The Movies

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The Odessey movie is officially a summer blockbuster, showing in theaters in a variety of technical formats such as IMAX and RPX and environments. It has been a long time since I bothered to see a blockbuster in a theatre. Yesterday, I went with two friends to the big, new, high-tech theatre in town to see it. I knew ahead of time that it was long (almost three hours) and loud. I forgot about the extra thirty plus minutes of advertisements and previews. We settled into our giant reclining lounge chairs complete with large snack trays for 48-ounce beverages and gallons of popcorn and snacks. I came prepared with my AirPod Pros set to noise cancelling, which worked well. I really enjoyed the movie, not because of the technology, but because the story was so familiar to me.

The high-tech movie environment took me back to my simpler childhood movie experiences at our nearby drive-in theatre. Drive-in theatres became very popular after WW II in part because of the baby-boomer growth in families and the availability of cars. At their peak, there were over 4,000 drive-in theatres across the country. Movie offerings included a rich assortment of Disney family movies, sci-fi and horror movies, epic westerns, and low budget "B" movies, often shown as double features.

Our local Drive-in theater went by a variety of names, mostly connected with its location out in the country at the intersection of US HWY 231 and State Road 43 (now State Road 231). It was two miles from our farm as the crow flies, so we enjoyed their Fourth of July fireworks show from our front yard.

I remember going there as a family in a car only a few times. It had the standard rows of speakers on poles which people attached to their car windows. In the center of the property was a building which projected the movies and housed restrooms and a concession area. There was a large playground set up in front of the giant movie screen. It had tall slides and swing sets. At intermission during a double feature, kids would play in that area and probably enjoy it as much as the movie. Parents probably appreciated getting their kids out of the car for a break.

What I remember most vividly is walking two miles across country to sneak into the drive-in theater with my three siblings. I can only guess that my parents thought it was safe as they waved goodbye to four kids ranging from eight to 12 years old as we set off into the woods at twilight. I remember that we each carried a blanket so that we could lie in the grass on the front row.

We left at twilight so that we could sneak in at dark and blend in with other paying customers who chose to sit in front on blankets. My older brother was in charge of the journey, which often did not go well. I remember once he tried to ditch our older sister in the creek and he often left my younger brother and me behind, well out of the range of our single flashlight. I always felt like he was trying to lose us. The route was not really defined, as we hiked through woods, across fields, over fences, across Upper Limestone Creek, and through more woods. We could eventually see the lights around the giant screen to guide us in the dark at the end. We would sneak in and pick out a prime location for our blankets and enjoy the playground and the movies. It was scary but it was an adventure.

When the movie ended, we would walk out of the drive-in and wait in the dark for our Mom to pick us up on the side of the highway. I suspect she called the theatre to know when to pick us up. We all knew not to say anything about the hike being scary or about our brother's behavior. No one wanted to risk ruining that experience in the future. I asked my Mom once later in life what she thought about us hiking two miles across country to sneak in and then wait on the side of the highway for a ride home. She just laughed and said, "times were different."

I enjoyed all the technology that created the environment of *The Odessey* movie experience. I also really enjoyed the movie-going experience of a two-mile cross-country hike and lying on a blanket on a warm Indiana summer night watching a movie at our drive-in theatre.