

# **THE HISTORY OF TELEVISION, CONDENSED**

**TEN MINUTE PLAY**

**By John C. Havens**

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**THE HISTORY OF TELEVISION, CONDENSED**  
**By John C. Havens**

**SYNOPSIS:** Two zany announcers act out *The History of Television* from caveman times to the present. Whether it's *I Love Lucy* or confusing modern commercials, this zany duo proves that we can't live without TV.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**  
(2 EITHER.)

ONE (m/f)  
TWO (m/f)

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**AT RISE:**

*ONE and TWO are standing center stage. Although they will both play a number of various characters, they start out as announcers. They return to the announcer characters throughout the duet. They have an announcer-like way about them; somewhat suave, somewhat tacky.*

**ONE:** Some said it would never replace radio.

**TWO:** Some called it the idiot box.

**ONE:** Some use it as a way to avoid conversation at dinner.

**TWO:** But in whatever form it's taken, it's grabbed hold of our collective conscience like a dying man falling off a mountain clinging to the side of a canyon so hard it makes his fingernails bleed.

**ONE:** *(Pause.)* That's right. Television. Tonight we'll be taking you though a history of television...

**TWO:** And commercials.

**ONE:** As a way of getting to know more about this great country of ours...

**TWO:** And ourselves.

**ONE:** First, the ancient origin of television!

*ONE spins around in place and then falls to the floor in a crouching position as a caveman, HE begins grunting and walking around like a neanderthal*

**TWO:** It's a little known fact, but television didn't have its first introduction in the twentieth century. No, it was invented long before in the caveman era by this man. His name would have been pronounced by contemporaries like this *(In a high voice with lots of grunts, Two also scratches himself, etc.)* Eeeee! Raki, raki, mumpiptu, mumpiptu. Lakrahona-oooooooooipee tang tang! Frekin. However, for the purposes of this demonstration, let's call him "Unibrow, dull-eyed, hairy backed freak show", or "Harry" for short.

**ONE:** *(As HARRY, waves.)* Untuku.

**TWO:** And Untuku to you. (*ONE acts this next section out as TWO describes it.*) It was an ordinary evening for Harry, he'd slain a prehistoric bison, washed his loincloth in sub arctic water and had lost a digit or two while wrestling a boar. To pass the time in the evening, however, he had a favorite game Harry liked to simply call, "singe". "Singe" consisted of setting himself on fire and seeing how long he could stand the pain before he rolled on the ground and put himself out.

*HARRY does this, laughing at the end.*

**ONE:** (*After HE's done laughing.*) Ow!

**TWO:** One evening, Harry invited a friend over (*TWO refers to self.*), and that's where ancient TV was first invented. (*Throughout this next section TWO narrates while also taking part in the action.*) (*To HARRY.*) Umbutau, eki pony actu. "Hey, Harry. Love what you've done to the place. Where'd you get the wooly mammoth tusk chair?"

**ONE:** Ikea.

**TWO:** Ooooo.

**ONE:** (*Screaming, scratching, etc.*) Tippy! Tippy! Hru hru. (*Translates.*) "Hey, want to see something totally cool?"

**TWO:** Mreep. "Always."

**ONE:** Scrande underpants. "Help light me on fire."

*They both pretend to light flint and light ONE on fire. ONE hops around and screams. In the midst of this, TWO points to the wall behind them.*

**TWO:** Scoltem! "Hey. Look at the wall behind you! The shadows cast from your image and the fire make moving pictures! This could be a way we could translate ideas and stories to countless numbers of other peoples for generations to come!"

**ONE:** (*Pausing from screaming, etc.*) You got all that from the word "Scoltem"?

**TWO:** Unfortunately, however, Harry burned to death in this last game of “Singe”, and the future birth of TV as we know it would have to wait for later years.

*ONE screams horribly and falls to the stage dead.*

**ONE:** *(Gets up.)* So now we skip ahead to the invention of modern television.

**TWO:** *(Spins around to become CRAWFORD T. EMBELLISHMENT, a broad, Southern “good ole’ boy”.)* Hey, ma!

**ONE:** Enter Crawford T. Embellishment, “good ole’ boy” from Biloxi, Mississippi. The true inventor of modern television.

**TWO:** *(As CRAWFORD.)* Pa! I can’t believe it! I found a way to beam light waves through walls to project moving images onto a screen! It’s like them movie shows I heard about with Gark Cable and King Kong!

**ONE:** *(As his Pa, spits a wad of chewing tobacco on the stage.)* Well, that’s fine boy! How’d you do it?

**TWO:** Well, I was a’buildin’ nuclear weapons for the Russians when an alien took control of my...

**ONE:** *(Interrupting.)* And THAT’S the way it really happened.

**TWO:** But just go on believing what those history books tell you.

**ONE:** The truth is out there. *(An “X-files” reference.)*

**TWO:** So then programming began. Back in TV’s infancy, there weren’t shows on around the clock like there are now. Nope. Families used to sit around watching this.

*TWO pretends to be TV set, ONE is a boy from the fifties.*

**ONE:** Hurry up everybody! It’s almost on! *(Turns on the “set”.)*

**TWO:** “And that’s all for Uncle Milty right now. Tune in next week for more Milton Burle comedy adventures.” Dooooootttt!

*Impersonating the “off air signal” with a high piercing tone*

**ONE:** I love this part!

**TWO:** *(Facing the audience, narrating momentarily.)* Two hours later.

*ONE* as *fifties* boy again, turns around in place and pretends to turn on the TV

**TWO:** Dooooottttt! (*ONE* sits down with head in hand, engrossed by the “show”).(*Facing the audience, narrating again.*) Three hours later. (*Turns back to boy who hasn’t moved.*) Dooooottttt!

**ONE:** (*ONE* turns head and pretends to be boy’s mother calling from off stage.)Jimmy! That’s enough TV for today! (*As fifties boy again.*) Aw, gee, ma! (*Turns off set.*)

**TWO:** Dooooottttt! (*Stops when HE gets turned off.*)

**ONE:** But then somebody got smart and discovered a way to fill up all that empty programming space.

**TWO:** With intelligent and thought provoking shows that commented on our humanity?

**ONE:** Wrong! With commercials!

**TWO:** (*In over-the-top old fashioned “commercial voices”.*) Hey, Beverly, I noticed that you’ve got an unsightly blemish on your leg.

**ONE:** I sure do, Patty. (*They both impersonate fifties housewives, as ONE cocks leg at a twisted angle.*) The doctor called it “gangrene”.

**TWO:** Gee, that sounds bad.

**ONE:** It is Patty. It ouches something horrible.

**TWO:** What’d the doc say?

**ONE:** He said I’d have to lose the leg. That’s why I’ve just found...this! (*Pretends to hold up a package.*) Mr. Medicine’s home amputation kit!

**TWO:** Well, criminey, Beverly, that’s swell.

**ONE:** Want to help me?

**TWO:** Sure do!

**ONE:** Well scrub your hands, Patty, and grab a scalpel!

**TWO:** (*Back as announcer.*) And commercials evolved right along with TV. But technology wasn’t always as advanced as it is now. Remember the old days when we didn’t have cable. That’s when reception could be just awful!

*ONE* sits down and starts doing a newscast A.K.A. Walter Cronkite style from the old days. Very subdued. *TWO* sits facing *ONE* as if watching the show.

**ONE:** - in Texas. Movie star Marilyn Monroe thrilled audiences today as she...kkkkkkssssssss...dress in the air and she wwwkkkkssssss...

*ONE* makes noises like the reception is going bad and shakes his head back and forth

**TWO:** Dang reception! (*While ONE continues to make noise TWO gets up and starts hitting where the side of the TV would be, ONE's head; after one or two hits ONE talks normally again.*)

**ONE:** - Joe DiMaggio. But Monroe's antics were no match for the b-b-b-a-a-a-s-s-s

*ONE* jumps up and down like the horizontal hold is breaking up

**TWO:** Dang horizontal hold!

*Bangs on TV, after a moment ONE stops*

**ONE:** - all of baseball was shocked. In other sports new, hockey f-f-f-f-a-a-a

*Now ONE goes side to side in a similar fashion.*

**TWO:** Dang vertical hold!

*Gets up and hits the TV, keeps hitting it harder and harder*

**ONE:** (*Stands up as announcer.*) Stop hitting me! (*Hits TWO who falls to the ground.*) But eventually things smoothed out a bit and modern programming began.

**TWO:** And with shows like "I Love Lucy" the modern sitcom was born.

**ONE:** (As RICKY, with heavy accent.) Lucceee? What deed you do?

**TWO:** (As LUCY, doing her famous cry.) Waaaa! I washed little Ricky's clothes!

**ONE:** Was so bad about that?

**TWO:** He was still in them! Waaaa!

**ONE:** (Doing the RICKY laugh.) Ha! Ha! Ha! Lucy, you are so funny!

*With all of these fast changes, performers can spin in place to demonstrate they're moving in to new characters.*

**TWO:** And now we'll do a brief history of famous sitcom one-liners.

**ONE:** Hey, Ralphie boy!

**TWO:** (As Jackie Gleason.) One a'these days, Norton, one of these days!

*TWO begins spinning in place, beginning to whistle the "Andy Griffith" theme song, pretending to be holding a fishing rod. ONE spins around and begins whistling with him, pretending to be a young Ron Howard. TWO pretends to cast with the fishing rod. ONE pretends to get his mouth caught on the fishing lure.)*

**ONE:** (With hook in mouth.) Nice, going Mr. Griffith, you got the hook caught in my mouth!

**TWO:** (Spins around, pretends to be Jim Neighbors.) Well, gol-lee!

**ONE:** (Spins around, pretends to be Schultz from Hogan's Heroes.) I know nothing!

**TWO:** (Spins around, pretends to be Gary Coleman.) Wat' chu' talking about, Willis?

**ONE:** (Spins around, pretends to be on Hawaii 5-0.) Book 'em, Danno.

**TWO:** (Spins around, pretends to be Beaver.) Aw, gee, Wally.

**ONE:** (Spins around, and they both say....)

**BOTH:** (From Cheers.) Norm!

**ONE:** Along with sitcoms, family dramas have evolved quite a bit from yesteryear. Let's compare a fifties family drama situation with one from today.

**TWO:** *(As fifties-esque son talking to his dad.)* Dad, I'm really sorry. I borrowed Frankie's skateboard and got it all scratched.

**ONE:** Son, you'll have to be punished.

**TWO:** *(Spinning in place.)* Dad, I'm really sorry. I found the key to your gun rack and held up the 7-11.

**ONE:** Did you smoke any cigarettes?

**TWO:** Yeah.

**ONE:** You'll have to be punished.

**TWO:** And now the new rage is reality shows. First it was MTV's the "Real World". Then, "Survivor". We'd like to show you the future of reality TV. A bold and daring new glimpse into the human soul as demonstrated by the cutthroat world of amateur bowling. It's called, "Between the Lanes." *(They both face forward. ONE pretends to hold up a bowling ball and then rolls it. They both pause for a long moment.) (Sounding very bored.)* Good shot, buddy.

**ONE:** *(Pause.)* Thanks.

**TWO:** And of course commercials have evolved right along with fast paced, high-tech world of technology.

**ONE:** *(In a modern voice, very hip and edgy.)* It's e-business going at the speed of hyper technology.

*TWO pretends to throw a basketball*

**TWO:** *(ONE pretends to swim.)* But you don't want to be left behind.

**ONE:** *(TWO pretends to drive a sports car.)* That's why you've got to design a website that doesn't just have all the newest bells and whistles.

**TWO:** *(ONE does an exaggerated dance move, possibly the Hustle or a country line dance.)* It's designed to motivate your customers and hurl them into the future like a roller coaster that's flung off its track.

*Both jump quickly to the right.*

**BOTH:** That's why they need a drink that's got zest.

**TWO:** And a car that says, “you’ve got way too much money and really just want to make everyone else feel like nothing.”

**ONE:** So lather up with a soap that makes your skin come alive.

**TWO:** And an online trading company that makes sense out of the madness.

**ONE:** *(Back as announcer.)* You see folks, eventually the Web and TV will be the same unit.

**TWO:** You’ll leave that glowing machine in the corner on twenty-four hours a day.

**ONE:** You can order that object and in seconds it will be delivered to your house.

**TWO:** By Urban Fetch Dot Com.

*They both spin around, breaking out of character.*

**TWO:** *(Possibly talking like Rod Sterling, a la “The Twilight Zone” or just being mysterious.)* What if Reality TV has gone so far that without our knowing it, we’re all being watched right now? *(ONE plays along, suspiciously looking around, etc.)* Who’s to say we aren’t all on some cosmic version of Survivor where our destinies are being controlled by some unseen television deity?

**ONE:** *(Miming.)* Here, eat this bug.

*TWO points at the bug and screams. ONE points at TWO and screams. They point at each other and scream, clinging on to one another, etc. Then they slowly look out at the audience, and their eyes get wide. They both scream in unison and flee the stage. Halfway off they turn around quickly, resuming their TV Host personas.*

**TWO:** Thank you and good night.

**ONE:** Get that dog spayed or neutered.

*They resume their screaming and run off.*

**THE END**

**NOTES**

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