

The Art of the Binge Watch, My Obsession with “See No Evil”, and the Perils of Shopping at Walmart

By Jennifer Vignone



I am not really a binge-watcher in what I believe to be the traditional definition. I do not latch onto an episodic show and have to watch the entire series in one elongated sitting. What I have is more of a serious appreciation of crime shows. It all started watching Columbo on “The NBC Mystery Movie” with my mother. I have seen them so many times that I can work a case with the charming, shaggy lieutenant with the sound down. And then along came “Law & Order”. My tolerance for watching reruns of “Law & Order” and “Law & Order: Criminal Intent” are the highest of anyone I have ever met. What would I do without “WE TV” in the middle of the night? I regularly evaluate the cast changes, guest stars, and my preferences over these shows’ long existences. Part of their allure is the fact that they were filmed in New York, allowing me to revisit my own native New Yorker life in the city as I try to make out where the actors are pursuing their criminals. And then there is just the loss of self in something that provides that weird personal enjoyment — being alone with it — as it accompanies me throughout an afternoon or evening when I work on other things, wander through a sleepless night, or sink into a favorite episode — rapt as though I have never seen it before.

But these shows do not provide the fix many people need and thus reality shows have surfaced over the years to provide what people call “entertainment”. I have no use of most of them and

have probably never seen the most popular. It is the shows that revisit actual crimes that grab my attention. I have sampled them all. “Snapped” has its appeal and wealth of nuances, from “Snapped” — the original; to “Snapped: Killer Couples”; to “Snapped: She Made Me Do It”. “Dateline” is also worth watching, especially if Keith Morrison is narrating the episode. But my favorite is Investigation Discovery’s “See No Evil”. From the opening high-intensity overview of what is to follow, I am glued to my seat.

The graphics for the splash screen are rough and monochromatic using a font that has those telltale devil’s ear-like edges that inspire fear and danger. They build in black and white and finish off with a red dot on the letter “i”. The red dot blinks like the eye of the surveillance camera it mimics. Genius. I am anxious before the story even begins.

“See No Evil’s” premise is to solve crimes based upon the fitting together of surveillance camera footage. They start each show with the crime described and then take the viewer into the thread of events based upon what recorded imagery law enforcement can locate and glean clues from. It uses actors minimally to provide fill-in action for the events, relying most on the real investigators, family, friends, and of course, those cameras (!!!) to track the victim’s last steps. The narration is provided by the same intense, slightly hoarse measured male voice (Ross Huguet) — which becomes somewhat higher-pitched and exaggerated before the commercial, leading you to the precipice of the next phase of the crime — if only we can all make it past the break — we will surely find out who committed this terrible deed. Pure television heaven.

There are a couple of important things to take away from a show like this:

- We all are victims in waiting. It seems we are all just a hair’s breadth from someone deciding for us that our time is up. And it appears that for us and those we leave behind, there are a few different angles captured to tell the tale.
- We are just about always under some sort of surveillance. Cameras are everywhere. This unites us all in a weird, exposed way that is uncomfortable yet comforting. It is uncomfortable in that we are always under observation, or observation is available...and comforting in that, should we become prey to a victim, there’s a good chance CCTV may play a part in solving the mystery of our demise.
- And, if we have any hope of reducing the odds of becoming a sad statistic, we need to think about something I want to draw your attention to...Walmart.

Basically, there are times when you should just stay the hell out of Walmart. Honestly, what is wrong with you?

Every criminal appears to do an inordinate amount of browsing, shopping, planning, and casing in Walmart at odd hours. This is where shovels are purchased, tarps are found, tape and rope fly from the shelves — and gardening is not on the purchasers’ minds. It is you and me that they are shopping for. And if you are gullible, thoughtless, or desperate enough to find yourself in a Walmart in the middle of the night, then you’re simply up for grabs. Shame on you.

In one of the episodes of “See No Evil”, a police officer actually states that the only people in a Walmart at 3:30am are cops and criminals. They know. They hear about a crime and just figure...Walmart...grab the surveillance tapes. It is at the point where, when they detail the attack, the viewer simply waits for when the surveillance trail leads law enforcement from gas station to ATM to a local Walmart to check the register and aisle tapes for glimpses of the victim and potential perpetrators.

If you are determined to go to Walmart anyway — then at least try to cut down on the potential incidences of victimization and thwart the efforts of the criminals wanting to do harm by following these suggestions:

- Do not go to Walmart during the high-criminal traffic hours, which apparently are from about 11:30pm to maybe 3:30am.
- If, for some inexplicable reason, you need that pint of ice cream, bottle of aspirin, potting soil, or new sweatshirt that late in the evening/early in the morning, go with a friend or family member.
- Never leave the side of that friend or family member while you’re there.
- If you must part at some point during the visit to Walmart, stay in constant phone communication. Consider walkie-talkies or attach those really tall flags to your heads like some shopping carts have so you can spot each other across aisles. Find what works for you.
- Should you have forgotten your phone, don’t get out of your car, return home, get the phone, and then go back. Better yet, return home and stay in until daylight.
- Park your car right out front. It is pretty well a guarantee that there will be oodles of parking near the Walmart entrance under their bright lights to make it easy for you. Do not park a quarter mile away under a shading elm outside of a closed bank or fast food joint...what are you thinking?
- Stay out of aisles that sell the following: axe, tarp, electrical tape, anti-freeze, gardening tools, hammers, very large garbage bags, and wheel barrels.
- If you happen to make a turn toward an aisle and there is already someone there who looks like they might have three names, and one of them is “Bubba” or “Junior” — do not go down that aisle.
- Stay away from anything dressed in overalls. Bibbed clothing is at least a “5” on the crime scale.
- Plaid, flannel in the summer, plaid flannel — nothing but a red flag of evil.
- If you see a stain and think, “Gee that looks like blood” — it probably is — avoid the wearer of this garment at all costs.
- Should anyone try to offer you help or make light conversation, come up with a few quick, polite responses to help you get away quickly: “No, I am okay and do not need your help” or “No, Uncle Sal and his friend ‘Billy the Gun’ are waiting for me right outside, I do not need any assistance, thank you.” Or, get on the phone or walkie-talkie FAST.
- Do not offer to help anyone to their car (a van is a big “Yikes”), regardless of limping, wheelchair, number of casts on body parts, lack of body parts, etc. It just is not safe.

Walmart itself is a wonder and I am not disparaging the shopping institution that serves us all. It has just about every item you could hope for, and at reasonable prices! But remember, the Walmart “rollback” does not apply to human life. Exercise caution and good common sense in everything you do at any location. And watch a few episodes of “See No Evil”. Learn some of the warning signs and realize that becoming a star on them is not a showbiz career move. It is basically the last cameo you might ever make.