



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

The Wayne Drive-In in Wayne is one of the last of a dying breed.

The hand butter churn . . . the horse-driven plow . . . the drive-in movie theater. These are relics of an America that is no more. Well, the drive-in has not disappeared completely. There are still a few in operation here and there, such as the Wayne and Grand River drive-ins. More and more drive-ins, though, are vanishing under the wrecker's ball to become — at least in a couple of cases — Toys R Us stores. That's progress?

GOOD HISTORIANS that we are, we've decided to preserve some memories of what drive-ins were like. Some day we will be able to tell our grandchildren of the time when cartoons were shown in broad daylight, when people brought pillows with them to the movies, and when you could watch the stars in the sky as well as the stars on the screen. Here are some other memories.

What I remember most about drive-ins is how slowly time went there. Not during the movies, but before the shows and during the intermission. We used to pile into our car — me, my ma, a lady down the street and her three kids — and get to the drive-in in plenty of time to get a good place to park. Unfortunately, it was always still light, and though they had a little playground up by the screen, the time just dragged. It would never get dark. During intermissions, they flashed a 10-minute countdown on the screen while they enticed you to stuff your face at the concession stand. We always had bags of food and pop we'd brought from home, and it was amazing how much you could eat while waiting for the 7 to turn into a 6.

Two brief memories from later days. I was engaged, and neither I nor my future wife had ever made out in a drive-in, something we thought we should remedy before we got married. I mean, this was 1969 America, and there were certain rituals that had to be obeyed.

We got there, waited for it to get dark and went into a clench. But we felt so silly with the crunch of gravel out the window as people walked by, and the knowledge that there were carloads of people to the left and right who (we were sure) were staring at us, that we ended up watching the whole movie.

Then I remember a buddy who owned a Rambler that had fully reclining seats. Not that he knew what to do with fully reclining seats, but he took great pride in the fact that most drive-ins banned that make of Rambler as too much of an assault on mid-'60s morality. — Tom Henderson

I sometimes used to accompany a buddy of mine who liked to slip in through the exit at the Wayne Drive-In. I can't remember ever getting caught. Often, however, his car would be without a muffler. We would make quite a disturbance coming in. — Brian Lysaght

You could say I was born (not conceived) by the light of a drive-in movie screen. I entered the world at Holy Cross Hospital in Detroit, which was oh so close to the Bel-Air Drive-In.

When I was a kid drive-ins would put on big fireworks shows for holidays such as the Fourth of July. It was always a treat to stand outside my cousin's house on the east side of Detroit and watch the fireworks go off at the Bel-Air about a mile and a half away. One special time my family actually was at the Troy Drive-In when a fireworks show took place. Talk about day becoming night! I was thrilled.

DRIVE-INS

Flickering memories

A couple of times my aunt and uncle who lived on Pontiac Lake would have all the cousins stay over for a week of fun. The week's evening highlight was a trip to the drive-in.

One year, when I was about 7, we went to see a triple bill of "Song of the South," some movie about Jesus and "Noah's Ark." I slept through the Jesus movie — you could do that kind of thing very easily at a drive-in — but was looking forward to the one about Noah. After all, it promised to have lots of animals in it.

Imagine my disappointment when it turned out to be an old silent turkey with narration tacked on. The only thing I remember about it is some guy being tortured by having to push a stationary wheel around. I didn't know who was being tortured more, him or me.

Many years later our aunt gave us the choice of seeing "Flipper's New Adventure" at the Miracle Mile or "Viva Las Vegas" with Elvis at the Blue Sky. Elvis won hands down — especially because he was double

bilied with John Wayne in "The Comancheros." John Wayne and Elvis Presley on the same bill? God, it sounded like a Voice of America show put together to show the natives of Rangoon what America was all about.

But my aunt, to whom our parents had entrusted us in good faith and who had been lobbying for Flipper, recalled squirming in her seat as Ann-Margret squirmed on the screen in some rather wild (for the time) Vegas dance numbers. She needn't have worried. At that stage, we were more interested in watching the car racing scenes and seeing how the Duke was going to mop up them varmint who were selling guns to the Comanches.

— Richard Leech

When my eldest son, Herschel (now 17) was an infant, about 2-3 months old, my wife and I took him in a car seat to the Algiers Drive-In, opposite Westland

Center. We saw the original "M*A*S*H" movie and missed a lot of the dialogue because Herschel was making a lot of noise in the back of the 1967 Chevelle.

It was the first time we took him to a movie to avoid the cost of a baby sitter. It also was the last that I remember.

The Algiers was torn down two years ago to make way for a retail shopping center. — Leonard Poger

Drive-in movies used to be a major part of my life, especially the teenage years and the years when I was the mother of young children. Where else could you take a gang of kids for an entire evening for the kingly sum of \$2.50? I managed to do this because buying refreshments at the theater, by a family rule, was strictly forbidden.

We would put our dinner of hot dogs, chips and fruit in Thermoses and bags and get to the drive-in at least an hour before the movie started in order to eat picnic style. It was crowded, messy and maddening, but the kids loved it.

One early spring evening my friend Marilyn and I decided to take the kids to the Wayne Drive-In. At that time, most of that theater was not paved, and the ramps consisted of graded gravel. Of course, Marilyn and I took both of our cars. We weren't fools, you know. We had, between us, seven kids under 8 years old. We were going to put the kids and Bandy, the dog, in my station wagon, and Marilyn and I were going to sit in her Volkswagen.

We got to the drive-in early, as usual, and I led the way in finding the perfect place. Being inclined to stupidity at times, I decided I would have some fun and lead Marilyn in a game of follow-the-leader. Down one aisle I went, then over a ramp, turn and head down another and over another ramp. I had just gone over my fourth ramp when *whomp!* the car was in a mudhole up to the floorboards.

I opened the door and looked back at Marilyn, who was at the top of the ramp.

"I'm stuck!" I yelled.

"Don't worry," she called. "I'll push you out." I was frozen in horror! She was going to push my station wagon out of a mudhole with her Volkswagen Beetle when her bumper was at least a foot above mine? Before I could stop her, her bumper closed on my tailgate. I jumped out of my car, landing in mud up to my knees.

"Are you trying to run us over?!" I screamed as the hinges on my tailgate gave way.

The drive-in had to get a tractor to remove my car, and I never could get that tailgate open again. To top off the evening, as if destroying the car wasn't enough, the dog escaped just before the movie ended. Between his running under cars and barking, and the nine of us scrambling and calling after him, we caused a near riot.

Did I learn my lesson? Of course not! Well, actually I did. I made Marilyn lead the way after that.

— Helen Furecen

The year was 1974. Being a curious young college student, I readily joined a careful of other youths equally curious about the movie fare offered at the notorious Seio Drive-In outside Ann Arbor. The drive-in was noted for its showing of X-rated flicks, you see.

It was midway through one particularly arty movie — in fact, a couple was in earnest communication, when a small dark spot appeared in the middle of the frame. The spot actually was a burn that soon engulfed the whole frame. It appeared the pair of lovers was being sent to burning hell, which got a bunch of car-honking movie-goers doubled over in laughter. — Kevin Brown



Cars lining up for the drive-in, a scene that's fast disappearing from the American landscape.

JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer