

At 50, Andy Griffith Show still providing wisdom

by [Kay Campbell](#) in the [October 19, 2010](#) issue

Say a group of immigrants want to build a mosque in Mayberry, right next to All Saints Church. WWAD: What Would Andy Do?

The question, of course, never surfaced in the beloved *Andy Griffith Show* that chronicled life in the bucolic town of Mayberry, untouched by the battles of civil rights and war that festered in the 1960s.

Tucked somewhere into the cool green hills of North Carolina, Sheriff Andy Taylor mediated minor feuds in the largely homogeneous hamlet, guided his son, reined in the excitable Deputy Barney Fife (played by Don Knotts), and set an example for commonsense leadership that still inspires today.

Joey Fann, a software engineer from Huntsville, Alabama, and author of *The Way Back to Mayberry*, a popular study guide for small groups in churches, wonders what the calm lawman of Mayberry would make of America's current collective agitation.

What impressed Fann first about the series? "The friendships between the characters and the compassion Andy has for everyone," Fann said. "There are a lot of values in that, even 50 years later."

Fann's book was reissued in time for the show's 50th anniversary. Fans gathered in Mount Airy, North Carolina, Andy Griffith's real-life hometown, for the annual Mayberry Days, September 23-26. Fann was there to sign copies of his book.

At 44, Fann is too young to have seen the show before it went into reruns. The show lived on long past its run from 1960 to 1968, and Fann thinks the gentle unfolding of those basic values—which Fann also finds in his Christian faith—are the reason.

"Andy Griffith insisted that each show have a moral," Fann said. "And religion is portrayed the way it fits into the life of people of faith: just as part of everyday affairs and conversation. It's a secular show, but you know these are churchgoing,

God-fearing people."

Fann began to analyze Barney's antics and Andy's tender shepherding of Mayberry while he was a student at Churches of Christ-affiliated Lipscomb University in Nashville. It's also when he fell in love with Mayberry.

Those conversations grew into a mid-week small group class that he taught and still leads from time to time at Twickenham Church of Christ in Huntsville. The class received national attention and spawned his website, BarneyFife.com, where he and others share lessons and conversations about the show.

In 1999, an editor from B&H Publishing in Nashville contacted Fann to see if he'd consider writing a book, and he felt as dumbfounded as Gomer Pyle would have before a date. "I'm a software engineer, not a writer," Fann told the editor.

But he picked out 30 of the episodes that had stuck with him and wrote essays on each, much as he would start a discussion for one of his group meetings at church. Each short essay begins with a Bible verse that he sees illustrated by the episode.

The show is reaching a new generation in his home. Fann's four-year-old daughter, Josey, loves to watch the episodes with her father. Fann encourages other families to discover—or rediscover—the show to learn from the time-tested example of a town where everything was, in a loving kind of way, black and white.

"Anytime you are talking about *The Andy Griffith Show*, you are going to have a good time," Fann said. "Being a friend, being compassionate to people not like you, taking responsibility, being a good dad—I think we all need a little Mayberry in our hearts." —RNS