

## THE POST-STANDARD

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#### Do You Live in Springfield?

How about a Marge, Bart or Lisa? Professor's book explores how real life intersects with 'Simpson's' By Dorothy Long

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Contributing writer Tim Delaney may have been born and raised in Auburn, but his heart is in Springfield. After all, he points out, there is a little bit of Springfield in all of us.

Delaney is a Simpson's fan. Really a fan. He is the kind of fan that can spend hours discussing favorite episodes (and recite many of them) of the hit Fox television show, "The Simpson's." He is the kind of fan that can boast seeing every single episode when it originally aired. In fact, he wrote the book on the Simpson's.

Delaney is a professor at the State University of New York at Oswego, teaching a variety of sociology and criminal justice courses.

"Simpsonology, There's a Little Bit of Springfield In All Of Us." is Delaney's seventh book. In it he explores the social significance and relevancy of the show. And has a little fun too.

Delaney stumbled on the Simpson's early. "I was in LA in the late 1980s. Fox TV was a local station in LA. When (Rupert) Murdoch bought it, he wanted to create a fourth network and he would put on any kind of show and do away with local broadcasting. He started giving different shows a chance," Delaney said.

Delaney was willing to give anything the new network offered a chance, too.

One of the shows he gave a chance was the "Tracey Ullman Show." And tucked away in that show were animated short features drawn by newcomer Matt Groening.

Delaney, like millions of others around the world, was hooked.

The show may be pretty conservative by today's standards, Delaney said, but at the time there was an uproar. "They were criticized by religious and family values groups. They were pretty cutting edge but by today's standards they are pretty tame. Now, many shows push the edge."

"The Simpson's" were, perhaps, shooting for a different audience than the religious and family values gang. When the cartoon finally got its own show in 1989, it was put up against NBC's blockbuster night and directly opposite the ultimate family show, "The Cosby Show."

The Simpson's are really the model of the traditional American family, Delaney points out. "There is the breadwinner father he has a job he goes to every day, although he may be inept the stay-at-home mother and the children all in one household. Now that is only 10 percent of homes," he said. "The once ideal American family is a thing of the past. It is ironic that the Simpson's are the standard bearer for the traditional American family."

In fact, Delaney said, the show was modeled after another American television family that lived in a town named Springfield. That was the Anderson family of "Father Knows Best." The Simpson characters were given names from creator Groening's own family.

So where exactly is this Springfield. Well, that has never been revealed, Delaney said, adding to the mystic of the show.

"Supposedly there are more Springfield's than any other town name," he said. "The writers knew they had something clever having people guess. They build hints into episodes. One time someone pulled out a map but someone stands in front of the map."

When the movie came out, Springfield's across the U.S. competed to have the opening.



Delaney said he got the idea for his book two years after writing "Seinology" about the "Seinfeld" show two years before (The Seinfeld book came first, because he likes that show even more than "The Simpson's"). "It seemed like the most logical follow up. Both are in the top three ratings of top comedies." In the book, he discusses the show from a sociologist's point of view. He tries to be both entertaining and informative for fans and for people trying to figure out what anyone sees in a show full of irreverent yellow people.

"People can relive their favorite episodes and at the same time connect to a lot of greater cultural issues that the show is really all about."

Some people like the show just because it is funny, Delaney says. There are lots of gags and gimmicks sometimes playing to the lowest possible denominator. But there are also references to history, literature and contemporary social commentary.

"One reason it is so successful is it is not far right or far left. They are equal opportunity offenders. They have conservative and liberal writers and they talk about important issues.

There is health care. In one episode the drove to Canada to get prescription drugs.

And there is global warming and environmentalism. There is a continuous tire fire at the Springfield dump it has been burning for years. They can't put it out and have erected a sign: "Now Smelled in 46 States."

In his book, Delaney deals with some current issues as well. He discusses relationships of all types, gender roles, racial issues, religion, politics, sports, education and more all seen through the eyes of the Simpson's, their friends and neighbors.

Delaney loves all the characters on the show but his favorite is probably Homer. "There is just something about the Homer Simpson character that I like. He has such a love of life. He is oblivious to stress. And he has done a lot. He's gone to outer space. He has met ex-presidents. He has lived a great life for someone that doesn't have a lot going for him."

Then there is Bart. "I love his adventurous nature."

There were a couple unanticipated problems when writing about the show, Delaney said. "There are so many episodes. The most difficult thing was when to quit writing."

Putting things in some sort of chronological order can be a challenge, too, when you are dealing with characters that haven't aged a day in 20 years, Delaney said. "When they first came on, Marge and Homer had met in high school in 1976 and Marge got pregnant with Bart. So now that they have been on 20 years, they have to go to the '90s to meet," he said. "The show will be on two more years. Then if they look back to when they first met, it will be the year 2000!"

One thing easy about the book is introducing the characters, Delaney said. Because they need no introduction at all. "Studies say 22 percent of Americans can name the family's five characters. One out of 1,000 can name the five basic freedoms," he said. "that says a lot about pop culture. The characters are highly identifiable, whether you watch the show or not. Americans are quick to demand their rights but I love asking people what are the five rights. It all reflects what is going on in American culture. We like to be entertained. That's what we value."

Delaney said he has gotten a lot of attention from the book. He has been interviewed on local television and radio. Everybody wants to know about the Simpson's.

His next book, titled "Shameful Behaviors," comes out in August. "It is about the growing culture of shamelessness in our society," he said. He hopes it gets attention, too. "When I tell people the title of the book they seem to light up."