

POINTS OF VIEW

A modest proposal: No TV for seven days

It's simple... so simple you'll wonder how you've missed it all these years.

All you have to do is hold your Starcom TV remote control device (standard issue for many cable TV subscribers) firmly in your left hand, aim it directly at the box, apply your right index finger to the "Off" button and push.

Zingo! The deed is done. The screen is dark.

Or, for those of you so backward as not to have cable TV, simply stop to the box and push the appropriate control to the "Off" position. For those with an old-fashioned knob, just turn the thing all the way to the left until you hear a "click."

And then hang a horse blanket or a burly sack over the blasted television set.

I've had it. I'm fed up with the junk on TV, cable and network. How do the computer nerds put it? Garbage in, garbage out... and garbage on TV every night!

Of course, I am a recovering sports junkie. ("My name is Tom, and it's been 12 hours and 20 minutes since my last televised basketball game.")

During the college basketball tournament I became one with my boob tube. My Zenith and I were like a drunk and his bottle.

Now that it's all over but the crying (for Michigan fans, anyway), we're estranged. The damn thing's not working very well, to be honest about it.

But I have come to a realization: There just isn't much worth watching on television these days and nights.

Sure, cable TV is better than plain old 2, 4, 7, 9, 20, 50, 56 and 62, but not much better. And cable's getting pricier. My last bill from TCI Cablevision of Oakland County was \$42.95 for the basic service and two premium channels.

And to think I hitched so hard in a 1988 column about a monthly bill of \$21.85 for exactly the same service. Yeah, if I had a dime for every cable



TOM BAER

TV rate increase, I could probably afford the Playboy Channel.

So what to do? Well, how about dropping TV like the proverbial bad habit that it is for, say, seven days in May?

By golly, I'll do it — if I can get just a little support from the community. Here's my modest proposal: The Farmington Community Library will sponsor a program called something like "The Great Farmington Turnoff" and provide several local families to go

cold-turkey with me.

For the library, the program would show what a role television plays in their lives. Participants would pledge to go one week, one whole week, without television, allowing them to find alternatives and new activities like... well, reading the books and joining the programs at the Farmington Library.

Just think of it: Without TV, whole families might get to know each other again... or maybe for the first time. The fine art of conversation will have to be revived.

Hey, without a TV set to flop in front of, some meaningful work may even get done around the house. Look for briar bushes at Farmington's paint and hardware stores that week.

Parents may find themselves a little strained, however, on Saturday mornings, when TV with its cartoons becomes the world's most inexpensive baby sitter, as well as a very effective salesman.

As for news, sports and the weather,

there's always the radio. It's hardly the great entertainment medium it was in the days before there was a TV screen glowing in every American living room, but it's still worth a listen.

Radio beats TV, of course, because a listener has to use his imagination to form the images of what's happening in his mind, instead of just staring at a screen.

How will we fare if we do take the pledge? Will we come crawling in after seven days like so many lost prospectors just emerging from the desert? Will we be ravenous for a sitcom or a ballgame or an auto commercial? Or will we be better, brighter people for our experience?

Let's find out. The Great Farmington Turnoff may sound silly at first blush, but let's give it a chance and see how it does. Anyone out there want to take up the challenge?

Tom Baer is the editor of The Farmington Observer. He can be reached by calling 477-5450.

Freedom of Information Act applies to 'all persons'

The customer was very dissatisfied.

He had ordered a videotape. The vendor gave him a long story about why it was unavailable. Finally the vendor said it was available — for \$78.

The customer paid but never saw the videotape and never got back his \$78.

Sounds like a nightmare version of an ordinary consumer problem. Well, the vendor was the law enforcement system in Detroit. The videotape was of an interrogation. The very dissatisfied customer was an inhabitant of the Charles Egeler Facility, Jackson — in other words, a guest of the Michigan Department of Corrections.

He was in my audience Saturday when I spoke about the state Freedom of Information Act.

FOIA is a law that applies to "all persons." You don't have to be a white male adult, an adult, or even a citizen to make an FOIA request. A 12-year-old Mexican wetback has the same rights under FOIA as the Wayne County prosecutor, who once had to use the

act to pry evidence from a certain mayor.

I'm not an attorney and don't file FOIA lawsuits. The Michigan FOI Committee does stock copies of the law and major court decisions. We encourage people to exercise their rights under Michigan's twin "sunshine laws," FOIA and the Open Meetings Act.

The inmates were upset over a ruling against David DeSorcy, who sued the Department of Corrections and its library. DeSorcy wanted to inspect final orders in prison discipline cases and their supporting records.

But the state Court of Appeals held that the Legislature had removed disciplinary hearings from the Administrative Procedures Act, thus removing those hearings from the definition of "contested cases" for purposes of FOIA.

Inmates can't learn the underlying reasoning, just the final order. They want to know why, when four men have done the same thing, one gets off, one gets five days discipline, and so on.



TIM RICHARD

Does personal favoritism have anything to do with it? Or maybe race? It's an official secret.

Inmates are worried about the fellows in the next bunk or serving food on the chowline, who might have AIDS. They can't find out.

They grouse over having to pay the state 20 cents a page for FOIA requests.

At the State Law Library, one floor below the Michigan Supreme Court in Lansing, I pay 10 cents a page for copying. Most libraries charge 10 cents.

Some commercial copiers are even cheaper.

At that, prison inmates are better off than people requesting information from the Livonia Police Department, which charges \$5 for the first page and \$2 for the second page. Police in Farmington Hills charge \$4 and in Redford Township \$3 for the first page.

A black inmate wanted to know how juries were selected in an outstate county. The county seat city has a large black neighborhood, but somehow his jurors came from the white population of the surrounding townships.

The prosecutor wrote him that the jury selection process was "exempt" under FOIA. The inmate smelled a rat.

The inmate smelled right, too. I had discussed jury selection with the clerk of that county. Yes, indeed, he did put older white township residents on the jury panel because they were looking for something to do and needed a bit of extra cash.

Unfortunately, that conversation

took place many years ago, the clerk is dead, and I have no notes. But don't be surprised if, some day, the Supreme Court orders a bunch of new trials because of a tainted jury selection process.

We chuckled over the obtuse Pontiac police sergeant who denied an inmate's FOIA request because "the case was still under investigation." Not even a Bloomfield Hills lawyer could get Pontiac cops off the hook in the Court of Appeals for that booboo.

Some friends think I'm nuts for being nice to inmates.

It's not Liberalism. I learned my lesson. When authoritarian government intends to shaft people, it starts with minorities like inmates, high school editors, Gypsies and Jews. To protect the suburban white middle class, we have to protect other groups first.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. His office number is (313) 349-1700.

A race watcher's guide to the WB half marathon

Spectators will find Sunday's half marathon in West Bloomfield as much fun as the participants.

Running, particularly competitively, is similar to religion. It's wonderful to see it practiced and marvelous to hear it discussed. The half marathon will attract those who can run, those who can talk about running, and those who would rather be home reading The New York Times.

Much like birds, runners can be identified by body type and plumage. Joey Spano, parks and rec director, will have illustrated guide books available. Excerpts follow:

■ The pros: They'll quietly be tooling up and down the lanes of parked cars in the West Bloomfield High School parking lot, slowly warming up their muscles and getting a feel for the temperature. Look for well-toned bodies, loose clothing, nylon running shorts and good, but not top-of-the-line, shoes.

■ TP's (tundra pigs): Tundra pigs split by gender because of where their weight is carried. Male TP's will appear to have 40-pound bags of library paste strapped on just above the belt buckle. They can be recognized from a distance by their silhouette, which is not unlike that of a marble balanced on a cantaloupe. (Male TP's can be distracted by cagey runners making donut squeals.)

Female TP's carry approximately the same weight as their male counterparts, but they carry it just below the small of the back. While discretion and a properly fitting pair of running shorts would go miles toward masking this phenomenon, female TP's instead will climb into sausage casings, also known as bicycle shorts, and create the illusion of twin moons orbiting an as-yet undiscovered planet.

■ The EZ (ee-zee): Brightly feathered, the EZ can be recognized by several common characteristics.

The male EZ, having dipped himself in Polo moments before the race, will be wearing several



PHILIP SHERMAN

gold chains and self-inflating shoes with headlights. Every hair will be in place, including those on his head. He will talk a lot about running, but in fact say little.

The female EZ gives off a scent that smells like bug spray to anyone but the male EZ, who identifies the scent as Giorgio. Snapping her gum, the female EZ will earnestly be puzzling over why she is the only woman running in 5-inch red heels.

If in doubt about an EZ sighting, just hold up a novel, point to it, look at the EZ and say "book." Having never seen one before, the EZ will circle and then mimic your cry, which will sound more like "ba-uk."

■ The gaunt: Fringe creatures known for obscuring gaunts, easily recognized by a sickly and complete lack of body fat, will try to convince you that a diet of dirt, paint chips and mineral water is just the ticket for maintaining that perfect 68-pound body weight.

Gaunts, lemur-eyed from food deprivation, unwillingly change lanes in low to moderate winds. Tundra pigs have been known to mistake gaunts for nicely dressed biscotti but usually leave them alone because they can't find any cappuccino.

Philip Sherman is the editor of the West Bloomfield/Lakes Eccentric, who will not run the half-marathon due to an old war injury. He can be reached at 644-1100, Ext. 264.



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