When TV Was New

Fast Change in TV

THE FIRST television set in our house, in 1947, was a black-and-white Motorola.

We covered the screen with a store-bought piece of plastic—the top third was blue, like the sky; the middle third was red; and the bottom third was green, like grass. It was perfect for programs that had scenes of fire trucks riding across someone's lawn on a sunny day!

We also bought an enlarger, a big magnifying glass that made the 7-inch screen look like a 9-inch picture. The problem with that was everybody had to sit squarely in front of the TV. When Grandma and Grandpa came up to see Bishop Sheen, wrestling and Milton Berle, we had four rows of chairs—two chairs in each row.

A new Sonora with a 12-1/2-inch screen replaced the Motorola in 1954. We gota Zenith a few years later. The screen was an inch or two bigger, and we got rid of that indoor antenna when Dad put the antenna on the roof. .

—Greg Lopatka, Downers Grove, Illinois

Just Like the Ballpark

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW, Selma, had one of the earliest TV sets in her Brooklyn neighborhood, in 1949. As newlyweds, my husband and I had a Tuesday-night ritual of running up the stairs to her home after work to hear the Texaco theme song before watching Milton Berle.

One Sunday afternoon, when the Brooklyn Dodgers were in the pennant race, Selma set up several rows of chairs in her living room so that all of her friends and neighbors could watch the baseball game. During the broadcast, she carried around a tray that contained hot dogs, Pepsis and snacks and hawked her wares.

What fun!

—Bunny Reid, Littleton, Colorado

Interactive TV, ’50s-Style

IN THE MID-1950s, the show Winky Dink and You was fun because it required young viewers to participate.

Parents needed to purchase, at a toy store, a Winky Dink Kit consisting of a plastic cover, crayons and a sponge eraser. The plastic cover stuck to the TV screen. During the course of the cartoon program, Winky, a little lad with a star-shaped haircut, requested participants to draw various objects, letters and numbers on the screen. These included doors, roads for his car and secret messages formed from letters created by Winky’s movements.

It was a lot of fun, but I remember concern over children being too close to the TV for their health, and the show was later taken off the air.

Years later, I learned that the show’s personable host, Jack Barry, was born in the same town as I was—Lindenhurst on New York’s Long Island. His real name was Barasch, and it was his family who sold my father his hardware store back in Lindenhurst.

—George Strum, Riverdale, New York

Meeting a TV Family

MY FATHER, Ralph Fisher, worked in the paint department at General Service Studios in Hollywood, California, where I Love Lucy, Our Miss Brooks and The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet were filmed at one time.

In 1962, when extras were needed for a TV episode of Ozzie and Harriet’s show, my two older sisters, Terri and Toni, and I got on the show with the help of our father. I was 7, and my sisters were 10. They were older and taller than the rest of the kids, and I think my father fibbed about their age to get them on the show.

We were to appear in the episode “The Tigers Go to a Dance.” The Tigers were a group of young boys on the show who would take part in a dance planned by Harriet’s women’s club.

We had to learn to dance the twist, so we worked for 2 days. Part of the time was spent rehearsing and filming, and part was spent with a tutor for our schoolwork. The highlight of those 2 days, for me, was meeting Ricky Nelson.

We were paid $25.47 per day, quite a lot for a child back then. In fact,it wasn’t much less than my father’s daily pay of $32.24 a full 5 years later.

My father’s car, a 1940 Mercury, was used as David Nelson’s car in a few episodes as well, for which Dad was paid $25 each time. Dad went on to work at The Walt Disney Studios, which we kids loved because we got free tickets to Disneyland.

—Trudi Fisher Cabrera, Palmdale, California