



Remembering the Saturday morning funhouse—and the adults who tore it down.

There was a time in America when Saturday mornings meant pure fun for kids. Six straight hours of cartoons on TV with all their pops, dings, booms, bangs, zings, flashing colors and sugar-sweetened commercials—until adults, claiming to have the “best interests of the children” in mind, ruined it.

For those who were youngsters in the average American home of the 1960s and '70s, Saturday mornings on television were a virtual children's paradise. Wall-to-wall cartoons on all three broadcast networks with no educational lessons, no social messages, just pure, mindless fun, with funny characters, bright colors, goofy sound effects and silly background music, providing escapist entertainment after a long week of force-fed schoolwork, demanding parents and threatening schoolyard bullies. It was a time for children to kick back, relax and not have a care in the world.

A significant part of this cartoon funhouse was commercials. Commercials for the kinds of things kids enjoy; toys, candy, delicious chewable vitamin pills and ultra-sweetened cereals with their own cartoon mascots. In fact it was the cereal companies such as Kellogg's, Post, General Mills

and Quaker who were the biggest advertisers on Saturday mornings, promoting breakfast foods that boasted of their sugar content with names like Super Sugar Crisp, Sugar Jets, Sugar Smacks, Sugar Frosted Flakes and Sugar Corn Pops. In addition to that, there were Trix, Frosty-Os, Froot Loops, Pink Panther Flakes, Franken-Berry, Count Chocula, Cocoa Puffs, Cap'n Crunch, Crunch Berries, Vanilly Crunch and hundreds of other sugary, brightly colored cereals that colored the milk in your bowl and added sweet, artificial flavors to your Saturday morning cartoons.

But like the evil Burgermeister Meisterburger character in an old Christmas special who banned toys and condemned children to a life of work and drudgery, you can count on adults wanting to put a stop to any fun kids might be having “for their own good.” Parent groups, educators, psychologists, politicians and government officials had to get in and psychoanalyze everything coming out of these cartoons, proclaiming them as too violent, not substantive, not educational (Lord knows kids needed education shoved down their throats even when they weren't in school), and overall bad for the psyche of children, among other things.