The Life of Riley Encyclopedia Article

The Life of Riley

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The Life of Riley

The 1950s family television program *The Life of Riley* offered one of situation comedy's original "dopey dads" as a protagonist, and was successful in laying the foundation for later working-class sitcoms such as *The Honeymooners* and *Roseanne*. Unlike his counterparts on such shows as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver*, the blue-collar family man Chester A. Riley was constantly befuddled by life's minor inconveniences, and his frequently uttered exclamation, "What a revoltin' development this is!" after creating confusion for his long-suffering family, became a catchphrase. William Bendix had originated the Riley role on radio in 1944, but it was Jackie Gleason who first brought the popular character to the small screen for the DuMont Network in 1949. This initial series lasted only one season, but NBC revived Riley in 1953, starring William Bendix in a return to his signature role. The show ended a successful six-season run in 1958.

Further Reading:

Castleman, Harry, and Walter Podrazik. *Harry and Wally's Favorite TV Shows*. New York, Prentice Hall Press, 1989.

Mitz, Rick. *The Great TV Sitcom Book*. New York, Perigee, 1983.