My So-Called Life Encyclopedia Article

My So-Called Life

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Contents

My So-Called Life Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

My So-Called Life.....3

My So-Called Life

Network television programming has often been criticized for being collectively shallow, insipid, and fashioned to appeal to the mentality of an ill-educated pre-adolescent. One refreshing exception was *My So-Called Life,* an original and intelligent dramatic portrayal of the world of contemporary teenagers that aired briefly in the mid-1990s. The show is set in Three Rivers, a fictional Pittsburgh suburb. Its heroine, Angela Chase (Claire Danes), is a 15-year-old sophomore at Liberty High School. Angela attempts to deal with her "so-called life"—her adolescent anxieties, quest for identity, relationships with peers, and her views of parents and authority figures. Patty and Graham Chase, Angela's mom and dad, are not the one-dimensional adults that are staples in teen-oriented Hollywood movies and television shows. Instead, they are a realistically depicted fortysomething couple who face their own problems and crises. It is just this sort of realism that made the show popular with a small group of fans during the cynical 1990s.

Claire Danes and Jared Leto in a scene from *My So-Called Life*.

My So-Called Life, produced by Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick, premiered on ABC on August 25, 1994. It earned positive reviews and quickly developed a cult following. Unfortunately, its ratings were unimpressive and *My So-Called Life* had come to television at a time when new shows were axed if they did not immediately earn big ratings. In December, ABC announced that the show would be cancelled. Had the network allowed it to gestate and build an audience, however, its ratings would likely have improved. After all, numerous classic television shows of an earlier time—including *M.A.S.H, All in the Family, Hill Street Blues,* and *Cheers* —started out with low ratings. But *My So-Called Life* would not be so lucky; reruns of its 19 episodes began airing on MTV (Music Television) the following April.

Further Reading:

"My So-Called Life." http:\www.mscl.com. March 1999.