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March 16, 1998

Dear Councilmember,

Thank you for giving me a few minutes of your time. Hopefully you will have had time to read the background information that I have enclosed.

When I speak to you I will be reading a letter I wrote to the Sacramento Bee three weeks ago, and elaborate on an issue that is very disturbing to me. Please understand me when I say I am not trying to restrict anyone's freedom of speech, but to question responsibility and decency.

What I will be asking you to do is individually, and as a council, to write to KOVR requesting that they move The Jerry Springer Show to late night, for the well being of the children in this community. That being said, I would welcome your endorsement of my community boycott of KOVR News, but understand the position you are in. I do believe though, that for you and the County Board of Supervisors to make that kind of bold statement would probably be enough to give KOVR second thought. Please consider?

Thank You,

Don Brown
Teacher



DIANA GRIEGO ERWIN

'Jerry Springer' no show for kids

Teacher Don Brown walked into his sixth-grade classroom a few weeks ago and conducted a little experiment. It was not science-related; there would be no test.

By a show of hands, he asked his English-as-a-second-language students if they ever watched the "Jerry Springer Show" on TV after school. About three-quarters of the students said they did.

This was not a positive revelation to Brown, who, in 10 years of teaching, has noted that many children take their cues about American culture from popular media such as TV. This is all the more true for children of immigrants, especially those still struggling with language and meaning.

"I have no problem with the show airing - I believe in the First Amendment - but you don't put it on after school when many kids are home alone," Brown said. "I think it's disgusting." The station is putting ratings and money before its social responsibility.

Aired locally on KOVR Channel 13, the controversial program is popular for the same reason many similar daytime shows are. Springer's guests are so sleazy, viewers feel better about themselves in comparison. The whole show features people demeaning one another, screaming, cursing and revealing disgusting personal secrets such as "I slept with my sister."

The difference is, Springer practically guarantees viewers the bravado will come to fisticuffs. Springer, the sleaziest of them all because he should know better, shakes his head, feigns concern, laughs and sometimes eggs them on.

Until February, the show aired at midnight, had a large following and nobody much cared. If stations want to air trash, the First Amendment says they can.

Then, just before the February ratings sweep, KOVR, which did not return calls Monday, decided to move the show to its 4 p.m. time slot. The move presented KOVR with its biggest daytime hit in years, giving its 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. newscasts a boost, too. Poor Stan Atkinson, practically a legend in this town. How embarrassing to have *that* as a lead-in.

But it also drew enough complaints - "comments," the station might say - to dedicate a voice-mail box for feedback about the show. Even the programming director's voice-mail message directs viewers to "the Jerry Springer comment line." A perky voice on that extension invites viewers to leave their comments, which "staff will review."

Return calls must not be part of the gig. Don Brown left a couple of messages there weeks ago and has yet to hear back.

He has since told his students' parents they shouldn't allow their children to watch the show, and now he's trying to get others on his side. The station does not seem to be responding to community criticism, he said. It's the old credo: Any publicity is good publicity.

"I will not sit back and do nothing but complain," said Brown, who teaches at Elder Creek Elementary.

And so he's approached members of the Sacramento City Council and the county Board of Supervisors asking them for help. A few words before the teachers union garnered him some encouraging nods.

"I just want people to take a stand," said Brown, who's calling for a consumer boycott of KOVR and its advertisers.

"I appreciate very much what he's trying to do," Sacramento City Councilman Darrell Steinberg said. "But I also have great respect for the First Amendment and believe strongly that government can't or shouldn't mandate anything limiting the freedoms it guarantees."

"On the other hand, those freedoms include the responsibility to do the right thing. . . I would hope Channel 13 would consider placing that show at a different hour."

"In education, you're always hearing about accountability; about how schools should be held accountable, and I'm all for that," Brown said. "But what about everyone else?"

"Part of my responsibilities as a teacher is to teach respect. . . Then my students go home and watch a display of people degrading each other and resorting to physical violence?"

Some will argue that what kids watch is the job of parents, and I agree. But that's ignoring the fact that not every parent can be home by 4 p.m., and wishing they could won't make it happen. The choices television executives make can help families - not work against them.

DIANA GRIEGO ERWIN'S column appears Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. Write her at P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, 95852, fax (916) 321-1109, e-mail dgriego@sacbee.com or call (916) 321-1057.

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Do I play censor and not run it? Sure, we're running the show because of ratings and money, but that's the business.

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Bob Finke
Channel 13's general manager

Trash TV

We want to hear what you think of Jerry Springer

Jerry Springer deals in trash. Pretty much everybody who has watched the increasingly popular television talk show understands that. Whether the subject is sexual perversion, mother-daughter dysfunction or just a plain vanilla family tragedy, Springer can be counted on to stage-manage the event into a foul-mouthed brawl before the end of the program.

Not just any ol' program, either. It's now Sacramento's most popular daytime TV, a phenomenon that's racking up ratings that mean as many as 120,000 local households are now enjoying stories about the cheating stripper who thinks the father of her unborn child might be her husband's best friend. What's more, the program that used to run at midnight now airs at 4 p.m., just in time for the schoolkids coming home with time on their hands and nothing better to do.

Channel 13 (KOV) understands there might be some concern about slotting this kind of trash programming in a kid-friendly late afternoon slot. General manager Bob Finke says the station plans to look into that, too — but not before the May "sweeps" that rank all the stations for viewers and help set rates for advertising.

"I understand a lot of people are upset, but

then there are 100,000 homes and 300,000 people watching," he told The Bee's Dan Vierra. "Where do you draw the line? Do I play censor and not run it? Sure, we're running the show because of ratings and money, but that's the business. I've had some sleepless nights about it, too."

Well, that's a fair enough question: Where do you draw the line?

Programs scheduled for the rest of this week include an examination of a married stripper who hasn't told

her husband about her affair with another woman dancer; a woman with no hands or feet getting revenge on her former boyfriend (and father of her child) by showing off her new boyfriend on camera; and a guy who slept with his best friend's girl, but says he only did it to show how

promiscuous she is — and will reveal other guys she slept with, too.

Are those appropriate 4 p.m. programming on broadcast television? Send us your comments by next Monday and we'll be happy to print samples of what you think and have to say about that. Please send brief comments to:

Jerry Springer Comments

E-mail is preferred: opinion@sacbee.com
Postal mail: Box 15779, Sacramento, 95852
Via fax: 321-1996



Scott + Special to The Bee