out, leaving you gagged and bound to a chair. He/she alleged that he/she is just running to the corner store for more whipped cream, but after twelve hours you *really* need to pee. Ask yourself: What TV character would best know what to do in this touchy predicament? Should you:

- \* Try that annoying “honking” sound that Felix Unger

(*The Odd Couple*) was famous for, in hopes of alerting the neighbors?

or

❖ Go into a crying jag in your best Chrissy Snow (of *Three's Company*) way, and be found dead two days later?

No, let's be smart about this. Think hard. Who from Sitcomland could come to the rescue in our heads?

Captain Barney Miller of New York City's Twelfth Precinct, natch! He'd just hobble right over to the telephone (in a seated position, of course), lean his weight against the telephone table to knock the receiver off its cradle, and using his nose, dial for help. And after the paramedics had untied him, and he'd had a moment to freshen up, he'd go straight back to the boys at the precinct (think your work place) and relate how the advent of push-button dialing saved his life. No sweat.

## SCENARIO

3

Are you just *itching* to ring the doorbell of a friend you haven't seen in twenty years?

Well, whatever you do, *don't* call first. It's simply not done in Sitcomland. Show up unannounced and impeccably dressed. And make sure you arrive around cocktail time.

## NOTE

If you happen to be the recipient of such a guest, it is mandatory that you, too, be impeccably dressed, sporting, say, a Hermes scarf, with a roast simmering in the oven. If you aren't a cook, don't worry; your surprise guest really

should take you out to dinner anyway. If not, tell him/her you've got a headache and lock the door upon his/her exit.

The point I'm trying to get at is: it's more powerful to open the door to your home while arranging flowers on the dining room table than it is to receive your guest while eating chili from the can in your underwear.

### SCENARIO

4

Is there someone in your life, at your job, or at school, who is making your life an absolute living hell? Watch every "bully" episode from your television archives to get the best answer to that problem. Almost any past sitcom featuring children—*Family Affair*, *Leave It to Beaver*, *The Brady Bunch*—offers a plot line about a bully. *The Andy Griffith Show* offered episodes of a punk picking on Opie Taylor, and an adult bully harassing Barney Fife. Take your pick. If you've taken Psych 101, you already know that a bully has his—or, yes, her; just think of Carla Tortelli (of *Cheers*)—own set of emotional difficulties, but that's not your concern. Your goal is to live a peaceful life, not to solve the bully's problems. Bully episodes may all have the same ending (the star either clobbers the bully or is clobbered but vindicated by the bully or makes the bully his friend), but you can create your own real-life scenario.

note

Do not, under any circumstances, allow anyone to knock your teeth out. Unless, of course, you're into that.

## Your Pilot

.....

**A**ndy Warhol was right when he said everyone has fifteen minutes of fame (though now, with inflation, it's more like five minutes).

Even if you think your life is less than sitcom perfect, that doesn't mean you can't be spotlighted for the joy you really are. Do you have a noticeable infirmity, a low IQ, a conspicuous lack of talent? Is there a dishrag in your kitchen sink with more personality than you have? Well, I say that if you are willing to be "showcased," then you are worthy of an existence that most of us only see on the tube. "Showcasing" means allowing an imaginary spotlight to shine on you. Yes, at all times.

Years ago, when I was a wee teen, my grandmother started calling me "Markie," and I didn't take to it at first. I thought

it sounded baby-ish and, God forbid, feminine. But once I got “Markie” scripted on a gold-plated ID bracelet at McClellan’s Dime Store, my life began to change. Now, when I leaned back and tipped over the chair at teen choir rehearsal, I was no longer Mark, clumsy geek spaz who couldn’t get a prom date, but Mark-*ee*, zany prankster. Every class needs a clown. That became my role.

Yes, if you allow your loved ones to dump a persona on you—by giving you a jazzy new moniker (your initials perhaps) or by forcing an unexpected new look on you—then it’s up to you to “hear the train a’comin’” and jump on board, grab the proverbial bull horns and run with ‘em. (I am not talking about stripping on a table top at your cousin’s next wedding. This is not about becoming a show-*off*.)

But first, you need loved ones. Alice had Flo; Hawkeye had Trapper John; Wilbur Post had Roger Addison; Kip (Buffy) had Henry (Hildegarde). Everybody needs a buddy. Buddies are especially useful if they are within close physical proximity, like a co-worker or a neighbor—someone who will remove the “kick me here” sign taped to your backside, or will honestly tell you when your hair is doing the hucklebuck.

I had always thumbed my nose at any programs—like church, bingo, Shriners, sewing circles, the twelve-step routine—where social skills, or at least the need for social interaction, was required. I thought anyone who wanted to share themselves or their lives with others was victim to the dirtiest



four-letter word in the English language: weak. I truly believed that personal facts, or secrets, were not to be taken to the local swap meet, but to the grave. Unfortunately, if they are not dealt with, secrets will take *you* to the grave.

Allowing people, or at least one person, to come into your life is not only helpful but also therapeutic. We all put on the brakes when we feel that we are being “leaned on” (like letting others trap you into duties such as car service or money lending), but if you never give to others, or if you place boundaries on your own innate good nature, then you can’t expect friend-candidates to come beating on your door. There was a time when I would sit as far away from other people as possible in public situations. Others probably labeled me “aloof,” but the truth was I felt like I had cooties.

It wasn’t until I was willing to face my own demons, to admit to myself and others that I was human—and that alcohol was but a symptom of my problems—that I was able to allow people in. As Lucy Carmichael also learned the hard way:



*Face your fear and it will disappear.*

It wasn’t other people who were the root of my problem; it was my own inability to accept myself, or others. But admitting weakness can be a strength. If you have no friends (and no substance abuse problems), then do as Ernest T. Bass did:

travel to Mayberry, North Carolina, join Mrs. Wiley's Social Club, where eligible men and women mix, and mingle. Any gathering where like-minded people meet—bowling, hiking, car clubs—falls under the category I call “friendship clubs.”



*Don't disqualify your “kin” from being part of your sitcom life.*

Family members may not be your buddies, but they are often ripe with comedic possibilities. Blood relatives can create enough hi-jinx to prepare you for a rubber room.

For example, my parents were musical directors of our church. Our family activities revolved around tent revivals and gospel sing-alongs and socializing with people of like faith. You could have named our family show *The Hallelujah Chorus*. As a child, I found this all pretty corny, and dreamed of a life where nobody sang in public or drove anything but a late-model convertible like photographer Bob Collins of *Love That Bob*. I was even jealous of a classmate who lived with his divorced, bottle-blond mom in a high-rise apartment, and constantly chastised myself with “How come *he* gets all the breaks?”

If I had only fallen in line with my parent's wishes, I could be hobnobbing right now with The Fleetwood Brothers or The Gaither Trio. But who knew? Try to pinpoint a theme running through your bloodline. Hopefully, there will be

enough fun things in your scenario to make your life a comedy. Especially on weekends.

Remember: Herman Munster and Grandpa raced their customized hot rods in Mockingbird Heights on weekends, and the whole family enjoyed it. *Together.*



## Casting

.....

**O**kay, listen up. As the star of your own real-life sitcom, you should start referring to family members, spouses, and longtime companions as “cast members.” That may sound harsh, but be aware that you are merely a “cast member” in their lives, too. We are often “guest stars” in other people’s lives. You may be of medium height, medium build—*perfect* for the wardrobe mistress—with a jawline to match Sam Malone’s (*Cheers*), but as far as that homely, conservative relative down the street is concerned, a “very special guest” star has your name on it.

Remember: No matter how high or how low our station in life is, we all deserve a spotlight now and then. That water-wrinkled old washer woman living in the building next door may be nameless, but when she takes communion at church,

dragging her mop and pail, she automatically gets top billing in my book under “eccentric lady.”

Think about it. Just who would Colonel Robert Hogan be without Louis LeBeau, Newkirk, Carter, and Kinchloe?

From now on, your mate is a “costar.” Your siblings or children are “supporting cast.” Your mother or grandmother? “Special guest star.” A neighbor who drops in occasionally to complain or snoop, a recurring nudge in your TV life, falls under “supporting cast.”

If there is a real VIP in your life—let’s say you bump into “the Governor and J.J.,” or are granted a private audience with the Pope—then that luminary is a “Very Special Guest Star.”

Start referring to each day as an “episode.” When you are not participating in sitcom life, you can always say you are on “hiatus” (see later chapter). If you want to take a break from your highly structured, highly successful sitcom life, you can, like most fruits, be “out of season.” Your “season” will run the school year, fall (September) to summer (June).

As star, you are entitled to keep your first name, but a fictitious last name is mandatory. For example, Don Rickles became “Don Robinson,” Sally Field was “Sally Burton,” Stubby Kaye passed as “Stubby Wilson,” Donna Reed as “Donna

Stone,” Danny Thomas was “Danny Williams,” and James Stewart was a.k.a. “Prof. James K. Howard.” This could prove very confusing while filing your income tax, but the mix-ups it will cause are perfect sitcom fodder.

Have a theme for your show. Are you a “klutz?” Are your children delinquents? Does your job as a cannoli-stuffer play a large part in your social life? Recurring themes can be as simple as “I have too many kids for too small a house,” “My car never starts,” “Hamburgers give me gas,” or “How come my boyfriend’s never in the mood when I am?”

Remember, as star of your own show, you must be outgoing and personable. Strike up conversations with strangers at the carwash. Don’t stand in the shadows wearing a Walkman. Just be sure to keep your sitcom life lively. God forbid you should “get canceled.”





## Your Backdrop

.....

**A**s a kid, when I first saw how the town of Mayfield was laid out, and how the Cleaver family lived happily ever after within their pretty city limits, I became disillusioned with my own neighborhood. The Cleavers enjoyed two fabulous addresses, on Grant and on Pine Avenues respectively, and at no time was there not an ice cream vendor ringing his bell, or a white-gloved traffic officer directing some late-model, highly-polished cars at a four-way intersection.

Mayfield began to fascinate me. So did Hillsdale, Hilldale, Springfield, Mockingbird Heights, Bryant Park.... These towns all had quaint houses, quainter shops, and the whisper of a lush green park around every corner. My young mind believed that the reason no one on these shows ever mentioned

their state was for fear everyone in the U.S.A. would flock there to live, thus ruining the idyllic fabulousness.

By the time the seventies rolled around, real towns were common on TV: Names like “Minneapolis” and “Milwaukee” conjured up whole new, accessible images. I could now sit and fantasize about what Mary, Lester, Rose, and Pearl were doing in the here and now, somewhere in Washington, D.C. Were they in apartment 3K of the “227” building, bundling up for the trek out in a snowstorm? Or were they celebrating the rites of spring on the stoop, gossiping about frisky neighbor Sandra Clarke?

You may be asking yourself, “Doesn’t this jerk know that all those shows were shot on backlots and soundstages in Hollywood and the San Fernando Valley, where it rarely rains and there is high-tech, corporate control over the chaos of daily life?”

Yes, I do. Thank you. But at no time in my life—except maybe for a few minutes during the 1994 Northridge earthquake—did I feel I had no control over *my* environment. For example, my current residence is a block away from a “village” that sort of resembles a San Pueblo (the *Partridge Family* hometown). Okay, maybe it is more of a bus-and-truck San Pueblo, but it still covers all the bases: sidewalks, trees, a park, a movie theatre, coffee shop, post office, boutiques, and enough restaurants to please any ethnic tastebud. There are meter maids, cross-town bus routes, and a grocery store.

And everything is within walking distance.

This last point has been most significant in fulfilling my Mary Richards fixation. You know, the chance to dress in a terrific-looking outfit and pass a crossing guard surrounded by a group of school children while carrying one bag of groceries. My idea of perfection.

Speaking of which, I also have a small, one-of-a-kind apartment—with a super view—in a safe part of the city. Delivery of Chinese food comes in those neat little square white boxes.

“But,” you may be thinking, “what if I don’t live in a Cosmos and Henrietta Topper (*Topper*) type of neighborhood?” No sweat. Let’s break it down into different settings. Don’t think just because you live in the sticks, that you can’t achieve the sitcom lifestyle. Simply choose the TV neighborhood closest to your real-life locale, and take it from there.

Here we go!

## Urban Modest

Is your neighborhood referred to as Hoodlum Heights? Does it fall under the heading “Ramshackle Row”? Don’t fret. Blue-collar life doesn’t have to be bleak. If your humble abode doesn’t scream “successful,” it can at least whisper “trying real hard.” Laverne DeFazio and Shirley Finney were both working class and they always had a blast. Employed at Shotz

Brewery and part-time at The Pizza Bowl, they always managed to pay their rent.



Here are some helpful hints for validating your own sub-standard lifestyle:

- \* Decorate your home like the Kramdens did, with plenty of low-end used furniture from your local thrift store or Salvation Army.
- \* Follow Edith Bunker's lead and have a free-for-all with knickknacks and kitchen cozies.
- \* So you can't afford a membership at the swank tennis club: Do like Rhoda and Mary did, and climb the fence at the local high school.
- \* Are you stumped on what to wear? Check in with Brooklyn's own Vinnie Barbarino or Arnold Horshack (*Welcome Back, Kotter*).
- \* If you live in a basement apartment that floods, throw *Titanic* parties.
- \* If your two main objectives in life are to own a wide-screen TV and warm up a couch, avoid becoming the size of a couch by volunteering to run the raffle down at St. Bernadette's, or organize field trips to the county jail (lots of colorful "supporting cast" there).
- \* If you wear a uniform to work, hang your garment, no matter what company, over your shoulder when walking home from the cleaners.

- \* No car? Well, wear your bus pass proudly on your lapel.
- \* *You'll* never have a debutante ball, so just go ahead and throw your own "coming out" party at the local Knights of Columbus hall or titty bar.
- \* You don't pick your kids up from the pool in a top-of-the-line sports utility vehicle? Get over it! Pick 'em up in that van you hot-wired a few moments ago, and be proud of it (chances are the kids like it better that way).
- \* Chew Double Bubble (for the really big bubbles) and get a toe ring.
- \* When introduced, always say, "nice to meet'cha."
- \* Always refer to a wastepaper basket as a "trash pail."
- \* Just because you bleach your bangs doesn't mean you don't have the same rights as anyone else.

It doesn't matter what your budget is. People with major trust funds are not necessarily happier people. It takes a real self-awareness to know it's okay to wear cutoffs to the mall, or to collect unemployment because you never got over that bad haircut and dropped out of school in the eighth grade.

As urban trash, your address must be a numbered street, a single name street, or a "boulevard" or "parkway." And please, include your apartment number on all correspondence.

## Hinterland Hoedown

If you live in vast open spaces, with little or no visual stimulation—beyond the blue sky, white clouds, mountains, and/or wildlife—then you must take it upon yourself to create some. If you're a farmer and bashful about it, shuck the shyness and go whole hog into hayseed heaven:

- \* Even if your farm has a major freeway running through it, you give it a name like "Old Billy Goat Hill" or "Stumpwater Estates."
- \* One or more disabled automobiles must be visible on the property at all times.
- \* Your home can be a shanty or a twenty-room mansion; it's nothing without a front porch with a swing.
- \* If the livestock is hidden out back, pull the whole menagerie into the front yard. This way the casual visitor will not be shocked when they see Maw dipping snuff.
- \* It doesn't matter that you're an authority on Swedish crystal. If your home setting resembles "Green Acres," bone up on the *Farmer's Almanac*, learn to drive a stick-shift pick-up, and shop exclusively at the finest dry good stores ("Hey, Sam, throw in a pair of house dresses with that fifty pound sack of feed!")
- \* Short of writing FARMER across your forehead, play up the corncob pipe, find a pair of overalls, and take up twig chewing.
- \* Start cutting your toenails with hedge clippers.

- \* So what if Grandpappy lost his teeth out in the north forty. Plan a picnic with all your friends and neighbors to find them.
- \* Learn to call square dances, and sprinkle your dialogue with “howdy.”
- \* It’s “ain’t,” not “am not.”
- \* Train yourself to call a paper sack a “poke.”
- \* Toughen up your feet by walking barefoot on hot asphalt.

If you don’t have a sister who ropes cattle, you can still keep up your corn-fed façade by entering a local spelling bee or winning a blue ribbon for an apple pie your grandma made. Your street address must read “rural route” with number, or facsimile—or be on a road with the required minimum of four words, as in “Old Goat Turd Road.”

But please, do not, under *any* circumstances, marry a first cousin.

## **Pampered Pastures**

If you are of the privileged set, then you have no excuse *not* to live a sitcom life. In fact, you are obligated to do so. You can even afford to be “eccentric.”

- \* Your home should have a minimum of two (preferably more) floors, nestled within a grove of trucked-in, overpriced, mature, non-indigenous trees. You make your home in Anchorage, Alaska? I hope you’ve got crepe myrtles around that fishing pond.

## How to Live a Sitcom Life

- \* A starburst design is mandatory on all closet doors.
- \* A quaint brook running through your side yard is always nice.
- \* You must have several garages, a motor court for guest parking, and enough hedges to keep a set of Japanese gardeners trimming from sunup to sundown.
- \* Acquire friends with names like Binkie, BoBo, and Duncan, or date girls named Muffin or Bitsy.
- \* Hang out in Don Loper resort-wear, even if you are just scratching your ass at home.
- \* Be sure to play up a "Cynthia Fenwick" persona—oh, you remember Cynthia, that snooty Beverly Hills deb who got palsy with Miss Elly Mae Clampett at "the Willows," that exclusive finishing school—and have your own fun-fur sweatshirt custom-made.

Never feel guilty about living so high on the hog while some children in Mayberry need winter coats. Think only in terms of interior decoration or the next fashion creation from Paris. For the expression "going to hell in a hand (*blank*)" your choice for the blank is "handbag."

Your street address should be numbered with a single digit, as in Two Park Avenue, or have a distinctive name like "Skyline Drive" or "Rue de Neiman Marcus."

Oh, and get a maid. And if her name isn't Mrs. Haver-sham, change it.



## Your New Set

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**T**hink of your home as the “anchor” of your sitcom life. The living room or den will probably be the “base,” with a kitchen, bedroom, or patio acting as a “swing” set. Your home is your castle and you have three choices for household smells:

- A:** sterile and reeking of Lysol, like the Mrs. Livingston-kept Corbett apartment (*The Courtship of Eddie's Father*);
  - B:** earthy, with the scent of a sheepdog, mud, carpet cleaner, laundry detergent, plastic plants, home-cooked spaghetti sauce, and Glade air freshener, like James and Joan Nash's (*Please Don't Eat the Daisies*) digs; and
  - C:** smoky and liquor-ridden, like Ralph and Alice Kramden's (*The Honeymooners*) abode in Brooklyn, New York.
- Your own unique lifestyle will dictate your personal whiff.

Most of the action in your life will take place in one room or a series of adjacent rooms. If the family room, or den, is where most of the “cast” gathers, then designate it for your imaginary three-camera set-up. Do you have a “dead (a windowed or fireplaced) wall”? Turn your couch to face this spot. Establish where you want your audience to be, and stick with it. Arrange your furniture like a stage set. Basically, you don’t want the world to see only the back of your head.

**note** Although a television in your home should be heard and not seen, an easy way to establish where your audience is to let your television screen double as the camera. Most homes are already set up with furniture arranged prominently around the tube. This will help you stay in character even when no one else is around.

Of course, kitchens and dining areas are paramount to TV life. Try to design yours so that they all work as part of your main “set”—divided, one hopes, by a stylish-yet-utilitarian countertop (with shutters), rather than being in separate cozy-but-cramped rooms that will require cutting to a whole ’nother camera set-up in the middle of a meal. This way your “cast”/family can do several tasks at once and still keep the snappy dialogue going.

For example, a “lead” (say, your mother) can be cutting up vegetables for a salad at a sideboard, while a “supporting cast” member (your younger brother) swivels on a bar stool

at the kitchen counter, nibbling on a carrot stick, while yet another supporting player (your older sister, maybe) plays a mean game of solitaire at the dining room table. What are they all talking about? I dunno. Maybe how to break the news to you when you get home from work that a methadone clinic's just opened up right across the street?

I'm not gonna preach here, but living areas should be kept neat and orderly, even down to Fido's dog bed. Keep those sofa pillows plumped at all times. Make sure all refrigerated foods are lined up on the shelves in the icebox. Never leave anything, except a folded newspaper *at most*, on any tabletop. Remember, there's no "prop person" hiding in your closet, waiting to pop out and vacuum the rug for you.

Speaking of which, trashcans should be top-of-the-line and spotless *at all times*. There is no such thing as "wet garbage" in TV land. Your take-out trash should look as neat as your bring-home groceries. Yes, this would be labeled a "chore," but I am including it here since taking out the rubbish is usually saved for a "heart-to-heart" conversation between two cast members. There should never be drippy, greasy, or pilfered-through refuse, a problem that can easily be eradicated by using your trusty kitchen garbage disposal.

Many a good "episode" can turn on a garbage disposal, like the time that Laura Petrie sent the Petrie family brooch—a map of the United States in fourteen karat gold, with pre-

cious stones designating the cities where each family member lived—down the drain. If you don't have one, get one. (A garbage disposal, not a brooch.) Fast. The more appliances your kitchen has, the more situations you can "write."

### The Kitchen

This is where canned goods are displayed in rows uniform enough to make Muffy Tupperman (*Square Pegs*) proud. Where gleaming, brand-new-clean pots and pans are arranged symmetrically. Where the counters are so spic 'n' span that there's not a bacterium in sight. *No* stacks of outstanding bills. *No* broken or mismatched utensils. Keep your counters hosed down and fully sanitized to avoid any dirty ant infiltration or drop-ins from the health inspector. Who said anything about cooking? Your sitcom kitchen should make a model home cover photo.

Refrigerators: Every egg insert must be filled, every door shelf needs a bumper crop of bottled beverages lined up like soldiers in an infantry, every condiment has to be available on a lower shelf. This is especially necessary for large households of two or more people, including extended families, house mates, charming-but-mysterious foreign exchange students, or whatever.

If you are single and live alone, a great look is an under-

the-counter demi-refrigerator, its contents at all times being half-a-lemon and a light bulb.

As for food *shopping*, you should only trade at high-end stores with piped-in music, elaborate displays, and a gourmet deli. Make it easy on yourself. Comparison shopping? Forget it. Remember: forays to the market are just a small part of your weekly twenty-two minutes of airtime. Go for whichever item is the most expensive and has the most attractive packaging. If you are stumped by two items of equal quality, follow the simple credo, "If it costs more, it has to be better."

Always ask for paper bags, double-strength. It makes a nice visual to cuff the top of your brown bag. I don't know if it makes the bag stronger or if it just looks terrific, but many shoppers in Sitcomland practice this nifty method of sack toting.

## **The Bedroom**

Bedrooms are an integral, if secondary, part of your sitcom home. How many times have we seen TV-intimate conversations going on at bedtime, or those funny bits caused by a bump-in-the-night?

One rule: For married couples, a standard or queen-size bed *must* be flanked by two matching end tables with matching lamps. After all, many of us still dream of the proverbial

suburban home with two kids and two cars in a double garage. If this is you, then bone up on shows like *Make Room for Daddy* and *The Bob Newhart Show*. Both boast pristine bedrooms, safe havens for a chaste, viral-free peck on the lips before lights out, with one nightstand for his glasses and one for her cold cream. Granted, TV marrieds of yore settled for twin beds. I do agree that in these days of Ellen and Anne, that may be a bit extreme—unless, of course, you really don't like sleeping with your mate. Just be sure, if you do go this route, that the headboards match.

Of course, if you happen to be single and live sparsely on a tight budget, it's no sin to live in a single room or studio. Brenda Morgenstern made her New York City digs the rage of the seventies. She made her sensible flat quaint and inviting without even including a couch.

Keep in mind:

- \* Unless you are going for a Dan and Roseanne Conner look, there is no reason for multiple afghans, a rebel flag above your bed, or incense burners anywhere on the premises.
- \* Your dwelling doesn't have to be the Taj Mahal (which, after all, was really just a first-class crypt).
- \* If you are a pack rat and you *prefer* a cluttered look, re-view *Sanford & Son* and decorate accordingly.
- \* If your real life is that of a college co-ed, try to recreate

your very own “Eastland School for Girls” (*Facts of Life*) dorm set.

Remember, you are the one who has to live in it.

## **The Bath**

It is perfectly okay to take time out of your half-hour-minus-commercials for a luxurious bubble bath or a long, languid shower. Just make sure the soap and/or steam covers any parts of your body that could get you into trouble (and if you can't, use a body double). Fortify yourself with large, thirsty towels, preferably white. Vanities with sinks are perfect for hairless growing boys learning to shave or nubile girls applying make-up. Terry-cloth bathrobes are great for keeping your censors at bay.

Acceptable bathroom activities include:

- \* hair brushing, cutting, and blow-drying;
- \* teeth scrubbing;
- \* acne cream applying;
- \* funny face making;
- \* conversations with yourself.

Warning: absolutely no sexual activity in the shower, tub—or, if you are a rich Euro-eccentric, on the bidet—please. Such scenes are the sole and exclusive property of primetime soaps. (No solo activity, either, unless you've bet your friends you won't.)

Unfortunately, there is little room in your sitcom life for a toilet. We've heard Archie Bunker's toilet and Jerry Seinfeld dropped a toothbrush in his. But there really is no hard or fast rule on this. I would suggest, since toilets usually don't figure prominently in televisionland, that you use the semi-convenient Texaco gas station down the block. Or simply hold it.

### The Garage

As any space in your home can be the scene for dialogue, think of your garage as a possible set option, too. Some necessities:

- \* Must contain pegboard paneling with shiny tools and gardening equipment all highly polished, and an automatic garage-door-opening-apparatus bolted proudly into the cross-beam.
- \* You don't actually *use* this stuff; you hire a gardener and tell him to bring his own equipment.
- \* Be sure to dust off your virgin lawnmower weekly.
- \* Garage should remain empty when your sedan isn't sleeping, and off-limits to squatters and junkies. Open to the public for rummage sales only.



## Lastly . . .

A service porch is not only nice to have, it's sitcom-useful, especially with matching washer and dryer hook-ups and a glistening linoleum floor that looks like it was lifted from Sue Ann Nivens' "Happy Homemaker" kitchen. This room is exclusively for interacting with bit players like the mailman, gasman, paperboy, and exterminator. Learn all their names, and tip generously at holiday time. You tell me if an amusing Carlton-the-doorman (*Rhoda*) isn't worth a crisp twenty on his birthday.

This is the perfect place for "the help" to gossip while ironing, folding laundry, or sneaking a nip from that just-opened bottle of sherry. Under no circumstances is it ever to be converted into a kiddie room, dog kennel, or cell for your mother-in-law.



## The Grass Is Always Greener on TV

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**I**f you've got a home with a yard to work in, then you should have a lawn to rival Steve and Barbara Douglas's North Hollywood Dutch Colonial.

Excuse me, *what* was that? You say you never saw Barbara or Steve, or even Uncle Charlie, tending to the hedges on their property? Well ponder this: If you are not going to tend to your garden, then what excuse will you have for donning a pair of cotton gardening gloves and pushing a pristine red wheelbarrow around your property? *Everyone* in sitcomland does this.

If you have kids, yardwork is the perfect chore for them to earn spending money. Keith Partridge could never have main-

tained his blow-shag if Shirley had done the yard herself. Keith even got side jobs from neighbors, like Mr. Loomis, to help pay for all those matching velour show outfits his family wore on tour.

You don't have a green thumb? Do what the crew on the backlot does: roll out the AstroTurf, staple on the fake greenery, and call it a day. (There's always green spray paint.)

**RULE ONE:** Don't walk on the grass. Always use the sidewalk or walkway. This will eliminate the well-worn path look and keep those shoes showroom-new.

**RULE TWO:** You may not have a white picket fence around your property but someone in your neighborhood should. Start a community chest to finance the building of at least two enclosed yards of whitewashed wood, and some walls of photogenic hedging.

**RULE THREE:** Don't clutter up concrete surfaces with a hodgepodge of potted plants. There should be no more than two pots on either side of a front door and even then, the pots must match and display identical plant specimens.

**RULE FOUR:** If you have a porch, a trellis of climbing vine is a must. This is mandatory for the kiss goodnight for your budding high-school-student offspring. Obviously, a porch light is also recommended. You don't want any teenage pregnancies on your show.

**RULE FIVE:** You will not have time to plant a vegetable garden. Most of your free time will be spent tending to the hedges or

forming topiary to accent your exterior. Leave the tomatoes and snap beans for the boys at Del Monte.

**RULE SIX:** Don't bring in statuary that will make mowing the lawn a collision course. Refrain from purchasing cuddly yard figurines of any kind. Your house is the focal point of your address, not the plastic squirrels lined up like the three wise men in a nativity scene. And unless your home has twenty-seven rooms, do not "name" your house. (P.S. The only place your family name should appear is on the mailbox.)

**RULE SEVEN:** Striped awnings are big in TV land, scalloped edges and tassels a plus. No air conditioners protruding from any front windows, please.

**RULE EIGHT:** You must remember that there will be several "establishing shots" of your house. If you are in the market for a home, it is very important that it have curb appeal. A home of original intent is your best bet. Don't slap on a second-story rental apartment, convert your humble garage into an upholstery shop, or rip out the original casement windows in favor of metal sliders bought at the discount builder's club. You say you love to remodel? Fine. Just do it like a first grade coloring book: within the lines of good taste.

**RULE NINE:** Most TV homes are quaint Dutch colonial jobs. I'm not saying you have to commit to a knotty pine-paneled den just because Ozzie Nelson had one. Go modern, see if I care. But don't try to convert your original Spanish villa into a Japanese pagoda. It will be a costly mistake. Buying

something with a ghost included (like Carolyn Muir of Schooner Bay did) is preferable to a new roof with a six-month guarantee.

**RULE TEN:** Do not stuff, clutter, or pack your home full of odd or uneven styles of furniture just because you can't part with anything. I realize that the current crop of TV shows feature a lived-in look, with well-worn chairs and afghans thrown over anything that doesn't move, but please, show *some* restraint.

If you can't part with anything, have a neighbor hold your yard sale for half the profits and leave town for the weekend. If you simply will not part with the macramé plant holder Aunt Sunshine made for you in 1971, I say wad it up in a drawer and dig it out only when she visits.

**RULE ELEVEN:** If you have the luxury of a large, standup attic or cellar, dress it accordingly with picture frames, hat boxes, a raccoon coat, a faded high school or college pennant, an old trunk full of vintage clothes, and a brass headboard and footrail. Don't ask me what to do with this stuff when your hormonal teen son or daughter decides to convert the attic into their "pad." If your home gets so crowded that every available storage area has been converted into "living quarters" for them, then pray that one of them does get pregnant and runs away from home.

**RULE TWELVE:** Many a classic episode revolves around Halloween or Thanksgiving. You *must* decorate. When I owned

a home, I'd go hog wild during holiday time, even when I couldn't pay the light bill. One year I had Santa, his sleigh, and all the reindeer in the yard, backdropped by thousands of white lights encased in six hundred feet of fake greenery, swathed over every eve and dormer. My neighbors used to come outside to watch and just shake their heads. Halloween was no different with a sixteen-member jack-o-lantern family, all in custom-made witch hats, all electrified and wired for sound.

Granted, I'm no stranger to a hot glue or staple gun. Crafts may not be your forte, in which case delegate the holiday decorating to someone you trust.



Hanging a tawdry seasonal flag by the front door does not constitute decorating, and if you say it does, you are a liar.

**RULE THIRTEEN:** A good rule for avoiding clutter is: for everything new, trash something old.

This rule I follow in my own home, a small modern apartment in the Los Feliz section of Hollywood. Shall I describe it for you? It's a sweet one-bedroom, untouched since its inception in 1956, that only had one tenant before me. With walls of glass and high ceilings with exposed beams, apartment #23 is furnished with mid-century pieces to match its heyday, Berber carpeting, vintage appliances, and a bathroom of pink Franciscan star-burst pattern tiles. All in just about six hundred square feet of living space. The whole complex sur-

rounds a *Melrose Place*-ish swimming pool. Being on an upper level, I get a spectacular view of the Griffith Park Observatory and the mountain range behind it.

I have no deadbolt lock on my front door, there are no riot gates or entry buzzers. A Fuller Brush man comes around door to door. (I keep my television hidden inside a credenza and my stereo equipment concealed inside a linen closet.)

My domestic joys are having small dinner parties, cards with the boys on Friday nights, and upgrading to better designer furniture whenever a deal comes along. I like things simple; with limited space, it's easier and more economical to have one good lamp over three beat-up ones.



## Moving

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**U**nfortunately, at least once in every sitcom there is “moving day,” that episode of upheaval that brings about a fresh new set. Despite the transitional nature of this event, never fear: living in an undecorated dwelling can be highly photogenic if you follow these guidelines:

**A:** Designate one outfit to be worn: sweat shirt, blue jeans, and moccasins are good. Do not confuse with Ann Romano’s (*One Day at a Time*) identical look that was worn everyday of her Indianapolis, Indiana, life.

**B:** Avoid packing your “take” items in torn, tattered, mildewed half-crates and refrigerator boxes from the dumpster behind the local Jubilee City or Clown Mart. Clean, sturdy, store-bought boxes look better on camera.

NOTE: Big, crinkly, black garbage bags filled with your fa-

ther's priceless stamp collection are a major no-no as they are unsightly and can cause interference during dialogue.

**C:** Try your best to be discriminating when choosing what you really need to take to your new set. Kiss that Depression mentality goodbye, packing only items that will fit in small- to medium-sized cardboard boxes (preferably overpriced ones with "FRAGILE" or "Handle with Care" stickers on the outside). Leave all kitchen cabinets, toilets, sinks, doorknobs, and inlaid floor tiles behind.

The first week in your new home should look like this: You and supporting cast eat Chinese take-out on carefully labeled boxes under the glow of a single silver candelabra.

**REMEMBER:** by the next episode, the place will look like you've never lived anywhere else, so enjoy the bohemian life while you can!

## Some Rules For All Seasons

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**N**ow that we've got this location thing down, let's move on to review a more general set of rules.

**RULE ONE:** No matter your socio-economic background, a TV set should never be in the living room. A small subtle portable is fine for the bedroom or den, but only to be watched in private and rarely turned on. Remember, you are living a sitcom life; you can't be watching someone else's.

**RULE TWO:** Your surroundings must "read" well, meaning that all visuals in your life—furniture, rakes, outboard motors, can openers, hunting jackets, etc.—should be categorically high quality and durable, and must be immediately identifiable to those viewing your sitcom life. For example, do not, under any circumstances, display an alarm clock that is also a piggy bank,

telephone, and egg-slicer. Or an umbrella that is also a rain hat and port-o-potty. This teeters on being “gadget happy” and is strictly taboo. If you buy, say, a portable gasoline can, it must be round and red with a handle, recognizable the world over. If you plan on being the lead character, I cannot stress enough how crucial it is for you to follow this credo.

**RULE THREE:** If you choose, for whatever reason, to play a supporting character in someone else’s life (i.e., a Mickey Hart to a Eunice or Ed), then you, by all means, should always show up behind the wheel of a “plain Jane” jalopy, wearing an inconspicuous “bland cloth coat” so as not to upstage the “lead.”

**RULE FOUR:** If you desire to be merely an “eccentric relative” in a recurring role, then feel free to go hog wild with gadgets of dual purposes and/or a wacky wardrobe.

**RULE FIVE:** If you are strictly a “supporting cast” type, your “props” will be sensible, not extravagant, to show that you are dependable, not flashy. You will always defer to the “lead,” whether it be your husband, wife, father, sister, or friend.

**NOTE** You can flip a coin to decide which of you will be the “lead,” or you can even have two “leads.” But personal tastes and styles must be adhered to. *No clothes borrowing* unless you are identical twins, in which case your sitcom life should be called “Double Trouble.”

**RULE SIX:** Although it is not imperative, living alone is best when undertaking the sitcom lifestyle.

**RULE SEVEN:** No one in TV land uses popular name brands; that would be too much free advertising. Get in the habit of calling your neighborhood K-Mart something like "Bargain City." Instead of Diet Pepsi, Tab, or Fresca, simply say "soda pop." Don't leave milk cartons hanging around in the refrigerator; milk should always be seen in a clear-glass pitcher. After all, that's how June Cleaver served it.



## Your Charming Self

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**M**usic and canned laughter can do in one second what that kynecalon wig you spent a whole paycheck on couldn't do in two years. Let's face it. We don't have a team of comedy writers whispering catchy dialogue in our ears twenty-four hours a day. Granted, if you are someone who says, "Well, look what the cat dragged in" to anyone who enters the room, then you have your work cut out for you. But there are ways to put your best foot forward when creating the kind of character you want to be.

It is well established in TV land that you should follow the Ten Commandments. (No, not the movie.) If you haven't been strict about this, I suggest you clean up your act *pronto*. After all, TV is our country's most popular baby-sitter.

Okay, I'll be the first to admit I've had to work very hard

to dispel my five-finger discount shortcomings. But I am proud to say that I haven't shoplifted since last Mother's Day. If you've fallen and need a checklist for all the commandments you've broken, don't fret. Today is a new day. Strive to hold your head high, and not have to look over your shoulder all the time. Erase that past and move into a positive future.

Before I cleaned up my act, I used to spread idle gossip, even if it weren't true. In fact, I created a lot of it. My justification? Well, there were only so many hours in a day; I figured why not spice up my numbing six-to-three routine with fibs that preyed on other peoples' shortcomings.

Gossip was my cruel springboard to comedy. I told anyone who would listen that one prim and snobbish colleague, whom I felt had slighted me, was a closet electrician on weekends. The word spread like black ink on a white rug, and before I knew it, there was a line of people at her desk, putting in requests for complete home rewiring jobs.

The pay-off was watching her clutch her pearl-draped collar, and in a frazzled voice say, "I'm *not* an electrician! Where on earth did you get *that* idea?"

But most of the mayhem I churned up stemmed from my own lack of self-esteem; you know, knock others because you want them to feel as bad as you feel about yourself. Every wrong that had been done to me, I returned three-fold. When a distant uncle, who had inadvertently scratched the paint on



my new car, had a coughing jag, I went straight to my gabbiest aunt and, oozing concern, said, “Y’know, Maybelle, he really should ask Jesus to help him put down that crack pipe.” His reputation was never the same.

You can spot anger and resentment in many people. It’s not that they are clueless or have a constant pebble in their shoe. It’s usually past hurts that have brought them to their current state of despair. I mean, I’ve had people latch hold of me and say, discreetly, “If you stood up straight and stopped slumping, your butt wouldn’t look so big.” Now, years ago, I would have planted a booger on their sandwich, but working through my own festering resentments and welts has caused a shift in my personality.

I don’t have to react anymore when zingers are thrown my way. What a joy it is just to observe (and mentally file) other people’s bad behavior—and even better, to be able to forgive them their trespasses. I’ve finally let go of grudges I’d held on to for thirty years. They’re over. So try to bring a bright key light wherever you go. If I can do it, you can do it. Remember:



*Every day you don’t get jumped in the parking lot is a good one.*

To upgrade your personality, all you really need is the willingness to change. Repeat after me:

## How to Live a Sitcom Life

*You can acquire a personality from television.*

It's simple. Just pick a character. Any character. Don't worry; you won't have to be one hundred percent brazen like Ralph Kramden, or eighty-percent surly like Archie Bunker. You could be sensitive like, say, Larry Mondello's (*Leave It to Beaver*) mother, with maybe a dash of salty Louie DePalma (*Taxi*) thrown in. Or mix your own "character cocktail" of several sitcom stars.

Bone up on all the episodes you can, and memorize the dialogue your chosen icon(s) spoke. Note their mannerisms, and add one half cup of your own humor. Find ways to incorporate their immortal dialogue into general everyday conversation. If Flo from Mel's Diner (*Alice*) was legendary for her "Kiss mah gree-its," you can become just as unforgettable with "Sniff mah pee-its!" Like Fonzie with his leather gear or Sally Rogers with her hair bows, you can create your own sitcom image with, say, geeky eye glasses, or a monumental hairdo—or, like my self, a giant war whoop of a laugh.

For example, I presently have a combo persona going that I really enjoy. I like to think of myself as embodying the lifestyle and grooming skills of a Sgt. Ernie Bilko, the blunt humor of an Ethel Mertz, and the down-home hospitality of Big Luke McCoy ("Hi, darlin'!"). It works wonders at social functions I can't get out of. The time to start is whenever

you are fed up with being you, or just need to escape during that scary visit to the dentist.

Think of it as having a healthy case of multiple personality disorder.

It is important to remember, however, that taking over a fictitious persona will not cure all your problems in life. In fact, if you are not careful, it might even create some.

Don't try to convey aircraft riveter Chester A. Riley (*The Life of Riley*) if you are applying for the CEO position at a major oil company. If Mr. French (*Family Affair*) is the character you emulate, don't fill out an employment application for the shampoo-girl spot at Dot's Coiffures. Be realistic. The general population may not know what you are up to. Don't tell the driver on the #118 cross-town bus, in a very sassy Willona Woods (*Good Times*) fashion, "Mornin', you tacky turkey!" He may say, "Beat it, freak" and revoke your transfer.

No matter who you strive to be, in public your personality must be bubbly at all times. It doesn't matter if you have a migraine, try your darndest to be pleasant. Nobody likes a grump (especially store clerks).

- \* Are you being insulted? Hold your tongue.
- \* Do you see red when barbs are thrown your way? Smile and say, "Bless your heart" while visualizing your verbal attacker's severed head on a stick.

## How to Live a Sitcom Life

You may think I am telling you to be a pushover, but that is not the case. For example, if you have just been introduced to someone named “LuAnn,” and the conversation has been a one-sided tirade on her part, then calmly offer your hand in a farewell shake and say, “Lovely to have met you, Lugene.” Passive-aggressive? Nonsense. In your own subtle way, you have simply pointed out that you have already forgotten the name of a forgettable person.

Trying to capture the physical quirks of your TV hero or heroine can often be disappointing. As a child, I studied the way Ricky Nelson held the telephone receiver, trying to imitate it for days. Being a perfectionist, I was heartbroken when the phone really did ring and I did not answer the way Rick did, or failed to hold the receiver the way he did. In fact, I was devastated. (By the way, he clutched the receiver with all fingers, except the index finger, which moved up to the earpiece.)

We must accept our limitations. Being human, we cannot always recite our favorite dialogue on cue. We must *be choosy*, and sensitive to those not involved in the sitcom life.

For example, when you are visiting your new mother-in-law, and have misplaced your wallet, don’t come down to the breakfast table, yelling and accusing, “All right, which one of you jugheads stole my wallet?” Chances are your new fam-

ily won't have a clue you are doing a dead-on impersonation of Eddie Haskell.

To reiterate: always try to *be pleasant*, even in difficult situations.

I realize it's not easy to stay calm when, say, a gang of hoodlums is about to pulverize you. Things like that are not in your script. But, as adults, we should at least try to discuss things in a civil manner. Preferably over a Viennese chocolate-hazelnut decaf with Nutrasweet.

Do you like to "get loud" with loved ones in public? Dear me. Let me refer you to what I call the "Can I See You in the Kitchen?" plan. Simply speaking, use this line whenever a conversation borders on roughhouse. Stepping outside the main set when supporting cast members are within earshot is usually enough to get your script back under control.

Remember, nothing is solved by hiding in the bushes with a lead pipe. Well, almost nothing. I say, take your accuser or foe into the kitchen to whisper your beef ("Could you lower your voice, *please*? You're not in prison anymore.") Only when you reach a dead-end should you "take it outside." NOTE: This last-ditch resolution usually only applies to those who favor Knapp Avenue's Lenny and Squiggy over Park Avenue's Bill Davis. Some people are just born to be a Clampett. That is fine. You don't have to, as my folks would say, "act above your raising." But whether you are draped in silk or a potato sack, *always argue in muffled tones*, leaving innocent bystanders out of

it. If the waterman rings your bell, interrupting your task of cramming your husband's body into a matching set of Samsonite, greet him with a soft drink and a smile.

Your daily life may not be themed by what I call the Three C's: Comical, Cute, and Cuddly.

Your job at the state mental hospital may not be heart-warming. You may never have been called "kooky" or "endearing," and you may long since have given up being called "cute." You may not have a garage door opener that is activated every time a plane flies overhead. Don't worry. Few among us have actually had the privilege of performing basic sitcom duties like acting as a judge in night traffic court, hiding a hood's gun in your freshly baked chocolate cake, or finding ways to get hit in the face with a lemon meringue pie.

But if we can learn to laugh at ourselves and at the absurdities of life—while, say, filing for bankruptcy or divorce—that is the true secret to sitcom success.

**RULE ONE:** You are more likely to be popular if you choose a likable character to emulate. Patty or Cathy Lane from Brooklyn Heights, New York, or Ann Marie from Brewster, New York, are far easier to cotton to than Joe Carson from Hooterville's Shady Rest Hotel or Mel Cooley from "The Alan Brady Show" staff.

**RULE TWO:** Ad libbing is acceptable, but remember, you are capturing the essence of your TV persona, so try to be precise. Review the reruns with the catchiest banter. Wear out the videotape until you can recite it in your sleep.

**RULE THREE:** Don't settle for Dr. Scholl's exercisers if Julia Sugarbaker of Atlanta (*Designing Women*) actually wore Papagallo pumps. I am all for re-creating the wardrobe and hair of your TV alter ego. Exactness and the precision of an eye surgeon will give you a "feel" for your new role. Represent those you love from the tube with distinction.

**RULE FOUR:** Unless your icon had them, don't take on self-destructive habits. If you are trying to clone yourself into Wally Cleaver, do not smoke, drink, or huff glue (on the downside, you can also forget about ever crossing your legs at the knees again). Start running track and wearing a letterman's sweater. Slick your hair up in an Aqua-Velva butch cut and wear Van Heusen button-down short sleeve shirts. Carry your schoolbooks under your arm, never to your chest, and wear penny loafers. Stop swearing. If you cannot live up to Wally Cleaver's standards, you can aim for Eddie Haskell. And if you are *really* slothful and spoiled, Clarence "Lumpy" Rutherford.

**RULE FIVE:** It is more important to find your inner TV personality than it is to acquire all the outer accouterments of your idol. Of course, it may be hard to picture your mom as Alice Mitchell (*Dennis the Menace*) if a half-pint falls out of

her purse during Sunday morning worship services, but I've always held onto the belief that certain things can be true if I say they are.



## Eloquence

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**S**ince TV time is so expensive, try to use as few words as possible. No one can ever call you a windbag if you rehearse your lines before speaking.

Accents always add color. Don't be afraid to incorporate regional slang, like Mayberry's Otis Cambell's (*Andy Griffith Show*) "betwixt" for "between," or the Bronx's own Rhoda Morgenstern's (*Rhoda*) "tote-ly" for "totally."

**RULE ONE:** If your regional twang is so thick even your own mother has a hard time understanding you, go out immediately and apply for any job that requires you to convey information over a loudspeaker.

**RULE TWO:** Lazy or broken English is fine if you are a new citizen like Latka Gravas (*Taxi*), but constant use of colloqui-

alisms like “y’know” or “ah, *man*” should be restricted to bikers, rockers, and slackers.

Some of us are raised to talk like sailors, but keep in mind that extreme Christian groups will put on the pressure, your sponsors will start pulling their hair out, and you could lose your time slot.

Remember: there are children present.

I had a landlord once who only knew two words of English, both four-letter, one starting with an “f,” the other with an “s.” From his disheveled appearance, I assumed that’s all he ever did. Don’t let this happen to you.

How, you ask, do I break a lifelong habit of talking trash? Simple. Just imagine there’s a tiny, little Sister Bertrille (*The Flying Nun*) in your hip pocket. I guarantee you’ll clip that garbage talk faster than Uncle Charlie cut Chip’s hippie hairdo.

Your new vocabulary should be introduced into your everyday dialogue gradually. Here are a few helpful substitute phrases I’ve selected to get you on the track to a TV-14 rating:

- \* Instead of “you motherfucker,” say “you silly little goon.”
- \* “Bitch” becomes the less sexist “beast.”
- \* “Goddamn?” No. Try “My *goodness!*”
- \* “Fuck you!” becomes “Oh, poo!”
- \* “Oh, shit” translates delightfully as “Oh, peach pit!”
- \* “Go to Hell!”: try “Oh, for heaven’s sake,” instead.

- \* Some good fall backs: “Lordy!,” “Mercy,” “Oh, *honestly*,” and “Fudge!”

As for trashing *people*, my advice is: Stop it. It always comes back to bite you in the rear. Speak about others, whether you like them or not, as if they were leaning on the other side of the door with their ear pressed to a glass. Instead of calling someone with poor hygiene words like “stinky,” “pigpen,” or “nasty,” use a less hurtful “earthy.” Carry around a pocket tape recorder and play it back after a hen party. You will probably cringe at the verbal slaughter you put your social circle through. Remember, even if your name is batted around among your “friends” as the most vile of shrews, you just take the adult route and soar above it all.

**RULE THREE:** Although very popular among talk radio and local news anchor *folks*, talking over someone who is already speaking is a no-no.

**RULE FOUR:** If you are in the company of a profanity-master, bark out “Easy!” after each four-letter violation. This will calm even the most rabid pool hall venom-spewer.

**RULE FIVE:** If you speak slowly, distinctly, and audibly enough, no one will ever ask you to repeat your lines.

CAUTION: Unless you are hell-bent on becoming your own customized version of Lucy Carter (*Here’s Lucy*), bellowing at others is not only offensive, it can damage your vocal chords.



## Phone Etiquette

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**F**act: You cannot live a proper sitcom life without a shiny, working telephone in your home. And you must learn how to use it properly:

**RULE ONE:** When speaking, always hold the receiver just below your chin so as not to block your close-up. If you are conversing in medium shot, be sure to have a potted plant beside you in the frame, or, preferably, be sitting at a well-lit breakfast table.

**RULE TWO:** Always hold the phone in the hand corresponding to your “best side,” index finger up, gently cradling the receiver. If you want a more forceful, “poser stance,” clutch the receiver with all fingers gripped together, like the Baxter’s own housekeeper, Hazel Burke.

### note

Never confuse sitcom etiquette with the stage business of soap operas (where coffee sipping is required during all phone usage).

**RULE THREE:** Keep your phone sparkling clean and germ-free at all times. No ear wax.

**RULE FOUR:** When dialing, talking, or waiting endlessly on hold, always be dressed impeccably from the waist up.

**RULE FIVE:** Try to remain seated during conversations. Filing or buffing your nails is acceptable. Do not wash dishes, your dog, or the living room rug during phone conversations. All that heavy breathing might sound like an obscene phone call.

**RULE SIX:** Do not allow barking dogs, police sirens, rap music, or children shrieking "You stole my sandwich!" to interfere with your phone moments. **NOTE:** The sound of chirping birds is okay, if it is an early morning phone conversation.

## Breakfast in Bed

.....

**E**very sitcom has at least one episode where a supporting cast member or lead gets breakfast in bed. Whether they're being seduced as an anniversary "gift" or are awaiting the results of a biopsy, the requirements are as follows:

- A:** A white breakfast tray with magazine rack handles. A folded morning newspaper must be protruding from one side. No wicker, please.
- B:** On the tray in question, food must always be served hot and steaming under plate covers, alongside a coffee pot, cup, and saucer, with a single yellow rose in a bud vase. Do not tilt or slide.

**note**

Although sickbed scenes use similar props, they are not identical. Sickbed staples:

- \* All-cotton PJs, ironed *and starched*.
- \* A single box of facial-quality tissues, one alarm clock, one reading lamp, one hardcover novel, and one vase of fresh flowers (unless you are a movie star, a local dignitary, or a much-beloved old-maid school teacher, in which case the entire room should be filled with deliveries from FTD).
- \* A thermometer must be visible, either in the patient's mouth or used for comedic purposes in hand gestures.
- \* Sickbed must be located near window so that afternoon sun passes through at around 2 P.M. If no window is available, a shadeless lamp placed behind a group of free-standing shutters can give the illusion of daylight through Venetian blinds. Terrific for scenes of spiritual rebirth or UFO abduction.
- \* Please, absolutely no bedpans or enema bags draped across the headboard.



## Chores

.....

**E**very TV family member has his or her duties clearly cut out for him or her to help maintain the sitcom status quo. Now I don't mean to sound like Margaret Anderson (*Father Knows Best*), but I must ask, would Bud Anderson get his allowance if he didn't round up and eliminate the autumn leaves in the family incinerator out back?

If you still don't get it, here's some real food for thought:

What would Sophia Petrillo's (*Golden Girls*) purse look like if she didn't clean it out every Thursday night?



## Grooming: It's Not Just for Lassie

.....

**T**ake a long, hard look in the mirror. Granted, we are not all Mr. or Miss America. Not all of us could have a cover of *Vogue* run up with our mug splashed over it fourteen inches tall. But though God may not have given us all Lily Ruskin (*December Bride*) lips or Dobie Gillis hips, neither has He doomed us all to a life posing as a rug rat or bridge-and-tunnel troll.

If any of you have watched Francis "Gidget" Lawrence, you will know why I call her the Queen of Grooming. How many different hairstyles was that girl working on any given day? Hailing from Pacific Palisades, she probably had plenty of money to keep her look intact. Now, I'm not suggesting you should spend hours preening in front of your favorite looking glass. But I am saying that there is a way to make

your personal TV-look perfect without a crew of make-up and hair personnel.

We've all got something we want to change. Don't let this keep you from achieving character flawlessness. Take a good look at your assets and liabilities and jot them down on paper. What is your most noticeable feature—flaring nostrils? Cro-Magnon forehead? beady criminal eyes? pathetic, non-existent chin? Have you, for the past ten years, been sporting a hairstyle that resembles the creme horn pastries in the vending machine at work? Well, do you like it? Does it flatter you?

If you answered yes, I say there is no need to change. Notice that lovable Lucy kept the same hairstyle the whole time she was a Ricardo. And so did her husband, Ricky. So there.

Today, all-natural products, from shampoo to seaweed, and flashy health clubs have replaced the chinstrap and the foundation garment. There is a more casual approach to living and dressing. Do you hate your monster hips? You've tried everything to reduce them but they are so big that you've named each one after a grandparent? Well, you've cried yourself to sleep for the last time. Try a new approach:



*Pad your hips with foam rubber and wear stretch pants to accentuate them.*

Call it your “signature look.” Turn that shame into self-respect.

Fangs? *Get them sharpened.*

Bulbous space saucer eyes? *Highlight with scads of eyeliner.*

Horse nostrils? *Darken and define with an eyebrow pencil.*

Were you cursed with a mousy hair color? Instead of dish-water blonde, *hire a colorist to create a cotton candy white.* Non-descript brunette could become raven black. Strawberry blonde could turn into Technicolor red.

Think about leaving an impression. No one will ever forget you. Paint your personal style with broad strokes.

Your real-life sitcom will be seen by millions.

Of course, you will need to make some concessions to your lifestyle. For instance, don't maintain an Agent 99 (*Get Smart*) mod ensemble if you work at the Sholtz Brewery. The look may be under-appreciated and the chances of an oversized mack cap getting caught in machinery are great.

Personally, I've never been too keen on going under the knife, and other than being too tall—I always wanted to be 5' 9" instead of a six-footer—my only real complaint was that I had big teeth. I have had my teeth bleached, and I sported braces for eight years. I was a thumb-sucker until my teens, which didn't help my overbite. With my protruding choppers, my dad had every reason to rename me "Bucky." I'm not saying I could eat corn-on-the-cob through a fence, but to this day I cannot close my mouth comfortably. There is not much I can do about having big teeth, other than learning to appreciate them. Luckily, a lot of TV characters, including Julie

Cooper (*One Day at a Time*), have big teeth too. If you think the answer to all your physical quirks is a trip to the plastic surgeon, I suggest you first talk this through with the relative you most resemble. Then decide.

The purpose of this chapter is to help you find your individual sitcom look and to help you stick with it. To start, the Three Most Obvious Traits all television characters share are:

- 1:** They have no visible blemishes.
- 2:** They wear cosmetics.
- 3:** Their clothes are either pressed or brand new.

Zits. Blackheads. Pimples. Warts. All of these fall under the heading of Blemishes. You may have been called Craterface in high school (I know I was), but as a TV star there is no excuse for blotchy or zit-ridden skin. Even if you have to apply Clinique #107 with a trowel, I say treat your face as if you are re-plastering your den. Fill in all cracks, crevices, pock marks, and *never leave the house without your "face."* Layer it on, then blend with light powder to take off the sheen.

Maintaining that sitcom-smooth complexion requires daily removal of facial fuzz. Never have a five o'clock shadow, even at five A.M. Did you ever see Ozzie Nelson with a razor cut? I don't think so. Practice shaving until you can do it blindfolded. Find a razor that you trust and get to know the contours of your face like the back of your hand.

As for hair on other parts of your body, just remember: You never know when you will be asked to take off your shirt for a fistfight or a pool scene. This can happen at any time.

Ladies, the fact that so many of you already use cosmetics scores an extra ten points in my book. If you own a lipstick, you are halfway to realizing your sitcom self. The addition of demi-lashes, purchased at any drug store and applied daily, is the only prerequisite for future celebrity status. Find a pair that looks natural, trim the excess, use religiously, and they will seal your stardom. Even if you are waiting tables, when a customer stares at your 199's (false eyelash code number) and scoffs, "Who do you think you are, a TV star?" you'll be able to reply honestly, "Yes, I am."



Never give false eyelashes as gifts. I know from experience that this is a bad idea. One time my brother Mike and I saved our allowance money and went to a better cosmetic counter to buy a pair of natural looking lashes for our mom's birthday. No one can prepare a kid for the expression on a mother's face when she opens a gift like that. The recipient can only assume you think she is not pretty or glamorous enough. I can't remember if the gift choice was because we wanted a TV mom, or if it was simply the rage at the time, but we learned: never again.



Some important thoughts:

- \* If you suffer from a skin disorder, don't frequent a water park in a string bikini. And if you have always enjoyed good, healthy, clear skin, slip your parents a fifty.
- \* Brush your hair one hundred times at bedtime—Samantha Stevens always did, and she was a bewitching knockout—brush your teeth, and gargle with mouthwash.

**note** It may be harder to acquire the exact look of someone from a forty-year-old sitcom, but if this is you, then, I promise, the visual rewards are worth it. Acquiring the arched eyebrows, platinum ducktail, and 1958 Ford sedan so that you can make a more believable June Cleaver of Grant Avenue is cause for a ten-gun salute.

Do not get this confused with permanent facial augmentation. If Serena (Samantha Stevens' cousin) was your idol, and you want to be able to twitch your nose and fly to Brazil in a millisecond, don't wish it would happen by doing a Peter Pan carving on your face.

Accept your limitations. If you play golf, you can always wear a golf sweater. This doesn't mean you will look like weekend putter Dr. Alex Stone. But you'll feel like him.

## Makeovers

This is a tried-and-true subject of many a sitcom episode:



# T.V. QUIZ

INSTRUCTOR:

MARK BENNETT

COURSE:

HOW TO LIVE A SITCOM LIFE

LESSON:

## "SARTORIAL SPLENDOR"

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

GRADE

Circle one:

1. If you are so hairy that you are often mistaken for a werewolf, what do you do?
  - a) Get a full body wax.
  - b) Have a free-for-all with a straight razor.
  - c) Tell everyone that you are related to The Tasmanian Devil.
  - d) Neatly trim any excess hair with electric clippers.
  
2. The shower in your current residence hasn't worked in two years. What do you do?
  - a) Take a bath in the kitchen sink.
  - b) Douse yourself in after-shave lotion.
  - c) Tell everyone you've got two full-time jobs.
  - d) Join a gym and shower there.

**3. Your eyebrows are so thick you look like you are wearing a black fuzzy headband. What do you do?**

- a) Shave your entire forehead.
- b) Pluck all but two brow hairs.
- c) Comb and blend them into Beatle bangs.
- d) Trim them frequently with scissors.

**4. You are constantly spilling food on your clothes. What do you do?**

- a) Wear a bib every time you eat.
- b) Have your teeth glued shut.
- c) Liquefy all foods and use a straw.
- d) Buy two of the same top.

- \* Rhoda Morgenstern's Hempel Department Store Beauty Contest.
- \* Jan Brady's wig-buying spree.
- \* Wally Cleaver's pug-nose eradicator gadget.

How about the time Ernest T. Bass turned suave and debonair thanks to Andy and Barney (*The Andy Griffith Show*)? Or when Eve, Ginger Grant's look-a-like, got marooned on *Gilligan's Island*? She rocked the Professor's world after her transformation. I still laugh at the way Ginger and Mary Ann worked their cosmetic magic on her . . .

*Ginger: Do you need these eyeglasses?*

*Eve: Only to see.*

Makeover episodes usually end with the new-and-improved character reverting to his or her humble roots. As Ricky told the glamorized Lucy and Ethel after a course at Miss Emerson's Charm School, "This isn't you. It's phony." And most times, the decision to maintain a more natural appearance is a healthy one. I mean, that black bouffant wig did nothing for Jan Brady.

But sometimes—like the time Mayberry's Frankie Flint, the local field hand, became Frances Flint, the quite-a-gal, thanks to the help of Miss Elly and the Walker Drug Store cosmetics counter—the results are permanent and positive.

I personally experienced my makeover quite by accident. It

was Senior Day 1974, Hixson High School, Chattanooga, Tennessee. The departing class was being “roasted” and before the entire student body, I was voted “One of the Ten Best Dressed Women.” The two hundred laughing voices only increased the sting I felt inside. Yes, David Bowie was the rage then, and I was working the quiana shirts, platform shoes, and clear plastic belts. The androgynous rocker look had bit me on the behind. Making matters worse, I didn’t have a clue as to who or what I was. I really believed you were only as good as the outfit you were wearing.

I went straight home, cut off my orange shag, and committed to change. A heavy protein diet and strict exercise regimen changed my scrawny six-foot frame. I was determined to prove to that school that I wasn’t laughable anymore. When I reached two hundred pounds with a twenty-nine inch waist, I knew I had met my goal. I was no longer Maynard Krebs; I was Jethro Bodine.

But even with the new “me” on the outside, I couldn’t escape the “me” on the inside. At the time, I didn’t have the psychological tools to deal with that. So, if you are contemplating a revenge makeover or drastic measures such as “facial reconstruction” or “gender switching,” make sure you call talk-radio therapist Dr. Frasier Crane first.

## Wardrobe

I think it was the great dry cleaner and orator George Jefferson of New York City who once said, "A man is worth only as much as he is willing to spend." I guess he was referring to his wife's clothing budget; it couldn't have been the housekeeper Florence's salary demands. Whatever, he was profoundly correct. You get what you pay for.

Who wouldn't pay an extra two hundred a week plus bonuses to have that sharp-as-a-tack dynamo keep your house? If I had the funds, I know I would. As for Louise, her wardrobe shouted loud and clear, "*Well-heeled society lady!*" Nobody ever called her "a broad."

You may think that dressing the part of sitcom husband or wife entails lengthy shopping trips, endless runs to the dry cleaners, and a clothes closet the size of a football field. *Wrong!* If you'll notice, most TV folks repeat the same outfit, rotating their wardrobe throughout the season. Just look at Uncle Martin and Tim O'Hara (*My Favorite Martian*), Richard and Paula Hollister (*He and She*), and Bud and Sandy and their dad, Porter Ricks (*Flipper*).

Ever since the advent of the sweat-suit, many of us have allowed our personal look to go to hell in a handbasket. I'm just as guilty as anyone of going out in public, hair in shucks, wearing the slouchiest of rags. I've come home from a full day

of activity only to look in the mirror and ask, "Do you sleep in your car?"

Truth is, it's a different era; the kids who wore the pressed chinos and party frocks are now letting it all hang loose with burned perms and jogging outfits. The structured look of the fifties sitcom has gone the way of the sloppy oversized T-shirt and baggy drawers. It is every American's freedom to dress comfortably. But, people, just because you don a pair of flip-flops does not mean you are dressed up!

Listen to me. You are responsible for the way you are viewed, and you are treated accordingly. If you choose to dress like a hoodlum, don't be surprised if every shopkeeper in town arches an eyebrow when you enter his store. You might as well write "shoplifter" across your backside, and that's the reception you will receive. Doors open quicker when you present yourself in clean clothes. I never realized how profound Mickey Mouse was when he asked his TV audience club if everyone was "neat and pretty." I realize we all can't look like Jennifer Marlowe (of *WKRP in Cincinnati*) everyday, but we don't have to look like Grandmama Addams, either.

I had my own rude awakening in the early eighties while waiting for the PATH train in Times Square to go to my graveyard shift at a plant in New Jersey. Thrift shop clothing was then filling my closet. I thought I looked stunning in my tartan-plaid hunting coat, hunting cap (flaps down),

black gloves, scarf, galoshes, and sunglasses. Two couples from Princeton were standing nearby, and I heard one of the prep girls say, "Let's stand over here. That guy gives me the creeps." I started to look around, only to realize she was talking about me! I had never been considered a threat. From that day on, I have tried to portray something less like what those snots must have thought was a serial-killer-in-the-making.

As for making wardrobe choices based on favorite characters, I say throw caution to the wind. It may be a little hard walking around with a slingshot in the back pocket of your overalls when striving for a "Dennis the Menace" look, but if this is the real you, then, by all means, go for it. I do, however, think there should be an age cut-off for Dennis. I wouldn't suggest this signature look if you are pushing forty.

Here are some sensible guidelines for a realistic TV wardrobe:

**RULE ONE:** Before departing the house, say, "I am making a personal appearance" rather than "I'm going to the laundromat." This way, you'll think twice before wearing those gold fuzzy house slippers in public. Put on a mouth, comb out that just-slept-on rat's nest of a hairdo, and face your fans in something more inspired than torn gym shorts and a tube top.

**RULE TWO:** Even "old painting clothes" should be heavily starched and pressed. You never know who might drop by

while you are perched on a ladder, painting the eaves of your house. If you are budget-conscious, buy an iron and a can of spray starch. Plan one night a week to press your wardrobe into perfection. Don't scoff. Ironing is very therapeutic—and you can study your sitcoms while doing it.

**NOTE** And what's so taboo about having the cleaners put heavy starch in your cotton slacks and shirts? It may be a little stiff at first, but I guarantee the public will prefer your cardboard straight chinos to the sight of your dick swinging in a ratty pair of college sweats. If you want to advertise your personals, get paid for it by becoming a lap dancer.

**RULE THREE:** Even if you are not wrapped up in recreating a favorite character's look, your fashion choices should still be consistent. If you are more of a Rob Petrie-golf-sweater-and-Hubbard-slacks kind of guy, do not suddenly switch to a Davy-Jones-monkey-fur-vest-with-striped-bellbottoms-teen. This will throw off your audience and they will not identify with you. If you can't help yourself, and you are seen in a drastically different outfit, tell your audience that you're going to a costume party.

**RULE FOUR:** If you work on a loading dock, do not wear high heels to unload a tractor-trailer. Find the right look for your job description. Sensible work shoes with sturdy socks are a good start. In essence, if you are using a jackhammer to break up a sidewalk, you shouldn't wear a necktie.

**RULE FIVE:** If you work at home, there is no excuse for not being



dressed during the day, with shoes on. Never answer the door in a bathrobe after twelve noon unless you have a fever of 103°. Remember, you are the star of your show, and you have a duty to look great for the UPS man, the Gallup Poll surveyor, and your local Jehovah's Witnesses.

**RULE SIX:** Buy two of everything. If you find a shirt you like, get a duplicate, and keep it wrapped in the trunk of your car. There is no room in your life for armpit or ketchup stains. You may have another scene to do in this outfit at another location. So be prepared.

**RULE SEVEN:** Handbags, wallets, key fobs, lighters, picnic baskets, umbrellas, galoshes, and hats go under "wardrobe" as "props." Systematically clear out old ATM receipts, empty matchbooks, hard candies, and syringes from your prop list weekly.

**RULE EIGHT:** Even at night you have to be prepared. Find yourself a comfortable pair of all-cotton pajamas and wear them. You never know when there will be an emergency in the night; you will look stunning as all neighbors observe you in full nightwear, including matching robe. Slippers are mandatory.

**RULE NINE:** Steer clear of bold or busy fabric patterns. Accent lines or soft plaids are fine but nix anything that resembles a test pattern.

**RULE TEN:** Never tell anyone which of your favorite television characters you are impersonating or celebrating. Your appearance and actions alone should reveal the essence of your TV self.

If your friends don't get it, find a new set of friends.

# T.V. QUIZ

INSTRUCTOR:

MARK BENNETT

COURSE:

HOW TO LIVE A SITCOM LIFE

LESSON:

## "ACTING OUT"

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

GRADE

Circle one:

1. You've never been perky but you would like to participate in creating a sitcom character.  
Whom should you veer toward?
  - a) Mr. Belvedere
  - b) Mr. Haney
  - c) Buffy Davis
  - d) Wally Cleaver
  
2. New neighbors have moved in next door.  
They look sort of shifty. What do you do?
  - a) Buy an extra deadbolt.
  - b) Show them your hiney when they drive past your house.
  - c) Buy a telescope and point it at their bedroom.
  - d) Prepare a fruit basket with a note for their doorstep, welcoming them to the neighborhood.

**3. You can't seem to find a lunch partner, and even at banquet dining you tend to seat yourself away from others. What do you do?**

- a) Try a different mouthwash.
- b) Buy everyone at the office lunch.
- c) Bring your lunch and eat in the car.
- d) Take a deep breath, and go for the one available seat between two people.



## Your Kin

.....

**E**ver since I saw Diedra Baxter, George Baxter's (*Hazel*) sister, wearing strands of pearls, drive up Marshall Road in her Ford Thunderbird roadster with Kelsey Hayes wheels, I found that my own relatives were missing the proverbial boat.

Compared to Harold's Aunt Diedra, my aunts looked plain, my grandparents dowdy. No one was off to "the club." Nobody was a successful lawyer, or even a process-server. We were just hardworking folk who might punch a time clock or raise a large brood or pull a ski boat with a Travelall wagon—not get our nails done. I am sure this is true for some of you, too. Having Endora for a mother or aunt or grandmother is usually wishful thinking. And I don't even want to talk about a father like Samantha's Maurice.

My parents didn't make the cut in the Stephen or Elyse Keaton (*Family Ties*) mold. But then, I was no Alex Keaton myself.

The point? Television has given us all such warm, sophisticated fantasy relatives that no one in reality (except maybe Dina Merrill) could possibly make the grade. Therefore, we have no choice but to take a long, hard look at how to accept the kin we are stuck with. This does not mean forcing Auntie Frump to don a bunch of lug-nut jewelry or bending Uncle Elmo's arm behind his back to take you fishing when all he really wants to do is watch *The Price is Right* with his Colt 45 Malt Liquor.

*Enjoy your parents and relatives for who they are and not who you want them to be.*

You may be disappointed that Aunt Clarissa looks and dresses like Broderick Crawford, but what if she makes the meanest banana pudding in twelve states?

Ask yourself: Does my family tree have long branches of parolees or henchmen? Are they computer freaks? Or are they fanatics about horseshoes, bowling, or playing Parcheesi? Did you always want to ride in a rodeo but the only relative you knew who was a cowboy was doing time for auto theft? Well, what are you waiting for? Call him up. *Don't be ashamed.* Visit on family day. Glean as much information as

you can before he goes to lockdown. You'll be sorry you didn't once he's been dusted.

**RULE ONE:** Don't force relatives to participate in your sitcom life if they don't like you. In such a case, I wholeheartedly accept the notion of making your friends your family. That neighbor who reminds you of Aunt Clara? Bring her a box of candy at holiday time. Those unruly boys from the car club? Get them all matching key fobs from the swap meet.

**NOTE** You don't have to be the mother of the world. Sometimes I catch myself totin' an' fetchin' for my brood of friends and think, "Who am I trying to be? *Good Times*'s Florida Evans?" Still, one must give from the heart. Within limits.

**RULE TWO:** Life ain't about bartering. If you think your friends are going to host this week's poker party just because you did last week, then you are in for a big letdown. Accept the limitations of others. Not everyone is a good host. Take comfort in knowing that you have, in some small way, brightened the lives of those around you.

Otherwise, you can always turn off the lights, lock all windows and doors, draw the drapes, and live like a recluse. That way, you might eventually be mistaken for a Munster.

**RULE THREE:** Don't rush people, including yourself. You will get nowhere being pushy. Find common interests. If that teller at the bank rocks your world visually, but has bad b.o. and is a compulsive nose picker, ask yourself how important

it really is for you to see her naked. You don't have to fill up a modified school bus with all your new sitcom "family"—unless maybe you can all harmonize.

**RULE FOUR:** Learn the names of all your relatives, in-laws, aunts, uncles, cousins, and their offspring by heart.

**note** If you are a grandparent, please don't call your grandchildren generic names like "hey, girl" or "hey, you." If you are too busy or too medicated to remember names, here are some sitcom-approved "pet names" to choose from:

### Sitcom-Approved Pet Names:

- |            |             |
|------------|-------------|
| ✓ Honey    | ✓ Peach Pie |
| ✓ Doll     | ✓ Doodles   |
| ✓ Chief    | ✓ Happy     |
| ✓ Partner  | ✓ Snuggles  |
| ✓ Hombre   | ✓ Kitten    |
| ✓ Compadre | ✓ Prince    |
| ✓ Pumpkin  | ✓ Princess  |



The following “pet names” are out of the question:

**Names to Avoid:**

✗ *Queenie*

✗ *Igmo*

✗ *Guttersnipe*

✗ *Sissy*

✗ *Creep*

✗ *Jughead*

✗ *Slob*

✗ *Sasquatch*

✗ *Brat*

**RULE SIX:** If you are rebuilding bonds with relatives just so you can win the pony on “family attendance day” at your church, shame on you.



## Love Among the Linens

.....

**I**f life were really like a sitcom, we'd all be married happily ever after, and KY jelly would be labeled "For Reproductive Purposes Only."

Have you ever wondered if Colonel Klink and Sergeant Schultz spent the occasional night of drunken abandon together? And what about Buddy and Pickles Sorrell? Mr. T and Tina? Or Blanche Deveraux (*Golden Girls*) and anyone?

I've wondered plenty. I've always wanted certain characters to have, if not a romance, at least an occasional sexual tryst. But, alas, picturing members of your favorite TV family huffing and puffing between the sheets seems almost sacrilegious. On this delicate subject, we cannot paint a (dirty) picture in broad strokes. As in real life, you can gossip about everyone on the block, but when it comes down to it, sex is

top-secret business. We were never granted the privilege of seeing Vint and Naomi Harper (of *Momma's Family*) doing it. And that is how we should conduct our own sitcom lives.

Just because you are a chubby-chaser or a "shrimper" (toe sucker), that does not mean your sexual preoccupation has to be the theme of your sitcom every single waking moment of every single day. Remember, less is more.

Now, I'm not a prude. Personally, I have poked at love relationships a few times, and quite frankly, have entertained a fetish or two. I know what it feels like to be celibate (not good), and I could also be called, if not a tramp, then at least a scamp. It's okay to be a dominatrix or rubber freak. I may not know the proper use of a French tickler, but I would like to think I am open-minded.

But please, don't bring your bedroom antics into the dining room, the living room, or the workplace. Far be it from me to tell you how to incorporate your proclivities into a coffee-break topic (*very* carefully, I would imagine). You don't think the neighbors see you running around the house in your bra and panties? Guaranteed! And they'll talk about it, too. Just keep in mind that you will get a less-than-ideal time slot on a local cable network with an X rating.

No, sitcom living doesn't leave much room for talk about the *Kama Sutra* or the Marquis de Sade. This must be why, when I was a teen, I told my mom that my favorite paperback, *The Story of O*, was an algebra book.

Don't we all have fond memories of the perfect date, when the moon was full, the weather balmy, and the conversation, like the passion, heated? There was a time when I was newly married and my lovely wife and I celebrated our anniversary in the Rainbow Room, high atop New York's Rockefeller Center. The orchestra was playing, the champagne cocktails were flowing, we were dripping in party clothes. And a wealthy Italian couple, from across the dance floor, sent a bottle of Dom Perignon champagne to our table. The evening was a visual overload of limousine rides, stemmed martini glasses, and throbbing disco music. I couldn't have been more "Donald Hollinger" to my wife's "Ann Marie." And the rich couple, without knowing a word of English, seemed to have been entertained as well, celebrating, I assumed, their own anniversary. Talk about a sitcom night.

Once you find Mr. or Ms. Right, you don't have to shell out the big bucks for a lavish wedding. Elopement is a viable option. But eloping is a very "co-star" thing to do; running off may be the only choice for you, but the *real* episode will be the parents' scene just after they get your letter in the mail. So think about it. Outside of the obituaries or police blotters, there are usually not many opportunities to get your picture in the paper.

The following guidelines may enlighten you on proper sitcom courting practices:

**RULE ONE:** Restaurants play an important role in most TV ro-

mances. Rob and Laura Petrie frequented a swank joint called The White Fox; Miss Jane and Jethro hung out at The Whisky A-Go-Go; Mary Richards went to The Embers; Andy Taylor took Helen Crump to Morelli's. Checkered tablecloths and Italian dinners by candlelight are popular among mature sitcom couples (Steven Douglas should have been as big as a house after all those heavy dishes).



*Find your favorite haunt and call it "our place."*

**RULE TWO:** Think of yourself as Chester Tate, the suave patriarch of *Soap*. If you are the host of such a dinner, you should know exactly what you want to order from the menu ("I'll have the usual, please") without having to look. Do not complain about service (unless you are paying top dollar). Do not stack empty dishes when the meal is finished, gargle with the ice water, or pick your teeth with a credit card.

If you are the guest of a "Chester Tate," you should listen to his stories, laugh where appropriate, and reapply lipstick after each course. Do not brush your hair at the table, hide food in your purse, or buy that big stud at the bar a drink.

No discount coupons on dinner dates.

**RULE THREE:** For those of you involved in extramarital affairs or messy entanglements involving multiple partners, please, try to be discreet. Find one of those honky-tonks, the kind Sgt. Vince Carter took Miss Bunny to (*Gomer Pyle, USMC*),

with high booths and low lights. Refrain from meeting in parking lots or doin' it in your car. If you must keep this liaison going, then ask for frequent guest rates at your favorite motel.

**RULE FOUR:** You and your mate must look as though a casting director put you together. Okay, maybe your aunt was the matchmaker, but she'll tell you the same thing I'm telling you:

**A:** Hair color should be complimentary; you can both have dark hair, but one should be a lighter shade, preferably hers;

**B:** Allow for no more than three inches difference in height between man and woman, in case she wears heels; and

**C:** Total bulk must be evenly distributed. Weigh each other; if one carries fifty percent more than the other, get the meat cleaver.

**RULE FIVE:** Never, *ever* kiss and tell, no matter how much money the tabloids or nosy neighbors (like Millie Helper) offer you. You don't want your business all over town. Remember, if you go around pointing fingers at your last conquest and bellowing, "I slept with him and got fifteen hundred dollars and a cheese sandwich," then don't be surprised if your phone stops ringing.

**RULE SIX:** Some of you may enjoy the shock value of your nervy, over-the-top pick-up lines. You may testify to the suc-

cess you've had with "Ooh, baby, you're so hot I could eat you alive," or "You're married? So. Isn't everybody?" Remember that if you go this route, your delivery in the sack better be as bold as your verbal delivery.

**RULE SEVEN:** If you throw caution to the wind and fall in love with someone who doesn't meet standard sitcom requirements, especially in the differing height category, one of you will have to wear lifts.



## Your Four-Legged Co-Star

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**T**he average sitcom family includes at least one precocious non-human supporting cast member, most often a dog named Cleo or Nelson or Fred. Sheepdog Lord Martin ruled on Doris Martin's Mill Valley ranch. Felines are generally excluded because of their sophistication and superior attitude. (They usually make it big in the movies, anyway.) Larger animals have occasionally become television stars, especially those with the gift of language, like Mister Ed.

But dog, cat, or horse, I recommend that you get a pet who is *not* cuter than you are, otherwise you will be upstaged in every interior establishing shot. It's great to have a dog that showcases *your* look, not the other way around.

Walking your highly-groomed but modest pooch in the

local park can also increase your chances of striking up important future relationships and/or situations. So try to wear clothing that compliments your dog's coat. If your pet's fur is salt-n-pepper gray, find yourself a complimentary plaid car coat (for you) and a red leather leash and collar (for the pet).

**RULE ONE:** Have your creature neutered immediately, unless you are planning on opening a stud farm. This will save you the embarrassment of having Buster dance on guests' legs. Just don't attempt the operation at home.

**RULE TWO:** Never train a pet (with the possible exception of goldfish) to be a vicious bodyguard or assassin. There is no place in your sitcom life for gnarling teeth or electrified fencing.

**RULE THREE:** Unless they talk, pets should be seen and not heard. The only barker who was sequestered in a dog house was Tiger Brady, and he ran away a lot. Mister Ed had his stable, but he was not a canine, and Wilbur spent most of his time there. Ed's stylish studio/stable had a television, telephone, and daybed. Don't think Mister Ed was slumming; he got three squares a day and *lots* of conversation. Didn't he also have his very own phone line?

**note** If your four-legger's locked up all day in the solitary confinement of your bachelorette apartment, only to be whisked outside for a quick winkie-tink twice a day, then I suggest you love and cherish your friends' animals instead of

owning one. Be a great aunt or uncle and visit on Sundays. Bring a dog biscuit or chew bone and baby-sit once in a while. You will save a fortune in dry cleaning bills.

**RULE FOUR:** Do not dye your pet's hair to match the seasons. This is cruel, and damaging to everyone's psyche. As a sitcom star, you should understand that your pet is aiming for a signature look just as you are. Your audience will be shocked if your snow white poodle is suddenly pink for Easter. Your ratings will plummet.

**RULE FIVE:** Doggie raincoats and turtlenecks are acceptable if you live in a cold climate. Full sweatsuits that cover the dog's legs are forbidden. Snow boots can be useful for those pets with sensitive paws but, like stiletto heels, they are hard to trot in. Use restraint in this department. Less is more. A tam-o-shanter with pom-pom is nice in the fall, if your dog likes hats—but please, if you make him wear one, then you wear one, too.

**RULE SIX:** Your pet should be able to perform at least one trick that will dazzle company: a handshake, a ballet move (in a homemade tutu), a roll-over. But frantic barking, clawing at the window, and jumping on your guests' backs are strictly forbidden.

If you cannot control your pet, maybe you shouldn't own one. You didn't see Rhoda Morgenstern with a terrier. Her landlady, Phyllis Lindstrom, probably didn't allow pets. Mine doesn't either, and for that, I am eternally grate-

ful. Most dog groomers look like hell while their charges look incredible.

**RULE SEVEN:** Unless you live in Alaska and are pulling a sled on a daily basis, there is no need to own a dog pack. You do not want your home to sound like an Alabama junkyard every time the doorbell rings. Unless the name of your own sitcom is something like *Kevin and the Kennel Klub Kritters*, more than one dog is pushing it.

## Wheels

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**E**ver since Ward helped Wally pick out his first automobile, I have wished that all of us could experience that virgin venture with our dads. My, how Mr. Cleaver went over that car with an eye for safety, durability, and dependability. Okay, maybe he overlooked style, because it was a heap, but his concern for Wally's safety made it priceless.

My own first car was a '73 yellow Ford Mustang, exactly like the one Rhoda helped buy for Mary in Minneapolis. I wouldn't have cared if it hadn't had an engine, I wanted that car so much. It was my way of becoming Mary. Well, a male version. I washed and waxed it. I pampered it. I drove all over Tennessee, pretending I was on my way to Minnesota to start a new life.

The few times I have seen film crews shoot car scenes, the automobile, full of actors, is on a flatbed truck, being towed by a camera truck. On the soundstage, cars have their windshields removed for lighting and sound purposes. Unfortunately, neither of these techniques works in real sitcom life. Driving without a windshield is not only hard on the eyes, but practically impossible during a Montana blizzard, a Kansas twister, or a Texas dust storm.

Unlike Rhoda, we do not call our automobiles “a big purse on wheels” (that was her 1965 Ford Falcon). And unless you’re Los Angeleno Dave Crabtree, whose vintage 1928 Porter was actually his reincarnated mother, most of our cars do not talk to us. Go ahead and name your car—mine is called Hassie McCoy after the pretty and pure farmgirl on *The Real McCoys*, because my car is elegant but a workhorse—and you can even talk to your car (sometimes that helps get it started). But if you feel that your car is talking back to you, consult psychologist Dr. Robert Hartley.

Let’s establish some ground rules from the get-go so you can get going:

**RULE ONE:** Try to drive a current automobile. This may not be within your budget, but the visual payoff is great when watching old reruns. Not only do you get the era down, but you also see what was on the road at the time. Notice on *Get Smart* how Maxwell’s Sunbeam Alpine was updated to a Karmann Ghia. And before vintage car clubbers throw this book in the

trash, let me say that antique or collectible cars are very desirable and coveted. I do think they work beautifully in a sitcomland setting, if you are playing an eccentric or are expecting a flashback. Your car should match your living situation. A Rolls-Royce is nice if you are living at Wayne Manor, but may not be appropriate if you are living like New York taxi driver Tony Banta.

I realize that being a bachelor, I should be driving something sporty. Instead, I have opted for a top-of-the-line Mercury Colony Park (now discontinued) station wagon because I need its hauling potential for my part-time job as Furniture Mover (a fine “plot-generator”). My ad in the neighborhood ragsheet reads: “Have Wagon, Will Travel. Bureaus and Dressers a Specialty.” Even though I could use a stick of margarine to squeeze her into my allocated parking space, my Hassie McCoy is worth every scratch. At forty-plus years of age, I very often like to feel that I am eighteen again; my wood-paneled wagon allows me to pretend that I am back in my mother’s car. Hopefully, those viewing my sitcom life from a distance—if they lean way, way back—can see this “scenario” too.

**RULE TWO:** Your vehicle must be American-made. Exotics and foreign cars are reserved for those “special guest stars” or eccentrics who make “recurring appearances” in your sitcom life, like a gutsy grandfather or flamboyant widowed aunt.



Rob Petrie did devote a few episodes (weeks) of his life to the purchase and maintenance of his beloved “Tarantula” sports car, but he eventually sold it.

**RULE THREE:** Ask yourself, “What car says my character?” There is no mistake in the choice of a Chevy Malibu convertible for the newlyweds Darrin and Samantha Stevens. This mid-sized, mid-priced car complimented their mid-sized house’s garage on Morning Glory Circle. The car was within Darrin’s budget, the convertible model screamed “young modern couple,” and having only the one car was also indicative of a “young family on the way up.”

Sometimes, especially in a “car town” like Los Angeles or Detroit, you are what you drive, so be careful.

**RULE FOUR:** I am all for convertibles, but you don’t have to prove your sportiness by lowering the top. Unless your car is needed for a parade, there is no reason to have the top down. Ever. Even on the sunniest days, have it up, windows closed, air conditioning on “high cool.” The reason behind this decision is that wind can do more damage to a hairstyle than a whole case of hair spray can repair.

**RULE FIVE:** Lest we forget, an automaker is frequently the grand sponsor of a television show, furnishing the cars that sitcom families drive. The Cleavers had Fords on Grant, but switched to Chrysler-Plymouth after they moved to Pine Avenue. The Stephen Douglas family were diehard Pontiac fans, even back in Bryant Park. For this reason, we do not, I



repeat, do not acquire cars outside of our chosen brand. If you have been blessed with two automobiles, they need not be the same model, but they must be the same make. Don't mix an Oldsmobile with a Nissan. If you have a sporty Buick Riviera, an obvious second car choice would be a sensible Buick Roadmaster station wagon. And please, pick complimentary colors.

**RULE SIX:** Always have the necessary registration and insurance papers in the glove compartment, preferably in a plastic holder. Do not keep cassette tapes, Chiclets, or sipping straws crammed in there. This area, as well as the rest of the interior, should be free of clutter and chaos. In every sitcom there is at least one incident of being pulled over by a traffic cop. Your glove box should not be a jack-in-the-box ready to explode.

**RULE SEVEN:** Garage your vehicle at night. If you have no garage, a carport will do. *Bird droppings are a no-no.*

**RULE EIGHT:** Always drive with both hands on the wheel. Never use the car radio, unless you are a hoody teenager with nothing on your mind but running away from home. Music will drown out any important dialogue that might occur between you and your passenger.

**RULE NINE:** You may toot your horn upon arriving at your destination if you are expected. Never hang your arm out the window, never smoke in your car, and never allow anyone to eat while operating your vehicle. It will mess up their lipstick.

**RULE TEN:** When visiting friends or shopping, call ahead and have someone place a reserved safety cone out front. This will ensure a clear curb or driveway for “car posing.”

**RULE ELEVEN:** Never modify or customize your factory original. Funny decals, glass-pack mufflers, and blacked-out windows are all taboo. If your vehicle has any of the above, trade it. Today.

**RULE TWELVE:** Passenger placement is vital for a successful sitcom car trip. Adults go up front, children always in the back. If you drive a four-door vehicle, make sure that the two passengers in the backseat sit close together, so their faces will not be blocked by the front passengers’ heads.

**RULE THIRTEEN:** Fender benders and rear-end collisions are common in sitcomdom, but only the immediate-repair variety. Never cash in your insurance check for a month’s supply of methamphetamine sulfate or to pay off your bookie. No matter the cost, have that fender replaced *pronto*. No homemade repairs, no red tape over busted taillights, no masking tape to patch canvas top tears, no trash bags where glass used to be. You are a reflection of what you drive. Your car is the most important extension of your life in a TV bubble. Treat it with respect and love. And there are usually no breakdowns in TV land, except on dates. Join AAA.

**note**

If you are, God forbid, pulled over by a motorcycle cop for drunk driving, and you have a gram of cocaine in the front seat beside you, please, under all circum-

stances, do not ruin your “big scene” with unruly panic or drama. In your best Larry Tate way, activate your driver’s window open, turn on the overhead courtesy light, and place both hands on the wheel. Shoving any objectionable paraphernalia like handguns or dope wrapped in plastic baggies under the seat or out the window should be performed in one sweeping motion. Police officers are wary of their pursuants anyway, so make it clear you are not going to be a threat or nuisance. Turn your engine off and smile for the flashlight glaring in your eyes. Kick into a charming Jack Tripper (*Three’s Company*) mode with a fatherly dash of Stanley Roper thrown in. You would not want to seem like a Helen Roper or then the cop will *really* know you are drunk. Use one word responses and stay away from loud, boisterous J.J. Evans taglines like “dyn-o-mite” when the officer tells you that you are under arrest.

# T.V. QUIZ

INSTRUCTOR:

MARK BENNETT

COURSE:

HOW TO LIVE A SITCOM LIFE

LESSON:

## "CAR CULTURE RECAP"

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

GRADE

**Circle one:**

- 1. You are a parent of four, with a blow & go hairstyle and a penchant for khakis & denim work shirts.**

**You should drive:**

- a) a Plymouth Duster
- b) a Mazarati
- c) a Rolls Royce Corniche
- d) a four-wheel utility vehicle or station wagon, wood-grain siding an option.

- 2. You are a young, conservative secretary.**

**You should drive:**

- a) your mother's '72 Buick Electra 225
- b) a Vespa scooter
- c) a Cadillac Seville
- d) a sub-compact with no options.

**3. You are a retired CPA. You should drive:**

- a) a Range Rover
- b) an '88 Dodge Colt
- c) a Harley Davidson motorcycle
- d) a standard sedan with leather upholstery and golf clubs in the trunk.

**4. You are a single, platinum-blond exotic dancer.  
You should drive:**

- a) a Chevy Malibu
- b) a Ford Escort
- c) an Aston Martin DB5
- d) a low-slung sportscar with seating for two and a trunk just large enough for "g-string" storage.

**5. You are a divorced bartender from Van Nuys, California. You should drive:**

- a) a Jaguar XJ12
- b) a Mercedes 450SL
- c) an Isotta
- d) a Pontiac Trans Am.



## Bringing Home the Bacon

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**W**hile many of us wish that we were a *Tomorrow* magazine editor like Tom Corbett (*The Courtship of Eddie's Father*), or a private secretary like Susie McNamara, it can be hard, often impossible, to make your real day job entertaining enough for sitcom viewing. TV families of the 1950s barely seemed to work—like sex, it just wasn't shown—and if they did, they almost never worked nights or weekends. TV characters never dug ditches for a living. Struggle with finances? What's that? Outside Suzanne Sugarbaker, I can't think of any TV tycoons who needed a slew of accountants to balance their checkbooks.

To put it bluntly, most of us have to work to earn the money for food, clothing, and shelter. As Americans, we are all supposed to clamor for the almighty dollar, but the truth is

that there is never *really* enough money. If we get a raise, we just acquire more things. Making money should not be our only avenue to happiness. I know people who boldly say they would rather have a lifetime guarantee of regular, healthy bowel movements over ten thousand dollars in cash.

There can be no “deadbeat dad” warrants or garnishments of your wages in the sitcom world. Keep your checkbook balanced and rubber-free. Having your lights or telephone cut off for non-payment does not push your story forward. You’ve got a “show” to do, and it is up to you to keep mundane things like bills paid. Your public expects a long-running hit show.

Everyone on TV looks like they are living off a vast inheritance. How else could they all dress so well working entry-level jobs like receptionist at a talent agency? Most of us do not land jobs like actress/temp Sandy Stockton (Sandy Duncan), who had a great apartment, a glorious wardrobe, and enough money left over for luxuries like luggage and lashes (for one season anyway). I always wanted a job like James West had. But how many secret agent cowboys do you know working full-time at this moment?

Face it. If the extent of your professional career has been slinging footlongs at a Nathan’s Hot Dog counter in Times Square, then I say put a crease in your cap and greet your customers with a smile! Make your position the most coveted, sought-after job in town. Where a lot of us get lost is in think-



ing that being a full-fledged dentist like Jerry Robinson of Chicago is somehow better than being an apartment super like Duane Schneider of Indianapolis. One may take more education than the other, but they still put in the same number of hours a week. It's being able to say, "This is what I do to pay the rent" that can make the difference between loving and hating your current position.

Even if your sales job at the tombstone company is fraught with boredom, unless you have other prospects try to make the best of the situation. Look at all those stressed-out, high-profile people who would kill to play solitaire during long hours at an empty desk. Remember, you don't have to like your job. Just *act* like you like it.

## **Picking the Perfect Sitcom Job for You**

I guess I've only recently learned how lucky I am to have my job as a U.S. Postal Service Letter Carrier for the City of Beverly Hills. Years ago, when I wanted to be "discovered," it seemed like eight daily hours of drudgery. Yes, I had more education than my job required, but 1) I liked the freedom of being outdoors, 2) I could still make art at night, and 3) many of my postal patrons were already living sitcom lives. I'd often think about how Ralph Kramden must have felt after a long day driving a New York City bus, or about James Evans, Sr., coming home to the Chicago projects after an endless series

of pick-up jobs. Connie Brooks made teaching high school seem like a breeze. Well, I tried teaching, and other than counting scissors and pencils all day, I didn't find it all that appealing. To be honest with you, I've always followed the credo: "Aim Low in Life."

Today, I proudly maintain an impeccable uniform. Unlike my TV counterpart, Cliff Claven (*Cheers*), I volunteer for all tasks, such as managing our employee laundry service, which allows clerks and carriers to have their uniforms sent out for a minimal charge, thereby maintaining a crisp, stylish look any costumer would approve of. I issue the laundry tickets, collect the money, and sort and count the uniforms. It's completely glamour-free. The perk is I get to make announcements over the workroom loudspeaker like, "Will the owner of the postal sweater with the broken shrimp (earring) in the pocket, please come claim your personals," and, "Attention carriers and clerks. We can no longer be responsible for underwear left inside uniforms. Thank you." See, I hope one day to snag the highest honor of my peers, the coveted Letter Carrier of the Year Award. This trophy includes one's name engraved on a plaque in the hallway to the john, a Rotary Club luncheon in one's honor at the Beverly Hills Hotel's Sunset Room, and the month-long use of a preferred parking space.

Yes, as a mailman I've sauntered into yards where vicious canines live, with only the protection of an empty mace can

to throw at a mad dog's head. But I've also gotten a blow job in Sharon Tate's house, a cup of tea from Loretta Young, and smiles and waves from celebrities like the late Elizabeth Montgomery and Morey Amsterdam.

Only you can create a sitcom job. Today, I love my job and treat it as a way of giving service to others, not as an eight-hour punishment.

**RULE ONE:** Try to work days. Rarely do you find night-time workers in sitcomland, unless it's a deejay like "Venus Flytrap" at WKRP in Cincinnati or a high schooler like Richie Cunningham, busing tables to raise money for a set of wheels.

**RULE TWO:** You should get fired and re-hired at least once in your career. It's easy, and makes great fodder for storylines. Neighbors love gossip, and viewers will relate to your hardships more than to your triumphs. Do not disappoint them. Like when Rhoda had to correct a smug Phyllis after she was axed from Hempel's Department Store: "Yes, Phyllis, I am fired. Now, I am hired."

Most TV folk establish a career and never waiver from it. If you are branded an accountant, don't suddenly decide to become a psychic channeler. Stay within your sphere of expertise.

**RULE THREE:** I don't care if it's "Chief Custodian," every job should have a title. Label yourself and make sure everyone knows it. There is nothing worse than having a friend or relative refer to you merely as "someone who works at the plant."

**RULE FOUR:** Even if you don't work at McMann & Tate with two-martini lunches and an expense account that can be padded, it is vitally important that you delve into the world of your coworkers. If there is a once-a-month pancake breakfast, show up with maple syrup and a smile for everyone. Learn the names of your coworkers' kids. Ask about the invalid wife or transvestite son. You don't have to wear a suit and tie to feel important.

**RULE FIVE:** If you have had the same job for twenty years and your boss calls to say he can't come in because he's got too much homework, it's time to rethink where you're at.

**NOTE** If you came from nothing, then you have more than half a chance to better your lot in life. If you came from a middle-class background, there's a fifty-fifty chance of either improving your standard of living or perishing in a sea of bad marriages, bad jobs, and bad breath. If you are living off a substantial trust fund, my apologies.

**RULE SIX:** If you are a talented screenwriter but you pump gas to keep the lights on, it is most important that you remember to focus your energies on the matter at hand. Become an expert at windshield washing. Strive to be the most pleasant attendant and gas pumper of the fleet. Who knows which Hollywood producer will roll up to the pumps, looking for the guy with the ready smile and the fresh squeegee.

**RULE SEVEN:** Learn to say "yes" to anything asked of you. Even if you have no intention of fulfilling the request, saying

“yes” shows that you are a team player. (And when you don’t comply, they’ll think twice before asking you again.)

**RULE EIGHT:** To acquire that “trust fund” look, tell everyone that you are “driven to work.” You don’t have to say it’s on the bus. And if you are seen running for the Express #4, you will get more sympathy votes for using public transportation than for sliding into the back of a chauffeur-driven limo. Personally, I get much more coverage on my wardrobe from fellow busriders than I ever get from coworkers.

**RULE NINE:** If you absolutely hate everyone and everything at your place of work, you should either change your attitude, find a job you can learn to like—or, as a last resort: thirty Secondals at bedtime.

# T.V. QUIZ

INSTRUCTOR:

MARK BENNETT

COURSE:

HOW TO LIVE A SITCOM LIFE

LESSON:

## "TAKE THIS JOB AND LOVE IT"

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

GRADE

**Circle one:**

1. Your work place is rife with foreign tongues. It gets so loud sometimes, if you closed your eyes, you'd feel that you were at United Nations peace talks. You should:
  - a) go to the Big Boss and complain
  - b) remind your immediate supervisor that you are a U.S. Citizen and would like others to pretend to be the same
  - c) mock every dialect you hear
  - d) politely ask someone speaking the language you most admire to give you a brief daily lesson.

## Being a Cute Consumer and Gracious Gift-Giver

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**F**orget long lists, industrial-sized cans of pork 'n' beans, and forklifts lugging your price club loads to your van. You will not drop that crystal nut dish you bought for Uncle Joe's wedding present because it will be gift-wrapped properly. Nurse Julia Baker (*Julia*) and her son Corey never came home from a shopping trip with less than perfect packaging.

**RULE ONE:** Only shop for one item at a time. If you are hunting for a new fall wardrobe, buy one good outfit and add a bevy of accessories to modify it.

**RULE TWO:** Stick with shopping bags, heavy-duty, colorful ones with no store name emblazoned on them. There may be

a conflict of interest with the sponsor of the store and the sponsor of your sitcom life. Did you ever see Robinson J. Peepers (Wally Cox) carry a new pair of shoes in a paper sack or plastic bag? Afraid not. They were always wrapped in plain brown paper and bound with parcel twine.

**RULE THREE:** If you are all thumbs when wrapping a package, pay someone else to do it. There is nothing like an uneven or poorly wrapped present. If you are adept at this procedure and can gift-wrap with the best of them, offer to help the less fortunate who can't make a crease or a bow. This way, when they point to a slipshod item under the Christmas tree and say, "Look, I wrapped it with my own two hands," you won't have to crack, "I thought you wrapped it with your own two feet."

### note

If you want to go solo in the wrap department, it is imperative that you acquire a sturdy box with a lid and wrap each part of this gift box separately, as follows:

- 1: Crease the edges and use invisible tape.
- 2: First tuck the item in among mountains of crisp white tissue. Then and only then do you close the lid.
- 3: Do not tape the lid closed. Simply use four-inch wide ribbon (thinner ribbon for smaller gift boxes) to secure all four corners of your box.
- 4: Tie this ribbon where it meets in the center with a slip knot. Fold the ribbon "tails" onto themselves and cut a "V" to finish off the ends. This knot will be covered by the



chrysanthemum-sized bow that you will make or purchase at a party shop.

The reason for all this is that you will want your gift receiver to open it in two simple movements: slip the ribbon off and remove the lid. This has a two-fold advantage: the lack of crackling paper will save your sound man's hearing and your prop person can reuse the box.

**RULE FOUR:** Refrain from being loaded down like a pack mule. Never carry more than one shopping bag on any trip. Don't lug large merchandise on your shoulders or back. If it's more than you can handle gracefully, tip the salesperson to carry it to your car. (The real luxury is to "have it sent" and never touch the stuff.)

If you hate to shop, use mail-order catalogs, but don't cry if your clothing purchases don't fit right. You be the judge as to what is too tight.

**RULE FIVE:** Do not swing your bags wildly, use your shopping bag as a weapon, or fling your bags to the floor upon returning home. Treat the shopping bags with respect and carry everything gingerly.



## Making the Rounds

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### Sitcom Parties

Unless you are a crasher, be prompt and in a festive mood. If you are sick, stay home. No one wants to hear about your cold. And please, do not attend if you have just been cited for speeding and have a big chip on your shoulder. I've been to parties where my dance companion marveled at another gyrating couple who she thought were "slamming." Turned out to be a brawl that had spilled onto the parquet disco floor. When your party guests start "actin' a fool," remember:



*A host or hostess is not a cop or policewoman.*

Think of how Katy Holstrum, the farmgirl played by Inger

Stevens (*Farmer's Daughter*), conducted herself at the Washington, D.C., parties of her boss, Congressman Glen Morley. She was always intelligent, sincere, and charming. In fact, that girl was so smooth she ended up the Congressman's wife and grand dame of the residence. So put that in your pipe.

At one costume party I attended, a boisterous participant who was not awarded the Best Costume Prize took out his anger by peeing on the judge's car. Sure, his Zulu warrior loincloth get-up accentuated his chiseled jaiyard body beautifully (the six-foot hand-held spear didn't hurt either). And truthfully, his efforts were far more original than the half-assed harem girl who did win "Best Costume." But he wasn't banging the judge, the harem babe was. Maybe not altogether fair, but no cause for retaliation or a visit from the police. Remember:



*Participating is what counts.*

Parties are a time for rejoicing with your friends, not cause for your host to scratch a big red "X" through your name on future guest lists.

**RULE ONE:** If you spill wine on your host's new carpeting, don't try to hide it under a potted plant. Apologize immediately or, if you are too embarrassed, send a note along with a cleaning fee the next day. Don't think your host won't know it was you who missed the ashtray and put a cigarette burn clear through the Ming Dynasty pedestal table.



If you consistently plop into chairs at other people's homes and have cracked the frame of at least one chair in every friend's house, do not dismiss your horsiness by interjecting, "Oh, this old tacky thing?" when you know good and well the chair was once owned by George and Martha Washington.

**RULE TWO:** If you are an excellent orator, take it upon yourself to tap your glass with a spoon to quiet the room, not to pontificate on the infected growth the doctor found in your ear, but to salute your party host.

**RULE THREE:** Do not use your host's bathroom as a place to score dope.

**RULE FOUR:** If the bartender flakes, don a bow tie, put a cup on the counter for tips, and mix your best Manhattan. Use colored water after the first round so that no one gets sloppy or starts bawling or brawling. Remember, those who can't handle their liquor usually can't remember their lines.

**RULE FIVE:** Never be the last guest to leave. For those of you who have closed down a nightspot, you know what "disco death" means. It's when the music stops and the house lights go up and it's worse than a dozen gin martini hangovers. Take your leave just after the party peaks around midnight. So what if you miss Gladys Kravitz stripping on a tabletop. Believe me, you'll hear about it in the morning.

**RULE SIX:** If you are on a strict diet or religious fast, do not attend a party unless you can accept what is being served. If your hostess brings out a stunning homemade lasagna, don't

ask, "Where's the meatless?" Who cares? Most vegetarians I know eat all the desserts anyway.

**RULE SEVEN:** If your host pops a videocassette into the VCR, do not say, "I'll watch anything, as long as Hope Lange's in it."

**RULE EIGHT:** If you are hosting or attending a pot luck, pick a dish that you can make effortlessly and serve it every time. It doesn't have to be Veal Prince Orloff. Add a special flavor or topping that makes it your "signature" dish, and even if it's just spaghetti, swirl your initials across the top with parmesan cheese.

# T.V. QUIZ

INSTRUCTOR:

MARK BENNETT

COURSE:

HOW TO LIVE A SITCOM LIFE

LESSON:

## "KATY HOLSTROM'S CHARM QUIZ"

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE

GRADE

Circle one:

**1. A neighbor challenges you to a foot race. You:**

- a) feign a weak heart
- b) accept the challenge but not a date
- c) set a date but do a no-show
- d) accept the challenge on the condition you both wear penny loafers and chinos and race at the high school track.

**2. There are two slothful coworkers at your office. They borrow items from your desk, inadvertently scratch your brand new car with their horsy behavior, and are generally an embarrassment to you and your company with their disheveled and sloppy appearance. What do you do?**

- a) Start calling them "The Mud Hens" behind their back.
- b) Give them the "Big Freeze" and act like they don't exist.
- c) Greet them each morning with a friendly, "Hi, deadbeat."
- d) Invite them to a free lunch and complimentary trip to Elizabeth Arden.

- 3. You are involved in a minor fender bender with a neighbor in your apartment building. You:**
- a) exchange insurance registration & phone numbers
  - b) exchange phone numbers and start an affair
  - c) slug it out for cash
  - d) take it before a befuddled judge in small claims court.
- 4. The head of the college department in which you are majoring asks you to his home to earn extra money. When you arrive, he offers you a choice of raking leaves or posing nude for nature slides. What do you do?**
- a) Ignore the proposal and grab the rake.
  - b) Shuck your drawers and smile.
  - c) Act like you didn't hear him and leave.
  - d) Go into a tearful tirade, lock yourself in the bathroom, and don't come out until you get hush money and carfare.
- 5. You had always wanted to be on the high school wrestling team but were too shy. Now you're too old or too fat. What do you do?**
- a) Lie about your age & join the team anyway.
  - b) Put ads in the Personals.
  - c) Pick fights in local bars.
  - d) Join a pro-school and perform on TV part-time.



**6. You are relaxing at home when the doorbell rings. Six of your closest friends show up unannounced and hope to share the evening with you. Actually, depending on your friends, they may just be looking for food. What do you do?**

- a) Slam the door in their faces.
- b) Threaten to call the police if they don't stop loitering.
- c) Toss them each a U-Need-A biscuit and remind them it's a school night.
- d) Invite them in and ask them to help you whip up something to eat. If anyone in the group asks if they are imposing, you give them a resounding Ethel Mertz and say, "Nonsense. Anybody from Albuquerque always has enough to eat."



## Weddings and Funerals

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### Going to the Chapel

No one on TV ever looks better than a bride and/or groom.

**GROOMS:** Rent matching tuxedos for your groomsmen. Just make sure none of them are flaky or chronically late.

**BRIDES:** Don't try to salvage those worn-once bridesmaids' dresses by inserting Velcro breakaway panels to convert maxis into minis. You select the clothes, you pay. If you can't stand the thought of investing in matching dresses that will probably never see the light of day again, cut corners by making your own dresses out of paper. That way, after the ceremony you'll only need a trash can and a lighted match, no wooden hangers or garment bags.

As for the guests, here are my Wedding Episode Ten Commandments:

- 1:** Avoid wearing bright, bold colors. No bride wants to be upstaged by a slut in a red dress, especially one who slept with the groom.
- 2:** Though it may be tacky to be a heckler, the groom will expect it. Keep it simple. Legible placards proclaiming “Just Married” on the trunk and empty cans tied to the bumper with string are fine. But please, no cherry bombs in the tailpipe.
- 3:** Toss, do not throw, birdseed at the dashing couple. Don’t retaliate for not being selected as a bridesmaid by trying to put someone’s eye out with the farewell rice.
- 4:** You must bring a gift. I don’t care if you are flat broke, on the verge of bankruptcy, or fighting extradition to Arizona on that stolen car charge, you put a big bow on something and see that the newlyweds get it. A card with a blank check enclosed is always appreciated.
- 5:** When they ask all single ladies to grab for the bride’s bouquet, you spring to that jousting area in your dyed-to-match pumps in a New York minute. There is nothing wrong with being un-married, so if the flowers come your way, just smile for the camera.



Do not fight, tussle, or knock people down in the attempt to catch the bouquet. Eligible men will think you

play tackle for Green Bay and will not ask for your phone number.

- 6:** If you are the “best man,” it is your duty to toast the happy couple. Rehearse something poignant, sincere, loving, and brief. If you used to sleep with the bride or groom, keep it to yourself.
- 7:** The bride’s father has paid dearly for you to have a good time, so even if you are miserable, fake it. You can’t dance? Be the first to dive in with a fox trot, a tango, or an out-dated hustle.
- 8:** If the buffet table offers only lukewarm beer and chicken wings, be a good background person and eat later.
- 9:** Congratulate the bride and groom. If you used to date her, don’t cop a feel or “tongue” her in the receiving line.
- 10:** Do not bring your loud relative to a same-sex wedding to have her yell out, *a la* Mother Jefferson, “Which one’s the top?”

## **Bringing Out the Black**

My parents were in the business of providing music for funerals, and I’ve probably been to hundreds of them, but never have I worn a complete black ensemble to one. What I would give to go to a funeral now that I own a black suit, tie, rain-coat, and umbrella. I am not saying you should look in the

obituaries for an excuse to dress like Lurch, but as a tried-and-true sitcomite, you need the uniform.

Although not all of us may be adept at comforting griever, it is important to note that making an attempt at human contact, no matter how primitive—be it a hug, a handshake, or a curt “I’m sorry”—is far better than avoiding this delicate moment by hanging out in the funeral snack bar or smoking cigarettes outside. Learn to be respectful at these affairs. Embrace the grieving loved ones, offer your condolences and a shoulder to cry on, but never, *ever* say, “Hey, you guys wanna grab a bite later?”

Rules to die by:

**RULE ONE:** Speak highly of the deceased, even if he owed you ten dollars.

**RULE TWO:** Talk up past good times—the camping trips, the skating rink, the bowling trophy you stole from his den. Stay away from graphic details of his or her hospital charts and from estimating his net worth. If you and the deceased had a falling out, say a prayer that all is forgiven. This is for you, not him.

**RULE THREE:** Sign the guest book. If it’s a thin crowd, sign the guest book several times with fake names so that the dearly departed will at least look like he was popular. Throw in some celebrity names. This will impress the funeral home staff, and the late one will thank you from the other side.

**RULE FOUR:** TV funerals are restricted to professional funeral

parlors or chapels. They are never held in community centers, backyards, or parking lots. Unless, of course, the deceased has been cremated, in which case the service can be a free-for-all in a volcano, an amusement park, or at Zuma Beach.

**RULE FIVE:** You can do more with a pine box than you can with an urn.

**RULE SIX:** No styrofoam "Phone Calls from God" easel displays, no fruit baskets, no IOUs. If you send flowers in a box, do not hold up the procession to ask if you can have the empty container back.

**RULE SEVEN:** Dark glasses are a must, pitch-black if you knew the deceased really well and plan to do a lot of crying. If you are a distant relative, go for a lighter tint. Bring back-up pairs for distraught novices who forget theirs.

**RULE EIGHT:** Unless you are highly psychotic and/or attention-hungry, do not fling yourself upon the casket, scream and wail to beat the band, or attempt to reopen the coffin to retrieve that long lost brooch the way Maude Finley and Vivian Cavender Harmon did in Tuckahoe, New York.

**RULE NINE:** If you didn't really like the deceased, you can always listen to the ball game with a radio and earplug concealed on your person like Sophia Petrillo did at Frieda Claxton's funeral. But no gum-chewing, okay?





## Your Day of Rest

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**I**n 1988, I tried to become a Presbyterian and went through eight grueling weeks of training, all because I liked the architecture of my local Presbyterian church. What an earful I got when I admitted that the only reason I was joining was that I liked the way their sanctuary looked. What did I know? On TV, a church is usually nothing more than a visual to let viewers know it's "Sunday," and most characters in sitcomland—except the cast of *Amen*, of course—are not in the clergy, probably because dedicating your life to a Higher Being means working nights and weekends.

I had been baptized a Pentecostal, and by the age of twelve had already spoken in unknown tongues at our Sunday night revival meeting. I don't know if I got "a-scared" (as Theodore Cleaver might say) or traumatized by the event,

but I never took to church teachings after that. Whatever the reason, my religious upbringing never seemed vanilla enough for sitcom living.

How have sitcoms dealt with spirituality? Well, *The Flying Nun*'s Sister Bertrille spent more time surfing the trade winds over the Convent San Tanco than reciting the rosary or teaching catechism. Most spiritual leaders on TV were relegated to "non-speaking townspersons" (think extras).

I've never known Alan Brady (*The Dick Van Dyke Show*) to read from the Torah, or Dorothy "Missy" Baxter (*Hazel*) to run down the aisles of her church in a fundamentalist frenzy. They only went to church at Easter or for a wedding. Finito. No sacrament taking, no altar calls. I have seen the passing of the offering plate, the singing of hymns—but then it's straight home for Sunday dinner and a game of touch football. There really isn't much to go on.

You have to choose what kind of Sunday you are going to experience.

Here are a few guidelines:

**RULE ONE:** When choosing a house of worship, make sure the minister, priest, rabbi, guru, etc., wears a clerical collar or traditional vestments at all times for instant identifiability.

**RULE TWO:** If you are a churchgoer, dress to the nines with hats, gloves, ties, suits, the whole bit. Do not sing in the choir. Your job is to sit there and look good.

**NOTE**

You may network for business, but if this is the only reason you go to church, then tithe more than ten percent.

**RULE THREE:** Keep in mind that you should not be a grump or crabapple on Sunday. You don't want to be called "Al Bundy." Be cordial, even pleasant, to family, friends, and one-time enemies. If you can't handle that, take two Tylenol PM tablets with a cherry NyQuil back and stay home.

**RULE FOUR:** There will be no television watching on Sunday. Even if your sitcom goal is "Ralph Malph," you are the star here, not Sister Veronica on Sunrise Mass. You may sneak a bit of TV in late at night, but your daylight hours are your "prime time." Don't blow it. Even if you get rolled in the parking lot at the mall and have to file a police report, that is better than being holed up at home with the remote control.

You say you don't have any interests outside television? I understand. That used to be my excuse, too. But if you have no interaction with the outside world, then what will you put in your diary entry at bedtime? You can't very well lie and write that you flew to Paris on the Concorde when you really watched a rerun of *Airport 1975*.

**RULE FIVE:** If it's a big sports watching day for you, and you must break my "no television watching" clause, then all I ask is this: If you wear a football jersey, make sure it's a generic one with no known team logos.



## Going on Hiatus

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**T**ravel—to the Grand Canyon, Paris, Hawaii, or Australia—is a great way to break the weekly TV monotony, freshen your sitcom plot, or make a last ditch attempt to up your ratings. Don't worry; your trip doesn't have to involve switched luggage that uncovers a nest of drug smugglers, or the re-burying of an ancient burial figure that has jinxed your every move (as happened to the Bradys at Waikiki Beach). The only requirement is a good set of matching luggage.

**RULE ONE:** Broken or mismatched luggage is strictly taboo on TV. Choose your luggage carefully. Mary Richards favored a white French-provincial Samsonite set. Dorothy Zbornak (*Golden Girls*) adored her Hartmann walnut-tweed luggage.

You don't even need every accessory. Two pieces will do: one for each hand.

**RULE TWO:** Absolutely no plastic bags, Igloo ice chests, or paper sacks. You are not packing a lunch for your job at the shipyard. You are "vacationing."

**RULE THREE:** You don't need the kitchen sink for a three-day tour. Forget what Thurston and Lovey Howell packed; they were wealthy "eccentrics." Chances are you will return from your holiday.

**NOTE** No hand guns, please. Those are for cop shows.

**RULE FOUR:** You may travel alone only if you are visiting an old college friend or a sick mother. If you are attached, do *not* take separate vacations. The neighbors will think your relationship is in trouble and you'll never hear the end of it. If the marriage *is* on the rocks, take a whirl in travel outfits of complimentary colors and see if you can't rekindle the old flame.

If you have a large family, everyone should go, even the dog.

**NOTE** Other travelers will oooh and aaah over your pet in your airline-approved sky kennel.

**RULE FIVE:** When traveling by car, luggage should be kept out of sight in the trunk. Make sure all magazines, newspapers, pillows, and snack food are stowed away and not lying pre-

curiously on the rear window shelf. You don't want to slam on the brakes only to have a stray banana hit you in the back of the head. It could hurt.

**RULE SIX:** You say you don't have the financial means to take a vacation? That's no problem. Do what I do. Talk up your trip to anyone who will listen. Tell everyone you are going to Hawaii. Then lay low for several days, checking into a cheap motel on the interstate to soak up some sun and exhaust fumes.

On the appointed return date, pull up at your home wearing a plastic dime store lei, reeking of coconut oil and bronzer, and carrying a petite overnight case. Your neighbors will be pea-green with envy...and *you* will be several thousand dollars richer!





## Epilogue: For Readers Who Already Exist in 3-D...

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**I** never was able to shake the powerful influence television had on me, and because of that, I have had to work extra hard. If you, on the other hand, are content with yourself, and with your mate, then you're already the star of your own sitcom. You probably don't need me or a sitcom family to tell you what you already know.

For me, learning as much as I could about the world of the Baxters, Davises, Ricardos, Bradys, Petries, Flintstones, Partridges, Evanses, Stevenses, Munsters, Cleavers, Jetsons, Lanes, Mertzes, Stones, Bunkers, Ropers, and so on was a great way to cope.

## How to Live a Sitcom Life

But it was an exhausting way to live. Today's TV families are much less structured, more natural . . . more human. Still, I'm proud to say, I don't need any of them anymore.

If I, as your humble sitcom etiquette servant, have in some small way helped you on your path to the horizontal lines in the utopia we call TV land, then I am happy you were on this journey with me.

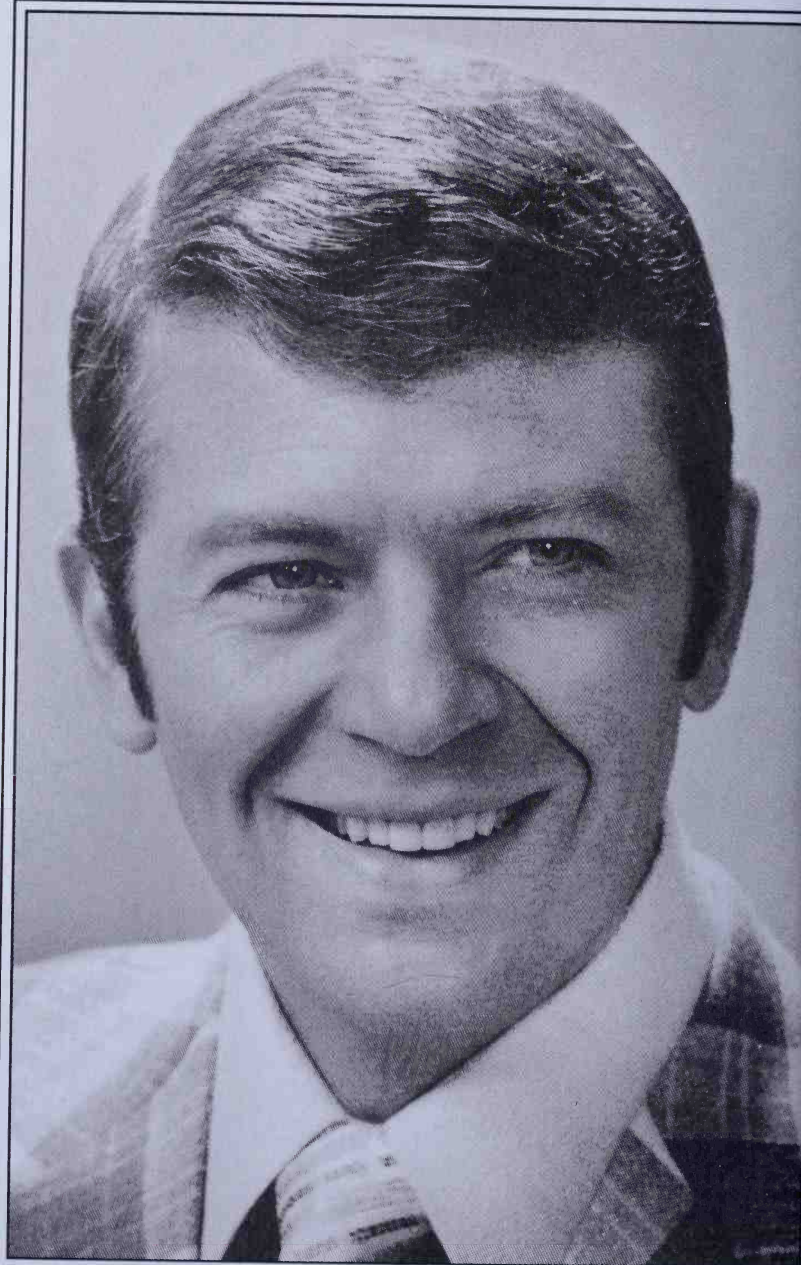
But all things must come to an end, even hit shows.

To quote Mary Richards, when she sent her physician boyfriend, Bill, packing:

"I say a lousy goodbye."

*The correct answer to all multiple-choice questions is "d."*

# **Names and Addresses**



## Mike Brady

4222 Clinton Way  
Los Angeles, CA

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A single parent raising three sons, architect Mike Brady married Carol, a single parent raising three daughters. He moved the whole brood into his strictly modern two-level rancher in a better neighborhood in the city. Even though the boys and the girls share two bedrooms and one bath, no one here wants for anything. He is a good provider, stretching his single income payroll to accommodate a well-furnished home and a uniformed live-in housekeeper.

He likes the Chrysler-Plymouth line of cars—a convertible for his sporty self and a sensible station wagon for Carol and the kids. He can be a slave to fashion, often attempting unattractive hairdos that may be up-to-the-minute but are not flattering, and buying trendy clothes that may not necessarily help his position in his staid corporate world but can be the talk of the golf course locker room. Mike likes to appear hip, even though he never frequents the inner city or seems to be politically inclined.

A good father, Mike plans trips that the kids will enjoy. On road excursions to Yosemite and the Grand Canyon and a Hawaiian vacation, the Brady family does not settle

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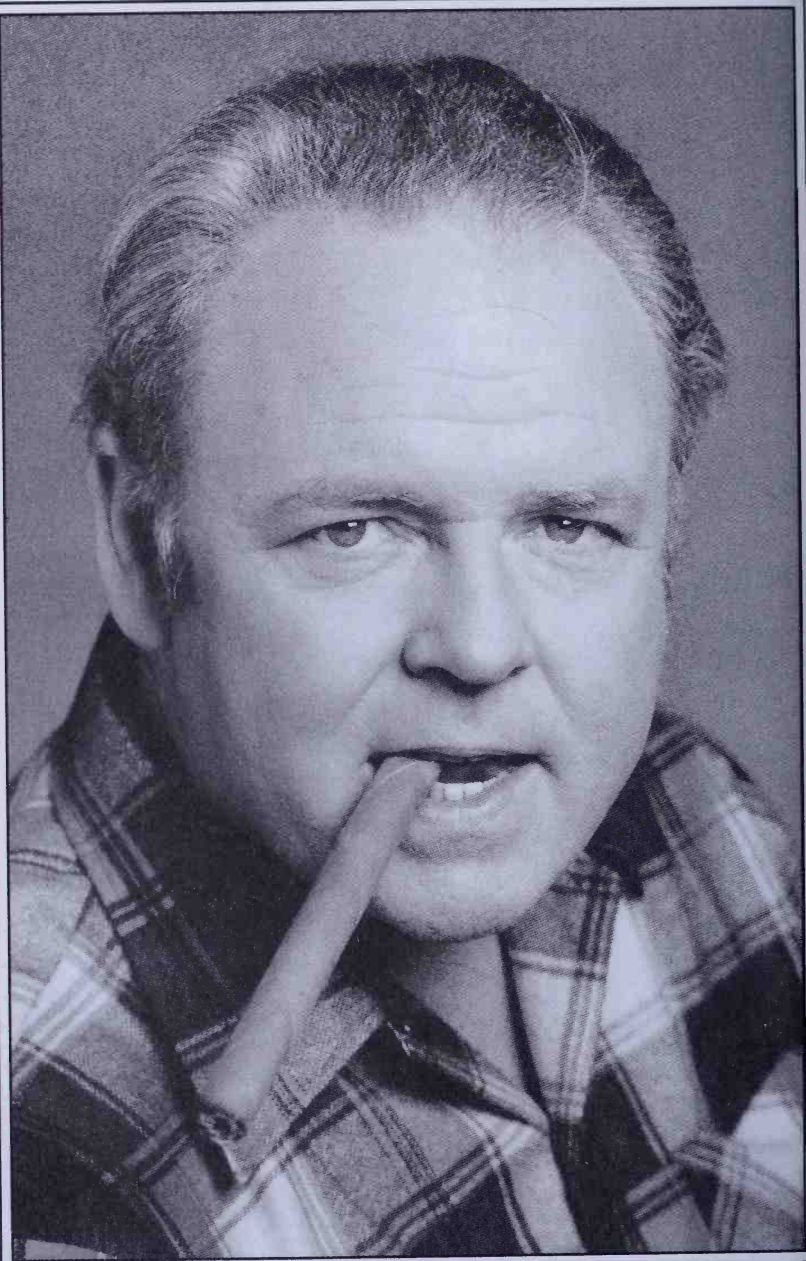
for Motel 6. Mike is a stickler for manners, conservative in his spending budget, and thoughtful in gift-giving and loving gestures. He once installed a pay telephone in the kitchen to teach his children the value of telephone service, and he can be stubborn.

Mike favors striped pajamas and enjoys reading hard-cover books in bed. He doesn't sing, rarely whistles, and seems to maintain a slim figure without disciplined exercise. He likes group activities, like volleyball with the kids, and is eager to help his children with school projects. He did give up his sacred den when Greg needed a hippie pad, but he is most at home at his drafting table.

Mike Brady does not believe in altering original homes.

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Archie Bunker

704 Houser St., Queens, NY

Narrow-minded and cynical, Archie may never be more than a blue-collar bigot, but you have to admit, with his educational background (or lack of it), he's done okay. He's a homeowner, a father, a husband, and, yes, to some, a friend. Married forever to his wife, Edith, Archie lives in Queens in a two-story row house. He likes cold beer, stale pretzels, and his constantly updated color television set. A creature of habit, Archie likes his routine, his easy chair, his dinner on time, an occasional cigar, and his interpretation of the world.

Not one for exercise, Archie could be considered portly, carrying around some excess weight at the waistline, proudly displayed under a long-sleeved, button-down shirt, usually white—no plaids or stripes. He wears a hat outdoors, to keep his thinning head of hair warm. He wears a plaid CPO jacket, and carries a standard lunch pail to work. Bedtime is promptly at eleven o'clock, unless Archie's on a tirade or having a heated argument with his son-in-law. He likes to give those in his path nicknames, or throw barbs at anyone he finds worthy.

Personal grooming consists of a bath twice a week, and

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a little witch hazel as a hair tonic. His clothes usually only look as good as Edith can make them. If he were to eat a meatball sandwich, the residue stains would not be cause for alarm. Shaving is done daily only so he “won’t look like a bum.” His personal beliefs stem from a by-gone era. So does his personal style. He can bowl or shoot the breeze with the fellas at the corner bar. His love for saloon camaraderie enables him to eventually open his own establishment, called Archie’s Place.

A high school graduate, Archie is loyal to New York City, even though he complains about the city and its people. In fact, there is almost nothing Archie doesn’t complain about. Except one thing: Twinkies.

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## Edith Bunker

704 Houser St.  
Queens, NY

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Edith Bunker, a sweet woman from Queens, New York, likes things simple. Not one to be demanding or demonstrative, this housewife has rarely set foot off Yankee territory. In fact, she rarely leaves her own neighborhood. But that's okay with her. This innocent, naive good Samaritan is more comfortable in a kitchen than on a trip to Paris. Her turn-the-other-cheek demeanor comes from her devout belief in God and her church, particularly the Reverend Felcher.

Although she doesn't see them often, Edith speaks fondly of her relatives, especially her cousin, Maude Finley, from Tuckahoe, New York, in nearby Westchester County. A mother to a single offspring, Gloria—the apple of her eye—Edith would rather devote her time to creating a comfortable home for her husband, Archie, a warehouse worker, than pursuing any career. A high school graduate, Edith is great at helpful hints like how to find the best butcher or the cheapest bargains at the corner market. Just don't ask her if she's read anything on *The New York Times* bestseller list. She can mend a sock or

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cook a roast but shies away from card games and hard liquor. She's been known to sip a sherry on special occasions.

Edith keeps her brown hair cut short and pin curls it at night. She might touch up the gray with a cheap rinse and would rather invest in a good bathrobe over extravagant cosmetics. She wears reading glasses, can basically play the piano, and likes low-heeled comfortable shoes. Edith never learned to drive a car. She knows everyone in the neighborhood and is more than happy to lend a hand to a neighbor in need. To her, there are no color lines. She loves to sing. She loves to laugh. Edith still wears a hat to church on Sunday and has worn the same cloth coat for the last twenty winters. She once dragged Archie to see *Carnal Knowledge* thinking it was "Cardinal Knowledge," a film about the Catholic church.

Edith enjoys *Kung Fu* on television.



## Hazel Burke

123 Marshall Road  
Hydeburg, New York

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This robust little dynamo really has a strong work ethic. With a heavy New England accent and spunky attitude, Hazel is a housekeeper extraordinaire. There is nothing this woman won't attempt to do. Although she may dress the part of the maid (down to pastel-colored uniforms for daytime and matte-black uniform for nighttime), she is really major domo to the Baxter family. Following the I Ching proverb, "to serve is to rule," Hazel takes no guff. She is the Baxter's food shopper, laundress, chauffeur, cook, baby-sitter, matchmaker, phone dispatcher, and nurse. Not to mention neighborhood watchdog, president of the welcome wagon committee, head of the Maids' Union, social club organizer, and not a bad poker player.

A life-long bachelorette, Miss Burke is most comfortable in her regulation-black work shoes (tie-up brogans with an inch heel) and simple cloth coats, on and off-duty. Her red hair is cut short in a stylish bob (perfect to accentuate her heavily starched maid's cap) and is rolled at night. Her prissiest accessory is a wristwatch. Her home, a room off the kitchen, is kept neat, everything tucked away in its



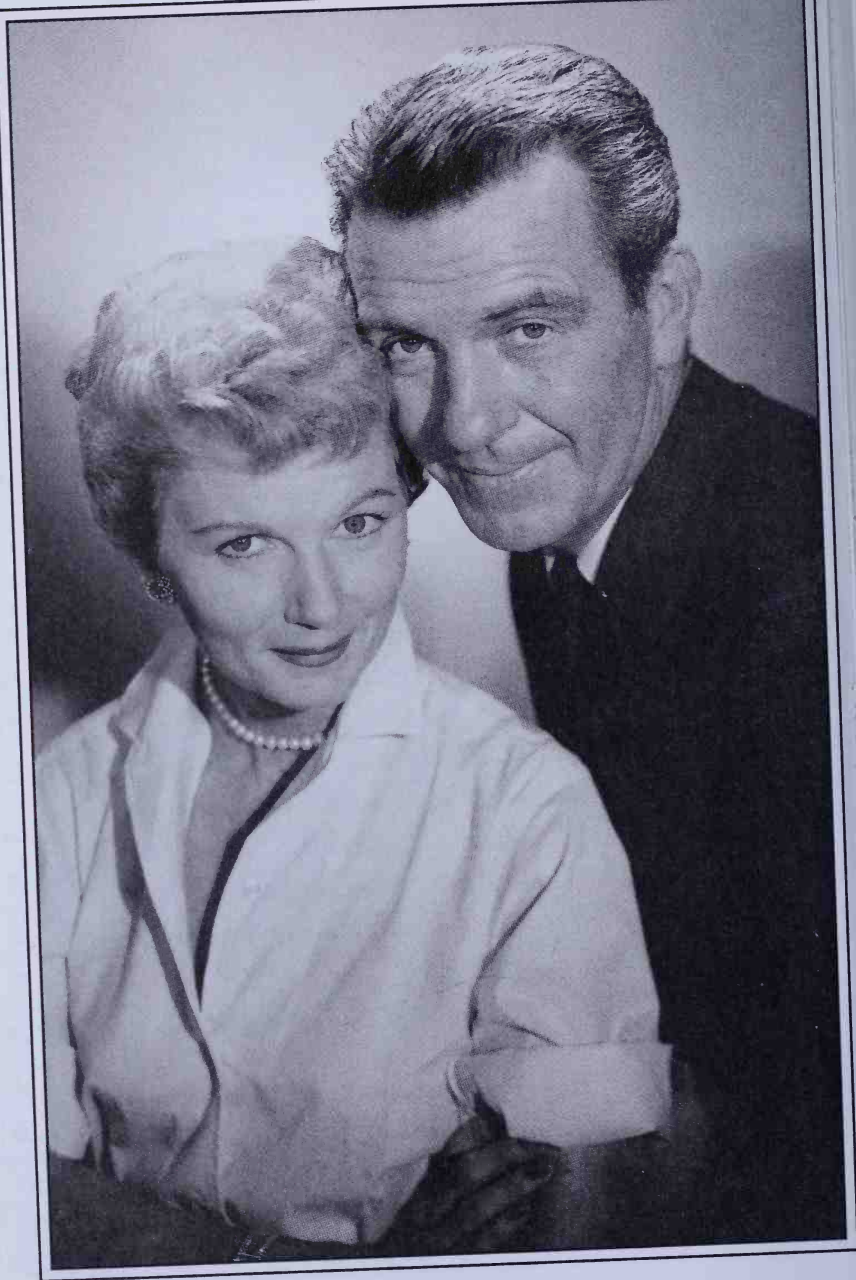
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proper place, a single bed made with military precision every dawn. There is a comfortable chair, if she cares to read at night, and stationery tucked in a nightstand for her correspondence. If she has family, she will make a pilgrimage on occasion, but her employers, George, Dorothy, and son Harold, are her real family.

She mops, she sweeps, she teaches Harold the rudiments of basketball. She's in everybody's business. Hazel is the Mother Confessor without the pageantry. A perfect addition to your next dinner party, she can serve the hors d'oeuvres, mix a mean cocktail, tell a funny joke, and mend the rip in your sleeve between the main course and some flaming dessert wheeled out around midnight. Not one to forget a name or a face, Hazel can delegate duties as well as any straw boss, read an appealing bedtime story, or pick you out from across a crowded parking lot as someone she went to grade school with. Equally comfortable with the mailman and a Supreme Court judge, Hazel speaks her mind, even when no one asks, drives a Ford Falcon convertible in red, and is an avid sports fan.

Hazel bowls on a league.



## Ward Cleaver

211 Pine Avenue  
Hayfield

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Growing up in Shaker Heights, a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, Ward Cleaver used to walk miles to school through all kinds of weather. This tenacity has paid off handsomely for him, in excelling on his high school football team and serving in the Armed Forces in the select Naval Corps, The SeaBees.

Married to the former June Bronson of East St. Louis, Ward is the father of two sons, Wallace and Theodore. An accountant by trade, he enjoys his work, always arriving promptly to the office wearing a suit and tie. Not a sourpuss, Ward enjoys a good laugh, especially in the work place, but *never* at the expense of others. At home, he likes to do household chores like staining the redwood picnic table on the patio or cleaning or repairing window screens. He always has time for his sons and is willing to help them out of a jam, but not without a life-lesson speech from his wealth of knowledge. Practical and conservative, Ward favors a direct approach in most situations and practices what he preaches. Ward does not lie. Ever. He is someone you can trust to keep a confidence or help in a financial pinch.

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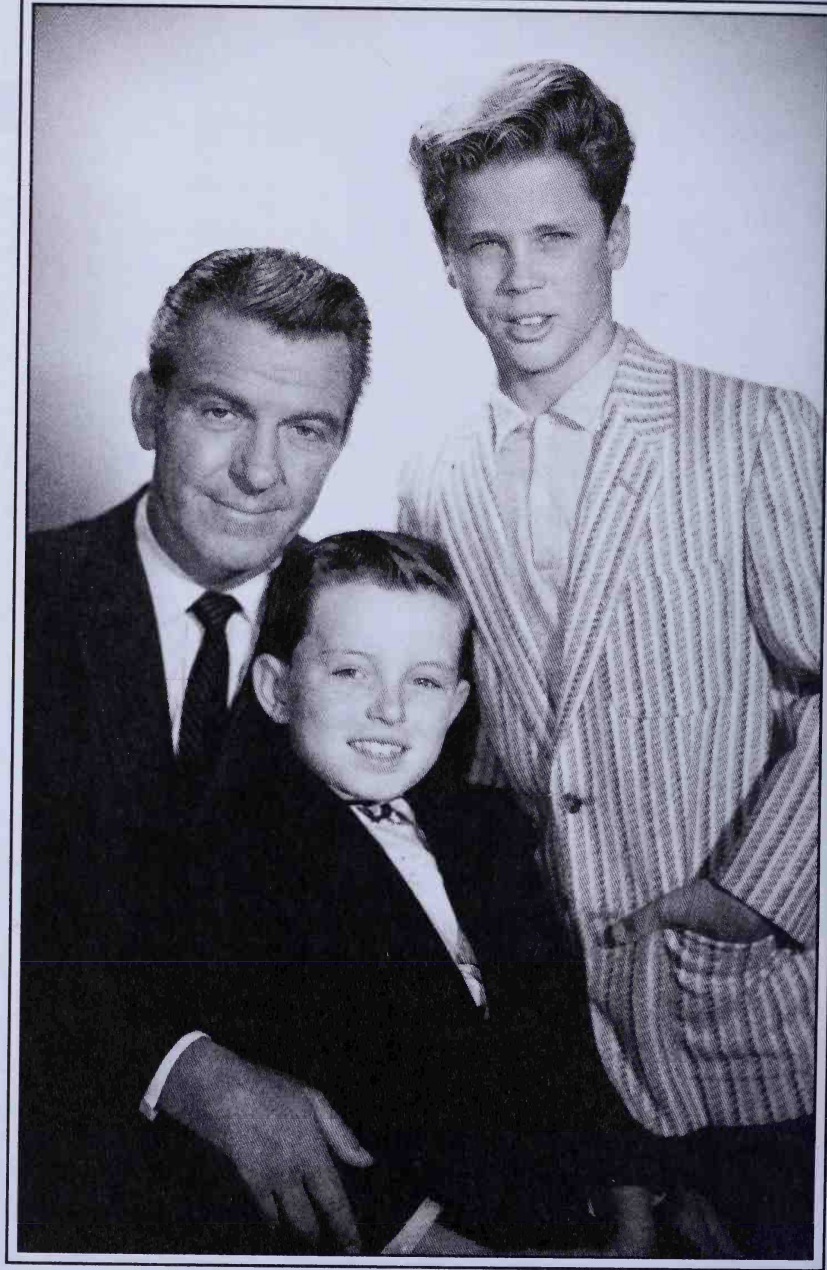
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Personal grooming consists of a clean-shaven face, hair slicked back with an enhancer, and fingernails trimmed and buffed. He likes pleated pants, cotton or knit shirts, and MacGregor golf sweaters or vests. He enjoys after-dinner coffee by the fire and reading a book in his oak-paneled den. Solitude is important to Ward, as is his membership to a golf and country club. He is a stickler for dinner table etiquette, even during breakfast. There is woodworking equipment in his garage and he has been known to help build a soapbox car for the boys. Tools are kept clean and orderly on pegboard panels.

Practical about money matters, Ward has moved his family to a better house, which is more expensive but well within the family budget. He used to drive Fords, but now likes Plymouths, traded in every year. He has never had a speeding ticket or auto accident and strongly believes in acquiring many kinds of insurance. Ward likes to take his family out to dinner on special occasions, like school graduations, but doesn't spend wildly on expensive trips or hotels.

He doesn't smoke, rarely drinks, and never swears, even in business. He is as regimented about attending Sunday morning worship services as he is about filling the wood box out behind the garage. The city of Mayfield has never cited him for unkept yard ordinances or slovenly house maintenance. A great neighbor and family man, Ward Cleaver would never be anything but a good citizen.





## Endora

### Bi-Coastal

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This vamp of a mother-in-law is any gay-boy's dream date. Heavy-lidded lashes, scads of make-up, red hair done up in a million different styles, she's the Auntie Mame of the supernatural set. With a last name that can't be pronounced, Endora likes to jaunt about the world, with one very big advantage. She possesses magical powers, a sorceress, if you will, who has no earth-bound limitations. Most times she pops in on her daughter, Samantha, a gifted witch as well, in her mortal world of choice, Morning Glory Circle, Paterson, New York. Even appearing suddenly in a chiffon "travel outfit," perched above the kitchen cabinets or high atop the roofline, Endora is not an imposition. No, she is a confidante of her daughter, a close loved one. Endora is a free thinker, an open-minded lover of the arts, a jet-setter who has seen it all and done it all for centuries. She looks great for her age (unknown) and has seen all four corners of the Earth—and probably Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn.

Having long separated from her husband, Maurice, a Shakespearean actor and warlock, Endora has full control of her life. She can produce a lighted cigarette, zap

herself a very dry martini, and change her son-in-law, Darrin Stevens, from a toad to a butterfly with the flick of her finger. Endora is not known for domestic duties; she probably wouldn't know how to vacuum or wash dishes or mop the kitchen floor. She can be the elegant party guest, charming, glamorous, sophisticated. Endora has turned heads; unfortunately, she has no use for mortals. Anything they can do, she can do better. Her gift is being able to blend, to live in both worlds, to recite the most complex of spells or hexes while being the loving grandma to her grandchildren, Tabitha and Adam.

When Endora wants to get comfortable, she zaps herself a pair of gold harem lounge slippers.



## Barney Fife

411 Elm St.

c/o Mrs. Mendlebright's Rooming House  
Mayberry, NC

.....

Barney Fife, the local deputy sheriff of Mayberry, graduated from Mayberry Union High. Thin and wiry, Barney always credits his mother's side of the family for his less-than-fleshy body structure. Although he has tried selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door, his real love has always been "sheriffin" and working at the Mayberry Court House with his best friend and first cousin Andy Taylor. Where Andy is laid-back and favors casual police uniform attire, Barney is high strung, nervous, fidgety, and wears the complete police uniform (down to the clip-on tie). Although often snickered at by tougher town folk, Barney walks with authority and tries to crack the whip in dealing with the public, especially when citing motorists for traffic violations. Even though the Mayberry Jail only contains two holding cells, Barney likes to treat their humble structure more like Alcatraz, especially after he's seen a George Raft or Glenn Ford movie with his girlfriend, Thelma Lou.

Very amorous, Barney likes to think he plays the field, always keeping Juanita, a waitress over at the BlueBird

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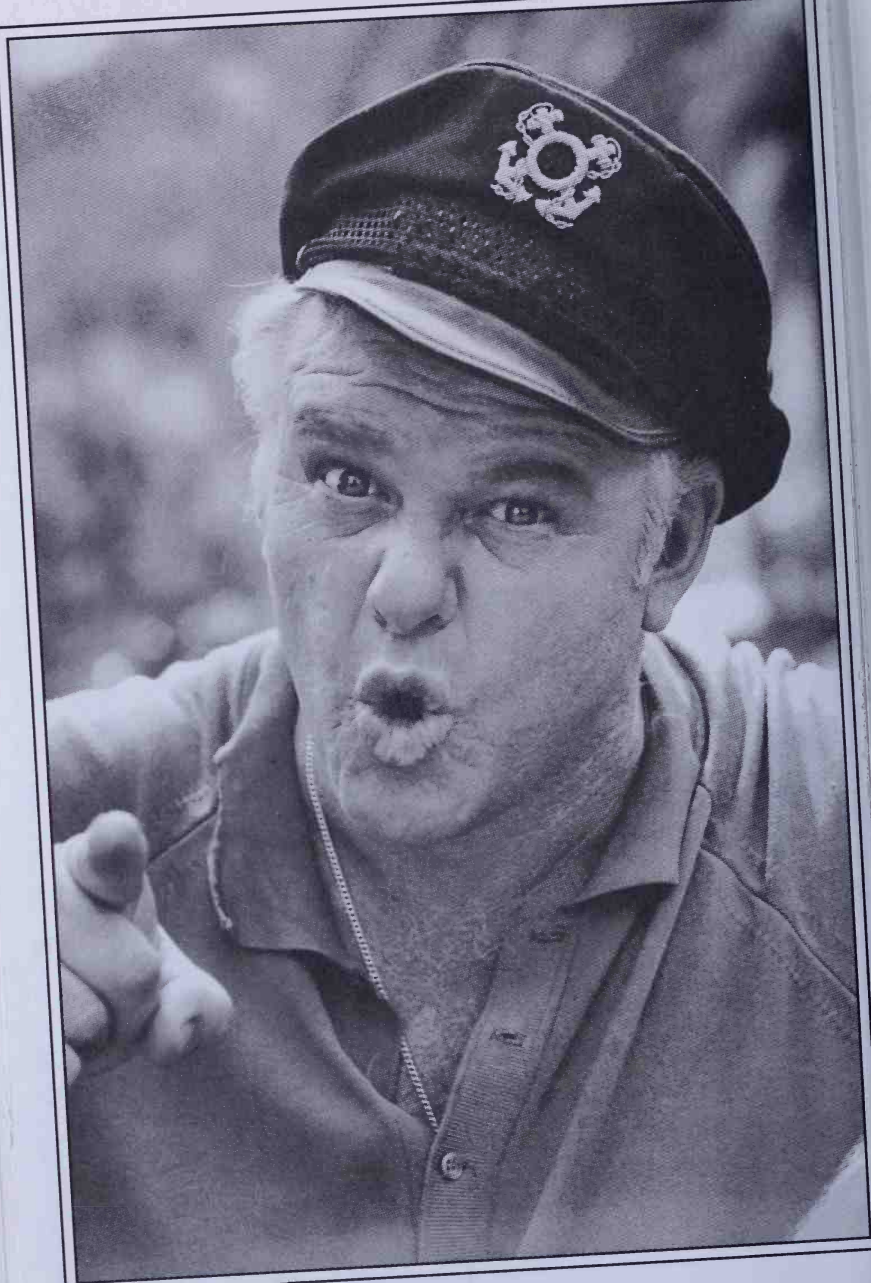


Diner, on the back burner. When he has an important date, he'll go to Floyd's Barber Shop for "the works": haircut, shave, witch hazel, eau de cologne. He can be a smooth talker when motivated, and likes to smooch in the back seat of the police car. Barney considers himself a judo expert, although he shies away from physical confrontations even when on duty. Although he's up on all the law enforcement regulations, he is forbidden to fire his gun because he is trigger-happy and is forced to keep one bullet, not in the gun's chamber but in his shirt pocket. Barney often teeters on the verge of not making the height and weight requirements to be on the police force, although he eats like a ranch hand and often packs three sandwiches in his lunch sack.

Quickly frustrated by Mayberry's small-town ways, Barney often likes to try out elaborate aids to benefit the police force, once purchasing a motorcycle with sidecar from Army Surplus. He can bungle many seemingly simple duties, but his heart is in the right place.

His furnished room at Mrs. Mendlebright's is upstairs, with a bed, dresser (all the way from Ft. Lauderdale), and a hot plate where Barney secretly heats up an occasional can of chili. He has one salt-and-pepper suit that he wears with a bow tie. Barney doesn't smoke, is conservative in finances, and only drinks when Otis Campbell, the town drunk, spikes the courthouse water-cooler.

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Jon

Gil  
Pa

# Jonas Grumby (the Skipper)

Gilligan's Island  
Pacific Ocean  
.....

This robust, affable navigator has always lived his life by the sea. Having done a seemingly life-long stint at the Honolulu marinas, the "Skipper," as he is called, became his own boss when he started three-hour tours around the islands in his beloved boat, the *SS Minnow*. With his one-man crew, Gilligan, his "little buddy," Jonas may not have the best results to his pursuits, but he's always sincere. Some might think the Skipper is jinxed, with the upheavals in his past, but you must admit: he has had an adventurous life.

Not one for extravagances, Jonas likes a no-nonsense wardrobe: knit polo shirts, khaki slacks, and dark canvas deck sneakers with white laces. Reflecting the water that surrounds him, his favorite color is blue.

Having been marooned during a terrible thunderstorm on a deserted island in the Pacific, Jonas has learned to adapt to life in a tropical paradise. With no telephones and no electricity, he has settled for living in a thatched hut and sleeping in a hammock. He keeps his worldly possessions in a footlocker. Other than the Polynesian-themed sur-

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roundings, Jonas Grumby's life probably wouldn't look that different in civilization. Even if he were back on the mainland, he'd still probably get his hair cut sitting with his head under a bowl.

Skipper does fight the battle of the bulge, even with a steady diet of banana and coconut creme pies. His life-long dream is to get back to the mainland, not for a reunion with loved ones, but for a thick, juicy steak and a beer.

He is single, does not have any visible tattoos, and tends to be nervous around pretty ladies. He is a gentleman, and can flirt more with his rich baritone voice than with his biceps. If he has ever been in love, he doesn't talk about it. Skipper is the type to grab a bunch of wild flowers as a first-date bouquet, and always removes his hat in what he deems an important moment. Unfortunately, his anger is hot and his temper is quick, especially when his crew (Gilligan) acts up, and the sailor hat he wears is often used as a weapon.

The Skipper has never owned an iron or ironing board.

Mrs. Emily Hartley

Northshore Towers  
Chicago, IL 60609

.....

Originally from Seattle, Washington, this dark-haired, deep-voiced beauty is the wife of psychologist Dr. Robert Hartley. She is cool, calm, collected, and childless. Trained as an elementary school teacher, Emily is employed at Tracey Elementary School and drives a Chevrolet Monte Carlo.

It rained on the day she and Bob married, something her mother called an “omen.” But while Emily and Bob like to throw a barb or two at each other, they don’t play rough. They are very much in love, accepting each other’s idiosyncrasies totally. They also enjoy each other’s company, spending most of their free time before lights out in their king-size bed, complete with Bill Blass bedding and comforter.

Emily is domestic to a point. She likes to cook most times, but also enjoys the convenience of take-out or home delivery. She loves interior decorating and revamps the Hartley two-bedroom apartment (one bedroom has been converted into a den) every year or so. She likes mixing antiques with contemporary pieces, an eclectic look that

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misfired only once, when she took the avant-garde route and installed a most uncomfortable iron day bed as the living room couch. Emily likes to shop and is at home in better department stores. She has been known to try the latest trends, like a star-studded blue-jean maxi skirt, but mainly sticks to chic, conservative suits and slacks sets. She has her hair professionally done, likes her make-up heavy, and is a whiz at jewelry accessorization. She'd rather have one expensive handbag than three cheap ones and likes real leather shoes.

She is known for throwing Fourth of July parties and often invites her husband's therapy patients as well as child-like neighbor Howard Borden. She counts Carol Kester (Bob's receptionist) and Ellen Hartley (Bob's sister) as close friends and is fiercely loyal to all those she holds dear. She especially likes Corinne, The Peeper's (Bob's buddy's) wife, a librarian from Vermont. Emily likes to dine out and would rather go dancing on a weeknight than tally the monthly household budget.

Emily is terrified of flying in an airplane and has had to postpone several excursions for this reason. She has been known to sing "Oklahoma" whenever frightened or on the verge of tears.

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## Edward "Eddie" Haskell

### Mayfield

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Deceitfully charming, positively insincere, this lanky teenager from Mayfield is very streetwise for his age. Even when he has volunteered to help his best friend, Wally Cleaver, valet-park cars for a wedding, he expects gratuities from all the guests. Yes, when it comes down to it, Eddie is a dichotomy in size 29" waist Hubbard slacks. With his sweet smile and concerned manner, he hoodwinks his way to poised, social success, or so he thinks. Most of his counterparts see right through him, even those labeled clinically blind.

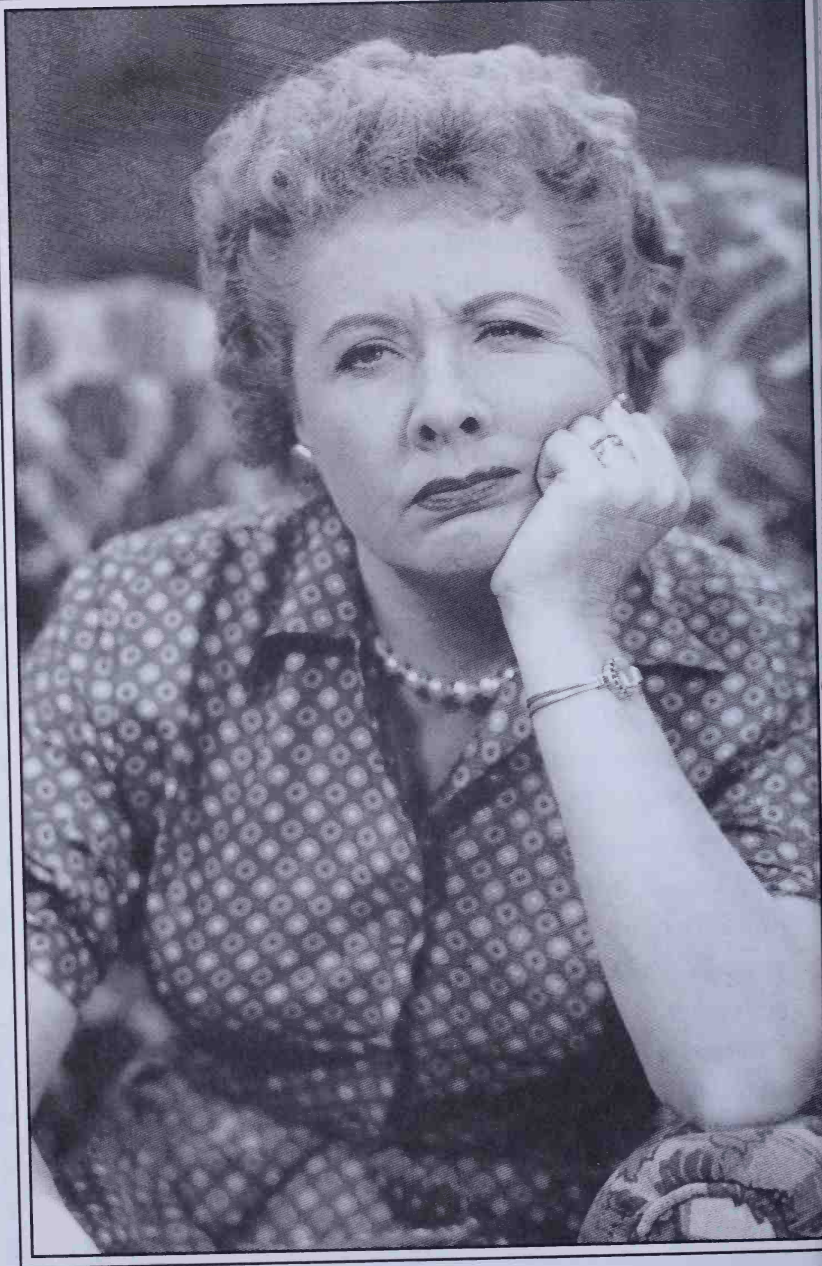
Eddie is the class clown, the smooth operator, and a fashion icon. He is the mastermind behind lots of practical jokes, usually coaxing his chief crony, Clarence "Lumpy" Rutherford, into carrying out the deed, like secretly entering Wally Cleaver's picture in the Huckleberry Hound Look-a-Like Contest, or ordering six quarts of ice cream from Gibson's Drugstore to be delivered by Wally to Mary Ellen's slumber party where no boys are allowed. If he only spent more time on his studies than he did scheming, maybe he wouldn't struggle to graduate with his class from Mayfield High. Eddie often boasts that he and his father are keeping an eye on Annapolis and M.I.T. as possible lucky recipients of his scholar-

ship choice. Truth is, Eddie is sliding through twelfth grade on the thinnest of margins. Possibly tiring of the pretense, Eddie does drop out of high school for a promising career as a gas jockey, only to find out the flashy new convertible and new duds aren't worth the reality of a sweat and strain job. He re-enrolls.

With his blonde hair slicked down to tame a curl frenzy, and a model frame looking dapper in anything draped on it, Eddie can work the runway. He favors button-down starched shirts, pressed chinos, highly-polished penny loafers, and matching cordovan belts. Eddie has style and likes to walk with his hands in his pants pockets.

Known for using his dad's gasoline credit card to buy impressive attire like an expensive tartan-plaid vest, Eddie, unfortunately, still believes one is only as good as what one is wearing.

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## Ethel Mertz

623 East 68th St., #3C  
New York, NY

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Ethel Mertz (formerly Ethel Potter) is from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her father is Will Potter, the owner of a sweet shop. Always itching to be in show business, Ethel did a stint in vaudeville, where she eventually fell for a fellow performer, Fred Mertz from Ohio.

Tired of the road, they invested their life savings in an old converted brownstone on New York's Upper East Side. Down-to-earth and sometimes downright horsy, Ethel is not one for pretense or flash. She has never spent more than one hundred dollars on an outfit since she married, which seems like an eternity. Since Fred is tight with their money and Ethel doesn't work, she has learned to economize, like sewing roast beef bones on a chuck roast, reupholstering their well-worn living room furniture, and buying a used washer from her neighbors, the Ricardos. In Ethel's opinion, it beats using the primitive washboard in the kitchen sink.

Travel has been limited to one trip: to have her gallstones removed at the Mayo Clinic. She does find a more colorful existence in the company of her best friend and

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cohort, Lucy Ricardo, who lives in Apartment 3D. Together, they plot all kinds of shenanigans, be it bottling their own salad dressing in a get-rich-quick scheme, sharing the proceeds from the newspaper's Lucky Buck Contest, or forcing their husbands to take them out on their anniversaries. Once, Fred corralled Lucy into buying Ethel's birthday present. Thinking she would like something chic, Lucy bought Ethel hostess pants. In reality, Ethel wanted a toaster.

Ethel does have one life-long hobby: eating. She eats with gusto, relish, fervor, and noise. Even carrying around an extra twenty pounds, Ethel is still quite attractive with her heart-shaped face and blonde hair that she wears either in a poodle cut or near shoulder-length. She favors moderate to heavy make-up, shirtwaist dresses, and comfortable shoes. She has never gotten on the subway wearing blue jeans. Despite her settled attitude, Ethel can be quick-witted, even in the midst of a mid-life crisis. Her funk has lasted twelve years. Although she is completely "over" her husband, Ethel remains married.

She will pin-curl her hair at night, visit a beauty parlor once in a while, and manicure her own nails. She likes chenille bathrobes and striped pajamas for sleepwear and has to go through a nightly bed-stuffing routine to compensate for their saggy mattress.

Ethel is an excellent singer, can play the piano, and dance the Charleston. She has never learned to drive.

# Daisy “Granny Clampett” Moses

518 Crestview Drive  
Beverly Hills, CA

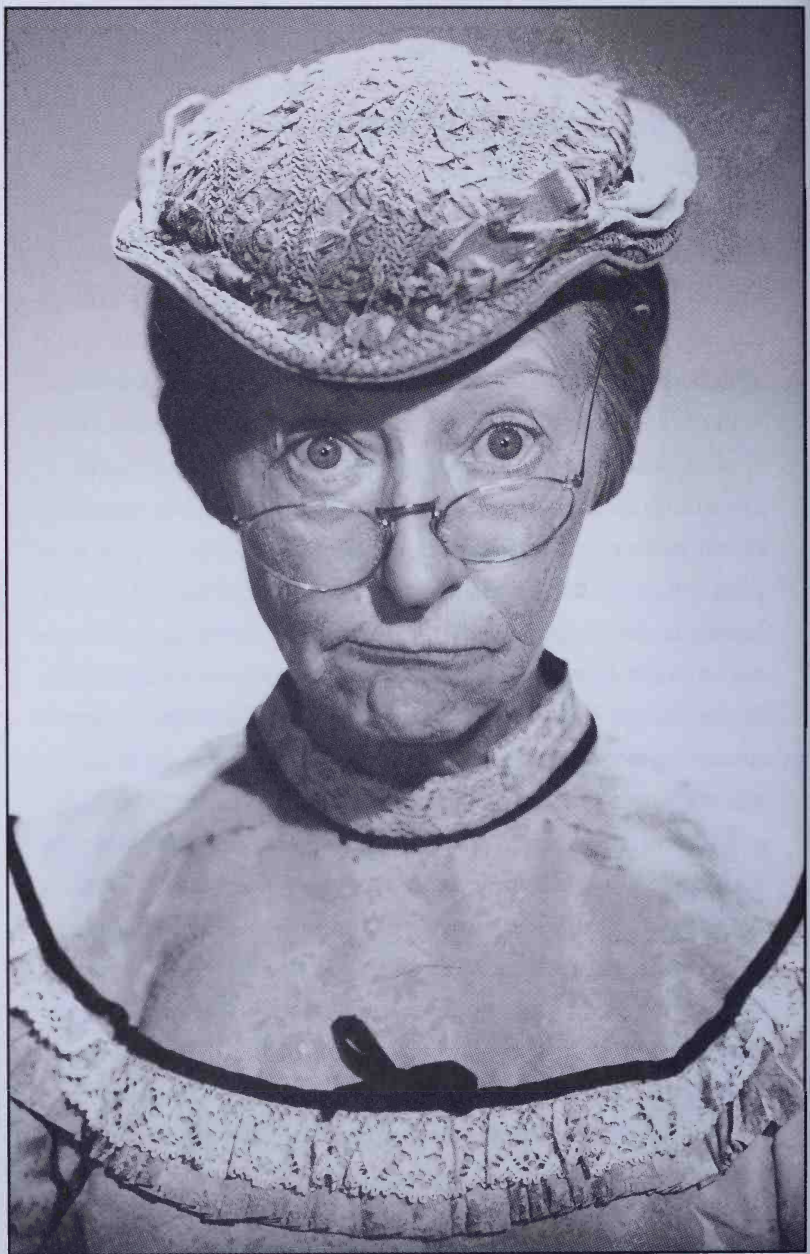
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Straight from the Ozarks, Daisy Moses is a fish out of water in Beverly Hills. She is the mother-in-law to J.D. “Jed” Clampett and grandmother to Elly Mae, his daughter. Tough as iron and strong as an ox, Granny, as she is called by family and friends, can plow a field better than a pack mule. She favors home-brew over store-bought liquor, maintaining her own moonshine still out back. She also makes her own lye soap, which may explain her leather-tough skin. With silver hair pulled back into a no-nonsense braided bun, Daisy doesn’t tolerate pretense or affectations, something she sees constantly in her snooty neighbors. She loves a good square dance, has the agility and skill of an Olympic wrestler, and never tires of her need to “doctor” her family into good health. Although she is short on schooling and holds no degree, Granny likes to think she is as good as any “city doctor,” prescribing the roots and berries and poultices of folklore origin.

Her primping activities might include a fresh polishing of her heavy-soled ankle boots, laced up over a pair of wiry legs. She might put a touch of vanilla extract behind

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her ears if she has a “gentleman caller” to court, but rarely wears makeup or goes anywhere without her round wire-rimmed bifocals. She never wears jewelry, save an occasional cameo brooch at the neck of her high-collared, lace-trimmed, long-sleeved cotton blouse, even though she could well-afford Van Cleef & Arpel diamonds with her millions of crude-oil dollars. She has no use for fur coats or flashy cars, but would rather spend her money on a good plow horse or shiny new buggy with yellow-painted wheels. She is trapped in the pre-Depression era of the Deep South, canning her own fruits and vegetables and fermenting her own elderberry wines. Granny makes good use of her deluxe kitchen with its double-everything appliances, but sets a table more for a handful of farmhands than pastry chefs.

She possesses the delight of a surprised child, even though she is somewhere between rocking chair and convalescent home. Granny likes her bathrobe a flannel plaid, with a rope belt, and can expertly fire any shotgun or pistol. She likes to ride high up on back of Jethro’s mother Pearl’s truck, and often wears a kitchen apron, even on errands like visiting the Commerce Bank of Beverly Hills. Suspicious by nature, Granny keeps a stranger at arm’s length, and believes the South won the Civil War.

Her favorite movie actors are silent screen stars Wallace Beery and Francis X. Bushman.

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## Rob Petrie

148 Bonny Meadow Road  
New Rochelle, NY

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Born to Sam and Clara Petrie, Rob grew up looking great in clothes. Tall, lean, and handsome, Rob has always been very agile, rubber-faced and comical. Married to the former Laura Meehan, Rob is father to one son, Richie. He works as a comedy writer for *The Alan Brady Show*, a popular television program out of New York City. Rob owns a modern ranch house in the suburbs of New Rochelle, in Westchester County. He commutes to work, but always likes to have breakfast with his family in the morning.

Even though they have twin beds in the master bedroom, Rob loves Laura very much. They have made a comfortable life for themselves: a well-appointed home, lovable coworkers like Buddy Sorrell and Sally Rogers, and wonderful neighbors like Jerry and Millie Helper. Rob is neurotic, is very accident-prone (he tends to do things like trip over the ottoman in the living room), and nervous at times. He is easily distracted, once putting on a tie to take a shower. Rob is a good father, spending quality time with his son, Richie, taking him camping on weekends with Jerry Helper and his kids in the family station wagon.

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Rob has a brother, Stacy, and is supportive of his family and relatives. Not overly political, Rob would probably rather polish up a comedy script than work the polls for a local campaign. His life is very busy and full of stressful situations.

Laura is a good wife, and she treats him respectfully, helping him when he falls, literally and figuratively. Rob keeps his thick hair cut short with a side part, never oiled or shiny. He favors golf sweaters with Hubbard slacks and loafers on weekends. A business suit is the order of the day when he is at the office, and he has been known to talk to his wife on the telephone several times a day from the workplace.

Rob is optimistic, fretful, and honest. He is not known to cheat or steal. He likes contemporary art and furnishings and is partial to taking showers. He enjoys most music and is a good dancer.

## Lucy Ricardo

623 East 68th St., #3D  
New York, NY

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Lucy Ricardo, born Lucille MacGillicuddy, is originally from Jamestown, New York. Her nickname as an infant was “Droopy Drawers.” She once played a tuba solo in grammar school. In high school, she excelled in Miss Hannah’s drama class and dated many fellow students, including Bennett, Argyle, Bud, Wilbur, and Noble. Lucy attended junior college.

She met Ricky Ricardo, a Cuban band leader, on a blind date set up by her friend Marion Strong. They fell madly in love, eventually marrying before the justice of the peace at Greenwich, Connecticut’s Beagle Club. They set up housekeeping on the Upper East Side of Manhattan in a converted brownstone. Their landlords, Fred and Ethel Mertz, have become life-long friends and confidantes and sometime enemies. Lucy keeps the one-bedroom apartment (#4A) tidy, preparing the meals in the eat-in kitchen. She is a whiz at spending money, often having to fudge on the household accounts to keep the utilities turned on. Lucy’s burning desire is to perform in her husband’s nightclub act at The Tropicana Nightclub downtown, much to





Ricky's consternation. A competent and skillful manipulator, Lucy doesn't take "no" for an answer. She likes to scheme. Even if Lucy can wreak havoc on those around her, she is basically harmless and lovable.

After fifteen years of marriage, Lucy and Ricky have welcomed their son Ricky, Jr., a bright, husky baby. Because of the cramped quarters, Lucy has convinced Mrs. Benson, who had a two-bedroom unit (#3D), into switching apartments.

Lucy gets her hair done weekly, maintaining the same hairstyle for years. She often shops at Macy's or Gimbel's basement or Mrs. Hansen's Dress Shop in the neighborhood. Lucy loves clothes, and has an insatiable lust for hats.

Although she is a stay-at-home mom, Lucy is sharp and quick-witted. She is devoted to fixing her husband's breakfast every morning, but is also co-president of the Wednesday Afternoon Fine Arts League. She is well-traveled, having been to Europe, Cuba, and Miami Beach, as well as having spent a year in Hollywood, California. She smokes cigarettes, loves to ogle movie stars, and likes to order spaghetti when dining out.

Settling into a suburban home in Westport, Connecticut, Lucy finds the fresh air exhilarating. She likes slacks for casual wear but likes fancy clothes, too. She has one dress with a Don Loper label.

She can play "Glow Worm" on the saxophone.





## Ricky Ricardo

623 East 68th St., #3D  
New York, NY

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Arriving in New York City from his native Cuba, Ricky Ricardo was already an established and successful bandleader. It wasn't until Marion Strong set him up on a blind date with a beautiful redhead named Lucille MacGillicuddy that his life would become complicated. He often wonders, after his wife gets into some new mischief, why he doesn't return to his homeland and a more simple life. Truth is, Ricky loves Lucy, and thinks she's "a wunnerful girl."

They take an apartment in a converted brownstone in Manhattan. Ricky settles in at The Tropicana Nightclub downtown, where he performs with his orchestra six times a week. Although not the world's greatest singer, Ricky is an accomplished entertainer. He works at night (off on Mondays), getting home sometime around 2 A.M. Mornings mean breakfast, usually eggs and bacon or his favorite waffles, with his wife and his son, Ricky, Jr. He likes to spend his afternoons at the club, rehearsing the show to be performed that evening. Ricky is a good businessman, handling all the details at the club and eventu-

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ally taking over the nightclub, refurbishing the interior, and renaming it Club Babaloo, after the song he has made famous. Always a ham, but not a bad actor, Ricky scores a film contract with MGM to play the lead in a picture called *Don Juan*. He buys a brand new 1956 Pontiac convertible and moves his family to the Beverly Palms Hotel for a year.

After the birth of their son and a move downstairs to a larger apartment (switching with Mrs. Benson after her daughter got married), romantic Ricky buys Lucy her dream house in Westport, Connecticut, as an anniversary present. Here he becomes the commuting executive and country gentleman, overseeing a hen house, new tenants and old landlords Fred and Ethel Mertz (living in the guest house), and doing such suburban jobs as building a brick barbecue.

Throughout his many travels and living situations, Ricky has always worn his thick dark hair combed back, with a generous pomade for height and sheen. His clothes are always top-of-the-line and stubbornly appropriate for all activities. If he's on a deep sea fishing trip in Florida, he'll have the deck shoes (rubber soled), striped shirt, and lightweight nautical jacket. Same for hunting: plaid car coat and matching hat with earflaps. He is most at home, even in a tie with smoking jacket, with friends like the Mertzes, playing cards. He likes the fights on TV, has been known to gamble, and likes poker. He enjoys a beer or cocktail on occasion and

smokes Philip Morris cigarettes. He is chummy with movie stars and has a terrible temper. Ricky often breaks into his native tongue when excited, religiously reads *Variety*, and has perfect eyesight.

His favorite dish is *Arroz con Pollo* (chicken with rice).

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## Mary Richards

119 N. Wetherly Dr., #D  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

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The daughter of a surgeon and a stay-at-home mom, Mary graduated from Roseburg High, Class of 1958. Never one for procrastination, she dove headfirst into school functions, excelling in extra-curricular activities like cheerleader and prom queen. Who knows where she would have ended up had her graduating class had more pep. Voted the girl most likely to get married, this tall, slender beauty ends up breaking off her long-standing engagement to Bill, a soon-to-be doctor, to start a new life in Minneapolis.

Renting a charming studio apartment, Mary enjoys her independence for the first time. Snagging an associate producer's job at WJM's Six O'Clock News, Mary is a study in time management. Every pencil sharpened, every hair in place, this single gal can turn quite a few heads, if not with her appearance, then with her infectious smile. Never one to be dateless, Miss Richards is still selective with her dinner companions and discreet in her love life. Always with her career as top priority, Mary has incorporated coworkers into her home life, often throwing dinner parties or at-

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tending social functions—like the annual Teddy Awards—with the gang from WJM. Her best friend, Rhoda Morgenstern, lives upstairs, and is her exact opposite in matters domestic. Where Rhoda would leave dirty dishes in the sink, Mary will wash them, even after midnight, by flashlight if necessary. A stickler for neatness, she pays her bills, makes her (sofa) bed every morning, and saves up to buy a new Ford Mustang every other year.

To keep in shape, Mary dons a leotard at night and performs a vigorous exercise regimen. She is known for her fashion statements and likes to keep current with sophisticated styles, usually bought on sale from better department stores. She'll keep a hairstyle if it suits her and her make-up is moderate to heavy. Mary prides herself on wardrobe maintenance, using only wooden hangers and the correct amount of Woolite or fabric softener in her laundry.

Her apartment is always orderly, decorated with useful and comfortable furnishings. She favors Sony portable televisions and her musical tastes run toward Gladys Knight & The Pips. Her most used home appliance is a toothbrush. She drinks Scotch neat, doesn't smoke, and is a thoughtful and kind party guest. She flosses her teeth religiously and keeps her gums, like her car, flawlessly clean.

Mary was baptized Presbyterian. Her dream is to be a good writer. Mary lives alone.

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## Samantha Stevens

1164 Morning Glory Circle  
Paterson, New York

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Yeah, she's a witch, but what a dish. Tall, slender, shapely, with shoulder-length blonde hair, and a cute, pert nose, Samantha has opted for a mortal life with her normal husband, Darrin, in suburbia. Not without great style and class, Samantha has sworn off witchcraft for the love of her man, a devilishly handsome bachelor she first met when they both crammed into the same revolving door. And they kept bumping into each other: on the sidewalk, in department stores, in an elevator. The courtship was not without its passionate moments, smooching in Darrin's Chevy Malibu convertible at a train crossing, courting on the couch in front of the fire, kissing on a park bench. On their honeymoon, Samantha 'fessed up to the truth: she is a broom-riding, caldron-stirring, card-carrying witch. Darrin still loved her (who wouldn't) and said he would make her life one of love, romance, and trust, but without the obstruction of any supernatural hanky panky or visits from known family witches or warlocks.

Samantha has promised to ward off the temptation to practice her craft, only going the magical route when all

mortal aids prove fruitless. The Stevens have set up house-keeping in their cute Dutch Colonial, bought from Darrin's income as an advertising artist at McMann & Tate in the city, with Samantha determined to make her home a happy and normal one. Although she has to stoop to magically producing a sparkling set of china or silverware when the Morning Glory Circle Welcoming Committee comes to call (with their judgmental asides), Mrs. Clyde, Mrs. Foster, and Mrs. Kravitz can only be impressed with Samantha's willingness to put her best foot forward.

Comfortable in at-home loungewear like dungarees and all-cotton, button-down shirts with the sleeves rolled up, Samantha can vacuum, dust, cook, and shop like any typical housewife. She likes her hair down around her shoulders, on occasion putting it up or tying it back, but rarely seen with a full head of curlers. Not partial to flashy jewelry, Samantha prefers a single diamond pendant on a chain around her neck. She likes simple cloth coats, handbags of basic construction, and plain sleeveless sheath dresses that show off her shapely arms. She might wear heavier eye make-up for evening, applying an occasional pair of false eyelashes, but unlike her mom, Endora, doesn't consider herself a dramatic-look type. Her demeanor is definitely East-Coast-private-girl-school and her smile is easy and radiant. She could zap herself to Cairo, but settles for driving into town for a little shopping.

## Dr. Alex Stone

Hilldale

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Take an attractive, dark-haired man, put him in a shirt and tie under a crisp, white medical coat, drape a stethoscope around his neck, and you've got Alex Stone. A native of the Midwest, this father to one daughter, Mary, and one son, Jeff, is the neighborhood patriarch. He is the loving husband of Donna Stone, and a trusted physician to countless friends and acquaintances. And he's not a bad golfer, either.

With the rich bass voice of a radio announcer, Alex is most at home with his medical books, seeing patients beyond the louvered doors of his at-home doctor's office, or on the golf course. He has the best bedside manner, fiercely coveted among Hilldale society, and has an easy smile and subtle chuckle.

Prone to neatness, Alex likes to keep his double detached garage just so, with the appropriate space for his Mercury Turnpike Cruiser, which he likes to drive fast. He likes his living space orderly, as does Mrs. Stone, keeping the golf clubs in the hall closet and the Christmas ornaments packed away in a box in the attic.

He's the first to answer the master bedroom's Princess



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phone for a middle-of-the-night medical emergency and is dependable to all (especially expectant mothers) who count on him. He likes nice clothes, particularly Botany 500 suits, which he wears often, and loves to keep his perfect set of teeth flawlessly white. He has the charm of seemingly effortless calm. Not one to beat his wife or children, Alex is the kind of man who would back away from a blinding rage (his or others) rather than acting out of anger.

Alex is a sports fan, having been athletic during his school years. He has passed this love on to his son, Jeff, and their camaraderie has produced quite a good baseball player and archery enthusiast.

He is well-read, up on all topical issues because he reads the local paper every morning, over breakfast in the kitchen with his family. He likes coffee and toast. Alex possesses a rare sensitivity for a father so masculinely succinct.

Alex installed his own redwood fence around the backyard patio last summer.



## **About the Author**

Mark Bennett is an artist, represented by The Mark Moore Gallery. He resides in Los Angeles.









**B**y day, Mark Bennett is a postal worker in Beverly Hills, and *How to Live a Sitcom Life* was handwritten during his lunch break in his postal truck at the corner of Wilshire and Linden. The rest of the time, Bennett is a nationally recognized artist represented by The Mark Moore Gallery in Santa Monica. Aside from national television and radio, Bennett and his work have been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *People* magazine. He lives in Los Angeles.



**Mark Bennett**

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*— The New York Times Book Review*

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Each section is chock-full of helpful hints for such domestic issues as choosing a car, dating, buying clothes, and caring for a pet, generously served up with razor-sharp wit by a self-professed and famous TV junkie.

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