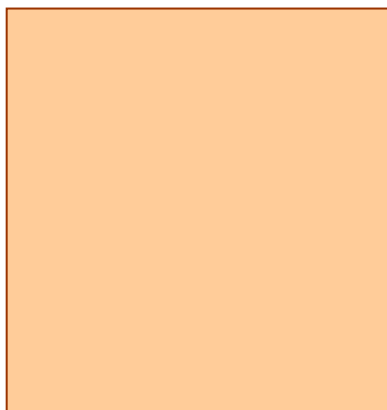




US TV sitcom : 1957-62 : dir. : CBS / NBC / ABC : 234 x 25 min
prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:
Jerry Mathers; Tony Dow; Ken Osmond
Hugh Beaumont; Barbara Billingsley

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Halliwell's Television Companion note:

"Domestic sitcom with the emphasis on two mischievous small boys. Small-town America as the clichés would have it – and extremely popular."

How Sweet It Was note:

"The Cleaver family included Hugh Beaumont and Barbara Billingsley as the mother and father, Jerry Mathers as Beaver, and Tony Dow as his older brother Wally. **"Beaver"**, which made its debut in 1957, was one of the best of the situation comedies because of its sensitivity in both writing and acting."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Mathers:

"His father was a teacher who became a high school principal. The family having moved to Los Angeles before he was two, Jerry began modelling and TV work (initially on **"The Ed Wynn Show"**) before appearing – together with his sister Susie - in **"THIS IS MY LOVE"**. The rest of Jerry's child career was occupied by his role as Theodore Cleaver, known as "Beaver", in the TV series **"Leave It To Beaver"**, which opened on CBS in October 1957. (It later moved to NBC and then ABC.) The pudgy, accident-prone boy became so well-liked by the nation over the next six years that he was actually made an honorary citizen of the Beaver State, Oregon, for services to beaverhood.

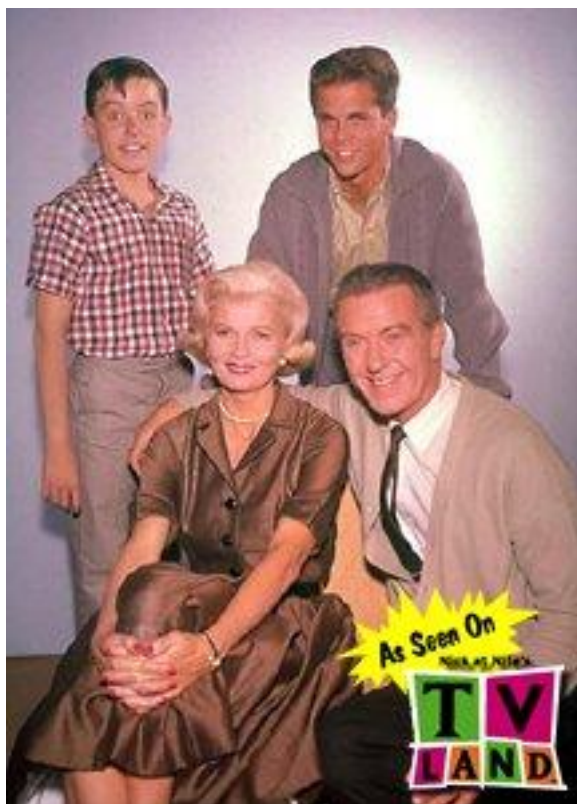
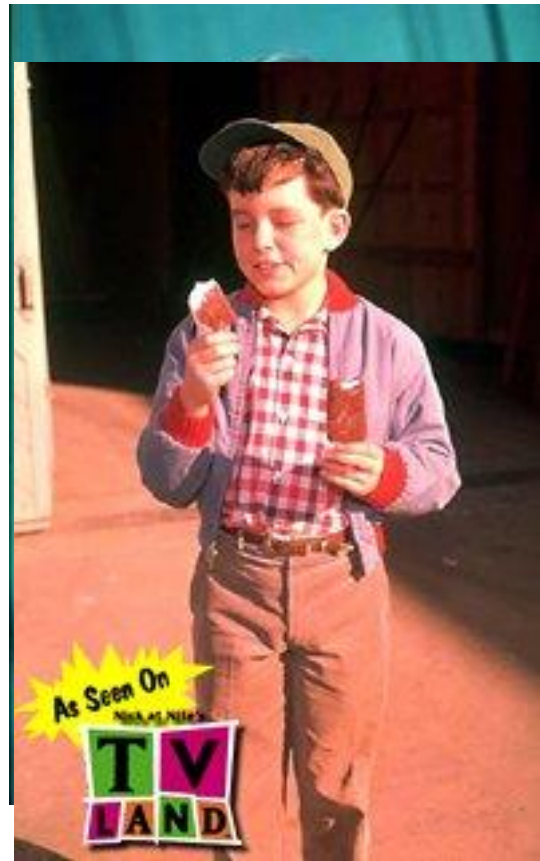
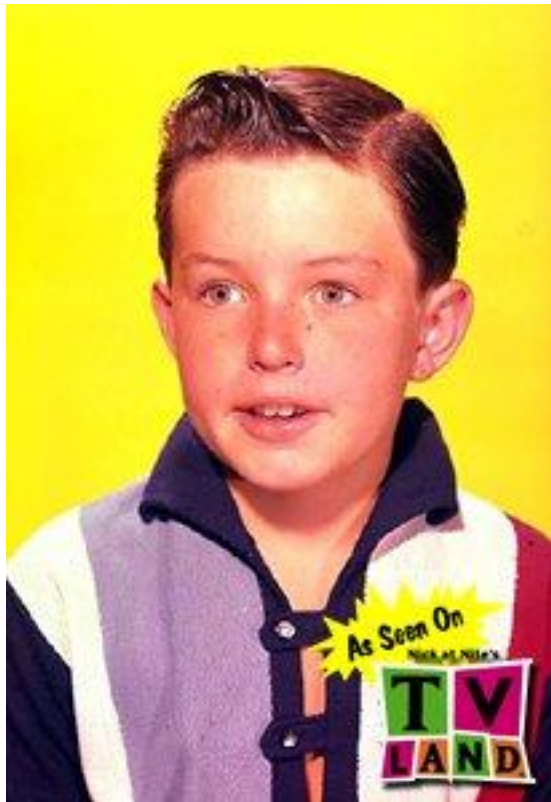
His elder brother Wally in the show was played by Tony Dow (born 13th April 1945), and the sneaky boy-next-door, Eddie, by Ken Osmond. Years later, in 1979-80, Mathers and Dow teamed up again to tour in a play called "So Long, Stanley". It was Wally's childhood inability to pronounce "Theodore", incidentally, that led to the name "Beaver".

Apart from the odd guest appearance on TV, though, Mathers didn't make any great effort to prolong his teenage career. He had the unnerving experience of being reported killed in action in Korea; but his Air Force experience didn't include death. He returned to acting in 1981 in a TV movie called **"THE GIRL, THE GOLD WATCH AND THE DYNAMITE"**."

Excerpt from intelligent appraisal of the American soap opera / family sitcom in **History of Television:**

"...**"Leave It To Beaver"** departed from this mould [ie: "the **'BLONDIE'** formula of the American Husband and Father as Jerk"] to an extent, as did **"My Three Sons"**. In these shows the prototypical suburban father-figures of the 1950s and early 1960s lorded over households of innocently wayward sons: Dad was always there to correct, soothe, chastise and sermonise by the show's end. If Ozzie Nelson was a Greek God to David and Ricky – an authority figure as flawed as a human – then Ward Cleaver (to Wally and Beaver) and Steve Douglas (to his three sons, who through the years included Mike, Robbie, Chip, and Ernie) were Greek Chorus figures coaching, chiding, commenting. Ultimately these characters and these shows were bland comedies of manners, reflections of a homogenised middle America that became reality through TV's repeated images and the subliminal secret weapon of television, the Implied and Assumed Truth.

When shows like **"Leave It To Beaver"** and **"My Three Sons"** are perceived as Everyman's typical home – as opposed to, say, the rather more modest milieux of **"Life of Riley"** and **"The Honeymooners"** – an Expectation Gap occurs. Added to the "typical" households shown in hundreds and hundreds of television commercials,





households that are plainly, upon examination, upper class, we can see the television as an instrument of economic seduction and social subversion. These settings do not spur viewers toward a lifestyle to attain, but rather tend to fill them with resentment that they do not share what seems so obviously to be the American household norm.

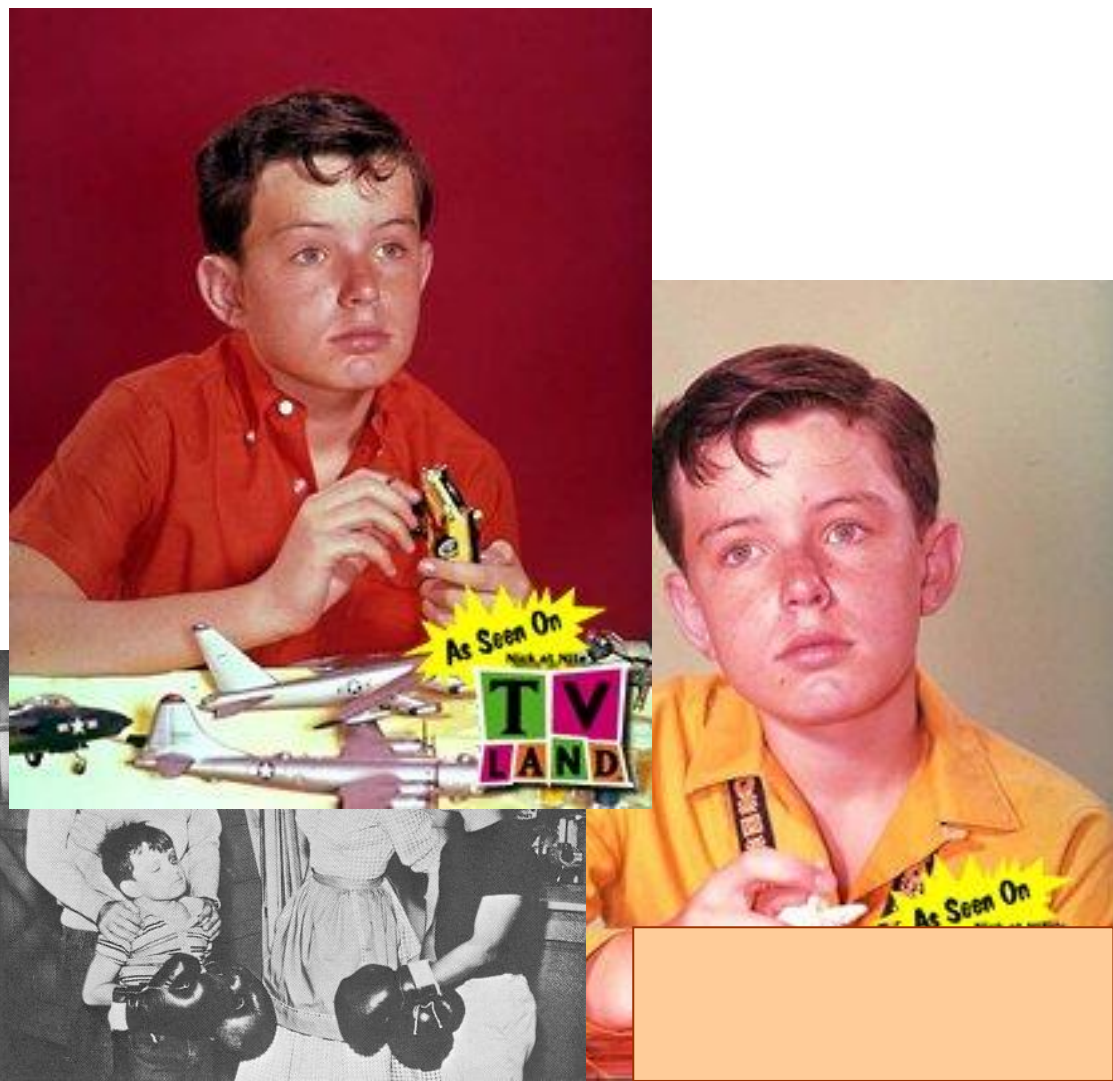
Hollywood and Madison Avenue thereby provided impetus to a generation's complaints about class structure and social mobility. The Cleavers (played by Hugh Beaumont, Barbara Billingsley, Tony Dow, and Jerry Mathers as Theodore "Beaver" Cleaver) and the Douglasses (Fred MacMurray played the lead, with William Frawley and William Demarest as stereotypically irascible older relatives) were clearly not revolutionaries. They were icons, symbols of a bland 1950s family life in America that probably never existed in widespread ways, but because of TV's inertial

law of Implied and Assumed Truths, are perceived today as mirrors of their time..."

NAMBLA Bulletin vol. 13/9 – November 92 – media note:

"Nostalgia: Jerry Mathers, now 44, with his **"Beaver"** work apparently over, wants to be a disc jockey. He's already dabbled in it. He has three kids who are into children's theatre... His stage brother, Tony Dow, revealed that his killing a boy in a highway accident when he was 20 has tormented him ever since..."

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



No further information currently available. The series was never seen in the UK to my knowledge. American TV has a fondness for exhuming the dearly remembered dead, and this small town spank opera was subsequently disinterred for "**The New Leave It To Beaver**", not to mention "**Still the Beaver**", being the doings of the next generation of, well, Beavers, pun notwithstanding, and with an adult Jerry Mathers continuing the role he created as a boy. A close relative of "**Dennis the Menace**", by way of Booth Tarkington's Penrod, or Peck's Bad Boy, "Beaver" Cleaver was perhaps less accident prone. "Little Beaver" was also, incidentally, the name of Red Ryder's indian boy sidekick in a series of popular B-movie Westerns.

Mathers was 9 at the outset of the series, and Tony Dow 12. Mathers' feature films included "**THIS IS MY LOVE**" (54), "**THE SEVEN LITTLE FOYS**" (54), "**BIGGER THAN LIFE**" (56) and Hitchcock's "**THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY**" (56). Nothing further is known of neighbour Ken Osmond.

See subject index under **RASCALS & SCALAWAGS** for many more "mischievous small boys" (a species now all but extinct in the sense these nostalgic whimsies have it) and under **SITCOMS & SOAPS**.