

The Bachelor makes a mockery of love, marriage, and human dignity. And it's pretty fun to watch.



By Margaret Evans

Original sin notwithstanding, children seem to have an innate sense of right and wrong. Take, for instance, my daughter's reaction when I explained the premise behind the popular TV show "The Bachelor."

"Ewwww," she cried, clamping her hands over her ears. "That sounds dreadful! Dreadful and foul!" (Nice vocabulary for an eight-year-old, eh?) I was relieved; that attitude would make it easier to keep her away from the TV and otherwise occupied while I conducted my "research" that night. Having only seen a few snippets of the show over the years – and having noticed several anticipatory posts about it on Facebook – I'd resolved to watch the season premier of "The Bachelor" in its entirety. All two hours' worth. Thought my column could use a little lightening up in the new year, and this seemed like perfect fodder. I had persuaded my husband to join me in my viewing experiment, with a solemn promise that we could flip back and forth to the football game.

At some point, about halfway through the show, Jeff looked at me with glazed eyes and muttered, in a slightly menacing monotone, "Just so you know... I am never. Ever. Watching this again."

He was preaching to the choir.

Not that I found “The Bachelor” boring. Not hardly. In fact, I found it strangely riveting. In the same way a train wreck is riveting. Or a cock fight. Or a slasher movie. You know that something terribly wrong is happening, and that you really shouldn’t be watching, but you can’t tear yourself away. Well, *I* couldn’t anyway. As this bizarro fairytale unfurled, I couldn’t bear to miss a single ridiculous, embarrassing moment. I nearly hyperventilated every time Jeff switched channels during commercials. “Who cares about the ball game?” I snapped, grabbing the remote and clutching it to my chest. I simply *had* to see who got those roses! And who didn’t. It was not my finest hour. (Or two.)

But perhaps I’m getting ahead of myself. Perhaps there are still a few of you out there who – like me, ‘til now – know virtually nothing about this hit show, now in its 14th season. For ye, the pure of heart, let me recap. “The Bachelor” is defined by Wikipedia as a “reality television dating game show.” The cast consists of a star (the bachelor), and an ever-dwindling bunch of co-stars (attractive young women who vie for his affections week after week). If I’m not mistaken, at the end of each episode, a certain number of women receive a single rose from our star. Those who do not receive a rose are out. Kaput. Banished.

The season premiere took place in a fancy-schmanzy Hollywood mansion, which I gather will house the bachelor – a cute, clean-cut flyboy named Jake – throughout the season. As the episode began, we were treated to beefcake images of a rippling, chiseled Jake flying his plane, riding his motorcycle, strolling on the beach, and whatnot. The scenes were punctuated by an earnest voiceover from Jake, who we learned is a Hopeless Romantic, ready to Settle Down, seriously searching for The One. He seems quite certain he will find The One here on “The Bachelor.” With 10 million viewers tuned in.

We then met Jake’s co-stars, 25 lovely young women from across the country, all with their hearts set on becoming Mrs. Jake. And snagging as much camera time as possible. They are models and fitness trainers, dancers and sales reps. There is a school teacher who seems nice. The most appealing woman by far – prettiest, smartest and most interesting – is a pilot, like Jake. (Maddeningly – and inexplicably – she gets almost no face time all night, and is ousted at the end of the first episode.)

After their brief bios, these women pull up to the mansion in limos, and one by one, they shimmy forward in tiny dresses and introduce themselves to Jake, who’s standing there in a suit with a Mr. Nice Guy smile pasted on. Seriously... he “meets cute” with 25 women, one after another, and the smile never wavers. Each woman is given a few seconds to make a dazzling

first impression. They make bad jokes. Suggestive comments. One squeezes Jake's triceps and asks, "Are these guns registered?" Another compliments his "rock-hard abs." Yet another trips on her stilettos and falls into his arms. And still, the bachelor smiles on. One wonders if his *jaw* is registered.

The rest of the episode is just... creepy. Jake hosts a party there at his Bachelor Pad, during which the 25 women compete shamelessly for "alone time" with the star. One drags him outside to throw a football. Another shows him pictures of her young son, who needs a daddy. Still another dons a wee stewardess uniform to capture his attention. (Get it? Jake's a pilot!) At the end of what feels like a lifetime – a very long, surreal lifetime – Jake presents roses to his 15 favorites. Their ranks will continue to narrow each week, I'm told, until only The One is left standing. To the ten teary-eyed women cast off in the season opener, Jake offered this gentle consolation: "It's nothing personal."

Nothing personal? Well, of course not. How could it be? How can anything as profoundly "personal" as a committed, lifelong relationship – a marriage, for crying out loud – possibly spring from this silly, vapid show? According to my research, in 14 seasons, it hasn't happened. There have been plenty of proposals, even some engagements, but none has resulted in a wedding. Which is, I suppose, cause for hope. But only a little.

Those who worry that marriage is being "redefined" by recent referendums and court decisions seem to be overlooking a glaring truth: Marriage has already *been* redefined, and homosexuals had nothing to do with it. If you look at our divorce rate (half of all marriages), together with the growing number of people – especially parents – never bothering to get married, an interesting (and to some, sobering) picture emerges. What was once inarguably the "building block" of civilization – an institution primarily for the raising and nurturing of the next generation, and, secondly, for lifelong caring and companionship – has become something else entirely. We still say "till death do us part," but what many of us really mean is: "Till boredom, frustration, or somebody more interesting, do us part."

Are shows like "The Bachelor" actually hastening the demise of marriage – making light of that which 'should not be entered into lightly' – or are they merely following along behind that trend, reflections of our confused (and confusing), rapidly changing value system? Bachelor Jake has been blogging about his adventure for *People* magazine, and his entry below speaks volumes, I think, about our relationship culture today – a motley patchwork of noble expectations, narcissistic desires, worn-out cliches, New Age nostrums, and other crazy contradictions. Apparently, in episode two, one of the bachelorettes was caught cozying up to a show staffer and booted from the series. Jake, sounding genuinely heartbroken, reflects on these events

here:

“This is the first time I have been cheated on (to my knowledge) and man, it sucks. I had started to develop feelings for Rozlyn and that’s why I had given her a rose. But what also hurt was the fact that I was friends with the staff member who engaged in the affair. That was hard to swallow. I was so hurt by both of their decisions, but I reminded myself that I still had 14 amazing women there for me, so I composed myself and moved on.”

When you get past the absurdity, there’s something very sad, and a little touching, about this paragraph. Jake was “developing feelings” for Rozelyn? *They’d met briefly at a party! On TV!* She “cheated” on him?

He’s dating 14 other women!

He feels betrayed by his “friend,” a staffer on the show?

The dude was probably paid to stir up this controversy!

Here’s a guy who clearly fancies himself an old-school Romantic Lead, using traditional language of courtship and love to describe a scenario that might be better told in rhyming slang. To a backbeat. By P. Diddy. On the show, you’ll hear him trot out all the right phrases – how much he “respects women” and appreciates the “sanctity of marriage” – and he really seems to mean them. All the while, he’s flashing his big white teeth and rock-hard abs in a weekly televised meat market.

Is Jake in the throes of an identity crisis? Are we all?

Oh, never mind. This was supposed to be a “light” column. I guess I’m not so good at those. I told a friend I was writing about ‘The Bachelor,’ and he quipped, “I’m sure you’ll find a way to tie it to the general decline of humanity.” I hate being so predictable.

So I make no pronouncements about humanity here. I will simply leave you with this warning: “The Bachelor” is not good for you. If TV shows were food, it would be a super-sized bag of Nacho Cheese Doritos. Nacho Cheese Doritos are disgusting. They’re empty calories. They leave a bad taste in your mouth. You feel guilty after eating them, and sometimes even sick. But they’re yummy, too, in a wicked sort of way, and you could probably scarf a whole bag in one sitting. This is why you just don’t keep them in the house.

Same goes for “The Bachelor.” Just don’t turn it on.