

**The Scoop on *The Simpsons*:
Journalism in U.S. Television's Longest Running Prime-Time Animated Series**

By Stephanie Woo

*"I changed the world. Now I know exactly how God feels."*¹
– Homer Simpson, on his role as Internet journalist Mr. X

Although the journalists of *The Simpsons* are far from godly, news in *The Simpsons* is vital, if for no reason other than its ability to provide exposition and advance a plot quickly. A week of Homer Simpson's public service is documented with daily headlines as he gets speed bumps and safety signs installed.² Power-plant owner Montgomery Burns' rise and fall in a gubernatorial campaign occur through headlines reading: "Burns Skyrockets to Seven Percent in Latest Polls," "Burns Nukes Bailey in Latest Poll," "Forty-Two Percent and Climbing," and, in the end, a broadcast story announcing: "The latest polls indicate Burns' popularity has plummeted to Earth like so much half-chewed fish."³

But media in *The Simpsons* are more than a plot device. They are the representation of journalistic quality, integrity, and influence. The news industry on *The Simpsons* faces the same dilemmas as outlets such as CBS News and *The New York Times* – maligned public images, a dearth of audience trust, and the chore of maintaining both credibility and entertainment value. When an anonymous Internet watchdog gains popularity in town, news anchor Kent Brockman tells his television audience: "We must never forget that the real news is on local TV, delivered by real, officially licensed newsmen like me, Kent Brockman." But the news up next on Brockman's show is an expose about a beer commercial's talking dogs, presented by a newsman called Cowboy Steve.⁴

A Show with a Message

Simpsons creator Matt Groening has never been a news anchor, but he has been a journalist. He wrote rock music reviews for alternative weeklies in Los Angeles. “I’d go in the record store ... after my review ... published and I’d go, ‘Did you sell any?’” Groening recalled. “‘No. No. They didn’t sell any.’ So I wasn’t that good as a rock critic.”⁵

He’s fared much better with *The Simpsons*, which made its television debut as a series of shorts on *The Tracy Ullman Show* in 1987. It premiered on the FOX Network as a weekly sitcom in 1990 and became the longest running prime-time animated television show, surpassing the 1960s caveman cartoon *The Flintstones*, in 1997. More than 335 episodes have aired in fifteen seasons and the show started its sixteenth season in 2004.

As a cartoon whose first breakout star was a disrespectful, delinquent fourth-grader – “I’m Bart Simpson. Who the hell are you?”⁶ – the show was an instant well of controversy, drawing complaints not only from parents but also from groups such as the nuclear power industry, which opposed its portrayal as the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant.⁷

“At the beginning, virtually anything we did would get somebody upset,” Groening said. “And now it seems like the people who are eager to be offended – and this country’s full of people who are eager to be offended – they’ve given up on our show.”⁸

In fact, some say the show’s ability and willingness to tackle the touchy stuff provide a public service. The first show to address drunk driving, accidental death, and drugs, it “became a deeper ‘message’ show of sorts, taking critical aim at such societal icons as the church, government, and the education system” – as well as journalism.⁹

The State of Journalism

On *The Simpsons*, journalistic quality is questionable and journalists are generally foolish, disrespectful, or unethical.

Bart and Lisa Simpson's dim-witted schoolmate Ralph is "poached" from Lisa's homemade paper by the *Chicago Tribune* for his "Ralphings" column, whose topics include "I Can Go on the Bus" and "Ralph's Oscar Picks," which is accompanied by a picture of the writer with his finger up his nose. Another reporter for Lisa's newspaper tells her, "The story I filed from Baghdad was all made up. I was actually in Basra."¹⁰ Introducing a story about matriarch Marge Simpson's paintings of her overweight husband, Homer, an anchor says, "And now on the lighter side of the news, and I use the term loosely."¹¹

In the Simpsons' hometown of Springfield, journalism is easy to create and manipulate. After acquiring all the media outlets in town so that he control public opinion and woo his neighbors, Mr. Burns instructs his assistant to doctor a front-page photo of himself by putting "a little more apple in my cheek."¹² When Kwik-E-Mart owner Apu and his wife become the parents of octuplets, reporters feed the couple lines, asking, "Would you say you and your babies have a love-*eight* relationship?" When Apu answers only "yes," the reporter snaps, "No, say it. We need a sound bite."¹³ The reporter who stumbles upon the Simpson family dog drinking beer says, "This is the kind of shot you only get once in a lifetime," but when the dog drops the can, the photographer rebalances it on the pooch's nose and repeats, "once in a lifetime."¹⁴

The show is no kinder to real-life journalism. In a *Simpsons* parody of the conservative-leaning FOX News Channel, the anchor refers to a Democratic candidate as "comrade" and the hammer and sickle of the former Soviet Union's flag appears next to the candidate's head, which

is adorned with computer-drawn devil horns. His Republican opponent wears a halo. Throughout the interview, a news crawl at the bottom of the screen reads:

“Pointless news crawls up 37%. Do Democrats cause cancer? Find out at Foxnews.com. R. Murdoch: Terrific Dancer. Dow Down 5000 points. Study: 92% of Democrats are gay. JFK posthumously joins Republican Party. Oil slicks found to keep seals young, supple. Dan Quayle: Awesome.”¹⁵

When the parody was planned, FOX threatened litigation, but the show’s creators figured network owner Rupert Murdoch – who some believe is the model for Mr. Burns – wouldn’t pay for the network to sue itself. However, the network did bar the show from using another fake crawl. Despite the absurdity of its content, the network was concerned that the headlines “might confuse the viewers into thinking it’s real news,” Groening said.¹⁶

Print Journalism

Although Homer considers newspaper writers “a bunch of jerks,” according to a political commercial in the sitcom, he frequently reads a newspaper and a daily is usually at the table, if not in someone’s hands, at breakfast in the morning.¹⁷

The role of newspapers on *The Simpsons* is mostly limited to headlines, but occasionally print reporters distinguish themselves from broadcast reporters by finding and creating news. In “A Car in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish,” an investigative reporter meets Bart and his sister Lisa while they are fishing and learns that Bart has caught a three-eyed fish. The reporter writes a story blaming the nuclear power plant across the waterway for the mutation.¹⁸

Still, most of the newspaper stories featured on the show are not pro-active. While reading an issue of the *U.S. of A.* newspaper, which includes the story “America’s favorite pencil: #2 is #1,” Lisa brands the paper “a flimsy hodgepodge of pie graphs, factoids, and Larry

King.” Homer calls it “the only paper in America that’s not afraid to tell the truth – that everything is just fine.”¹⁹

The Broadcast News Anchor

In a television world like that of the Simpson family, broadcast news provides the “depth” that newspaper headlines cannot. It shows Springfield residents in action and “live,” from rioting babies²⁰ to a park dedication²¹ to security-camera footage of Krusty the Clown robbing a convenience store.²²

Kent Brockman, Channel 6’s Emmy Award-winning anchorman, dominates the show’s broadcast news, but his image isn’t that of a seasoned or capable journalist. He proves he is live on the air by saying “penis”²³ and uses cue cards at live stand-ups.²⁴

Brockman isn’t unique. His predecessors²⁵ at fictional television news desks include *Murphy Brown*’s stuffy Jim Dial and *Saturday Night Live*’s “Weekend Update” hosts, who were first inspired by newsmen like Roger Grimsby and his awkward slogan “Here now the news.” As two journalists said, they are now nothing more than a “pair of sexy smart alecks sitting around and making fun of the world.”²⁶ But Brockman is clearly a descendant of Ted Baxter, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* anchor credited with casting “the mold for the cheesy, vain, intellectually vacant, superficially self-confident but ultimately insecure newscaster in the early 1970s.”²⁷

Brockman looks like Baxter. He has a “snow-white mane, tanned good looks and baritone voice.”²⁸ And he’s vain. He’s primped with a blow dryer and a comb, telling the makeup artist “forget the hair, just give me the blush,” before noticing he’s already on the air.²⁹ However, the connection between the two anchors is more than skin-deep. Baxter’s a fool who relies on cue cards and colleagues to guide him through a newscast. Thinking on his own causes trouble. “In order for the bill to be passed, it has to be ratified by two-thirds of the 48 states,”

Baxter explains. The WJM-TV anchor realizes he's made a mistake when he looks off-camera and sees a crewman holding up two fingers – *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* first aired in 1970, 11 years after the United States annexed its 50th state. “Oh, two more, huh?” Baxter says. He immediately makes an on-air correction, but he's still confused. “Correction, that's four-thirds!” he announces.³⁰

Brockman also has difficulty thinking on his feet. “Oh, and the president was arrested for murder ... More about that another night,” *The Simpsons* anchor announces, adding “or you can turn to another channel.” He, too, tries to salvage his newscast, but while more accurate than Baxter, he is no less subtle. Realizing his slip, he tells the audience, “Do NOT turn to another channel.”³¹

As Baxter's descendant, Brockman is also heir to the real newsmen on which *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* creators Allan Burns and James L. Brooks based the character. Jerry Dunphy and George Putnam, two Los Angeles-area anchors were “really newsreaders more than anything else,” Burns said.³²

On *The Simpsons*, even Brockman's young daughter is a better journalist than he is. Immersed in his story about the fortieth anniversary of the *Beetle Bailey* comic strip, he tells her: “Daddy's job is bringing people important news.” His daughter responds, “That is boring. Talk about the dolly,” and points to her new Lisa Lionheart, a talking feminist doll. Brockman gives in, telling the girl, “You were right about the Berlin Wall.”³³

One difference between Brockman and many other television newsmen, however, is that audiences see very little of *The Simpsons* anchor's personal life. On *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, Baxter got married.³⁴ On Canada's *The Newsroom*, the employees of the local TV news channel deal with sexual impotence and the integration of the newsroom.³⁵ In Will Ferrell's 2004

film *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, a Ted Baxter clone is attracted to his station's latest hire – a newswoman who threatens his newsroom supremacy.³⁶ Yet Brockman exists mainly in relation to the news. With the exception of town hall meetings and a few celebrity appearances, he appears only on-air in the studio, at remote shots or while putting together a story.

But Brockman's personality, frequent asides, and personal commentaries seep into his work. When reporting on the long lines at the post office on tax day, he inserts himself into the story, praising his industriousness, "Some of us took our receipts and pay stubs to our accountants months ago," he says. "At the risk of sounding a little smug." A harried man with an armful of papers interrupts him. "Myron?" Brockman says, recognizing the man as his accountant.³⁷ Later, Myron is audited.

Brockman is more a celebrity than a journalist. He appears on *Padz*,³⁸ a parody of MTV's *Cribs*, and entertains Ted Kennedy, whom the anchorman's llama bites.³⁹ In fact, Brockman's glamorous personal life may be the key to his success. Grandpa Simpson denounces him as a "blow-dried college boy," until his son Homer tells him, "No, his girlfriend is the weather lady." Grandpa is impressed. His face lights up and he exclaims, "You don't say!"⁴⁰

Television News

But Brockman is not Channel 6's only liability. Live shots and unconfirmed breaking news undermine the anchor and his profession. An innovative plan backfires. Brockman is lowered from a helicopter with a helmet-mounted camera for an exclusive interview with Marge Simpson, who is blocking traffic on the Springfield Memorial Bridge. The anchor floats past Marge's station wagon and slams into the side of the stone bridge, making him and his station look silly and incapable.

The anchor's colleagues don't help. Before Brockman's descent from the chopper, Arnie Pie in the Sky, the news show's helicopter-based traffic reporter, tells viewers: "Look out at the corner of Fourteenth and L, 'cause I just dropped my bagel."⁴¹

Sometimes Brockman even breaks the Baxter mold and acts as a responsible, level-headed journalist who is exasperated and burdened by a sloppy off-screen crew. What he describes as a "very preliminary" report of a downtown fistfight involving a giant lizard prompts the anchor to abandon his notes while on-air to ask his colleagues off-camera, "Do we have a source on this?" Told that the source was "a bunch of drunken frat boys," Brockman says, "I could use some names." He grimaces after being told one source's name is "I.P. Freely."⁴²

Sensationalism

Broadcast sensationalism on *The Simpsons* is more gratuitous than print's, with offerings such as "an eye-opening look at the bikini" set to rock music⁴³ and dramatizations of a hospitalized Santa Claus dying of obesity in a health piece called "I'm Okay, You're Too Fat."⁴⁴

But print journalists are shown on the hunt for sensationalism. Reporters for *The National Informer* descend on a campground when Homer is mistaken for Bigfoot. They run stories about Marge's life as Bigfoot's wife and the Bigfoot diet, which includes many pork chops and is accompanied by a photo of the beast wearing a chef's hat.⁴⁵

In "Bart-Mangled Banner," Bart moons the American flag at a school event and an editor at *The Springfield Shopper*⁴⁶ tells a reporter, "I want you to overhype this story so much it makes *The New York Post* look like *The New York Times*, or makes *The New York Times* look like *The New York Post*. I forget which one the good one is." The story runs the next day with a full-page cover photo of Bart, his backside, the flag and the Statue of Liberty under the headline: "U-ASS-A!"⁴⁷

Power of the Press

One of the few predictable aspects of life in Springfield is its unpredictability. As Carl Rhodes wrote in *The Journal of Management Inquiry*, *The Simpsons* celebrates “the way individuals and corporations in positions of power – ranging from Homer to Mr. Burns ... can never entirely control their environment.”⁴⁸ And media, whether used for good or evil, are frequently the reason why.

Mr. Burns silences public discourse and strips the media and Springfield residents of their free press and speech rights when he buys up all the radio, television, and newspaper outlets as well as the skywriting services, so that he can “amass a vast media empire,” control his public image, and make his neighbors love him. But the tables turn when Lisa’s *Red Dress Press* makes the townspeople realize “the importance of free and independent media” to “find out the truth about things.”⁴⁹ They all start their own publications, so, as Homer notes, “instead of one big shot controlling all the media, now there’s a thousand freaks xeroxing their worthless opinions.”

While print journalism is more likely to keep bad guys from gaining control, television is often a means of disseminating false information and damaging images. When Homer is accused of harassing a babysitter, journalists swarm the family’s house, covering the lawn and looking in the windows from helicopters. A seedy television news magazine guarantees Homer “fair and even-handed” coverage but only makes things worse.⁵⁰

Some of the most influential pieces of journalism on the show are online news reports. As Mr. X, an Internet reporter who dishes on Springfield’s indiscretions – “all the muck that’s fit to rake” – Homer raises awareness about political corruption (the mayor’s secret pool paid for with pothole money), consumer quality (the revelation that bagels are day-old donuts), terrorism (Mr. Burns sells uranium), and beauty-pageant integrity (a contestant uses “appearance-altering

cosmetics”). Principal Skinner remarks that “Mr. X has done this town a great service, despite his poor grammar and spelling.”

Homer wins a Pulitzer Prize and reveals his identity, but then has trouble getting stories, so he invents some. “Real news is great, son, but I’m getting a thousand hits an hour with grade-A bullplop,” he says. Yet he’s still a threat. After running a fabricated story about flu shots laced with mind-controlling additives, he is kidnapped. The story is actually true and Homer’s expose threatens to ruin the Christmas shopping frenzy created by the seasonal vaccinations.⁵¹

But, ultimately, Springfield’s audiences determine the impact of the press. It’s up to them to notice, or care, about a story. Although Lisa is alarmed when Brockman warns his audience that America’s body “blubber” could fill two-fifths of the Grand Canyon, her food-obsessed father isn’t even paying attention.⁵²

Consumed by an international public-relations crisis for the town of Springfield, Mayor Quimby chooses to ignore a story about the possibility of impending warfare. After a talk-show host decides that “Springfield hates America,” an anchor announces: “All over the country tonight, patriotic Americans are denouncing Springfield and its official spokesmen, the Simpsons.” A clip shows Congress declaring Sept. 25 “We Hate Springfield Day.” Another features Middle Easterners holding up photos of Homer, shooting guns in the air, and cheering: “Simpsons be praised. Praise be to Springfield.” The mayor and his staff watch every clip. They are disconsolate.

The anchor moves on, announcing: “Not everyone is ululating tonight. The president said today he is pointing warheads ...” Before the anchor reveals the warheads’ target, Quimby tells an aide, “Turn that off. This could destroy our town.” But he’s not referring to missiles. He hasn’t heard the second story. He’s only worried about the bad publicity.⁵³

Endnotes

1. "Episode 254: The Computer Wore Menace Shoes," *The Simpsons*. First aired 3 December 2000. Directed by Mark Kirkland. Written by John Swartzwelder.
2. "Episode 3: Homer's Odyssey," *The Simpsons*. First aired 21 January 1990. Directed by Wesley Archer. Written by Jay Kogen and Wallace Wolodarsky.
3. "Episode 17: Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish," *The Simpsons*. First aired 1 November 1990. Directed by Wesley Archer. Written by John Swartzwelder and Sam Simon.
4. "Episode 254: The Computer Wore Menace Shoes," *The Simpsons*.
5. "Matt Groening discusses music and *The Simpsons*." Anchor Terry Gross. *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio. First aired 18 December 2003.
6. Johnston, Ian. "Don't have a cow, man! Simpsons brushes off controversy to become longest-running fictional show." *The Halifax Daily News*, 16 February 2004: 23.
7. Ian Johnston.
8. "Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*, talks about his show." Anchor Terry Gross. *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio. 23 October 2003.
9. Ian Johnston.
10. "Episode 335: Fraudcast News," *The Simpsons*. First aired 23 May 2004. Directed by Bob Anderson. Written by Don Payne.
11. "Episode 31: Brush with Greatness," *The Simpsons*. First aired 11 April 1991. Directed by Jim Reardon. Written by Brian Roberts.
12. "Episode 335: Fraudcast News," *The Simpsons*.
13. "Episode 233: Eight Misbehavin'," *The Simpsons*. First aired 21 November 1999. Directed by Steven Dean Moore. Written by Matt Selman.
14. "Episode 310: Old Yeller Belly," *The Simpsons*. First aired 4 May 2003. Directed by Bob Anderson. Written by John Frink and Don Payne.
15. Episode 305: Mr. Spritz Goes to Washington," *The Simpsons*. First aired 9 March 2003. Directed by Lance Kramer. Written by John Swartzwelder.
16. "Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*, talks about his show." Anchor Terry Gross. *Fresh Air*. National Public Radio. 23 Oct. 2003.
17. "Episode 321: Marge vs. Singles, Seniors, Childless Couples and Teens, and Gays," *The Simpsons*. First aired 4 January 2004. Directed by Bob Anderson. Written by Jon Vitti.
18. "Episode 17: Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish," *The Simpsons*.
19. "Episode 40: Homer Defined," *The Simpsons*. First aired 17 October 1991. Directed by Matt Kirkland. Written by Howard Gewirtz.

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20. "Episode 321: Marge vs. Singles, Seniors, Childless Couples and Teens, and Gays," *The Simpsons*.
21. Episode 310: Old Yeller Belly," *The Simpsons*.
22. "Episode 12: Krusty Gets Busted," *The Simpsons*. First aired 29 April 1990. Directed by Brad Bird. Written by Jay Kogen and Wallace Wolodarsky.
23. "Episode 305: Mr. Spritz Goes to Washington," *The Simpsons*.
24. "Episode 20: Bart vs. Thanksgiving," *The Simpsons*. First aired 22 November 1990. Directed by David Silverman. Written by George Martin.
25. After 15 seasons, it seems that Brockman has his own disciples, such as anchor Tom Tucker of *The Family Guy*, another prime-time FOX animated series that debuted in 1999. "Because of an accident today at the Quahog cable company all television transmission will be out for an undetermined amount of time," Tucker announces. "Of course, no one can see this news program, so it doesn't really matter what we say. I'm the lord Jesus Christ. I think I'll go get drunk and beat up some midgets," Tucker says. ("Episode 2: I Never Met the Dead Man," *Family Guy*. First aired 11 April 1999. Directed by Michael Dante DiMartino. Written by Chris Sheridan.)
 On *The Simpsons*, with a comet hurtling toward Earth, Brockman announces: "I've said it before and I'll say it again. Democracy doesn't work. Now, over the years, a newsman learns a number of things that, for one reason or another, he just cannot report. It doesn't seem to matter now, so ... the following people are gay ..." ("Episode 117: Bart's Comet," *The Simpsons*. First aired 5 February 1995. Directed by Bob Anderson. Written by John Swartzwelder.)
26. James A. Miller and Tom Shales. *Live from New York: An Uncensored History of Saturday Night Live, as Told By Its Stars, Writers and Guests* (Little, Brown and Company, New York, 2002), p. 58, 439.
27. McCullough, Michael. "Decoding an anchorman: The vain, vacant (think Ted Baxter) TV news reader disappeared years ago, replaced by the intelligent, informed journalists we see on the screen today. But the caricature persists." *The Vancouver Sun* 10 July 2004: C1.
28. Kaltenbach, Chris. "The legend of Ted Baxter; Will Ferrell's *Anchorman* owes a spiritual debt to the blowhard newsman of television's *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*." *Los Angeles Times* 16 July 2004: E31. Kaltenbach writes: "Knight, with his snow-white mane, tanned good looks and baritone voice, certainly looked the part of the vain Baxter."
29. "Episode 40: Homer Defined," *The Simpsons*.
30. As described in "Anchored in their own goofy world; With the opening of the film *Anchorman*, the TV world recalls classic talking heads." Associated Press 9 July 2004.
31. "Episode 95: Lisa vs. Malibu Stacy," *The Simpsons*. First aired 17 February 1994. Directed by Jeffrey Lynch. Written by Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein.
32. Chris Kaltenbach.
33. "Episode 95: Lisa vs. Malibu Stacy," *The Simpsons*.
34. "Episode 129: Ted's Wedding," *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. First aired 8 November 1975. Directed by Jay Sandrich. Written by David Lloyd.
35. Rosenberg, Howard. *Los Angeles Times* review 17 April 1998: 1. Rosenberg writes: The second of tonight's two episodes has Jim facing two crises: his inability to perform in the sack and management's insistence that he have a female co-anchor."

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36. *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* Web site. <http://www.anchorman-themovie.com>.
37. "Episode 198: The Trouble with Trillions," *The Simpsons*. First aired 5 April 1998. Directed by Swinton O. Scott III. Written by Ian Maxtone-Graham.
38. "Episode 299: The Dad Who Knew Too Little," *The Simpsons*. First aired 12 January 2003. Directed by Mark Kirkland. Written by Matt Selman.
39. "Episode 54: Dog of Death," *The Simpsons*. First aired 12 March 1992. Directed by Jim Reardon. Written by John Swartzwelder.
40. "Episode 20: Bart vs. Thanksgiving," *The Simpsons*.
41. "Episode 50: Homer Alone," *The Simpsons*. First aired 6 February 1992. Directed by Matt Kirkland. Written by David M. Stern.
42. "Episode 73: Brother from the Same Planet," *The Simpsons*. First aired 4 February 1993. Directed by Jeffrey Lynch. Written by Jon Vitti.
43. "Episode 45: Flaming Moe's," *The Simpsons*. First aired 21 November 1991. Directed by Rich Moore and Alan Smart. Written by Robert Cohen.
44. "Episode 58: Bart's Friend Falls in Love," *The Simpsons*. First aired 7 May 1992. Directed by Jim Reardon. Written by Jay Kogen and Wallace Wolodarsky.
45. "Episode 7: The Call of the Simpsons," *The Simpsons*. First aired 18 February 1990. Directed and written by Wesley Archer.
46. In early episodes of the series, *The Springfield Shopper* is free. In later episodes, it costs 50 cents.
47. "Episode 334: Bart-Mangled Banner," *The Simpsons*. First aired 16 May 2004. Directed by Steven Dean Moore. Written by John Frink.
48. Carl Rhodes.
49. "Episode 335: Fraudcast News," *The Simpsons*.
50. "Episode 112: Homer Badman," *The Simpsons*. First aired 27 November 1994. Directed by Jeffrey Lynch. Written by Greg Daniels.
51. "Episode 254: The Computer Wore Menace Shoes," *The Simpsons*.
52. "Episode 58: Bart's Friend Falls in Love," *The Simpsons*.
53. "Episode 334: Bart-Mangled Banner," *The Simpsons*.

Appendix: Additional Images of Journalism in *The Simpsons*

“Episode 3: Homer’s Odyssey.” First aired 21 January 1990. Directed by Wesley Archer. Written by Jay Kogen and Wallace Wolodarsky.

Homer begins a public-safety campaign, which is documented by *The Springfield Shopper*. A story about Simpson’s new street signs runs every day from Monday to Friday: “Simpson Says Safe!” “Dozens Cheer Homer Simpson,” “Homer Simpsons Strikes Again,” “Watch Out, Here Comes Homer,” and “Enough Already Homer Simpsons!” A photo of a grinning Homer next to the appropriate sign appears with each headline.

“Episode 7: The Call of the Simpsons.” First aired 18 February 1990. Directed and written by Wesley Archer.

While camping, Homer is mistaken for Bigfoot. Television news interrupts a president’s address for a report about a naturalist’s discovery of the creature. *Springfield Weekly* tabloid offers a \$5,000 reward.

Media and tourists swarm the campground. *The National Informer*, a 79-cent tabloid with the “Largest Circulation of the Any Paper,” announces “Bigfoot Still at Large.” Other stories focus on Marge: “I Married Bigfoot: Shocking Interview Inside” and “Bigfoot’s Wife Pleads: ‘Call Him Homer!’ Lurid Details Inside.” There’s also “The Bigfoot Diet: ‘Pork Chops Aplenty’” with “Tasty recipes inside.” The rendering of Bigfoot on the cover includes a chef’s hat. A reporter asks Marge if she would describe her marital relations as “brutish.”

Homer is captured. At a press conference, specialists who have examined Homer share their opinions about whether he is Bigfoot.

“Episode 8: The Telltale Head.” First aired 25 February 1990. Directed by Rich Moore. Written by Al Jean, Mike Reiss, Sam Simon, and Matt Groening.

A special radio bulletin announces that Jebediah Springfield’s statue has been “brutally decapitated in an act of senseless vandalism.” As the broadcast switches to a news conference, the announcer cries.

“Episode 12: Krusty Gets Busted.” First aired 29 April 1990. Directed by Brad Bird. Written by Jay Kogen and Wallace Wolodarsky.

Springfield Action News with “Springfield’s No. 1 news team” and “our Emmy Award-winning anchorman Kent Brockman.” Before a cityscape backdrop, the anchor begins, “Good evening. I’m Scott Christian. Why did the clown cross the road? To rob a Kwik-E-Mart. The story behind that enigmatic half-joke right after this commercial message.” He later explains that Krusty the Klown is “behind bars tonight after a daring twilight robbery.”

Brockman reports, “Krusty the Klown, beloved idol of countless tots, now nothing more than a common, alleged criminal. His trial, which begins tomorrow, has taken center ring in a media circus as children of all ages from 18 to 80 hang on each new development like so many Romanian trapeze artists.” A mini-biography of the clown includes footage of Krusty’s “near-fatal on-the-air heart attack.” Brockman laughs at the clip, saying Krusty will be trading “baggy pants for a snug uniform.” *Newsweekly* and *Timely* magazines cover the story. Apu, the held-up convenience store owner, is featured on the cover of *Today’s Guns*. He holds a .35 Magnum next to the headline “The Clown Stopper.”

“Episode 13: Some Enchanted Evening.” First aired 13 May 1990. Directed by David Silverman and Kent Butterworth. Written by Matt Groening and Sam Simon.

The Cueball Killer and the Babysitter Bandit are profiled on an *America’s Most Wanted* parody. Bart and Lisa catch the Babysitter Bandit, but Homer frees her, thinking she was an innocent babysitter wronged by his children. Television crews outside the Simpson home question Homer: “Are you saying to the world that you just aided and abetted the escape of the infamous Babysitter Bandit?” More microphones appear in front of Homer one by one. He lies. Media call him a “local boob.”

“Episode 17: Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish.” First aired 1 November 1990. Directed by Wesley Archer. Written by John Swartwelder and Sam Simon.

The Springfield Shopper runs a story about Bart and Lisa’s fishing trip: “Mutation Caught at Ol’ Fishin’ Hole, Is Power Plant Responsible?” and “Boy was using five-pound test and ordinary worms. Sister was just there for the tranquility.” Bart puts the clipping in his scrapbook.

Later headlines read: “Fishin’ Hole or Fission Hole?” “Burns Denies Responsibility in Fish Flap,” “Count the Eyes, Mr. Burns!,” and “Governor Calls for Power Plant Investigation.”

Mr. Burns runs for governor. *Springfield Shopper* headlines document his campaign. When Burns attends dinner at the Simpsons’ home, they feed him a mutated fish. He spits it out. Outside, investigative reporter Dave Shutter, the man who discovered the story, is on the phone. “Get me the city desk,” he says. Another reporter dictates, “Here’s the headline, Phil: Burns can’t swallow own story.” Brockman’s show uses a picture of Burns and the fish with the headline “Our Next Governor?”

“Episode 19: Dead Putting Society.” First aired 15 November 1990. Directed by Rich Moore. Written by Jeff Martin.

The family reads the newspaper at breakfast. Bart competes against his neighbor in a miniature golf tournament, which is covered by sports journalists. “Good afternoon, everybody, and welcome to what has already been a stirring afternoon of miniature golf,” they begin. “The cream has risen. The wheat has bid farewell to the chaff. And now we approach the championship match with but two warriors remaining, the heretofore unknown Bart Simpson and Todd Flanders, one of the most skilled ten-year-olds to ever take back the blade.”

“Episode 20: Bart v. Thanksgiving.” First aired 22 November 1990. Directed by David Silverman. Written by George Martin.

Brockman reports at a homeless shelter on Thanksgiving. People at the shelter recognize him as “that anchor dude from Channel 6.” Another says, “Oh yeah, he’s doing one of those be thankful for what you got stories.”

Brockman reads from cue cards:

“We have lots of names for these people: bums, thieves, losers, scums of the earth. We’d like to sweep these people into the gutter, or, as they’re already in the gutter, to some other out-of-the-way place. Oh, we have our reasons. They’re depressing. They wear ragged clothes. They’re ‘crazy.’ They smell bad.”

An on-looker interrupts, “Hey, listen, man.” Brockman replies, “Wait, I’m going somewhere with this.” He continues:

“So every year on one lone conscious-salving day, we toss these people a bone – a turkey bone, and that’s supposed to make it all better. No, you won’t find Freddy the Freeloader or Emmett Kelly or even Charlie Chaplin’s beloved little tramp down here.”

He then interviews Bart:

Kent Brockman: And how long have you been on the streets?

Bart: Goin' on five years, Kent.

Kent Brockman: Mmmm, son, your family may be watching. Is there anything you'd like to say to them?

Bart: Yes, there is, Kent. Ha ha. I didn't apologize.

Outside the shelter, Brockman gets into a news van and tells a group of men, "Hey, thanks for your help, fellas. This reporter smells another local Emmy." They respond, "Yeah, we're rootin' for you, guy."

"Episode 22: Itchy and Scratchy and Marge." First aired 20 December 1990. Directed by Jim Reardon. Written by John Swartzwelder.

Marge appears on *Smartline*. Brockman moderates: "Are cartoons too violent for children? Most people would say no, of course not, what kind of stupid question is that? But one woman says yes and she's here with us tonight."

They play a clip of the allegedly offensive cartoon. Brockman laughs at the end. "Hilarious," he says. "Now what in the world is wrong with that, Mrs. Simpson?" At the end of the panel discussion, Brockman asks Marge to summarize her position in the show's final nine seconds.

A new story takes attention away from Marge. According to *The Springfield Shopper*, Michelangelo's *David* is coming to town. Controversy erupts over the naked statue. *Smartline* asks if *David* is a "work of art or guy with his pants down." Marge appears on the show to support the art show. "Aren't you Marge Simpson the wacko?" Brockman asks. When Marge, referring to her cartoon campaign, admits that one person usually should not make a difference,

Brockman announces, "I'd like to alert our affiliates that we'll be ending our show early tonight. Join us tomorrow when our topic will be 'Religion: Which is the one true faith?'"

"Episode 23: Bart Gets Hit by a Car." First aired 10 January 1991. Directed by Matt Kirkland. Written by John Swartzwelder.

The Springfield Shopper: "Burns Fire Ungrateful Employee," "Another smart move by Burns," and "Hooray for Burns!"

"Episode 29: The Dad Who Knew Too Little." First aired 12 Jan 2003. Directed by Mark Kirkland. Written by Matt Selmán.

Homer hires a private investigator named Dexter Colt, who has a framed newspaper on his wall. It's *The Springfield Times*. Its headlines: "Drunk Cop Fired from Force" and "Private Eye Wins Bake-off."

Brockman later reports live at a Pre-Teens for the Ethical Treatment of Animals protest. At a lab that has been broken into, he asks the police chief for a statement, but the chief never finishes his comments. He is distracted by an officer making funny faces.

"Episode 31: Brush with Greatness." First aired 11 April 1991. Directed by Jim Reardon. Written by Brian Roberts.

Television news shows on Marge's painting of Homer: "Eyewitnesses estimate the man's weight at somewhere between four and five hundred pounds" and "And now on the lighter side of the news, and I use the term loosely."

Krusty holds a press conference.

The Lively Arts paper covers the Springfield Art Fair and Marge's work.

“Episode 37: Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington, Part 1 of 2.” First aired 26 September 1991. Directed by Wesley Archer. Written by George Meyer.

Marge suggests Homer read *Reading Digest*. Homer replies, “Marge, I’ve never read a magazine in my life and I’m not going to start now. Hey, a cartoon!” He devours contents including “Can We Trust Bermuda?” “Quotable Notables,” “Seven Ways to Spice Up Your Marriage,” and “They call me Dr. Soybean.”

The Springfield Shopper runs a piece about Lisa meeting a senator. Seeing the article, Moe comments, “Isn’t that nice? Now, there is a politician who cares.” Barney adds, “If I ever vote, I’ll vote for him.”

An old-time newsboy in Washington, D.C., hawks papers on the street, yelling, “Extra! Congress cleans house!”

“Episode 39: Bart the Murderer.” First aired 10 October 1991. Directed by Rich Moore. Written by John Swartzwelder.

Gangster reads *Daily Racing News*. Principal Skinner disappears. *The Springfield Shopper* headline reads: “Principal Still Missing: Police Search for Body.” Television news covers the disappearances of Skinner and a truckload of cigarettes.

Bart goes to trial for Skinner’s murder. As the hunt for the principal’s body continues, *The Shopper* writes, “Psychic Joins Skinner Hunt” and “Principal Murder Trial Begins Today.” The second story includes a photo of Bart covering his face with his hands. A later edition announces, “Sentencing Today for Dinky Don” and includes an cartoon depicting Bart as an octopus.

**“Episode 40: Homer Defined.” First aired 17 October 1991. Directed by Matt Kirkland.
Written by Howard Gewirtz**

Brockman anchors live coverage of a power-plant emergency on the *Springfield Action News* with a bulletin called “Meltdown Crisis: The First Couple of Minutes.” He announces, “This station has just learned that a serious crisis is in progress at the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant.” Mr. Burns is interviewed over the phone. He lies about the plant’s safety.

At the senior citizens’ home, they watch the coverage until Grandpa says, “I don’t like this program. Change the channel.” They choose to watch *Wheel of Fortune*.

Later, Brockman responds to Burns, who says it was a false alarm, saying, “Very good. Well, sir, your point about nuclear hysteria is well taken. This reporter promises to be more trusting and less vigilant in the future.” In his “My Two Cents” segment, Brockman editorializes, “Eenie, meenie, miny, mo. Is Homer a hero? The answer is no.”

On a segment called “Laugh and a Half,” with Scott Christian, the newsman says, “There was more dumb luck in the news today when our own Police Chief Wiggum foiled a bank hold-up without even trying. It seems the chief had gone to the bank to cash in his penny jar. Yes, it seems the chief pulled a Homer Simpson of his own.” The two anchors laugh.

**“Episode 45: Flaming Moe’s.” First aired 21 November 1991. Directed by Rich Moore.
Written by Robert Cohen.**

An “infotainment” television show called *Eye on Springfield* features the 25th anniversary of a tire-yard fire, Springfield’s oldest man and fattest man, heavyweight champion Drederick Tatum, and part seven of an “eye-opening look at the bikini.”

A hot drink at Moe’s Tavern gains him national publicity. *The Springfield Shopper* calls him the “Wizard of Walnut Street.” *Timely* magazine runs a story called “One Moe for the Road”

and *Bar & Stool Magazine* one called “Through the Roof.” *Eye on Springfield* interviews Moe, who is joined by a blonde, hip-thrusting model.

“Episode 48: Radio Bart.” First aired 9 January 1992. Directed by Carlos Baeza. Written by Jon Vitti.

Bart drops a radio that projects his voice down a well. The town believes a boy is trapped in the well and the press swarms, taking pictures and yelling questions down the well. Brockman reports live with a stand-up in front of a food cart. “The circumference of the well is 34 inches, so unfortunately not one member of our city’s police force is slender enough to rescue the boy,” he says. “Although the well is too dark to see the boy, Timmy has told us his foot is trapped under a rock. Thus, any attempt to pull him up would snap him like a twig.”

Later, a television story announces: “Krusty the Clown has gathered the entertainment community, who normally steer clear of fashionable causes for a video called ‘We’re Sending Our Love Down the Well.’”

Eventually the town learns the boy-down-the-well tragedy is, as Brockman says on the air, a “hoax perpetuated by a ten-year-old hooligan.” “The time has come for finger-pointing and most of them are squarely aimed at the boy’s parents,” he says, as he turns to look at a photo of Homer and Marge.

Bart ends up stuck in the well. A reporter sits outside the well typing: “Town to Well Boy: No More Free Food, by Dave Shutton.” He gets a phone call about a new story and drives away. Television gets the same story – it’s a squirrel that looks like President Lincoln. Later, Brockman reports in a special bulletin, “The Lincoln Squirrel has been assassinated. We’ll stay with the story all night if we have to.”

“Episode 50: Homer Alone.” First aired 6 February 1992. Directed by Matt Kirkland. Written by David M. Stern.

Traffic reporter Arnie the Pie with “Arnie in the Sky”: “We’ve got big problems on the Springfield Memorial Bridge, people. Traffic going way back in both directions and look out at the corner of Fourteenth and L cause I just dropped my bagel.”

Brockman joins him in the helicopter. He tells the audience, “But I assure you this is no mere morning traffic report. Face the facts, Arnie. An overworked and under-appreciated housewife has snapped. This reporter is now going to be lowered down in the Channel 6 sky harness for an exclusive interview.”

“Episode 53: Separate Vocations.” First aired 27 February 1992. Directed by Jeffrey Lynch. Written by George Meyer.

School newspaper *The Daily Fourth Gradian* headlines: “Foodfight Foiled” and “Fishsticks Seized.”

“Episode 54: Dog of Death.” First aired 12 March 1992. Directed by Jim Reardon. Written by John Swartzwelder.

Brockman reports on the “Lottery Fever” caused by a \$130 million jackpot. “In fact, every copy of Shirley Jackson’s ‘The Lottery’ has been checked out,” Brockman says. “It is rather a chilling tale of conformity gone mad.”

The lottery gets top billing in *The Springfield Shopper*. The day of the drawing, Brockman realizes on the air that he has won. “Can you get a shot of me?” he asks the cameraman. A photo of him appears in the corner. “There we go,” he says. “In other news, tragic mix-up today in Cleveland. Many people killed.” He pauses, remembering he has won the lottery. “Uh, good-bye!” he says.

Later, he's at home. He is tanned, wearing a speedo and gold chains. He explains, "You know, ever since I won the lottery everyone wants a piece of Kent Brockman. Homeless this and hungry that."

"Episode 57: The Otto Show." First aired 23 April 1992. Directed by Wesley Archer. Written by Jeff Martin.

Brockman reports: "Tonight, the city weeps as for the first time ever a hockey arena becomes a scene of violence following a concert by Spinal Tap."

"Episode 58: Bart's Friend Falls in Love." First aired 7 May 1992. Directed by Jim Reardon. Written by Jay Kogen and Wallace Wolodarsky.

Television news show *Smartline*.

"Episode 59: Brother, Can You Spare Two Dimes?" First aired 27 August 1992. Directed by Rich Moore. Written by John Swartzwelder.

A copy of *Forbes* magazine with the headline: "The Blunder of the Century." A man sleeping on a bench is covered with a newspaper with the headline: "Local Man, Homer Simpson, Receives Award and \$2,000 Check."

"Episode 60: Kamp Krusty." First aired 24 September 1992. Directed by Mark Kirkland. Written by David M. Stern.

Children take over a summer camp. Brockman, clothed in a safari shirt, reports live with the “Krisis at Kamp Krusty”:

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I’ve been to Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, so I can say without hyperbole that this is a million times worse than all of them put together. A group of school-aged Spartacuses have taken the camp by force. Counselors are missing and presumed scared.”

Footage of the press swarming around the camp’s celebrity namesake ask, “Krusty, is it true you got smashed when you heard?” and “Are you and Princess Di just friends?” Before punching a cameraman, Krusty replies, “You people make me sick. You’re vultures. Where were you when I sang at Farm Aid? Out of my way, you parasites. I said outta my way.”

“Episode 68: Mr. Plow.” First aired 19 November 1992. Directed by Jim Reardon. Written by Jon Vitti.

Brockman receives a live feed from traffic reporter Arnie Pie, who is stuck in a blizzard:

Arnie Pie: All I can see is white.

Kent Brockman: Arnie, please, the ski conditions.

Arnie Pie: (the snow piling upon him) Mayday, mayday. Tell my wife I ...

Kent Brockman: That’s great, Arnie. (He chuckles.)

Later, Brockman announces, “Springfield’s beloved Mr. Plow is trapped.” Footage shows an avalanche.

Brockman, in his “My Two Cents” segment: “Well, if 70-degree days in the middle of winter are the price of pollution, you’ll forgive me if I keep my old Pontiac.” He laughs.

“Episode 81: Krusty Gets Kancelled.” First aired 13 May 1993. Directed by David Silverman. Written by John Swartzwelder.

Brockman hosts a *Hollywood Squares* parody called *Springfield Squares*. Ventriloquist dummy Gabbo will launch a show that competes with Krusty the Klown. *Shopper* headlines leading up to the show’s debut read: “Five Days ’til Gabbo” and “Gabbo Here Today.”

Because of Gabbo’s popularity, Krusty’s show is cancelled. *Springfield Variety* announces, “Gabbo Fabbo! Krusty Rusty.”

Brockman editorializes on a “Gabbo Gaffe”: “[Gabbo] used language with no place on or off TV, and that’s my two cents.” He shuffles his papers and adds, under his breath, “that oughtta hold those SOB’s.” The headline in the corner of the screen instantly changes to “Brockman in Trouble.” “What the!” he exclaims. *The Springfield Shopper* reads: “Gabbo still #1 in Springfield” and “Brockman fired.”

Additional *Shopper* headlines featured in episode: “Krusty special airs today,” “Gabbo to Have ‘Real Boy’ Operation,” “Quimby Re-Elected by Landslide,” and “Two More Bodies Surface in Springfield Harbor.”

“Episode 82: Homer’s Barbershop Quartet.” First aired 30 September 1993. Directed by Matt Kirkland. Written by Jeff Martin.

The singers hold a press conference at John F. Kennedy airport in 1986. The reporters wear hats with press cards in them. They laugh at the band’s recollection of discovering the fourth member of the group, Barney, on the floor of a men’s room. They ask about another member, Skinner, who is presumably “the funny one.”

The quartet gives a final rooftop performance at Moe’s Tavern. A newsboy on the street sells papers. “Extra! Extra! Be Sharps sing on rooftop.” A customer in a derby gets a paper.

“There’s nothing in here about the Be Sharps,” he says. The boy laughs and runs. The customer follows.

“Episode 91: Springfield (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Legalized Gambling).” First aired 16 December 1993. Directed by Wesley Archer. Written by Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein.

Episode includes an old filmstrip called “News on Parade” that features current events, gadgets, and Hollywood.

“Episode 95: Lisa vs. Malibu Stacy.” First aired 17 February 1994. Directed by Jeffrey Lynch. Written by Bill Oakley and Josh Weinstein.

The Springfield Shopper runs a story headlined “Local Gays Show their Pride.” Bart appears in the accompanying photo of a gay pride parade.

Kent Brockman works at home. His daughter asks him to abandon his story about the fortieth anniversary of Beetle Bailey and write about her new doll. Brockman replies, “Daddy’s job is bringing people important news.” But he relents and goes with the girl’s suggestion, noting that she was right about the Berlin Wall.

“Episode 101: The Boy Who Knew Too Much.” First aired 5 May 1994. Directed by Jeffrey Lynch. Written by John Swartzwelder.

The mayor’s nephew stands trial for assault. *The Springfield Shopper*’s headline: “Quimby Nephew Charged in Beating: Chowder Said Wrong.”

Brockman reports outside the courtroom. He tells the audience that he suggested the trial be nicknamed “Waitergate,” but the rest of the press club outvoted him. Cameras aren’t allowed

inside the courtroom, so Brockman whispers, “We have to be quiet,” and begins to tiptoe into the trial. The door shuts in his face.

“Episode 112: Homer Badman.” First aired 27 November 1994. Directed by Jeffrey Lynch. Written by Greg Daniels.

A babysitter accuses Homer of sexual harassment. News magazine *Rockbottom* tells Homer: “We want to help,” and Homer expects “fair and even-handed” coverage. The *Rockbottom* interview, which is obviously edited out of context because of the discrepancy between the times displayed on the clock in the background, vilifies him.

Reporters swarm the Simpson home. They take photos through windows and make up stories, including one about an oxygen tent. Homer becomes the topic of talk shows, a made-for-TV movie (about which a viewer says, “Listen to the music. He’s evil.”), phone-in polls, and David Letterman jokes. His friends sell information about him to the media.

Standing in front of an American flag, Homer tells his side on a public-access television show called *The Innocence Report*. The show is no help, but he is exonerated when school groundskeeper Willy reveals a videotape that proves his innocence. *Rockbottom* issues a correction and produces a piece about the voyeuristic Willy.

“Episode 117: Bart’s Comet.” First aired 5 February 1995 Directed by Bob Anderson. Written by John Swartzwelder.

A comet threatens to destroy Springfield. Headlines on the front page of *The Springfield Shopper* read: “Prez Sez: School is for Losers,” “Rocket to Kick Comet’s Tail,” and “Mayor Visits City.”

A television news broadcast anchored by Kent Brockman and titled “Countdown to Death” shows footage of cars driving off the bridge that was hit by the missile intended to stop the comet and the passage of a rider bill in the House of Representatives. Brockman explains that over the years there were things he simply could not report, but in what might be his final broadcast he abandons protocol and presents a list of people who are gay.

“Episode 122: Lisa’s Wedding.” First aired 19 March 1995. Directed by Jim Reardon. Written by Greg Daniels.

In the future, Brockman is an anchor on CNNBCBS, a division of ABC. He reports: “Tonight the following celebrities have been arrested.” A list including the Baldwin Brothers Gang, Dr. Brad Pitt, and John John Kennedy scrolls across the screen. Brockman continues: “Heather Locklear Fortensky remains at large. Remember, if you see any celebrities, consider them dangerous.”

“Episode 181: Lisa’s Sax.” First aired 19 October 1997. Directed by Dominic Polcino. Written by Al Jean.

Brockman reports on a heat wave. Behind the anchor, viewers see a picture of Brockman on a beach with a dog tugging on the back of his speedo, as if the anchor were the little girl illustrated on bottles of Coppertone sun block.

“Episode 198: The Trouble with Trillions.” First aired 5 April 1998. Directed by Swinton O. Scott III. Written by Ian Maxtone-Graham.

Brockman at the post office on Tax Day: “It’s literally the eleventh hour – 10 p.m. – and tardy taxpayers are scrambling to mail the returns by midnight.” He asks a man in line, “Why did you wait until the last minute to file your taxes?” The man replies, “Because I’m an idiot.

Happy?” Brockman continues his report, noting that he submitted his tax information to his accountant months ago, but stops when he sees his own accountant at the post office.

“Episode 203: Natural Born Kissers.” First aired 17 May 1998. Directed by Klay Hall. Written by Matt Selman.

Attempts to energize Marge and Homer’s sex life leave them naked on a football field, where a game is in progress. *The Springfield Shopper* runs a photo. Headlines read: “Local couple bares all!” and “Police dog clings to life.”

At the breakfast table, Bart and Lisa rifle through the paper. Marge tells them, “I don’t want you reading those awful scandal sheets.” Lisa responds, “I was just trying to find Dave Barry’s column.” Bart adds, “He’s great. He pokes fun at life’s little foibles.”

“Episode 205: Wizard of Evergreen Terrace.” First aired 20 September 1998. Directed by Matt Kirkland. Written by John Swartzwelder.

On KBBL radio, *Bill and Marty’s 5 O’Clock Newsflush* uses the theme song from the film *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* and sound effects. Their “topless” story is Bill Clinton’s new Web site. They also report on the average man’s life expectancy, 76.2 years.

Bart reads the newspaper while using Homer’s invention, the Lazy Man Reclining Toilet Chair.

Brockman reports on a phony pope who can be identified by his “incredibly foul mouth” and “high-topped sneakers.” “In other news,” he continues, “Thomas Edison, the greatest inventor of all time, is apparently still inventing, despite the notable handicap of being dead. Two new Edison creations have just been discovered in his museum.” The inventions, a six-legged

chair and an electric hammer, are actually Homer's. Brockman says they are expected to make millions for Edison's "already wealthy heirs," who are shown with a giant bag of money.

"Episode 215: Sunday, Cruddy Sunday." First aired 31 January 1999. Directed by Steven Dean Moore. Written by Tom Martin George Meyer, Brian Scully, and Mike Scully.

Real-life sports commentators close the episode:

Pat Summerall: Well, John, what did you think of tonight's episode?

John Madden: I loved it. The last minute addition of Wally Kogen to the lineup was a gamble, but it really paid off.

Pat Summerall: Marge and Lisa painting eggs, did that work for you?

John Madden: Oh! Big time. They came off the bench with a huge effort that allowed Homer and Bart to make some significant gain.

Pat Summerall: Did you strike as odd that in a Super Bowl episode with Dolly Parton we didn't see any football or singing?

John Madden: I hadn't thought about it Pat, but in retrospect it was kind of a rip-off.

What a way to treat the loyal fan who put up with so much nonsense from this franchise!

Pat Summerall: Any final thoughts?

John Madden: Nah, I'm too mad. Let's get the heck outta here.

"Episode 224: Monty Can't Buy Me Love." First aired 2 May 1999. Directed by Mark Ervin. Written by John Swartzwelder.

Brockman reports: "Springfield is still swooning from the whirlwind visit of playful plutocrat Arthur Fortune. This is new breed of fun-loving billionaire is a welcome change from the classic joyless miser brooding in his cavernous mansion, grasping a glass of brandy with his

thin, clawlike fingers and a superior smirk on his greedy, soulless face.” He refers to Mr. Burns, who is shown watching the news just as Brockman described him.

Jerry Rude’s KBBL radio show features Siamese midgets named Knick Knack and Paddy Whack, as well as Mr. Burns. Questions posed to Burns include: “How many times a day do you go to the can?,” “How long is your wiener, seriously?,” “When was your first gay experience?,” “Ever murder anybody?,” and “Monty, I’ve heard you’re a pretty flatulent guy, any comment on that?” Rude coughs and blurts out “queer” under his breath and plays fart sound effects. Burns asks him to stop and falls to the ground. Rude plays more fart noises and tells the audience that there are still signs of life in the billionaire.

Burns captures the Loch Ness Monster and brings it back to Springfield. Brockman reports from the pier: “Monster fever has gripped Springfield by the throat and it’s all thanks to one man. Montgomery Burns has captured not only a legendary monster, but also our hearts. And by the way, girls, he’s single.”

“Episode 233: Eight Misbehavin’.” First aired 21 November 1999. Directed by Steven Dean Moore. Written by Matt Selmán.

Apu’s wife gives birth to octuplets. *The Springfield Shopper’s* headline: “NAHASAPEEMAPETILAN-TASTIC.” The family becomes press darlings, but the coverage abruptly stops when another woman gives birth to nine children. That couple’s sound bite, which Apu notes is better than his and his wife’s, is “We’re on cloud 9.”

“Episode 243: Bart to the Future.” First aired 19 March 2000. Directed by Michael Mercantel. Written by Dan Greaney.

An adult Ralph uses a newspaper to dry himself after a shower.

Brockman is still an anchor, but he has grown a mustache and appears via hologram on a show called *BrainVision News*. His motto: “From around the globe to your frontal lobe, this is *BrainVision News*.” To start the show, Bart shoots a laser gun at his head.

Brockman reports: “Tonight’s winning lotto number: 446. In other news, President-elect Lisa Simpson moves into the White House tomorrow. The 17-bedroom home features long distance, laundry service, and three food kitchens.”

At a news conference, an old lady called Helen, who wears a pink suit with a pillbox hat and pearls, asks Lisa, “Wasn’t I wearing a hat?” Lisa replies, “Yes, yes, you were.”

In a later broadcast, Brockman reports ballot results. “According to polls, Americans have emphatically said ‘smell ya later’ to President Simpson’s refund adjustment and that’s the news,” he says. “We’ll smell you later at 11.”

“Episode 244: Days of Wine and D’Oh’ses.” First aired 9 April 2000. Directed by Neil Affleck. Written by Deb Lacusta and Dan Castellaneta.

Brockman reports on a Mt. Springfield fire that has trapped “two youngsters and their camera.”

“Episode 250: A Tale of Two Springfields.” First aired 5 November 2000. Directed by Shaun Cashman. Written by John Swartzwelder.

Springfield splits into two towns. At a town meeting, Brockman asks the other half of town, “And what are you pathetic slobs going to do about it?”

Brockman later reports on New Springfield. As footage of Homer and his pals drinking rolls, Brockman says: “As expected, New Springfield’s bold experiment in slob rule is a disaster. A study shows their crumbling economy is due to their lazy attitude and shoddy work. Scientists say they’re also less attractive physically and while we speak in an educated manner, they use lowbrow expressions like ‘oh yeah’ and ‘cum ’ere a minute.’”

In another report, Brockman wears gold reading glasses, rings, and necklaces. A gold chalice sits on his desk. “Thanks to you we’re all taking golden showers,” he says. The studio laughs, but Brockman doesn’t get the joke.

“Episode 254: The Computer Wore Menace Shoes.” First aired 3 December 2000. Directed by Mark Kirkland. Written by John Swartzwelder.

Homer becomes an Internet columnist. Going by the name Mr. X and using the motto “All the muck that’s fit to rake,” he uncovers a pool the mayor has built with pothole money. “Mr. X has done this town a great service, despite his poor grammar and spelling,” Principal Skinner says. Reporters confront the mayor, who is wearing a bathrobe and swim trunks. He pretends to know nothing about a secret swimming pool, but the reporters find it hidden behind a door.

The Springfield Shopper headlines: “Web snoop exposes pool hustle” and “Mr. X makes headlines.” Brockman reports: “A new Internet watchdog is creating a stir in Springfield. Mr. X, if that is his real name, has come up with a sensational scoop. But we must never forget that the

real news is on local TV, delivered by real, officially licensed newsmen like me, Kent Brockman. Coming up: How do they get those dogs to talk on the beer commercial? Cowboy Steve will tell you.”

Reflecting on his success, Homer says, “I changed the world. Now I know exactly how God feels.” He is determined to make a difference, deciding, “Mr. X will keep on probing until every single person in this town is in jail.”

He next discovers that bagels are old donuts. Police Chief Wiggum holds a press conference to announce that the force has confiscated all of the town’s donuts, and some coffee. A reporter asks the chief about other accusations posted by Mr. X. Wiggum denies claims that police race prisoners or cook chicken with an electric chair. He ends the conference and walks away.

Homer wins a Pulitzer and reveals that he is Mr. X so he can claim the prize money. But he can no longer get stories, so he makes them up. He explains, “Real news is great, son, but I’m getting a thousand hits an hour with Grade-A bullplop.” In the end, Homer is kidnapped by people who have added mind-controlling drugs to flu shots after one of his fabricated stories reveals their plot.

“Episode 271: The Parent Rap.” First aired 11 November 2001. Directed by Mark Kirkland. Written by George Meyer and Mike Scully.

Brockman reports: “There’s new judge in town with a hard-nosed approach to juvenile crime – punish the parents.” He interviews Judge Constance Harm. “Kids are running wild, Kent,” she says, “and I blame Mr. and Mrs. Neverspank.” Brockman is taken aback, believing she has named actual people. “Uh-oh, we’ll have to bleep their names,” he says. “You’ll bleep

nothing,” the judge replies. “Parents, it’s time to take control. If you can’t cope, you’ll wear the rope,” she says, referring to her order that Homer and Bart be tied together.

Later, *The Springfield Shopper* reports: “Pair [Marge and Homer] sinks judge’s house: Quilt ruined.”

“Episode 288: The Sweetest Apu.” First aired 5 May 2002. Directed by Matthew Nastuk. Written by John Swartzwelder.

Rainier Wolfcastle interviewed on *Inside the Actor’s Studio*.

“Episode 305: Mr. Spritz Goes to Washington” First aired 9 March 2003. Directed by Lance Kramer. Written by John Swartzwelder.

Kent Brockman covers an “Armstrong for Congress” press conference. “How can I prove we’re live?” he asks. “Penis. Now here’s the candidate.”

Candidates Armstrong and Krusty the Clown appear on Fox News, which the anchor calls “your voice for evil.” The anchor introduces the candidates. “For the Republicans,” it is Krusty, a “beloved children’s entertainer.” “For the Democrats, this guy.” Krusty wears a computer-added halo. Armstrong has horns. The image of a hammer and sickle graphic sits next to his head. “I have a name,” Armstrong says. “Yes, I’m sure you do, comrade,” the anchor replies. “You’re so mired in sleaze, it must be quite an effort to come down to the studio.” The anchor calls Krusty “congressman.” “He hasn’t won yet,” Armstrong points out. The anchor’s reply: “You make a very adulterous point.” The so-called debate concludes with a pro-Krusty commercial. A news crawl runs along the bottom of the screen.

In an election update with Brockman, Krusty is shown in a stock photo standing next to a pool and a topless girl, whose breasts have been covered by a superimposed bar.

“Episode 310: Old Yeller Belly.” First aired 4 May 2003. Directed by Bob Anderson. Written by John Frink and Don Payne.

Snowball, the family cat, rescues Homer from a fire, and a park is dedicated to the pet. Kent Brockman covers the event. He asks Homer how long he’s been a “cat person” and says Homer “must really love the Broadway musical *Cats*.” Homer expresses his disgust for his dog, who saved no one from the fire, telling Brockman that he actually does not have a dog.

Brockman closes the interview with “Strong words from a strange man.”

A newspaper photographer sees the family dog, Santa’s Little Helper, drinking beer. It is the photo of a lifetime, he says. But when the dog puts the can down, the photographer puts it back so he can get the shot.

Later, Homer’s interview with Brockman is used by Santa’s Little Helper’s former owner to get back the dog that is now worth a lot of money.

“Episode 315: My Mother the Carjacker.” First aired 9 November 2003. Directed by Nancy Kruse. Written by Michael Price.

Marge is featured on a segment of Brockman’s newscast called “Oops Patrol” after sending in a headline that mistakenly called the mayor’s election an “erection.” She wins a T-shirt and Homer sets out to find his own error. In a newspaper article about a giant pizza, he discovers a hidden message from his mother.

“Episode 321: Marge vs. Singles, Seniors, Childless Couples and Teens, and Gays.” First aired 4 January 2004. Directed by Bob Anderson. Written by Jon Vitti.

The town’s babies start a riot at a Roofi concert. Brockman reports, “I’m told we have the leader of the babies on the line. Is a peaceful solution possible?” The baby’s response is gibberish. Headlines around the screen read: “Police threaten time out,” “Babies to Mayor: Wah,

Wah,” and “Raffi denounces Roofi.” The piece is called “The Tot Offensive” and includes footage of fighting babies.

“Babies got backlash,” Brockman says in another report. “Bad babies, yes you was.”

Townsppeople band against children. Marge gets her “Families Come First” proposition on the ballot. *The Springfield Shopper* reads: “FCF on ballot” and “Second headlines less important, study shows.” Homer makes a political commercial in which he calls newspaper writers “a bunch of jerks.”

Brockman reads a tease for a segment about “what your dog can tell you about your prostate.”

“Episode 334: Bart-Mangled Banner.” First aired 16 May 2004. Directed by Steven Dean Moore. Written by John Frink.

Bart reads *Temporarily Deaf Weekly*. The cover features a bikini-clad model.

Classmate Martin, wearing a hat with a press card in it, takes Bart’s picture when he accidentally moons the American flag. It runs in *The Daily Fourth Gradian* with the headline “In-De No-Pants Day!” At *The Springfield Shopper*, an editor asks the newsroom, “All right, who can take a story and blow it way out of proportion?” A journalist leaning back in his chair with his arms folded behind his head exclaims, “I’m your man, boss!” The editor instructs him: “I want you to overhype this story so much it makes *The New York Post* look like *The New York Times*, or makes *The New York Times* look like *The New York Post*. I forget which one the good one is.” The reporter types furiously.

The next screen displays a tabloid-sized paper. Bart’s photo fills the cover. It has been doctored. He wears no pants and a cruel grin. Behind him is an American flag and the Statue of

Liberty. The headline: “U-ASS-A!” After the story breaks, the whole town turns against the Simpsons.

The family appears on a television show called *Head Butt*, hosted by Nash Castor. Of the show, Marge reasons, “If there’s one way to get the truth out, it’s on a cable news channel. When we explain our side of the story, the hate calls will end.”

Select Castor quotes throughout the show:

- “I’m Nash Castor and it’s time to butt heads! Bart Simpson, what do you hate most about this country, is it the freedom?”
- “So if I hear you correctly, you’re saying America is better than Jesus. Do you agree?”
- “So America isn’t perfect, is that why you and your son hate us?”

Marge breaks. “If by us, you mean loud-mouth talk show hosts, which everyone seems to be in this country, then, yes, I do hate Americans,” she says. Her family’s mouths fall open. Castor concludes: “Well, there you have it. Springfield hates America. Now, coming up after this commercial, I will be talking even louder. Don’t miss it.”

A news anchor reports: “All over the country tonight, patriotic Americans are denouncing Springfield and its official spokesmen, the Simpsons.” A clip follows showing Congress declaring Sept. 25 “We Hate Springfield Day.” The anchor resumes, “Overseas, the reaction tonight is decidedly different.” The next clip shows Middle Easterners holding up Homer’s photo and cheering, “Simpsons be praised! Praise be to Springfield!” Gunshots and ululation ring out.

The anchor switches stories. “But not everyone is ululating tonight. The president said today he is pointing warheads ...” The mayor of Springfield watches the newscast, but interrupts it, ordering his staff, “Turn that off. This [the Simpsons crisis] could destroy our town.”

**“Episode 335: Fraudcast News.” First aired 23 May 2004. Directed by Bob Anderson.
Written by Don Payne.**

A local mountain called Geezer Rock becomes an official landmark. Brockman describes the rock as “more than just a place for teens to have sex and commit suicide.” During the ceremony, the rock crumbles and lands on Mr. Burns. Brockman eulogizes: “One old man we certainly don’t miss ... Thank you Geezer Rock for doing what most of us didn’t have the courage to do: Smush Mr. Burns.”

Lisa creates *The Red Dress Press*, whose first edition includes an elegy for Geezer Rock. The whole town reads it. Neighbor Ned Flanders describes it as “one dilly of a daily.” Lisa’s schoolmates are the staff. Bart sells subscriptions for prizes. Nelson becomes the television critic because he can make nerds cry. The boy who plays with a toy fire truck becomes a features columnist. Lisa instructs Bart to bloody a nose in his cartoon, saying “I want the readers to gag on their cup a joe.”

Meanwhile, Burns, who survived the accident, is upset when he learns that the town does not care about his death. He plans to “win their love.” “Step 1,” he says, is to “amass a vast media empire.” His acquisitions include Channel 6, which is “still in English,” family institutions that he wins by offering money, girls, and an ice cream sundae, and skywriters, whose messages are footnoted “A Division of Burns Media.” On television, Brockman and an Elvira look-a-like named Boobarella, the daughter of Bill from accounting, debate. Boobarella declares that Burns has “got a heart as big as my boobs.” An *Itchy and Scratchy* animation has an anti-protestor and pro-nuclear slant.

Even though Burns offers Lisa her dream gift – ponies – she refuses to sell her paper. Burns tells her, “I’m going to shred you like a Christmas card.” The next day, Lisa’s headline is

“Lisa to Burns: ‘Drop Dead’” Bart draws a cartoon of Burns tying a dog labeled “free speech” to railroad tracks as a train approaches.

Burns cuts the power to stop Lisa from publishing. Principal Skinner brings her a mimeograph machine that he used in Vietnam. She runs the machine by candlelight, producing an edition reading: “Nyah, Nyah We’re Back: Lisa Rules, Burns Drools.”

Burns retaliates, interviewing Homer for a story titled “Lisa’s a Total Wacko, implies Father.” Other articles include “Plastic pearls make the girl” and “Lisa loves Milhouse.”

Lisa publishes a “Final ‘I Give Up’ Edition.” Homer pulls an all-nighter to produce *The Homer Times*. His headline: “My Daughter, The Hero.”

Barney launches *The Barney Bugle*, whose stories come mostly from wire services, because he “realized the importance of free and independent media.” Lenny’s *The Lennysaver* seeks to “find out the truth about things.” The Willy World News is full of tractor reviews. “They’re all shit,” Willy says. As Homer puts it, “See Lisa, instead of one big shot controlling all the media, now there’s a thousand freaks xeroxing their worthless opinions.”

Burns concludes: “Well, I guess it’s impossible to control all the media. Unless, of course, you’re Rupert Murdoch. He is one beautiful man.”