

Cannell had enormous impact on TV business

In the six months I've been writing this column, there have been several times when I've struggled to find a topic. But this week, I knew the topic. I just struggled to find the words.

I was trying to figure out the best way to honor the memory of a man who played an enormous role in shaping my love for TV — the love that drives me to write this column each week. That man is the prolific TV writer and producer, Stephen J. Cannell, who died last week at the age of 69.

My first TV obsession was "The A-Team," which Cannell co-created and brought to TV in 1983. I had the comics, the posters, the action figures, the Viewmaster reels — everything I could get. While other girls were just starting to worry about hair and makeup, I was worried about whether anything bad was going to happen to Face (Dirk Benedict, my first celebrity crush) in the next episode and whether or not all the groups complaining about the show's violence were going to succeed in getting it taken off the air.

But soon the show got me thinking about other things. At the end of every episode, we'd see Cannell ripping the page out of his typewriter and throwing the paper into the air (the title card for Stephen J. Cannell Productions). Soon, I started seeing that typewriter page flying at the



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end of other shows. It became like a game to keep track of all the Cannell productions. That led me to start paying attention to the names attached to all the other shows as well.

When talk began about the sliding ratings of "The A-Team," I started reading more about what that meant. That led to me learning more about the entire Nielsen ratings system. So when my friends started talking about their favorite shows, I was able to tell them when they were going to get cancelled.

The nuts and bolts of the TV business is probably a strange thing for an 11-year-old kid to be an expert in, but I thought it was cool. And no one has ever accused me of being normal.

In 1986, "The A-Team" was revamped somewhat as new characters were brought on board. I still thought Face was awesome and his frequent team-ups with a saner Murdock (Dwight Schultz) were always outstanding. But it was just never the same and my obsession began to wane. NBC canceled the show



Stephen J. Cannell appeared as himself in the May 17 episode of the ABC drama, "Castle." Cannell, a successful TV writer and producer and novelist, passed away last week at the age of 69. Courtesy of Michael Desmond/ABC

and I moved on to my next obsession.

But there were other Cannell shows that helped create the backdrop for my childhood. I had a "The Greatest American Hero" t-shirt. We watched reruns of "The Rockford Files" over dinner when I got home from school. "Hunter" was a Saturday night staple and "Stingray" was also a popular choice in my house. In fact, I can

think of a happy memory for many of the more than 40 shows Cannell helped create. And I can hum most of their theme songs.

Sadly, the TV business changed, leaving the independent studios behind and Cannell began a second career as a novelist. He was extremely successful, writing 17 books, including one of the best I've ever read, "The Plan."

But to me, he will always be

the man typing away at that IBM Selectric creating the shows that shaped who I am today. And though there are probably those who would wonder if that's a good or bad thing, I will be forever grateful.

Angela Henderson-Bentley writes about television in her "Stay Tuned" blog at www.herald-dispatch.com.