

SCIENCE

GUY/RU

Bill Nye helped me actually like science

By Matthew Auchmuty

It went something like this ...

The year is 1999. I am less than 4 feet tall, our telephone at home is attached to the wall with a cord, and I am at the library. Before me are rows upon rows of VHS tapes along shelves that tower up to twice my height. My mother has told me that I may choose two tapes to take home.

I sort through the tapes for kids along the bottom row, discarding the ones I consider to be "for babies," which turn out to be quite a few since I consider myself "a big boy." I flip through the tapes until I reach several in a row about a man called Bill Nye the Science Guy.

I had seen this science guy before on my channel-surfing adventures. While flipping through the boring adult channels to reach my beloved Nickelodeon, I had caught glimpses of this science guy gesturing wildly and talking about something called physics before I resumed my quest for cartoons.

Of course these videos about science I'm looking at sound like those boring documentary shows my parents would watch so I continue on my search until I see one of the Bill Nye tapes with a picture of the scientist riding a dinosaur. I look down at the *Jurassic Park* shirt I am wearing and back to the tape and smile. Just about anything having to do with the prehistoric creatures has me frothing at the mouth so I decide to give the science guy a chance.

Once home I pop the tape in and punch the play button with a satisfying click. I am greeted with not a happy-go-lucky jingle but with a theme song that I can't help but join in with, chanting "Bill Bill Bill Bill Bill!" Somehow, through a combination

of eclectic sound effects, zany humor, and Bill Nye's limitless energy in explaining all things scientific, I discover that science could actually be cool. Maybe I could actually like science.

So upon my next visit to the local library I get the next tape in the series and then another after that. Soon enough I am hooked and I am not alone.

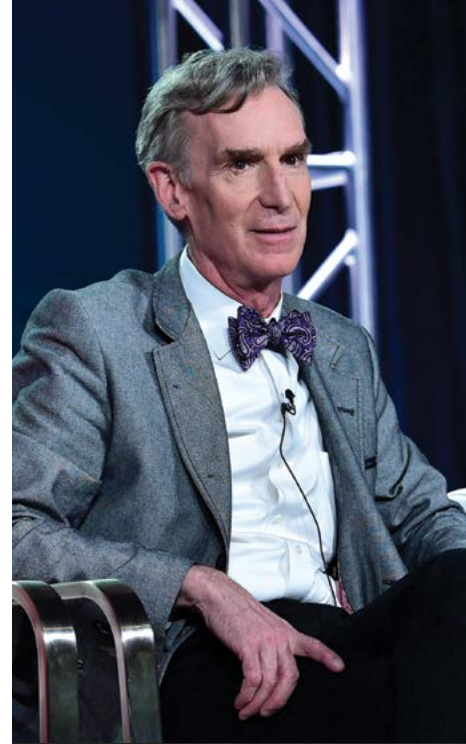
Today, my entire generation cannot help but chant Bill's name with the same zealous fervor as our 8-year-old selves. When I was in college at Florida State University, Bill Nye came to speak. Literally thousands of college students lined up as early as noon to see Bill Nye at 7 p.m. Every so often during that wait, someone started up a Bill chant and the results were incredible.

Thousands of college students took the time to line up for hours to see a beloved children's educational science show host and chant his name like he had dropped the hottest hip-hop album of the year.

Bill Nye the Science Guy wasn't the first show that managed to make science fun but it was the first for me to make science cool. Sure, there were other educational shows like *The Magic School Bus* and *Zoboomafoo* but they didn't do what Bill did and that is, to make me see that there's science everywhere. That science was not only beakers and lab coats but also the pursuit of understanding via systematic study of the structure and behavior of pretty much anything.

The fact that *Bill Nye the Science Guy* is still changing the world one science fact at a time is fantastic. So thank you, science guy, for reminding us that science does, most assuredly, rule. ■

Matthew Auchmuty is a journalist and pop culture aficionado living in Southwest Florida.



The Nye we never knew

Coming to PBS this month is *Bill Nye: Science Guy*, a documentary falling under the POV umbrella and featuring the former kids' show host.

He has taken off his lab coat and gotten serious, taking on what he terms the "anti-science movement" advanced mainly by climate-change skeptics and creationists.

The documentary shows how Nye is approaching education from a different viewpoint now, one that some critics have derided as political.

"If we raise a generation of kids that can't think critically, can't think scientifically, we are headed for trouble," he has said. "As a science educator, I am really more serious about it than ever. These people who are denying science, denying evolution, denying the efficacy of vaccinations and especially denying human-caused climate change—we just can't have this. We've got to fight this fight. I've got to fight this fight."

Press materials for the show describe it "an absorbing, charming portrait of a man and his not-so-modest mission to educate and change the world."

We're promised insight into his family and romantic life, too.

