



REPORTS & COMMENT

NOTES

HELP FOR THE TV-SHY

ALMOST EVERY SHOW on television, including the news, has parts that are too embarrassing for normal people to watch. On *L.A. Law*, for example, Mr. Sifuentes once had a romantic dinner with a pretty dentist who had retained him, just before injecting him with Novocain, to represent her in a malpractice suit that had been filed by a patient who believed that she (the dentist) had installed a tiny radio in her (the patient's) mouth.

That wasn't the embarrassing part. The embarrassing part came after the romantic dinner, when the dentist said in a sexy voice that she was going to do something very special for Mr. Sifuentes. Then, suddenly, she was straddling Mr. Sifuentes and using some sort of dental equipment to clean Mr. Sifuentes's teeth. While she was doing this, she was saying—

Naturally, I have no idea what she was

saying. The whole time she was saying it, I was saying "buh buh buh" and poking my fingers in and out of my ears. I bet there aren't ten people in America who know what that dentist said to Mr. Sifuentes.

If you're watching a movie on a VCR, you can fast-forward through the embarrassing parts. But you can't do that with ordinary television, unless you videotape everything and then watch the tape. When the embarrassing parts come on, you have to run out of the room, sing in a high voice, eat a big mouthful of potato chips, or say "buh buh buh" and poke your fingers in and out of your ears. Or wear a protector hat.

I invented the protector hat one night while my wife and I were watching *Moonlighting* and folding the laundry. It was that terrible episode in which Maddie and David speak in fake Shakespearean English and act out a sort of parody of *The Taming of the Shrew*, complete with period props and costumes. There were so many embarrassing parts that blocking out all of them would have made it impossible to fold the laundry. I tried shaking my head back and forth rapidly, to distort my hearing, but this gave me a headache.

Then I had an idea. I folded a dish towel in half and put it on my head. I could still see and hear the show, but the embarrassing parts seemed less embarrassing. Objectively, a dish towel draped on the head offers no protection against anything. And yet it helped. "Put on a protector hat," I said to my wife. "It helps."

With towels on our heads, we were able to watch the rest of the show. At very embarrassing parts I would pull firmly on all four corners of my towel, applying a protective pressure to the top of my head. At extremely embarrassing parts I would stuff the end of the towel between my glasses and my eyes. At times the show became so embarrassing that I wondered whether we would have to wear protector hats for the rest of our lives. But we made it through.

How do protector hats work? I don't know. Why does pulling a blanket over your head make it impossible for Martians to shoot you in your sleep? I don't know that, either. Perhaps it has something to do with the chemistry of the brain or certain properties of cloth. All I know is that it helps.

—David Owen

