

## STRANGER IN OUR HOUSE

A few months before I was born, my dad met a stranger who was new to our small Tennessee town. From the beginning, Dad was fascinated with this enchanting newcomer, and soon invited him to live with our family. The stranger was quickly accepted and was around to welcome me into the world a few months later.

As I grew up I never questioned his place in our family. In my young mind, each member had a special niche. My brother, Bill, five years my senior, was my example. Fran, my younger sister, gave me an opportunity to play 'big brother' and develop the art of teasing. My parents were complementary instructors - Mom taught me to love the word of God, and Dad taught me to obey it.

But the stranger was our storyteller. He could weave the most fascinating tales. Adventure, mysteries and comedies were daily conversations. He could hold our whole family spell-bound for hours each evening.

If I wanted to know about politics, history, or science, he knew it all. He knew about the past, understood the present, and seemingly could predict the future. The pictures he could draw were so lifelike, that I would often laugh or cry as I watched.

He was like a friend to the whole family. He took Dad, Bill and me to our first major league ball game. He was always encouraging us to see the movies and he even made arrangements to introduce us to several movie stars. My brother and I were deeply impressed by John Wayne in particular.

The stranger was an incessant talker. Dad didn't seem to mind, but sometimes Mom would quietly get up while the rest of us were enthralled with one of his stories of faraway places, go to her room, read her Bible and pray. I wonder now if she ever prayed that the stranger would leave.

You see, my dad ruled our household with certain moral convictions. But this stranger never felt obligated to honor them. Profanity, for example, was not allowed in our house - not from us, from our friends, or adults. Our longtime visitor, however, used occasional four letter words that burned my ears and made Dad squirm. To my knowledge the stranger was never confronted.

My dad was a teetotaler who didn't permit alcohol in his home - not even for cooking. But the stranger felt like we needed exposure and

enlightened us to other ways of life, He offered us beer and other alcoholic beverages.

He made cigarettes look tasty, cigars manly, and pipes distinguished. He talked freely about sex. His comments were sometimes blatant, sometimes suggestive, and generally embarrassing. I know now that my early concepts of the man-woman relationship were influenced by the stranger.

The stranger began to discuss personal issues and ailments without regard to the tender ears that might be listening or the fact that it was at mealtime - some of the topics caused mom to leave the table.

As I look back, I believe it was by the grace of God that the stranger did not influence us more. Time after time he opposed the values of my parents. Yet he was seldom rebuked and never asked to leave.

More than thirty years have passed since the stranger moved in with the young family on Morningside Drive. He is no nearly so intriguing to my Dad as he was in those early years. But if I were to walk into my parent's den today, you still see him sitting over in the corner, waiting for someone to listen to him talk and watch him draw his pictures.

He never told us his name - we always used his initials: T.V.

- Author Unknown