

## REAL HORROR

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[Assignment: Write a short essay about the impact of television on people's lives. Does violence trigger violence among viewers? Can viewers really differentiate between fiction and reality? Use a rhetorical mode best suited to your thesis.]

(1) The loud crack of the gun resounds as the bullets pierce the air and rush towards their victim. The killer shoots again, feeling a surge of power. He stands behind his piece--his double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun, his instrument of power and destruction. He holds death and life at his fingertips. At any moment, a spark of rage or maybe just the urge to make life a little dangerous can trigger the already deranged mind into committing such a horrendous crime. He turns and faces the young girl in the car. Grinning, intoxicated with pride and power, he lifts his weapon and discharges another slug into his last victim of the night. "A job well done," he must think, for what he has done tonight, in his mind, is no different from a woman on a shopping spree in a mall. He is just checking names off his list; if he does not have a list, as is likely, he is free to pick and choose as he pleases.

(2) This episode of *Hunter* was aired on Tuesday night, October 30, 1990. It was no different than other episodes of the serial, or was it? After all, all sorts of crimes are reenacted on television shows and movies. Why should this one episode differ from the rest? Technically, this episode is not any different from the others. But for a few families of Griffith, St. John, Merrillville, and Cedar Lake, this episode signifies a nightmare from which they cannot awake.

(3) Usually when we think of nightmares and scary things we think of horror movies, like those of Stephen King, the master of horror. Usually our visions of horror do not include criminals and homicides, but they should.

(4) On Friday, November 2, 1990, my family and I attended the funeral of Rhonda Hammersely, a victim of a crime very similar to the *Hunter* episode aired on October 30, 1990. In fact, the *Hunter* episode was aired on the very same night that the killer struck the nearby towns of Northwest Indiana.

(5) It was closing time, and Rhonda was waiting for her husband to pick her up. A friend with whom she worked decided to wait with Rhonda until her husband arrived. They were both sitting in the car waiting when Rhonda saw some trash lying on the ground. She got out of the car to throw it away when a man walked up behind her with a double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun. When she stood up from picking up the trash, the man shot her twice in the head with both barrels. Her friend, still in the car, screamed and ducked away from the car window but not fast enough to avoid some of the shot grazing her face. Acting on impulse, she went limp and played dead. To this action she owes her life. The killer proceeded to nudge her with his shotgun, but thinking she was dead, left the scene of the crime.

(6) Rhonda and her friend were the killer's last victims on his shooting spree. And as far as the authorities know, there is no link between the victims and the killer. They just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time when an insane man reenacted the murder seen on *Hunter*, randomly picking people to kill.

(7) When we think of horror we think of monsters or mysterious phenomena that cannot be explained or understood. But the real horror lies with Rhonda's family and others like them. It lies in the nightmares that people never expect to happen to them. The real horror does not lie in fictional stories, but instead in real life and in the maniacs who live beside us: people with seemingly ordinary lives and ordinary faces like yours and mine.