

## SITCOM FUN

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[Assignment: Using Richard Hawley's essay "TV and Adolescents" as a model, tell a story of your own in which you show how television dramatically influenced behavior.]

(1) "Two years court supervision, forty hours community service, and the cost of repairs to be divided equally between the perpetrators."

(2) These were the words that two of my friends heard after one of their pranks on Halloween night went beyond the limits of good sense and simple fun. How could two generally well-brought-up, well-behaved boys have ended up in this situation?

(3) It had all begun innocently with Brian, Jay, and me watching television one evening after school. We were watching a sitcom, the name of which I have long since forgotten. The basic plot of the show was as follows: One of the teenaged boys in the sitcom family had decided to play what he considered the ultimate Halloween prank on one of his small town's police officers. He and a friend waited until the police officer took his coffee break late one evening at the local donut shop. They then proceeded to jack up the rear of the officer's car until the wheels no longer touched the ground. After "blocking" up the car, they went across the street to wait for the fun to begin. The officer emerged, started up the car and tried to back out of his parking space. Realizing that something was wrong (he could hear the tires spinning but the car would not move), he stepped out of the car to investigate. He quickly located the problem and called another officer for assistance in lowering the car. The two boys had enjoyed their fun, and, thinking that it was all over, they went home. Later that evening, when one of the boys was relating their Halloween prank to a friend over the phone, his father overheard the conversation. The father then did what any sitcom father would do: He called the other boy's parents and together they took their sons down to the police station to make amends. The whole program ended on a happy note when the boys apologized to the officer who forgave them and admitted that he too had played a prank or two in his youth.

(4) Although the situation ended happily in the sitcom, life is not a sitcom, as my friends were soon to learn.

(5) Last Halloween, Brian and Jay decided to play this same trick on a police officer from our community. They asked me if I wanted to come along but I refused. I have to admit that my refusal was not due to good sense on my part, but rather to the fact that I had already been invited to a costume party. I would later be extremely grateful that I had made other plans. My inability to attend the festivities did not discourage them, as they eagerly headed off to the local cop hangout, which happened to be a nearby family restaurant. After waiting for about an hour, they found their prey, a state trooper. In their minds, they had hit the jackpot. The only thing that could be better than playing a prank on a town police officer was playing one on a state trooper. They waited long enough to insure that this was not a just a short restroom stop and then began their

trickery. While Jay kept a lookout, Brian slipped the jack under the car's rear end and went to work. In a matter of minutes, he had the car blocked up and they were on their way to safety, or so they thought. As the officer came out of the restaurant, the scene began to unfold quite differently than it had in the sitcom. Whereas the sitcom officer had been calm and nonchalant when he left the restaurant, this officer seemed to be in a frenzy. He leaped into his car, flipped on his siren, and stepped heavily on the gas pedal to back out. It was at this point that Brian's job of blocking up the rear axle failed. While the tires were spinning at top speed, the car dropped to the pavement. The smoke screen that rose from the rear tires did little more than amuse Brian and Jay, but what happened next struck their hearts with a mixture of fright and amazement. When the car dropped to the ground, the sudden jerk caused the transmission to crack and fall to the pavement. From the disabled vehicle emerged the most infuriated police officer ever seen in our town. As he pounded on the hood, Jay and Brian, still only dimly aware of the chaos they had caused, slipped away.

( 6 ) What my friends did not realize was that two miles down the road a pickup had blown a tire and flipped over several times. The officer on whom they had played their little prank had been called to the scene. They also did not know that a waitress had seen them sneaking around and had made a mental note of their appearances.

( 7 ) Now it was Brian's and Jay's turn to be surprised. A police officer approached them in the local burger joint and arrested them for criminal damage to property.

( 8 ) They were taken to the police station where their fingerprints were taken, mugshot photos made, and worst of all--their parents called. They were released on bail to their parents later that night and informed of their court date. On the day of their trial, they were told that their fingerprints matched the fingerprints taken from the damaged squad car. In light of this information, they both pleaded guilty. The judge informed them that since the accident victim had been unhurt, and it was their first offense, he was going to be lenient with them. However, he made it clear that he did not want to see either of them in his courtroom ever again, not even for so much as a traffic citation.

( 9 ) While the sitcom described here was merely showing what it considered a harmless juvenile prank, in real life this prank led to a potentially life-threatening situation. We need to remember that while many things on television look like fun and games, in the real world they have much more serious consequences.