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Grand Finale

May is the month to say goodbye ... Parting can be such series sorrow

In the real world, the arrival of May signals sunshine, springtime, rebirth. But television has a calendar all its own. With each Memorial Day approaching, it's time to say goodbye to some true characters, TV's wacky office workers and meddling mothers-in-law who kept us company, snuggled under our afghans, through the winter. Most often, the parting is just for a few months' time, knowing that we'll soon meet again wearing new fall sweaters. But on occasion, when a show's stars or producers feel that their story has all been told, May is the time for us all to move on. But we've spent so much time together, laughing and crying in our living rooms, that sometimes it can be hard to say goodbye. Now, as yet another TV season draws to a close, *Watch!* takes a look at our favorite finales in CBS history, episodes providing the perfect signoffs for some beloved TV friends.



◀ **The Mary Tyler Moore Show**
Episode: "The Last Show,"
 March 19, 1977

Big Finish: Prior to Mary's 1977 finale, most shows—particularly comedies—would end with merely an ordinary episode, containing nary a word of farewell. But as series costar Betty White told the Archive of American Television, *Mary's* cast and crew had grown nostalgic over the course of what they already knew to be their final season. And so the show's writers

chose to end on an especially emotional note. In "The Last Show," a new owner buys Minneapolis station WJM, ironically firing all but incompetent news anchor Ted Baxter. In the episode's final scene—which White says the writers didn't even have the heart to pen until the Wednesday of production week—the bawling gang gathers in a now-famous group hug, complete with a group shuffle over to Mary Richards' desk to pick up a box of tissues. They gird themselves to exit the newsroom one last time, singing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." And it's good ol' Mare who then leans back in the doorway, literally to turn out the lights on a TV classic.

Final Word: Reinforced the concept of closure for series television, giving viewers the chance to say goodbye. After all, to paraphrase Lou Grant, we treasure these people.



◀ **M*A*S*H**
Episode: "Goodbye, Farewell and Amen," Feb. 28, 1983

Big Finish: Preceded by a novel by former military surgeon Richard Hornberger and then by Robert Altman's subversive hit 1970 movie of the same name, the successful series version of *M*A*S*H* had run for 11 seasons—over three times as long as the actual Korean War—before calling it quits with this moving final episode. An estimated 106 million Americans tuned in to watch Hawkeye Pierce, B.J. Hunnicutt, Hot Lips Houlihan and the rest of the mobile 4077th strike their tents for the very last time, topping *Dallas'* ratings record and turning "Goodbye, Farewell and Amen" into what is still—and likely forever to be—the most-watched single episode of television.

Final Word: Rare supersized finale delivered on its promise. War may be hell, but as Hawkeye spells out his message in paving stones for B.J. in the helicopter buzzing overhead, we realize that it's saying goodbye that can be truly painful.



◀ **Newhart**
Episode: "The Last Newhart,"
 May 21, 1990

Big Finish: In one of the biggest TV twists of all time, Bob Newhart wakes up next to Suzanne Pleshette instead of Mary Frann—and

realizes that he's not Dick Loudon, *Newhart's* mild-mannered inn-keeper from Vermont, after all, but still Bob Hartley, the original CBS *Bob Newhart Show's* mild-mannered psychiatrist from Chicago. Newhart's brilliant "the whole show was a dream" ending has remained so famous that when Pleshette died of lung cancer this past January, at age 70, many of her obituaries included quotes from a 1990 appearance on *CBS This Morning* about her experience taping the episode. Recalling the thrill she felt as she was about to emerge once more from under the Hartleys' bedsheets, Pleshette described the show's live studio audience's palpable sense of anticipation. "They heard this mumble ... and nobody does my octave ... And I think they suspected it might be me, but when that dark hair came up from under the covers, they stood and screamed."

Final Word: Proved that sometimes, a show saves its best for last. So many series overstay their welcomes; *Newhart* not only avoided "jumping the shark," but it also ended with what has become perhaps its most beloved episode.



△ **Everybody Loves Raymond**
Episode: "Finale," May 16, 2005

Big Finish: As was its creator Phil Rosenthal's deliberate intention, *Raymond* culminated its nine-year run with a typically half-hour-long episode. At first seemingly ordinary, "Finale" reminded us quite effectively that Ray Barone was not *Raymond's* title character for nothing. When Ray undergoes routine surgery on his adenoids, his doctors have a brief moment of worry that he's not waking up properly from the anesthesia. The family panics over the potential of losing its favorite son and emotional center, then rejoices when Ray turns out to be okay. It's a deceptively simple setup, giving the Barones one last chance to do everything they do so well; argue, annoy, eat and love—not necessarily in that order.

Final Word: Bucked the trend toward bloated farewells à la *Seinfeld* or *Friends*. Not oversized or overblown, "Finale" is a perfect-sized reminder why, for so many seasons, everybody truly did love *Raymond*.



◀ **Jericho**
Episode: "Why We Fight,"
 May 9, 2007

Big Finish: Talk about going out with a bang! For a while there, it looked like *Jericho* and its star Skeet Ulrich were going to have to leave us in suspense forever, thanks to an inadvertent series

finale. The show's first season closed on May 9 with "Why We Fight," in which Ulrich's character, Jake, and his allies prepare for an impending battle against the sinister neighboring town of New Bern. A cloud of dust settles over the town as Jake gives the order to fire, and then ... Well, it

looked like we'd never know, because the show was canceled on May 16, when CBS presented a Skeet-free fall 2007 lineup. But, in a relative rarity for television, the show's fans organized an offensive. Seizing on a line from the episode—in which Jake quotes his grandfather's story of American soldiers saying "Nuts!" to a Nazi-proffered surrender—they found a willing coconspirator (and a very smart marketer) in Web vendor nutsonline.com and began deluging CBS brass with peanuts and cashews. The result? The network responded, ordering seven episodes to constitute *Jericho's* second season. The date, for conspiracy theorists wanting to draw out this World War II connection, was June 6.

Final Word: Closure comes full circle, with fans now *demanding* at least a satisfying ending and ending up rewriting history. The lesson? If you want to get a network executive's attention, send food.

Ask MO

CBS' in-house ratings guru, Marianne O'Leary, breaks down the numbers and answers your TV questions



Question: "What's the longest-running program in prime time?"

Marianne O'Leary: *60 Minutes*, which completed its 39th season last year. *20/20* is next on the list with 29 seasons on air. Both *48 Hours* and *America's Most Wanted* have been on the air for 20 seasons, and *Cops* has finished 19 seasons.

Q: "Which one of the awards shows—the Oscars, the Emmys or the Grammys—has the biggest audience every year?"

MO: While the ratings change a little every year, most seasons the Academy Awards ceremony is both the No. 1 awards program and the top nonsports special of the season. In

the 2006-'07 television season, it was no different. The Academy Awards and the ceremony's red carpet special finished as the top two prime-time entertainment specials.

Q: "Are there ratings taken for holiday classics like *Rudolph* and *Charlie Brown Christmas*?"

MO: Yes. *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* delivered more than 15 million viewers and *A Charlie Brown Christmas* had 14 million in December of 2007. In fact, these and other holiday classics, such as *Frosty the Snowman*, *Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* were among the top 20 entertainment

specials of the year. But new shows are also attracting fans. The *Shrek* holiday special scored more than 20 million viewers.

To have Marianne answer your TV questions, send an e-mail to ask.marianne@cbs.com