

It Was Time For Us to Part . . .

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

Two months ago I made one of the great, defining decisions of my life. I decided to give up something that was once very dear to me, something that I had shared many moments of joy and sorrow with. Together we had seen many glorious moments and many moments of great sadness and shock, even. We had laughed together, sung together and even played together. But in late January it was time for us to part. In a rather sad mood, on a snowy Saturday afternoon, I said goodbye to my television.

In the year 2001, 96 per cent of Finnish households had a television, and the average Finn spent 176 minutes per day watching it. That is almost three hours per day, 90 hours a month, or more than 42 days per year. That, my friends, is a long time. It's longer than the average person spends outdoors. If we spend three hours a day with something, I believe we must develop quite a special relationship to it.

Over the years, my relationship with my TV had varied quite a lot. When I was younger and had fewer things to do, I believe at times I did spend three hours a day on television. I used to watch a number of series. When I found Music Television in the early 1990's, my TV-watching increased quite a lot. I even lobbied my parents to get us the movie channel Filmnet back when it was still in existence.

But during the past couple of years, my relationship with what was formerly my favorite family member had cooled. I noticed that the programmes were no longer as attractive as they had been. Music TV had lost it completely. Even the films on television started to appear worse than they had been in my youth. I started watching the news and wondering whether I could do something else with my three hours.

Yes, I wonder what the world would be like if we all stopped watching TV? Would it make us ignorant? Would we lose touch with the world? What would we talk about around coffee tables and on cigarette breaks? How would we find out about the President's annual Independence Day ceremonies?

There is at least one society in the world that has recently tried television-free life: Afghanistan under the late Taleban regime. But even they were soon toppled by the Americans, the world's leading TV nation, in a war that was televised around the globe from TV studios, newsrooms and even the front lines.

The war in Afghanistan is an example of why people watch television so much. We want to keep track of what's happening. We want to be able to see the other side of the world without actually going there ourselves. We want the facts, but we also want the fiction. We want to break free of our daily routines; we want to become heroes just for a while on our home couches. We need dreams, but we also need to occasionally peek into a different world that helps us forget about our everyday problems.

If television is such an important machine for us people, you might expect that giving it up would make a big impact on one's life. Now that I know, I can tell you: It does not. Before giving up television, I thought that I would start doing something useful with the time that I'd formerly spent watching it. I thought I would read more books, listen to music, take long walks or even go jogging outdoors. But none of this has actually happened.

I don't know how to explain it, but I don't seem to have the time to do the good things I thought I would. On the other hand, I've been pleased to notice that I haven't dropped out of the world; I still think I know what's going on. The only change that I've noticed in my life has been the fact that I am now even more ignorant in casual television conversations with people than I used to be.

I realize that my experience is rather short and that it does not yet offer any scientifically sound proof about the impact of televisionlessness on humans. However, I would like to draw some preliminary conclusions.

First of all, human life does not end when television exits the human daily routine. Different people may have developed different kinds of TV-addictions, but in my case the side effects ceased to exist after only about a week of not having a television. In fact, I no longer noticed the absence of the device.

My second finding is that giving up television doesn't even fundamentally change your life. It doesn't make you a better human being, but it doesn't make you any worse, either. You don't instantaneously become a member of high society or a friend of the fine arts. From my experience, I can tell you

that the most important change is that you lose the occasional feeling that you're just wasting your time watching bad television.

Now at this point, you may ask yourselves: Is it worth it? Should I try to live without television? From my experience — despite the lack of obvious changes to my life — I can tell you that the past few months have been a very interesting and positive period in my life. Now I feel I have a little more time for other things; in fact I am planning to continue my experiment with television-free life indefinitely. I'm not going to tell you whether you should try it yourselves; instead I am now going to close my little presentation with a few smart words from long ago:

"It's funny how the things you have the hardest time parting with are the things you need the least."

Thank you.

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