

Mayberry, R.F.D.



My wife, who identifies as Italian (understandably, as three of her four grandparents were born in that sun-dappled country), is sometimes baffled as to how she ended up with someone as unabashedly all-American as me. The family joke is that of all the men in the world, she managed to marry Opie. As it turns out, I actually do have a connection to the sitcom world of Mayberry.

Andy Griffith, who played the folksy sheriff of the fictional town, happens to be my cousin (5th cousin, once removed to be exact). It's nice to know that my small-town nature and homespun charm have a genetic explanation.

Griffith started out his career in entertainment as a comedic monologist. His routine "What It Was Was Football", released by Columbia Records, became an instant classic. He followed that up with the starring role in "No Time For Sergeants" which began as a teleplay. He would reprise the role on Broadway and again in the 1958 film adaptation. He made his film debut in 1957 as an ambitious and power-hungry country boy with political aspirations in Elia Kazan's "A Face In The Crowd."

In 1960, when Griffith expressed interest in returning to

television, Sheldon Leonard, producer of the Danny Thomas Show had an episode written for especially for him. Griffith played a country sheriff who arrested Thomas' character for running a stop sign. The episode was intended to be a back door pilot for a new show and it worked. Sponsors immediately committed to the concept and on October 3, 1960, the Andy Griffith Show made its debut. It would run for 8 years, and never once fell lower than 7th in the Nielsen ratings.

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