

# New TV show, the second or third time around

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Chances Are



Frankahan



Tayong Dalawa

**H**AVE YOU noticed? When new shows are introduced on local TV, they put their best collective feet forward, pull out all the stops, splurge on budgets, production values and regular and guest stars, and generally come on like a house on fire. After their showy opening salvos, however, some new productions quickly turn lazy, slow and shallow. Talk about taking viewers' interests for granted.

In the light of this desultory tendency, we need to view and review, not just the initial telecasts of new TV shows, but also some of their subsequent episodes. Only after we watch a number of telecasts can we more correctly evaluate how these programs are really shaping up. And so, to re-view:

**Chances Are**

We found the second telecast of *Chances Are* on QTV less dramatic than its initial episode, but it was ultimately more thought-provoking, because it focused on the broader topic of spiritual healing, specifically on the healing priest, Fr. Joey Fallar.

As with the show's first telecast, however, we found the long focus on just one topic tedious after a while, and we would like to repeat our suggestion that the otherwise exceedingly viewable show line up two features per week.

**Frankahan**

The debating program *Frankahan* on ANC got a lukewarm review from us months ago. Since then, we've watched the show again on occasion, and found that our negative notes still hold.

Basically, the show isn't an involving viewing experience, because quite a number of the student debaters it features mistake speedy delivery and loquaciousness for excitement and persuasiveness. How wrong-headed can you get?

**Tayong Dalawa**

On the teleserye, *Tayong Dalawa*, our initial review focused on the over-the-top portrayals turned in by its young leads, especially Jake Cuenca. What do

you know? After a few weeks, we caught a TV show that praised Cuenca for his outstanding performance in the show. Was this his handlers' way of offsetting our negative notes on his portrayal?

In any case, it prompted us to watch the show again, to see if Cuenca's work on the show had dramatically improved.

Last April 1, the show featured a very melodramatic confrontation scene involving Cuenca's character (who had come back from the "dead"), his half-brother played by Gerald Anderson, and Kim Chiu as the girl they both loved.

After Cuenca's character's alleged "death," Gerald and Kim's characters had become sweethearts—now that he had resurfaced, therefore, they had a huge problem to contend with!

To his credit, Cuenca handled his part in the scene with relative circumspection. However, in a subsequent sequence that required him to react to a hallucination, he went shrill and hysterical once more.

Of course, Cuenca's handlers may point that he was simply reacting to the terrifying hallucination, so his hysteria was called for. We submit, however, that it was still an instance of excessive emotionalizing for emotionalizing's sake.

More experienced and insightful actors have a keener sense of the thin line between drama and melodrama, and work hard not to cross it, because they realize that, in good acting, emotions are not to be indulged in, but to be purposively used to clarify a dramatic or thematic point.

Less is indeed more, because circumspection allows the thematic point to emerge, and not get swamped and upstaged by all that raw emotionalizing.

It turned out that, aside from Cuenca, Kim Chiu also had a problem in the episode, because she could not sufficiently vivify her character's terrible moral and emotional predicament: She now loved Gerald, but couldn't further hurt the already battered Cuenca.

Instead of digging deep into her terribly conflicted character's thoughts and feelings, Chiu opted to play it safe and go the *tulala* (numbingly confused) route, and thus ended up as another liability in the admittedly difficult episode. Anderson didn't do great work either, but came off with the least deficient or distracting portrayal. ■

## A haunting tale straight from the heart

by BUTCH FRANCISCO  
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**T**he two major television networks have a docu-drama each. In 2008, GMA 7 launched *Case Unclosed* with Kara David (who has since moved to hosting *OFW Diaries* late Friday nights). Arnold Clavio now anchors the show and I reviewed last Tuesday the program's episode on the pagoda tragedy in Bocaue, Bulacan. It had comprehensive interviews and an impressive reenactment of what happened when tragedy struck and claimed several lives.

For a couple of weeks now (actually every Thursday), ABS-CBN has been airing *I Survived* with Ces Drilon. I failed to catch its pilot telecast, but I read somewhere that it was about a mining tragedy.

Its second episode I caught and as I write this, I still couldn't shake it off my head. The story starts during one of the darkest chapters in the history of the modern world, especially here in the Philippines: The outbreak of the Second World War. We then see a Filipino family accused by the Japanese of coddling guerrillas. The father is skinned to death, while in the bedroom the mother is raped by a Japanese soldier. The narrator — then still in her very teens — recounts the incident. Your heart is crushed when she recalls how she saw her mother "already without skirt" being sexually abused by a Japanese.

An older sister who couldn't stand the sight of her father being tortured comes to his defense with a wooden club, but is killed instantly. After the soldiers make sure both parents are dead, they herd the three remaining daughters to a camp where they are separated from each other.

Every night, the soldiers ravage the women, but the narrator is spared — thanks to an inflamed arm. A Japanese soldier helps her while she recovers, but once she is well, it is this

soldier who first assaults her sexually. Life is hell for them in that camp where they aren't even properly fed. Their daily ration is thin gruel. When the soldier traps some cattle, they have meat, but these are rare occasions.

When the country is finally liberated, she is reunited with one of her sisters (the other one is never found and is presumed dead). Together, they trace their way back to what was left of their home to start life anew.

Recovering from that nightmare isn't easy, but she tries to move on and start fresh (the one who has a tougher time is her sister, who always sees images of Japanese soldiers approaching her). In time, the narrator meets a man who loves her and accepts her dark past. Her wedding night, however, is a disaster: She feels like she is being raped all over again by the Japanese. But her husband is kind and patient. And you also have to give it to her for her eternal positive attitude in life. Eventually, she and her husband raise a happy family and they are now doting grandparents to several loving grandchildren.

While I am so happy that she found happiness in the end, I still felt like reaching out to her to give her a tight hug — for going through that ordeal and for getting over it. However, we don't really know what is in her heart.

I've heard and read a lot of other horror tales about comfort women — including *Lola Rosa Henson's* diary — but this one recently featured in *I Survived* is the most horrid. Imagine witnessing your father being tortured to death and your mother being raped and later killed — and then you and your sisters being turned into sex slaves.

I grew up on stories about the Japanese Occupation on my grandmother's lap and that was how I first learned about the horrors of the Second World War. But even if I've already ingested countless accounts about the Japanese brutality, I have yet to get jaded. My heart still bleeds for every victim of war here in the Pacific and even those in faraway Europe, particularly the Jews who suffered under Nazi rule.

I feel so lucky that I only went through EDSA



Kara David, host of *Case Unclosed*



GMA 7's *Case Unclosed*



Ces Drilon, host of ABS-CBN's *I Survived*

I and II, which were both picnics and my biggest fear is still being around when — heaven forbid — another World War erupts (that should be all nuclear).

But some people — like our parents and grandparents — had the misfortune of living through the Japanese Occupation and there are those who still couldn't shake off the experience. The narrator in *I Survived* is one of them and you can't blame her. Even if she was able to rise above that nightmare there are still moments when the chapters come back to

haunt her.

*I Survived* was fortunate to have her as that episode's narrator. She told her story coherently — and from the heart. It was like everything just happened yesterday.

Apparently, even if the war happened more than 60 years ago, the memories are still painful, especially for those who greatly suffered. Let's all hope and pray that the Spratley's issue is settled peacefully among the claimants. As they say, nobody wins in a war. Everyone ends up a victim. ■