

Poverty and movies

by Kate Good

I wasn't surprised when I read recently that movie theater ticket sales surged during the current economic crisis. People returned to the movies in droves, the news report said, hoping to get a little time off without taxing their budgets. It made perfect sense to me. The movie theater has always been one of my favorite escapes.

I knew about going to the movies long before I actually saw one in a theater. As a kid, movie theaters seemed like a magical place where my parents went on their weekly date nights or my older cousins ventured with friends. Going to the movies was a rite of passage, a step towards adulthood, it seemed.

I saw my first movie in the theater in fifth grade. My best friend that year, Becky Hatzmichael invited me to go as part of her birthday celebration. I don't remember what we saw, a cartoon maybe, but I do remember the red velvet seats in The Dutch Wonderland Theater that felt big and plush to a little kid. I rocked back and forth in mine until the lights dimmed and the room filled with gigantic sound and the enormous screen flickered with huge images of people and places.

My romance with movie theaters had only begun. Soon, I learned that action movies were particularly fun to watch on the big screen. My family saw *Back to the Future* one summer when the air conditioning in our car broke during a family vacation in Louisville, Kentucky. I gasped and squealed along with the crowd while Michael J. Fox careened around both the past and the future in his DeLorean.

As an adult a trip to the movies is one of my favorite treats. While I love watching DVDs at home with my dog, there's something magical about watching a movie in the theater with a crowd of people. Over the holidays or as a mini-vacation to a nearby city, my family will occasionally indulge in an afternoon of two or three movies together. I love the communal experience of watching a story unfold on the screen, listening as people around me laugh, cry, or gasp. Often, I recall where I saw a movie as easily as I can remember what the movie was about.

I saw *Match Point*, the Woody Allen comedy, in a theater on the Upper East Side in Manhattan. The crowd had clearly watched Allen's movies for years and laughed at the inside jokes. Afterwards,

I felt like I was in an Allen movie when I shared the bathroom with a group of elderly New York women, decked out in their fur coats, who debated the merits of the plot from inside the bathroom stalls.

I learned that humor doesn't easily translate when I saw *Good Will Hunting* in Paris, and my friends and I were the only ones laughing during this beautifully written story. Later, in the same theater, I was grateful for the French subtitles while watching *The Full Monty* because they helped me to decipher the thick British accents of the working-class characters.

I had a center row seat on the opening night of *The Dark Knight* and covered my eyes while Heath Ledger's joker menaced Gotham in the Penn Cinema in Lancaster. I tapped my feet along with my fellow theater mates at the Ritz in Philadelphia during the rousing finale of *Slumdog Millionaire*. Earlier that afternoon, I held my breath along with the crowd as Meryl Streep and Phillip Seymour Hoffman battled for control of a Catholic school in *Doubt*. A day later, I tried to control my tears while the heartbreaking tale of *The Reader* unfolded in the same theater.

Of course, audiences don't always have the same reaction to a movie. My dad and I saw the wonderful Irish film, *Once*, in a theater which was otherwise empty except for an ancient couple who sat near the front. As Dad and I left, discussing how much we liked the acting and the music, the old man turned to his wife and said, "That's the worst movie I've ever seen."

I still check the movie listings each week and avidly read the reviews. And I still go often. Each time, I wonder if the magic will wear off. But as the lights dim and the sound booms around me, a shiver creeps up my spine and I grin in the dark, just as I did that first time years ago. 📺