

Timmy's mom died this week. June Lockhart passed away at her home in Santa Monica at the age of 100. How many Sundays did I spend as a young boy with Timmy, his mom and Lassie. We never owned a dog so it was a real vicarious treat watching Lassie the wonder dog save the day in every episode. Turns out there were six generations of Lassies and owner Rudd Weatherwax made a name for himself as the go-to guy for trained animals in the TV and film biz.

Lassie was portrayed by multiple Rough Collies, though the role began with one legendary male dog named Pal. Pal originated the role of Lassie in the 1943 MGM film *Lassie Come Home*. When the television series began in 1954, Pal had retired from film work, but his descendants carried on the role for nearly two decades. There was a total of six generations of Pal's male descendants who played Lassie on the TV series, which ran from 1954 to 1973. All were carefully trained to maintain the consistent look and behavior that made Lassie famous. All the TV Lassies were male dogs, even though they played a female character. Lassie became one of the most recognizable animal stars in television history, appearing in over 500 TV episodes, films, specials, and live events.

Television shows have long been more than just entertainment; they shape how we understand ourselves and the world around us. From early childhood to adulthood, what we watch reflects and informs us about our values, identities, aspirations, and social connections. For children, television often functions as a kind of cultural classroom. Programs like *Sesame Street* or *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* or more recently the ubiquitous *Bluey*, don't just teach numbers or letters—they model empathy, cooperation, and emotional intelligence. Characters become role models, shaping how children see friendship, family, and community. Even fictional worlds offer frameworks for understanding what's "normal" or possible, whether through the imagination of cartoons or the gentle rhythms of educational programming. As we grow into our teenage years, television plays a key role in identity formation. Teens often see themselves in the characters on screen—navigating friendship, love, independence, and rebellion. Shows targeted at youth reflect and amplify cultural trends, music, fashion, and language. They offer scripts for behavior and belonging, providing both mirrors and windows: mirrors to see ourselves reflected, and windows into lives that differ from our own.

In adulthood, television continues to influence how we think, vote, empathize, and dream. News programs and documentaries shape political understanding and social awareness, while dramas, comedies, and reality TV reflect shifting cultural values around gender, race, class, and identity. Binge-worthy streaming series create communal experiences, even in an age of individual screens, connecting people across communities and generations.

Ultimately, television tells stories that help define who we are—both individually and collectively. The shows we grow up with linger in our memories and language, subtly shaping how we relate to others and to ourselves. Television doesn't just reflect culture; it actively participates in making it. So here I am all these years later remembering Lassie and those enjoyable, simpler times with simple story lines and where the good guys (and dogs) always win! Happy Halloween! I wonder if there is a Lassie costume. Speaking of dog costumes, I saw a "Balloon Dog" costume on Plumas Street the other evening modeled on the Jeff Koons sculpture of the same name. Of course, the actual sculpture is monumental; twelve feet long, ten feet tall and five feet wide weighing about a ton. I wonder if the young trick or treater knew the origin of their costume.