

Going to the Movies

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A Thousand Words

Hi. Welcome to the podcast, "A Thousand Words", for April 26th, 2019.

Today, my story's about a time when I was a movie critic... for about a week. When I was young, I was obsessed with movies. Maybe growing up just south of Hollywood had something to do with it. I still love movies today, but my obsession with them has turned into something a bit more controllable. Maybe, ironically, because today with DVDs, YouTube and online streaming you can watch almost everything at any time. But back when I was young, it was more challenging [1].

In the US, we don't call the places you go to watch movies the cinema, like people do here in Europe and the UK. When we say cinema, we mean the whole thing – the science of movies and moviemaking. We don't ask if you want to go to the cinema or, as they do in India, the cinema hall. In the US, that would be like asking if someone wanted to go to the gastronomy instead of to a restaurant. We call those places movie theaters. Or we say that we're going to the movies.

When I was young, during the summer school breaks I spent my time between the beach, baseball fields and movie theaters. Back then, there were only two ways to watch a film – turn on the TV and take what it offered – the good, the bad and the ugly – or go to a movie theater. There were some summer days when my father dropped me off at the movies at around noon and picked me up in the evening. The theaters often showed more than one movie at a time – usually 4 or 5. So, when one finished I would sneak [2] into another auditorium [3] and watch another film. I wasn't picky [4]. I watched just about anything. I didn't have a favorite genre – comedy, drama, action, sci-fi, crime, thriller, horror...even musicals. All were interesting. And I did my best to like whatever I watched – the good, the bad and the ugly.

When I was at high school, I was on the school newspaper. I wrote articles about our school sports teams and did interviews with teachers and students. Our journalism teacher was also the baseball coach, a man of many hats [5].

"Hey Coach," I said one afternoon when I went to visit him before class. "I've got an idea for the paper."

"Oh?"

"It's too bad we don't do movie reviews," I said.

"Not enough space," he said. "Only six pages."

"Couldn't we just add a page?"

"That would make it seven pages then. You do know about odd and even numbers [6] when printing newspapers?"

"Oh, yeah. I didn't think of that."

"That's why they hired me," he said. "To keep track of [7] the page count."

"But wouldn't it be good to have a movie review?"

He shrugged [8].

I went to him once a week and kept asking about it. Finally, probably to shut me up [9], he agreed.

“But you’ll have to pay for yourself,” he said. “The school doesn’t have the budget to pay for you to go to the movies.”

But I had another idea.

Before leaving school that day, I went into the teachers’ room, saying that I was sent there to get some paper for the journalism classroom. While taking handfuls of sheets, I found what I was really looking for - stationery [10] with the school’s logo on it.

At home, I put one of the sheets into my typewriter and began to type:

To whom it may concern [11], I wrote at the top.

Richard is a student at Orange County Beach High School. He works on our school newspaper as a movie critic. I kindly ask, as a service to the public school system, that you allow him to enter the theater at no charge [12].

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate [13] to call.

Sincerely,

and I typed his full name and scribbled [14] a doctor’s signature underneath.

Then I opened a newspaper and checked the movie listings. Steve Martin was playing in a movie called All of Me, so I took the letter and went to the theater.

I was nervous as I walked up to the box office [15]. Would the letter get me in for free? Or would I get caught [16]? And what kind of trouble would I be in for signing the name of my teacher?

A middle-aged woman was selling tickets that day, and I watched her smile turn into confusion as she read my letter.

“So... you’re a movie critic?” she said, looking at me closely.

I nodded my head yes, in the cool way I thought a movie critic would nod.

“Let me check on this with my manager,” she said, and got up from her seat and took the letter with her. It didn’t look good for me. But I couldn’t just turn and run, because she had the letter with my name on it. I had to wait.

She returned about five minutes later, with the manager who was holding the letter now. He smiled when he saw me.

“So, you’re a movie critic?” he said. “And you’d like to watch a movie here without paying. Is that right?”

“We don’t have a very big budget for our newspaper,” I said. “So my teacher thought it a good idea to write a letter.”

“Did he?” he said.

“You can call him,” I bluffed. “Right? Didn’t he put that in the letter?”

“That’s what it says,” he said.

We looked at each other for a moment.

“And... what would happen if I called him?” he asked.

"I imagine he'd say it's true," I said, hoping like mad that he wouldn't call my bluff.

"Is it okay if I hold onto the letter?" he asked, holding up the evidence [17].

"Sure," I said, swallowing [18] as quietly as I could.

"How about some popcorn?" he offered. "The letter doesn't say anything about popcorn. But a movie critic surely needs some popcorn to enjoy a film."

He walked me over to the snack counter and handed me a big bag of popcorn.

"Enjoy the movie," he said.

But in the darkened theater, I couldn't. The whole time Steve Martin was up on the big screen, I was thinking about the manager calling up Coach. Would Coach back me up [19], or would he be angry that I wrote a letter in his name without asking? I worried that the manager would come in at any moment and drag me away [20].



When the film was over, I passed by the manager who was hanging a poster up on the lobby wall.

"So, did you like it?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "It was very funny."

"Well, I hope as a movie critic you find a few more words to describe it."

I said nothing.

"I'm looking forward to your review," he said. "Maybe you could drop off a copy when it comes out?" he said.

"Sure," I promised.

But when I went home to write the review, I couldn't remember anything about the movie. It was simply one big blur [21]. And so I needed to watch it again, this time at another theater but paying for my own entrance. It was the first and last time I worked as a movie critic.

Thanks for listening.

If you liked this podcast, or others you've listened to on our website podclub.ch, tell a friend. You can also write us a message. As well, you can download our app if you'd like, and we have a vocabulary trainer to help you practice some of the new words you hear. I'll be back on May 10th with a story about hitchhiking. Bye for now.

Glossar: A Thousand Words

[1] **to be challenging:** to be difficult; hard work

[2] **to sneak:** to move in a way so you are not seen

[3] **an auditorium:** a room where movies are shown

[4] **to be picky:** to be critical; not easily satisfied

[5] **a person of many hats:** someone who can do many things well

[6] **odd and even numbers:** odd numbers are 1,3,5 – even numbers are 2,4,6

[7] **to keep track of something:** to be informed or aware of something

[8] **to shrug:** to move your shoulders up and down to show you don't know or don't agree

[9] **to shut someone up:** to make someone be quiet

[10] **stationery:** paper for writing letters

[11] **To whom it may concern:** a formal way to begin a letter when you don't know the name of the person it should go to

[12] **to enter at no charge:** free admission

[13] **to hesitate:** to wait; to be unsure about doing something

[14] **to scribble:** to write something that is difficult to read

[15] **the box office:** where tickets are sold

[16] **to get caught:** to be found guilty for doing something wrong

[17] **evidence:** proof

[18] **to swallow:** to let something go down your throat; something some people do when they are guilty

[19] **to back someone up:** to support what someone has said or done

[20] **to drag someone away:** to remove someone by force

[21] **a blur:** unclear