

Uncle Joe's
Life Inside a
Television Set

A Contemporary Observation By Ferdie J. Deering

Nobody knows for sure just when Uncle Joe moved into the television set. Perhaps it was a gradual thing. Anyway, the family didn't notice what was taking place until he insisted that one of us write a letter to ~~him~~ a certain lady announcer. Uncle Joe wanted to notify her that he wasn't going to New York to marry her, no matter how good a cook she was. Somehow, she had led Uncle Joe to believe that she was ready to move in with him, ready-to-eat foods, easy-swinging refrigerator door, dishpan hands, deodorant, and all. But he wasn't about to take on another wife at his age!

That incident was passed off as just a sort of misunderstanding. But the next time, everybody knew that something strange was happening to our respected and retired nonegenarian relative. We soon learned that his real world and his television world had become commingled into a new and active life that took him far beyond the easy chair aimed at the squawkbox, where he sat all day long.

Uncle Joe's real world had been fading for him ever since he retired. Always a little on the timid side, he had ceased to make new friends or even visit many old ones after he sold his business and his wife had passed on.

He loved his children and grandchildren, and treasured the collection of their pictures he had accumulated. But their busy comings-and-goings were too frequent and too hurried for him to comprehend. Too many years had passed he had little ones of his own for him to understand the fussing, the crying, and the needs of small children.

It wasn't easy for him to keep track of which family which child belonged to when they all piled into his son's house for a family reunion. Usually this was at Christmas or on his birthday. How he hated birthdays! Always gifts of socks and ties and shirts that he didn't need. He could have used them when he was struggling to get his little drug store started, but who wears a necktie to watch TV? But he'd ~~an~~ given up smoking, never cared for fishing, and they'd taken away his drivers license, so there wasn't much choice. Having to sell his car was just another ~~is~~ broken link in his connection to the real, live world that swirled about him---but too often left him out.

The television world was nearer and more companionable. During the many days when he was left at home alone, he sat with his eyes glued on the magic screen, his cocker spaniel, Brownie, on his lap or curled up at ~~a~~ his feet. The whole family knew that Uncle Joe talked to Brownie just like he was a person and laughed when Brownie looked as if he understood every word. Maybe he did. Brownie would do just about everything Uncle Joe told him to, but pretty well ignored the rest of us. We figured the dog was good company for Uncle Joe when his son was away at work and his daughter-in-law was off to one of her numerous church or club activities. Uncle Joe didn't want a

housekeeper or a cook around, even though he could well afford one. Brownie seemed to be just right for him, when the family was away.

Perhaps that's why we didn't pay much attention when Uncle Joe first started talking back to people inside the TV set. What really stirred us up was the day he got mad ~~and~~ at the loud-mouthed automobile salesman who insisted that he had to come right down to his sales lot and buy a car from him or he'd be sorry forever and ever.

"You crazy galoot!" Uncle Joe shouted. "You ought to know I can't drive a car any more!" He jumped up out of his well-worn easy chair---forgetting his aching back---and waved his cane at the salesman. ~~and~~ "I'll whack you with this stick if you don't shut up!" He moved threateningly toward the TV set. Fortunately, the auto man's time was up about then and the weather ^{man} ~~man~~ came on, predicting fair skies. Uncle Joe calmed down, ~~and resumed his daylong posture in the chair aimed permanently toward the squawkbox.~~

After that, we began noticing Uncle Joe and soon found out that he has moved right out ~~to~~ the real world around him and actually lives inside the TV set in just about every way except physically.

The people on the TV shows ~~were~~ ^{are} to him the actual persons in his life, and the rest of us ~~were~~ ^{are} just so much static that interfere with his TV world. Uncle Joe makes no bones about it; a lot of times he'd just like to turn the rest of the world off and out!

"That woman wants me to come and see her, so I can try out her cooking," he'd say. "But I'm not going. Too many of these women are just trying to get hold of my pocketbook. ~~and~~ She knows I've got some money saved up. They're always trying to get me to buy something."

Prize fights and wrestling matches ~~were~~ ^{are} something Uncle Joe wanted no part of before he moved inside the TV. Now, he not only

watches every one he can find; he is an actual participant as far as he's concerned.

"I ~~can~~ could'a' won that match tonight, if I'd had an honest referee," he sometimes complains. "I think that whiskered so-and-so I was wrestling must be his cousin, or he owes him money."

When the westerns come on, Uncle Joe lives in the past. He rides the range with the persecuted ~~man~~ rancher, and he walks down the street to danger with the ~~man~~ swaggering sheriff. He fights Indians attacking the wagon train, with whoops and rifle fire, not to mention those he beats to death with his cane. Brownie hides under the sofa when the shooting starts, lest he be mistaken for a desperado or a mountain lion.

But Uncle Joe doesn't stay in the past. He also lives far into the future. Science fiction stories on TV are a favorite dish for him. Many a time he's been blasted (he thinks) into space to seek life on a distant planet, or to do combat in rocket ships with ~~men~~ creatures from Mars. Fact is, he won't have anything to do with those moon ~~photos~~ ^{photographs} made by American scientists awhile back.

"Fake! Cheat!" he told them. "I've been to the moon lots of times, and that's not the way it is at all. You're just trying to sell us a lot of propaganda, telling us that's the way the moon looks!"

Then he may launch into a detailed description of the landscape and monsters that appeared in the most recent scientific gruesome he's seen.

Travelogues interest ~~him~~ Uncle Joe, too. There's hardly any place in the world he hasn't been--on TV. Of course, he did run around a lot when he was young but he never got outside the United States even when he was in the army in World War I. That doesn't

~~both~~ bother Uncle Joe. Some of the places he's seen only on TV are more real to him than others he's visited often, or even lived in. He likes to travel ^{space ship,} by horseback or train but not by plane or boat.

Probably he got acquainted with some of the big cities while he was helping private eyes solve murder mysteries. They have to do it just right, or they'll hear from Uncle Joe. He doesn't bawl them out or anything bad, because he is on the side of the law; but he tells them where they're making mistakes so they won't do it again.

What really makes Uncle Joe mad is those lawyer programs that lead you all the way through the show with ~~the~~ fingers of accusation pointing toward practically everybody. Then the lawyer will explain in the epilogue how he's figured all along that the real culprit is somebody else, on account of some minute but significant piece of evidence that wasn't even hinted at on the show.

"Those blasted shyster lawyers," Uncle Joe fumes. "That crooked guy ought to be disbarred for covering up evidence like that! Soon as I get time, I'm gonna write the supreme court and have that bird charged with malfeasance of his ~~oath~~ hypocritical oath!"

Of course, he's got his oath mixed up with his medical ~~programs~~ programs, which he also watches but with a different identification pattern. On the medical shows, he is neither the hero nor the patient. He is always the young lover, chasing the nurses. But the less said about that, the better.

Uncle Joe never makes any distinction ^{regarding realism} between ~~news~~ newscasts and science fiction, between comedies and commercials, or ^{between} documentaries and old movies. Everything is real as life and twice

as big. Probably he is convinced that they can see ~~2~~ and hear him just as well as he can see and hear them. Maybe better.

The whole family was pretty worried for awhile after we discovered what had happened to Uncle Joe---or was it something that Uncle Joe had done? But we figured maybe ~~the~~ everything's all right after all.

"What difference does it make, as long as he's healthy and happy?" Cousin Edgar asked. Nobody could think of a good answer for that, and there probably isn't anything we could do about it, anyway. It just looks like Uncle Joe enjoys living in the TV world better than in the real world.

After all, life inside a television set may have its advantages. ~~the~~ We can get several channels on our set, so all Uncle Joe has to do if he doesn't like the world he's in is to turn the ~~knob~~ knob, and he's in another world. If he doesn't like any of them, he can turn off the whole business and go to bed.

The rest of us who have to get up and go to work every morning aren't so fortunate!