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Watching



t Decades of American Television

Dukes of Hazzard combination gave the network three consistently strong nights. This was one of the main reasons CBS rebounded so fast from its weak fall start.

For ABC, something was wrong. The network's seemingly invulnerable position had crumbled practically overnight. Boosted by the World Series and hit movies such as "Jaws," ABC held on to first place in the cumulative ratings through January, though CBS won the November ratings sweeps. A season that was supposed to be a rout for ABC had turned into a neck-and-neck race.

Fred Silverman had observed, going into the 1979-80 season, that he expected ABC to fade soon because the network was repeating its most frequent sin, overworking hit formulas. When he had been with ABC, Silverman had stressed diversity in programming (from *Three's Company* to *Family*) and even raised a few eyebrows by canceling shows that were still ratings winners (*The Bionic Woman* and *Wonder Woman*) because he felt they had peaked. Now ABC seemed determined to produce as many teen-oriented sitcoms as possible, while banking on the success of all its older series to continue undiminished. Even the homespun *Mork and Mindy* found itself tinted with titillation in episodes featuring Mork as a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader and Raquel Welch as a sexy alien. Silverman explained that when viewers at last tired of ABC, they would not so much tire of particular shows as of the approach taken by the entire schedule.

Equally important to ABC's slippage, though, was the miscalculation by Fred Pierce and Tony Thomopoulos on the drawing power of particular hit shows. Viewers did not automatically follow them to different nights and different times, so all the programs dropped in their new slots, some immediately, some after a few weeks. (*Mork and Mindy* dropped as low as 41st in the ratings one week; in another, *Laverne and Shirley* sank to 51st.) ABC shifted *Fantasy Island* back to its previous Saturday slot almost immediately and the show regained much of its ratings strength. The network doggedly stuck with its other shifts awhile longer, and that was a fatal mistake.

CBS had made similar scheduling moves in the 1978-79 season, rearranging several moderate hits in mid-season to build strength on other nights. In the process, *The White Shadow*, *One Day at a Time*, and *The Incredible Hulk* lost their audience and practically dropped from sight. CBS quickly saw its mistake and, within a month, moved them all back to their previous slots, thereby saving the shows.

In the fall of 1979, CBS yanked its fall flops from the schedule right away (in addition to its three unsuccessful sitcoms, that also included three hour-long series, *Paris*, *California Fever*, and *Big Shamus*, *Little Shamus*). Some were gone by the beginning of October. ABC, on the other hand, took until February to finish its moves. By then, shows such as *Laverne and Shirley* and *Mork and Mindy* had lost much of their ratings luster and needed time to rebuild even in their old slot. To have former top five shows occasionally in the Nielsen basement dragged down the entire ABC schedule and CBS pulled ahead in January.

One important reason for ABC's inability to move quickly, cut its losses, and bring in new shows was that the network had failed to develop adequate back-up strength. Earlier in the decade, CBS had fallen from first place for much the same reason: While comfortably on top, it had not built up a solid inventory of replacement shows. CBS, however, had also learned its lesson. In the 1978-79 season, the network was ready with *The White Shadow* and *The Dukes of Hazzard* as early winter replacements. This season, CBS displayed more of its valuable "bench strength" at the end of 1979 by quickly replacing failed series with two strong new shows:

Knots Landing (a Dallas spinoff set in California, with Ted Shackelford as Gary Ewing, the exiled son) and *House Calls* (a hospital comedy starring Wayne Rogers and Lynn Redgrave and based on a hit movie of the same name). Both series became solid hits and kept up the CBS momentum. In April, CBS temporarily replaced *House Calls* with yet another strong series, *Flo* (a spinoff from *Alice*), which immediately jumped into the top ten as well.

ABC, in contrast, had only one big new mid-season hit, *That's Incredible*. *Tenspeed and Brownshoe*, a well produced new cop show, flashed into the top ten after an intense publicity boost surrounding its premiere, but then faded before the characters had time to catch on. *240-Robert* (a pale copy of *CHiPs* and *Emergency*), *B.A.D. Cats* (worse than *240-Robert*), and a condescending blue collar sitcom, *When the Whistle Blows* (worst of them all), were tremendous flops.

Still, ABC planned to hang on for the season by riding the Winter Olympics ratings boost, then heavily promoting its key series as they returned to their previous hit slots and plugging in special blockbuster movies. The February Olympics did put ABC back in the lead, but, by March, CBS was rolling with solid performances on Sunday, Monday, and Friday. Veterans such as *Archie Bunker's Place* (the renamed *All in the Family*), *Alice*, and *The Jeffersons* were once again top ten hits. MTM shows such as *Lou Grant*, *WKRP in Cincinnati*, and *The White Shadow* were also doing well. And then CBS's Friday night headliners exploded.

As the battle for the top spot in network television moved into the spring, *Dallas* and *The Dukes of Hazzard* became the hottest shows on the air, sometimes finishing first and second in the weekly ratings. *Dallas* pumped up fresh viewer interest by closing out its new episodes for the season with the shooting of the dastardly J. R. by a mysterious assailant. Reruns began the following week and many new *Dallas* viewers, lured by the closing episode, stayed put to fill in character background and catch up on the plot lines and setups they had missed from earlier in the season.

Armed with this line-up of hits, CBS closed the gap on ABC and the two were in a dead heat going into the final week of the regular season (which ended April 20). The cumulative ratings victory rested on the performance of a few blockbuster specials. ABC opened strong on Monday, April 14, with the number one show of the week, the annual Academy Awards program hosted by Johnny Carson. CBS neutralized this by scoring big on Tuesday and Wednesday with the surprisingly well-done miniseries, *Gyana Tragedy: The Story of Jim Jones*. On Friday, ABC put in "The Best of *That's Incredible*," a special edition of its only new big hit. It all came down to the last day, Sunday, April 20. ABC pulled out one of its champion theatrical films, "The Sting," for an encore performance. CBS countered with a special new two-hour episode of *The Dukes of Hazzard*. The downhome Hazzard County crew beat the con men from Chicago. CBS won the night, the week, and the season. The final seasonal averages for the networks were CBS: 19.6; ABC: 19.5; and NBC: 17.4. CBS held a party to celebrate its first regular season win since the 1975-76 season, and network chairman William Paley called it one of his "sweetest victories."

In one season, CBS had outscored and outmaneuvered the competition with a varied, versatile schedule ranging from the high gloss soap of *Dallas* to the serious character drama of *Lou Grant*. Yet, this dramatic turnaround also underscored how volatile the network standings had become. Even with one of CBS's strongest line-ups in years, there was little chance that victory in the 1979-80 season, however sweet, marked the beginning of another twenty-five year reign at the top by CBS.

1980-81 SEASON

40. The Strike

FOR MORE THAN THREE YEARS, NBC's strategy for becoming the number one network hinged on the 1980 Summer Olympic Games. In February 1977, even before luring Fred Silverman from ABC, NBC had won the rights to the contests (the first to be held in the Soviet Union) by committing a record-breaking \$100 million in its bid. This broke down to approximately \$22.4 million for the actual television rights, \$50 million for the production facilities in Moscow, \$12.6 million to the International Olympic Committee, and \$12-\$15 million for such miscellaneous items as talent and transportation.

There was a very good reason for this expenditure: The 1976 Olympics had helped push ABC to the number one slot. Even though the Summer Games took place before the annual ratings battle began for the regular season, they had provided a tremendous opportunity for ABC to promote its upcoming fall schedule. NBC counted on doing the same in 1980, while also treating its overall Olympic coverage as an on-going "big event" with frequent on-the-air promotions. When Fred Silverman joined NBC in 1978, he paced his plans toward the summer and fall of 1980, aiming to have ready a strong program line-up that could ride the momentum of the Olympics and bring NBC to the top by Christmas 1980.

To coincide with its huge investment, NBC signed ABC's 1976 Olympics producer, Don Ohlmeyer, to supervise both the actual coverage in 1980 and the necessary preparations by NBC's sports department. Ohlmeyer's first NBC project was *Sportsworld*, a weekend afternoon sports anthology modeled after ABC's *Wide World of Sports*, that arrived at the start of 1978. This new program gave NBC's sports production crews the opportunity to sharpen their technical skills while providing the network with the perfect on-air promotional forum to talk up Olympic-type competitive events.

As 1980 drew nearer, NBC also scheduled a host of other tie-in programs, ranging from specials such as the animated "Animalympics" to the NBC-financed movie "Goldengirl" featuring Susan Anton as an American track star at the Moscow games. Ohlmeyer himself produced a four-hour made-for-TV movie on the Summer Olympics, "The Golden Moment." NBC announced plans for 152½ hours of Olympic coverage in 1980, pre-empting most of its prime time schedule from July 18 through August 5. Then, on Christmas day 1979, the entire NBC Olympics project was put in jeopardy as the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

The Russian invasion shocked and angered many Americans who were already frustrated by the continuing stalemate over the

hostages taken in the seizure of the American embassy in Iran the previous month. Looking for some way (short of war) to protest the Soviet move, many people focused on the Summer Olympic Games in Moscow as a symbolic rallying point and they began to call for a boycott of the event. On January 20, 1980, President Jimmy Carter appeared on NBC's *Meet the Press* and expressed his support for such a move. He said that unless the Soviets withdrew their forces from Afghanistan by February 20, he would formally request the U.S. Olympic Committee to officially sanction a boycott. Many athletes, who had been training years for the games, disagreed with that course of action, saying that it unfairly mixed sports and politics in violation of the true spirit of Olympic competition.

While everyone watched for the next move by the Soviets, the 1980 Winter Olympics went on as scheduled in Lake Placid, New York, running from February 12 through 24 and carried by ABC. The ratings were even better than ABC's successful 1976 Winter Olympics coverage, culminating in a dramatic face-off between the Soviet Union and the United States, on ice. There, for the first time in twenty years, the U.S. hockey team beat the Russians, eliminating them from the Olympic championship series. A video tape replay of the game placed as the number four program of the week and, two days later, the U.S. team went on to beat Finland for the gold medal in hockey.

In the jubilation over the American victory, many people opposed to the boycott were quick to point out that the Winter Olympics seemed a perfect illustration of why the United States should participate in the Summer Games: Confrontations could take place in the sports arena rather than on the battlefield. Nonetheless, the Soviet troops remained in Afghanistan into the spring and, on April 22, the U.S. Olympic Committee voted 1,604 to 797 in favor of the resolution calling for a boycott. Though individual athletes were not specifically ordered to stay home, the committee's vote meant that there would be no official U.S. team sent to Moscow and, therefore, no funds available to defray the tremendous cost of participating.

Throughout the months of public debate on the boycott, NBC found itself in a difficult position and deliberately kept a low profile. Because the Soviets said that the Olympics would go on even without U.S. participation, NBC could still carry them. Realistically, however, such a move would have been a public relations fiasco. The network's financial investment in the games had been widely reported and to go through with coverage while the athletes

FALL 1980 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30			
M O N	That's Incredible		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC		
	Flo	LADIES' MAN	M*A*S*H	House Calls	Lou Grant		CBS		
	Little House On The Prairie		NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC		
T U E	Happy Days	Laverne And Shirley	Three's Company	TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT	Hart To Hart		ABC		
	The White Shadow		CBS Tuesday Night Movies				CBS		
	NBC Tuesday Night At The Movies			STEVE ALLEN COMEDY HOUR			NBC		
W E D	Eight Is Enough		Taxi	Soap	Vega\$		ABC		
	ENOS		CBS Wednesday Night Movies				CBS		
	Real People		Diff'rent Strokes	The Facts Of Life	Quincy, M.E.		NBC		
T H U R	Mork And Mindy	BOSOM BUDDIES	Barney Miller	IT'S A LIVING	20/20		ABC		
	The Waltons		MAGNUM, P.I.		Knots Landing		CBS		
	GAMES PEOPLE PLAY		NBC Thursday Night At The Movies				NBC		
F R I D A Y	Benson	I'M A BIG GIRL NOW	The ABC Friday Night Movie				ABC		
	The Incredible Hulk		The Dukes Of Hazzard		Dallas		CBS		
	MARIE		NUMBER 96		NBC MAGAZINE WITH DAVID BRINKLEY		NBC		
S A T U R D A Y	BREAKING AWAY		The Love Boat		Fantasy Island		ABC		
	WKRP In Cincinnati	Tim Conway Show	FREEBIE AND THE BEAN		SECRETS OF MIDLAND HEIGHTS		CBS		
	BARBARA MANDRELL AND THE MANDRELL SISTERS		NBC Saturday Night At The Movies				NBC		
S U N	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
	THOSE AMAZING ANIMALS		Charlie's Angels		The ABC Sunday Night Movie				ABC
	60 Minutes	Archie Bunker's Place	One Day At A Time	Alice	The Jeffersons	Trapper John, M.D.		CBS	
Disney's Wonderful World		CHiPs		The Sunday Big Event				NBC	

themselves were forced to stay home would have appeared to be the height of cynical self-interest.

In May, NBC announced that its far-flung summer Olympics programming would be drastically cut back. Because the U.S. Olympic Committee decided to go through the formality of naming an Olympic squad, NBC did cover those team trials in the spring and early summer. For the actual games in Moscow, though, NBC limited itself to short feature reports (running about ninety seconds each) during the nightly news. This was virtually indistinguishable from the short clips and summaries offered by ABC and CBS as well as other news organizations. A few individual stations went even further and specifically ignored any Olympic news, refusing even to mention winners in major events or new world records. Though most news organizations did not go to that extreme, for most television viewers it was as if the 1980 Summer Olympics never took place.

NBC lost more than \$50 million in ad revenue as well as money already spent in preparations. There was not even a chance to rebound four years later. ABC had already won the bidding for the rights to both the Summer and Winter Olympic Games in 1984. Above all, NBC had lost the promotional vehicle it had counted on for more than three years. Fred Silverman and NBC had been done in by events totally outside their control.

Just a few days after the Moscow Olympics began, though, there was another development outside network control, but this

one disrupted all three networks. On July 21, 1980, the members of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists and the Screen Actors Guild went out on strike. This halted production on theatrical films, made-for-TV movies, and most prime time filmed and taped series. The central issue of the strike was a desire by the unions to win for their members a share of the money earned by producers upon the distribution of programs via pay television systems and prerecorded video cassettes and video discs.

Everyone involved recognized the precedent-setting importance of the negotiations. At the time, actors received nothing from cable, cassette, or disc sales, yet, since the mid-1970s, use of these alternate television systems had begun to grow. Any new contract would serve as a model for future arrangements both by the actors and other craft unions. Both sides therefore approached the contract talks very carefully and, as a result, an immediate settlement was unlikely. Negotiations dragged on through the remainder of the summer while celebrities walked the picket lines.

When the strike began, the companies supplying program material for the networks were just a few weeks into production for the 1980-81 season and had only a handful of shows "in the can." As September approached, it became clear that, for the first time in television history, the networks would have to begin the new season without most of their regular series.

Though the strike virtually shut down Hollywood, there were a number of areas unaffected. Performers appearing in commercials,

news programs, game shows, sports broadcasts, afternoon soap operas, and variety shows all operated under different contracts. Programs such as *Tonight*, *60 Minutes*, *Monday Night Football*, and *Real People* could go on as usual. The networks were forced to improvise with what was available for the fall, carefully mixing variety specials, theatrical films, sports events, selected reruns, and the few series episodes completed before the strike began.

By chance, number three NBC appeared to be in the best shape to handle the strike season, which seemed a perverse form of justice to balance its Olympic disaster. NBC had a backlog of both old and new miniseries and "big event" presentations to draw from, including the twenty-five hour *Centennial* from 1978, the combined *Godfather Saga* from 1977, and a new twelve-hour miniseries, an adaptation of James Clavell's novel, *Shogun*. In addition, the network's "reality shows" such as *Real People* were unaffected, and it even had ready a good number of completed episodes from popular series (including four of *CHiPs* and six of *Little House on the Prairie*). NBC also had the World Series and, if the strike dragged into 1981, the Super Bowl.

With such strong inventory, Fred Silverman went into September very aggressively, touting the NBC schedule as being 75%-80% new material through October. CBS and ABC, more reliant on weekly sitcom and drama series than NBC, were not as fortunate. Though ABC featured its own reality shows (*Those Amazing Animals* and *That's Incredible*) and reran its 1978 miniseries of *Pearl* during the usual September premiere period, the network essentially continued its summer rerun schedule, occasionally using episodes that were several years old. CBS was squeezed even tighter. Though the network had a few new "pre-strike" episodes of *Lou Grant* and *The White Shadow*, some of its other top series such as *M*A*S*H* and *Archie Bunker's Place* had already parceled out all but the preceding season's shows into rerun syndication. In addition, short-run winter and spring replacement hits such as *Flo* and *House Calls* had only a handful of episodes at all, and those had already been rerun in the summer. Thus, CBS had to scrap most of its schedule and rely instead on elongated movie presentations and reruns of specials.

NBC sensed the potential for a big victory. Even before the strike, Silverman had planned to open the 1980-81 season with a week of *Shogun*. He stood by that timetable, figuring that the miniseries could be practically unbeatable without front line series competition from the other networks. Silverman's calculations were correct. The five episodes of *Shogun* ranked as the top five shows of the first week of the "new" season, giving NBC the highest rated week in its history. *Shogun* became the second highest miniseries ever at the time, right behind *Roots*.

Unlike *Roots* or *Holocaust*, which focused on generations and families, *Shogun* was the story of one man's personal struggle. Richard Chamberlain played the hero, an English sea pilot named John Blackthorne, who found himself shipwrecked in Japan during the early 1600s. Facing vast cultural differences, as well as complex political and religious intrigue, Blackthorne slowly adapted his Western instincts to the Eastern traditions. The Englishman befriended Toranaga (Toshiro Mifune), a Japanese warlord aspiring to be the supreme military dictator (or "shogun") of the country, and fell in love with his translator, the beautiful Mariko (Yoko Shimada). Along the way, Blackthorne also proved himself in combat and won acceptance in his new land, becoming the first non-Japanese samurai warrior. *Shogun* was an entertaining combination of exotic settings, beautiful photography, a love triangle, and bursts of violence. The program was challenging, effective, and, much to NBC's delight, an overwhelming success, giving the network a big lead to open the season.

The week after *Shogun*, the striking unions reached a tentative settlement with the producers. However, there still remained two or three weeks for ratification by the rank and file, and then about three or four more weeks before the first new shows would be ready to air. So the ad hoc strike schedule continued until the beginning of November, with new shows, new specials, sports, and theatrical films generally outdrawing rerun competition. ABC's NFL *Monday Night Football* had the best opening ratings in its history. Both the baseball playoffs (on ABC) and the World Series (on NBC) also earned record-high ratings. CBS's highly publicized made-for-TV movie about a Jewish woman in a Nazi concentration camp, "Playing for Time" (starring Vanessa Redgrave), scored as the number one show of its week, giving CBS its only weekly win during the strike.

At the beginning of October, the actors ratified the tentative agreement and, on October 6, series production resumed. For the immediate future, the settlement provided actors with a pay rate boost of 33% for prime time reruns. In the developing new video fields, there were important precedents established: Performers were granted 4.5% of the distributor's gross for the first year of a show's play on pay TV, and 4.5% of the producer's gross on prerecorded video disc and video cassette sales above 100,000 units. Though such provisions did not result in any immediate cash, they promised performers a share in the expanding video industries that could eventually prove lucrative. Looking even further ahead, the new pact acknowledged the likelihood that as more and more material was required by cable services, cable programmers would have to follow the route taken by the commercial networks years before and begin to develop original movies, variety specials, and even continuing dramatic, adventure, and comedy series to supplement their basic late 1970s schedule of uncut movies and sporting events. All that was years away, though. The immediate focus following the settlement was to turn out new material for the season already in progress as quickly as possible.

The networks' post-strike schedules in October, November, and December were almost as confusing as the strike period because not every returning series followed the same production timetable. Half-hour videotaped programs were ready much faster than hour-long filmed series, so the networks had to continue to improvise, plugging the holes in their schedules as the shows became available. There were other disruptions as well, including election coverage, the November sweeps, and holiday specials for Thanksgiving and Christmas. As a result, some season premieres were practically buried and did not produce the expected instant jump in the ratings. It was not until January 1981 that the schedules settled down at last. Despite NBC's success during the strike season, though, it was CBS that came out on top, once again propelled by *Dallas*.

CBS had done the worst of the networks during the strike because it did not have as extensive a backlog of flashy "event" programming as NBC. More important, this weak start threatened to scuttle CBS's game plan for the entire season because it diffused the momentum of the network's strong come-from-behind victory in the 1979-80 season. CBS had planned to start the 1980-81 season with its winning schedule in place and quickly build its previous razor-thin victory into a healthy lead. The strike nullified those plans and gave NBC the initiative instead. CBS could only sit on the side and wait.

Once the strike ended and program production resumed, CBS set out to quickly win back the audience. Its first move, in mid-October, was to rebuild interest in *Dallas* by rerunning episodes from the show's initial tryout as a 1978 spring series. This innovative ploy worked. Few current *Dallas* fans had followed the series

September 9, 1980

The FCC creates "secondary stations," a new technical classification that sets up the possibility for thousands of new low-powered local television stations.

September 16, 1980

As part of Johnny Carson's new contract with NBC, *Tonight* shrinks to sixty minutes. Tom Snyder's *Tomorrow* expands to ninety minutes to take up the half-hour slack.

October 25, 1980

ABC's *Love Boat* and *Fantasy Island* are the first series to get new episodes on the air after the strike settlement.

October 28, 1980

President Jimmy Carter debates Republican challenger Ronald Reagan in Cleveland before a television audience of forty-six million.

November 2, 1980

In the season premiere of *Archie Bunker's Place*, Archie comes to grips with the death of his wife, Edith. This realistic plot development evolved from Jean Stapleton's desire to leave the series for good.

November 4, 1980

NBC's use of strategic exit polls helps it to call Ronald Reagan the winner in the presidential election at 8:15 P.M. Eastern time, beating ABC's announcement by more than ninety minutes and CBS's by more than two hours.

November 15, 1980

Under new producer Jean Doumanian, the "next generation" of *Saturday Night Live* debuts with a new cast of six unknowns, but the refurbished program fails to gel. After only four months, NBC installs another producer (Dick Ebersol) and revamps both the crew and format, with only two cast holdovers: Joe Piscopo and Eddie Murphy.

November 17, 1980

Roger Mudd, passed over by CBS as Walter Cronkite's successor, defects to NBC News.

in its original run and the ratings for the program remained strong. Then, going into November, CBS began to rekindle the "Who shot J. R.?" mania that had started with the season finale of *Dallas* the previous spring. Since then, the program had turned into a worldwide sensation. In Britain there was spirited betting on the identity of the assailant, with odds quoted at 20 to 1 that J. R. shot himself.

To open November, CBS staged "Dallas week," airing four episodes of the program in one week (one on Thursday, two on Friday, and one on Sunday). The first two were reruns of the final episodes from the previous season, featuring some of J. R.'s dirtiest deals and culminating in his shooting. This effectively set the stage for the two-part season premiere in which doctors rushed to save J. R.'s life. All four episodes finished in the top ten (coming in at number one, two, four, and nine for the week). The regular Friday episode the following week continued the story, dangling spurious clues and suspects. This also finished number one. With interest once again at a peak, the answer to the burning question "Who shot J. R.?" came at last on Friday, November 21. In the closing moments of the program, Kristin, J. R.'s mistress and personal secretary, confessed that she had done it.

A record number of viewers tuned in to find out the answer,

sending *Dallas* through the ratings roof. With a 53.3 rating and a 76 share, it became the highest rated individual show in television history to that point, topping such sports events as the Super Bowl and World Series and previous TV milestones including the birth of Little Ricky on *I Love Lucy*, the final episode of *The Fugitive*, and even the concluding segment of the original *Roots*.

Dallas stayed at the front of the television ratings pack for the remainder of the season as its many new viewers stuck around to follow the plot complications introduced while J. R. recovered. As CBS's other regular series fell into place, the network wiped out its ratings deficit from the strike period and by mid-December passed both ABC and NBC in the cumulative ratings race, eventually winning the entire 1980-81 season with relative ease.

One reason that NBC, which had taken the ratings lead during the strike, fell so quickly from the top was that the network could not match CBS's line-up of established hit series. Yet, for a while, it looked as if NBC at least had a chance at making a respectable showing for second place overall by following an innovative three-phase post-strike plan. First, in November, Fred Silverman quickly set in place NBC's strongest night, Wednesday, bringing back *Facts of Life*, *Diff'rent Strokes*, and *Quincy* to follow the hit *Real People*. For phase two, he held back most of NBC's other returning shows and new series while ABC and CBS slotted theirs, filling in with short-run series instead. One of these, a variety hour starring country singer Barbara Mandrell, proved successful enough to win instant renewal in January.

At the beginning of January, Silverman launched phase three and brought in the remainder of NBC's regular series. Because CBS and ABC had just finished their delayed fall premieres, NBC had a second-season type limelight all to itself. For the first five weeks of 1981, the NBC strategy seemed to be working as the network beat out ABC and came in second four times. Returning (and revamped) programs such as *Lobo*, *BJ and the Bear*, and *Buck Rogers* all did well in elongated two-hour openers, and new series such as *Flamingo Road* and *Harper Valley P.T.A.* turned in respectable ratings.

NBC's three-phase post-strike strategy gave Fred Silverman a chance to demonstrate his greatest strength: effectively juggling hit programs on a schedule in order to entice viewers to give the other shows on the network a chance. However, though such Silverman favorites as *Real People* and *Diff'rent Strokes* had caught on, NBC still had not developed a sufficient number of solid series to fill the entire schedule. In many cases, once viewers were lured to NBC, they found little to keep them there. Instead, NBC still had to depend on big events and specials both to buy time for shows to catch on and also to fill between hits. Here, ironically, Silverman's successful strike strategy took its toll.

In presenting a mostly new schedule during the actors' strike, NBC had not only drawn from its backlog of material, it had also aired many blockbuster movies and specials normally kept until the ratings sweeps periods. This tactic put NBC in a very vulnerable position, particularly during the February sweeps. While CBS had such top theatrical movies as "Hooper" (with Burt Reynolds) and "The Amityville Horror," and ABC aired "Norma Rae" and "Jaws 2," NBC was left with tepid made-for-TV films such as "Kent State" and "Elvis and the Beauty Queen." Worse yet, with a shortage of attractive event programming, NBC was forced to throw its regular series against such ABC specials as the three-part, eight-hour sexy miniseries *East of Eden* and the flashy made-for-TV movie "Miracle on Ice" (recreating America's 1980 Olympic hockey triumph). As a result, Fred Silverman presided over his third consecutive losing season at NBC, with the network's ratings for the 1980-81 season exactly the same as the year before. On



"The most trusted personality in America," Walter Cronkite, ended nearly nineteen years as anchor of *The CBS Evening News* on March 6, 1981. *60 Minutes* correspondent Dan Rather took over the post three days later. (CBS News Photo/CBS Photo Archive © 2003 CBS Worldwide, Inc. All Rights Reserved.)

June 30, new RCA board chairman Thornton Bradshaw announced that Silverman had been removed from NBC and was being replaced by Grant Tinker, president of the MTM studios. Silverman's dream of being the first person to take all three TV networks to number one had to remain unfulfilled.

The two and one-half month actors' strike made the 1980-81 season one of the most confusing programming periods in television history. The strike, however, had a much more significant meaning than merely messing up network plans for that one season. It also marked the first time ABC, CBS, and NBC were forced to confront head-on the changing reality of television technology and to acknowledge the rapidly growing influence of cable TV and home video attachments. For years, the networks had steadfastly ignored or dismissed advances in these fields, but in 1980 this could no longer be done. On the surface, the industry in 1980 looked much as it had for decades. The three networks, combined, averaged 86% of the TV viewing audience. Less than 2% of American homes owned video cassette recorders. About 20% of the country subscribed to cable TV service (more than doubled from 1970), but original programming on cable was still minimal, at best. Nonetheless, many established television production outfits had begun to diversify in order to be ready to fill the programming needs that were just now starting to emerge with the new video outlets. The demands by the actors (and other craft unions) for a share in these new sources of profit reflected the increasing confidence in their inevitable growth. At last, the networks began to deal with these changing times as well. Near the end of 1980, first ABC, then CBS, established new cable television divisions to develop programs exclusively for the new video industries. ABC's were the first to hit the air.

At 9:00 P.M. on Sunday, April 12, 1981, ARTS, ABC's cultural cable service (the Alpha Repertory Television Service) debuted with three hours of original cable TV programs three nights each week (rebroadcasts filled the other four nights). Like the sparse schedule of network television four decades before, the ARTS offerings represented only a modest start in a new market. Yet they were an important first step, signaling that a seismic change was coming to the television world.

November 30, 1980

Tanya Roberts joins *Charlie's Angels* as Julie Rogers, replacing Shelley Hack who lasted only one season.

December 8, 1980

While watching ABC's *Monday Night Football*, millions learn of the fatal shooting in New York City of former Beatle John Lennon, with announcer Howard Cosell clearly upset by the news. Six years earlier, Cosell had interviewed Lennon on air during a Monday night game in Los Angeles.

December 20, 1980

As an experiment, NBC airs a televised football game between the New York Jets and Miami Dolphins without any play-by-play announcers.

January 12, 1981

Tomorrow Coast-to-Coast. (NBC). Rona Barrett, formerly of ABC's *Good Morning America*, joins Tom Snyder as co-host of NBC's revamped late late night talk show.

January 15, 1981

Hill Street Blues. (NBC). MTM presents a critically acclaimed series on police life in an urban setting.

January 20, 1981

After twenty-nine years as CBS's chief anchor for special events, Walter Cronkite reports his farewell news spectacular: the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as president and the release of the American hostages from Iran.

April 11, 1981

TV writers begin a three-month strike against TV and film producers in another dispute over how to divide profits from the new video technologies. The fall 1981 premieres are delayed somewhat as a result.

April 12, 1981

Anne Baxter hosts opening night for ARTS, ABC's cultural cable service. The initial offerings include performances by flutist Michel Debost, a concert by the Israel Philharmonic, and a feature on painter Gustav Klimt, kicking off the first week's theme: "Paris: The Dream and the Reality."

May 8, 1981

SCTV Network 90. (NBC). Nearly five years after the Toronto branch of Second City launched its uniquely warped TV satire series, the program moves from syndication in the U.S. to a network slot. Despite a starting time of 12:30 A.M. (following *Tonight* on Friday), it quickly becomes a late night comedy favorite.

September 1, 1981

Milton Berle's thirty-year ("\$200,000 per year") contract with NBC expires.

41. Stop and Start It All Again

BY THE EARLY 1980s, THE PUBLIC ATTENTION directed toward which network was number one and what shows were in the top ten had fostered the image of television competition as a wide-open free-for-all. The reality was completely different.

From the beginning, network television bore the stamp of a surprisingly small number of people. Milton Berle inspired millions to buy their first TV sets in the late 1940s. During the early 1950s, *I Love Lucy* launched the Desilu studios and began the domination of filmed sitcoms. Throughout that decade, Louis G. Cowan presented one quiz show after another on all the networks. In the late 1950s, ABC drew more than one-fourth of its schedule from the Warner Bros. film studios. NBC carried a similar reliance on Universal Studios through the 1960s and 1970s. CBS's president James Aubrey presided over programming geared toward rural America in the early 1960s, building on the success of Paul Henning's *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Ten years later, producer Norman Lear developed a style of television comedy with *All in the Family* that was more urban-oriented, topical, and controversial. Garry Marshall supplied ABC with a string of hit sitcoms that made the network number one in the mid-1970s. Ace programmer Fred Silverman directed strategy at all three networks during the 1970s, moving from CBS to ABC to NBC.

Though tens of thousands of people worked toward the finished products, over the decades access to television remained limited. Ultimately, program material was funneled through just a few networks, studios, and producers. As a result, the race for the top spot was more accurately a contest among those who had already staked out a share of the television pie. Placing a show on television meant the opportunity to earn huge profits. It also afforded a vast pulpit to present a particular point of view. So from the beginning, the constant battle in broadcasting was between those who had power and influence, fighting to keep it, and those without such status, fighting to attain it.

From its creation in 1927, the Federal Communications Commission recognized the special limited nature of the broadcast medium and set up rules that called for use of the airwaves for the public's "interest, convenience, and necessity." The FCC tried to include avenues of access by calling on stations (first radio, then television as well) to incorporate a wide range of programming aimed at serving their communities. Though often compliance with the commission's rules consisted only of token religious, public affairs, and educational programs, these were important precedents because, from the start of American television until the mid-1960s,

most cities had only a few stations. On these, for the most part, access to the viewing public was largely limited to those within the New York-Hollywood entertainment-production axis.

Besides fighting for time on existing channels, others in search of a television forum tried to find new outlets, attempting to multiply choices for viewers and available markets for producers. Over the years, a frequently proposed scheme to enhance access was the creation of a fourth commercial network that might organize stations into a force equivalent to ABC, CBS, and NBC.

American television had, in fact, begun with four networks, but that situation lasted only a few years. By the mid-1950s, the DuMont television network had foundered and died—a victim of politics, financial constraints, and a lack of affiliates. The same problems almost killed ABC as well.

By the mid-1960s, the number of stations throughout the country had grown. Many major cities had at least three TV stations, and UHF reception had been mandated for all TV sets. More viewers were capable of picking up ABC's signals and, as that network grew, serious discussions once again began on the possibility of starting a new fourth commercial network.

One 1967 effort, the United Network, actually hit the air. It lasted all of one month with just one program, *The Las Vegas Show*, a virtual clone of the *Tonight* show on NBC, hosted by Bill Dana (a *Tonight* show regular himself under Steve Allen in the 1950s). But the problem remained finding affiliates. Though there were many more stations operating than there had been in the early 1950s, when both ABC and DuMont were floundering, they were still not in the right places to follow the existing network model.

In order to reach 90-95% of the homes with TV sets, a network needed broadcast affiliates in about two hundred cities. However, most of the stations unaffiliated with ABC, CBS, and NBC were bunched in only the largest cities, thereby leaving out significant sections of the country. Even with more than seven hundred commercial TV stations on the air nationwide, every fourth network model still faced a daunting task trying to reach a sufficiently large audience (90% of the viewing public) to attract major advertisers.

Until the problem of audience penetration could be dealt with, there would be no viable fourth network. So program producers turned to another form of access: syndication, creating an ad hoc network of stations for individual programs. During the late 1940s and early 1950s independent producers such as Jerry Fairbanks and companies such as Ziv began selling programs to individual stations to slot during time periods not used by the networks. These

efforts stalled in the late 1950s as the networks increased the amount of their programming and the locals began using a greater number of readily available old movies as well as reruns of network filmed series. So syndication producers then joined forces with the networks to produce the new wave of filmed Westerns and action-adventure series that were starting to dominate prime time. These, in turn, wound up as syndicated reruns.

Original material for syndication increased in the 1960s, when powerful groups of stations such as the Westinghouse, Metromedia, and Avco chains struck gold with talk shows. They supplied member stations and other interested locals with videotaped gab-fests hosted by Mike Douglas, Merv Griffin, and Phil Donahue for use in the brief non-network time slots of later afternoon and late night. The government expanded the potential syndication market even further with the "all-channel" bill, which required all television sets manufactured after 1964 to include UHF reception capabilities.

As UHF grew through the decade, independent producers again ventured into the realm of producing entertainment series, though at first they just turned out new versions of old game and quiz shows. The government entered the field again with the FCC's 1971 "access rule," which mandated that all three networks return thirty minutes each night to be filled locally by their affiliates. The commission also forbade the use of off-network reruns in this "prime time access" slot, so independent producers stepped in with more game shows, new versions of canceled network programs, and even a few original series.

Through the 1970s, producers grew bolder in their access ventures, producing new comedy, adventure, and drama programs. Many of these had been rejected by the networks, so they were placed on individual stations, by-passing the networks. In 1975, the British-made *Space: 1999* gave local programmers big-budget space drama with familiar television stars (Martin Landau and Barbara Bain from the successful *Mission: Impossible* series). In 1976, Norman Lear supplied five episodes weekly of the adult-oriented *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* comedy soap opera.

Universal Studios, then television's largest supplier of prime time network programming, took the next step in 1977 when it set up Operation Prime Time (OPT), a short-lived attempt to compete with prime time network programming. For a few years, the studio successfully slotted a handful of first-run drama miniseries directly with individual stations, beginning with *Testimony of Two Men*.

Both Universal's OPT formula and Lear's *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* went to the heart of alternative access. Instead of trying to build and maintain a full-time network, they wisely concentrated on small slices of time. They allowed subscribing local stations flexibility in airing this flashy material against their competition. However, the success of Universal and Lear only underscored the frustration experienced by "outsiders" trying to gain access to prime time television. Ultimately, Universal and Lear merely offered minor variations on what they were, at the same time, supplying to the networks. Yet the resemblance of their shows to familiar network offerings probably accounted for their success in syndication.

Ironically, for all the talk (especially by the government) of seeking alternatives to the major commercial networks, there already was such a system in place. This system had been created by the government itself and was designed with a different motivation from the commercial networks. It was public television.

Noncommercial television began in the United States in 1952, but due to a lack of funding the system was limited to low-budget "educational" fare. Access to public television was almost a joke because there were very few people watching the cheap-looking,

deadly dull programs. In the late 1960s, after passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, public television began acting more like a full-fledged network as its member stations gained production savvy and the federal government awarded it a yearly stipend. During the administration of President Richard Nixon, public television was strong enough as an alternative network power to pique the government with its public affairs analysis of war and domestic policies. As a result, the administration forced the PBS network to decentralize and return more power to the local stations. Oddly, the complicated system that emerged worked.

The PBS schedule was set up by a convention of local affiliates that bid on shows and pledged support for new series. Local stations usually did not air PBS shows at a set time, instead fitting them into their own schedules as they chose. The affiliates in larger cities such as New York, Chicago, Washington, Boston, and Los Angeles often produced programs and offered them to the entire network, but anyone who could navigate the funding bureaucracy could produce a show.

Once a show was picked up, it was treated far differently than it would be by the commercial networks. Philosophically, PBS was meant to co-exist as an alternative to commercial television, not as a replacement for it. As a result, programs were treated as something special. Even a one-shot program might be aired multiple times during the same week as its original broadcast, then offered additional times during the same season and periodically revived over the years. Limited-run series could also receive the same treatment. Movies would often be aired without any interruption. Though public television had less consistent success with comedy (apart from a handful of British imports such as *Monty Python*), it excelled with dance, drama, variety, and documentary shows.

Yet even with all these offerings, public television was still not the all-encompassing answer to American television's closed nature. The stations were still constrained by the same limited number of frequencies available for broadcast. They had merely been earmarked by the government for this specific purpose.

The chief stumbling block to practically any major change in television access and selection remained the very nature of the commercial television setup. A fixed number of outlets were in competition with each other. Even more limiting, they all had to cater to a huge audience.

In addition, because commercial television was beamed to homes indiscriminately, nervous executives tended to remove whatever might be perceived as offensive by some people—even though others might consider the same material to be high quality, mature, adult entertainment. Popular theatrical movies were edited to soften language and to remove violent and sexual content. Series were created for the largest possible audience. Because commercial television advertising rates were based on the relative standings of the programs against each other, the networks selected entertainment formulas that had proven popular and successful in the past and might "knock off" the competition.

By the dawn of the 1980s, however, there was a glimmer of potential for change, coalescing around ideas that had been around for decades.

As soon as television caught on with the public in the 1950s, various production outfits pressed to get "pay TV" started as a competitor to free TV. Hollywood studios, losing box office business to television, were especially interested in a system that would allow charges beyond commercials and the one-time purchase price of the TV set. A few such experimental systems got off the ground in the 1950s and early 1960s, using individual TV stations that broadcast signals that were coded and could only be picked up by viewers with a decoding box attached to their home sets. Zenith had

September 27, 1977

Madison Square Garden Sports Network (MSG), owned by United Artists/Columbia, begins programming via cable. It is the first attempt at an all-sports cable network.

April 1, 1979

Warner/Amex's Nickelodeon cable network, aimed at children, begins operations.

April 26, 1979

Weekly Major League Baseball comes to cable via the Madison Square Garden network, with the beginning of twenty-three weeks of Thursday night games. Generally games are blacked out within fifty miles of the home team's city. Jim Woods, the regular announcer for the Boston Red Sox telecasts, handles the games from cities in the East, while Monte Moore (who does Oakland Athletics games) handles those from the West Coast.

September 15, 1979

TV Guide adds listings for pay cable services such as HBO and Showtime to its New York City edition.

an experimental pay TV station in Chicago; pay TV stations stayed on the air for a few years in California and Connecticut. The stations ultimately failed for the same reason that various fourth networks had flopped to that point: They could not compete with the selection on the established commercial networks.

Advances in the concept of pay television took place from another angle during the 1950s with "cable television." Rural residents who lived in fringe reception areas that could only receive over-the-air signals from one or two stations (if that many) willingly signed up to pay for clear reception of the closest free TV stations. Cable companies plugged a cable connection directly into the home sets, delivering a signal that even a rooftop antenna could not supply. In addition, the cable wires even had capacity for some extra channels, though not a great number at first, beyond those needed to present the nearby local stations.

At first, the FCC seemed uncertain how to handle such signals which, technically, were not using the broadcast airwaves at all. Eventually it claimed jurisdiction and issued rules such as the "must carry" requirement specifying that local cable services had to carry all local broadcast stations, not just the more popular channels. In the 1970s, several legal cases brought by the cable industry successfully staked out cable's identity as being different from the broadcast networks and more akin to print publications. There would be rules, but the rules would begin with a different set of assumptions about scope, coverage, and content. They were not, in general, as restrictive as the rules that applied to broadcasters.

As the market for rural cable service grew, urban over-the-air local stations soon realized that they could expand their total audience by arranging to feed their signals to the nearby cable systems. In the mid-1970s, Atlanta entrepreneur Ted Turner revolutionized cable TV by taking this process a step further and transformed his low-profit non-network UHF station into America's first "superstation," WTCG (later renamed WTBS). Though the programming on WTBS generally consisted of old movies, syndicated reruns, and local sports events, Turner worked to convince cable TV systems throughout the Southeast to add his station to their service.

Turner realized that, unlike many city dwellers, rural viewers had rarely been offered a choice beyond network affiliates because

there were few independents operating in their areas. As more and more local cable systems added WTBS to their cable service, Turner's station became available throughout the South. Using TV relay satellites to bounce his signal to cable systems throughout the country, Turner eventually transformed WTBS into a virtual national TV station. Other non-network stations (such as WGN in Chicago) followed Turner's lead and began sending their signals to cable systems throughout their regions.

Though these independent superstations offered their viewers a new choice on the dial, their programming was hardly revolutionary television. The movies, sports, and series reruns were even peppered with plenty of commercials. However, Turner's idea of aggressively using cable connections was revolutionary.

While they reached a relative handful of viewers compared to ABC, CBS, and NBC, these cable connections could by-pass the limited number of available over-the-air frequencies. In addition, the fact that viewers were willing to pay for such connections (even with commercials) opened up a whole new revenue stream. Once households went from paying *zero* to paying *something* for television, there was the potential to add other charges.

In 1972, Time-Life set up Home Box Office (HBO), a program service carried over various cable systems, but one with an important difference. Cable subscribers had to pay an *additional* fee above their regular costs in order to receive HBO. This income allowed HBO to be noncommercial and still be profitable, succeeding with an audience of thousands rather than millions. At first HBO was distributed (via microwave transmitters) to just a few systems in the East, and its programming was restricted to recent box office films not yet farmed out to network television, R-rated films considered too racy to air intact on the commercial networks, and sporting events that the networks had by-passed. By the mid-1970s, HBO was using TV relay satellites to distribute its signal to cable systems coast-to-coast and also had developed a number of original programs to drop in between the films, including concerts, comedy-variety acts taped in nightclubs, and independently produced entertainment shows.

Though the initial audiences were miniscule (HBO's premiere night reached a mere 365 subscribers), cable systems soon learned that adding HBO as another channel in their service resulted in a higher number of subscribers. By 1976, HBO had a competitor, Viacom's Showtime, which also charged a premium fee for its own package of uncut movies, original programs, and special events. The potential business was there, even if nobody yet knew exactly what programming mix would convince cable subscribers to ante up an additional fee.

Even more challenging was the question: How could viewers who had no problem receiving the networks over the air for free be convinced to *pay* for television? What could lure members of this audience into becoming cable subscribers? There was no obvious answer, but there was also no shortage of those trying to find one.

With ABC, CBS, and NBC offering one-stop "department store" shopping for a mix of mainstream comedy, drama, news, and sports, those attempting to emulate Ted Turner's success needed concepts that were both distinctive and cost-effective. Because the superstations were already the surrogate local stations in their markets, there was little room for others in that format. New cable services had to be even more specialized, though taking a cue to offer potential viewers something reassuringly familiar.

The quickest route was one that involved existing material or program models. Television preachers had been a broadcasting mainstay for decades, and the Reverend Pat Robertson had been particularly successful since the early 1960s with his syndicated program, *The 700 Club*, which packaged religion within a comforta-

ble talk show format. In 1977, Robertson used that program as the foundation for the Christian Broadcast Network (CBN), which began feeding *The 700 Club* and other religious programming to cable systems via satellite.

The Madison Square Garden (MSG) network had local (New York) production roots from years of in-house coverage at one of the country's premiere sports arenas. For its national cable service, MSG offered selected hockey (New York Rangers) and basketball (New York Knicks) games, along with a handful of special events such as an annual dog show competition.

In 1979, Nickelodeon brought programming for kids to cable, taking what had started in 1977 as a local Ohio offering (*Nick Flicks*) and expanding it nationally. Nickelodeon represented a break from many past local children's shows by eschewing familiar old cartoons in favor of its own original creations. A modest daytime schedule allowed these new features nurturing time.

The halls of government provided the programming material for another new 1979 service, C-SPAN (the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network), a noncommercial offering funded by the cable industry itself. The brainchild of thirty-seven-year-old journalist Brian Lamb, C-SPAN was a savvy corporate venture that allowed the nascent cable industry to display a commitment to public affairs by providing a daily civics lesson for home viewers.

Initially, the main focus for C-SPAN was live gavel-to-gavel coverage of the U.S. House of Representatives, but it quickly added other features to fill its off-session hours, including videotapes of recent congressional meetings and hearings and other public events involving political figures. Because many of these events had already been routinely open to the press, C-SPAN needed only to bring its camera crews. However, in contrast to other news organizations that rarely aired more than a few words from the events, C-SPAN carried every minute. Even more attractive to those appearing on camera, the network took the approach of being an "observer of record" and did not inject any critical commentary during the coverage. Instead, that was handled on separate viewer call-in shows.

Sports was another ready-made programming hook with events already taking place that did not require much in the way of scripts, sets, and original production. The challenge, though, was to find sports not already claimed by ABC, CBS, and NBC. In September 1979, ESPN (the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network) took on the mainstream networks with a service that assembled a mix of the available, the obscure, and the otherwise ignored. Sports of every sort were carried from virtually anywhere around the world, then repeated (and repeated) on tape.

Such repetition was necessary because cable services interested in luring new customers were realizing that one strong selling point was constant availability. While the commercial networks and even most locals aired individual programs only once and usually signed off in the wee hours of the night, cable services realized there was no good reason not to keep on playing and replaying their material throughout the day. It did not cost them much to do so and it helped solidify their identity on the cable dial.

A pattern began to emerge. Because these cable services could not afford to be all encompassing, they had to define themselves by the type of programming they were offering. Because they also could not afford non-stop original material, they plugged in reruns as often as necessary. In the process, having a succession of original episodes became less important. For the specialized cable services, it was most important to emphasize their brand identity: Government. Sports. Kids. Movies.

This resulted in a subtle, gradual, but significant change in cable viewer expectations. Instead of tuning in at a specific time for a

specific show, viewers turned to a channel virtually anytime for a specific *type* of program. It almost did not matter that, at any particular moment, the program on that service might be a rerun.

The development of these specialized services occurred completely under the radar screen of most television viewers. For one thing, there were large areas of the country that did not have cable franchise setups, so residents of cities as large as Chicago could not order cable if they wanted to. There also remained the question: Why would they want to? Cable services for the most part still offered little in the way of original programming that could be considered on a par with that of ABC, CBS, NBC, or PBS. Probably the biggest lure of cable was the opportunity to see uncut and uncensored theatrical films, but that was more of a substitute for going to a movie theater than an alternative to commercial television.

It was Ted Turner who again upped the ante.

In 1979, Turner announced that his next cable venture would be an all-news service, CNN (the Cable News Network). It was to begin the following year, just in time to cover that year's political conventions and fall presidential campaign.

While on the surface "all-news" appeared to be yet another in a growing list of specialized cable networks (like "all-sports"), the idea of a full-time on-air television news service was staggering in its audacity. In the early days of television, the three networks had regarded news as a loss leader. Later, when the evening news programs and prime time series such as *60 Minutes* and *20/20* became bona fide successes, they were still just one element of a network's revenue stream.

CNN would be a news operation that would stand on its own, twenty-four hours a day. Unlike all the other specialized cable

January 25, 1980

Black Entertainment Television (BET), the first U.S. television network aimed at black audiences, commences programming on cable with a limited schedule of two hours per day. BET's founder is black businessman Robert L. Johnson.

April 9, 1980

Cable's MSG network is renamed the USA Network, as it begins to move away from an all-sports schedule to a more diversified general entertainment format.

August 1, 1980

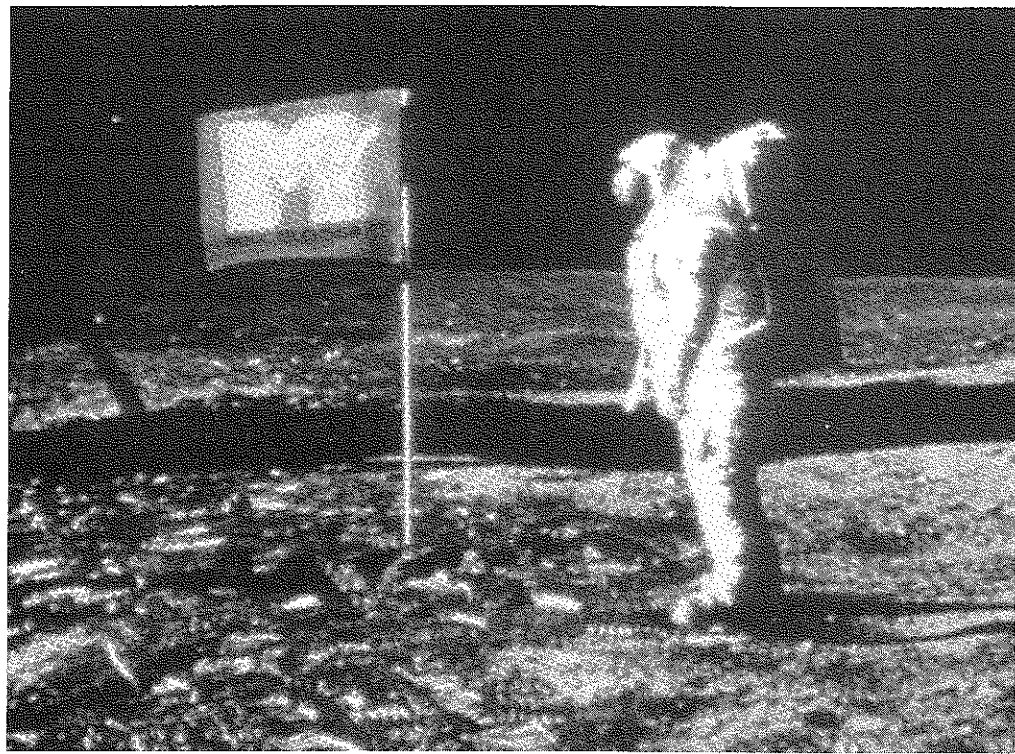
Cinemax, a sister channel of Time-Life's HBO, debuts on cable with an eighteen-hour per day schedule of movies, movies, and nothing but movies.

December 7, 1980

Bravo, a pay cable service focusing on the arts, debuts with a tribute to Aaron Copland taped at Carnegie Hall in New York.

August 1, 1981

MTV (Music Television), Warner/Amex's latest cable venture, brings rock music videos to TV twenty-four hours per day, beginning with The Buggles' "Video Killed the Radio Star" and Pat Benatar's "You Better Run." Some of the other artists featured in MTV's first hour include Rod Stewart, The Who, Todd Rundgren, Split Enz, and .38 Special. The original five "veejays" are Martha Quinn, Nina Blackwood, Mark Goodman, J. J. Jackson, and Alan Hunter.



For a new generation of youthful TV viewers, MTV was the destination that inspired the acquisition of a cable connection in the house. (Viacom International Inc. © 2003. All Rights Reserved.)

formats to that point, a creditable television news operation would cost money. Big money. That was because, in contrast to the congressional sessions typically carried by C-SPAN or the scheduled sports events on ESPN, major news stories could take place anytime, anywhere in the world, at a moment's notice. If CNN was to be a respected news source, it would have to be ready to go where the news was.

Turner made it clear that CNN would be such a major player doing things his way, even down to locating the CNN news headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, rather than in the traditional network turf of New York or Washington. (Both cities would contain bureaus.) Such pronouncements added to Turner's maverick reputation (which had earned him the nickname "the mouth from the South"), but they also followed in the tradition of previous stubborn visionaries, such as NBC's David Sarnoff and CBS's William Paley. Ted Turner had previously transformed his family's successful billboard-advertising business into a wide-ranging communications company. Now he was expanding that vision further, in the process taking original cable programming to a new level.

At 6:00 P.M. on June 1, 1980, CNN debuted as promised. After a filmed presentation of "The Star Spangled Banner" (just like a "regular" TV station might run when signing on every morning), anchors David Walker and Lois Hart in Atlanta began presenting the news as if this was just another day of a service that had always been there.

Even then, CNN was not automatically accorded parity with the existing network news operations. For example, at the Democratic Party's August presidential nominating convention in New York's Madison Square Garden, ABC, CBS, and NBC were allowed to build huge anchor booths immediately adjacent to the floor of the convention. CNN, by contrast, was allocated much smaller space in the nosebleed level along with local TV stations and other independent broadcast news groups. It still had to prove itself.

Within the broadcast news establishment, the attitude in some circles was to dismiss the fledgling news service with a condescending sneer, calling it "Chicken Noodle News." For the future, then, CNN would have to build its own news tradition, one twenty-four-hour day at a time, as people became accustomed to the concept of tuning in the latest news anytime they wanted.

CNN was joined about one year later (in August 1981) by another groundbreaking cable service, this one aimed at quite a different niche audience: MTV (Music Television).

While some cable concepts such as all-sports seemed obvious and inevitable, the same could not be said for the premise behind MTV. It was designed to be a video radio station, playing "music videos" (self-contained rock music performances on film and tape, provided by the artists themselves). These were not lengthy concerts but, rather, individual songs that were introduced by hip and stylish young "veejays" such as Martha Quinn and Nina Blackwood. MTV played these music videos again and again, twenty-four hours a day. Such promotional music films had been around for years, proving especially popular on European television. In the U.S., only a handful ever hit the networks, usually in a one-time broadcast on some music or variety show such as *American Bandstand* or *Ed Sullivan*.

Unlike sports, news, movies, and kids programming, music videos were not a proven format with a hit track record on U.S. network TV. Yet teens soon transformed the slogan "I Want My MTV" into a national catch phrase and put the desire for a home cable TV connection on the family shopping list. There was no equivalent to the non-stop MTV music video lineup anywhere on network TV.

So even though ABC, CBS, and NBC entered the fall of 1981 with ratings numbers that continued to dwarf those of cable, the networks were actually already engaged in the opening skirmishes of a battle for the hearts and souls of the viewing public.

1981-82 SEASON

42. Freddie's Blues

WHEN GRANT TINKER ASSUMED CONTROL of NBC in July 1981 as chairman and CEO, he brought a significant change to the public face of that network.

As former head of the MTM production company, Tinker had built a reputation as a leader in quality television, primarily in comedy (*Mary Tyler Moore*, *The Bob Newhart Show*, *WKRP in Cincinnati*) but also in drama (*Lou Grant*, *The White Shadow*). These were shows that won high critical praise and also registered good ratings.

This track record was contrasted to that of the departing chairman, Fred Silverman, who (despite championing such series as *M*A*S*H*, *The Waltons*, and *Roots*) remained inexorably linked to his big (but more lowbrow) hits on ABC (including *The Love Boat*, *Three's Company*, and *Charlie's Angels*). For NBC to put forth Tinker as its new front man guaranteed a wave of positive critical PR. It suggested that as the number three network NBC might be considering something a little daring as a competitive strategy: quality programming. After all, could the network do much worse?

Tinker's presence also sent a signal to the creative community (and its many MTM alumni and friends) that they might find sympathetic ears in the NBC network offices.

Tinker did make a few changes to the 1981-82 season schedule, which had been planned during Silverman's regime, but NBC's fall lineup was still largely Silverman's creation. More significantly, Tinker kept in place the man that Silverman had made his programming chief, thirty-one-year-old Yale graduate Brandon Tartikoff.

Like Silverman, Tartikoff was a programmer who truly enjoyed television. During his ABC days, Silverman had spotted Tartikoff working at ABC's Chicago O&O (WLS) and pulled him to the network. Soon after Silverman became president at NBC, he lured Tartikoff to that network as well, installing him as head of the entertainment division. In that role, Brandon Tartikoff had the opportunity to use his "TV generation" sensibilities to seek out viable concepts that appealed to him as both a programmer and a viewer. He understood that, in some cases, new programs needed awhile to find their niche, and he was ready to fight for that opportunity for the shows he truly believed would eventually thrive.

Appropriately, the 1981-82 schedule Tartikoff had developed toward the end of Silverman's regime already included its share of quality offerings. There was Merlin Olsen in *Father Murphy* (a warm Western period piece from *Little House on the Prairie*'s Michael Landon), James Garner in *Bret Maverick* (a revival of one of

the best 1950s Westerns), and—as a centerpiece of high-class television—the MTM-produced police drama *Hill Street Blues*.

A mid-season entry in the strike-delayed 1980-81 season, *Hill Street Blues* had registered high critical praise but extremely low ratings during that first go-round. In fact, the program was ranked in the bottom 20% of all series for the 1980-81 season (eighty-third out of ninety-seven shows). Nonetheless, in his closing days at NBC, Fred Silverman had signed off on Tartikoff's renewal of the program, making it one of the lowest-rated prime time series ever brought back for a second season.

There were practical elements to the decision. NBC did not have a deep bench of sure-fire replacements waiting in the wings. Having been the number three network for a few years, NBC was also more inclined to try practically anything in search of a potential hit. Though *Hill Street Blues* had not yet registered with the general public, it had developed a passionate following among critics. That was exactly the type of scenario that had worked in the past for such series as *All in the Family* and *M*A*S*H*, so NBC was willing to give this one more time to catch on. The 1981-82 season would make it or break it.

Going into the fall, *Hill Street Blues* received a tremendous boost from the Emmy awards. First, in August, it received twenty-one nominations (including multiple citations in several categories). At the Emmy telecast itself in early September, *Hill Street Blues* walked away with wins in eight of its twelve nominated categories, including Best Drama, Lead Actor, Lead Actress, Supporting Actor, Directing, Writing, Cinematography, and Sound Editing. Boosted by these numbers, NBC found itself unexpectedly with more Emmy wins than anyone else.

NBC ran promotional clips from the Emmy show incessantly leading up to the new season, which had a later than usual start due to a spring-summer strike among writers. Though not as disruptive as the previous season's labor dispute, this year's strike once again stretched the unveiling of new series past the traditional September premiere dates. Because NBC was airing baseball's World Series that October (and so delayed the premieres of most of its shows until early November), it had a perfect promotional platform leading up to its premiere week. After all the press coverage, on-air promos, and word-of-mouth attention, *Hill Street Blues* at last managed to attract a larger audience. What viewers found when they tuned in was something truly different, a worthy successor to previous MTM dramas such as *Lou Grant* and *The White Shadow*.

Hill Street Blues had the sharp writing and attention to charac-

FALL 1981 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30			
M O N	That's Incredible		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC		
	Private Benjamin	The Two Of Us	M*A*S*H	House Calls	Lou Grant		CBS		
	Little House On The Prairie		NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC		
T U E	Happy Days	Laverne And Shirley	Three's Company	Too Close For Comfort	Hart To Hart		ABC		
	SIMON AND SIMON		CBS Tuesday Night Movies				CBS		
	FATHER MURPHY		BRET MAVERICK		Flamingo Road		NBC		
W E D	The Greatest American Hero		THE FALL GUY		Dynasty		ABC		
	MR. MERLIN	WKRP In Cincinnati	Nurse		SHANNON		CBS		
	Real People		Facts Of Life	LOVE, SIDNEY	Quincy, M.E.		NBC		
T H U R	Mork And Mindy	BEST OF THE WEST	Barney Miller	Taxi	20/20		ABC		
	Magnum, P.I.		Knots Landing		JESSICA NOVAK		CBS		
	Harper Valley	LEWIS AND CLARK	Diffrent Strokes	GIMME A BREAK	Hill Street Blues		NBC		
F R I	Benson	Bosom Buddies	DARKROOM		STRIKE FORCE		ABC		
	The Incredible Hulk		The Dukes Of Hazzard		Dallas		CBS		
	NBC Magazine		McCLAIN'S LAW		NBC Specials		NBC		
S A T	MAGGIE	Making A Living	The Love Boat		Fantasy Island		ABC		
	Walt Disney		CBS Saturday Night Movies				CBS		
	Barbara Mandrell And The Mandrell Sisters		NASHVILLE PALACE		FITZ AND BONES		NBC		
S U N	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
	CODE RED		TODAY'S F.B.I.			ABC Sunday Night Movie			ABC
	60 Minutes		Archie Bunker's Place	One Day At A Time	Alice	The Jeffersons	Trapper John, M.D.		CBS
The Flintstones		Here's Boomer	CHiPs		NBC Sunday Night At The Movies			NBC	

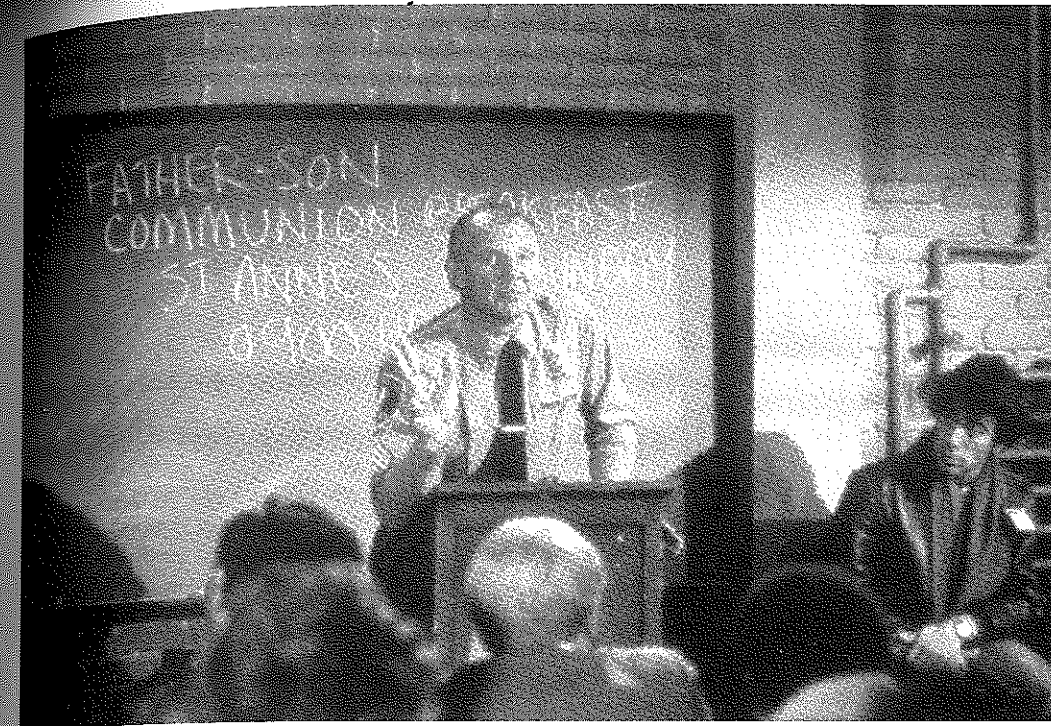
ters typical of MTM offerings. It went further, however, adding the soapier style of continuing storylines and doses of steamy sensuality that might be found in shows such as *Dallas*. There was also occasional violent action that would not have been out of place in a series such as *S.W.A.T.* Yet *Hill Street Blues* brought a fresh take to all these elements, mixing them with a gritty inner-city sensibility. Judiciously placed handheld camera shots (quite unusual for mainstream TV in the early 1980s) conveyed the sense that viewers were really peeking in on the day-to-day life of cops on the front lines, from morning roll call to the end of another exhausting shift.

The program put identifiable and believable faces to the very real challenges of contemporary police work, showing men and women serious about their jobs yet also able to see the humor and absurdity of life that came with it. For example, at times during the opening roll call the cops seemed almost like restless students being addressed by a patient teacher, but that was just one way of coping with the unknown that lay ahead. The daily warning "Let's be careful out there" was the understated acknowledgment of the dangers they faced. With its deft combination of quality production style, writing, and character development, *Hill Street Blues* reenergized the police show format and helped set the standard for TV dramas for the next decade.

Created by Steven Bochco (producer of *Delvecchio* and *Paris*), two innovative but overlooked CBS police shows from the late

1970s), *Hill Street Blues* was set in a shabby downtown police station in an unnamed rust belt city. There, Capt. Frank Furillo (Daniel J. Travanti) tried to keep some semblance of order and justice in the often crazed world of urban law enforcement at his precinct. He was supported by a well-rounded cast of characters both at the station house and on the street. These included the quiet and considerate roll call sergeant, Phil Esterhaus (Michael Conrad); the hyper and militaristic S.W.A.T. leader, Lt. Howard Hunter (James B. Sikking); the bleeding-heart liberal crisis negotiator, Sgt. Henry Goldblume (Joe Spano); the borderline manic undercover cop, Mick Belker (Bruce Weitz); the uncouth but cunning Lt. Norman Buntz (Dennis Franz); and three great teams of street cops. Reflecting the diversity of the force, one was the male-female team of Lucy Bates and Joe Coffey (Betty Thomas and Ed Marinaro) and two were black-white pairings: Bobby Hill and Andy Renko (Michael Warren and Charles Haid) and Neal Washington and J. D. Larue (Taurean Blacque and Kiel Martin).

Furillo's former wife, Faye (Barbara Bosson, Steven Bochco's wife in real life), was constantly turning up at the station to talk with him about money, their young son, and the tribulations of going back into the dating world. He provided a sympathetic ear without revealing that he was involved in an intense secret romance of his own with headstrong public defender Joyce Davenport (Veronica Hamel). That steamy affair provided some of the key sexual tension at the beginning of the series because the two



Every morning at roll call, Sgt. Phil Esterhaus (Michael Conrad) warned the officers at the *Hill Street Blues* station to "Be careful out there." (Hill Street Blues © 1980 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)

were always in conflict at work, but passionate lovers after hours. Eventually almost every major character was involved in a romantic sub-plot, with some of the sex scenes rather daring for the era. For example, the audience did not just see Furillo and Davenport together in bed; there were also erotic settings such as a steamy shared bubble bath. There were also kinky daytime precinct house frysts between Sergeant Esterhaus and his sex-obsessed widowed girlfriend, Grace Gardner (Barbara Babcock).

With a strong core cast, *Hill Street Blues* came up with years of intriguing stories that were realistic, gripping, and entertaining. The continuing storylines, often overlapping dialogue, and complex themes required a fair level of attention from viewers, but the reward was a near-perfect mix of TV drama elements.

Despite all the critical attention lavished on *Hill Street Blues* following its Emmy triumph, NBC still languished in last place during the 1981-82 season. In fact, the network's overall ratings for the year dropped in comparison with those of the previous season (although *Hill Street Blues* managed to jump to twenty-eighth place among all the season's programs). This had been Fred Silverman's final NBC schedule, leaving him far short of a network "hattrick." Number one CBS and former number one ABC still had the programs that filled the weekly top ten, building on familiar formats and stars, many of which had been nurtured during Silverman's earlier days at both networks.

ABC, in fact, was still mining *Happy Days* with the short-run success of mid-season spinoff *Joanie Loves Chachi*. The network also turned to familiar faces William Shatner and producers Aaron Spelling and William Goldberg for its own new police show, the mid-season entry *T. J. Hooker*. Though including slices of off-duty life and earnest plots involving the rights and wrongs of the police world, the series was a far cry from *Hill Street Blues* and generally stuck to a standard crime action formula over its run. Shatner played the title character, a veteran cop who chose to go "back on the street" to guide such fresh-faced officers as Vince Romano (Adrian Zmed) and Stacy Sheridan (Heather Locklear).

The most popular crime fighter on CBS was private investigator Thomas Magnum (Tom Selleck) on *Magnum, P.I.* The series was

in the spirit of *The Rockford Files*, but in a far more comfortable setting: Hawaii. Less than six months after Steve McGarrett (Jack Lord) had booked his last case on *Hawaii Five-O*, *Magnum's* producers Donald P. Bellisario and Glen A. Larson brought viewers back to that luscious island setting for one of the best set-ups a TV detective could hope for.

In exchange for providing security for the lavish island estate of Robin Masters, Magnum was given lodging in a comfortable guesthouse, access to a snazzy \$60,000 red Ferrari, and the time to pursue his own cases. Masters, in fact, was never there at all, though his very proper and officious British aide Jonathan Quayle Higgins III (John Hillerman) attempted to keep in check the flip and casual Magnum. The sparring between Higgins and Magnum (perfectly executed by Hillerman and Selleck) provided a core of camaraderie to the series. It was clear that the two men deeply respected each other and, after a while, Magnum became convinced that, in fact, Higgins himself was the never-seen Robin Masters. (Of course he denied it.)

Overall, *Magnum, P.I.* was lighter fare, buoyed by Selleck's charm and good looks (his smile while he raised his eyebrows was truly disarming). Yet the series did not go over the comic edge. Magnum was a Vietnam vet and two of his war buddies helped on his cases: helicopter pilot T. C. (Roger E. Mosley) and nightclub owner Rick (Larry Manetti). This carefully developed serious side to the characters emerged just often enough to keep the series and the stories grounded for eight seasons.

CBS's most innovative police drama of the 1981-82 season was *Cagney and Lacey*. Though stylistically worlds apart from *Hill Street Blues*, the series had its own unique point of view and its own protracted quest for ratings success. The project had first been pitched as a feature film by two female writer-producers, Barbara Avedon and Barbara Corday, but it eventually ended up as a TV movie (co-produced with Corday's husband, Barney Rosenzweig).

The premise was groundbreaking in either medium: female buddies. Over the years, there had been solo female cops (*Police Woman*), male-female couplings (*McMillan and Wife*), plenty of teams (*The Mod Squad*), and male buddies (*Starsky and Hutch*).

November 15, 1981

This Week with David Brinkley. (ABC). Six weeks after leaving NBC, David Brinkley lands as host of a one-hour Sunday morning news and interview show at ABC.

November 16-17, 1981

ABC's *General Hospital*, TV's number one rated daily soap, sets a new daytime ratings record with the ultra-hyped wedding of Luke (Tony Geary) and Laura (Genie Francis). Soon enough, they are split up, when Laura is kidnapped (and presumed drowned) and Luke barely survives an avalanche.

December 21, 1981

HBO at last expands its schedule to twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

January 1, 1982

Ted Turner launches his second all-news cable network, called CNN-2. Unlike CNN, CNN-2 simply runs forty-eight consecutive self-contained half-hour live newscasts daily, with each updated for the latest developments. By August, the network is renamed CNN Headline News.

January 4, 1982

Sports announcer Bryant Gumbel replaces Tom Brokaw as co-host (with Jane Pauley) of NBC's *Today* show.

Cagney and Lacey offered television's first female buddies, two women elevated to the rank of police detective, working closely together on high-profile cases.

The TV movie aired in October 1981, with Loretta Swit (in between filming for *M*A*S*H*) as Chris Cagney and Tyne Daly as Mary Beth Lacey. That film scored well and earned the premise a series tryout in the spring of 1982, with Meg Foster stepping into Swit's role for further cases with the groundbreaking pair. Cagney was single, highly competitive, and determined to prove herself the best on the force. Lacey was equally dedicated to her career, but was also committed to her home life, where she had a husband and two children. Together, the two women were determined to show that they were not only as good as "the boys," they were better.

Unfortunately, the spring tryout did not do spectacularly well. While the network brass contemplated possible renewal, stories circulated that perhaps there were second thoughts about exactly how the premise was being executed, with nervous executives reportedly concerned that the series was "too feminist."

Cagney and Lacey was at last given the green light to return in the fall of 1982. However, the character of Cagney was recast with Sharon Gless, fresh from replacing Lynn Redgrave for the final run of episodes in the CBS hospital sitcom *House Calls*. It was left to see whether that change to a "softer" and more accessible Cagney would make a difference to viewers in the fall of 1982.

Sexual identity was still one of those areas the networks approached with caution and apprehension. Whenever anything slightly daring was attempted, there was sure to be controversy. For example, programmers were still extremely careful about gay characters in regular series. Yet, because placing a gay character on a prime time television series was so rare, it also offered the opportunity for some extra publicity.

NBC walked that line early in the season when it unveiled *Love, Sidney*, which featured Tony Randall as Sidney Shorr, a middle-aged commercial artist who happened to be gay. Almost. In the TV

movie pilot that aired in early October ("Sidney Shorr: A Girl's Best Friend"), Sidney made no secret of his homosexuality as he helped a young single pregnant woman, Laurie, deal with the decision of whether to have the child or to have an abortion. However, when the regular sitcom series started a few weeks later, Sidney may still have been gay but he was not reminding anybody about it. Instead, it was a few years later and he and Laurie and her daughter, Patti, shared his large Manhattan apartment in a perfectly platonic relationship. Randall brought his usual comic timing to the character and Swoosie Kurtz was effective enough as Laurie, but even at its funniest, the series was haunted by the unaddressed "big issue" just out of sight and still hanging in the closet.

ABC had a much less volatile take on non-traditional sexual roles in *Bosom Buddies*, a low-rated carryover from the previous season. The original premise was highly convoluted and deeply in debt to the 1959 film "Some Like It Hot." Henry and Kip, two off-beat young advertising agency employees newly arrived in Manhattan, found their bargain-rent apartment building demolished one morning. With no other affordable housing available, they jumped at their co-worker Amy's idea of moving into her apartment building. One problem: It was a women-only residence. The solution? Henry and Kip decided to dress in drag as Hildegard and Buffy, their respective "sisters," when they were in the apartment building. Only Amy (who had a crush on Henry) knew their secret.

Naturally, this premise not only called for plot complications revolving around keeping their double lives straight, it also meant that beautiful women (often in skimpy nightgowns) were regularly dropping by "Hildegard" and "Buffy's" apartment for "girl talk" (allowing ABC a few promotional titillating moments). This premise was too complicated to sustain a series for long, and the show largely dropped the "boys in drag" emphasis in the midst of the program's second (and final) season. Henry and Kip "came out" to their women friends in the apartment building and set up their own small production company. By then, *Bosom Buddies* could emphasize what had been its *real* strength all along, sharp writing and an outstanding pair of leading actors: Peter Scolar as the cute, smallish, and shy Henry, and twenty-four-year-old Tom Hanks as the lanky and bolder Kip.

While the networks tended to shy away from dealing with controversial sexual issues, viewers certainly were not automatically outraged by sexual matters. That was reflected in the ratings; the most popular format on television was now clearly the sex-drenched prime time soap opera, with *Dallas* comfortably ensconced at the top of the ratings. In the 1981-82 season, it had plenty of company.

Everywhere, even in everyday life, conspicuous consumption was celebrated, with success in the boardroom and the bedroom seen as a badge of honor. Larry Hagman's J. R. Ewing might be presented on *Dallas* as a villainous manipulator, but he also came across as the sly one you'd like to see on your team. J. R. managed to put a smiling face on greed.

That allure of wealth, sex, and crafty manipulators was not lost on Lorimar, the *Dallas* production company, which set in motion similar conflicts on *Knots Landing* (its direct *Dallas* spinoff), *Flamingo Road* (an NBC series based on a 1949 movie of the same name), and its newest hit series, CBS's *Falcon Crest*. (No surprise there. *Falcon Crest* was placed in a choice slot immediately after *Dallas*, which moved up an hour). *Falcon Crest* was set in the wine country region outside San Francisco and centered on the schemes of powerful matriarch Angela Channing (Jane Wyman, who had been the real-life first wife of newly inaugurated President Ronald Reagan). She would do anything to consolidate and extend her vineyard holdings while crushing her enemies, real or

imagined. The series quickly established its own ardent following and ran for nine seasons.

And then there was *Dynasty*, which brought Aaron Spelling (a veteran TV producer of extravagant fluff) to the prime time soap opera world in a big way. Set in the breathtaking natural beauty of the Rocky Mountains near Denver and the man-made beauty of the opulent mansions and offices, *Dynasty* presented the story of the Carrington business empire and its far-flung cast of backstabbing, self-centered, amoral beautiful people living luxurious lives or aspiring to them. Despite such a winning formula, the series had a slow start as a midseason entry for the 1980-81 season. It began promisingly with the wedding of company head Blake Carrington (John Forsythe, the voice of Charlie in Spelling's *Charlie's Angels*) and his former secretary Krystle Jennings (Linda Evans), but then meandered through complicated business and family plots. These culminated with Blake standing trial for murder and, at season's end, a mysterious veiled woman entering the courtroom.

In the fall of 1981, viewers learned the woman's identity: Alexis Carrington (Joan Collins), Blake's former wife. Once Alexis entered the *Dynasty* world, the program took off. Deliciously played by Collins, Alexis was the ultimate manipulator, determined to once again sit with Blake at the seat of corporate and personal power, or destroy him and everything he had built. (At times it appeared she would do both, just for the fun of it.) Alexis saved her strongest vitriol for Krystle, whom she regarded as a rank pretender for Blake's love. Over the course of the series, the two women became entwined in a series of bitter confrontations, including outright physical battles (most dramatically, a knock-down fight in an artificial lily pond).

Dynasty had its share of complicated plots and a long list of supporting characters (including Krystle's daughter, played by Heather Locklear, at the same time she was collaring criminals on *T. J. Hooker*). The series even had several gay characters, including Blake's own son, Steven. Yet, first and foremost, *Dynasty* was all about style. No matter their sexual orientation, both the men and the women of *Dynasty* were strikingly attractive and inevitably wrapped in sartorial splendor. This was a glitterati world in which viewers spent most of their time admiring the scenery, over time generally ignoring the details of stories that often resembled daytime soaps at their most self-indulgent, with kidnapping, amnesia, and characters undergoing plastic surgery so new actors could assume the roles. Real-life Washington power broker Henry Kissinger and former U.S. President Gerald Ford appeared in cameos, further blurring the line between the real world and the make-believe world of Hollywood.

Though stargazing had been a part of American pop culture for decades, at the time there was an increasing emphasis on celebrities and their associated lifestyles, even up to the White House. President Reagan had served eight years as governor of California, but he had first spent decades as a star in feature films and television. So as president he seemed perfectly at ease in front of the cameras, easily connecting with people back home yet also comfortably mixing with celebrities of all sorts. He and his wife Nancy were not products of elite family backgrounds like that enjoyed by President John F. Kennedy, but they nonetheless brought to the White House a Hollywood-trained sense of style and gloss not seen in Washington since the early 1960s.

In this context, *Entertainment Tonight* premiered during the fall of 1981 as a syndicated show (distributed via satellite) devoting a half hour each day to the world of showbiz. It became a hit by treating glitzy film openings and entertainment industry announcements as news—celebrity news. Inevitably, such stories focused on luxurious homes, fancy cars, and lavish lifestyles. In essence, these

were real-life versions of people like the Carringtons of *Dynasty* and the Ewings of *Dallas*.

Dynasty did well enough in the 1981-82 season, landing in the top twenty overall. Still, *Dallas* remained television's number one series, letting CBS easily ride to another victory in the annual battle for network ratings superiority. With CBS at the top of its ratings game, the network looked to make its mark in the emerging world of cable. What could be easier?

Unlike ABC (and its lukewarm investment in the ARTS cable channel), CBS affixed the network's own brand name to its cable identity. This identification helped CBS Cable to better stand out in the crowd and could be used to help attract new viewers to sign up for cable service. ABC's ARTS service was almost exclusively filled with programs purchased from outside suppliers. CBS Cable, on the other hand, emphasized its own productions (which made up 60% of its schedule).

On October 12, 1981, CBS Cable began with style. In the first program, *Signature*, host Gregory Jackson spoke with musician Isaac Stern, but the camera never cut away to Jackson. Instead it remained focused only on Stern, demonstrating that this was a show that put the interview subject first.

There was much more. Respected journalist and documentarian Patrick Watson, from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, served as the original on-air host for the cable network's schedule. Author-producer Norris Chumley offered a special on Gene Kelly. Emmy-winning editor Alan Miller worked his magic on the program *Mixed Bag New Wave*. Charles Kuralt hosted *I Remember*, a weekly one-hour examination of a news story from the past thirty years. Bill Moyers hosted a lavishly produced twenty-part documentary series, *A Walk Through the 20th Century*. There were concerts, operas, and a weekly one-hour drama anthology.

It was as if television's critics had at last been given their own network to program. CBS Cable embraced the buzzword "narrowcasting" and seemed tailor-made for the upscale, well-educated viewers that potential advertisers wanted to reach. It was a high-class operation that seemed determined to show this upstart cable industry just how the seasoned professionals did the job.

February 1, 1982

Late Night with David Letterman. (NBC). NBC replaces Tom Snyder in the post-Johnny Carson late night slot with a sixty-minute program hosted by cool young gap-toothed comic David Letterman, who recently flopped with an equally hip show that NBC weirdly slotted at 10:00 A.M.

March 4, 1982

Police Squad! (ABC). In Color. The creators of the hit film spoof "Airplane!" present an equally crazed send-up of TV cop shows. Leslie Nielsen plays the dense but deadpan Det. Frank Drebin. While a flop on TV, this idea succeeds six years later with the first of three "Naked Gun" films.

March 15, 1982

ABC teams up with the Hearst television chain for a new cable service called Daytime, aimed at women. At first, it only runs from 1:00 to 5:00 P.M. Monday through Friday.

April 5, 1982

Tom Brokaw (in New York) and Roger Mudd (in Washington) replace John Chancellor as anchor of *NBC Nightly News*. Chancellor still provides occasional commentaries.

For longtime CBS boss William Paley, this was the vision of television he had preferred to tout from the beginning of his network. Yet ever since TV had become a mass medium in the mid-1950s, pandering to the broad American populace had been the guiding principle at all three networks. As time went on, there were fewer and fewer slots available on CBS's own competitive schedule for the more "refined" (some would say "elitist") programming that Paley wanted to have associated with his network.

Yet clearly Paley had not forgotten those days; he became one of the biggest boosters of CBS Cable. So what if the commitment to the cable service cost a great deal of money? William Paley had started CBS on its road to riches back in the 1920s. He had certainly earned the right to spend some of his company's money to recapture the stature that had once given CBS its nickname as the "Tiffany" network. If CBS Cable succeeded in this new medium by being the best, that success would be one more jewel in Paley's crown.

However, that hoped-for renaissance in television never took hold. Instead, after just fourteen months, CBS Cable signed off as a costly failure. The service never drew enough subscribers or advertising dollars to prosper. Instead, it produced a loss of about \$50 million for CBS. As a result, the network essentially wrote off cable as part of its corporate plans for more than a decade. It was not worth the bother and yielded little immediate bottom-line return. Cable was in barely a quarter of the country's households. The percentage of homes with video recorders was in the single digits. Together ABC, CBS, and NBC still dominated television viewing, day in and day out, with their over-the-air broadcasts.

Besides taking CBS out of the cable game, the failure of CBS Cable marked the end of an era for the network. The press release disclosing the demise of CBS Cable came out (not coincidentally) just one week after William Paley announced his plan to resign as chairman of the board of CBS, thus relinquishing his day-to-day control over the network. Paley would remain as one of the company's directors (and its major stockholder), but the last of the original broadcasting pioneers no longer had the final say at the network he had created.

In an odd way, CBS Cable had tried to do too much, bringing a

traditional network emphasis on specific content to the fractured world of cable choice. Even the familiar network brand name did not help, particularly because it had virtually nothing to do with the CBS identity people had come to know from its top-rated shows. Instead of J. R. Ewing, Thomas Magnum, and Hawkeye Pierce, viewers were offered Isaac Stern and Patrick Watson.

The real direction cable was heading was far less splashy than the glittering CBS Cable line-up. Down the street, Paramount, Time-Life, and MCA/Universal were buying up Madison Square Garden's cable network and renaming it the USA Network, changing its programming to a more mainstream "superstation"-like mix of movies, TV reruns, and sports. WTBS was buying the rights to begin airing live NCAA college football in the fall of 1982, while ESPN joined the USA Network in obtaining the rights to air some NBA basketball games.

In May 1982, *Good Morning America* weatherman John Coleman launched the Weather Channel, a twenty-four-hour-a-day cable service that only reported ... the weather. Just a few years before, such an idea might have been the basis for a *Saturday Night Live* skit. Now, it was cable reality.

As the number of cable networks continued to grow, most local cable system operators upgraded their systems to gain the capacity to provide more than just a handful of strictly cable channels along with retransmissions of local over-the-air stations. In addition, many cable channels continued to expand their hours of operation, moving in the direction of twenty-four-hour-a-day programming.

Clearly, a process of profound change had begun in television, but it was the type of change that would unfold over decades, not just a season or two. It would not come about because of any one show or any one event, though there would be important milestones. Instead, the change would be cumulative, as households began to respond to the additional television choices being presented to them. New generations were growing up seeing more than just ABC, CBS, and NBC as the sources of television entertainment. Even though viewers still tuned in the major networks for most of the big shows, they were also becoming aware that there might be something else, just down the dial.

1982-83 SEASON

43. Send in the "A" Team

ON JULY 5, 1982, NBC VENTURED INTO late late news with *NBC News Overnight*, hosted by Linda Ellerbee and Lloyd Dobyns. The program aired even later than ABC's *Nightline*, running Monday through Thursday from 1:30 to 2:30 A.M., and Friday nights from 2:00 to 3:00 A.M. The program was remarkable in its simplicity and elegant in its execution. Recognizing that NBC's network correspondents worldwide sent in far more reports than could ever be used by the nightly news, *NBC News Overnight* offered those reporters a chance for air time—not only presenting pieces that had never made the regular news cut, but also including longer versions of stories that had been trimmed for time.

Consequently, *Overnight* was cost-effective, using resources the network already had in place, including feeds from international news services. As anchors, Ellerbee and Dobyns were not afraid of irony and often used the odd juxtaposition of stories to make subtle points without sacrificing the integrity of the overall presentation. It was perfectly appropriate for the wee hours and, with the emphasis on world news and in-depth pieces, *Overnight* was a newshound's newscast.

A few months later (October 1982) CBS launched its own overnight service (*CBS News Nightwatch*) digging even deeper into the late hours (broadcasting from 2:00 to 6:00 A.M. late Sunday through Thursday nights) and making similar use of resources already in place. That same month, ABC replaced its late night entertainment series reruns with *The Last Word*, a flashy followup to *Nightline*, featuring Gregory Jackson and daytime interview impresario Phil Donahue providing news analysis and interviews.

The networks also expanded their news coverage at the other end of the broadcast day. On July 5, ABC placed a one-hour newscast, *ABC News This Morning* (with Steve Bell and Kathleen Sullivan), before *Good Morning America*. That same day, NBC extended its *Today* show an extra thirty minutes, using the regular *Today* cast for *Early Today*. In October, CBS also added a thirty-minute early edition of the news, *The CBS Early Morning News*.

Cumulatively, these new programs added some forty hours of news per week to the networks' schedules. Because the overnight shows and the early morning shows practically overlapped, they effectively extended network feeds for their affiliates to nearly twenty-four hours a day, just like some cable services. This represented a spectacular recommitment by the networks to one of their most respected areas of programming, and resulted in nearly ninety hours each week of news, information, public affairs, and interview shows across ABC, CBS, and NBC. Not coincidentally, this

expansion also served as a strategic response by those networks to a new venture by cable magnate Ted Turner.

In January 1982, Turner had launched CNN-2 (later called *Headline News*), a companion service to CNN that could make further use of the material already being gathered for the all-news cable channel. *Headline News* packaged its stories into self-contained thirty-minute news programs that were repeated (with updates) twenty-four hours a day. These programs could be plugged into virtually any time slot, using a news format very familiar to viewers: a half-hour survey of national and international news, features, and sports. Just like a network newscast.

What made ABC, CBS, and NBC take notice, however, was the fact that *Headline News* was not offered only to cable services; it was also pitched to over-the-air broadcasters, including network affiliates, for use in filling whatever slot the local station might choose. This was a direct encroachment on network turf, not only in content but also in servicing their affiliates.

The relationship between the networks and their affiliates had always been complex, with affiliates, in theory, retaining considerable flexibility in deciding what network shows they slotted and when. Practically speaking, it made good business sense to run network programs exactly as scheduled to take advantage of viewer familiarity and national publicity. However, there were exceptions, as when stations chose to insert local sports events or decided to avoid controversial network programs they felt might offend local sensibilities.

Affiliates had always looked to programming sources apart from the networks for early evening and post-prime time shows (generally game shows and talk shows), so in that sense *Headline News* was just another potential program provider. However, by offering news programming, *Headline News* was aggressively staking out new territory. ABC, CBS, and NBC did not want longtime relationships ruptured, even in the empty overnight hours (where many stations slotted *Headline News*). In theory, such a change could set a bad precedent from the networks' point of view. If the affiliates became accustomed to turning to *Headline News*, they might by-pass other network programs elsewhere in the broadcast day. So the networks moved in with their own news offerings for late night, overnight, and early morning to try to nip this affiliate "rebellion" in the bud.

Though CNN's *Headline News* marked the first time there was such an identifiable and direct challenge to the broadcast networks from cable, there were skirmishes on other fronts as well.

FALL 1982 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30			
MON	That's Incredible		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC		
	SQUARE PEGS	Private Benjamin	M*A*S*H	NEWHART	Cagney And Lacey		CBS		
	Little House: A New Beginning		NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC		
TUE	Happy Days	Laverne And Shirley	Three's Company	9 To 5	Hart To Hart		ABC		
	BRING 'EM BACK ALIVE		CBS Tuesday Night Movies				CBS		
	Father Murphy		GAVILAN		ST. ELSEWHERE		NBC		
WED	TALES OF THE GOLD MONKEY		The Fall Guy		Dynasty		ABC		
	SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS		Alice	Filthy Rich	TUCKER'S WITCH		CBS		
	Real People		Facts Of Life	FAMILY TIES	Quincy, M.E.		NBC		
THU	Joanie Loves Chachi	STAR OF THE FAMILY	Too Close For Comfort	IT TAKES TWO	20/20		ABC		
	Magnum, P.I.		Simon And Simon		Knots Landing		CBS		
	Fame		CHEERS	Taxi	Hill Street Blues		NBC		
FRI	Benson	THE NEW ODD COUPLE	The Greatest American Hero		THE QUEST		ABC		
	The Dukes Of Hazzard		Dallas		Falcon Crest		CBS		
	POWERS OF MATTHEW STAR		KNIGHT RIDER		REMINGTON STEELE		NBC		
SAT	T.J. Hooker		The Love Boat		Fantasy Island		ABC		
	Walt Disney		CBS Saturday Night Movies				CBS		
	Diff'rent Strokes	SILVER SPOONS	Gimme A Break	Love, Sidney	THE DEVLIN CONNECTION		NBC		
SUN	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
	RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT		MATT HOUSTON		ABC Sunday Night Movie				ABC
	60 Minutes		Archie Bunker's Place	GLORIA	The Jeffersons	One Day At A Time	Trapper John, M.D.		CBS
VOYAGERS!		CHIPs		NBC Sunday Night At The Movies				NBC	

With music videos on MTV continuing to generate "teen buzz," NBC became the first broadcast network to attempt a regular slot for such programming. In the summer of 1983, NBC unveiled its response, *Friday Night Videos*.

For ninety minutes late Friday night into Saturday (12:30 to 2:00 A.M.), *Friday Night Videos* brought the MTV video world to mainstream television. At first, there was only an off-screen announcer (Nick Michaels) to introduce the videos, but soon the network used its clout to vie with MTV for the latest video premieres and celebrity guests to spice up the program's format.

Friday Night Videos developed into a respectable program by network standards, but it could never hope to compete for teen loyalty with MTV's twenty-four-hour video lineup. Instead, it was more like Music Videos 101 for those who had heard about this new form of TV and now could see some of it for themselves. Nonetheless, slotting *Friday Night Videos* was a tacit admission that in this case the over-the-air networks were playing catch-up with cable, attempting to lure the young audience for a hot programming form that had been created totally outside their system.

ABC, CBS, and NBC were much more comfortable viewing cable as the pricey home for network castoffs, reruns, and a limited number of movies that were repeated ad nauseam. Broadcasters were still the only ones that could afford the original, high-gloss professional productions that viewers had come to expect from commercial television. Still at no additional charge.

Yet even here, the first chinks were appearing in the network armor. In the spring of 1983, the premium cable service Showtime added to its schedule a network "castoff," *The Paper Chase*. The series had originally played for a single season on CBS in 1978-79, and more recently had been rerun on PBS. Showtime was the program's third home. However, Showtime was doing something unprecedented with the series: It was paying for the production of additional new episodes, marking the first such commitment by a cable service. This was a warning that another exclusive network area could be challenged: the production of original series.

The Paper Chase was the perfect vehicle for such a venture. During its CBS run, the series had been well regarded as a strong adaptation of the 1973 feature film, due primarily to Oscar-winning star John Houseman continuing his role as Professor Charles Kingsfield. Houseman was riveting as the no-nonsense contract law professor who demanded the best from his classes, winning the immediate and undying admiration of first-year student James T. Hart (James Stephens), the epitome of Midwestern integrity, optimism, and hard work.

Houseman and Stephens formed the nucleus of the series and both were back for *The Paper Chase: The Second Year*. These new episodes not only gave Showtime the chance to show off a new production that looked as good as any network series, they also allowed a glimpse of what premium cable could do that the commercial networks could not (or would not).



From first year to graduation, the relationship between Professor Charles Kingsfield (John Houseman, right) and his top student, James Hart (James Stephens), was at the center of *The Paper Chase*. (The Paper Chase © 1979 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)

The CBS *Paper Chase* episodes had seemed buffeted by the demands of playing in a television world dominated by the likes of *Laverne and Shirley* and *Charlie's Angels*, so that for every plot about integrity and moot court there were also riffs about romancing a mobster's daughter or helping a defecting Russian gymnast. The result was hit and miss, never luring the *Three's Company* crowd but often annoying the quality crowd. Nonetheless, *The Paper Chase* still stood out as an exceptional offering for the time and its quick cancellation on CBS became a rallying point for those who found little to watch on commercial television. Its revival on cable was a chance to support quality television by pointedly subscribing to an alternative.

Showtime's viewers were not disappointed. On the new episodes, the pacing was less frenzied and the plotting more character- and issue-driven. There was a greater willingness to let the stories flow at their own pace, even if they were less flashy. One episode ("My Dinner with Kingsfield") found Kingsfield and Hart unexpectedly sharing dinner and conversation as the result of a snowstorm. In another story, Kingsfield quietly disappeared for one day, forcing both students and faculty to make important decisions on their own, without having him there for guidance.

The new *Paper Chase* episodes did not air each week. Instead, Showtime took three years to present thirty-six new episodes,

treating each one like a special mini-movie that was repeated and promoted throughout the schedule. Eventually, the series took Hart and Kingsfield through the three years of law school to graduation. For his part, Houseman refined and polished the nuances of his character, giving cable subscribers the opportunity to see performances that went far beyond the original film portrayal.

The Paper Chase showed that, in addition to offering movies, cable could use the right series to attract subscribers. That was exactly what had lured viewers to commercial television in the first place back in the 1950s: regular series with strong, identifiable characters. The trick was to use familiar formats with hooks that differentiated the cable shows from those of the over-the-air networks. After all, while people regarded watching movies on cable as saving the cost of going to the theater, there were already series on commercial TV for free. A series on cable had to be something special. As competition to land hit films increased, such original productions would become a key element in defining the cable landscape.

The overall television landscape, however, remained the province of ABC, CBS, and NBC. Among the three, CBS maintained its reign at the top of the ratings with a mix of soaps led by *Dallas*, adventures led by *Magnum, P.I.*, comedy led by *M*A*S*H*, and television's number one show, *60 Minutes*. In second place, ABC had its soapy mainstay (*Dynasty*), a handful of aging comedies (*Three's Company*, *The Love Boat*), and *Monday Night Football* (hurt that fall by a players' strike). NBC remained a distant third. Overall CBS had a comfortable lead in the competition, and the new shows for the fall of 1982 did little to change that equation.

Yet amid a fall lineup on the three networks that included such disposables as *Bring 'em Back Alive* (a knockoff of Indiana Jones), *The Powers of Matthew Star* (a teen-hero science fiction tale), and *Matt Houston* (a generic male hunk detective), there came almost unnoticed an astonishing number of high quality comedy and drama offerings. Most were from writers and producers weaned on the MTM production company style, and a few were from MTM itself. Nearly all were on the third place network, NBC. Only one registered respectable ratings that season: Bob Newhart's new sitcom on CBS.

Newhart placed Bob Newhart's resilient deadpan everyman persona in the setting of a small Vermont country inn. He played Dick Loudon, a transplanted big-city writer of how-to books (and, after awhile, the host of a local TV talk show), who bought and ran the Stratford Inn with his wife, Joanna (Mary Frann). Throughout the eight-season run of the series, Dick and Joanna remained perpetual "newcomers" to old Vermont, continually puzzled by the town's otherworldly situations that brought a never-ending parade of odd characters through their door as guests, neighbors, or employees. These included the slow but countrywise handyman George Utley (Tom Poston), shallow and self-absorbed local TV producer Michael Harris (Peter Scolari), pouty and self-absorbed hotel maid Stephanie (Julia Duffy), and backwoods siblings Larry (the only one who spoke), his brother Darryl, and his other brother Darryl (William Sanderson, Tony Papenfuss, and John Volstad, respectively). All of them gave Newhart plenty of opportunities to do what he did best: React. Slowly. Cautiously. Hilariously.

Newhart was a comfortable fit with CBS, giving the network a new yet very familiar program from one of its comedy mainstays of the 1970s. As part of the CBS Monday-night lineup (following *M*A*S*H*), the series got the time it needed to properly establish itself and easily landed in the top twenty for the season.

Of course, even the CBS clout did not guarantee that every new series from the network would be a hit, especially those shows that ventured too far from the familiar CBS groove. *Square Pegs*, also

slotted on Monday night, was a high school comedy created by former *Saturday Night Live* writer Anne Beatts, focusing on the in-out social crowds at Weemawee High School. Tracy Nelson (daughter of Rick Nelson) was one of the "in" Valley Girls while Sarah Jessica Parker played Patty Greene, a tall, awkward "plain Jane" with glasses. The program was clever but inconsistent, displaying a hip swagger more appropriate to an MTV audience. With fractured storylines and jarring "new wave" musical riffs (including a theme song by The Waitresses and such guest acts as Devo), the series did not seem to belong on CBS and disappeared after one season. That was the downside of a slot at the number one network. While a show would get a built-in audience, it also faced expectations that it would fit in and deliver solid ratings.

There was little pressure of that type over at NBC. Despite the critical success and decent ratings of *Hill Street Blues*, the network still did not have any big hit shows. Nonetheless, programming chief Brandon Tartikoff continued to try a wide variety of offerings, in the process building a true A-list of programs for the network. That fall, the new shows on the NBC schedule included *Family Ties*, *Silver Spoons*, *Cheers*, *Remington Steele*, and *St. Elsewhere*. None of them caught on in their first season, but Tartikoff judged the shows to be worth nurturing. They each had a distinctive premise, good writing, and a solid cast. All they needed was the opportunity to connect with viewers.

Family Ties was the creation of Gary David Goldberg, who had been a writer on such MTM series as *The Bob Newhart Show* and *Lou Grant*, and who had created the short-lived 1979 sitcom *The Last Resort* (college students working in the Catskills). Goldberg took his ear for strong dialogue, character nuance, and believable situations and applied it to a 1980s twist on generational conflict. He set *Family Ties* in the heart of middle America (Columbus, Ohio), though instead of having the World War II generation cross swords with the Swinging 1960s crowd (as had been the case with the previous decade's *All in the Family*), this series presented as its older generation a pair of idealistic baby boomers who had come of age in the 1960s and now had to deal with their own kids.

Mom and dad (Elyse and Steven Keaton, played by Meredith Baxter Birney and Michael Gross) were appropriately earnest (especially Steven), constantly asking themselves whether they were being true to their starry-eyed past. As responsible adults with three children, they had respectable jobs (she was an architect, he was manager of a local public TV station), made a comfortable living, and hoped to pass on their liberal values to the next generation. Teenage daughter Mallory (Justine Bateman) and nine-year-old Jennifer (Tina Yothers) were polite and respectful of these efforts, but were frankly far more interested in their own growing up concerns than in nostalgia-tinged music and tales from an era that was just so much history to them. Son Alex (Michael J. Fox), the oldest, was equally respectful but far more engaged in the political side of life. He was an intelligent and articulate conservative, a firm believer in the wonders of free market capitalism, and an admirer of such U.S. presidents as Richard M. Nixon and Ronald Reagan.

Despite this setup, *Family Ties* never settled for a formula of shrill shouting matches on the issues of the day. Instead, Alex and his family agreed to disagree, talking forcefully but not constantly about liberal and conservative values. The series quickly showed its strength as a genuinely affectionate family comedy, with the members always there for each other, working through conflicts, and inevitably embracing after disagreements. The real focus was on growing up, not only by the three children, but also by the parents. Alex even opened doors by bonding with his similarly conservative grandfather Jake (Steven's dad, played by John

Randolph) as the two tried to figure out how a guy as good-hearted as Steven could be so wrong in his world view. For all the characters, especially the parents, family life was a blessing, representing the best thing that ever happened to them.

Over time, Michael J. Fox's Alex emerged as the program's most popular character, with his ingratiating smile, nervous self-confidence, and puppy-dog charm. Though always remaining true to his conservative leanings, Alex also learned to explore his emotions in greater depth. One pivotal moment took place when he illogically lost his heart to Ellen Reed (Tracy Pollan), an art student at his college. Uncertain how to express himself, he watched tongue-tied as she boarded a train to visit her current boyfriend at another college (with marriage likely to follow). A short time later, on the way to a prestigious college party, Alex impulsively turned the car away from campus and frantically drove hundreds of miles to meet Ellen at the destination train station. There, in the early morning hours, Alex finally uttered the words, "I love you" and she reciprocated. Though the character of Ellen was written out of the series after only a season, in real life Pollan and Fox followed through on that declaration and were soon married.

Family Ties did not keep its characters frozen in time but took Alex and Mallory from high school through college and Jennifer into her teen years. Steven survived a heart attack and bypass surgery, while Elyse had a late-in-life fourth child (son Andrew). Appropriate to the generations theme of the series, conservative Alex soon won the heart of his younger brother, though the series blatantly jumped character time-line continuity to help this along. The season after Andy was born, he was suddenly a walking and talking child (played by four-year-old Brian Bonsall) who was much easier to integrate into the stories than the eight-month-old baby he should have been. As a result, Andy could engage in verbal give-and-take, especially enjoying the attention of his older brother. Together the two scanned such publications as *Wall Street Journal* and watched such television shows as *Wall Street Week in Review*. Alex knew it was never too early to develop important family values.

NBC's other new generational sitcom that fall, *Silver Spoons*, was hatched by producers from *The Jeffersons*. In this series, there was no doubt as to which was the most mature and intelligent character: It was twelve-year-old Ricky Stratton (Ricky Schroder), who had just moved in with his wealthy dad, thirty-five-year-old Edward Stratton III (Joel Higgins), owner of a fabulously successful toy company. The two had never spent time together before then (as the result of a divorce, Ricky had been raised by his mom and then sent to military school), so Ricky was amazed to see that his dad was more of a kid than he was: sunny, optimistic, and taking great delight in playing with toys, not just selling them. The household included a miniature railroad train system that ran throughout the mansion, with cars just big enough for Edward to ride in. Edward's secretary, Kate (Erin Gray), kept his life in order and hoped for adult romance one day; while his business manager, Dexter (Franklyn Seales), and his lawyer, Leonard (Leonard Lightfoot), made sure he remained solvent. Grandfather Edward Stratton II (John Houseman, in an occasional role) scowled at his son's childish (though successful) behavior, but Ricky helped bridge that generation gap. Not surprisingly, Ricky and his dad taught each other aspects of life they had missed by going their separate ways. Edward learned to let go of some of his extended childhood tendencies (marrying Kate in the third season) while Ricky found it was all right to relax and enjoy being a kid while he was still a kid.

In contrast to the family settings in *Family Ties* and *Silver Spoons*, *Cheers* used the "workplace family" hook that had worked

so well on *Mary Tyler Moore* and, more recently, on *Taxi*. In fact, not only did some of the same talents behind *Taxi* serve as the creators of *Cheers* (director James Burrows and writers Les Charles and Glen Charles), but also the new program began its network run on NBC coupled with the cabbies. Upon hearing the news that ABC had canceled *Taxi* in the spring of 1982 (and of reported overtures by HBO to continue the series), Brandon Tartikoff had stepped in and picked up the program. For the fall of 1982, NBC placed *Cheers* at 9:00 p.m. Thursday, followed by *Taxi* in its old 9:30 P.M. time slot, with accompanying promos by Danny DeVito in his Louie De Palma persona sneering, "Same time, better station." Unfortunately, the new network home did not improve *Taxi's* soft ratings (the reason ABC cited for the cancellation in the first place), so the program ended five years of high quality production with this one final season on NBC. That left *Cheers* on its own, but the series was up to the challenge. Just as *Taxi* could have virtually anyone turn up as a passenger in one of the cabs, *Cheers* had a setting (a neighborhood bar in downtown Boston) that allowed virtually anyone to come through the front door.

Cheers had all its key elements in place starting with the first episode, and never looked back. It all began when a well-educated but somewhat starry-eyed graduate student, Diane Chambers (Shelley Long), stopped at the Cheers bar with her paramour, literature professor, Sumner Sloan, for a celebratory drink before he made good on his promise to whisk her away to a tropical island (leaving his wife behind). Before the end of the evening, though, he had disappeared, flying off instead with his wife and leaving Diane behind. Realizing she could never return to the school, a distressed Diane accepted a job offer by bar owner Sam Malone (Ted Danson) to work as a cocktail waitress, rationalizing it as an opportunity to help her writing by getting to know the "common people." Sam, in turn, needed a new waitress, felt sorry for her situation, and knew that with her lack of real-world experience she was not qualified for much else.

Sam also wanted to have sex with Diane. It was his natural reaction to any attractive woman. (Sam's long list of lovers was legendary at the bar.) She would not admit it (at first), but Diane was attracted to Sam from the start as well. Initially, Sam and Diane hid their feelings for each other with quips and putdowns. She made fun of his lack of formal education, and he mocked her pretentious mannerisms. By the end of the first season, though, they admitted their true feelings and at last embraced after a passionately angry argument in Sam's office (with the entire bar listening at the door). They then carried on an intense affair for one season, but it was a stormy arrangement and their barroom comments were still peppered with quips and putdowns. That sharp edge continued through every subsequent phase of their relationship as they split, continued to work together, and flirted with other people (Diane nearly married her psychiatrist, Frasier Crane). Sam and Diane eventually became engaged, but called off the marriage at the last minute. The give-and-take between the couple gave the series a continuing sexually charged lure, with Long and Danson particularly adept at keeping the sparring familiar yet fresh.

The on-going relationship also gave the writers the freedom to develop the comic possibilities in all the other characters, using the flexibility of the premise to take the stories anywhere. This turned *Cheers* into one of the best written and best executed situation comedies ever, with parallel subplots and throwaway background comments that were as funny as the main punch lines. The main bar lineup included a logically illogical bartender, Ernie "Coach" Pantusso (Nicholas Colasanto), who had coached Sam during his time as a baseball pitcher with the Boston Red Sox; a sharp-

tongued waitress who hated Diane and loved kinky sex, Carla Tortelli (Rhea Perlman); a deadpan intellectual psychiatrist, Frasier Crane (Kelsey Grammer), who hung out at the bar even after Diane left him at the altar; a know-it-all yakker, Cliff Clavin (John Ratzenberger), a U.S. postal worker who still lived with his mother; and a rotund, beer-drinking schlub, Norm Peterson (George Wendt), an accountant who spent as much time as possible at his Cheers barstool and whose entrance was always greeted with a chorus of "Norm!" from the patrons. When Colasanto died after the third season, Woody Harrelson stepped in as Woody Boyd, a wisely innocent young farm boy come to the big city.

These characters were all clearly defined and remained true to type, even if that meant coming off as selfish, slovenly, or obnoxious. Personal flaws and all, they were dead-on hilarious. They also ended up providing a truly supportive family for each other, in the tradition of the best workplace ensembles.

Though many of the people behind these three new NBC comedy series had roots back in the MTM production company, the only new programs for the network that were actually from MTM were a pair of dramas: *Remington Steele* and *St. Elsewhere*.

With *Remington Steele*, MTM ventured into the lighter fare of detective adventure with a clever take on a romantic male-female team. Private investigator Laura Holt (Stephanie Zimbalist) had been frustrated at the unwillingness of potential clients to take seriously a female detective, so she created an imaginary boss

September 26, 1982

Gloria. (CBS). Archie Bunker's little girl, now a single mom after her husband left her for a flower child, briefly gets her own TV show. She is an assistant veterinarian in upstate New York.

December 17, 1982

Just fourteen months after its debut, CBS Cable dies. Its final offering is *Mixed Bag*, which presents highlights of the service's brief history.

March 6, 1983

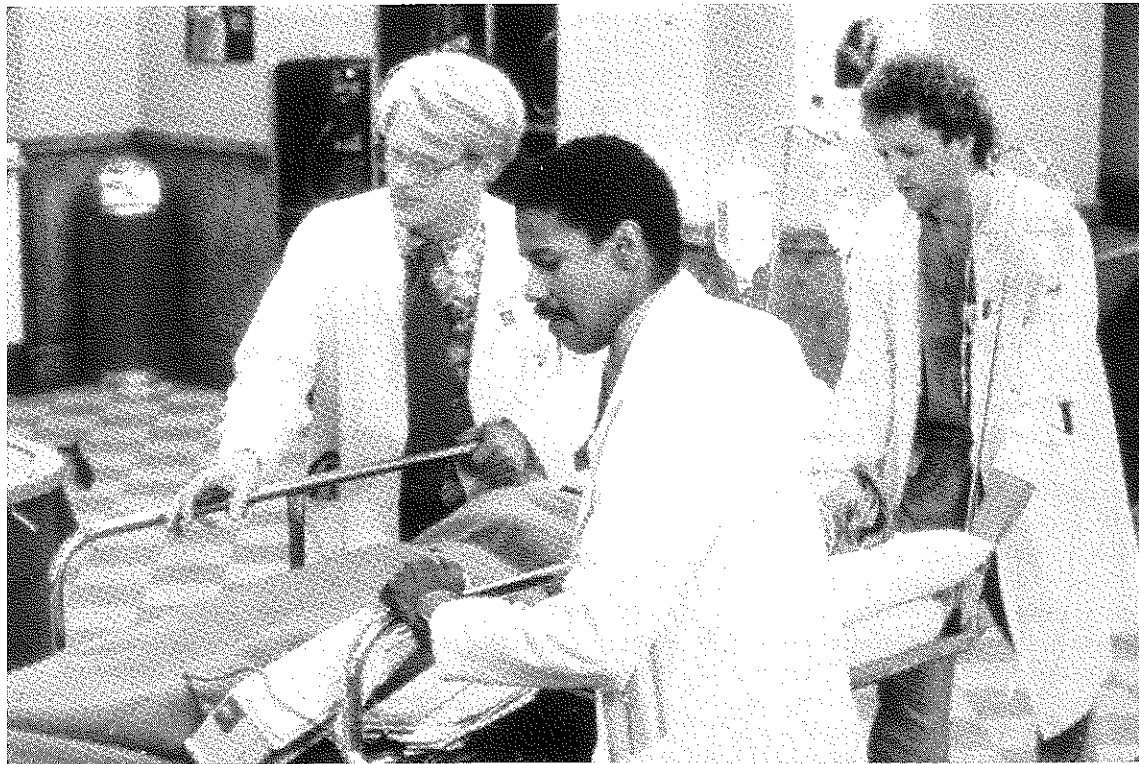
A new attempt at spring football, the United States Football League (USFL), begins with the first of sixteen Sunday-afternoon telecasts on ABC. Keith Jackson and Lynn Swann are behind the microphones as the Los Angeles Express defeats Herschel Walker and his New Jersey Generals 20 to 15 at the Los Angeles Coliseum. The league lasts only three seasons.

March 19, 1983

"Still the Beaver." (CBS). The surviving cast members of *Leave It To Beaver* reunite for a two-hour made-for-TV movie. Things have not gone well for the Beaver in the past twenty years. He is now thirty-three, overweight, in the middle of a divorce, and the father of two sons who largely ignore him. Still, high ratings for the movie lead to *The New Leave It To Beaver*, a regular series that runs on cable from 1985 to 1989.

March 31, 1983

After months of criticism for not featuring videos by black artists, MTV presents the world premiere of Michael Jackson's innovative "Beat It" video. Eight months later, Jackson's fourteen-minute big-budget mini-movie (directed by Hollywood's John Landis) for "Thriller" also has its world premiere on MTV.



Strong characters and literate scripts put *St. Elsewhere* in a class by itself. The cast included (from left) Ed Begley, Jr., Denzel Washington, and David Morse. (St. Elsewhere © 1983 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)

named Remington Steele (who preferred to be "behind the scenes" whenever her agency was on the job). In the pilot, a professional thief and con man (played by Pierce Brosnan) discovered the deception and found the opportunity to step into the role of Remington Steele irresistible—primarily because he found himself attracted to Laura Holt. She, in turn, agreed to the setup because she was attracted to him as well. All they had to do was figure out how to take that next step to commitment. It would take Holt and Steele five years to successfully work out their relationship and, unlike Sam and Diane in *Cheers*, this did not involve falling into bed with each other on a first date.

Instead, while getting to know each other, Holt and Steele constantly sparred, as he grew to enjoy and embody the character of Remington Steele and she constantly probed, looking for hints about his mysterious past. Unlike such series as *Hart to Hart* (which featured an already comfortably married couple), there was a sense of seduction and mystery to the repartee between Holt and Steele because the two did not know a lot about each other. Each episode provided the opportunity to fill in a few more lines in their respective portraits.

That was the central romantic premise, but the additional genius of the series was its clever mystery writing. Every episode was a genuine puzzle executed with the right balance of humor, adventure, and personal panache worthy of the classic *Avengers* days of John Steed and Emma Peel. Because Steele was established as a movie buff, the stories were inevitably filled with cinematic allusions; some episodes were even structured like particular films, such as Alfred Hitchcock's "The Trouble with Harry" or the appropriately manipulative "The Sting."

In the program's second season, Holt and Steele were joined by Mildred Krebs (Doris Roberts), a former IRS auditor who became their office manager, dogged researcher, and unofficial "mom." Over the course of the series, Steele also searched for details of his own past that even he did not know, at last learning the answers from his lifelong mentor, con man Daniel Chalmers (played by Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., real-life father of Stephanie).

MTM's other new drama, *St. Elsewhere*, was, in essence, largely *Hill Street Blues* set in a hospital. Even though it had no direct connections to that Steven Bochco drama, *St. Elsewhere* shared many of its best traits. *St. Elsewhere* had an equally strong creative team behind it, including MTM veteran writers Joshua Brand and John Falsey, producer Bruce Paltrow, and director Mark Tinker, who had all worked together on *The White Shadow*. *St. Elsewhere* also had a rich acting ensemble and, like *Hill Street Blues*, a similarly bleak urban setting. Located in a run-down neighborhood in Boston, St. Eligius Hospital was the place you ended up if you could not afford one of the fancy downtown medical facilities, thus earning it the nickname "St. Elsewhere." Sometimes the sobriquet seemed particularly well earned because, just like in real life (and unlike typical television medical dramas), some patients brought to St. Eligius did die. Nonetheless, the hospital staff was clearly top-notch, and so was the program's storytelling.

A large regular cast allowed for a wide range of plot threads on different levels of hospital life, from administrators to orderlies. Donald Westphall (Ed Flanders) and Daniel Auschlander (Norman Lloyd) were the administrators charged with the task of keeping the institution open, despite the fact that St. Eligius was always on budgetary life support. Mark Craig (William Daniels) was the highly honored chief of surgery, a demanding taskmaster to the rest of the hospital staff, especially to his protégé Victor Ehrlich (Ed Begley, Jr.). Many of the doctors and nurses were there for the duration of the series, including Jack Morrison (David Morse), Wayne Fiscus (Howie Mandel), Helen Rosenthal (Cristina Pickles), and Phillip Chandler (Denzel Washington), with each one experiencing personal and professional ups and downs. Others had shorter but no less dramatic stints. Peter White (Terence Knox) was a confessed rapist who was executed in the hospital morgue by vengeful nurse Shirley Daniels (Ellen Bry). Robert Caldwell (Mark Harmon) and, years later, Seth Griffin (Bruce Greenwood) both departed the series as separate victims of AIDS. Among the support staff, orderly Luther Hawkins (Eric Laneville) eventually

became an emergency medical technician while his buddy Warren Coolidge (Byron Stewart) showed the turns life could take after high school basketball. (Stewart's character had originated on *The White Shadow*.)

Because St. Eligius was a teaching hospital with a front line emergency room, *St. Elsewhere* could work in the expected life-and-death struggles of any hospital drama, but with a more gritty and immediate feel. Yet the series offered much more. Throughout its run, there was a liberating sense that *anything* could happen on *St. Elsewhere* with scripts that were literate, philosophical, and downright playful. One episode was staged much like the Thornton Wilder drama "Our Town"; another sent Mandel's Dr. Fiscus up to heaven to meet God; others showed liver cancer victim Auschlander donning superhero garb and accomplishing impossible tasks. Such dramatic fantasies were usually (but not always) explained as dreams or medical hallucinations. Other moments simply reflected a whimsical sense of humor. When one character said that it's not over "until the fat lady sings," it was no surprise that an opera singer under treatment at the hospital burst into song before the end of the episode. Being located in Boston, members of the St. Eligius staff eventually wandered over to the *Cheers* bar for a drink. After all, it was the same city and the same network, if not the same production company. In turn, when Carla on *Cheers* gave birth, it was at St. Eligius.

St. Elsewhere never achieved hit status, but the series managed to hang on for six seasons by successfully appealing to a young, upscale demographic. Even so, the program's year-to-year fate was always in doubt. That uncertainty, though, perversely added to *St. Elsewhere's* appeal because every season unfolded as if it were the last, with the program's writers approaching their stories with abandon. Anything could happen, even if it was not high ratings for NBC.

In fact, about the only time NBC and ABC had the chance to score big in the 1982-83 season was with specials such as sports events or miniseries. ABC did just that under its Novels for Television umbrella (used for *Roots*) with two miniseries: *The Winds of War* (in February) and *The Thorn Birds* (in March). They quickly succeeded each other as the number two miniseries behind *Roots*.

In May, NBC did well with the miniseries *V*, an allegorical science fiction adventure that likened a subtle and insidious alien invasion of Earth to the rise of Nazi power in Europe that led to World War II. The four and one-half hour presentation took the story up through the first underground resistance efforts against the triumphant aliens, leaving the all-out confrontation for a planned miniseries sequel the following year.

NBC's most predictable special-event success was the annual football Super Bowl in January, which rotated each year between CBS and NBC, the two primary football networks. Determined to make the most of that one-time audience, NBC undertook a tremendous promotional campaign for *The A-Team*, with the program premiere scheduled to follow the game. For weeks the network peppered its schedule with mock recruitment messages that continued through the Super Bowl itself. These featured high-powered wrestling personality Mr. T, who practically demanded that viewers tune in *The A-Team*. They did, sending the two-hour pilot into the top five for the week. Even more important, viewers stayed around for the regular series, giving NBC its first big hit in years.

Created by Stephen J. Cannell (who had recently scored a minor hit on ABC with *The Greatest American Hero*, a gentle send-up of superheroes), *The A-Team* was a canny mix of broadly drawn characters, exaggerated adventures, and countless vehicle crashes. The members of the A-Team were veterans of the Vietnam War who had been falsely convicted of a major theft during the closing

days of battle in that country. They promptly escaped from maximum security and fled to the Los Angeles underground, where they kept one step ahead of the military law and occupied their time as soldiers of fortune taking on impossible missions at \$100,000 a crack. (Typical of TV heroes, they waived the fee if you were broke but had a truly hopeless cause.)

The A-Team was gleeful in its audacious sense of fun, especially at the expense of such TV mainstays as *Mission: Impossible*, turning the well-ordered and orchestrated world of meticulous government missions into a wide-open guerrilla warfare free-for-all. Though team leader and part-time actor Col. John "Hannibal" Smith (George Peppard) inevitably declared, "I love it when a plan comes together"; in fact it rarely did without some unexpected improvisation (much like combat missions back in Vietnam). Simply assembling the team itself was sometimes a challenge. Capt. H. M. "Howling Mad" Murdock (Dwight Schultz) often had to be sprung from a mental hospital. Ace mechanic Sgt. B. A. "Bad Attitude" Baracus (Mr. T) was paranoid about flying, so he had to be tricked into taking a sleeping injection. That was assuming the smooth-talking Lt. Templeton "Face" Peckman (Dirk Benedict) could con someone out of the cash or materials necessary for their transport. Once on the job, the A-Team eschewed the latest

April 10, 1983

Casablanca. (NBC). TV's second attempt to turn the classic 1942 film into a TV series. This time, David Soul (of *Starsky and Hutch*) plays American émigré Rick Blaine, the proprietor of Rick's Café.

April 18, 1983

Just two months after Disney's weekly TV series temporarily shuts down, the studio trailblazes a new medium for promoting its product, with the debut of cable's Disney Channel.

April 20, 1983

William Paley formally steps down as chairman of the board of CBS; he is replaced in that post by Thomas Wyman. Paley retains the title of chairman of the executive committee of the CBS Board of Directors.

May 16, 1983

"Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, and Forever." (NBC). Michael Jackson and his "moonwalk" dance steps steal the show in a two-hour special honoring the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Detroit-based R&B record label.

August 9, 1983

Two weeks after the death of ABC news anchorman Frank Reynolds, his temporary replacement (Peter Jennings) is given the post on a full-time basis, as *World News Tonight* adopts a solo anchor format. Fifteen years earlier, Jennings had given up the very same position.

September 5, 1983

Roger Mudd is removed as co-anchor on the *NBC Nightly News*, leaving Tom Brokaw the sole anchor.

September 5, 1983

The MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour. (PBS). After nearly eight years as a thirty-minute show, public television's *MacNeil-Lehrer Report* expands to sixty minutes nightly, with Robert MacNeil and Jim Lehrer continuing as co-anchors.

electronic gadgets and generally used whatever was available, from spare machine parts to boxes of toilet paper. The plots were not particularly complex and usually depended on cartoon-style explosions and car crashes. Typically, a car might fly through the air, tumble, and crash, but at the last minute, just before it exploded, the occupants would pop out and flee.

The A-Team was admittedly pure fluff, but it was also a hit, giving NBC its first wedge for building word-of-mouth awareness for its other series. For a network hungry for any success, that was welcome news.

Appropriately, just as *The A-Team* was beginning to present renegades from the Vietnam War as heroes, another series was wrapping up its portrayal of an unorthodox group of military characters.

By the 1982-83 season, *M*A*S*H* had been on the air for ten years, nearly three times as long as its Korean War setting, and it had lasted nearly six years after the end of the Vietnam War (the implicit target of many of its initial jibes). *M*A*S*H* had maintained that rare balance of high ratings and high critical praise. Over the years, the program had morphed from a comedy with dramatic overtones into a drama with comic overtones. While some episodes played almost as experimental short films (a *Twilight Zone*-style tale told by the spirit of a dead soldier, or a surrealistic collection of dream images), the program could also be consistently counted on for well-polished jokes, especially when delivered by Alan Alda's droll Hawkeye Pierce.

As with any long-running series with a familiar central cast, the program was starting to show the strain of searching for stories it had not already done. Led by Alda (who by then was also a creative consultant, a regular writer, and an occasional director) the cast and crew were ready to go out in style at the end of its eleventh season. The last round of regular episodes for the season were confidently reenergized, ending with a time capsule story that allowed for references to such departed characters as Radar O'Reilly, Trapper John, and Henry Blake. With all that out of the way, there remained the final sendoff.

The *M*A*S*H* finale aired Monday, February 28, 1983, as a heavily promoted must-see sweeps event. News outlets vied for leaks on plot details; magazines and newspapers devoted special features to the show; and broadcasters covered it as the major pop culture event it had become. Directed by Alan Alda and running two and one-half hours (which, minus commercials, was about as long as the original theatrical film), "Goodbye, Farewell and Amen" almost managed to live up to all the hype in its first forty-five minutes.

Viewers expecting merely an extra-long episode of a popular comedy were immediately surprised to see the story beginning at

an Army psychiatric hospital, with Hawkeye Pierce at last driven over the edge by the war and now a patient under the care of Dr. Sidney Freedman (Allan Arbus). But how? When? Why? Layer by layer, the details came forth along with plot complications facing the other characters. Unlike past *M*A*S*H* episodes in which Freedman sometimes made what amounted to miraculous insights, the premise here was perfect. *Everybody* knew what had driven Hawkeye over the edge—everybody except Hawkeye and the viewers. It was up to him to face his demons. When that moment came, it was a gut-wrenching payoff, an out-pouring of anger, sorrow, and contrition that left Hawkeye cursing Freedman for making him face himself. Hawkeye felt he had been responsible for the death of a child and that fact had destroyed his self-image as a healer, driving him into deep denial and into the hospital.

This was *M*A*S*H* completely crossing the line from sitcom to drama and it left some viewers puzzled. What had happened to that perfect balance between comedy and drama? Though the rest of the episode offered some deliberately comic moments, they were routine in comparison to the high drama surrounding Hawkeye in the first forty-five minutes. Over the course of the finale, the other characters also faced some dramatic complications before the 4077th was decommissioned and its members sent home because the interminable peace talks had finally produced a truce that ended the fighting. Some of these plots were touching, as when the imperious Charles Winchester (David Ogden Stiers) took a group of Korean musicians under his wing. Others were ironic, as when Max Klinger (Jamie Farr) stayed behind with his new Korean wife, after spending the entire series attempting to convince the Army to send him home. Some were just silly (Father Mulcahy failing to report an accident that left him nearly deaf). On departure day, Hawkeye was given the book-ending series closer, flying away in an evac helicopter scene that mirrored the arriving helicopter sequence that had opened each episode since the series began in 1972.

The *M*A*S*H* finale was a tremendous ratings success that easily eclipsed the previous champion, the "Who Shot J. R.?" episode of *Dallas*. More than three-quarters of all television viewers were tuned to *M*A*S*H* that night, making it the most-watched episode of a series ever.

Over its entire run, *M*A*S*H* demonstrated that a commercial television series could be groundbreaking, critically acclaimed, and a smash hit. Its heavily promoted finale represented the high-water mark of viewer loyalty to the already fading TV world that simply assumed viewers would automatically turn to one of three places for television entertainment. That night, for one last time, more than 100 million viewers tuned in to confirm that *M*A*S*H* was the best show in town.

1983-84 SEASON

44. After *M*A*S*H*

WHAT COULD FOLLOW *M*A*S*H*?

Even before the characters from *M*A*S*H*'s fictional 4077th unit folded up their tents and headed back to U.S. civilian life (circa 1953), CBS had selected what it saw as the perfect sitcom successor. It would follow some of the same characters from the fictional 4077th back to U.S. civilian life (circa 1953).

Production people from the final season of *M*A*S*H* came along for the new series, including executive producer Burt Metcalfe and producer Dennis Koenig. Old hand Larry Gelbart also returned as one of the writers and directors. (Gelbart had written the *M*A*S*H* television pilot and had later co-produced the series for three seasons.) They slyly dubbed the new program *AfterMASH* and set it in Col. Sherman Potter's home turf, Missouri, where he took the job of chief of staff at General Pershing Veterans Administration Hospital. This setting provided the opportunity to see Potter's much-talked-about home life (at last meeting his wife, Mildred) as well as giving him the chance to hire two old friends: Max Klinger (as his administrative assistant) and Father Francis Mulcahy (as the hospital chaplain). Klinger also brought along his new wife, Soon-Lee (Rosalind Chao). After some first-episode surgery, Mulcahy had his hearing restored, correcting an annoying plot contrivance from the *M*A*S*H* finale. All three were determined to adjust to life after war and to fit in as civilians.

AfterMASH premiered in the prize *M*A*S*H* Monday night slot in September and its first episode was the number one show of the week. Viewers were obviously curious about "what happened next" with the characters and were also ready for more of the high quality entertainment they had come to enjoy over the eleven-season run of *M*A*S*H*.

Yet within weeks the new series had dropped out of the top ten and by the spring it had been banished from its Monday night slot. While *AfterMASH* was renewed for a second season, the program barely lasted a few more months into that second round.

What happened?

Though Twentieth Century Fox went so far as to label *AfterMASH* (in the closing titles) as "a continuation of *M*A*S*H*," the question was, which version of *M*A*S*H* was it continuing? By the end of its run, *M*A*S*H* was more than just a sitcom and had moved beyond such plots as fighting over a pair of long underwear in winter or dealing with the body of a pompous general who died while having sex with Margaret Houlihan. More often than not, *M*A*S*H* in its later years led with dramatic elements, supported by comedy. With his rapid-fire Groucho Marx-style delivery, Alan

Alda was particularly adept at meeting viewer expectations for laughs, adding just the right injection of humor in each story and allowing the series to successfully walk the line between comedy and drama.

AfterMASH did not have Alan Alda or any strong equivalent to his humorous but commanding Hawkeye Pierce character. Instead, the program seemed oddly off balance from the start, never able to find the right mix. It began confidently, indeed acting just like a continuation of *M*A*S*H*. But even with three returning characters, *AfterMASH* was more akin to a brand new comedy that had to prove itself funny, especially with its stateside setting far from the inherent contradictions and pathos of a war zone. This made the combination of comedy and drama particularly difficult to achieve. What might have come off as a heartfelt observation back in Korea too easily veered toward heavy-handed preaching in a civilian setting. For example, about halfway through the first episode Klinger made a dramatic speech on veterans' rights and dreams. Rather than resonating, it brought the episode to a screeching halt. It seemed too much. Railing against military authority in a war zone was one thing; there was no option to leave. Complaining about bureaucrats in a booming peacetime U.S. setting was a different matter. No one was holding a gun to their heads and forcing them to stay.

There were other problems with *AfterMASH*. Bringing three out of the seven main characters from the final *M*A*S*H* season was too much. Following just one (such as Harry Morgan's Sherman Potter) with occasional guest appearances by the others would have been a wiser strategy with more flexibility. Jamie Farr and William Christopher also had to face the problem encountered by any supporting performer stepping into a lead role. What worked beautifully as comic relief (Klinger) or inspiring fortitude (Mulcahy) did not automatically translate to the expanded status of co-star, especially when their characters were already best known as supporting players.

Yet being senior to all the other performers, Morgan, Farr, and Christopher ended up with the lion's share of each episode, leaving too little time to develop the other characters. That was a major problem because to work as its own series, *AfterMASH* needed new faces to do more than just the equivalent of a walk-on role. Though the production crew did an excellent job attempting to make the series an authentic slice of 1950s America, it needed to show more of that world through different sets of eyes.

New characters such as Dr. Gene Pfeiffer (Jay O. Sanders), Dr.

FALL 1983 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30			
M	That's Incredible		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC		
O	SCARECROW AND MRS. KING		AFTERMASH	Newhart	EMERALD POINT N.A.S.		CBS		
N	BOONE		NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC		
T	JUST OUR LUCK	Happy Days	Three's Company	OH MADELINE	Hart To Hart		ABC		
U	The Mississippi		CBS Tuesday Night Movies				CBS		
E	The A-Team		Remington Steele	BAY CITY BLUES			NBC		
W	The Fall Guy		Dynasty		HOTEL		ABC		
E	WHIZ KIDS		CBS Wednesday Night Movies				CBS		
D	Real People		Facts Of Life	Family Ties	St. Elsewhere		NBC		
T	TRAUMA CENTER		9 To 5	IT'S NOT EASY	20/20		ABC		
H	Magnum, P.I.		Simon And Simon		Knots Landing		CBS		
R	Gimme A Break	Mama's Family	WE GOT IT MADE	Cheers	Hill Street Blues		NBC		
F	Benson	WEBSTER	LOTTERY		Matt Houston		ABC		
R	The Dukes Of Hazzard		Dallas		Falcon Crest		CBS		
I	MR. SMITH	JENNIFER SLEPT HERE	MANIMAL		FOR LOVE AND HONOR		NBC		
S	T.J. Hooker		The Love Boat		Fantasy Island		ABC		
A	CUTTER TO HOUSTON		CBS Saturday Night Movies				CBS		
T	Diffrent Strokes	Silver Spoons	THE ROUSTERS		THE YELLOW ROSE		NBC		
S	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
U	Ripley's Believe It Or Not		HARDCASTLE AND McCORMICK		ABC Sunday Night Movie				ABC
N	60 Minutes		Alice	One Day At A Time	The Jeffersons	Goodnight Beantown	Trapper John, M.D.		CBS
	First Camera		Knight Rider		NBC Sunday Night At The Movies				NBC

Boyer (David Ackroyd), and Mike D'Angelo (John Chappell) tried gamely to make their marks, but there was an overwhelming sense that this was not so much a new series as an old favorite hanging around too long. Rather than being cutting-edge, *AfterMASH* seemed almost nostalgic. In that sense, it was appropriate that the second season highlights included the birth of Klinger and Soon-Lee's child and a visit by Radar O'Reilly on his wedding day. Then it was time to truly say goodbye and farewell to the last remnants of the 4077th.

The failure of *AfterMASH* also seemed to confirm a growing sense that the television sitcom was spent. Viewers had seen one too many. While the genre still had a few successes, most of the programs regularly in the top twenty were in some other format. Prime time soaps. Various adventure series. Police and detective dramas. Even news.

Once-popular sitcoms were aging and fading fast. In the 1982-83 season, shows such as *Archie Bunker's Place*, *Laverne and Shirley*, and *Taxi* had tumbled in the ratings and been axed. This season, *One Day at a Time* and *Happy Days* also faded. By the close of the season, even Jack Tripper's "scandalous" eight-year living arrangement on *Three's Company* ended when both his female roommates moved out. (No, nothing ever happened between Jack and any of the women sharing that flat.)

NBC continued to nurture a handful of sitcoms (including *Cheers*, *Family Ties*, and newcomer *Night Court*), but given their

place on the number three network, they generated comparatively limited interest. In fact, NBC's biggest success in comedy came in the form of *TV's Bloopers and Practical Jokes*, a variety show featuring comical outtakes from movies and TV programs, hosted by Dick Clark and Ed McMahon. The series was an outgrowth of occasional specials produced by Clark.

Even more troubling, with just a handful of exceptions, most new sitcoms seemed terribly derivative and were not connecting with viewers. Failures among the new series sitcoms in the fall 1983 included *Just Our Luck* (a magical genie), *Oh Madeline* (Madeline Kahn as a bored suburban housewife), *It's Not Easy* (life among the divorced and remarried), *We Got It Made* (two bachelors and their sexy live-in maid), and *Jennifer Slept Here* (Ann Jillian as a knockout ghost haunting a Beverly Hills mansion). Mid-season sitcom entries did not fare much better, with such failures as: *Suzanne Pleshette Is Maggie Briggs* (a hard-news reporter writes soft features), *Domestic Life* (Martin Mull as a TV commentator about humor in family life), and *The Duck Factory* (Jim Carrey in an MTM production about a tiny animation studio). Even the Alan Alda-produced adaptation of his hit movie *The Four Seasons* did not catch on as a mid-season series.

About the only recent sitcom success was CBS's low-key *Newhart*, which was joined in March by another comfortably relaxed comedy, *Kate and Allie*. Susan Saint James and Jane Curtin played the respective title characters, two divorced women

September 5, 1983

Former Buffalo Bills star running back O. J. Simpson replaces Fran Tarkenton as one of the announcers on ABC's *Monday Night Football*. Simpson stays with the show for three seasons.

September 16, 1983

Webster. (ABC). Emmanuel Lewis plays seven-year-old Webster Long, a diminutive black orphan taken in by kindly white folks (played by Alex Karras and Susan Clark).

October 3, 1983

Scarecrow and Mrs. King. (CBS). Bruce Boxleitner is Lee Stetson, code name "Scarecrow," a U.S. agent. Amanda King (Kate Jackson) is a recently divorced suburban housewife who unexpectedly becomes his civilian partner in this light-hearted adventure series.

October 4, 1983

Vietnam: A Television History. (PBS). America's involvement in the protracted Vietnam War is the focus of this well-produced thirteen-part documentary.

November 15, 1983

The first commercial direct broadcast satellite (DBS) transmissions begin in the United States, as United Satellite Communications Inc. starts beaming five channels of programming directly from its leased satellite to viewers in Indianapolis, Indiana, equipped with a home satellite dish. The cost is \$39.95 per month, plus dish installation.

January 9, 1984

The Jewel in the Crown. (ITV). Set in the final years of English rule in India, this fourteen-part Granada miniseries comes to PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre* in December.

January 17, 1984

The U.S. Supreme Court rules 5 to 4 (in the so-called "Betamax" case) that home videotaping of TV programs for personal use is not a violation of federal copyright laws. Two major Hollywood studios (Universal and Disney) had filed the suit in 1976, when home video recorders were still quite new, hoping to kill off VCRs in order to keep more control (and more of the accompanying profit) over the distribution of their programs. With this "green light" from the Supreme Court, sales of VCRs explode and the percentage of U.S. homes with them increases from about 10% at the time of the court's ruling to more than 50% in less than three years.

sharing a Greenwich Village apartment along with their children (Kate's daughter and Allie's son and daughter). Each episode began with a quiet conversation between the two leads, usually in some outdoor New York setting. The plots were creditable complications facing intelligent women attempting to balance children, career, love, and friendship. *Kate and Allie* also marked the first success by a *Saturday Night Live* alum (Curtin) in prime time, and did well filling the vacated *AfterMASH* slot adjacent to *Newhart*. Appropriately, the program also benefited from proximity to the highly promoted return of another pair of independent women, Chris Cagney and Mary Beth Lacey.

The road for *Cagney and Lacey* had not been easy. The series had won its initial renewal by replacing one of its two leads and for the fall of 1982 Sharon Gless stepped into the role of Chris Cagney

while Tyne Daly continued as Mary Beth Lacey. Amazingly, the chemistry between the two characters worked better than ever and the program continued its groundbreaking portrayal of two strong women as New York City police detectives. This was a truly different series that managed to juggle a multitude of elements. Though the cases were treated seriously, *Cagney and Lacey* was not as grim as *Hill Street Blues*. Neither was it structured as a soap opera. The scripts were not a weekly feminist diatribe, though the dialogue and subject matter frequently dealt with issues important to women. Cagney and Lacey were considered every bit as good as "the guys," yet they were also consciously different from the guys, and they knew it. They regularly took advantage of the fact that no men could follow them into the women's bathroom by having their one-on-one conversations there.

Though the series execution was tremendously successful (Tyne Daly won an Emmy for best actress), its ratings still fell short. CBS canceled *Cagney and Lacey* at the end of the 1982-83 season. That touched off organized protests that resulted in the return of the series as a midseason replacement for the 1983-84 season, with one caveat: This time, the program had to deliver strong ratings or it was gone for good. By then, *Cagney and Lacey* had achieved enough public awareness that its return was a genuine high-profile TV event. Its spring run registered as one of the top ten series for the entire season. It was back and a hit, eventually running seven seasons, with both Gless and Daly picking up multiple Emmy awards during that time.

January 22, 1984

Apple Computers introduces its new Macintosh personal computer through a striking one-minute commercial premiering during the Super Bowl. Directed by filmmaker Ridley Scott ("Alien") and titled "1984," the ad is modeled on the drab, conformist world imagined by George Orwell in his novel *1984*, and features a woman in a colorful running outfit tossing a sledgehammer into a giant TV monitor that is showing the bald head of a "Big Brother" figure. Though produced at a cost of \$400,000, the ad runs for little more than one week after its Super Bowl debut.

February 1, 1984

Two mergers create two new cable services. The three-year-old ARTS service (owned by ABC and Hearst) merges with RCA's two-year-old Entertainment Channel to form the Arts and Entertainment Network, better known as A&E. That same day, another Hearst-ABC cable service, the two-year-old Daytime, merges with the two-year-old Cable Health Network to form Lifetime, a twenty-four-hour-a-day cable service largely aimed at women.

June 18, 1984

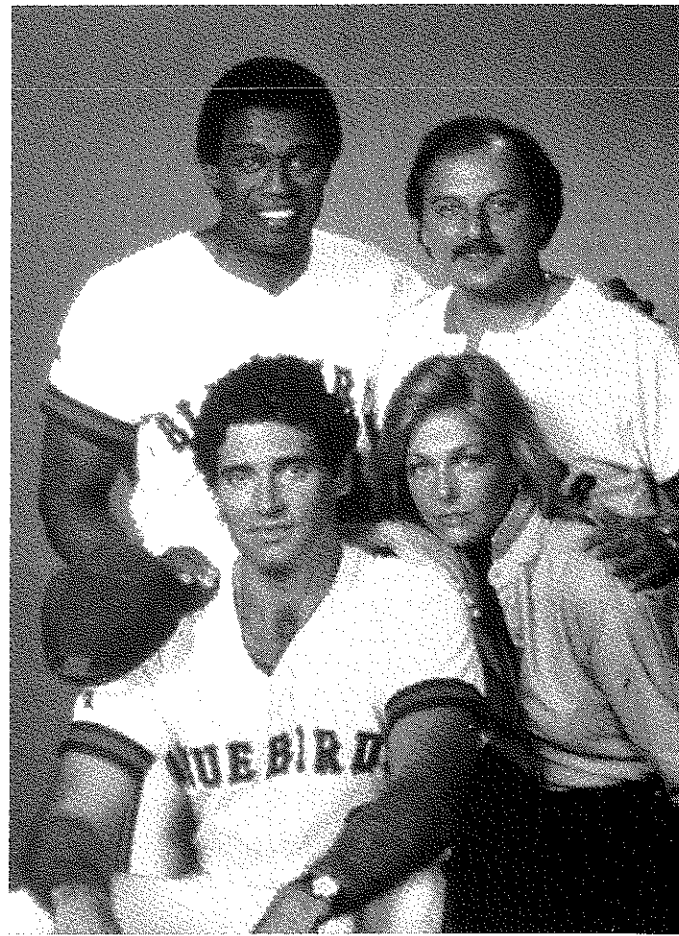
ABC acquires a controlling interest in the all-sports ESPN cable network.

July 16, 1984

ABC Rocks. (ABC). Late Friday nights, ABC joins the music video bandwagon with a no-frills half-hour showcase.

July 13, 1984

Brothers. (Showtime). The first original sitcom to air on a pay cable service revolves around three grown brothers, played by Robert Walden, Brandon Maggart, and Paul Regina. In the opener, the youngest brother pulls out of his upcoming wedding and announces he is gay.



The baseball drama *Bay City Blues* combined a love of the game with steamy off the field encounters. The program's lineup included (clockwise from top) Bernie Casey, Dennis Franz, Kelly Harmon, and Michael Nouri. (*Bay City Blues* © 1983 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)

The success of *Cagney and Lacey* was more good news for CBS, which won virtually every key ratings contest that season. The network led in prime time, daytime, and the nightly news. CBS won all three sweeps periods and its shows dominated the top ten. The network's only concern was the age of some of its series, which would have to be replaced soon. But by carefully adding a few successful new performers each year, CBS had no reason to think its lock at the top would be broken anytime soon.

The other two networks had to settle for more modest successes.

ABC did send into the top ten the most luxurious-looking new series, *Hotel*, starring James Brolin and Connie Sellecca (looking their best). Inspired by the Arthur Hailey novel and using the real-life Fairmont Hotel on Nob Hill in San Francisco for its exterior, the series was a combination soap opera and drama anthology, a five-star *Love Boat* with accommodations that would please even the characters in *Dynasty*.

As usual, however, ABC's biggest successes came from its miniseries and TV movie specials. In January, Glenn Close and

Ted Danson (from NBC's *Cheers*) starred in the racy tale of incest, "Something About Amelia." To cap the February sweeps, the network offered the shamelessly trashy miniseries *Lace*, the story of Lilli (Phoebe Cates), a movie sex star who went in search of her real mother (who had put her up for adoption at birth) in order to extract revenge. Lilli stopped at nothing in her quest, finally confronting three suspected moms with the scathing question: "Which one of you bitches is my mother?"

Lace brought ABC very close to CBS in the February sweeps, but the sports events during the season that were expected to be blockbusters proved disappointing. ABC scored lower than expected ratings with the World Series, a fairly lackluster set of just five games out of a possible seven. The ratings for the Winter Olympics (in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia) were down significantly compared to 1980, primarily because there were no strong U.S. team stories this time around.

Still, the disappointments at ABC and CBS were nothing compared to the frustration at NBC. There, programming chief Brandon Tartikoff continued to try a variety of programming types in an intriguingly varied schedule: some parts deliberately highbrow, others as mainstream as possible, still others deliberately off-beat. Yet despite a couple of legitimate hits (*The A-Team*, *TV's Bloopers*) the total package still had not gelled. In fact, NBC was doing as badly as ever in the overall ratings for the season. A pair of new Friday night "animal" series (*Mr. Smith* and *Manimal*) seemed to symbolize the network's desperate willingness to try anything. Both were easily mocked, sight unseen. *Mr. Smith* featured a talking genius orangutan (played by C.J., best known from Clint Eastwood's film "Every Which Way But Loose"). *Manimal* presented a criminology consultant (played by Simon MacCorkindale) who could magically turn himself into various animals (a hawk, a bull, a horse), usually in a series of disconnected close-ups or, more often, in some dark corner or behind closed doors. Neither show made it past December.

Other NBC failures were painful in different ways. *The New Show*, a mid-season prime time comedy-variety package from *Saturday Night Live* maestro Loren Michaels, felt old and tired and quickly faded. The soapy *Yellow Rose* (with Cybill Shepherd and David Soul) could not make a dent against the *CBS Saturday Night Movie*, even with fading competition from *Fantasy Island* on ABC. *Bay City Blues*, Steven Bochco's long-awaited followup to *Hill Street Blues*, held great promise with the lovingly executed story of a minor league baseball team (the Bluebirds) in Bay City, California. The program had a true all-star lineup of writers and performers, including Dennis Franz, Ken Olin, and Michele Greene, but it was gone in less than a month.

It was a disappointing cycle. Sometimes a series had great performers but a flawed premise. Sometimes there were great production people behind the concept, but things never fell into place. Most disappointing, sometimes everything worked perfectly, but still large numbers of viewers did not find the programs. Highly praised comedies such as *Cheers* and *Family Ties* and dramas such as *St. Elsewhere* still had not caught on. Already NBC's best show, *Hill Street Blues*, seemed to have passed its modest ratings peak after four seasons.

Would time pass the rest of the NBC lineup as well?

1984-85 SEASON

45. We Are the World

BILL COSBY AND TELEVISION first discovered each other in the 1960s. As a rising young comic with a series of hit record albums, Cosby had made successful appearances on variety and talk programs such as *Ed Sullivan* and the *Tonight* show. Cosby's first signature bit (included on his 1963 debut album *Bill Cosby Is a Very Funny Fellow, Right!*) was a series of conversations between God and Noah about building the Ark before the Great Flood. It quickly became clear that Cosby's strong suit went beyond simple punch lines to the fine art of storytelling. With a relaxed, matter-of-fact style, he was especially effective mining humor from the details of everyday life, equally comfortable with childhood memories of growing up in Philadelphia and with observations about being a parent himself. In these routines, his expressive face and versatile vocal delivery made each character come alive, especially colorful neighborhood kids such as Fat Albert.

While playing Alexander Scott on the mid-1960s adventure series *I Spy*, Cosby occasionally hinted at such stories as part of that character's background. He brought more of that comic persona to the character of athletic teacher Chet Kincaid in the 1969 *Bill Cosby Show*, even staging one of his classic bits ("Rigor Mortis") about freezing up while running on the track field. However, that series had lasted only two seasons. Cosby's other prime time efforts in the late 1960s and 1970s were comedy-variety shows. The stand-alone specials did well, but series such as *The New Bill Cosby Show* and *Cos* were unable to last more than a few episodes. During this period, Cosby did have considerable success outside prime time, turning his stories and characters into a Saturday morning cartoon show, *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* (beginning in 1972). He also lent his support to other educational children's programming, most notably *The Electric Company* on public television.

Through all these ventures, Bill Cosby himself came across as a very likable person, everybody's best friend or favorite uncle. He parlayed that positive persona into a lucrative career in commercials, being particularly at ease interacting with children for such sponsors as Jell-O. By the early 1980s Cosby appeared to have found a very comfortable niche: effective commercial spokesman, talk show guest (and occasional substitute host), and education advocate (he had earned a Ph.D. in his spare time). Then, NBC's programming chief Brandon Tartikoff happened to see Cosby on the *Tonight* show and was reminded of the comic's long-time appeal, and of his potential to once again front a series.

Turning to a familiar face for a new series was perfectly

consistent with the wide net Tartikoff had been casting for several years in search of prospective hits. In previous seasons he had already tried ventures with former *Vega\$* star Robert Urich (in *Gavilan*), former *McMillan and Wife* lead Rock Hudson (in *The Devlin Connection*), and former *Medical Center* star (and one-time pop music pinup) Chad Everett (in *The Roustlers*). However, none of those shows had caught on. Clearly, familiarity alone was not enough to guarantee a hit, especially on the number three network.

Tartikoff's interest in Cosby coincided with the comedian's own discussions with producers Marcy Carsey and Tom Werner about developing a new series. However, because Carsey and Werner had an existing relationship with ABC (where they had both been network executives), that network was offered the show first, but passed on it. That left Tartikoff the opportunity to pursue the project with them for NBC and the network made a guarded commitment for an initial half dozen episodes of *The Cosby Show*.

Part of Cosby's motivation for taking on the new series was that he was at the perfect time of his life to star in an idealized 1980s version of a happy home life. So the actual Bill Cosby, the successful entertainer and educator with a savvy professional wife (Camille) and five children (daughters Erika, Erinn, Ensa, and Evin, and son Ennis), portrayed the fictional Cliff Huxtable, a successful obstetrician with a savvy lawyer wife (Clair, played by Phylicia Rashad) and five children: daughters Rudy (Keshia Knight Pulliam), Vanessa (Tempestt Bledsoe), Denise (Lisa Bonet), and Sondra (Sabrina Le Beauf), and son Theo (Malcolm-Jamal Warner). The Huxtables lived in a comfortable Brooklyn townhouse with a living room that resembled the one in Cosby's own Massachusetts home. Cliff operated from a home office that allowed him to remain always just a few steps from family life. In short, *The Cosby Show* was like a Bill Cosby comedy routine brought to life. Just like his monologues, the series was deliberately low-key, following the simple premise that family life has its own gentle good humor and there was no need to resort to silly caricatures, painfully dumb misunderstandings, or demeaning insults. More so than any of his previous series, *The Cosby Show* captured the heart and soul of his warm family tales, with the entire cast quickly making these characters their own.

Cosby's material had always successfully connected across ethnic lines, but that did not mean that he ignored being black. In fact, he fashioned the series to reflect a diverse world view beyond the usual television trappings. The decorations in the kids' rooms included black pop stars and anti-apartheid posters. The girls

FALL 1984 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
M	CALL TO GLORY		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC
O	Scarecrow And Mrs. King		Kate & Allie	Newhart	Cagney And Lacey		CBS
N	TV's Bloopers And Practical Jokes		NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC
T	Foul-Ups, Bleeps & Blunders	Three's A Crowd	PAPER DOLLS		JESSIE		ABC
U	AfterMASH	E/R	CBS Tuesday Night Movies				CBS
E	The A-Team		Riptide	Remington Steele			NBC
W	The Fall Guy		Dynasty		Hotel		ABC
E	CHARLES IN CHARGE	DREAMS	CBS Wednesday Night Movies				CBS
D	HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN		Facts Of Life	IT'S YOUR MOVE	St. Elsewhere		NBC
T	PEOPLE DO THE CRAZIEST THINGS	WHO'S THE BOSS	GLITTER		20/20		ABC
H	Magnum, P.I.		Simon And Simon		Knots Landing		CBS
R	THE COSBY SHOW	Family Ties	Cheers	Night Court	Hill Street Blues		NBC
F	Benson	Webster	HAWAIIAN HEAT		Matt Houston		ABC
R	The Dukes of Hazzard		Dallas		Falcon Crest		CBS
I	V		HUNTER		MIAMI VICE		NBC
S	T.J. Hooker		The Love Boat		FINDER OF LOST LOVES		ABC
A	Airwolf		Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer		COVER UP		CBS
T	Diff'rent Strokes	Gimme A Break	PARTNERS IN CRIME		HOT PURSUIT		NBC

	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
S	Ripley's Believe It Or Not		Hardcastle And McCormick		ABC Sunday Night Movie				ABC
U	60 Minutes		MURDER, SHE WROTE		The Jeffersons	Alice	Trapper John, M.D.		CBS
N	Silver Spoons	PUNKY BREWSTER	Knight Rider		NBC Sunday Night At The Movies				NBC

consciously sported stylish international fashions. When Cliff and Clair dug out one of their favorite old songs, it was the rhythm and blues hit "(Night Time Is) The Right Time" by Ray Charles. Even daughter Sondra's decision to name her twins Winnie and Nelson carried a special meaning, honoring South Africa anti-apartheid activists Winnie and Nelson Mandela. These details were not delivered in some smug, preachy manner but, rather, were presented as a natural part of everyday life. Cosby also deliberately played against television's clichés about black family life and family life in general. Clair and Cliff Huxtable were professional, upper middle class, in love with each other, and clearly in charge of the household. The kids might be cute and clever, but mom and dad still had the last word.

Though this was a strong package, there was no guarantee of success. Nonetheless, Tartikoff put *The Cosby Show* on the front lines, leading off Thursday nights against CBS's powerhouse *Magnum, P. I.* As a further vote of confidence in Cosby's across-the-board appeal, Tartikoff did not pigeonhole the show as a companion to other NBC series featuring black characters (such as *Gimmie a Break* or *Diff'rent Strokes*). Instead, he slotted it as the lead-in to three highly regarded but underperforming NBC comedy series: *Family Ties*, *Cheers*, and *Night Court*. It worked. From the beginning, *The Cosby Show* connected with audiences and quickly became the unexpected hit of the season, a buzz-generating across-the-board success. The series was not just a top ten show, it was a

popular program that people made a point to remember to watch. It was "appointment television."

Equally important, the spotlight shining on *Cosby* reflected onto other shows in NBC's schedule that had been quietly toiling in comparative obscurity. The most immediate beneficiary was the program slotted after Cosby's show, *Family Ties* (in its third season), which followed the lead-in hit right into the top ten. The rest of the NBC Thursday night lineup moved up in viewer awareness as well. In the general television landscape, *The Cosby Show* also restored the credibility of sitcoms as a ratings draw, less than a year after the form had been written off in some circles as being past its prime.

The Cosby Show was the linchpin that NBC had been looking for, drawing viewers to the network in record numbers. Once they were there, they could find their way to other offerings in a surprisingly varied lineup of adventure, comedy, and drama shows, such as *Knight Rider*, *Cheers*, and *St. Elsewhere*. Among other new shows, NBC found itself with two other surprise hits that were poles apart: *Miami Vice* and *Highway to Heaven*.

Miami Vice was the first successful marriage of the music video world with prime time television, a concept Brandon Tartikoff succinctly described as "MTV cops." With Michael Mann (director of the theatrical film "Thief") as executive producer and *Hill Street Blues* writer and producer Anthony Yerkovich authoring the pilot, *Miami Vice* set its tone from the opening episode. The series took



Bill Cosby and Phylicia Rashad were at the center of *The Cosby Show*, portraying a loving, affectionate couple that handled raising a large family with humor and style. (The *Cosby Show* Photo Courtesy of the Carsey-Werner Company, LLC/NBC)

the familiar elements of crime-fighting detective stories and washed them through the aural and visual trappings of music video production. It was all about style, fashion, and attitude. Miami police detectives Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson) and Ricardo Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas) were not only the usual rebel outsiders they were also cutting-edge hip. Crockett was white, often unshaven, drove a Ferrari, lived on a boat with a pet alligator, and dressed in a casual combination of t-shirts, loose pants, and European jackets. Tubbs was black, urbane, drove a Cadillac, came from New York, and sported silk shirts and double-breasted designer jackets.

The hip look extended to the film presentation, which was richly cinematic with sweeping camera angles, rapid-fire cuts, and, above all, music. As in a theatrical feature film, music helped set the tone with a combination of original pieces and showcases for contemporary performers. Some program segments looked for all the world like mini versions of the better MTV music videos—allowing snatches of the latest chart-bound songs to move the story along (or to comment on the plot) without any dialogue, presenting images related to the tone of the song. In the first episode, for example, the Phil Collins hit "In the Air Tonight" accompanied shots of a speeding car in the night, focusing as much on close-ups of the tires as on the driver. Other episodes included music by such artists as Glenn Frey ("Smuggler's Blues"), Chaka Khan ("Own the Night"), Tina Turner ("Better Be Good to Me"), and Gladys Knight ("Send It to Me"), with the series generating a pair of hit soundtrack compilations.

The Florida setting completed the effect, emphasizing splashy tropical colors, exotic birds, and sun-drenched waters. But this was not the theme park Florida of the tourist brochures. Beginning with the staccato riffs of the program's Jan Hammer opening theme, the message was clear: This was a supercharged, pulsating world with wholly different assumptions. Drugs and drug money were everywhere, ready to ensnare both the innocent and the ambitious. In this world, people lived to get high and party, to flaunt their wealth, and to show off their power. This was not mere street-corner drug traffic. There were powerful individuals behind these activities with far-flung international operations and networks of connections that infiltrated society at all levels. Crockett and Tubbs might snare their share of bigwigs (and, more often, mid-level operators) but the series left the clear impression that over the long haul they were unlikely to win the war.

Despite such a downbeat setup, the overall package worked. *Miami Vice* looked and felt cutting edge, with Don Johnson and Philip Michael Thomas as likely to appear on the cover of *Rolling Stone* as on *TV Guide*. Though the series was not an instant hit like *The Cosby Show*, the program's reputation grew throughout the year and in its second season it reached (and peaked) in the top ten.

Highway to Heaven could not have been further from the world of *Miami Vice*, though it, too, reflected a distinct, individual vision. Michael Landon served as a writer, producer, creator, and star, playing Jonathan Smith, an angel on a mission to help people in trouble. He and his companion, Mark (Victor French), did not necessarily solve each person's specific earthly problem, but they

September 14, 1984

MTV presents its first annual MTV Music Video Awards live from Radio City Music Hall in New York. Bette Midler and Dan Aykroyd are the hosts, with performances from Madonna, Huey Lewis & the News, Rod Stewart, and Tina Turner. Video of the Year award goes to "You Might Think" by the Cars.

September 25, 1984

Three's a Crowd. (ABC). John Ritter and ABC eke out one more year of the saga of Jack Tripper after his *Three's Company* platonic female roommates move out. In the retitled format, Jack falls for a stewardess named Vicky (Mary Cadorette) and proposes marriage, but she prefers to just live together. They do and this time there really is plenty going on behind the bedroom door, much to the intense dismay of her father (played by Robert Mandan), who turns up as landlord of their apartment building.

October 8, 1984

"The Burning Bed." (NBC). Tired of being typecast as just another blonde-haired pretty face, Farrah Fawcett takes a gamble by playing a decidedly unglamorous battered wife who, after years of abuse from her husband, sets him on fire while he sleeps.

October 26, 1984

V. (NBC). Five months after the miniseries wrap-up showed resistance forces using a homegrown virus to thwart the efforts of the extra-terrestrial "Visitors" to Take Over The World, the lizard-like aliens-disguised-as-humans get their own weekly series. Aided by treacherous human collaborators, they are engaged in Cold War tactics to win the planet piecemeal. TV newsmen Mike Donovan (Marc Singer) again leads the freedom forces.

December 8, 1984

After almost thirty years (the last two in obscure early morning weekend slots), *Captain Kangaroo* is mustered out of the CBS schedule.

January 1, 1985

Warner/Amex launches VH1 (Video Hits 1), a new music video cable service aimed at the already-graying baby boomers, who prefer their old favorites to the wild kids making noise over on sister service MTV.

did manage to remind individuals of their own inner strength and good souls. The program further solidified Landon's long-standing image as champion of wholesome family entertainment (such as *Little House on the Prairie*) that could also deliver strong ratings.

Going into the fall, nobody had expected NBC to have multiple hits, especially in such a variety of formats. Yet because Tartikoff had been trying for four years with so many different types of shows, when some at last began to connect the success was not just in one area (such as prime time soaps), but across the board. Of course, there were also outright flops, including *Berenger's* (a soap opera about a department store), *Hot Pursuit* (a husband-and-wife fugitive pair), and *Partners in Crime* (veterans Loni Anderson and Lynda Carter failing to gel as a private eye team). Yet when weighed against the success of *The Cosby Show*, these were only minor disappointments. In fact, NBC suddenly found itself a contender for top ratings honors. Though CBS won the November and February sweeps, NBC was a strong second. By the spring

NBC had built sufficient momentum to win the May sweeps. It was NBC's first sweeps win since November 1974.

NBC's success was a big surprise to the number one network, CBS, which had been treating its successful lineup of prime time soaps, adventure shows, and *60 Minutes* as a well-oiled machine that just needed annual tuning. For the new season it had trimmed a few old series and introduced a handful of new shows, including one instant hit, *Murder, She Wrote* (created by Peter Fisher and *Columbo* mavens Richard Levinson and William Link). Angela Lansbury played mystery writer Jessica Fletcher, a successful author who solved murders in between writing novels. It was akin to raiding PBS's *Mystery!* series and casting its featured authors such as Agatha Christie or Dorothy L. Sayers as the lead character. The clever premise was executed as a perfectly paced whodunit, complete with enough time for viewers to guess the murderer before Jessica's narrated flashbacks revealed the solution.

None of CBS's other new series matched the performance of *Murder, She Wrote*. The misfires included the medical comedy *E/R* (Elliott Gould as a divorced doctor working in a Chicago emergency room), the family comedy *Charles in Charge* (Scott Baio as a college student boarder taking care of a busy couple's three kids), and the spy adventure *Cover Up* (which lost its co-star Jon-Erik Hexum in a real-life fatal accident on the set). Nonetheless, CBS still won the ratings race for the 1984-85 season although by its end NBC was close behind.

That left ABC as the number three network for the season, though hardly without bragging rights. ABC had the number one show on television, *Dynasty*, which created an international stir with a story arc featuring Rock Hudson in his last TV role. (He died later in 1985 from AIDS-related illnesses.) The series capped the season with a particularly far-fetched cliffhanger involving the long-lost daughter of Alexis marrying the prince of Moldovia (a tiny European kingdom) in a ceremony that climaxed with *Dynasty's* main characters facing armed revolutionaries attacking the wedding party, guns blazing. While viewers waited over the summer to learn who had survived, ABC confidently planned a *Dynasty* spinoff, *The Colbys*, for the following fall, featuring Charlton Heston as business magnate Jason Colby, father of *Dynasty's* Jeff Colby.

Though most of ABC's new fall programming flopped, the network did score with *Who's the Boss?*, a family comedy that cast Tony Danza (from *Taxi*) as a widower working as a live-in housekeeper in Connecticut and raising a young daughter. His boss, played by Judith Light (from the daytime soap *One Life to Live*), was a divorced woman living with her young son and her free-spirited mom (played by Katherine Helmond, from *Soap*). As usual, ABC also did well with flashy miniseries, including *Lace II*, which picked up from the original's "Which one of you bitches is my mother?" and offered the scathing companion question, "Which one of you bastards is my father?"

In the spring, ABC also managed to steal the sexy detective couple crown from NBC's *Remington Steele* and CBS's *Scarecrow and Mrs. King* with *Moonlighting*. Created by former *Remington Steele* writer Glenn Gordon Caron, *Moonlighting* featured a pair of bickering detectives, Maddie Hayes (Cybill Shepherd) and David Addison (Bruce Willis) at the Blue Moon detective agency. Maddie was a successful former model who owned the agency (probably as a tax loss) but had never bothered to visit it until she discovered her manager had absconded with her fortune, leaving it as one of her few saleable assets. Addison was its number one slacker, a fast-talking charmer who convinced her to keep the agency open. Maddie agreed, but also insisted on being an active participant in the cases—partially out of boredom, partially

because there was an instant energetic chemistry between them. The verbal sparring between Maddie and David quickly evolved into a deliciously entertaining mating ritual, with the dialogue taking on an almost lyrical quality filled with clever puns, rhymes, and pop culture allusions (with asides to the audience).

Moonlighting was rarely about the cases (sometimes the mystery, if any, was not apparent until halfway through the story) and some of the best episodes completely abandoned the regular format. In one, all the characters appeared in a full-costume adaptation of William Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew." Another episode offered a film noir period piece hosted by Orson Welles, who patiently explained why the episode was in black and white. Even the regular cases, though, were handled with style and humor, usually ending with a slapstick chase scene. About midway through the series (March 1987), the two did "get horizontal" (as Addison described having sex) but the writers then seemed flummoxed over where to go next. They later attempted to work Shepherd's real-life pregnancy into the scripts, but the resulting story arcs were surprisingly leaden, with visual tricks (such as a claymation sequence) appearing more forced than clever. Eventually, Maddie's pregnancy ended in a miscarriage, and the two characters were never able to reestablish that same balance of energetic sparring and deep affection.

Ultimately *Remington Steele* proved to be the better executed series over the long run, keeping its plots coherent and its leads out of bed until the last episode, while *Scarecrow and Mrs. King* showed that it was possible for a couple to get married and still have exciting adventures. But neither of these series ever reached the giddy, self-confident highs of *Moonlighting* at its best. During its brief and glorious run, *Moonlighting* gave ABC one of the truly hip and sophisticated shows on television.

ABC also showed off its hip credentials during the summer of 1985 when it signed on as the U.S. prime time network showpiece for a unique international entertainment event, the Live Aid fund-raising concerts. Live Aid was the culmination of more than eight months of extraordinary humanitarian efforts by some of the biggest pop music icons in the world, all to raise money and awareness for a disastrous situation in Africa. Appropriately, this plight had been driven into the world's consciousness as the result of international television news coverage.

In October 1984, Michael Buerk of the BBC reported on famine conditions in the country of Ethiopia, sending back heart-breaking television footage. *NBC Nightly News* picked up Buerk's report on its October 23, 1984, edition. Those pictures instantly transformed the story from just another event "out there" into a portrait of personal pain and suffering. While various relief agencies worked on aid plans, in Great Britain Bob Geldof (leader of the pop group The Boomtown Rats) hatched a plan to jump-start donations by tapping the small fortune he knew came with a hit record. He wrote a pair of songs with musician Midge Ure and on November 25, 1984, assembled an impromptu collection of about forty performers in Britain to record a benefit single under the banner Band Aid. In short order, "Do They Know It's Christmas?"/"Feed the World" became the best-selling single release in British history, capturing some of the millions spent on holiday gift giving and directing those proceeds to help Ethiopia. Sufficiently wise in the arcane ways of music business accounting (and determined to avoid legal and financial problems that had plagued previous well-intentioned benefit projects by other people), Geldof structured each stage of the distribution to capture every penny possible for the cause, even arguing (unsuccessfully) that the British government should contribute the taxes collected on the sale of each record.

The artists performing on the disc were not all household names in the U.S., but they were well known to fans of MTV, whose playlist regularly featured their videos (including work by Boy George, George Michael, Phil Collins, Duran Duran, U2, and Bananarama). Not to be outdone, U.S. performers Lionel Richie and Michael Jackson wrote their own song for a U.S. benefit disc. After the January 28, 1985, American Music Awards telecast on ABC, they gathered their own star-studded supergroup with producer Quincy Jones to record "We Are the World" under the moniker USA for Africa. Apart from Richie and Jackson, about forty performers participated, including Stevie Wonder, Kenny Rogers, Bruce Springsteen, Dionne Warwick, Ray Charles, and Bob Dylan. The single (and a companion album of solo songs donated to the cause) topped the charts that spring while the video played incessantly on MTV (and its new sister service, VH1).

To keep the fund-raising momentum going, Geldof spearheaded plans to gather an international lineup of artists for one gigantic telethon-style benefit, harnessing the power of television and radio throughout the world. Under the banner Live Aid, they staged an

January 20, 1985

Almost fifteen years after the debut of *Monday Night Football*, ABC is at last allowed by the NFL to join CBS and NBC in the annual rotation of telecasting the Super Bowl. In ABC's first title game, the San Francisco 49ers defeat the Miami Dolphins 38 to 16 at Stanford Stadium in California.

April 9, 1985

Television. (ITV). Britain's Granada Television produces a thirteen-hour documentary on the history of the medium, narrated by Ian Holm. An eight-hour U.S. version (revised to present a more stateside focus), narrated by Edwin Newman, appears on PBS in February 1988.

June 3, 1985

Larry King Live. (CNN). Mutual radio's popular late night interviewer brings his successful format to cable, as host of a Washington-based weekday prime time hour.

June 14, 1985

Michael Nesmith in Television Parts. (NBC). The ex-Monkee, who was producing music videos before there was an MTV, presents a decidedly esoteric and eclectic mélange of music video and comedy that is soundly ignored by the viewing public. Comics Garry Shandling and Whoopi Goldberg are among the featured performers.

June 17, 1985

Debut of cable's Discovery Channel, which focuses on science-based documentaries.

July 1, 1985

One month after expanding from thirteen hours each day to twenty-four, the Nickelodeon cable channel begins filling the prime time evening hours with reruns of old network series such as *Dennis the Menace* and *Route 66* in a programming block dubbed "Nick at Nite."

July 1, 1985

After four years as a local Tampa, Florida, cable service, the Home Shopping Network (HSN) goes national with twenty-four hours a day of selling merchandise to cable viewers who can order via telephone. A competing shop-at-home cable channel, QVC, appears in November 1986.

all-day concert on July 13, 1985, at two large outdoor venues: London's Wembley Stadium (starting at about noon British time) and Philadelphia's JFK Stadium (starting at about nine in the morning Philadelphia time). There were also cut-ins for videos from Australia, Japan, Belgrade, Moscow, Austria, Cologne, and the Hague. To avoid potential business complications, there was no companion album, video, or even a rerun at the time. The only way to see Live Aid was to share in the event as it happened that day. In the U.S. this was a perfect opportunity for cable's MTV to promote itself as *the* premiere music outlet on television, so the four-year-old service outdid itself with all-day live coverage of the proceedings on both continents. The bubbly MTV veejays were on screen as much as possible providing chatter between acts. Throughout the broadcast, viewers were urged to call in their pledges.

Because most of the U.S. was not yet wired to MTV, there was also a special syndication network created just for the event, offering local stations as much of the all-day extravaganza as they wished to carry. At 8 P.M. Eastern time, while MTV's coverage continued, ABC stepped in with an exclusive three-hour U.S. network prime time special (produced by Dick Clark). In that broadcast, ABC presented highlights from the entire day interspersed with live performances still in progress. There were separate finales (originally hours apart) from England and the U.S. with Paul McCartney on stage in London singing The Beatles song "Let It Be," while in Philadelphia Bob Dylan wrapped up the night with Keith Richards and Ron Wood from The Rolling Stones. When ABC aired its prime time package, it served to confirm that Live Aid was more than just a pair of rock concerts for the MTV generation. It was an event worthy of placement on a major television network and worthy of support.

Live Aid was a tremendous fund-raising success, a once-in-a-lifetime event that raised more than \$80 million and was seen by approximately 1.6 billion people in 170 countries. The Live Aid broadcast structure in the U.S. also showed the approach to cable the broadcast networks had apparently settled on. They would keep the cream of any programming event for their prime time show-cases. If cable wanted to devote endless hours to what led up to "the good stuff," that was fine with them. Network time slots were there for maximum return aimed at the widest possible audience. After all, network television was first and foremost a business.

Network news had taken that approach the previous summer while covering the 1984 political conventions. Breaking a decades-old tradition, all three broadcast networks chose not to carry the proceedings gavel-to-gavel in San Francisco (for the Democrats) or Dallas (for the Republicans). Instead, they pointed to cable services such as C-SPAN and CNN (disdainfully dismissed only four years before) as sources for those who wanted such non-stop coverage. ABC, CBS, and NBC would each deliver their comprehensive highlights packages in prime time. It made perfect economic sense. After all, *most* viewers did not care about every procedural moment at a political nominating convention any more than they cared about every act on the Live Aid stages.

In taking that approach, the networks were choosing a logical bottom-line strategy. They were also sending a subtle but significant message to viewers, especially younger audiences: Network television was there for the important highlights. If you wanted the complete presentation, you went elsewhere. The networks were no longer the source of record they had been in the past, not even for unique political and pop culture events. Instead, they were handing off that role. Ironically, cable was not stealing the networks' thunder. They themselves were giving it away, one event at a time.

1985-86 SEASON

46. Isn't That Amazing?

STEVEN SPIELBERG BEGAN HIS DIRECTING CAREER in the late 1960s in television, working for Universal Studios. One of his first assignments was "Darker Than Dark," a segment in the 1969 made-for-TV movie pilot for Rod Serling's *Night Gallery* anthology. Written by Serling and starring Joan Crawford, Barry Sullivan, and Tom Bosley, it was a creepy tale of a wealthy blind woman who bought the eyes of a gambler in debt so she could see for half a day. Spielberg also directed "Make Me Laugh," a first-season episode of the subsequent *Night Gallery* series, which played in the 1970-71 season as part of *Four-in-One* (NBC and Universal's unusual experiment to alternate four different series under one umbrella title). In addition, he directed a pair of episodes for one of the other series in the rotation, *The Psychiatrist*, created by Richard Levinson and William Link.

By then, that duo had already scored with two successful made-for-TV movies featuring the character of Columbo, and for the fall of 1971 they turned to Spielberg as director (and Stephen Bochco as writer) for "Murder by the Book," the first episode in the regular *Columbo* series. While never getting in the way of the already-established style of a Columbo mystery, Spielberg showed an uncanny ability to manipulate visual images, sound, and shot sequences to maximum effect. For example, instead of using some "mysterious music" during the otherwise wordless opening exposition, Spielberg punctuated the story of a writer planning to murder his partner with the thundering rat-a-tat sound of typewriter keys. Just two months later, during the November 1971 sweeps, Spielberg's reputation as a director was nailed when ABC aired the made-for-TV movie "Duel," in which Dennis Weaver played a traveling salesman driving on a lonely Western highway who was being "stalked" by a mysterious ten-ton truck with no visible driver. It was a superbly executed suspense premise straight out of *The Twilight Zone* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, and the TV film earned release as a theatrical feature in Europe.

Spielberg stuck with television for a few more directing assignments, the last being "Savage," a 1973 Levinson/Link made-for-TV movie starring Martin Landau and Barbara Bain as a pair of investigative reporters. In 1974, Spielberg moved on to his first theatrical feature, "The Sugarland Express." With the worldwide success of "Jaws" in 1975, he never had to look back to television.

Only he did. Serving as executive producer, Spielberg brought back Rod Serling's signature series as a theatrical feature film in 1983 with "Twilight Zone—The Movie." The film was actually an anthology of four *Twilight Zone* stories, one new and three re-

makes of tales originally presented as part of the television series. Burgess Meredith served as narrator (Serling had died in 1975), adopting a soft, understated style and remaining discretely off-screen, wisely avoiding any visual comparisons with Serling's distinctive on-camera series persona. Spielberg himself directed one segment in the movie ("Kick the Can") and landed top-drawer names for the others: "Blues Brothers" director John Landis for "Time Out" (from a previously unfilmed Serling story), "Gremlins" director Joe Dante for "It's a Good Life," and "Mad Max: Road Warrior" director George Miller for "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet." "Twilight Zone—The Movie" did reasonably well, demonstrating some commercial viability for the anthology format.

Meanwhile, Spielberg himself was in top form as a box office force. He had directed five films that were among the all-time highest grossing movies to that point: "Jaws," "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "Raiders of the Lost Ark," "E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial," and "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom." He had also served as a producer for many other hits, including the summer 1985 blockbuster "Back to the Future." So when NBC announced that Steven Spielberg would be returning to television in the fall of 1985, the hype was understandable and network expectations were sky high. Without seeing a pilot, NBC made a commitment for two years (forty-four episodes) of the new series, a half-hour anthology called *Amazing Stories*, with Spielberg serving as executive producer.

The series setup offered considerable flexibility: The stories could be about anything in virtually any style, allowing Spielberg to lure a who's who of actors and contemporary directors, both famous and obscure, many of whom normally "did not do TV." They welcomed the opportunity to try something different that would be seen quickly, thanks to the fast turnaround time of television production. For NBC, the anthology format meant that each episode would offer opportunities to promote different big-name performers. It all began on September 29.

The nifty opening sequence for the series celebrated storytelling, reaching back to primitive caveman days and the warm glow of the campfire. There, all eyes were fixed on the storytellers spinning their tales. Then, sweeping through the ages and technologies, there was a montage of images from storytellers and stories from those eras, all leading up to another warm, glowing campfire. This one was on a living room television screen, with a typical American family gathered to watch and listen. The opening was the kind of dazzling presentation viewers had come to expect from

FALL 1985 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
M	Hardcastle And McCormick		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC
O	Scarecrow And Mrs. King		Kate & Allie	Newhart	Cagney And Lacey		CBS
N	TV's Bloopers And Practical Jokes		NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC
T	Who's The Boss	GROWING PAINS	Moonlighting		OUR FAMILY HONOR		ABC
U	Hometown		CBS Tuesday Night Movies				CBS
E	The A-Team		Riptide	Remington Steele			NBC
W	THE INSIDERS		Dynasty		Hotel		ABC
E	STIR CRAZY		CHARLIE & COMPANY	GEORGE BURNS COMEDY WEEK	THE EQUALIZER		CBS
D	Highway To Heaven		HELL TOWN		St. Elsewhere		NBC
T	The Fall Guy		LADY BLUE		20/20		ABC
H	Magnum, P.I.		Simon And Simon		Knots Landing		CBS
R	The Cosby Show	Family Ties	Cheers	Night Court	Hill Street Blues		NBC
F	Webster	Mr. Belvedere	Diff'rent Strokes	Benson	SPENSER: FOR HIRE		ABC
R	The Twilight Zone		Dallas		Falcon Crest		CBS
I	Knight Rider		MISFITS OF SCIENCE		Miami Vice		NBC
S	HOLLYWOOD BEAT		LIME STREET		The Love Boat		ABC
A	Ainwolf		CBS Saturday Night Movies				CBS
T	Gimme A Break	Facts Of Life	THE GOLDEN GIRLS	227	Hunter		NBC

	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
S	Ripley's Believe It Or Not		MacGYVER		ABC Sunday Night Movie				ABC
U	50 Minutes		Murder, She Wrote		Crazy Like A Fox		Trapper John, M.D.		CBS
N	Punky Brewster	Silver Spoons	AMAZING STORIES	Alfred Hitchcock Presents	NBC Sunday Night At The Movies				NBC

one of the movie industry's most successful directors, and they were looking for the show itself to live up to the title.

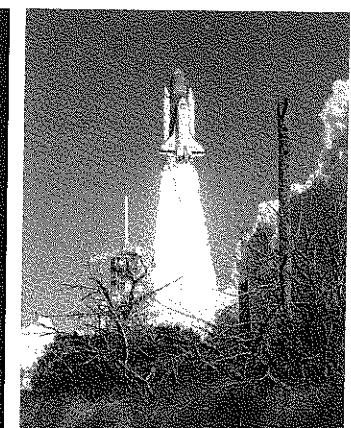
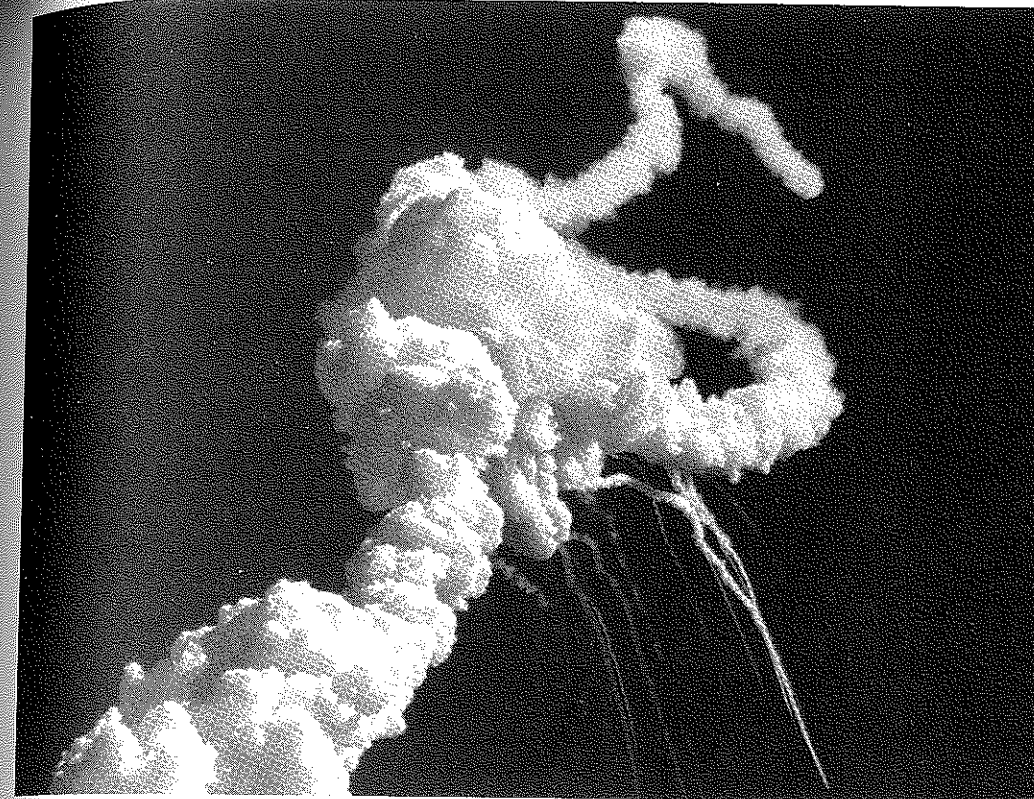
At their best, the stories that followed delivered on the promise of bringing a real mix of talent to a weekly television showcase. In "Fine Tuning," Bob Balaban (from the cast of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind") directed the hilarious Steven Spielberg story of alien visitors that came to Earth (specifically, Hollywood) with the hope of meeting their favorite stars from old TV broadcasts they had picked up in space. (Best moment: A great cameo by Milton Berle.) In "Secret Cinema," Paul Bartel ("Eating Raoul") remade his own 1969 short film about a woman whose whole life was being secretly filmed and shown in theaters as a slapstick serial. Peter Hyams ("Running Scared") directed "The Amazing Falsworth," with Gregory Hines as a mind-reading magician who uncovered a murderer in the audience. Clint Eastwood directed "Vanessa in the Garden," with Harvey Keitel as a painter looking to reconnect with his deceased wife through his portraits of her. John Lithgow starred as a lonely bachelor entranced by a hand-made doll and its real-life model in "The Doll," written by Richard Matheson (author of Spielberg's breakout TV movie "Duel").

There were many others. Yet, just like the classic anthologies of the past (including *The Twilight Zone*), for every successful entry there were also episodes that did not quite gel. Ironically (given the program's title), while the visual presentation was generally good, the stories themselves often turned out to be the weak link, in need

of another round of polishing and rewriting. That shortcoming might have been minimized had the series found a way to capitalize on its greatest strength, the amazing array of talent behind the productions, rather than merely getting that angle out to potential viewers through press coverage. Had Spielberg personally introduced the episodes, explaining why a particular story was being done with certain people or incorporated chats with the talent into the program, the series could have emphasized its assets the moment viewers tuned in. Instead, most viewers simply saw the stories in a vacuum, judging them instantly without any context, sometimes coming away with the question, "What was that all about?" As a result, *Amazing Stories* ended up as a particularly difficult sell from week to week, despite the tremendous hype that had preceded it.

The series also faced an unexpected problem: it did not have the anthology format all to itself. Amazingly, after years of absence from network television, *three other* anthologies were also introduced that fall.

One series was also on NBC, a revival of the half-hour *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, which the network placed immediately after *Amazing Stories* to create what it saw as a logical programming flow. This new version of the Hitchcock series continued the presentation of "stories with a twist" that had worked so well in the original run (1955-65) but with a twist of its own. Recognizing that Alfred Hitchcock's on-screen presence delivering humorously



Only CNN covered live the lift off of the *Challenger* (the twenty-sixth U.S. space shuttle launch) on January 28, 1986. An explosion seventy-three seconds later destroyed the vehicle and claimed the lives of schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe and her six astronaut partners. (NASA)

deadpan comments had been essential to the program's original success, the new production brought him back from the grave (he had died in 1980) by colorizing and reusing his original black-and-white clips. The technique had worked well in a two-hour TV movie the previous spring, when Hitchcock's comments were coupled with newly filmed versions of four stories from the original series. For the new weekly anthology, Hitchcock's remarks were carefully chosen so that it was not necessary to always redo the old stories - the comments could fit any drama. Unfortunately, that's exactly how the program then played: as a collection of remarks by Hitchcock sandwiching stories that might best be described (in his cold, measured tones) as "irrelevant."

The two anthology series on CBS were, in their own ways, unexpectedly effective. *George Burns Comedy Week* once again cast Burns in his favorite role (playing George Burns), with the nearly ninety-year-old performer acting as host to a variety of humorous tales bearing the unmistakable off-beat touch of producer Steve Martin. Throughout the series there was a nice mix of veteran comedy faces (including Don Knotts, Harvey Korman, and Don Rickles); the *Saturday Night Live/SCTV* crowd (including Laraine Newman, Catherine O'Hara, and Eugene Levy); and a host of others (including Martin Mull, Fred Willard, Bronson Pinchot, Sandy Baron, Howard Hesseman, Patrick Duffy, and Tim Matheson). The stories ranged from silly mock adventure ("Home for Dinner," in which a fishing trip was turned into a rescue mission in a foreign country) to downright surreal (Telly Savalas and Elliott Gould in 1940s Africa searching for a supposedly extinct animal in "The Assignment"). One of the best was "Christmas Carol II: The Sequel," in which Ebenezer Scrooge (James Whitmore) was once again visited by Marley's ghost, this time to tell him that his newfound generous nature had turned him into a patsy.

The most quietly impressive anthology was the one-hour CBS revival of *The Twilight Zone*. Apart from a brief flash of Rod Serling's face in the program's opening montage, this series made no attempt to revive the dead. Instead, it stood on its own in the

spirit of the original *Twilight Zone*. There was new theme music (by the Grateful Dead), a soft-spoken off-screen narrator (actor Charles Aidman), and, most important, original new writing (and only a few remakes of stories from the original series), with science fiction writer Harlan Ellison serving as a story consultant. The first presentation was "Shatterday" (written by Ellison), in which Bruce Willis played the dual role of a man confronting himself in a separate body with a separate personality. "A Little Peace and Quiet" followed, featuring Melinda Dillon as a woman who gained the power to stop time in its tracks and then start it again. During the temporal hiatus, she was the only one who could move around because everyone and everything else was frozen. However, that power soon left her with an impossible choice when she stopped time as a nuclear missile headed toward her town. She could see it frozen in the sky, about to strike, but everyone else (including anyone who might help) was also frozen. Should she live that way for the rest of her life, alone? Or should she unfreeze the world and die a second later? On a less cataclysmic level, "Wordplay" cast Robert Klein as a man who discovered one day that everybody else was speaking a different language and that he needed to learn to talk, read, and think from scratch.

Despite the many intriguing, entertaining, and sometimes thought-provoking stories offered on all these anthology series, none of them connected with viewers. Though several decades had passed since the networks had abandoned the form, the programs were still haunted by the same problems that had led to their demise by the mid-1960s. Anthologies had no regular characters, no familiar settings, and no reassuringly consistent approach to storytelling. Even the most effective presentations played for one night only. Viewers had to deal with entirely new elements in every episode. As a result, anthologies were unable to perform well in the competitive network ratings environment. Even though the latest group of anthology series presented some very good TV, viewers just could not get into the habit of checking them out, week after week. It was simply too much trouble.

September 15, 1985

"Death of a Salesman." (CBS). The 1984 Broadway revival of Arthur Miller's classic play is brought to TV for a three-hour adaptation, with Dustin Hoffman as salesman Willy Loman and John Malkovich as his son Biff.

November 15, 1985

Viacom International acquires control of the Warner Amex cable holdings, giving it complete ownership of Showtime and The Movie Channel and majority ownership of MTV and Nickelodeon.

December 1, 1985

"Perry Mason Returns." (NBC). Almost thirty years after the popular lawyer drama faded from CBS, Raymond Burr revives his Perry Mason role in the first of a series of popular two-hour made-for-TV movies. Barbara Hale also returns as Della Street, with her real-life son William Katt added as Paul Drake, Jr., Perry's investigator. The TV movies run until Burr's death in 1993 and come from former network executive Fred Silverman's production company.

December 6, 1985

Radio program production company Westwood One buys the Mutual Broadcasting System, the radio network that never expanded into television. Over the next decade, MBS is folded into Westwood One's expanding radio programming empire and no longer operates independently. By April 1999, Westwood One at last kills off the Mutual network after almost sixty-five years of broadcasting.

January 3, 1986

Capital Cities Communications closes on its acquisition of ABC.

George Burns Comedy Week was gone after Christmas, though there was a spinoff series (*Leo & Liz in Beverly Hills*) that followed characters introduced in one episode ("The Couch"). *Amazing Stories* finished its two-year commitment and also spawned a spinoff series, the animated *Family Dog*. Later, groups of *Amazing Stories* episodes were packaged for use by local stations in their TV movie slots. As anthology films, the touts usually focused on film stars (such as Kevin Costner in "The Mission" episode) who had appeared in the series. *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* lasted only one year on NBC, then shifted to the USA cable network with a handful of new episodes and repeats from the initial run.

The Twilight Zone did return for a second season, but it aired only sporadically. Eventually CBS (which co-produced the series) struck a deal to turn out enough additional half-hour episodes (produced in Canada) for the program to go into syndication. (The first-run syndication strategy had worked well for the off-network suspense anthology *Tales from the Darkside*, which turned out original scary tales on a modest budget from 1984 to 1988.) *The Twilight Zone* ended up with nearly one hundred half-hour episodes, splitting up the segments of the one-hour network shows and redubbing the voiceovers with new narrator Robin Ward. Somehow, syndication seemed to be the best venue for the form, outside the intense glare of the network ratings race. There, the program came full circle, returning to the original *Twilight Zone*'s roots as a low-budget series that did not try to do more than take a good story and tell it well, with few pretensions to grandeur.

Though the highly touted anthologies fizzled for the networks in the 1985-86 season, there was no doubt what did connect with

viewers. It was sitcoms. A format that had been dismissed as past its prime just two seasons earlier was not only back, it was dominating television. NBC was the greatest beneficiary of the trend. It had the greatest number of newer hit sitcoms, led by *The Cosby Show*, which began its second season as the number one show on television and maintained its momentum. (For the 1985-86 season, thirteen out of the fifteen highest rated individual programs were episodes of *The Cosby Show*, with only the Super Bowl and its post-game show breaking the streak.) Yet NBC's comedy success did not end with Bill Cosby.

Family Ties had already become a top ten hit, buoyed by *The Cosby Show* as a lead-in, but it was further boosted by the successful launch of Michael J. Fox's film career in the summer smash "Back to the Future." These two Thursday night shows, in turn, were luring viewers to *Cheers* and *Night Court*, the comedies that followed, both of which were invigorated with fresh supporting characters for the new season. *Cheers* introduced Woody Harrelson as naive barman Woody Boyd, while *Night Court* added Markie Post as legal-aid defense lawyer Christine Sullivan. (Later on Thursdays, *Hill Street Blues* also got new blood when Dennis Franz joined the cast as Lt. Norman Buntz.)

NBC's comedy success was not limited to its powerful Thursday night lineup. The network also had the most successful new show of the season, *The Golden Girls*, in the process establishing a comedy beachhead on Saturday night. Once again, NBC programming chief Brandon Tartikoff had given the go-ahead to a new showcase for some familiar names and it paid off. Bea Arthur (from *Maude*), Betty White (from *Mary Tyler Moore*), Rue McClanahan (*Maude*'s best friend), and Estelle Getty (fresh from playing a mom in Cher's theatrical feature "Mask") showed that life in Miami consisted of more than the drug lords of *Miami Vice*. The four played active single women over fifty living together in a retirement community, who acted anything but retiring. All four performers were in top form (over the course of the series each won an Emmy), playing their characters with almost giddy enthusiasm. *The Golden Girls* also provided a strong lead-in for another familiar face, Marla Gibbs (from *The Jeffersons*), and her new ensemble sitcom, *227* (set at an apartment building in Washington, D.C.). Still later on Saturday night, producer Lorne Michaels was back in charge of *Saturday Night Live* after an absence of five years. Among the faces in his new troupe were Joan Cusack, Robert Downey, Jr., Jon Lovitz, Damon Wayans, and Dennis Miller doing the news.

Of course, NBC still had its share of disappointments for the season. Apart from the lower-than-hoped-for ratings registered by *Amazing Stories*, there was the silly *Misfits of Science*, the volatile *Hell Town* (with Robert Blake as a Catholic priest), and an unsuccessful attempt to hitch a promotional wagon to the theatrical James Bond films. In the spring of 1986, amid rumors that Pierce Brosnan was in line to succeed Roger Moore in the role of 007, NBC unexpectedly announced the renewal of *Remington Steele*, exercising its contractual option for a fifth season despite soft ratings. It would have been a priceless cross promotion for the network, but after the announcement Brosnan was immediately dropped from the short list for Bond. Lacking that tie-in, NBC ended up dumping a truncated four-episode *Remington Steele* season into "special" time slots the following fall, giving the series a less than royal sendoff. (Brosnan did assume the Bond role a decade later, beginning with the film "Goldeneye.")

Nonetheless, for the 1985-86 season, NBC had rarely looked better. The network owned Thursday and Saturday nights, won the November sweeps, tied for the lead in the February sweeps, and ended up with five of the top ten shows of the season. When the

final numbers came in, NBC had won the 1985-86 season. It was not even close. The wide-ranging mix of program types, performers, and styles had paid off for CEO Grant Tinker and ace programmer Brandon Tartikoff.

For NBC, this was a momentous achievement. It had been a "respectable" number two during CBS's long years of TV dominance in the 1950s and 1960s, but then had mostly languished in third place since ABC's glory days in the late 1970s. While rarely thought of as a failing enterprise, the harsh reality was that NBC had not clearly won a TV season since 1951-52, back when Milton Berle was still in his heyday and *I Love Lucy* was brand new.

NBC's success did not mean that the other networks were locked out of the top ten or that they did not have some very good and successful shows of their own. ABC, for example, had the lock on Tuesday night with a new comedy, *Growing Pains*, joining the already established *Who's the Boss?* and *Moonlighting*. The network also added a pair of high quality adventure series, the classy *Spenser: For Hire* (based on detective novels by Robert B. Parker, with Robert Urich as a literate Boston detective and Avery Brooks as his mysterious streetwise comrade); and *MacGyver* (with Richard Dean Anderson playing a private agency special operative who knew how to skillfully use science and everyday objects to thwart the bad guys). CBS had its own shadowy force for justice in *The Equalizer*, with Edward Woodward as former government agent Robert McCall, a classy one-man version of *The A-Team* who stepped in to help people in seemingly hopeless situations.

Still, the lackluster ratings performance of CBS and ABC that year was symbolized by the weak seasons turned in by their two primary prime time soaps, *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. Though both shows remained in the top ten, they both had particularly bad years. *Dynasty* had to deal with the fact that its much-touted Moldovan wedding cliffhanger in the spring of 1985 had been a washout. When the smoke cleared in the fall, all the major characters were still alive, though facing particularly silly plots even by *Dynasty* standards. (For example, Krystle was kidnapped and replaced by a lookalike, also played by Linda Evans). A few interconnected episodes to launch *The Colbys* spinoff series further complicated *Dynasty*'s storylines.

Dallas had its own problems. Patrick Duffy had quit the long-running program at the end of the 1984-85 season, so his character of Bobby Ewing was deliberately struck and killed by a murderous hit-and-run driver. Unfortunately, the writers soon discovered that removing Bobby from the series totally upset the balance of conflicts. Larry Hagman's J. R. Ewing had no one else who could stand up to him, and other characters such as Bobby's widow Pam no longer had much reason to exist on the show at all. Worse yet, the stories lost focus and the series became a nightmarish caricature of itself, including silly foreign intrigues more appropriate to *Dynasty* than *Dallas*. These included Pam Ewing in a South American jungle and J. R. venturing overseas with a sexy international executive (played by Barbara Carrera). In a startling admission of failure, the final scene of the final episode of the 1985-86 season had the effect of throwing the entire season's scripts into the trash can. Pam, who had just remarried, woke up alone in her bed, but heard the sound of water running in the bathroom shower. In a daze, she walked over and opened the bathroom shower door. There was Patrick Duffy, who turned and said simply: "Good morning." Freeze frame for the season, with closing credits that teased: "Patrick Duffy as ?"

That cliffhanger became the talk of television over the summer. Everyone knew that *Dallas* wanted Patrick Duffy back on the series, preferably as Bobby Ewing, but was that Bobby in the shower? If so, how did he get there? In the fall of 1986, *Dallas*

revealed the answer in its very first scene. It was, in fact, Bobby Ewing. He was back because his death had really been Pam Ewing's nightmare. And, by the way, so had the entire 1985-86 season. Pam had dreamed it all. Bobby was not dead. She was not remarried. Everything was as it had been before the car struck Bobby. Though some purists were outraged at such a blatantly corny turn, series fans knew that if ever there had been a *Dallas* season that should have been erased, the 1985-86 season was it. They were perfectly happy to watch the characters follow a "road not taken," somehow wiser in the new choices they made. The "Bobby-in-the-shower/It-was-all-a-dream" stunt helped pump new life into *Dallas*, which ran for five more years. However, it was also the last gasp of the prime time soaps, the last time they would be the subject of such intense national discussion. None of them could ever match the audacity of that *Dallas* move. Nor could they ever completely recapture total credibility in their storylines. After all, if some plot thread did not quite work out, couldn't any soap just declare, "It was all a dream"? Later, other series apart from prime time soaps would be tempted to play with season-ending or series-ending dream sequences. Only a few, notably *Newhart* and *St. Elsewhere*, would pull it off.

Turning an entire season into a discarded dream was a reminder that television's business side had the ultimate control over what appeared on the screen. The people behind *Dallas* (including Larry Hagman, who personally appealed to Duffy to return) had concluded that they needed to fix a problem, and so they did. Story continuity had to adjust to business reality. Yet this was nothing compared to changes that were beginning to occur in the overall

March 6, 1986

Fox acquires six Metromedia television stations, forming the basis for its new TV network.

March 25, 1986

Ted Turner's Turner Broadcasting System acquires MGM's massive film library (including "Gone With the Wind") to provide programming for Turner's cable services.

April 13, 1986

"Return to Mayberry." (NBC). Most of the cast of the 1960s *Andy Griffith Show* reunite in what turns out to be the top-rated TV movie of the season, providing a comfortable sense of series closure as Andy returns home and once again becomes town sheriff.

May 30, 1986

Almost five years after its birth, MTV makes its first change in veejays. Nina Blackwood and J. J. Jackson are out, "Downtown" Julie Brown is in.

June 2, 1986

Live television coverage of the U.S. Senate begins with the debut of a second C-SPAN cable channel, C-SPAN 2.

June 9, 1986

GE closes on its acquisition of RCA and its subsidiary, NBC.

September 5, 1986

Merv Griffin ends twenty-one years of hosting a daily talk show by shutting down his syndicated Metromedia series.

television industry, reshaping the status quo of U.S. broadcasting that had been in place for decades.

Network ownership had been remarkably stable over the years, a situation that was reinforced by the fact that commercial broadcasters operated by special rules set by the U.S. government through the FCC. These rules called for certain actions in the public interest, especially related to news, community service, and children's programming. They also imposed limitations on station ownership such as a cap on the number of stations a network could own, forbidding simultaneous ownership of a newspaper and a television station in the same market, and not allowing foreign ownership of stations. As long-time participants in this process, the established networks appeared to be uniquely qualified to thrive in a business that allowed only a few players due to the limited number of broadcast stations in the country. CBS and NBC had remained part of the same corporate ownership structures virtually since their foundation in the 1920s. During the 1950s, the DuMont network had gone under, while ABC had held on after several lean years only by merging with a division of Paramount. Since then, ABC, CBS, and NBC had been in place as the only successful commercial television networks.

Suddenly in 1985, that began to change. Rapidly.

In March 1985, Capital Cities Communications, the nation's second-largest independent chain of TV stations, announced it was buying ABC for a reported cost of about \$3.5 billion. Just like that, after thirty years, one of the three U.S. television networks was suddenly under new ownership. Though the Capital Cities move did not result in any obvious changes to ABC's on-air offerings, it served as notice that networks were just like any other business in a world where big businesses were increasingly falling under the control of even larger conglomerates. The TV networks were simply one more valuable commodity that could be bought and sold, bringing in new players to the network world.

At the same time, there was also action on a different front as fifty-four-year-old Australian media mogul Rupert Murdoch began a series of striking moves into the U.S. entertainment industry. Murdoch had started his career in 1952, turning a family inheritance of Australian newspaper properties into a major corporate concern. He took over two British newspapers (*News of the World* and *The Sun*) in the late 1960s and made inroads into the U.S. in 1974 with the similarly styled *Star* tabloid. He added the *New York Post* in 1976. Murdoch was renowned for his ruthless financial efficiency and his unshamed emphasis on tabloid journalism and titillating sensationalism to attract and maintain readership.

In April 1985 Murdoch's News Corporation bought 50% of Twentieth Century Fox (an established producer of both feature films and television series) and, eight months later, purchased the remaining 50%. In May 1985, News Corporation announced its intention to buy six TV stations from the independent Metromedia group (the living remnant of the long-defunct DuMont network) for a reported cost of about \$2 billion. These included stations in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, and Washington, D.C., covering some of the top media markets in the U.S.: a

perfect lineup of potential network O&Os. In order for the station purchase to receive the necessary legal approvals, Murdoch became a naturalized U.S. citizen (effectively dealing with the FCC requirement forbidding foreign ownership of TV stations). The station purchase finally closed in March 1986 and, two months later, Murdoch boldly announced the formation of what advocates of TV diversity had long hoped for, a fourth commercial television network. Murdoch's network was to be called Fox (after the famous film studio he had just purchased) and it would carry Murdoch's traditional bold "in your face" style.

Fox was to be based on the six O&Os purchased by Murdoch, and the proto-network's first important task was to line up affiliates in other major cities in time for its planned launch during the 1986-87 season. For its programming, Fox would rely on the talents of veteran television executive Barry Diller, who had developed the flashy "made-for-TV movie" concept for ABC back in the 1970s and had gone on to head up first Paramount Pictures and then the Twentieth Century Fox studio just before it was acquired by Murdoch. Although Diller wisely decided that the new network would start slowly with a limited schedule of shows, from the beginning Fox clearly intended to become a significant player in the world of television networks. Unlike DuMont, the last fully functioning fourth commercial network, the Fox ownership had deep pockets.

As if that was not enough of a seismic shift in the TV world for one year, General Electric announced, in December 1985, that it was buying RCA (including its subsidiary, NBC) for \$6.28 billion. Unlike the situation with Capital Cities and ABC, GE was not another broadcaster. In fact, television was not even its primary business. Instead, GE drew its revenue from such diverse areas as military contracts, financial services, and manufacturing. The targeting of RCA was strictly a matter of aggressively pursuing a profitable company. The acquisition process was completed in June 1986, giving new ownership to the number one television network at the peak of its prestige and popularity. GE moved quickly to install its own people at the upper echelon of NBC network operations. (Clearly GE had not gone after RCA for its line of television sets.)

Sixty-year-old Grant Tinker was unceremoniously shown the door by GE. To replace Tinker, Jack Welch, chairman of GE, was named chairman of the board of NBC, while forty-three-year-old Robert Wright was named president and CEO. Wright had most recently served as head of GE Financial Services. Tinker's departure from NBC, even coming so soon after the network had at last won a season, was really no surprise. Though he had a lifetime career in all aspects of television (including time at Universal Studios and founding the MTM production company), the network's future was now in the hands of new owners with a far different viewpoint on the business of broadcasting. Before the acquisition, NBC had been responsible for more than 40% of RCA's profits. Now, the network was just one division of a much, much larger company.

This was the evolving new reality of American television.

1986-87 SEASON

47. Finally a Fourth

GE'S NEW CORPORATE OWNERSHIP of NBC had no immediate effect on the network's continued ratings success. The 1986-87 season was not even close. It was clear by the November sweeps that NBC had the momentum to win the entire season. In February 1987, the network notched its eighth consecutive sweeps victory. By the end of the season in April, NBC had won twenty-seven of the thirty weeks, including every Thursday and Saturday night. Even though both ABC and CBS still had their share of hits, NBC had an unquestioned claim as the number one network.

Though Grant Tinker was gone, programming ace Brandon Tartikoff remained in place at NBC, keeping an eye on returning hits, shepherding new programs, and maintaining existing relationships with the creative community. Meanwhile, new NBC head Robert Wright embarked on a strategic reshaping of the network that reflected his strong business orientation. Apart from serving as head of GE Financial Services, Wright previously had been in charge of the GE division handling cable TV and, years earlier, had been on the corporate management side of Cox Communications (which encompassed not only cable concerns but also a strong group of independent TV stations). With GE now in the network television business, it looked to diversify, expand, and rework NBC for an even greater return on its investment. With the percentage of U.S. households wired for cable nearing 50% (and the total share of viewers tuned to the three networks dropping slowly but steadily each year), Wright also pursued possible opportunities in cable alliances.

Yet there were key unanswered questions that hung over the new GE ownership. What would be the long-term effects? Grant Tinker's presence had served as a welcoming beacon to producers. Would that continue? Though GE was an extremely successful corporation, could the company adjust its ingrained bottom-line approach to handle the more intangible aspects of an entertainment property? There were early signs that it would not be a perfectly smooth transition. An attempt by *Late Night* host David Letterman to deliver a tongue-in-cheek welcoming gift to the new GE bosses (only to be rebuffed by security) produced a hilarious taped bit that underscored a huge corporate culture gap. Rather than basking in a golden public relations moment courtesy of the network's own hip star, the image that emerged was that of a company annoyed by one of its own employees. Nonetheless, as long as NBC continued to perform well, such considerations just seemed to be a minor glitch in the changing of the guard.

The reality of NBC's solid leadership position hit hard at former

ratings champ CBS. Clearly this was not a one-season fluke and there was nothing to suggest that CBS was likely to bounce back soon. Even with its existing stable of hits, profits at CBS dropped and that turn could not have come at a worse time. With ABC and NBC already sporting new corporate owners (and the Fox network just starting up), there was a sense that CBS needed an infusion of new blood (and more cash would not hurt, either). There were rumors of possible corporate takeovers or mergers with the likes of Time Inc., Gannett, and Ted Turner. What emerged instead in the fall of 1986 was an unexpected "palace coup" that represented a change, for all practical purposes, in control of the network.

Just as the 1986-87 season was getting under way, the CBS Board of Directors suddenly voted to make major changes in senior management. Out went Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer Thomas Wyman, who had succeeded William Paley upon his retirement in 1983. Coming in as CEO was Laurence Tisch, CBS's new primary stockholder (and chairman of Loews Corporation, a financial holding company), who had only joined the CBS Board of Directors the previous year when his accumulation of company stock had grown. In an effort to give the power shift more of a sense of continuity, Paley (on the verge of his eighty-fifth birthday) was brought out of retirement and returned to the largely figurehead position of chairman of the board. While at first these new titles were deemed temporary, by January 1987 they were made permanent, confirming that a new era had begun at CBS. However, it was not the aged Paley who was to run the network but, rather, financial wheeler-dealer Tisch. While this was technically not a corporate takeover in the same way as Capital Cities and ABC or GE and NBC, the change had virtually the same effect as a takeover. That meant all three networks had undergone significant ownership upheavals within twelve months. Within a year of the CBS power shift, Tisch had instituted a host of corporate changes large and small, including installation of a new head of CBS News (veteran producer Howard Stringer) and the sale of CBS's publishing and record divisions for some \$3 billion as CBS became far more fiscally conservative.

The most controversial cost-cutting moves involved the news division. On March 6, 1987, CBS News laid off some 220 staffers, including thirteen on-air correspondents such as Ike Pappas and Fred Graham. Coming just two years after a round of belt-tightening moves by the now-departed Thomas Wyman, this left CBS's news division reeling. Those who were left pressed on, dealing with this new tighter budgetary world. Though new man-

FALL 1986 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
M O N	MacGyver		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC
	Kate & Allie	MY SISTER SAM	Newhart	DESIGNING WOMEN	Cagney & Lacey		CBS
	ALF	Amazing Stories	NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC
T U E	Who's The Boss	Growing Pains	Moonlighting		JACK AND MIKE		ABC
	THE WIZARD		CBS Tuesday Night Movie				CBS
	MATLOCK		CRIME STORY		1986		NBC
W E D	Perfect Strangers	HEAD OF THE CLASS	Dynasty		Hotel		ABC
	TOGETHER WE STAND	BETTER DAYS	Magnum, P.I.		The Equalizer		CBS
	Highway to Heaven		Gimme A Break	You Again?	St. Elsewhere		NBC
T H U R	OUR WORLD		The Colbys		20/20		ABC
	Simon & Simon		Knots Landing		KAY O'BRIEN		CBS
	The Cosby Show	Family Ties	Cheers	Night Court	Hill Street Blues		NBC
F R I	Webster	Mr. Belvedere	SLEDGE HAMMER	SIDEKICKS	STARMAN		ABC
	Scarecrow And Mrs. King		Dallas		Falcon Crest		CBS
	The A-Team		Miami Vice		L.A. LAW		NBC
S A T	LIFE WITH LUCY	ELLEN BURSTYN SHOW	HEART OF THE CITY		Spenser: For Hire		ABC
	DOWNTOWN		The New Mike Hammer		The Twilight Zone		CBS
	Facts Of Life	227	The Golden Girls	AMEN	Hunter		NBC
S U N	Disney Sunday Movie		ABC Sunday Night Movie				ABC
	60 Minutes	Murder, She Wrote		CBS Sunday Night Movie			CBS
	OUR HOUSE	EASY STREET	Valerie	NBC Sunday Night At The Movies			NBC

agement at all the networks was scrutinizing news budgets, it was CBS that seemed to be leading the way in downsizing.

Even though all the networks had always operated for the purpose of making money, news generally had enjoyed a special status. Sometimes it was there for prestige, for public service, or to assuage governmental and community watchdogs. At its best, though, news had become a source of network pride (especially at CBS) because it was one extraordinary way to show off U.S. broadcasting at its best, following a tradition that stretched back to World War II.

Yet, as more finance-based management put news under the magnifying glass at all the networks, tradition became less important than the bottom line. The success of *60 Minutes* (a huge money machine for CBS) almost inevitably led to the observation that the rest of the news industry could learn a fiscal lesson from that show's success. News did not have to be a loss leader; it could, in fact, make money.

The fact remained, however, that most news coverage did not lend itself to easy cost control. To fully function as a news organization, there was always the need to dispatch correspondents to exotic locations or to devote precious airtime to important (but less lucrative) public discourse (such as, in this season, the congressional hearings from May to August on allegations of illegal arms sales to the country of Iran).

Ironically, all three networks (including CBS) had been trying

for years to duplicate the ratings and financial success of *60 Minutes* (a steady top ten hit for years), with generally disappointing results. While the programs themselves might have been well done, they all faced a difficult time drawing audience numbers that could match a successful entertainment series. In 1983, NBC, which had been struggling for nearly twenty years to develop its own version of a successful news magazine, boldly tried running its latest effort (*First Camera*) on Sundays directly opposite *60 Minutes*, but that attempt had failed. This season, NBC tried again but on Tuesday night with *1986*. That series did not last long enough to have to deal with a name change in January. ABC had achieved reasonably consistent performance from *20/20* on Thursdays against *Hill Street Blues*, but when the network slotted a wonderfully conceived weekly documentary series, *Our World* (hosted by Linda Ellerbee and Ray Gandolf), earlier that night against the one-two ratings hits *The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*, the news show ended up as the lowest-rated series of the season. It was only CBS with *West 57th* that seemed to find some success in copying and updating its own formula. Beginning with its brief summer run in 1985, *West 57th* was squarely aimed at younger audiences, featuring younger correspondents and shorter stories on trendy topics such as "designer drugs" and cosmetic surgery.

CBS did have some good news in the ratings for the 1986-87 season, but there just was not enough of it. Patrick Duffy's return to *Dallas* (following the infamous "shower" resurrection) rejuvenated

that old favorite, besting the no-longer-trendsetting *Miami Vice*, while *Magnum, P.I.* knocked off *Dynasty*. The strong Monday night regulars of *Kate and Allie*, *Newhart*, and *Cagney and Lacey* were joined by the moderately successful *My Sister Sam* (with former Mork and *Mindy* co-star Pam Dawber) and a brassy slice of Southern charm, *Designing Women*. Produced by Linda Bloodworth-Thomason (who wrote the original pilot for *One Day at a Time*) and her husband, Harry Thomason, *Designing Women* focused on four strong-willed, independent women running their own design business in Atlanta. Delta Burke, Dixie Carter, Jean Smart, and Annie Potts each played a distinctly defined character and the energetic sharp-tongued give-and-take among the four formed the core of each episode (with occasional kibitzing from their in-house male handyman/assistant, played by Meshach Taylor). This loud and saucy "girl talk" served as the perfect lead-in to *Cagney and Lacey*. CBS might have lost its ratings crown, but it still had good performers on Sundays, Mondays, and Fridays.

Number three ABC also had its strong slots, especially on Tuesdays with *Growing Pains*, *Who's the Boss?*, and *Moonlighting*. Even more promising for the future, ABC seemed particularly open to a range of series ideas (much as NBC had done earlier in the decade, when it was in the ratings basement). In the winter, for example, ABC offered *Max Headroom*, a sardonic (but prophetic) science fiction peek "twenty minutes into the future" at a world essentially controlled by media organizations totally obsessed with profit and ratings. The title character existed only on television, hopping from set to set. Matt Frewer played the dual role of muck-raking reporter Edison Cater and his video doppelganger, Max.

ABC also had the dubious distinction of airing two of the season's bigger flops, both of which had arrived with great expectations: *Life with Lucy* and the miniseries *Amerika*. *Life with Lucy* was one of the most highly touted ventures for the fall, reuniting Lucille Ball with her long-time foil, Gale Gordon. Unfortunately, the program did not follow the successful path of *The Golden Girls* (which put its over-fifty characters in a savvy contemporary setting). Instead, *Life with Lucy* settled for familiar physical shtick (already decades-old by her 1970s *Here's Lucy* series), even though Ball herself had broken from her standard character type the previous season when she starred as a bag lady in the successful made-for-TV movie "Stone Pillow." The new series merely trotted out shopworn routines, set them in a hardware store, and waited for the magic. It never came, though the seventy-five-year-old Ball was in surprisingly good physical shape and gamely tackled every bit. The problem was that *Life with Lucy* had to compete with the Legend of Lucy, ingrained in the national consciousness through daily *I Love Lucy* reruns. That legend was from another era and it was a mistake to try to do exactly the same thing one more time. Critics were merciless and ratings were tepid. Despite a commitment for a full slate of episodes, there was no great fuss when only eight aired before cancellation.

ABC's other highly touted disappointment, the miniseries *Amerika*, would have been perfect airing during the Cold War 1950s because it had a premise that had haunted the era: What if the U.S.S.R. somehow took over the U.S.? Set in the near future of 1997, *Amerika* never bothered to explain how the Russians assumed control of the country, only that it had happened ten years earlier. (A tie-in novel's back story pointed to an electromagnetic pulse weapon that destroyed all U.S. communication operations.) It was an intriguing, if far-fetched, premise. The miniseries had a strong cast (including Kris Kristofferson, Robert Urich, Sam Neill, Christine Lahti, and Mariel Hemingway), but at fourteen and one-half hours the story went on far, far too long. What might have made a truly powerful made-for-TV movie played out as a diffuse

and tedious miniseries that registered respectable but ultimately disappointing ratings, considering its cost and length. This was particularly bad news for ABC because for a decade such expensive long-form drama had proven to be a reliable draw, especially during sweeps periods. If that was no longer the case, the network's resources would have to be directed elsewhere.

There were few such doubts for number one NBC. Led by its Thursday night comedy line-up, the network enjoyed spectacular success, making GE's pricey purchase appear to be a wise investment. The hit shows not only provided a stable base, they also served as lead-in launching pads or cross-promoting platforms for new programs. Though not every one became a hit, there was no denying they had plenty of opportunities for exposure.

One year after *The Jeffersons* ended, lead Sherman Hemsley slipped easily into the post-*Golden Girls* slot with *Amen*, bringing his blustery style to the role of Ernest Frye, deacon at the First Community Church of Philadelphia. *ALF* offered a brand new face, following the misadventures of a fluffy three-foot-tall Alien Life Form who was adopted (and hidden) by a suburban family (headed by Max Wright) after crash-landing his spaceship into their garage. The family's biggest challenge? Keeping *ALF* from dining on the family cat (considered a delicacy on his home planet Melmac). It was perfect prime time kids' TV.

In addition, that season NBC had a particularly good batch of new crime and law dramas, including successful new turns by several veteran performers. Michael Mann, still basking in the glow of his previous hit *Miami Vice*, came out with *Crime Story*, a wonderfully executed tale of mob activities during the 1960s. (It featured a well-chosen opening theme, an effective remake by Del Shannon of his 1961 hit "Runaway.") The key figures in the story were Lieutenant Mike Torello (Dennis Farina, a one-time Chicago cop in real life) and mobster Ray Luca (Anthony Denison), who sparred throughout the run, first in Chicago, then in Las Vegas, where Luca established a legitimate casino business as a front for

September 2, 1986

"48 Hours on Crack Street." (CBS). A two-hour news special that provides something of a *cinema-verité* look at drug addicts in New York City serves as the impetus for a weekly documentary series (*48 Hours*) using the same basic style the following season.

September 8, 1986

After a few years as a local daily talk program, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* begins Monday-through-Friday national daytime syndication from its Chicago locale.

September 10, 1986

It's Garry Shandling's Show. (Showtime). Standup comic Garry Shandling updates the old George Burns sitcom idea of a TV star playing himself and talking directly to the home audience during the show.

December 16, 1986

The Singing Detective. (BBC). Michael Gambon plays bed-ridden detective-story writer Phillip Marlow, whose thoughts, dreams, and boyhood memories mix with his written plots, resulting in a convoluted, hallucinogenic masterpiece. Authored by the prolific Dennis Potter, the six-part series features characters breaking into song, akin to his previous miniseries-turned-Hollywood movie, "Pennies from Heaven." This eccentric new series comes to the U.S. via PBS in February 1988.

February 23, 1987

Newsman Charles Gibson replaces David Hartman as the host of ABC's *Good Morning America*.

May 5, 1987

Television coverage begins of congressional hearings into charges that the Reagan administration diverted funds from covert arms sales to Iran in order to fund the anti-Sandinista "Contra" rebels in Nicaragua.

June 9, 1987

National Amusements Inc., a movie theatre chain controlled by Bostonian Sumner Redstone, closes on its \$3.4 billion acquisition of Viacom Inc., whose holdings include the cable channels Showtime, The Movie Channel, MTV, Lifetime, and Nickelodeon.

September 5, 1987

After thirty years, *American Bandstand* ends its run on ABC, with Dick Clark still serving as host. Two weeks later, the show returns to TV via weekly syndication. Eighteen months later, the program briefly switches to the USA cable network, where it at last dies in the fall of 1989.

his underworld operations. In contrast to the more style-oriented *Miami Vice*, the *Crime Story* plots were complex, understandable, and engaging; the characters were authentic and believable; and the overall package was retro yet still cutting edge.

Working with Fred Silverman's production company, NBC also brought a genuine 1960s figure back into the crime-fighting game: Andy Griffith. Following an eye-catching turn as a prosecutor in the 1984 miniseries *Fatal Vision*, Griffith was cast as disarming Atlanta-based defense attorney Ben Matlock in a TV movie pilot that played in the spring of 1986 (about a month before the highly touted "Return to Mayberry" aired, also on NBC). The fall *Matlock* series was an immediate hit, with Griffith effectively retailoring his familiar Southern character into a crafty but charming courtroom persona. The success of *Matlock*, along with the continuing revival of Raymond Burr's *Perry Mason* (also from Silverman's company), demonstrated once again that viewers would welcome their old favorites, in the right vehicles. Eventually, *Matlock* ended up running longer than the original *Andy Griffith Show* itself.

With *Hill Street Blues* rolling into its seventh (and final) season, producer Steven Bochco brought in a worthy successor, *L.A. Law*. Created with *Cagney and Lacey* writer-producer Terry Louise Fisher (a former lawyer from the office of the L.A. district attorney), *L.A. Law* examined a wide range of contemporary issues from the comfortable perspective of a prestigious downtown law firm (the opening sequence, showing the license plate "LA LAW" on the back of a fancy Jaguar, immediately let you know you were in a world of conspicuous consumption). The firm's original lineup included crusty senior partner Leland McKenzie (Richard Dysart), high-strung managing partner Douglas Brackman, Jr. (Alan Rachins), good-looking litigation partner Michael Kuzak (Harry Hamlin), sleazy domestic relations partner Arnie Becker (Corbin Bernsen), levelheaded litigation partner Ann Kelsey (Jill Eikenberry), nebbish tax partner Stuart Markowitz (Michael Tucker, in real life married to Eikenberry), eager associate Abby Perkins (Michele Greene), and suave litigation attorney Victor Sifuentes (Jimmy Smits). In court, they often faced off against icy assistant district attorney Grace Van Owen (Susan Dey, formerly Laurie in *The Partridge Family*). Because the characters in *L.A. Law* (unlike

those in *Hill Street Blues*) did not begin every episode wondering if they would still be alive by the end of the day, there was time to discuss nuances and implications of legal strategies. In doing so, the series displayed a knack for making legal issues understandable, more like engaging puzzles rather than dull discourses.

Each episode of *L.A. Law* followed multiple cases, ranging from divorce and taxes to fraud and murder. This variety allowed the different characters time in court in their special areas. Jimmy Smits was particularly strong on this stage, with his Victor Sifuentes character providing the true heart for the series. At the same time, his portrayal also deftly shook up the complacent casting cliché that all too often seemed to relegate ethnic characters either to the police line-up or to their own self-referential circles. Without surrendering a bit of his ethnic identity, the Hispanic Sifuentes confidently and successfully walked the establishment corridors of power, knowing full well that he was always under scrutiny. In one episode, such scrutiny was literally true as Kuzak asked Sifuentes to act as the plaintiff's attorney in a consulting firm's videotaped mock trial for a liabilities case the firm was defending. Taking one look at Sifuentes (sporting an earring), the consulting firm thought it had an easy win, but by the end of the presentation it was Victor who had won over the mock jury (with one of the consultants shedding a sympathetic tear).

L.A. Law also included large doses of soapy interpersonal developments, beginning with Kuzak wearing an ape suit courting Van Owen, and Markowitz wowing Kelsey in bed with a technique he called the Venus Butterfly (the specifics of which were never revealed). Over time, particularly as the show underwent many cast changes during its eight-year run, these personal plots grew to be at least as important as the cases themselves, and often more so.

If there was any programming uncertainty at NBC, it was the realization that one day the current big draws (especially *Cosby*) would run their course. Would the network be sufficiently nimble (and lucky) to find equally strong successors? The increasingly popular *Cheers* was even a cause for concern because the series finished the 1986-87 season with the departure of Shelley Long, thus breaking up the show's key character relationship. Though the season finale was a spectacular success (Diane Chambers left Sam Malone and the Cheers bar to go write a novel), could the series continue to draw the next fall without the on-again/off-again relationship between Diane and Sam? Would such a change work?

Such concerns were part of the cycle of success. It was often easier for a network to develop a varied and innovative line-up outside the spotlight of being number one. Practically speaking, a network carrying a full complement of hit shows had fewer open slots for new ventures. There was also greater corporate pressure to continue turning out more of whatever formula was working. Ironically, this tension between the familiar and the fresh often meant that viewers, critics, and producers looking for something a little bit different might find more opportunities at the lower-rated networks. Starting in the 1986-87 season, they had one more such venue when the Fox network took to the airwaves.

Following its spring 1986 unveiling announcement, Rupert Murdoch's Fox network began easing into programming at a slow and deliberate pace. With only ninety-five stations to start (far fewer and less prominent than those affiliated with ABC, CBS, and NBC), Fox strove to project its own distinctive "attitude" to help make its mark. This meant that, even while working within familiar genres, Fox programs would be deliberately different. The network's first offering embodied that spirit: *The Late Show* (starring Joan Rivers), a one-hour Monday-through-Friday entry into the late night talk show game that began October 9, 1986 (with guests Cher, David Lee Roth, Pee-Wee Herman, and Elton

John). Though comedian Joan Rivers had been the permanent guest host for Johnny Carson's *Tonight* show on NBC since 1983, their styles were worlds apart. In contrast to the relaxed and affable Carson, Rivers was a non-stop talker with an "in your face," gossipy style. She not only took her own act "to the edge," she also egged on her guests. In short, she was the perfect fit for Fox. Having Rivers leave *Tonight* for this new show gave Fox the best of both worlds: a familiar face with credibility from her association with Carson, yet also a clear alternative to that same competition.

Fox did not begin prime time programming until six months later, near the end of the regular 1986-87 season, starting with just one day (Sunday). The first Fox prime time shows included four comedies (*Married ... with Children*, *The Tracey Ullman Show*, *Duet*, and *Mr. President*) and a cop show (*21 Jump Street*). Even then, all the series did not arrive on the first day (April 5). Instead, the premieres stretched out for a month (*Mr. President* had its debut May 3), with the new series easing in week by week using such gimmicks as repeating the same episode multiple times in the same night or in subsequent weeks. This scheduling was itself in radical contrast to the routine of the established networks and was more akin to cable's approach. In addition, these repeats helped deal with the fact that Fox did not yet have all that much programming. Yet from the beginning, Fox, when it could, deliberately attempted to do something different from the competition.

21 Jump Street was aimed squarely at teens, with producer Stephen J. Cannell deftly combining elements of *The Mod Squad* and *Miami Vice* with flashy editing and a rock music soundtrack. A youthful squad of performers (including Johnny Depp, Holly Robinson, and, later, Richard Grieco) played undercover cops dedicated to helping teens in difficult situations (drugs, sex, violence). They operated out of an abandoned chapel at 21 Jump Street in Los Angeles, working under the tutelage of Capt. Richard Jenko (Frederic Forrest) and, later, Capt. Adam Fuller (Steven Williams). The characters were designed to connect with kids, and the actors even delivered sincere public service announcements as part of the show. Naturally, the music used on the series was consciously aimed at teens and, not surprisingly, also turned up in a compilation record album.

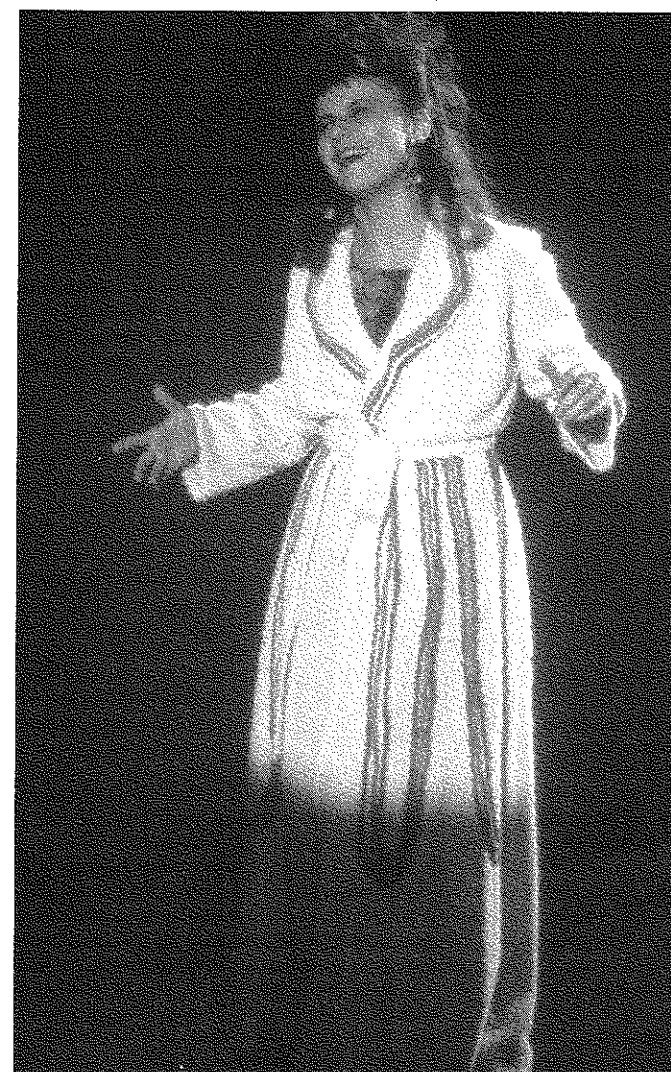
The Tracey Ullman Show took the traditional mainstays of a comedy-variety sketch show and then added a sly new twist to the entire proceeding. It was a brassy, confident stance for someone who was a virtual unknown (at least, to U.S. television audiences). Actually, the thirty-two-year-old Ullman was an established star on British television. There she had demonstrated her versatility in variety with a pair of BBC sketch shows (*Three of a Kind* and *A Kick Up the Eighties*), excelling not only at character types and accents but also in singing; she landed three top ten songs in the British music charts, with one ("They Don't Know") becoming a U.S. top ten hit in 1984. In the viciously manipulative comedy series on Britain's ITV network, *Girls on Top*, Ullman played a pathological liar and pseudo-hypochondriac sparring with her equally devious London flatmates (played by Ruby Wax, Dawn French, and Jennifer Saunders).

As Ullman began appearing in feature films (including Paul McCartney's "Give My Regards to Broad Street" and Meryl Streep's "Plenty"), she connected with *Cheers* producer James L. Brooks. In developing the variety series for Fox, they assembled a versatile support troupe of comparative unknowns: Dan Castellana, Joe Malone, Sam McMurray, and Julie Kavner (who, from her stint as younger sister Brenda on *Rhoda*, was the only truly familiar face). They also added short, irreverent, self-contained drop-in animation bits, many featuring the Simpson family (the brainchild of artist Matt Groening, creator of the off-beat weekly comic strip

"Life in Hell"), with Castellana providing the voice for dunder-head father Homer Simpson and Kavner as the voice of his wife, Marge. The entire package was wrapped with a catchy rock theme and an anything-goes attitude.

The skits each stood on their own and allowed Ullman to display her amazing ability to totally inhabit a character, whether it was a shy spinster still living with her "mum" or a confidently self-centered Yuppie having her way with the world. The program also had an ingrained rock and roll sensibility far beyond the usual approach of including musical performers as guest stars. Songs would become part of the routines. Ullman herself usually tackled the vocals, sometimes using the entire sketch as a setup to the song as a punch line. (For example, a sketch about painting led to the 1965 hit by The Rolling Stones, "Paint It, Black.") In a final dig at the established variety format, Ullman replaced the usual obsequious concluding "thank you" to the audience with a quick ending bit, coming out in her bathrobe to thank the unseen studio audience and to tell them to "Just go home!"

By far the longest lasting of the new Fox shows was the sitcom *Married ... with Children*, which followed the woeful life of the working-class Bundy family. Though each episode began with the



Though Tracey Ullman became totally immersed in many different characters in her skits, she closed each show as herself. (*The Tracey Ullman Show* © 1988 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)

cheery Frank Sinatra recording of "Love and Marriage" set against scenes of the Chicago skyline, the series took to heart the song's warning that love led to marriage. It then reached some unpleasant conclusions: Marriage wrecked your dreams, saddled you with children, and then it was all downhill. This was the epitome of Fox "attitude," and also the setup for a wickedly funny program.

Married ... with Children consistently skewered familiar situations, starting with the warm and fuzzy view of families that had come to dominate television in the wake of *Cosby* and *Family Ties*. In contrast, Al and Peg Bundy (Ed O'Neill and Katey Sagal) felt stuck in a dead-end life. (He was a shoe salesman and she was a dysfunctional housewife.) They especially resented their kids, Kelly and Bud (Christina Applegate and David Faustino), who, in turn, could not believe they had been dealt such a loser life. None of them made any attempt to hide their feelings and, in fact, they came to pepper their ritual exchanges with zingers that only family members could direct at each other. In that spirit, a send-up of the film "It's a Wonderful Life" had Al looking at his own life with his guardian angel (played by burly comic Sam Kinison) after a brush with death. Ultimately, Al chose to live, but not because the world would be a better place if he was there. Rather, Al discovered that everyone would be happier if he was *not* there and he knew his family did not deserve that.

The only thing the Bundy family found worse than their lives was dealing with the rest of the world. They suspected that everyone was deliberately out to get them and they were absolutely right, suffering at the hands of government bureaucrats, inflexible corporate types, and incompetent service people. Worst of all were their neighbors, Marcy and Steve Rhoades (Amanda Bearse and David Garrison), who were well off, not burdened by children, and had a great sex life. *Married ... with Children* consistently took its characters to exaggerated extremes, yet in doing so the series ultimately made them more identifiable and, oddly, more believable. Anyone at any age who was ever frustrated by life could easily identify with these characters.

Sex was a constant in the series, but it was usually presented as just one more conflict in a non-stop battle between men and women. Al hated the drudgery of his tired sex life with Peg and much preferred to look at gorgeous models at the local "nudie bar" or in the latest pinup magazine. Peg dreamed of great sex (but was stuck with Al), Bud fantasized about it (often with an inflatable model), and Kelly successfully used her jail-bait sex appeal in her high school social circles. Though Marcy and Steve enjoyed sex, that did not stop them from splitting. When Marcy later took a trophy second husband, Jefferson D'Arcy (Ted McGinley), it was just for the sex. This sophomoric attitude toward sex was admittedly crude but it also served to tear through Hollywood's mystique about "making love." It was just sex.

This brash, ribald, often crude tone offended some viewers, but it attracted many as well. While sexual innuendo and sexual themes were a staple of many shows on the existing networks, it was only on Fox that sex was treated in such an up-front and matter-of-fact manner.

None of the Fox shows were bona fide hits that season. The network did not yet have a sufficiently strong lineup of affiliates to reach the same viewer levels as the established networks, so Fox's programs were more ratings footnotes than real competition. Many of its early series came and went quickly and quietly, without garnering much attention. *The Late Show* fizzled after the initial curiosity phase passed, and Joan Rivers herself was gone from that program by mid-May 1987. Black comic Arsenio Hall was one of several replacements that stepped in as host for several months, and *The Late Show* began to take on a more hip, urban feel. But that change came too late and continued low ratings killed the show in 1988.

Yet, for all its early failures, Fox was able to connect with some parts of the viewing audience. Average viewers of *Murder, She Wrote* might not have cared for (or even been aware of) *21 Jump Street*, but teens noticed. Hollywood's creative community quickly took note of Tracey Ullman's show (nominating it for an Emmy in its first season), while *Married ... with Children*'s growing reputation for crude humor soon made it a target for TV watchdogs that launched an unsuccessful boycott of the show's sponsors. Three talked-about series in one month was not bad for any network.

By the end of the 1986-87 season, Fox had established a beachhead in the highly competitive TV network landscape. Compared to the already-existing networks, it was barely a network at all. Fox offered no sports. No news. No morning or afternoon programming. Even when it added a second night (Saturday) in the summer of 1987, Fox still seemed more a high-powered syndication service than a fully functioning network on a par with ABC, CBS, NBC, or even PBS. In some ways, that was a conveniently helpful limitation, winning the network exemptions from having to adhere to FCC rules on program ownership imposed on the full-fledged networks. Yet this gradual ramp-up also made business sense because it kept Fox from spreading itself too thin by expanding its programming too quickly.

The key point was that Fox had managed to do what had previously been regarded as virtually impossible. It got on the air as a fourth commercial broadcast television network. Not via cable or through some special coded satellite dish, but as free TV, just like the established networks. Though the FCC had certainly not pictured Al Bundy, Joan Rivers, and Johnny Depp when it worked for decades to encourage alternative television offerings, in fact that was exactly what it had received. Alternatives. A new network. A different attitude, with all of its consequences.

1987-88 SEASON

48. The Boomer Years

MEMBERS OF THE POST-WORLD WAR II baby boom generation had spent virtually their entire lives accompanied by television. From their earliest days they had been pitched to and courted by programmers and advertisers, who were eager for their loyalty and influence on family spending. Yet while the shows aimed at this generation might feature young on-screen performers, the behind-the-scenes writing and producing talent was often from older, established generations whose experiences growing up drew on memories of vaudeville in the 1920s, the Great Depression in the 1930s, and World War II in the 1940s.

By the 1980s, enough writers, producers, and executives from the baby boom generation had come of age within the entertainment industry to be in positions of authority, and they were able to project their view of the world onto the screen. Rather than looking back to the big band era, Little Orphan Annie radio serials, World War II battle reports, and U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt, they cast their memories to The Beatles on *Ed Sullivan*, the "Summer of Love," Vietnam War body counts, and U.S. President John Kennedy. In viewer demographics, members of the baby boom generation were also now sufficiently established in jobs and households to be the ones to spend the money. They did not have to ask mom and dad to buy a product. They *were* mom and dad.

Baby boomer Brandon Tartikoff's successful lineup on NBC had done well with this lucrative advertising demographic. In part, this success came from having hugely popular series that drew audiences of all types. However, it also extended to particular series such as *St. Elsewhere*, which drew advertising support more for the upscale quality of its audience rather than for its total ratings numbers. For the new season, ABC, the third-place network, took deliberate aim at this audience with the self-reflective drama of *thirtysomething*.

Created by Edward Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz (who had written for the low-key 1970s series *Family*), *thirtysomething* aimed to mine the inherent drama in everyday life. No screeching car chases. No exploding oil rigs. No international intrigue. Instead, the two creators looked at their own lives and immediate concerns and translated them into characters and situations that felt familiar and accessible. They even set the show in their old hometown of Philadelphia. The stories centered on two couples and three singles in their thirties (the prime baby boomer age in the 1980s). Friends Michael Steadman and Elliot Weston (Ken Olin and Timothy Busfield) had left lucrative positions at a large advertising agency to start their own company, balancing long hours on

the job with family life. Michael's wife, Hope (Mel Harris), was a Princeton graduate who "temporarily" put aside her high-powered career aspirations to raise their new baby. Elliot's wife, Nancy (Patricia Wettig), was an aspiring artist with "flower child" sensibilities who also stayed at home, taking care of two school-age children. The families were comfortable but not super wealthy, sharing their everyday concerns with singles Ellyn Warren (Polly Draper), Hope's "career woman" friend; Gary Shepherd (Peter Horton), Michael's college professor friend; and Melissa Steadman (Melanie Mayron), Michael's sex-obsessed cousin and an expert photographer. These characters were simultaneously confident yet uncertain, upwardly mobile yet nostalgic, focused on career yet endlessly introspective. They wondered about every decision, no matter how mundane, and constantly compared their actions with each other's. The result was an emphasis on the routine moments of life (working late, time with the kids, looking for love) mixed with a touch of soap opera (inevitable relationship tensions) and punctuated by occasional dramatic turns (such as Nancy facing the prospect of cancer).

For some viewers, the package worked perfectly. They easily identified with the sentiment behind the ABC print ad for the series that observed: "Happiness is envying your single friends less than they envy you." Others found the angst of the characters whiney and self-indulgent—after all, they were not exactly scrubbing floors and digging ditches. What was their problem? No matter the response, though, it was clear that *thirtysomething* had chosen a distinctive point of view for its stories, giving TV-savvy baby boomers something a little different with very familiar elements.

Surprisingly, *thirtysomething* was not alone in such ambitions. Throughout the schedule there were a number of high quality dramas and comedies that took innovative approaches to their subjects. At CBS, Stephen J. Cannell went from the undercover teens of *21 Jump Street* even deeper into the world of organized crime with *Wiseguy*. Ken Wahl played Vinnie Terranova, a tough, street-smart undercover government agent who infiltrated criminal organizations by posing as "one of them." Even Vinnie's own family believed that he had "gone bad" after he served time in prison (arranged as a necessary cover by the government's O.C.B., the Organized Crime Bureau). With such street credibility, Vinnie could do serious damage to the criminal organizations he infiltrated with some carefully timed moves. However, if he was discovered, he was dead. That left Vinnie in constant peril, with only limited backup from the O.C.B. He was really on his own.

FALL 1987 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
M	MacGyver		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC
	FRANK'S PLACE	Kate & Allie	Newhart	Designing Women	Cagney & Lacey		CBS
O	local						FOX
	Air	Valerie's Family	NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC
T	Who's The Boss	Growing Pains	Moonlighting		THIRTYSOMETHING		ABC
	Houston Knights	JAKE AND THE FATMAN		THE LAW AND HARRY MCGRAW			CBS
U	local						FOX
	Matlock	J.J. STARBUCK		Crime Story			NBC
W	Perfect Strangers	Head Of The Class	HOOPERMAN	THE 'SLAP' MAXWELL STORY	Dynasty		ABC
	THE OLDEST ROOKIE		Magnum, P.I.		The Equalizer		CBS
E	local						FOX
	Highway To Heaven		A YEAR IN THE LIFE		St. Elsewhere		NBC
T	Sledge Hammer	The Charmings	ABC Thursday Night Movie				ABC
	TOUR OF DUTY		WISEGUY		Knots Landing		CBS
R	local						FOX
	The Cosby Show	A DIFFERENT WORLD	Cheers	Night Court	L.A. Law		NBC
F	FULL HOUSE	I MARRIED DORA	Max Headroom		20/20		ABC
	BEAUTY AND THE BEAST		Dallas		Falcon Crest		CBS
I	local						FOX
	Rags To Riches	Miami Vice		PRIVATE EYE			NBC
S	ONCE A HERO		Onara		Hotel		ABC
	My Sister Sam	EVERYTHING'S RELATIVE	LEG WORK		West 57th		CBS
A	Werewolf	Beans Baxter	SECOND CHANCE	Duet	local		FOX
	Facts Of Life	227	The Golden Girls	Amen	Hunter		NBC
S	Disney Sunday Movie		Spenser: For Hire		DOLLY	BUCK JAMES	ABC
	60 Minutes	Murder, She Wrote		CBS Sunday Night Movie			CBS
U	21 Jump Street		Married...With Children	WOMEN IN PRISON	Tracey Ullman Show	Mr. President	FOX
	Our House	Family Ties	MY TWO DADS	NBC Sunday Night At The Movies			NBC

Such a setup meant that it would not have been creditable to put Vinnie into a different assignment each week—surely even typically dumb TV bad guys would catch on eventually. Instead the series was structured into a limited number of story arcs of five to ten episodes each, following the same assignment over an extended period. (There were fewer than a dozen such arcs over the three-year run of the series.) Apart from giving individual stories time to develop, this also allowed a particularly strong lineup of guest performers. They could turn in virtuoso performances more detailed and expansive than in a feature film without the potential typecasting of being a television series regular. Some of these included Ray Sharkey as Atlantic City mobster Sonny Steelgrave; Kevin Spacey and Joan Severance as demented international smugglers Mel and Susan Profitt; and Jerry Lewis and Ron Silver as garment industry merchants Eli and David Sternberg, entangled with mobster Rick Pinzolo (played by Stanley Tucci). Vinnie dealt with them, and many others, as part of a highly charged duplicitous world where betrayal could come at anytime from anywhere. From his own government. From his own family. Even from himself. It was an engrossing presentation and a surprisingly dark slice of American life, especially for prime time television.

Another new CBS drama offered a completely different take on battling crime. *Beauty and the Beast* was a shamelessly romantic fairy tale, with New York City attorney Catherine Chandler (Linda Hamilton) discovering love and another world deep beneath the

streets of Manhattan. Her paramour was named Vincent (Ron Perlman), a powerful man-beast with the facial features of a lion and the soul of a poet. He first spotted Catherine left for dead after an attack in Central Park, took her to his underground world to recover, and then, in the best romance novel tradition, they fell in love. Over the course of the series they protected each other from evil forces both above and below ground while dreaming of an eventual happy life together. With its romantic and poetic atmosphere, *Beauty and the Beast* was unlike anything else on television.

CBS also slotted one of the first TV war dramas in years, *Tour of Duty*, breaking through apprehensions about revisiting Vietnam (a painful episode for baby boomers). The series followed the exploits of Bravo Company in 1967 as its men (including Terence Knox as Sergeant Zeke Anderson) attempted to deal with the peculiar challenges of fighting that controversial war. The series was gritty and honest (with the dark Rolling Stones song "Paint It Black" as the opening theme), though its earnest portrayal of the era sometimes seemed to be a throwback to such 1960s series as *Combat*. It was ABC later in the season that best captured the complicated nuances of the first television war with *China Beach*.

Premiering as a late spring 1988 series, *China Beach* followed the Vietnam War from a very different perspective, that of the women at a hospital and recreational facility near the U.S. base at Da Nang, on the South China Sea. Conscientious nurse Colleen McMurphy (Dana Delany) and manipulative hooker K. C. Koloski

(Marg Helgenberger) were the key characters, living in two very different worlds yet both constantly facing situations that took them through a roller coaster of conflicting emotions and choices. Though McMurphy was responsible, she also did not hesitate to pursue the joy of sex. K. C.'s life revolved around sex, but she also knew how to maximize other wartime opportunities for profit. As with *M*A*S*H*, the hospital setting allowed for life-and-death situations and a constant stream of guest characters. The entertainment environment of the recreational facility, which featured personalities such as radio star Wayloo Marie (Megan Gallagher), fit perfectly into the media-rich texture of the series. Equally important, *China Beach* was capable of moving effortlessly from straight drama to evocative mood piece to symbolic juxtaposition to comic relief—all in the same episode. Rather than play out all the character threads in strict chronology, the series sometimes skipped forward. "Fever" (directed by Diane Keaton) jumped to the 1970s. Other stories zipped straight into the contemporary 1980s. They then flashed back to the past, filtering events in Vietnam through the knowledge of what was to come. One of the most effective episodes ("Vets") incorporated on-camera observations by real-life Vietnam veterans into "flashbacks" from the fictional storylines. If *M*A*S*H* had been done as an hour show, it might have turned out close to the deft mix of character, narrative, style, and experimentation in *China Beach*.

*M*A*S*H*, of course, had shown how the half-hour form could regularly shift the balance in particular episodes from a comedy with dramatic elements to a drama with comic elements. Though the show had a laugh track, even that was banned from the operating room and from particularly intense scenes. Since *M*A*S*H*'s heyday, there had been a number of attempts to push sitcoms even further from their traditional domain, such as *United States*, a darkly grim 1980 marriage comedy from former *M*A*S*H* producer Larry Gelbart. More recently (May 1987), NBC had turned over the post-*Cheers* slot to veteran producer Jay Tarses (*The Bob Newhart Show*) for a spring and summer run of *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd*. Blair Brown played the title character, a thirty-something divorced woman living solo in a rent-controlled Manhattan apartment and dealing with the everyday details of life, love, family, and career. The program was a quirky blend of low-key musings, odd occurrences, and simple complications. Though the series dispensed with a laugh track, *Molly Dodd* was humorous, earning it a return spot in the spring of 1988.

By then, *Molly Dodd* was joining a handful of other half-hour sitcoms attempting to redefine the balance between comedy and drama. Generally running without a laugh track, these "dramedies" (as they were dubbed) were among the distinctive series of the 1987-88 season that were willing to take a chance on executing visions that were just a little bit different.

On CBS there was *Frank's Place*, with Tim Reid as star and executive producer (along with Hugh Wilson from *WKRP in Cincinnati*). Already familiar to viewers from roles in two previous CBS series (*Venus Flytrap* on *WKRP* and *Downtown Brown* on *Simon and Simon*), Reid brought a sense of comfortable credibility to the role of Bostonian Frank Parrish, a professor of Renaissance history who unexpectedly found himself owner of a small New Orleans Creole restaurant, the *Chez Louisiane*, when he inherited it upon the death of his estranged father. A Northern Yankee in the Deep South, Frank was both puzzled and fascinated by this exotic new world, so much so that by the end of the first episode he was ready to believe that perhaps it was a touch of voodoo magic that kept him from successfully returning home to New England. Maybe head waitress Miss Marie (Frances E. Williams) had cast a spell and that was why suddenly his Boston home was wrecked, his

girlfriend left him, and his office burned. Or, maybe what really kept him in town was his attraction to Hannah Griffin (Daphne Maxwell Reid, his real-life wife), a mortician and embalmer at the neighborhood funeral parlor. The series followed Frank's subsequent attempts to fit in, not only as a fish-out-of-water big-city single guy, but also as a son trying to make sense out of his dad's world after a lifetime of separation.

Frank's Place also built upon Bill Cosby's powerhouse sitcom success that had broken the long-time TV stereotype of black characters too often placed in lower class or domestic "housekeeper" settings. In fact, *The Cosby Show* was now the television series that offered the era's snapshot of the American dream perfectly fulfilled (1980s style), much as programs such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver* had done in the 1950s. Yet while *The Cosby Show* remained focused on upscale Manhattan family life, *Frank's Place* ventured into adult single life, drawing from a variety of different social and economic circles. As with *The Cosby Show*, *Frank's Place* proudly displayed a deep and detailed sense of black history, but with a funkier New Orleans flavor. In particular, the New Orleans setting allowed for some unusual storylines that were different from the tried-and-true New York or California settings of most sitcoms (white or black oriented). The series also dared to get into some touchy issues, such as racial prejudices among some blacks. For example, in one story Frank found himself courted for membership in an exclusive black men's social club, only to discover he was being used as the "token" dark-skinned black in a group dominated by blacks with fairer skin. Yet even with such topical angles, *Frank's Place* always remained anchored in basic entertainment and human insight by Reid's superb sense of comic timing. The ultimate draw in *Frank's Place* was Frank, as he attempted to loosen up and strike a balance between trying to run his own establishment and allowing it (and New Orleans) to run him.

ABC also used this season to dive into experimentation with half-hour comedies. The network had lured hit drama producer Steven Bochco with an exclusive multiple-series deal, and one of his first new offerings was a police show dramedy, *Hooperman*. Former *Three's Company* lead John Ritter played the title character, a San Francisco cop who had a demanding boss (played by Barbara Bosson, a former *Hill Street Blues* regular) and a quirky home life (*Hooperman* managed a rundown apartment building left to him by his former landlady), and who loved to play the saxophone (allowing for jazzy interludes). ABC also looked to the dramedy form as the ideal fit for Dabney Coleman, who excelled at selfish, manipulative, and self-centered characters (as in the film "9 to 5" and in his previous short-lived NBC series, *Buffalo Bill*). *The 'Slap' Maxwell Story* cast him as an egocentric sportswriter at a second-rate newspaper.

The Wonder Years, ABC's most effective dramedy that year, arrived midway in the season. After a heavily promoted premiere in the choice post-Super Bowl slot, *The Wonder Years* followed up with a short six-episode spring run. The series returned for its first full season in the fall of 1988 and, over the course of 115 episodes, presented the story of white, suburban, middle-class family life in the U.S. from 1968 to 1973. It was all seen through the eyes of Kevin Arnold (Fred Savage), who went from junior high to his high school junior year during the series run, observing not only his own concerns but also the dynamics of his family, his friends, and the world around him. What set the series apart was the use of an off-screen narrator, Kevin as an adult (voiced by Daniel Stern, uncredited). This technique allowed the series a remarkable level of insight and perspective that did not come off as forced. It was really the adult Kevin remembering what had happened, filling in nuances that he might have observed but not really understood as a

August 16, 1987

An exhibition match between the Chicago Bears and the Miami Dolphins inaugurates ESPN's new three-year, \$55 million contract with the National Football League, the last of the major U.S. sports leagues to expand its TV coverage to cable. The deal includes eight regular-season Sunday night NFL games during the second half of the football season, along with the usually ignored Pro Bowl all-star game and four pre-season contests.

August 25, 1987

For \$50 million, NBC agrees to sell its radio network to burgeoning radio program producer Westwood One (which previously purchased the Mutual radio network in 1985). Westwood will lease the use of the NBC name as it takes over operations. Within a year, NBC also sells its radio O&Os in New York, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., effectively ending its sixty-two-year radio history.

September 11, 1987

The CBS network goes dark for seven minutes. First, the network's live coverage of the U.S. Open women's tennis semi-finals runs two minutes into the scheduled time for Dan Rather's live evening newscast. Then Rather (steamed that sports would intrude on his air time) is down the hall attempting to reach his boss by telephone to complain when the tennis coverage ends. With Rather off the set, the news could not begin, so CBS sends blank air to its affiliates. Finally, Rather returns to begin an abbreviated edition of the *CBS Evening News*.

September 20, 1987

NBC adds a ninety-minute version of *Today* to its Sunday morning schedule, hosted by Boyd Matson and Maria Shriver.

December 7, 1987

Remote Control (MTV). Sliding away from being a twenty-four-hour music video service, six-year-old MTV offers its first game show, an irreverent quizzer that looks at television and pop culture trivia through a rock fan's eyes. Ken Ober hosts, with sidekick Colin Quinn.

child. This years-later distance also made dwelling on the mundane details of everyday life appear less self-indulgent than it did on *thirtysomething*. Such details were touchstones to the past and, seen through adult eyes, they could be viewed with a more knowing sense of humor. One narrative device was to have the adult Kevin eloquently describe a situation with what he had *wanted* to say at the time, then the scene would play out with what the young Kevin blurted out back then, in words far less profound or poetic. The use of nostalgic period music also worked, as part of associated memories from days that were simultaneously in the distant past, yet as fresh as yesterday.

Stories in *The Wonder Years* covered the expected topics of growing up: school, friendship, siblings, learning to drive, and, of course, girls. Winnie (Danica McKellar) was Kevin's first love, Paul (Josh Saviano) was his best buddy, and the three of them experienced together the ups-and-downs of youthful discovery. Kevin's older sister, Karen (Olivia d'Abo), went through "all that hippie stuff" (protests and love beads), even moving in with her boyfriend Michael (David Schwimmer) before they were married. Kevin's older brother, Wayne (Jason Hervey), "tortured" Kevin

mercilessly (or so he remembered it), but was also eager to make his own mark, landing a job out of high school at their dad's company. Kevin's parents, Jack and Norma (Dan Lauria and Alley Mills), were a believable combination of concern and authority, with the family confrontations (especially involving Karen) perfectly epitomizing the "generation gap" of the era. Kevin's observations about his parents benefited the most from the "looking back" perspective. He could see how frustrated his dad was with his own life, which had not turned out the way he had hoped it would. Even at angry moments, Kevin could see, in retrospect, the conflicting emotions of love, fear, and disappointment in his dad's eyes. In a rarity for television, the final episodes of the series wrapped up the story, with the voice-over narration explaining what happened to everybody.

Ultimately, there was nothing extraordinary about the life of the Arnold family during this era, and that was the point. Variations of the same sort of stories had unfolded in many other U.S. households in the late 1960s. The grown-up Kevin acknowledged as much in the opening episode, noting that the relatively stable and secure suburban setting led many to think that nothing of interest occurred there. But, the adult Kevin pointed out, that was not a fair observation. Those living in the suburbs had their own crises to deal with, which seemed as real and difficult to them as anyone else's might be. By keeping such concerns close to the heart, *The Wonder Years* truly succeeded in capturing the inherent human drama of daily living in that era, presenting an "inside" view of the much-vaunted 1960s from those who had gone through it.

Of all the innovative and creative shows that arrived during the 1987-88 season, only *The Wonder Years* landed in the final top ten listing for that season. Or in any subsequent season. Though these dramas and comedies collectively had shown that television was still capable of high quality production, these products did not translate into chart-topping ratings. At best, they were more akin to such series as *St. Elsewhere*, prestige productions capable of reaching more limited though desirable niche audiences. That was fine if network programmers would be satisfied with such performance. In some cases they were, at least for a few seasons. However, if they were seeking the next *Cosby Show* or *Cheers*, they were doomed to disappointment. Most of the year's innovative series only lasted about three seasons. *Frank's Place* and *'Slap' Maxwell* were gone after one. After its second spring run on NBC, *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd* was banished to cable, appearing now and again for two additional seasons on Lifetime. Though *thirtysomething* managed to last four seasons, it changed part of the central dynamic during its second year, adding a more mainstream *Dallas*-type villain (David Clennon as Miles Drentell).

For most viewers, though, television for the 1987-88 season was business as usual as they returned to their long-running favorites. *The Cosby Show*. *Cheers*. *Growing Pains*. *Who's the Boss?* *60 Minutes*. *Murder, She Wrote*. *ALF*. For many, the biggest question of the new season was how the new female lead on *Cheers* would fit in after Shelley Long's departure. New bar owner Rebecca Howe (Kirstie Alley) did just fine, providing a new type of male-female interaction with former owner Sam Malone, who was now just another *Cheers* employee. *Cheers* remained a top-five hit, usually landing just behind *Cosby* and also behind the most successful new show of the season in the ratings, *A Different World*.

There was no doubt as to why *A Different World* was an instant success. The program occupied the choice time period immediately after *The Cosby Show*, replacing *Family Ties* (which was moved to Sunday). There was also no doubt why the series had landed that golden slot. *A Different World* was a direct spinoff from *The Cosby Show*'s production company, following Huxtable daughter Denise

(Lisa Bonet) to her dad's alma mater, the predominantly black Hillman College. Some of the other Huxtables visited in the first few episodes and, like *The Cosby Show*, the stories themselves offered a wide variety of positive and uplifting black role models. Yet, unlike *The Cosby Show* (which had instantly gelled as a Bill Cosby monologue come to life), *A Different World* was not built around a seasoned stand-up comic. Instead Bonet faced the familiar problems of a supporting character thrust into the lead spotlight, and the series drifted into an ill-defined ensemble form. It was not a good fit. As the number two show on television, though, *A Different World* was given the time to right itself. In its second season, the series took shape under new producer Debbie Allen who reworked the cast and stories with a snappier style. Lisa Bonet left and eventually returned to the well-defined ensemble mix of *The Cosby Show*. This allowed Whitley Gilbert (Jasmine Guy), who had stolen the show from day one, to officially become the main focus. The series ran for six seasons, though its ratings success continued to depend on its coupling with *The Cosby Show*. When that program ended its run, *A Different World* spent its final year far from the top.

Because its success was so closely linked to *Cosby*, *A Different World* did not offer the networks any clues for future hit formulas. In fact, overall, there were no new breakout network hits, merely hints at what might work. Series such as *thirtysomething* and *The Wonder Years* simply confirmed what they already knew: A small number of such quality programs could succeed on a limited basis. A highly touted vehicle built around country singer Dolly Parton flopped, confirming the belief that prime time variety was still dead. In the spring Fred Silverman's production company once again succeeded in bringing a familiar face to a new setting with *In the Heat of the Night* (based on the 1967 film), casting Carroll O'Connor in Rod Steiger's role as a small-town Southern sheriff. The sitcom *My Two Dads* raised eyebrows (but little viewer interest) with its premise of an odd couple pair of young men (played by Paul Reiser and Greg Evigan) raising a twelve-year-old girl left to their care by the child's deceased mother, who had slept with them both back in college but who had no idea which was the dad. *Full House* offered a far less tawdry-sounding premise and connected with a very young Friday night audience. A cute widower (played by Bob Saget) talked his two buddies into moving in with him to help raise his young girls (including the precocious Michelle, played by twins Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen).

In a completely different direction, the Fox network connected directly with viewers in *America's Most Wanted*, hosted by John Walsh (who had come to prominence when his young son had been kidnapped and murdered a few years before). The program started in February 1988 on local Fox O&O stations, recreating real-life crimes in short vignettes, packaging them along with background conversations with victims and law enforcement officials, and then inviting viewers to call a toll-free number with information to help apprehend the perpetrators. A few days after the first episode, viewer calls led to the capture of one of the FBI's ten most wanted. A few months later, the program was on the entire Fox network.

As all the networks searched for and tinkered with formats aimed at new generations of viewers, an old baby boomer favorite made a triumphant return. For the fall of 1987, Gene Roddenberry brought back *Star Trek*. In the eighteen years since NBC had pulled the plug on the series after only three seasons, *Star Trek* had become its own cottage industry. The original 79 episodes played endlessly in rerun syndication. There had been four theatrical features, with the most recent ("Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home," directed by Leonard Nimoy) one of the most successful films of 1986. For Roddenberry, the time seemed right for another run at

television, but on his terms. Rather than subject himself to the capricious scheduling decisions of an established network (which would treat his project as just another fungible commodity), Roddenberry and Paramount created an ad hoc network pitching *Star Trek: The Next Generation* directly to individual stations for first-run syndication. In a canny business arrangement that maximized the value of the new series and the old, stations signing up for *Next Generation* also got the rights for the original *Star Trek* episodes for their market (when next available). After just one season of *Next Generation*, the total *Star Trek* package would reach 100, the preferred episode total for syndication. It was a modest goal. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* far exceeded it. The series ran seven seasons (178 episodes), more than double the run of the original.

Next Generation found clever ways to reconstitute the elements that had worked before. Stories still took place on a ship called the *Enterprise*, but it was now set in the 24th century, seventy-eight years after Captain Kirk. That shift allowed for creditable advances in technology and also established a respectful distance from the

January 25, 1988

During a live interview on the *CBS Evening News*, anchor Dan Rather and Vice President George Bush get into a shouting match over Bush's role in the Iran-Contra scandal. Bush says that judging him just on that one issue would be like judging Rather only on his seven-minute absence from the news anchor chair the previous September.

February 15, 1988

Tanner '88. (HBO). Film director Robert Altman ("MASH") and *Dooniesbury* comic strip creator Garry Trudeau team up to produce an innovative and off-beat short-run cable series taking pot shots at American presidential campaigns. Michael Murphy plays Democratic presidential candidate Jack Tanner, with Cynthia Nixon as his daughter, Alex.

February 21, 1988

"Bring Me the Head of Dobie Gillis." (CBS). Twenty-five years after leaving prime time, the cast of *Dobie Gillis* reunites for a two-hour TV movie. Dobie, now married to Zelda, still has a hankering for Thalia Menninger, now a wealthy widow who actually wants Dobie: dead or alive.

March 7, 1988

Television writers begin a strike against the program production companies, which lasts five months.

April 1, 1988

Douglas Edwards, anchor of a daily CBS newscast since 1946, hosts his last news show before retirement. It is in his regular slot, a sixty-second newsbreak at 11:58 A.M.

May 25, 1988

The final episode of *St. Elsewhere* ("The Last One") concludes with the bizarre implication that all the stories in the series might have been figments of the imagination of Donald Westphall's autistic son, Tommy.

August 1, 1988

The Reverend Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network changes its name to the Family Channel, highlighting the cable channel's move from a full-time religious schedule to one that combines preaching with wholesome "family" entertainment such as reruns of *Bonanza* and *The Waltons*.

original's characters. Kirk had been something of a loose cannon, so new Captain Jean-Luc Picard was cast as someone more in control. Patrick Stewart, with impressive stage credentials that included Britain's Royal Shakespeare Company, was perfect for the role. He not only projected a true air of authority and had a commanding presence, but he was also erudite and literate. In contrast to Kirk, Picard was perfectly comfortable letting his number one officer, William Riker (Jonathan Frakes), lead the various away teams. Humanoid android Data (Brent Spiner) filled the Mr. Spock role of logical advisor haunted by human emotions—though in Data's case, he wanted to be more human, not less. Picard's other counselors included Deanna Troi (Marina Sirtis), who could read emotions; Tasha Yar (Denise Crosby), head of security; Worf (Michael Dorn), a Klingon advisor who later took over security; and Guinan (Whoopi Goldberg), the ship's mysterious bartender. The ship's technical crew included Beverly Crusher (Gates McFadden), head of the medical team; Geordi La Forge (LeVar Burton), a blind helmsman-chief engineer who could see when aided by a special visor; and Miles O'Brien (Colin Meaney), the transporter chief. Unlike the original *Star Trek*, all the members of the support crew were given story showcases that developed their individual characters.

Next Generation also greatly expanded the mythos of the *Star Trek* universe, adding new alien races including the ruthless Borg, which wiped out entire civilizations by absorbing them into a "collective," and the virtually omnipotent Q (John Delancey), who

delighted in toying with the *Enterprise* crew by putting them through various tests (much to the annoyance of Picard). The *Enterprise* also contained a wonderful plot innovation called the holodeck, which created a computer-generated environment aboard the ship, allowing the show's writers to set particular stories anywhere in time or space (as when Data played Sherlock Holmes).

Most important, the quality and variety of the stories on *Next Generation* outshone the inconsistent nature of the 1960s original. There were character studies, interstellar battles, moral fables, and pure speculative science fiction. Patrick Stewart was at the center of many of these delivering truly sublime performances. For example, in "The Inner Light" Picard collapsed on the bridge when an alien mind probe took over his brain. Though still unconscious aboard the ship, in his mind Picard began living an alternative life on another planet. In about twenty minutes (from the point of view of the *Enterprise* crew), he experienced a full life on that other planet, was happily married, had children, then grew old and approached death. When he revived he found himself still on his own starship, but with a second lifetime of memories. That was a story that could not be found anywhere else on television.

Even more than the original, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* embodied Gene Roddenberry's positive vision of the future. Its success opened the doors for many other *Star Trek* ventures, winning viewer support and affection by turning a television treasure from the past into an even more satisfying new experience.

It was the ultimate in baby boomer wish fulfillment.

1988-89 SEASON

49. The Goddess

ROSEANNE BARR WAS NOT a household name going into the fall of 1988. Though she had achieved success in stand-up comedy circles (including appearances on Johnny Carson's *Tonight* show and her own 1987 special on HBO), Barr was a comparative unknown to the general public. Her comic persona—a chunky, unglamorous woman getting by on pointed barbs and biting observations (she sarcastically referred to herself as "the domestic goddess")—set her miles apart from the cool, folksy style of fellow stand-up comic Bill Cosby. Still, Barr was chosen by *Cosby Show* executive producers Marcy Carsey and Tom Werner to star in a new TV sitcom, simply titled *Roseanne*. Like *The Cosby Show*, the focus was on family. Like *The Cosby Show*, traits for the fictional lead character were drawn from the star's stand-up act. And like *The Cosby Show*, the new series was an immediate hit. In its first season, *Roseanne* ended up number two in the overall ratings, right behind *Cosby* and just ahead of *A Different World*. This success gave Carsey and Werner television's top three series, and reemphasized the appeal of casting a stand-up comic as centerpiece to a sitcom.

Yet from the beginning *Roseanne* proved to be anything but a *Cosby* clone. This was family life with all the frayed edges. Barr and John Goodman played Roseanne and Dan Connor, a beefy working-class couple living in Lanford, Illinois, a world quite different from the upscale Manhattan life of *Cosby*'s Huxtables. She was stuck in a boring manufacturing job and he worked as a small-time construction contractor with seasonal cycles of employment. They needed both paychecks to barely stay ahead while maintaining their midwestern bungalow and raising thirteen-year-old Becky (Lecy Goranson), eleven-year-old Darlene (Sara Gilbert), and six-year-old D. J. (Michael Fishman). Roseanne and Dan's big night out typically involved bowling or penny-ante poker, and for their anniversary they might head to a cheap neighborhood restaurant (preferably with a two-for-one coupon). Though love existed in the Connor family, conversations between family members were usually laced with putdowns and dark humor. (For example, after the kids had left for school, Roseanne suggested changing the locks so they could never get back in.) Dan usually played good cop and let Roseanne's flat-voiced sarcasm set the family boundaries, recognizing that she was going to rule the home roost anyway so there was no point in fighting it.

Life imitated art as the real-life Roseanne quickly established that she was the one in charge of *her* program, on and off stage, leading to the first-season departure of Matt Williams, the official

series creator. Producers Carsey and Werner soon opted to take a "hands off" attitude toward the hit show (and its mercurial and temperamental star). Fortunately, though Barr quickly became the unquestioned production force of the series as well as the star, she was also smart enough to let her strong supporting cast shine. Goodman and Gilbert were particularly effective, with the level-headed Dan acting as a calming force in the household and the headstrong and independent Darlene clearly taking after her sharp-tongued mom. That family resemblance also extended to Roseanne's sister, Jackie Harris (Laurie Metcalf), who brought the trials and tribulations of adult single life to the stories. Though already a thirty-something, Jackie was still unmarried and uncertain what she wanted to do when she grew up. She had a long string of disastrous relationships and unfulfilling jobs to illustrate her frustrations. Barr and Metcalf played the sibling connection between Roseanne and Jackie so effectively it seemed as if they really were sisters, alternately sniping and supportive, knowing each other's best and worst sides. Over the course of the series, the two characters ended up running a small business together, a local diner.

Roseanne's world was not pretty. There was hard work. Low pay. Deferred dreams. Serious limitations on the future. And yet the series connected with large numbers of viewers who found its blue collar vision authentic, accessible, and funny. The audience recognized situations from their own day-to-day lives and enjoyed the Connors' minor victories over bosses and bureaucrats. Best of all, the family exchanges had bite and were almost like eavesdropping on real kids and real adults as they argued, teased, bluffed, lied, and occasionally almost hugged. The series was often unflinchingly topical, but the creditable characters made such storylines both believable and humorous. For example, a "just say no to drugs" harangue directed at Darlene's boyfriend David (Johnny Galecki) was tempered by Roseanne's realization that some marijuana she found in the house was actually her own from years back, not his. When the series dealt with gay characters such as Leon Carp (Martin Mull) and Nancy Bartlett (Sandra Bernhard), they received the same sarcastic jibes as anyone else. When Darlene went off to art school (on a scholarship), boyfriend David moved into her off-campus apartment, but only until mom showed up. And when Jackie found herself single and pregnant, the entire Connor clan backed her, and the episodes included shots of Metcalf's own real-life pregnant form, conveying an impending mom's outright pride at the new life inside her. Bringing such moments to the series enhanced the credibility of the characters and

FALL 1988 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30			
M O N	MacGyver		ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)				ABC		
	Newhart	Coming Of Age	MURPHY BROWN	Designing Women	ALMOST GROWN		CBS		
	local						FOX		
	Alf	The Hogan Family	NBC Monday Night At The Movies				NBC		
T U E	Who's The Boss	ROSEANNE	Moonlighting		thirtysomething		ABC		
	HIGH RISK		CBS Tuesday Night Movie				CBS		
	local						FOX		
	Matlock	In The Heat Of The Night			MIDNIGHT CALLER		NBC		
W E D	Growing Pains	Head Of The Class	The Wonder Years	Hooperman	China Beach		ABC		
	THE VAN DYKE SHOW	ANNIE MCGUIRE	The Equalizer		Wiseguy		CBS		
	local						FOX		
	UNSOLVED MYSTERIES		Night Court	BABY BOOM	TATTINGERS		NBC		
T H R	KNIGHTWATCH		Dynasty		ABC Specials		ABC		
	48 Hours		PARADISE		Knots Landing		CBS		
	local						FOX		
	The Cosby Show	A Different World	Cheers	DEAR JOHN	L.A. Law		NBC		
F R I	Perfect Strangers	Full House	Mr. Belvedere	Just The Ten Of Us	20/20		ABC		
	Beauty And The Beast		Dallas		Falcon Crest		CBS		
	local						FOX		
	Sonny Spoon		SOMETHING IS OUT THERE		Miami Vice		NBC		
S A T	MURPHY'S LAW		Police Story				ABC		
	DIRTY DANCING	RAISING MIRANDA	Simon & Simon		West 57th		CBS		
	The Reporters		BEYOND TOMORROW		local		FOX		
	227	Amen	The Golden Girls	EMPTY NEST	Hunter		NBC		
S U N	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
	Incredible Sunday		Mission: Impossible		ABC Sunday Night Movie				ABC
	60 Minutes		Murder, She Wrote		CBS Sunday Night Movie				CBS
	21 Jump Street		America's Most Wanted	Married... With Children	It's Garry Shandling's Show	The Tracey Ullman Show	Duet	local	FOX
The Magical World Of Disney		Family Ties	Day By Day	NBC Sunday Night At The Movies				NBC	

also showed a savvy awareness of the off-screen world. *Roseanne* consciously played on the notoriety associated with pushing TV boundaries and deftly walked a fine line. Even while incorporating such topics as child abuse (which Barr cited from her own early life), the series was careful not to sacrifice the credibility of its characters. The program even survived her short-lived marriage to Tom Arnold, another stand-up comic, who then joined the show as an occasional character (Dan's buddy, Arnie) and as a behind-the-scenes business partner. After the marriage ended (and Arnold's own series, *The Jackie Thomas Show*, was canceled), Roseanne dropped the character, the business relationship, and the married name of Arnold. Thereafter she was known simply as Roseanne.

The only series remotely like *Roseanne* was Fox's *Married... with Children*, which previously had taken up the darker side of family life. Yet there was a key difference between the Connor family and the Bundy family. The Bundys seemed to take perverse pleasure in their woeful lot, while on *Roseanne* the characters actually tried to do something to improve their lives. Often the plans did not work out, but it was easy to see why viewers would welcome them in. The Connors might not be an ideal family unit, but over the nine-year run of the series they never stopped trying.

Roseanne was not the only new series to feature a strong female force on and off camera. At CBS, producer Diane English (with husband Joel Shukovsky) created *Murphy Brown*, which revisited the *Mary Tyler Moore* hook of an independent woman at a televi-

sion newsroom, but through 1980s eyes and in a major market, Washington, D.C. Candice Bergen played the title character, an ace correspondent for the TV newsmagazine *F.Y.I.* Murphy was aggressive, overbearing, sarcastic, a ruthless competitor, an unreconstructed liberal, and, in the opening episode, was just coming out of rehab at the Betty Ford clinic, where she had quit smoking and drinking. She was an uncontrollable fury who (in a running gag) blew through personal secretaries at about one per episode. Yet Murphy was also the consummate professional, respectful and respected by her *F.Y.I.* colleagues, including straight-laced anchor Jim Dial (Charles Kimbrough); dogged investigative reporter Frank Fontana (Joe Regalbutto); perky correspondent and former Miss America Corky Sherwood (Faith Ford); and a new program producer in his twenties, Miles Silverberg (Grant Shaud), so young that he did not recognize some of Murphy's favorite old Motown songs. They formed a classic workplace family with intertwined lives and moments of genuine affection. At home in her private townhouse, Murphy (unlike Mary Richards from the 1970s) had no upstairs neighbors to drop in, but she was hardly alone. Eldin Bernecky (Robert Pastorelli), hired to paint the interior of her home, remained on the job day and night (for more than half a decade) and was always ready to talk. He was philosophical, patient, and clearly a perfectionist.

Generally, though, after hours the *F.Y.I.* gang hung out at Phil's Place, a longtime Washington bar whose owner (played by Pat



Roseanne Barr was the driving force behind the authentic working class comedy of *Roseanne*, with John Goodman rock solid as her husband, Dan. (Roseanne Photo Courtesy of The Carsey-Werner Company, LLC/Don Cadette)

Corley) had tactfully shared sage moments with politicians of every stripe. Murphy Brown, in contrast, was no diplomat (she made no secret of her liberal political preferences), but she was a terrific reporter and interviewer in the *60 Minutes* mode. Her high-profile comments carried weight and she was on a first name basis with her fictional network honchos (including Alan Oppenheimer as Gene Kinsella and Garry Marshall as Stan Lansing). The show also regularly dropped in real-life names from both political and broadcast circles and featured cameos from the likes of Walter Cronkite, Linda Ellerbee, and Larry King. Though the series did not instantly land in the top ten like *Roseanne*, within a few seasons *Murphy Brown* became one of television's most successful series, right beside *60 Minutes*.

The debuts of both *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown* came during a particularly disjointed fall premiere season. Beginning in the spring of 1988, a five-month strike by the TV writers' union had disrupted the annual TV production routine. This process usually involved preparing scripts for fall shows in the spring so production could begin in the summer and the first finished episodes could arrive in time for the fall premieres. Though the spring writers strike was settled by August, this still meant that this season's new shows would appear only as each series was able to get up to speed with its production schedule, and new episodes for some programs did not arrive until November. Some fall series (including a revival of *Columbo* on ABC) were delayed until mid-season. *TV Guide* did not issue its traditional fall preview until the beginning of October.

As luck would have it, number one NBC was in the best posi-

tion after the strike ended. A few of its series (including *The Cosby Show*, *A Different World*, and *Highway to Heaven*) had managed to arrange separate deals with the writers' union before the general settlement, so they were ready to air in early October, giving them a head start over most other series, which were delayed by the effects of the strike. The network had plenty of extraordinary backup material in the form of special event programming: the Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, in September, and baseball's World Series in October. So NBC was perfectly content unveiling its new and returning series during October and November, after heavily promoting them throughout both sports events. Given that lead-off boost, NBC once again had an easy win for the entire season, which was anchored by its solid Thursday and Saturday night lineups. The network won all thirty weeks of this strike-affected season and had thirteen of the top twenty shows.

NBC was particularly adept at creating new hits by carefully slotting them to follow established successes. Thus, *Cheers* led to *Dear John* (Judd Hirsch playing a divorced husband attending a singles support group), while *The Golden Girls* ushered in *Empty Nest* (Richard Mulligan as a widowed physician in Florida keeping a fatherly eye on two grown daughters). Apart from such direct ratings jumpstarts, NBC also was able to use its lineup of hits in general to promote the rest of the schedule. Of course, that was still no guarantee that every NBC program would connect, with series such as *Baby Boom*, *Something Is Out There*, and *Sonny Spoon* quickly fading. The former producers of *St. Elsewhere* also flopped with *Tattlingers*, an hour drama set at a tony Manhattan eatery. Despite a strong cast (including Stephen Collins, Blythe

October 3, 1988

Ted Turner unveils a new cable network, TNT (Turner Network Television), which initially serves as an outlet for the hundreds of old films he had acquired from the MGM studio. (First offering is "Gone With the Wind.") By 1989, Turner moves to TNT the NBA basketball games previously showcased on his WTBS superstation and in 1990 adds Sunday night NFL games to the network.

October 23, 1988

Mission: Impossible. (ABC). Fifteen years after shutting down operations on CBS, the IMF crew returns in an Australian-produced series. Peter Graves is back as Jim Phelps, directing an otherwise new (and younger) crew. ABC uses the series to fill gaps while awaiting the programs delayed by the writers' strike.

November 13, 1988

War and Remembrance. (ABC). Picking up where the 1983 miniseries *The Winds of War* left off, this eighteen-hour sweeps presentation follows Herman Wouk's World War II novel from Pearl Harbor to 1943. During the May sweeps, another eleven-and-one-half hour stretch at last brings the saga to the war's end in 1945.

January 9, 1989

The Pat Sajak Show. (CBS). After eleven years filling its late night slot primarily with reruns of old series, CBS takes a stab at cloning Johnny Carson's success. Amiable *Wheel of Fortune* host Pat Sajak aims for the same cool detachment as Carson, but his tame program fails to catch on. After fifteen months, the network concedes defeat and cancels it.

February 5, 1989

Lonesome Dove. (CBS). Larry McMurtry's engaging novel of a Texas-to-Montana cattle drive in the 1870s turns into a February sweeps success for CBS. The eight-hour adaptation stars Robert Duvall, Tommy Lee Jones, and Robert Urich and is the season's highest rated miniseries.

Danner, Jerry Stiller, and Rob Morrow), they quickly discovered that, no matter how well written, the woes of wealthy restaurateurs did not entice the public.

Overall, though, NBC seemed to be on the right track for the long run by continuing to place a few new hits into its lineup each season. In addition to *Dear John* and *Empty Nest*, there was *Midnight Caller* in the fall (Gary Cole as a former cop hosting a late night radio call-in show) and, at mid-season, *The Father Dowling Mysteries* (Tom Bosley as a sleuthing priest, with Tracy Nelson as a nun). In the spring, NBC, which since the start of the Brandon Tartikoff era had often tried but always failed to develop new hit fantasy series (such as *Manimal* and *Something Is Out There*), at last came up with a successful science fiction series in *Quantum Leap*, from producer Donald P. Bellisario. In *Quantum Leap*, Scott Bakula played Dr. Sam Beckett, a time traveler leaping through the recent past (his lifetime) and temporarily assuming the physical appearance of a person in trouble at each stop (although to viewers Dr. Beckett still looked like Scott Bakula). Beckett's only guide through his journeys was Al (Dean Stockwell), a wisecracking hologram projection from Beckett's time. Bakula's likable and accessible persona helped make the outlandish premise seem perfectly believable.

NBC also nimbly picked up on the growing viewer interest in Fox's real-life crime-stopper series *America's Most Wanted*,

(which had premiered the previous season) and, for the fall of 1988, turned its own *Unsolved Mysteries* from a string of occasional specials into a weekly series. Robert Stack stepped in as host (Raymond Burr and Karl Malden had served that role in the specials), taking viewers through stories of unusual "unsolved" cases. These cases included not only confirmed crimes (as on *America's Most Wanted*) but also personal mysteries such as a lonely person's disappearance after a date or reports concerning UFO encounters or paranormal activities. For most of these tales there was no actual footage, so the program staged reenactments of the incidents, clearly labeling them as such. At the end, the screen showed an 800 phone number to call for viewers with any information. The combination worked and *Unsolved Mysteries* easily landed among the season's top-twenty series.

With all these successes, NBC still faced the usual problems of any network with a strong lineup of hits. NBC had fewer available slots to try out new ideas, and at the same time the network was reluctant to give new programs a great deal of time to prove themselves. It was also a calculated gamble to rely so much on mildly successful series that depended primarily on the strength of their established hit lead-ins, some of which were already half a decade old. When programs such as *The Cosby Show* and *The Golden Girls* faded, would the new shows have built enough of a following by then to stand on their own? On top of that, NBC, like ABC and CBS (the other "Big 3" networks), had to fight harder than ever to maintain viewer attention as other forces nipped away at the edges of the network audience, including more aggressively promoted syndication and cable offerings.

The previous season's success of the first-run syndication package of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* had invigorated hopes for similar original syndication fare, especially because some affiliates occasionally chose to slot that space adventure in place of particularly weak prime time network fare. For the 1988-89 season, Paramount (home studio for *Star Trek*) launched *War of the Worlds*, a one-hour series that served as a continuation of the 1953 feature film based on the H. G. Wells novel. Other companies offered such programs as *Freddy's Nightmares* (a horror anthology based on the "Nightmare on Elm Street" feature films), *Superboy* (from the producers of the "Superman" feature films), and *The Munsters Today* (a dreadful revival of the 1960s series). Though none of these attempts succeeded, there was a new groundbreaking syndication smash that season when black comic Arsenio Hall entered the late night talk show world in January 1989 with *The Arsenio Hall Show*. Fresh from co-starring with his friend Eddie Murphy in the feature film "Coming to America," Hall brought a completely different attitude to the talk show genre, with consciously hipper guests, a funkier musical tone, and a vocal studio audience that seemed more like a basketball game crowd than one at a talk show. Hall easily bested the more traditional Pat Sajak (moonlighting from hosting the game show *Wheel of Fortune*), who launched his own late night talk show at the same time for CBS.

Cable tweaked the networks in several areas as it continued its slow but steady penetration into more U.S. households (more than 50% by 1988). Apart from showing recent feature films uncut and (on the premium services) commercial free, cable increasingly cashed in on viewer familiarity with network shows by buying cable rerun rights. This trend was extending beyond golden oldies to include such recent hits as *Miami Vice* (just canceled at the end of the 1988-89 season) and *Murder, She Wrote* (still running on CBS). Even more significant, starting with the ceremony held in August 1988, television's Emmy awards began including original cable offerings in its competition. (One of the first awards went to HBO for a special featuring stand-up comic Jackie Mason.) This

February 28, 1989

Coach. (ABC). Craig T. Nelson shows his comic side playing Hayden Fox, the divorced football coach of Minnesota State University. His sitcom sidekicks include TV veterans Jerry Van Dyke as a dense but well-meaning assistant coach and Shelly Fabares as a local newscaster who is Hayden's new love.

March 7, 1989

Anything But Love. (ABC). Jamie Lee Curtis (fresh from the film "A Fish Called Wanda") and Richard Lewis (a stand-up comic with a borderline-neurotic persona) star in the premise that opposites attract, eventually. Set largely in the offices of a Chicago magazine, this sitcom takes two years and multiple time-slot shifts before the two admit they are in love.

April 17, 1989

NBC launches its first cable network, CNBC (Consumer News and Business Channel), featuring business news all day and talk shows in the evening.

April 26, 1989

Lucille Ball, age seventy-seven, the first lady of TV sitcoms, dies.

July 5, 1989

The Seinfeld Chronicles. (NBC). Stand-up comic Jerry Seinfeld plays himself in this half-hour sitcom pilot, which he created with fellow comic Larry David. Jason Alexander plays Jerry's not-quite-bald pal George, while Michael Richards is Jerry's very odd neighbor, named Hoffman.

August 3, 1989

Prime Time Live. (ABC). Diane Sawyer defects from CBS (and her post as a *60 Minutes* correspondent) to join ABC as co-host with Sam Donaldson for this hour-long news magazine. Her opening night interview is with ABC star Roseanne Barr.

marked an important perception change. Up until then, "television" had meant offerings by broadcast stations, while "cable" was considered programming outside this mainstream. Including cable in the Emmy categories carried the suggestion that the two might be far more equal than previously thought—adding credibility to cable services and chipping away at the networks' status as the only showcase that really mattered for original programming.

The Big 3 networks were also facing the rising force of the new Fox network. Though Fox was still losing tens of millions of dollars annually on its television operation, in the increasingly cost-conscious network world, nobody was better at coming up with eye-catching innovations, especially on the cheap. In early 1988, Fox found a quick way to land a highly regarded comedy for its schedule. Striking a deal with the Showtime cable service, it began to air episodes of *It's Garry Shandling's Show*, no less than one month after their initial cable presentation. Created by stand-up comic Garry Shandling and former *Saturday Night Live* writer Alan Zweibel, the program began on Showtime in the fall of 1986, following the everyday life of stand-up comic Garry Shandling. In an effective update of the *George Burns and Grace Allen* TV set-up, Shandling regularly broke the "fourth wall" between the audience and the performers, delivering asides on the story in progress and also gleefully manipulating the action for maximum effect. Unlike *Burns and Allen*, the other characters also knew they were part of a television show, but just accepted that fact. The series was an instant critical hit, not only because of the storytelling gimmick, but also because it was perfectly in tune with comic Shandling's personality, a hilarious combination of media savvy, social insecurity, and an obsession with the most trivial details of life. Though the series never became a big ratings hit for Fox, the broadcast airing allowed viewers without cable to see what all the fuss was about. It also let Fox tout one of the best programs on television as one of its own.

In January 1989, Fox took reality programming to the next level with *Cops*. The premise behind this series was simple. With permission, crews armed with portable video cameras traveled with local police and taped their pursuits and arrests. This was real front line footage, which took advantage of advances in video technology that had reduced camera sizes and required lighting levels. The program began in January on the Fox O&Os, and by March it was on the entire Fox network. There were no reenactments, no somber narratives, and no expensive actors and scripts.

Even with its still-minuscule ratings (only about one-third of NBC's total), Fox had shown the ability to win viewers and influence the television landscape with its self-proclaimed in-your-face style. *Married ... with Children* helped set the stage for *Roseanne*. *America's Most Wanted* showed the viability of a weekly *Unsolved Mysteries*. Arsenio Hall had gotten his start as a substitute host in the waning days of the Joan Rivers late night talk show on Fox. The Big 3 networks at last seemed to be realizing that they just might have to make some changes in their programming styles in order to stay ahead.

50. Mmmm ... Doughnuts

DESPITE CONTINUING BOTTOM-LINE budget concerns, network spending on sports rights escalated rapidly at the end of the 1980s, in the process changing that landscape for the new decade just beginning. CBS made the first move, capturing exclusive broadcast network rights to Major League Baseball for four seasons (1990 through 1993), for the then-astounding price of \$1 billion. In that deal, CBS became the sole outlet for the World Series, the League Championship Series, and the All-Star game, along with the long-running Saturday afternoon game of the week, an NBC staple since 1966. ESPN soon followed this move by paying \$400 million for exclusive national cable baseball rights for those same four years, with an ambitious schedule of 175 games per season, highlighted by a national game of the week on Sunday nights.

NBC retaliated by stealing away professional basketball from CBS, which had televised the NBA for seventeen years. Beginning in the fall of 1990, NBC would pay \$150 million a year for four years of NBA broadcasts, more than triple the \$47 million per year CBS had been paying. In response, CBS agreed to yet another \$1 billion sports rights package, capturing exclusive rights to the annual March NCAA college basketball tournament for seven years (1991 through 1997), also almost tripling the then-current rate paid between CBS and ESPN (which had aired some of the tournament's early round games for several years).

CBS's NCAA contract, eliminating cable from the college basketball tournament picture, went against the latest trend among sports organizations, which was to foster parallel deals covering both broadcast networks and cable. This policy of multiple outlets increased revenues from the sale of TV rights, allowed the cable networks to fill their schedules with newsworthy sports events, yet still left the broadcast networks with the principal sports events, such as the World Series and the NBA championship games.

The prices paid in these new sports contracts were truly astonishing, especially when, at the same time, the networks were otherwise scrutinizing every penny. How could they possibly recoup such expenditures? There were several justifications. It was a partially preemptive move, keeping specific sports away from the competition. It was also proactive, landing distinctive events that helped set the network (and its affiliates) apart from the competition. Most important, the price tags were justified by judging sports in a new way. Sports events were not to be seen merely as sports events. They were now positioned as a key part of an overall promotional effort. In that light, sports contests did not have to

make back through the sale of commercial time all the money spent on the rights because, as marquee showcases, they were offered as the perfect vehicle for promoting the entire network schedule. Viewers for basketball or baseball games would be bombarded with information about the network's other offerings, from morning news to late night programs. This would be an especially effective way to launch new shows, providing the network a short cut to rejuvenating its lineup. With sports as the promotional billboard, viewership and associated ad revenue would increase throughout the rest of the schedule. Overall, the network would make money.

That was the theory. Of course, this assumed that sports broadcasts would actually deliver a sufficiently large number of new viewers to the rest of the network schedule. Even more basic, it assumed that the rest of the schedule contained programming that was worth promoting. After all, it would do little good to lure potential viewers if they immediately went away disappointed.

It seemed CBS would have the toughest task exploiting such promotions in the near future. For the 1989-90 season it was still struggling with comparatively few hits (*60 Minutes*, *Murphy Brown*, and *Murder, She Wrote*) and an assortment of long-running leftovers from its previous glory days (including three prime time soaps: *Falcon Crest*, *Dallas*, and *Knots Landing*). More troubling, the network was having only limited success with its new programs. *Rescue 911* (host William Shatner chronicling real-life disasters) garnered respectable ratings when it became a regular weekly series that fall after successful specials the previous spring. CBS's only other new fall series hit was *Major Dad*, with Gerald McRaney playing a career Marine who fell for and married a liberal reporter (played by Shanna Reed) with three daughters. Otherwise, most of CBS's new series did not catch on, even with good casts, including Jon Cryer and Alex Rocco in *The Famous Teddy Z* (a mailroom gofer lands a top spot in a talent agency), Lindsay Wagner and Tom Wopat in *Peaceable Kingdom* (life at the L.A. County Zoo), and the affable husband-and-wife acting pair of Tim Reid and Daphne Maxwell Reid in *Snoops* (in which they played a husband-and-wife sleuthing pair). Perhaps incessant sports promotions might have helped. CBS would find out soon enough.

NBC hardly needed multi-million dollar sports programs to remind viewers of such continuing hits as *The Cosby Show*, *Cheers*, and *The Golden Girls*. Nonetheless, while remaining in the top ten, those shows were no longer the fresh new hits of television. *Cheers* was already in its eighth year, while *The Cosby Show* found

itself edged out as the top show of the season by ABC's *Roseanne* (in only its second year). NBC needed fresh blood in its fall lineup, but, like CBS, none of its new shows were particularly successful. *The Nutt House* (from Mel Brooks) was set at a one-time ritzy New York hotel, but seemed tired rather than manic. *Mancuso, FBI* (with Robert Loggia) was intense but bland. *Sister Kate* seemed incongruous, casting Stephanie Beacham (who had played *Dynasty* vixen Sable) as a nun managing a home for adorable but scheming orphans (led by Todd Mahaffrey, played by Jason Priestley). Even *Baywatch*, a new offering from the production company of former NBC head Grant Tinker, flopped despite a premise (lifeguard adventures in sunny California) that placed dozens of good-looking men and women on the beach wearing revealing swim wear, led by David Hasselhoff (previously the star on NBC's *Knight Rider*).

Though *Baywatch* disappeared from NBC after one season, a reconstituted version returned one year later in first-run syndication. Combined with strong international sales, the series eventually laid claim as one of the most watched programs in the world. The fact that number one NBC had let *Baywatch* slip through without success seemed oddly symbolic. NBC had some of television's most popular series, but was unable to generate any "buzz" for its new offerings. In fact, the most talked about new shows for the season were elsewhere, most often on ABC and (surprisingly) Fox.

In the summer of 1989, Fox once again found a cheap-to-produce format with *Totally Hidden Video*. Borrowing a page from Allen Funt's *Candid Camera*, the series used the compact portable equipment that worked so well on programs such as *Cops* to stage and tape stunts catching average people in embarrassing moments. A few months later, ABC launched its own inexpensive video program, *America's Funniest Home Videos*, starting with a special in November and beginning a regular series in January 1990. Recognizing that many people had video cameras at home, the program invited viewers to send in their best clips — that is, those that captured silly moments in everyday life. Bob Saget served as the comic host (while continuing with his Friday night sitcom *Full House*), introducing the videos in front of a studio audience, which voted for each week's favorite entry and awarded its creator a \$10,000 prize. That was a strong lure for amateur video participants but a pittance on the network budget sheets. The makeshift quality of the material was oddly appealing and *America's Funniest Home Videos* lasted more than two decades for ABC.

The network had a far less satisfying experience with *Chicken Soup*, a highly touted new sitcom from Marcy Carsey and Tom Werner. It began in the fall with extraordinary ratings in the post-*Roseanne* slot, but then was almost immediately canceled. The series had seemed a perfect continuation of Carsey and Werner's *Cosby Show/Roseanne* formula, once again building a premise around a distinctive stand-up comic performer by casting wise-cracking borscht-belt comic Jackie Mason as a middle-aged New York Jewish man in love with an Irish Catholic woman (played by Lynn Redgrave). Using his trademark comedy monologues, Mason would stand on the roof of his building and talk to God about the latest turns in life. Unfortunately, the comic monologues were the only part that worked. The mixed-religion coupling seemed forced, with virtually no romantic chemistry generated between Mason and Redgrave. Though viewers had shown an increasing willingness to follow distinctive characters such as *Roseanne* and *Murphy Brown*, *Chicken Soup* lacked their authenticity. Instead, the series just felt awkward. Determined not to squander such a prime programming slot, ABC canceled *Chicken Soup* and in November replaced it with *Coach*, a mid-season hit from the previous spring.

By righting itself so quickly, ABC was able to maintain a sense of momentum for the season, not only building on *Roseanne*'s success, but also adding a mixed bag of fresh new series. In addition to *Coach* and *America's Funniest Home Videos*, the network had *Doogie Howser, M.D.*, a Steven Bochco comedy-drama series following a sixteen-year-old wunderkind (played by Neil Patrick Harris) who found that being a licensed M.D. still did not spare him the usual challenges of growing up. In a nod to the growing presence of personal computers, each episode ended with Howser typing his reflections about life into an electronic diary. ABC also continued to build its strong Friday night franchise of sitcoms aimed at younger viewers (dubbed the "TGIF" lineup) with *Family Matters* (following a working-class black family in Chicago). Though that series was quickly hijacked by the nerdy next-door-neighbor character of Steve Urkel (Jaleel White), *Family Matters* still proved an ideal companion to *Full House*, *Perfect Strangers*, and *Just the Ten of Us*. ABC also found appropriate counter-programming to *60 Minutes* on Sundays with the sentimental *Life Goes On*, casting Christopher Burke (who had Down Syndrome in real life) as Corky Thatcher, a high school student similarly affected. And there was the ABC equivalent to CBS perennial *60 Minutes*, with the twenty-year-old *Monday Night Football* still landing among the season's top ten series.

October 17, 1989

Just four minutes into ABC's pre-game coverage of game three of the World Series (the Oakland Athletics hosting the San Francisco Giants), an earthquake rocks the Bay area, temporarily knocking ABC off the air. When power is restored, ABC's Al Michaels switches roles from sports to on-the-spot news reporting to cover the calamity.

November 8, 1989

NBC, which had been late in covering the San Francisco earthquake story the previous month, is the first broadcast network to have its nightly news anchor (Tom Brokaw) report live from Berlin, Germany, as the wall dividing the city is opened and knocked down.

December 18, 1989

CBS, stuck in third place in the ratings, hires Jeff Sagansky as its new president of entertainment, the executive in charge of scheduling.

January 8, 1990

Deborah Norville, thirty-one, who had been reading the news on the *Today* show since September, replaces Jane Pauley, thirty-nine, as the show's co-host.

January 10, 1990

Time-Life merges with Warner Communications to form Time Warner, the world's largest entertainment conglomerate.

January 21, 1990

MTV Unplugged (MTV). The video music channel begins a series featuring rock acts performing acoustically. First up: Squeeze, Syd Straw, and Elliot Easton of The Cars.

February 7, 1990

Ralph Roberts, founder of cable's Comcast Corporation, names his thirty-year-old son Brian to succeed him as president. The elder Roberts remains as Comcast's chief executive officer and chairman of the board.

FALL 1989 SCHEDULE

	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
M	MacGyver			ABC NFL Monday Night Football (to 12 Midnight)			ABC
O	MAJOR DAD	PEOPLE NEXT DOOR	Murphy Brown	FAMOUS TEDDY Z	Designing Women	Newhart	CBS
N	21 Jump Street		ALIEN NATION		local		FOX
	Alf	The Hogan Family				NBC Monday Night At The Movies	NBC
T	Who's the Boss	The Wonder Years	Roseanne	CHICKEN SOUP		thirtysomething	ABC
U	RESCUE 911			WOLF		ISLAND SON	CBS
E				local			FOX
	Matlock		In The Heat Of The Night			Midnight Caller	NBC
W	Growing Pains	Head Of The Class	Anything But Love	DOOGIE HOWSER, M.D.		China Beach	ABC
E	PEACEABLE KINGDOM		Jake And The Fatman			Wiseguy	CBS
D			# Fox Night At The Movies			local	FOX
	Unsolved Mysteries		Night Court	THE NUTT HOUSE		Quantum Leap	NBC
T	Mission: Impossible		THE YOUNG RIDERS			Prime Time Live	ABC
H	48 Hours		TOP OF THE HILL			Knots Landing	CBS
R			local				FOX
	The Cosby Show	A Different World	Cheers	Dear John		L.A. Law	NBC
F	Full House	FAMILY MATTERS	Perfect Strangers	Just The Ten Of Us		20/20	ABC
R		SNOOPS		Dallas		Falcon Crest	CBS
I			local				FOX
	BAYWATCH		HARDBALL			MANCUSO, FBI	NBC
S	Mr. Belvedere	LIVING DOLLS		ABC Saturday Mystery (Kojak; CHRISTINE CROWMELL; B.L. Stryker; Columbo)			ABC
A	Paradise		Tour Of Duty			SATURDAY NIGHT WITH CONNIE CHUNG	CBS
T	Cops	The Reporters	Beyond Tomorrow			local	FOX
	227	Aman	The Golden Girls	Empty Nest		Hunter	NBC

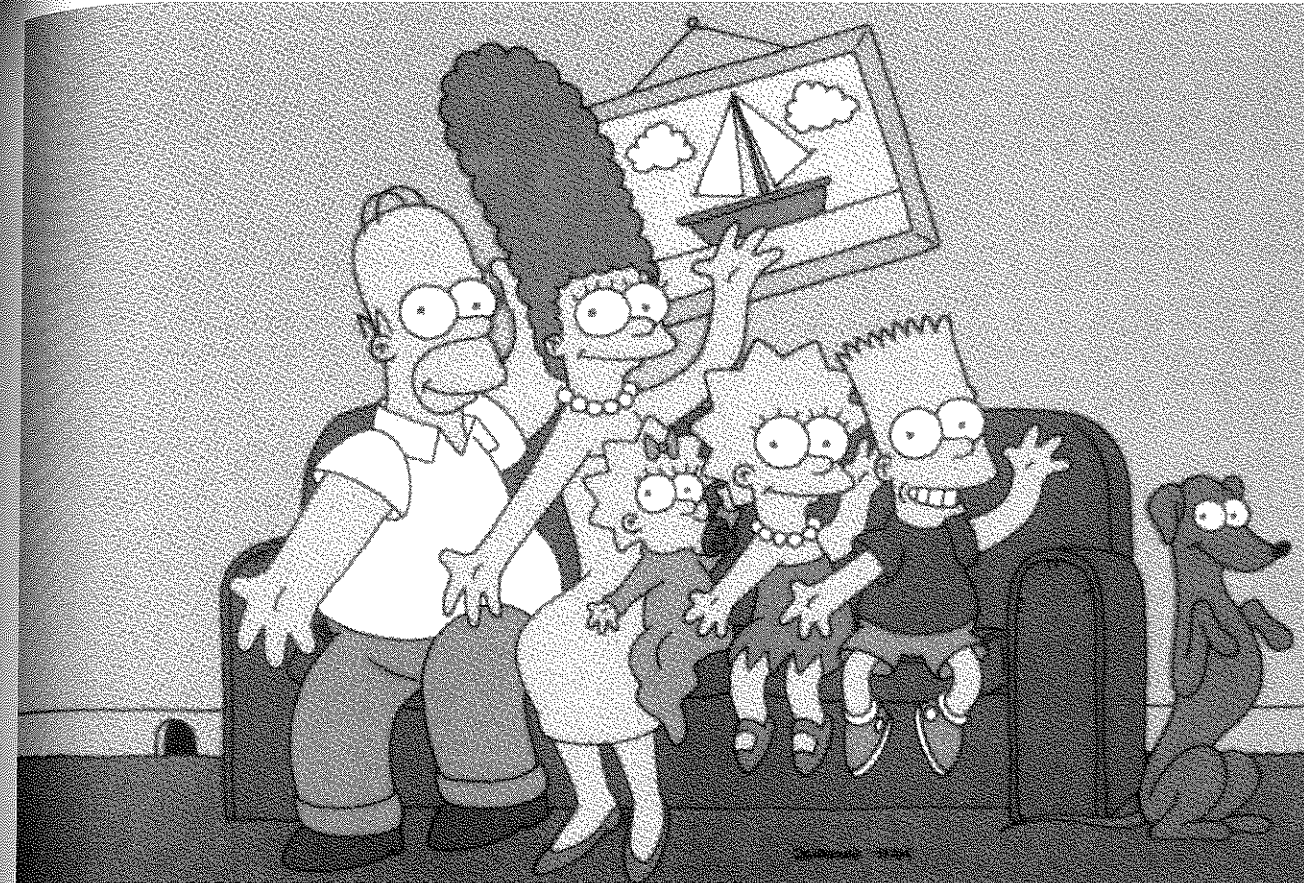
	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	
S	LIFE GOES ON		FREE SPIRIT	HOMEROOM				ABC Sunday Night Movie	ABC
U	60 Minutes		Murder, She Wrote					CBS Sunday Night Movie	CBS
N	BOOKER	America's Most Wanted	Totally Hidden Video	Married...With Children	OPEN HOUSE	The Tracey Ullman Show	It's Garry Shandling's Show		FOX
	The Magical World Of Disney	SISTER KATE	My Two Dads					NBC Sunday Night At The Movies	NBC

Of all its offerings in the 1989-90 season, ABC won the most praise for two diametrically different slices of American life: *Elvis* and *Twin Peaks*. Twelve years after the death of Elvis Presley at age forty-two, the mythology around the singer had come to focus primarily on his decline. The *Elvis* series set out to recapture the singer's roots, focusing exclusively on the 1954-55 era, when the future icon was still a teen dealing with small-town Southern life, just beginning his recording career, and discovering the power of his music. Michael St. Gerard was Elvis (a role he first played in a 1989 theatrical film about Jerry Lee Lewis, "Great Balls of Fire"), though singer Ronnie McDowell supplied most of the singing vocals, as he had previously done in the TV movies "Elvis," "Elvis and the Beauty Queen," and "Elvis and Me." Nonetheless, *Elvis* was a true TV innovation—a biographical portrait that was inspired by real-life incidents but that freely adapted them for a weekly series (under the watchful eye of executive producer Priscilla Presley, Elvis's widow). Though not a big ratings hit, *Elvis* successfully transported viewers to another era, offering a genuine insight into what made the earthshaking emergence of this young man from Memphis such a deeply personal event.

Twin Peaks also looked at small-town America, but with a far darker vision and far greater ratings success. (The series was in the top twenty-five for the 1989-90 season.) Theatrical film director David Lynch (from "Blue Velvet," a 1986 cult hit starring Dennis Hopper and Kyle McLaughlin) and veteran *Hill Street Blues* writer

Mark Frost teamed up to transform what could have been merely a typical TV murder story into a moody peek into the eerie and duplicitous corners of the American psyche. Set in the Pacific Northwest town of Twin Peaks (just a few miles south of the Canadian border), the series followed special FBI agent Dale Cooper (Kyle McLaughlin) as he investigated the circumstances surrounding the death of teenager Laura Palmer. Working with local sheriff Harry S. Truman (Michael Ontkean), Cooper encountered a wide range of local residents including Catherine Martell and Josie Packard (Piper Laurie and Joan Chen), the competing half-owners of the local sawmill; Laura's emotionally sensitive dad, Leland (Ray Wise); Laura's "good girl" best friend, Donna Hayward (Lara Flynn Boyle); Audrey Home (Sherilyn Fenn), the manipulative daughter of a local hotel owner; and eccentric characters such as the Log Lady (Catherine Coulson), who received messages through the small log she carried. They all seemed to have some personal or professional secrets to hide and, while those may or may not have had anything to do with the death of Laura Palmer, the locals were not happy to have a federal agent poking about.

Yet it quickly became obvious that this was not a traditional whodunit. *Twin Peaks* was part soap opera, part murder mystery, and part journey to the outer limits. Cooper consistently spoke in oblique dialogue and seemed as intensely interested in the quality of the town's pie, hot coffee, and doughnuts as in the latest leads. He was also open to psychic inspiration, dreams, and visions,



In Matt Groening's *The Simpsons*, each family member was voiced by a different performer (from left): Homer (Dan Castellaneta), Marge (Julie Kavner), Maggie (silent, with pacifier), Lisa (Yeardley Smith), and Bart (Nancy Cartwright). (The Simpsons © 1990 Twentieth Century Fox Television. All Rights Reserved.)

which took the series down increasingly quirky paths that eventually suggested (among other things) ancient contact with an alien race from outer space. Cooper's work also brought into the picture other agents, including his half-deaf boss (hilariously played by David Lynch himself), his vindictive one-time partner (Ken Welsh as Windom Earle), and drug enforcement agent Dennis/Denise Bryson (David Duchovny) fresh from a change in sexual orientation. Ultimately, though, none of the particular plot details mattered as much as the style, tone, and individual set pieces of the series. With these, *Twin Peaks* demonstrated that television could go places far beyond typical mainstream entertainment. Viewers were caught up, at first, with Lynch's kinky theatrical style as they focused on the "who killed Laura Palmer" angle. When Lynch deliberately took the series to an even higher level of weirdness, abandoning logic and apparent interest in explaining the Laura Palmer mystery, viewers began deserting in droves—left cold by such sequences as dreamy interludes featuring a backward-talking dwarf. Though the series self-destructed within a year, the fact that it made such an impression during its brief run demonstrated that there was an audience to tap for such distinctive fare.

The Fox network also had a pair of innovative series, including one with its own ardent doughnut lover. After three years as a short feature on *The Tracey Ullman Show*, the animated Simpsons graduated to a full-fledged mid-season series (beginning with a December 17 Christmas special). While the shorts for Ullman had essentially been one-liner gags, the half-hour *Simpsons* series was a full-fledged situation comedy that happened to be an animated cartoon. The premise was deceptively simple: the everyday life of a middle

American family in the typical U.S. town of Springfield. Homer was a dim-witted safety control engineer at the town's nuclear plant (the thought of a doughnut, or of any rich and fattening food, would send him into a state of bliss); Marge was a stay-at-home-mom; their ten-year-old son, Bart, was the terror of the fourth grade; daughter Lisa was a sweet and sensitive second grader; and baby Maggie just looked on, sucking her pacifier.

The Simpsons took full advantage of the animation format. There were dozens of other characters created and drawn without a casting call, often voiced by the same handful of performers (especially Dan Castellaneta, Hank Azaria, and Harry Shearer). These included Krusty the Clown (foul-mouthed host of Bart's favorite TV show), Montgomery Burns (Homer's megalomaniac boss), Waylon Smithers (Burns's excessively devoted assistant), Seymour Skinner (stressed-out principal at Bart and Lisa's school), and Kwik-E-Mart owner (and frequent robbery victim) Apu Nahasapeemepiton. Set budgets were irrelevant because everything had to be drawn anyway. Guest stars could be either soundalike caricatures or real celebrities offering their own voices.

Most important, by design the characters never aged (though they might be involved in flashbacks or flash-forwards). Therefore, it was impossible to treat the series as a linear chronological narrative. In effect, all the stories were taking place during the same time period. This approach was tremendously liberating, allowing the writers to treat each episode of *The Simpsons* as a fresh pallet, capable of going anywhere, with the assurance that the next episode would start all over again from essentially the same point. With such creative freedom, *The Simpsons* became one of the best

April 9, 1990

ESPN begins coverage of Major League Baseball with an opening-day tripleheader: the Orioles vs. the Royals, the Padres vs. the Dodgers, and the Blue Jays vs. the Rangers.

April 13, 1990

CBS shuts down its late-night *Pat Sajak Show* and resumes airing reruns of action-adventure series in the slot.

April 19, 1990

Wings (NBC). Producers from *Cheers* move that concept to the cozy lounge of a small airport on Nantucket Island off the Massachusetts coast. Timothy Daly and Steven Weber play brothers who work as pilots for Sandpiper Airlines.

May 21, 1990

Bob Newhart wraps up eight seasons of *Newhart* by tying it back to his previous hit series. In the last scene of this final episode, he wakes up as Bob Hartley (his character from his 1970s series) and tells his wife, Emily (Suzanne Pleshette, his co-star from that show), about his nightmare of running a Vermont inn. It is the definitive dream finale.

May 31, 1990

Seinfeld (NBC). Almost a year after its pilot aired, stand-up comic Jerry Seinfeld's sitcom debuts, with Michael Richards's character's name changed to Kramer, and Julia Louis-Dreyfus added as Jerry's ex-girlfriend, Elaine.

July 12, 1990

Northern Exposure. (CBS). The producers of *St. Elsewhere* offer a successful summer series that returns in the spring of 1991 for a four-year run. Rob Morrow plays a young New York doctor required to practice in Cicely, a small town in Alaska, to pay off his medical school loans. The cleverly written show contains a wry collection of characters and a tastefully eclectic soundtrack.

comedies ever on television, with multi-layered plots suffused with references to pop culture, literature, art, and historical events. Though cut from the same skeptical cloth as *Married ... with Children* and *Roseanne*, *The Simpsons* contained an even greater sassy subversive streak that tweaked everybody. Yet while characters were lazy, selfish, manipulative and greedy, they could also be generous, caring, and surprisingly wise. Even the adults.

Fox never touted *The Simpsons* as just a children's show and, in fact, the series proved popular with adults, especially young adults. This demographic fact was vital for the still-fledgling network because, while it could not yet hope to win the ratings race outright, Fox could still thrive by selling itself as a popular destination for the more youthful viewers increasingly prized by advertisers.

Just a few months after *The Simpsons* series began, Fox introduced yet another innovative take on a familiar format with the comedy-variety series *In Living Color*. Created by Keenan Ivory Wayans, this was a fast-paced half-hour sketch show starring comparative unknowns. There were musical guests, commercial parodies, original characters, and pop culture send-ups. Wayans had scored a theatrical hit in 1988 with his canny spoof of black exploitation films, "I'm Gonna Git You Sucka," and he brought this satirical sense to the new show, along with a few of the film's performers (David Alan Grier and siblings Kim and Damon Wayans). They formed the core of performing regulars along with Jim Carrey, Kelly Coffield, Tommy Davidson, Kim Coles, and T'Keyah

"Crystal" Keymah. (Later years added Wayans brothers Shawn and Marlon, as well as Jamie Foxx and Chris Rock.)

In Living Color had an energetic beat that began with its distinctive opening theme and continued throughout, courtesy of its sexy dancers (dubbed The Fly Girls) and its musical DJ—initially Shawn Wayans (a.k.a. SW-1) before he became a regular skit performer. The cast was racially mixed and displayed a sassy self-confidence tweaking ethnic, racial, and gender stereotypes. There were gleeful double entendres throughout the show, along with deliberately contrarian characters and grossly exaggerated authority figures. These included the downright nasty Homey the Clown, a pair of blatantly gay film critics ("Men on Film"), the pyromaniac Fire Marshal Bill, and a pair of jive-talking street hustlers operating their own shopping channel dealing in stolen goods.

Like *The Simpsons*, *In Living Color* was seeped in pop culture self-awareness, conscious of the conventions of its genre and constantly putting its own spin on the format. The program's racial humor was a particular departure, bringing a different perspective on how the world worked. For example, one of the show's first skits followed a runaway slave from the Civil War era as he emerged from a hidden cave into a downtown park in modern America. A confident black professional assured him that there was no need to automatically shuffle and bow to white passers-by because slavery was abolished and he was now free. But by the end of the skit, it was the professional who was hauled away by a pair of white cops (essentially for being "too uppity") as the former slave knowingly looked on. As with the Bundys on *Married ... with Children*, the Connors on *Roseanne*, and the cartoon *Simpsons*, *In Living Color* offered satirical snapshots of the American dream turned upside down. There was no confusing this with yet another of Bob Hope's mainstream variety specials, which were still regularly showing up on NBC's schedule.

In Living Color and *The Simpsons* once again demonstrated that Fox was truly bringing something different to the broadcast network picture. On the business side, though, the network was still struggling with its weaker lineup of affiliates and a schedule that only covered three nights a week. Fox needed to keep its total number of hours per week below fifteen so it would not be subject to the FCC's long-standing prime time access rule and its complicated requirements limiting network ownership and syndication of programming. However, that dual ability to create and distribute programs was precisely the type of synergy that had allowed Fox to financially get off the ground in the first place, as an outgrowth of the Twentieth Century Fox studios. If the network was to grow further, it had to deal with these restrictions that the older networks had chafed under for years. In May 1990, the FCC, which was beginning to question the continued need for the prime time access rule and the financial interest and syndication rules, granted Fox's petition for a temporary waiver from these rules. Fox immediately announced expansion plans for the 1990-91 season, and it soon began adding additional programming. In August, Fox added Thursday nights to its schedule. In September, it added Friday nights, plus five and one-half hours of children's programming on weekends and weekday afternoons.

The big news, though, was how Fox planned to kick off its Thursday night lineup. The network announced that in the fall of 1990 it would move its most successful show, *The Simpsons*, from Sunday to Thursday, opposite *The Cosby Show*. This was a symbolic declaration that Fox was taking the next step as a competitive network, entering the ring to duke it out with the Big 3 by challenging the series that had dominated television for half a decade.

1990-91 SEASON

51. The Live Storm

BART SIMPSON VERSUS BILL COSBY was the marquee match-up for the fall of 1990, when Fox moved *The Simpsons*, its most successful series, to the Thursday night slot directly opposite NBC's *Cosby Show*. This was a brilliant strategic move that enhanced the visibility and credibility of the Fox network, playing as the perfect story hook for media coverage of the new season. Images of the cartoon Simpsons (usually represented by Bart) were inevitably juxtaposed with those of Bill Cosby, giving the newer network invaluable exposure. Because Bart had already become a symbol of youthful rebellion, the contrast with the mature and more staid Cosby perfectly suited the Fox pitch to younger viewers. In addition, Fox's weaker affiliate lineup meant that few expected *The Simpsons* to really beat *The Cosby Show* outright in the overall ratings, so the network could declare victory with almost any respectable showing. Finally, with *Cosby* entering its seventh season, there was the possibility of ratings slippage anyway (almost inevitable for a long-running series), and *The Simpsons* stood ready to claim credit. Though new episodes did not arrive until later than most other returning series, *The Simpsons* did very well in the slot, with ratings for its October 11 second-season premiere matching *Cosby*'s. Ultimately, *The Cosby Show* easily won the head-to-head contest, though it lost enough of its total audience to fall from number two in the previous season to number five this season in the annual series rankings. (*Cheers* ended up at the top.)

The Fox strategy had worked, up to a point. However, NBC's lineup still continued to dominate Thursday nights, with *The Simpsons* a single destination hit. (Few viewers stuck around Fox for the show that followed, *Babes*, a live-action comedy about three beefy Manhattan women.) The problem was that Fox did not have deep bench strength. Though the network had rushed to fill five nights of prime time for the new season (versus three the previous season), many of its new series were clearly second- or third-tier offerings. *Haywire* was a comedy anthology mishmash, *Good Grief!* dropped comedian Howie Mandel into a mortuary setting, and David Lynch's documentary series, *American Chronicles*, was too far off the beaten path. Clearly, Fox still had a long way to go to lose its image as the (distant) fourth network.

Nonetheless, with offerings such as *The Simpsons* and *In Living Color*, Fox had shown the viability of gearing series toward younger-skewing demographics, even if the total audience was less than the competition's. Those who tuned in were prime advertising targets. (For example, the Thursday night *Simpsons* was the perfect place to advertise teen-appealing theatrical feature films opening

on Fridays.) For the fall, the other networks also joined Fox in adding a few new series aimed at younger viewers (usually telegraphed by a high school setting or goofy characters), though Fox continued to be most on-target with its offerings. *Get a Life* featured former David Letterman regular Chris Elliot playing a thirty-year-old slacker newspaper delivery boy still living at home with his parents (played by Elinor Donahue and his real-life dad, Bob Elliott). *Parker Lewis Can't Lose* cast Corin Nemec in the title role of a deviously charming teen and Melanie Chartoff as his exasperated high school principal. The concept was in the spirit of the hit 1986 film "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" and was far superior to the official TV series adaptation, *Ferris Bueller*, on NBC that fall.

The most impressive new Fox teen offering was from veteran producer Aaron Spelling, *Beverly Hills, 90210*, set in that posh California zip code. It opened with siblings Brenda and Brandon Walsh (Shannen Doherty and Jason Priestley) as sophomore transfer students from Minnesota dropped among the sons and daughters of the rich and famous at West Beverly Hills High School after their dad's company moved him to the West Coast. The series perfectly captured teenage self-confidence tempered with awkward self-awareness and social peer pressure, providing a slice of high school life grounded in reality but highly accelerated in the tony Beverly Hills setting. Over time, both Brenda and Brandon built a strong circle of friends, including status-savvy Kelly (Jennie Garth); Steve (Ian Ziering), a dedicated party animal; Dylan (Luke Perry), a brooding loner with a James Dean aura; Donna (Tori Spelling, daughter of Aaron), a "good" girl proud of her virginity; David (Brian Austin Green), a freshman music wiz interested in Donna; and Andrea (Gabrielle Carteris), the brainy editor of the school newspaper who was from the less affluent side of town (she lived with her grandmother so she could reside in the high school's district). Together they faced issues that resonated with teen viewers, including choosing the latest fashions; using fake IDs; dealing with academic and social pressures; resisting the lures of drugs, cheating, and gambling; pursuing an active sex life; and, most important, developing and treasuring friendships. Even teens who would never own a Porsche could identify with them.

On the Big 3 networks, about the only creditable new youthful personality in prime time was Will Smith, who had scored a mainstream pop music hit in 1988 (as half the duo D. J. Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince) with the comic rap lament "Parents Just Don't Understand." NBC's *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* alluded to Smith's rap identity in the title, casting him as a teen from the