

## Reclaim your life, join the great television turnoff



**BARB GUY**

*I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book. - Groucho Marx*

This from a man who hosted his own television program and regularly appeared on many others. Too bad Groucho's gone; I bet he would love TV-Turnoff Week, an annual invitation for us all to take a break from television.

Like many people, I have (wrongly) convinced myself that I am a fairly discriminating TV viewer. I never watch soap operas, chair-throwing talk shows, reality TV, or cheap true-crime programs disguised as news. I skip police dramas or comedies that are overly fond of making women into victims. I have given up on the local news. I never watch TV in the daytime. I limit my options by not having

cable or satellite TV. I watch less than the average viewer.

So I must be doing OK, right?

We like to tell ourselves a story of who we are, and, for a lot of us, our autobiography includes a chapter on the exciting and enriching ways we spend our time. We volunteer. We give to charity. We support the arts. We work hard. We participate in politics. We socialize. We travel. We are good neighbors. We read. We take classes. We exercise, whether anyone can tell or not. We don't watch much TV.

In spite of my goal of being a high-minded, careful TV viewer, last weekend, when awakened in the middle of the night and with a half-dozen books on my nightstand, I reached past all of them for the TV remote, puzzling through the dubbed-into-Spanish version of some swashbuckler that must have been 20 years old.

I also find that I will watch "The West Wing" or the new "Grey's Anatomy," and then inertia will keep me on the couch when it's over, making a one-hour appointment with TV last a good deal longer.

So I welcome TV-Turnoff Week. It's a great idea. Sometimes we need to be reminded to strive to be as good as we think we are.

The week starts tomorrow, April 25, and runs through Sunday. The TV-Turnoff Network hosts the week each year to combat stupidity. They don't say it quite that simply, but that's really the idea.

Cutting down on TV also promotes good physical health. In 2001, then-U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher said, "I am particularly supportive [of TV Turnoff Week]. Given our national television habit, it is no surprise that we are raising the most sedentary and most overweight generation of youngsters in American history."

I'm interested in reducing my own stupidity and increasing my own health, so I will participate. The group's Web site ([www.tvturnoff.org](http://www.tvturnoff.org)) is replete with ideas for how to spend the 30 or more hours that the average American TV viewer can gain next week by unplugging the set. Reading tops the list, but it's a huge list, limited only by the needs and imaginations of the participants.

Other ideas - bike, clean out a closet, renew a friendship, do a good deed, garden, groom your pet, take a walk with your sweetie, paint a picture, knit, sing, build a birdhouse, play your accordion, or write a letter to President Bush. Heck, with 30 hours to spare next week, Jane

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and Joe Average could do all those.

I expect that when I click off the TV for the week, the awesome world that I occupy, the world of beauty and privilege that most of us find ourselves in, will be waiting for me. I expect to feel like an idiot for giving so much of myself to TV.

One woman on the TV-Turnoff Network's Web site said, "The worst single choice I ever made was getting my husband cable for his birthday. Now there are woodworking, gardening, quilting, cooking, and home improvement shows on for 24 hours a day! If we weren't watching these shows, we would probably be woodworking, gardening, quilting, cooking, and improving our home." There's something to that.

The people we see on TV are doing; we're only watching. Whether they're acting, reporting, teaching us to make a bench, or climbing Kilimanjaro, they're doing; like Groucho, they're not home watching TV.

The TV-Turnoff people are intent on getting kids to participate in this special week of non-programming. I laughed at a second-grader's comment on the Web site: "I really didn't like TV-Turnoff Week except that my grades went up and I was in a good mood all week."

Libraries and teachers are big proponents of the campaign, for obvious reasons.

I don't think I'll ever take the TV outside, tie a blindfold around it, tape a cigarette to its seductive screen and shoot it with a gun (like folk singer Utah Phillips did), but I'm kind of looking forward to TV-Turnoff Week. It's just a week, after all. And once I turn my attention to other things, who knows what I will find.

Care to join me?

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*Barb Guy is a frequent contributor to these pages.* © Salt Lake Tribune.