

The Guest

Author Unknown

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. Mom taught me to love the Word of God. Dad taught me to obey it. But the stranger was our storyteller. He could weave the most fascinating tales. Adventures, mysteries and comedies were daily conversations. He could hold our whole family spellbound for hours each evening.

He was like a friend to the whole family. He took Dad, Bill and me to our first major league baseball game. He was always encouraging us to see the movies, and he even made arrangements to introduce us to several movie stars. 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—and go to her room and read her Bible and pray. I wonder now if she ever prayed that the stranger would leave. My Dad ruled our household with certain moral convictions. But this stranger never felt an obligation to honor them.

Profanity was not allowed in our house—not from us, 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. Dad didn't permit alcohol in his home. But the stranger enlightened us to other ways of life. He often 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.

I believe it was only by the grace of God the stranger did not influence us even more. Time after time he opposed my parents' values. 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.

But if I were to walk into my parents' home today, I would still see him sitting over in a corner, waiting for someone to listen to him talk and watch him draw his pictures. His name? We always called him TV.