



Strange Reality

My husband and I were looking forward to it: our first grown-up night out in a long, long time. No kids and adult conversation for four straight hours. Some friends invited us to the Oak Room in the famed Algonquin Hotel to hear the smooth and smoky jazz sounds of Paula West. Beautiful, in a black dress and looking younger than anyone in the room, she stepped up to the mike and said, “I hope you all aren’t missing some of your favorite reality shows tonight to be here.” I wanted to tell her that I’d miss any reality television show to hear her sing. After all, she’s real life; so-called “reality television” only pretends to be.

Paula’s remarks got me thinking about what we are staying home to watch these days. The landscape of television ain’t what it used to be.

It is said that MTV aired the first reality show with *Real World* back in 1992. It centered around seven diverse 20-something strangers living together under one roof. Simple. Yet it changed the face of

I disagree. I think there is something with depth and meaning in TV-land.

Let me interject here that I’m the host of what I hope is an exception to my husband’s view of television programming: *New Morning* on Hallmark Channel. We tell stories of ordinary people who take life’s challenges and transform them into opportunities for growth, healing, and

Even some reality shows have that kind of depth. Take *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, where Ty Pennington and his design team have only seven days to renovate a home for a deserving family. I have shed many tears watching families not only get a home makeover, but get their lives back.

Even lighter reality fare like *American Idol* and *Project Runway* set themselves apart because they present opportunities to people who might not otherwise have them. By giving the guy or gal from Smalltown, USA, the chance to sign a record deal or sell their designs in a top New York City boutique, dreams have been fulfilled. And, for the people watching, it might inspire them to pursue their own dreams. Nothing wrong with that.

Frankly, it isn’t that easy to find shows that nurture the human spirit. If you’re searching for quality television, it may take just that: some searching. A lot of our viewers tell us that they found our

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television. The more jealous outbursts, backstabbing, and conniving those kids revealed, the more people loved it.

So began a plethora of unreal reality shows, where contestants sucked down live slugs or munched on Madagascar hissing cockroaches in hopes of winning the grand cash prize. This new kind of television was habit-forming. Yet no one really wanted to admit that they were watching it. It was so bad, it was good. I’ve been hooked on more than a few such shows, to my husband’s chagrin. He believes all reality TV is a waste of time and that much of what’s on TV has no redeeming value.

service to others. We want our viewers to start their day centered and connected to their spiritual side. We’re the antidote to reality TV.

So is the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. Oprah uplifts weary souls by rousing people off the couch and out, making a positive difference in the world. Sex offenders have been caught, new homes have been built in post-Katrina New Orleans, and she has brought attention to hundreds of charitable organizations and volunteer programs through her Angel Network. Not long ago, she gave \$1,000 cash to every studio audience member and assigned them to use the money charitably.

show by word of mouth or by accident. One woman’s cat stepped on the remote and — voila! — *New Morning* appeared; now she doesn’t leave home without her daily dose of spirit.

Love it or hate it, this reality TV phenomenon is here to stay. And, if you’re like my husband, you’ll pray for its demise.

Be that as it may, I wouldn’t miss Paula West for anything on television. After all, there’s Tivo . . .

Timberly Whitfield, grew up in Africa in a household without any television. Her show, *New Morning*, can be seen at NewMorningTV.tv.