When Movies Were Magic

The Monster Got Her

IN 1948, when I was 11 years old, our family looked forward to going to the movies on Saturday nights in Columbus, Wisconsin. All seven of us kids, ages 5 to 17, would pile into the backseat of our Plymouth, with Mom and Dad in front.

One night, after seeing Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein, we felt a little scared going home in the dark. Arriving home, where there were no yard lights on, Dad drove into the garage and we made a beeline for the house.

After a while, my mother asked where my 5-year-old sister was. We all looked at each other in surprise. Dad rushed out to the garage to find her crying in the car. No one had awakened her, leaving her in the dark garage.

My little sister never wanted to go to a scary movie again, and none of us has forgotten that movie.

—Sadie H., Lodi, Wisconsin

All for "Old Siwash"

IN OCTOBER 1939, I was one of 300 Knox College students permitted, by lot, to apply for participation in the filming of Those Were the Days!

The 1940 film was the screen version of the book At Good Old Siwash by George Fitch. Siwash was Fitch's name for his alma

mater, Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. William Holden, Bonita Granville, Ezra Stone and Judith Barrett played the story's main characters in the film.

Students like me without a Social Security card had to apply for one to collect the pay of $5 a day for a movie extra. The $10 I earned paid my initiation fee for Sigma Alpha Iota, a national music fraternity.

We extras showed up at 6:30 a.m. each day for wardrobe and makeup, and "shooting" began at 9 a.m.

When the filming was completed, Knox students and the whole town enjoyed a 4-day celebration. Residents dressed in period clothing, and there was a big parade. The film's world premiere was held at Galesburg's Orpheum Theatre on May 21, 1940.

After I graduated, in 1941, it didn't hurt my career goal to become an educator when my Social Security card read, "Employer: Paramount Pictures Inc., Los Angeles, Cal." What fun I've had with that through the years!

—Marcia L., Roanoke, Virginia

Her Other World

MY FIRST movie trance came at the Park Movie Theater, located on Rockaway Boulevard in Ozone Park, Queens, New York, sometime between 1940 and '42. Causing the trance were Dorothy Lamour and Ray Milland in The Jungle Princess.

Ray, that handsome dog, was dashing even while injured when he

crashed into the jungle to find Dorothy in her strapless sarong and a big white flower behind an ear.

As an 8- or 9-year-old, I knew someday that someone would crash into my life like that and sweep me off my bare feet. We'd frolic, we'd kiss and we'd never worry about where our next coconut was coming from.

Why wouldn't I be taken with that stuff? It beat memorizing multiplication tables or minding my brother, the worst tattletale in two shoes.

I still love movies, believable or otherwise. They beat paying the bills, swabbing toilets and having the oil changed. Movies transport me. They still make me jump when someone is shot or make me stifle gasps when I'm shocked.

—Betty J., West Hartford, Connecticut