



Truth and Rumors: The Reality Behind TV's Most Famous Myths (The Praeger Television Collection)

Bill Brioux

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When you first heard it, you couldn't believe it: Jerry Mathers, from TV's *Leave It To Beaver*, had been killed in Vietnam. Then word came that Abe Vigoda, the actor who played the curmudgeonly cop Fish on *Barney Miller*, was dead; and that Mikey, who would eat anything as the Life Cereal tyke, had eaten too many Pop Rocks and exploded. Besides exposing us to things we couldn't otherwise believe, television can convince us of things that never actually happened. But how did these outrageous TV legends get started? How did they spread from classrooms to boardrooms across North America and beyond? And, most important, what do these rumors, so quickly transformed into facts and common knowledge, reveal about our relationship to reality through the medium of television? Put in other words, what exactly is it that were doing when were dealing in these fabulous rumors—are we chasing after surprising truths or simply more incredible entertainment?

To take one telling example: Jerry Mathers was not actually killed in Vietnam—but the basic sense of this lie wasn't far removed from the emotions factually expressed in the two-page spread of the faces of the dead in Time magazine. In the course of this compelling work—which is supplemented with interviews with many of the people implicated in these rumors—author Bill Brioux exposes the reality behind the many stories that currently circulate in our culture. Through these stories (both true and false), he sheds a revealing light on just what role these rumors play in contemporary society—and what role our society plays in regard to these rumors as well.

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