



## VoTE Annual General Meeting

# Quiz the Experts About TV Standards

The Annual General Meeting for Viewers for Television Excellence Inc. (VoTE) will be held at the Canterbury Horticultural Society Hall, 57 Riccarton Ave, in South Hagley Park, opposite Christchurch Hospital, South Hagley Park, on Monday the **10th of July 2006 at 7.30pm**. A panel of experts will answer questions that concern members at this meeting:

- Anne Tolley: MP, National Party's Associate Welfare Spokeswoman (CYF)
- Marc Alexander; ex MP, Crime Prevention Spokesperson for the Sensible Sentencing Trust, interest in Broadcasting and Law & Order issues
- John McNeil; Writer/reporter, former broadcaster
- Judi Lawrence; Assistant Head of Middle

School, Middleton Grange School  
Please submit any questions you wish to be covered in writing to VoTE, PO Box 12054, Christchurch, by the 30th June. If there is time, questions will be taken from the floor. Our President, Mr John Terris (Lower Hutt), will chair the meeting. Please come with friends and support VoTE at this very important meeting. We are seeking people for the National Committee, Officers of that committee (Treasurer and Secretary especially), a Newsletter Editor and Wellington and Auckland Committee members. Please send your nominations to: The Secretary, VoTE Inc., PO Box 12054, ChCh..

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## VoTE Auckland members hear how TV watching is harmful

Dr. Geoff Bridgeman, Associate Head of the Health and Community Studies Department at Unitec, gave a presentation based on his research commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Authority on 'Violence on Television'. Dr. Bridgeman said it was not so much that violence is watched on television, rather it is the amount of time spent watching, combined with the violence, that is most harmful. This combination could lead to such things as obesity, bullying, passive behaviour and lack of incentive and depression.

There is increasing research to show that much ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and ADHD is attributable to television viewing. Children are particularly at risk, and those who watch too much can suffer from sensory deprivation, and also suffer impaired intellectual development if they watch more than two or three hours a day. Cognitive development of children from 5-12 is inhibited, whereas with adolescents it is the lost opportunity which is the most significant.

Although less than 2% of violent behaviour in adulthood is attributable to TV violence, 28% of adolescents committed violence if they watched more than three hours a day.

Dr. Bridgeman said violence in advertisements and promos is used to keep viewers in front of television – these two between them provide 33% of all the violence on television, and were particularly effective in attracting those with limited life skills and immature cognitive development. The 2003 study indicated that there were approximately 8 episodes of violence/hour on NZ television and most of these were in overseas programmes (mostly from the US). NZ-made television, as with Australian television, is a lot less violent. The most violent channels available in NZ were TV3 (8.2 episodes/hour), TV2 (6.3/hour), Sky movies (12/hour), Nickelodeon (13.8/hour). Dr. Bridgeman recommended that we ask for more Australian programmes to be shown.

In 1990, there was a change to competitive TV in New Zealand, and episodes of violence increased markedly as the channels competed. The introduction of the Broadcasting Act in 1995 gave a measurable brief respite in levels of violence as broadcasters were 'running scared'. Although it was not easy to relate antisocial behaviour directly to 'TV



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# Bouquets & Brickbats

## BOUQUETS

To *Prime* for interesting documentaries on Sunday evenings:

On 14th and 21st May there was in-depth examination of whether there was any factual truth behind the novel *The Da Vinci Code*.

To *Prime* for the very moving documentary *Death in Gaza* on 29 May 2006.

To *TV3's Campbell Live* for consistently addressing interesting social problems.

To *TV One* for the series *Hidden in Numbers* - a factual and informative series that highlighted trends in NZ daily living.

This series was classified as 'G' - why do we not have more 'G' material in prime time?

To *TV Two* for their *Truth Files Special* programme on 23<sup>rd</sup> May. It was interesting, topical (on drugs in New Zealand), informative and well-researched.

## BRICKBATS

To *TV One* for "dumbing down" its *News* and using sensationalism in items.

To *TV One* for trivialising *Sunday*. This was once an interesting current affairs documentary - it is now more like a smutty woman's magazine. For example:

14/5/06 gave a graphic description of a murder and physical abuse and descriptions of abuses of three different women. It started before 8pm and included re-enactments!

### THE BIGGEST BRICKBAT OF ALL

The biggest brickbat of all must go to the way the *Broadcasting Act of 1989* was set up.

Under the Act, in order to make a Formal Complaint, the complainant must first complain to the broadcaster then, if the

complaint is not accepted, a Formal Complaint can be made to the *Broadcasting Standards Authority* who may, or who may not, uphold it.

This system might have been dreamt up by Lewis Carroll in "Alice through the Looking Glass".

It means, in fact, that we are supposed to sit through a programme full of sex, violence and bad language *in order to be able to complain about it*.

Since people who are likely to object to the above probably do not watch the programme,

this inevitably means there are far fewer complaints about violations of standards for *good taste and decency* than might be expected, simply because people have not wished to watch objectionable programmes.

In their latest publication, *Freedoms and Fetters*, the Broadcasting Standards Authority admits there is more public tolerance of some bad language. This is inevitable when we have been exposed to it so much - so many of us not having complained because we did not watch programmes that used it!!

Surely the BSA should have been set up to be the watchdogs themselves - not to have to wait for the public to use a cumbersome system of complaints that has allowed standards to slip unbelievably low compared to those practised before the 1989 Act.

The 1989 *Broadcasting Act* has allowed us to be delivered into the hands of the advertisers. Programmes are chosen not for their quality but for whether they will appeal to the lowest common denominator and the greatest number of viewers.

The whole *Broadcasting Act of 1989* should be re-drafted to deliver a better, more responsible television service, and MPs should be urged to agitate for this, including ways to ensure the standards of television are responsibly upheld and the protection of children and youngsters are made a priority.

## How TV watching is harmful (cont.)

watching statistics', one interesting report to recently come out of the US is that murder rates (which are easily measurable!) significantly increased 20 years after an increase in TV ownership. Other studies have pointed out that the correlation between violence in the media and aggressive behaviour is higher than the effect of smoking on health.

Disturbing statistics show that with under 2-year-olds, 45% are watching more than 2 hours a day. Only 10% of 3-year-olds are not watching any television. Of those watching television, 40% are more likely to develop ADHD than those who watch none at all.

Following this presentation, there was a brief presentation of VoTE's 2005 AGM in Wellington that showed a number of MPs applauding the general aims of VoTE.

The discussion turned to what VoTE members could do about these trends of increased use of television and its effects. It was stated that although the Report on Television Violence was issued in April 2004, nothing has been done about it. The meeting agreed:

- ◆ That VoTE members could pressure for action on the recommendations from the 2003 report (nothing has happened yet), ask local MPs to find out what has

happened to the report to ensure it is implemented.

- ◆ To request changes in legislation so we have a monitoring regime (we are one of the only few countries without).
- ◆ To provide information on how to make complaints.
- ◆ That all pre-schools (kindergarten, Play Centres etc) should be given a single sheet of paper to hand out to parents with the main points of Dr Bridgeman's research and suggestions of how to keep children from too much TV watching.
- ◆ That we should be more active in contacting advertisers and letting them know that violence on screen is not acceptable.
- ◆ Although everyone agreed that the watershed for AO programmes should be raised to 9.30, not left at the present 8.30pm, it was nevertheless pointed out that the greatest amount of violence shown on screen is in children's programmes - particularly cartoons, screened mostly earlier in the day!

The group agreed to meet again and aim to form a small group to continue with these discussions. If any members are interested in joining this group, please contact Mrs. Betty Gilderdale, Ph 09 478 7843.

# Members speak out

To The Editor, Hamilton Press:

It is with great pleasure I watch the falling ratings of Television One. Any channel that can put on photos of nude women in provocative poses out of Playboy magazines on the *Headliners* programme at 10 to 6 in the evening, deserves to be taken off the air altogether. TV One has lost sight of its service and responsibilities to the public. Children of all ages would have been watching television at that time. Parents would not expect to have to protect them at that time. Even the presenters didn't seem to know the photos were coming. I urge all parents throughout the country to refuse to turn on Television One until they make a public apology for exposing our children and grandchildren to pornography while in a position of trust. ~Robyn Jackson

To TV3:

I hereby register a Formal Complaint about your poor/wrong choice in presenting a large quantity of TV programming featuring violence as entertainment. **Why are you programming society to be more violent?** While it is acceptable to show the reality of human cruelty in short bites as part of a documentary or the TV News, it is not acceptable to show murder and killings as the dominant theme of everyday life as our major form of entertainment. Here are just a few examples: On Sunday 8.30pm *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* is followed at 9.30pm by *Criminal Intent* which are both dealing with violent criminal activities as common entertainment. What possible value is there in showing every gruesome detail of humanity's violence and insanity in shocking and traumatic scenes day after day? The problem is in the cumulative effect of prolonged watching of a vast array of similar violent programmes for weeks, months and years. **Why do we have to protect ourselves from TV programmes and your choices of social conditioning?** What worries me is that many people (not only children) will watch every programme (whatever it is) and be conditioned by it because that is what television does. **Do you realize that you are culturally conditioning a nation?** ~ Laurie Ross

To TVNZ

During a TV2 screening of NZ Idol on Monday 5 September 2005, between 8 and 8.30pm your network showed a promo for the AO classified programme 'Grey's Anatomy', containing language not in keeping with the classification of the host programme. The promo... shows 2 women and a man together. One of the women says to the other woman, "you must be the one screwing my husband." Hardly language I would consider suitable for young audiences. Do you imagine it would be acceptable language in a classroom of primary or intermediate aged children? Why then, is it considered appropriate to be aired in the middle of NZ Idol, a G classified programme? ~Christine Fletcher (Mrs)

The Editor, 'The Press' ChCh.

I am very distressed and upset by Prime Television and TV1, who both used explicit pornographic pictures during their

News broadcasts at 5.30 and 6pm respectively on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2005. I can understand that they use them to illustrate the news item, but feel that it is totally inappropriate and unnecessary to use them, especially at a family viewing time, or for that matter at any time. Perhaps if more people let them (TV sStations) know that things are unacceptable (and I would include those explicit adverts for sex promoting medications and others) we might get a better deal. But as long as we do nothing, we will continue to get more and more unacceptable junk thrust at us, and we will deserve it. We might also consider boycotting the advertisers, and letting them know why we are doing it. ~ Yvonne Barnes

To VoTE:

Interesting to read in the last Newsletter (Nov. 03) that complaints to the BSA have decreased and this does not surprise me. The reason for this is, it is futile complaining – that has been my experience over the years. Television standards have been dropping significantly, particularly over recent years, and there appears to be little being done, VoTE excepted, to halt the decline. Even letters to the papers remain unpublished. I tried writing directly to the

Broadcasting Minister as I was frustrated with the results of going to the BSA. The Minister informed me that this would amount to 'political interference' if that office became involved. Astounding! So there appears nowhere or no-one complaints can be sent to. ~ Laurie Collier

To TV3 programmers:

I wish to protest most strongly about the trailers for forthcoming programmes which are placed in breaks during children's/family programmes. It is now 7.15pm on a Saturday night and I am watching 'The Simpsons' with my child. We were suddenly subjected to a trailer saying: "What's the most unusual place you ever had sex?" Also "What are you hiding? Probably the drugs". I ask you to ensure that trailers and advertising are appropriate to the target audience of the programmes that frame them. ~ Mary McCamman

To TV3:

"Today (31.3.05) at approx. 1.08pm I switched on accidentally to a programme 'Missing' to see a black-cloaked figure slice at a woman's head with a sword and severing it. I switched it off instantly – a child walking into a room while this was on would have been exposed to a violent and horrible sight. "There are many other disgusting and violent instances that come through the screen when least expected. ~ (Mrs) M Stafford

To Prime TV

"Last evening, Sunday 17 2005, at 9.33 I turned Prime on and was sickened and horrified to see a red hot piece of steel being violently thrust into a person's face. To show scenes such as this as this, in my view is totally lacking responsibility and accountability and almost as sick as the mind that thought of it. "We know the effect on some minds of this type of viewing and I request stricter editing of programmes portraying human beings enjoying the pain of others." ~ Marie Stafford



