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## TV's Top 100 Episodes

### #7: The Honeymooners "Better Living Through TV"



Original airdate: November 12, 1955

If you want to understand the essence of *The Honeymooners*, and the generations of working-stiff sitcoms it spawned – everything from *The Flintstones* to *The King of Queens* and even *Family Guy* – this is the episode where the magic ingredients are visible in their purest form: Jackie Gleason's blustery and self-deluding Ralph Kramden comes up with a sure-fire plan to make easy money, -- in this case the selling, via tv commercial, of a gadget called the Handy Housewife Helper. ("It cores apples, it scales fish, it sharpens scissors and there's a little thing here

that takes corns off your feet.") His long-suffering wife, Alice, tells him why it's a terrible idea. His true-blue sidekick Ed Norton agrees to help him out and, inevitably, it all goes horribly, hilariously wrong. Ralph's schemes always failed. *The Honeymooners* never did.

Ralph freezes on camera, unable to respond to Norton's set-up question, "Tell me, oh Chef of the Future, can it core a apple." The commercial ends with Ralph, humiliated, crashing through a backdrop and Norton left with nothing to say but, "And now back to Charlie Chan."

"The genius of Gleason's Kramden," says *Till Death* star Brad Garrett, who played Gleason in a 2002 CBS bio-pic, "was that his schemes and frustrations were always a byproduct of his desire to make a better life for him and Alice."

So she put up with his pipe dreams, not just the Handy Housewife Helper, but the no-cal pizza, the glow-in-the-dark wallpaper, the uranium field in Asbury Park. She loved him in spite of himself. "You can't put your arms around a memory," Kramden says, threatening to walk out if Alice doesn't go along with his latest bad idea. She just gives him that look and says, "I can't even put my arms around you."

But she does. Every time.

*Joe Rhodes is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer. ©2009 joebo productions.*