
a gift by edward herrmann

An actor's life is full of ups and downs.

Sometimes the work comes so fast and heavy he can't deal with all of it. Sometimes, as the saying goes, he can't get arrested. But if he is very lucky, a project comes along that makes all the lean times seem unimportant. Such a project is like a gift. Such a gift in my life was *The Gilmore Girls*.

I had avoided episodic television for years until I read the pilot for a new show that I thought was hip, smart, funny, and an ironic turning on its head of the usual teen show format: a young girl who was less interested in boys and makeup and sex and popularity, than reading *War and Peace*.

Adults were not automatically idiots and the dialogue was sharp, funny and loaded with literary awareness. It was, in a word, intelligent. The cast was terrific, the producer/writer team eccentric and off center in the best sense, and there was every prospect that the show, with careful tending from a sympathetic network, could be a success. No one has to tell me how rare a successful television show is these days. Commercial networks have a nasty habit of pulling the plug on shows—some of them very good—within three or four episodes if some arbitrary numbers are not hit in a prescribed time limit. Not so the WB network, at least with *The Gilmore Girls*. However the decisions were made to keep the show going, and I don't pretend to know what blood was shed in that struggle, we were given a second season and the chance to build an audience.

And what an audience! Just as I write this, I am in New Haven, Conn. at the Yale Rep. doing Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance*, a great American play at a wonderful theater. Yesterday I was asked to a "tea" at Trumbull College, a tradition at Yale where visiting scholars speak in an informal way to whoever wants to come. After a very interesting question-and-answer period about art, playwriting and the aesthetic of a creative life in America, I was surrounded by young Yale undergraduates in an outpouring of gratitude for the show, its message and the power it had of healing the usual rifts in the mother/daughter relationship of adolescence. "My mother is my best friend because of that show! Thank you, thank you, thank you!!" Of course it might have helped that the setting of Rory's college days was Yale, but the message was clear: the show had a truly positive and powerful influence on kids trying to make creative decisions about their futures at the most confusing and trying time of their lives: the infamous teen years. There is so much garbage out there encouraging kids to take the road of least resistance, and here was a show that was amazingly popular telling them to raise the bar and try for something less vulgar, something better. And doing it with grace, humor and wicked wit.

As I said, a gift. Warner Bros. Studio was a great place to work: all those ghosts of Cagney and Bogart and Errol Flynn. And the working conditions, always horrendous on a single-camera, one-hour show, were made intriguing and fun by the wonderfully funny and smart cast. We stay in touch and have great satisfaction in each others' success. The greatest joy for me, however, is the impact the show has had on a whole generation of young people who learned that, though growing up is tough at the best of times, it can be done with humor, honesty and love. The gulf between generations is far less important than is commonly supposed when people can drop the pose and talk honestly with each other. And this was the real triumph of *The Gilmore Girls*. A gift.