

Beverly Abbey

by Roz Warren

If you, like me, are a Boomer who is addicted to Downton Abbey, that show just might remind you of a wildly popular TV show of our youth, a 1960s classic that reflected the essential culture of the country that produced it, just as Downton does now.

I'm thinking, of course, of the Beverly Hillbillies.

Has anyone else noticed the many similarities between the two shows?

Both are about close-knit families who didn't earn their vast wealth, but instead lucked into it.

The Earl of Grantham and Jed Clampett are both patriarchs of clans made up of loyal and loving but independent-minded family members whom they often find difficult to control.

Elly May Clampett and Lady Mary Crawley? Both attractive, yet unattainable. Avidly pursued by countless suitors, neither proves to be an easy catch.

The theme of both shows? A family struggles to survive, although often at odds with the world around them. (A formula known in the TV biz as a "culture conflict" program.) For the Crawleys, the challenge is maintaining their aristocratic values in a world that's increasingly modern and democratic. For the clan from Bugtussle, it's maintaining their simple country ways amidst a shallow, materialistic "swimming pools and movie stars" culture.

Both shows are about money. For the Crawleys? Getting enough to keep their way of life going. For the Clampetts? Having so much that their basic identity is challenged.

We see the Crawleys through the eyes of their servants, the
Clampetts through the eyes of their bankers.

Yes, Jed is a widower, whereas Cora is alive and well. And you've got
Cousin Jethro rather than sisters Edith and Sybil.

But Granny Clampett and the Dowager Countess of Grantham?
Practically identical! Both are feisty old ladies who dress retro,
speak their minds, happily manipulate family members, and offer
plenty of sage advice to the “young ‘uns. “

As similar as the two shows are, there are, of course, a few
differences:

DA: No banjo playing.

BH: No jazz vocals.

DA: More elegant costumes.

BH: More laughs.

DA: Isis the dog

BH: Elly May's “critters.”

DA: Tragic, snooty, cold-hearted Lady Mary

BH: Warm, sexy, tender-hearted Elly May.

BH: Texas tea

DA: Actual tea

But the most important difference between the two shows? Driving
skills! The best thing about the Beverly Hillbillies is that nobody
ever dies in a tragic car crash. Jethro may have driven it around
packed to the gills with his family and their possessions, but he
never once totaled that truck. Mathew Crawley, alas, wasn't as

lucky. (Weird fact? The Hillbillies' vehicle was a 1921 Oldsmobile. The year that Mathew Crawley shockingly perished behind the wheel? 1921.)

Besides "Drive Carefully," both shows offer the viewer valuable life lessons.

Downton Abbey:

- (1) Hurrah for the British upper classes! A stiff upper lip will get you through almost anything.
- (2) Marry for money. Resist change. When in doubt, ring for a servant.
- (3) The family that pulls together will triumph and endure.

The Beverly Hillbillies:

- (1) Who needs a deeply entrenched class system? Just strike oil, and you too, can live in a mansion.
- (2) Enjoy life. Stay true to your roots. When in doubt, cue up some bluegrass.
- (3) The family that pulls together will triumph and endure.

The special episode I'd love to see? After Jethro invents a time machine, the Clampetts travel back in time to weekend with the Crawleys. Elly May bonds with Lady Mary and gets her to loosen up a little. Jethro falls for Lady Edith, who finally gets a sexy dude of her own. Jane Hathaway and Thomas Barrow both come out of the closet. And Granny and the Duchess of Grantham get on like wildfire, trading confidences over tea and moonshine, while Jed and Lord Grantham go hunting together.

The Lords and Ladies and the Hillbillies learn that they've got more in common than you'd think, including a pronounced skill at getting terrific ratings, and everyone lives happily ever after.

Ya'll come back now, Blimey!

