



## 11 TV or Not TV

Wow! Friday was a great adventure because A.J. took me on the school bus. It was noisy and smelly and very, very bumpy, and just about everyone on the bus wanted to get a good look at me, including the driver, Ms Victoria.

It was exciting – almost too exciting because A.J. couldn't hold my cage steady and I was slipping and sliding and bouncing until I was quite dizzy. 'Sorry, Humphrey. I'm trying to hold still,' A.J. told me as someone bumped his elbow and sent me sprawling on the floor of my cage. 'It's all right,' I squeaked weakly.

The bus let us off close to A.J.'s house. It was a two-storey old house with a big porch. As soon as I entered, I got a warm welcome from A.J.'s mum, his younger brother Ty, his little sister DeeLee, and his baby brother Beau.

'Anthony James, introduce us to your little friend,' his mum said, greeting us.

Anthony James? Everybody at school called A.J. by his initials or just 'Aje'.

'This is Humphrey,' he answered.

'Hello, Humphrey,' said Mrs Thomas.

'So how was your day, Anthony?'

'Lousy. Garth kept shooting rubber bands at me. He won't leave me alone.'

'But you two used to be friends,' his mother said.

'Used to be,' said A.J. 'Until he turned into a JERK.'

Mum patted her son on the shoulder.

'Well, you've got the whole weekend

to get over it. Now take Humphrey into the den and get him settled.' Mrs Brisbane called him Lower-Your-Voice-A.J. because A.J. always talked extra loud in class. I soon noticed that everybody at A.J.'s house talked extra loud. They had to, because in the background the TV was always blaring.

Now, every house I've been in so far has had a TV. Even Ms Mac had a TV, and I enjoyed some of the shows I saw with her.

There's one channel that has nothing but the most frightening shows about wild animals attacking one another. I mean *wild*, like tigers and bears and hippopotamuses. (I hope *that's* not in our vocabulary test in the near future.) Those shows make me appreciate the protection of a nice cage. As long as the lock doesn't quite lock.

There's another channel that only

has people in funny-looking clothes dancing and singing in very strange places. It makes me glad that I have a fur coat and don't have to work out what to wear every day.

Mostly, I like the cartoon shows.

Sometimes they have mice and rabbits and other interesting rodents, although I've never seen a hamster show. Yet.

Anyway, the difference at the Thomases' house is that the television is on *all the time*. There's a TV on a table across from a big, comfy couch and a big, comfy chair and someone's almost always sitting there watching. I know because they put my cage down on the floor next to the couch. I had a very good view of the TV.

I couldn't always hear the TV, though, because A.J.'s mother had a radio in the kitchen, which was blaring most of the time while she



cooked or did crossword puzzles or talked on the phone. No matter what she did, the radio was always on. When A.J.'s dad came home from work, he plopped down on the couch and watched TV while he played with the baby. Then A.J. and Ty plugged in some video games and played while Dad watched. DeeLee listened to the radio with her mum and danced around the kitchen. When it was time for dinner, the whole family took plates and sat in the den so they could watch TV while they ate. Then they watched TV some more. They made popcorn and kept watching. Finally, the kids went to bed. The baby first, then DeeLee and later Ty and A.J. After they were all in their rooms, Mr and Mrs Thomas kept watching TV and ate some ice-cream.

Later, Mrs Thomas yawned loudly. 'I've had it, Charlie. I'm going to bed and I suggest you do, too,' she said. But Mr Thomas just kept on watching. Or at least he kept on sitting there until he fell asleep on the couch. I ended up watching the rest of the wrestling match without him. Unfortunately, the wrestler I was rooting for, Thor of Glore, lost. Finally, Mr Thomas woke up, yawned, flicked off the TV and went upstairs to bed. Peace at last. But the quiet lasted only about ten minutes. Soon Mum brought Beau downstairs and gave him a bottle while she watched TV. When Beau finally fell asleep, Mrs Thomas yawned and flicked off the TV. Blessed relief. Five minutes later, Mr Thomas returned. 'Sorry, hamster. Can't sleep,' he mumbled to me as he flicked on the remote. He watched

and watched and then dozed off again. But the TV stayed on, leaving me no choice but to watch a string of commercials for car waxes, weight-reduction programmes, exercise machines and 'Red-Hot Harmonica Classics'.

The combination of being nocturnal and being bombarded with sight and sound kept me wide awake.

At the crack of dawn, DeeLee tiptoed into the room, dragging her doll by its hair, and switched to a cartoon show about princesses.

She watched another show about cats and dogs. (Scary!) Then Mr Thomas woke up and wanted to check some sports scores. Mrs Thomas handed him the baby and his bottle and soon the older boys switched over to video games and their parents watched them play.

It was LOUD-LOUD-LOUD. But none of the Thomases seemed to notice.

'What do you want for breakfast?'

Mum shouted.

'What?' Dad shouted louder.

'WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR BREAKFAST?' Mum yelled.

'TOASTED WAFFLES!' Dad yelled louder.

'I CAN'T HEAR THE TV!' Ty hollered, turning up the volume.

'DO YOU WANT JUICE?' Mum screamed.

'CAN'T HEAR YOU!' Dad responded.

And so it went on. With each new question, the sound on the TV would be turned up higher and higher until it was positively deafening.

Then Mum switched on her radio.

The Thomases were a perfectly nice family, but I could tell it was going to be a very long and noisy weekend unless I came up with a plan.

So, I spun on my wheel for a while to help me think. And I thought and thought and thought some more. And



**then it came: the big idea. I probably would have come up with it sooner if I could have heard myself think!**

**Around noon, the Thomases were all watching the football game on TV. Or rather, Mr Thomas was watching the football game on TV while A.J. and Ty shouted questions at him. Mrs Thomas was in the kitchen listening to the radio and talking on the phone. DeeLee played peekaboo with the baby in the cosy chair.**

**No one was watching me, so I carefully opened the lock-that-doesn't-lock on my cage and made a quick exit.**

**Naturally, no one could hear me skittering across the floor as I made my way around the outside of the room, over to the space behind the TV cabinet. Then, with great effort, I managed to pull out the plug: one of the most difficult feats of my life.**

**The TV went silent. Beautifully,**

**blissfully, silently silent. So silent, I was afraid to move. I waited behind the cabinet, frozen.**

**The Thomases stared at the TV screen as the picture slowly went dark.**

**'Ty, did you hit that remote?' Mr Thomas asked.**

**'Naw. It's under the table.'**

**'Anthony, go and turn that thing on again,' Mr Thomas said. A.J. jumped up and hit the power button on the TV. Nothing happened.**

**'It's broken!' he exclaimed.**

**Mrs Thomas rushed in from the kitchen. 'What happened?'**

**Mr Thomas explained that the TV had gone off and they discussed how old it was (five years), whether it had a guarantee (no one knew) and if Mr Thomas could fix it (he couldn't).**

**'Everything was fine and it went off – just like that. I guess we'd better take it in to get fixed,' Mr Thomas said.**

**‘How long will it take?’ DeeLee asked in a whiny voice.**

**‘I don’t know,’ her dad replied.**

**‘How much will it cost?’ Mrs Thomas asked.**

**‘Oh, yeah,’ her husband said. ‘I forgot. We’re a little low on funds right now.’**

**The baby began to cry. I thought the rest of the family might start crying, too.**

**‘Well, I get paid next Friday,’ Dad said.**

**A.J. jumped up and waved his hands.**

**‘That’s a whole week away!’**

**‘I’m going to Grandma’s house. Her TV works,’ said Ty.**

**‘Me, too,’ DeeLee chimed in.**

**‘Grandma’s got her bridge club over there tonight,’ Mum said.**

**‘I know,’ said Dad. ‘Let’s go to a movie.’**

**‘Do you know how much it costs to go to a movie?’ Mum asked. ‘Besides, we**

**can’t take the baby.’**

**‘Oh.’**

**They whined and bickered for quite a while. They got so loud, I managed to scamper back to my cage, unnoticed. Then I suppose I dozed off.**

**Remember, I had hardly had a wink of sleep since I’d arrived. The bickering was a nice, soothing background after all that racket.**

**I was only half asleep when the squabbling changed.**

**‘But there’s nothing to do,’ DeeLee whined.**

**Her father chuckled. ‘Nothing to do! Girl, my brothers and I used to spend weekends at my grandma’s house and she never had a TV. Wouldn’t allow it!’**

**‘What did you do?’ A.J. asked.**

**‘Oh, we were busy every minute,’ he recalled. ‘We played cards and board games and word games. And we dug in her garden and played tag.’ He**



chuckled again. 'A lot of times we just sat on the porch and talked. My grandma ... she could *talk*.'

'What'd you talk about?' Ty wondered.

'Oh, she'd tell us stories about her growing up. About ghosts and funny things, like the time her uncle was walking in his sleep and went to church in his pyjamas.'

Mrs Thomas gasped. 'Oh, go on now, Charlie.'

'I'm just telling you what she told us. He woke up in the middle of the service, looked down and there he was, in his blue-and-white striped pyjamas.'

I let out a squeak of surprise and the kids all giggled.

Then Mrs Thomas told a story about a girl in her class who came to school in her slippers by accident one day.

'Yes, the fuzzy kind,' she explained with a big smile.

They talked and talked and Dad got out some cards and they played a game called Crazy Eights and another one called Pig where they put their fingers on their noses and laughed like hyenas. When Beau fussed, they took turns jiggling him on their knees.

After a while, Mrs Thomas gasped. 'For goodness' sake! It's an hour past your bedtimes.'

The children all groaned and asked if they could play cards tomorrow, but in a few minutes all the Thomases had gone to bed and it was QUIET-QUIET-QUIET for the first time since I'd arrived.

#### **TIP ELEVEN**

Be careful. If set free, hamsters are experts at disappearing in a room.

*Guide to the Care and Feeding of  
Hamsters*

Dr Harvey H. Hammer