

Father Knows Best

US TV sitcom : 1954-59 : dir. : CBS / Columbia : 191 x 25 min
 prod: Eugene B Rodney : scr: : dir.ph.:
Billy Gray; Lauren Chapin
 Robert Young; Jane Wyatt; Elinor Donahue

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L to R: Lauren Chapin (Kathy/Kitten), Robert Young (Jim Anderson), Elinor Donahue (Betty/Princess), Jane Wyatt (Margaret Anderson) and Billy Chapin (James Jr/Bud)
 Source: History of Television



A Valentine's Day kiss from dad to daughter "Kitten" (Lauren Chapin)

Source: *How Sweet it Was*

Halliwell's Television Companion review:

"The life of a typical American insurance man and his family. As played, somewhere between the Hardys and the Joneses. And who can quarrel with success? The original sponsor dropped the show after the first 26 episodes, which shows what sponsors know. In 1977 two taped "reunion" programmes were made with all the members present. * "

History of Television comment:

"Probably the show that stands tallest among such shows is the one that largely inspired the genre, but whose similarities to the endless stream of imitators are only superficial. **"Father Knows Best"** starred Robert Young, making the transition from the radio serial of the same name, and adding the following cast: wife Margaret (Jane Wyatt); daughter Betty (Elinor Donahue); son Bud (Billy Gray); and younger daughter Kathy (Lauren Chapin).

Yes, there were predicaments – this was a weekly sitcom – and yes, Father did get in binds, but so did everyone in the family. Father *didn't* always know best (the clever title has all but supplanted the phrase that it tweaked, "mother knows best"), and this

sitcom was arguably the most democratic of all family comedies on television.

All of the players supported and respected each other, and when they didn't, there was common regret and forgiveness. None of the characters was clichéd – the children could be brash, but were sensitive and vulnerable¹ – and they grew each week – in affection as well as maturity. The viewers of **"Father Knows Best"** were intensely loyal, and public reaction brought the show back after cancellation the first season, prefiguring many such salvations.

The programme ultimately ran for nine seasons, and if other family sitcoms remain with us as how television saw us in the 1950s and 1960s, then **Father Knows Best** stands as how American families saw themselves in that period: it was more a comedy of relationships than situations."

How Sweet it Was – Television: A Pictorial Commentary review:

" **"Father Knows Best"** first appeared on television in 1954. It was the saga of the Anderson family, with Robert Young and Jane Wyatt as parents Jim and Margaret Anderson,

¹ No-one would call that a cliché, certainly..

and Billy Gray, Elinor Donahue and Lauren Chapin as children Bud, Betty and Kathy. Unlike so many other family comedies in which the father was portrayed as a near idiot, "**Father Knows Best**" showed its leading character as a mature and responsible parent. The programme's humour was incidental to its depiction of middle-class American family life. After the show had completed its run, Robert Young returned to television with a programme called "**Window on Main Street**", which was broadcast for a single season. "**Father Knows Best**" is currently being re-run on local stations."

NAMBLA Bulletin – vol. 6/6 – media note (July/Aug 85):

"YOUTH CULTURE: A Chicago Tribune column used TV to point out how the kid-parent role has changed in the last generation. "**Father Knows Best**", for example, featured parents in authority roles kids looked up to. I would add "**Gentle Ben**" and "**Lassie**" as examples. Now we have "**It's Your Move**", where a 13- year-old wheeler-dealer cons everyone in sight to take care of his

divorced mother; "**Silver Spoons**", where the father still plays with elaborate toys; "**Punky Brewster**", who always get her way by charming the tears out of authorities; "**Charles in Charge**" of a brood abandoned at home by working parents; "**Kate & Allie**", "**Webster**", "**Family Ties**", "**Cosby**", etc."

Excerpt from **The Moving Picture Boy** entry on Gray:

"In the mid-1950s Billy Gray became involved in the TV series "**Father Knows Best**", with Jane Wyman and Robert Young as his parents, plus a brace of sisters. His all too gosh-and-golly role of "Bud" was an embarrassment to this down-to-earth boy, not accustomed to deal in such old-hat currency. The steady income was hard to spurn, though, so he held his nose and got on with it - for the next six years or so."

[no listing in "Television's Greatest Hits" or "25 Years of ITV - 1955-1980"]



Billy Gray as an "all too gosh and golly" son

Source: *How Sweet it Was*

No further information currently available. Gray was 16 at the start of the series. Lauren Chapin, one would presume, was some relation to boy actors Michael & Billy Chapin, although I've no confirmation of this. Nothing else is known of her.

See also **"THE FATHER KNOWS BEST REUNION"** (TV 77), **"FATHER KNOWS BEST: HOME FOR CHRISTMAS"**, and subject index under **SITCOMS & SOAPS**.