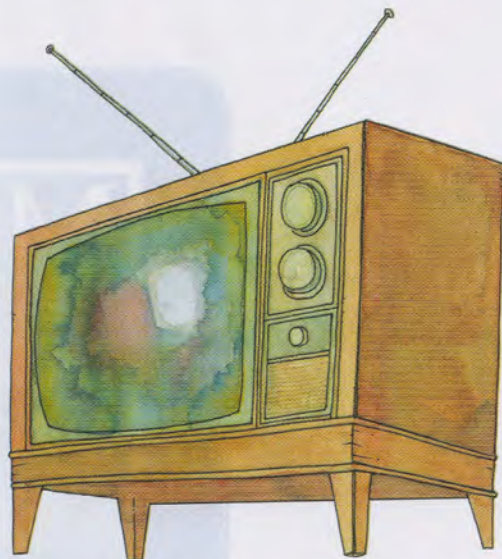


simple sundays

by harriet riley | illustration by justin schultz



Growing up in Mississippi in the 1960s, Sunday was a quiet day. Stores were not open, except the downtown newsstand. Only doctors, nurses, and preachers worked. Even law enforcement took the day off. Sundays were intentional. This day stood apart from every other day of the week as a sacred time of rest.

Preparations started on Saturday. In addition to the grocery shopping, we had our hair-washing ritual. We always had a serious bath and hair washing on Saturday night. It was intense. My mother—normally a mild-mannered Southern woman—was vicious with my hair. She scrubbed and scratched like a cat trying to claw its way out of a carrying case on the way to the vet. After the tortuous hair washing, my sister and I were submitted to hair curling. Mama combed and parted our hair with a sharp comb until our heads ached from the tugging. With our wet hair set in large plastic curlers, we took turns sitting under a dryer attached to the back of a chair in our playroom. The hood sat over our heads sending hot air blowing into our aching follicles. No handheld dryers for us; they didn't exist yet. The worst part—we had to sleep in those large plastic curlers. It was like sleeping with several rocks attached to your head. The preparations were worth it; the next morning we awoke with lovely ringlets.

The routine was the same every Sunday. We went to Sunday school and church and then to Grandmama's for a large family lunch. We never missed Sunday school because we were working on earning perfect-attendance

badges to wear to church. Even when we went on our family vacation to Florida every summer, Mama dragged us to Sunday school at some unfamiliar Presbyterian church with tanned, blonde Floridian children.

At home, the highlight of going to church was being allowed to walk to Raynor's Newsstand a few blocks from church. We were allowed to buy chewing gum to keep us occupied. We chewed our Fruit Stripe and Beechnut clove gum all through the interminably long service. We also doodled on the church bulletin, leaned on Mama's arm, and pinched each other, a lot. Church services lasted forever and nothing interesting ever happened, but I do remember the chewing gum treat and the softness of my mother's mink jacket.

After church, we were herded into the family car for the short drive to Grandmama's house. By now my curls were long gone, and I just wanted to remove the uncomfortable tights easing down my legs. Not that Mama would have tolerated that.

Grandmama always had a feast prepared—fried chicken, corn casserole, green beans, ambrosia, tomato aspic, and little sweet pickles in the condiment dish—and spread on the large dining table. After the lengthy meal, dessert was served, a six-layer caramel cake or a pecan pie, or both. Finally, we were allowed to play on Grandmama's large wrap-around porch and a lush green patch in her small backyard.

That afternoon, we returned home to the most boring time of the week—the endless Sunday afternoon. We

couldn't watch television and weren't permitted to gallivant around the neighborhood with our friends. My older brother and sister were far too grown up to lower themselves to play with me, so I had only my books as companions. By Sunday evening, I had often devoured my library books for the week, finding I could re-read favorites—*Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown*, *Strawberry Girl*. My love of books was nurtured to maturity during those long Sunday afternoons alone.

By six in the evening, the quiet time was over and we were allowed to turn on the large console television set in the family room. We started with "Lassie" and then watched "The Wide World of Disney," which was always a thrill. I saw "Pollyanna," "The Absent-Minded Professor," "Herbie The Love Bug" and many Disney classics shown for the first time during that era. Next was "The Ed Sullivan Show," followed by "Bonanza" for my older brother and sister. Staying up for "Bonanza" on Sunday night was the ultimate in achieving teenager status. TV was Sunday's one redeeming feature in my mind in those days.

But now it all seems special. Sundays were sacred, set apart. These days, Sunday seems to blend in with all the other days of the week. Maybe the day starts a little slower, but we are soon out running errands, shopping, going to sports events, and doing the mundane everyday chores of our weekday lives. How nice it would be to return to a time for silent contemplation, long afternoon naps, simple family time, and timeless Disney movies. M