

The Silver Screen and Me by Estelle Lewak Geva

I love movies -always have.

My dad had a cine camera from about 1951 which he used to film my journey through life. I always remember Dad with his camera: filming at our parties and family functions, on our family holidays and later on when he and mum would go overseas together. Sometimes he would hand the camera over to Mum and pop into the frame for a few minutes (usually giving her instructions all the whilst, ever the film director).

My very first movie was at the Curzon Bioscope in Wynberg. My mom took me at the age of four to see "Dumbo". I was enthralled and remember crying. The Curzon was later renovated and transformed into the Constantia Cinerama. Here I remember going with my class at school to see "A Man for all Seasons" with Paul Scofield and Robert Shaw and many other excellent actors bringing our history lessons alive on the big screen. I also went with my school friend Linda to see Franco Zeffirelli's "Romeo and Juliet" with Leonard Whitting and Olivia Hussey.

Over the years I have seen so many movies and the special ones I can remember at which theatre I saw them and most times with whom. I loved the whole experience: first going to the cinema and standing in the queue to buy the tickets; entering the lobby and smelling the popcorn; seeing all the posters and photos of the stars and scenes from the various movies; standing at the usually curtained entrance to the auditorium peering into the slightly dimmed movie house and either being shown to our seats by the ushers or usherettes or finding them ourselves; the adverts before the movie started: when we were kids we would play a game finding the letters in the order of the alphabet from the words of the various adverts; watching the black and white Pathe News which was the British Newsreels with the narrators beautifully modulated English voice and then the lights were dimmed completely and the excitement when either the lion roared or the stars sparkled round the snowy mountain top or that lady held a torch or the earth rotated or that magical castle with the fireworks sparkling came on the screen accompanied by orchestral music – this meant the film was about to start.

My mom and her friend Pearl took all us kids to the Van Riebeeck Cinema in town to see Julie Andrews in "The Sound of Music". How we loved all the songs and I still remember the words.

In 1963 whilst on holiday in Durban my dad took me to see my first Cinerama movie MGM's "How the West was Won". There was a beautiful souvenir magazine on how the film was made with pictures of scenes from the movie and photos of all the actors.

Seeing the epic "Gone with the Wind" for the first time with my mom at the Rosebank Cinerama was like watching something I had seen before. It was so true to Margaret Mitchell's book that I loved and had read several times. The wonderful photography and iconic scenes from the first "Quitting Time" to Scarlet O'Hara's closing lines, "Tomorrow is another day" are etched in my memory. The music and the costumes and the wonderful characters. What is amazing is that the movie was made in 1939 and the magnificent Vivian Leigh was an English actress who played the part of the Southern Belle. It runs for nearly 4 hours and goes by so quickly and always leaves me wanting more.

As kids the local Scala Cinema in Claremont was our favorite movie house and the Saturday morning double features were a special treat. The ushers and usherettes would show us to our seats with a "Mind the patrons please" as they flashed their torches and then in the interval would stand with a tray and sell "Stage and Cinema". When I was about 13 I went with my friend Rene to see an Italian movie which starred Anthony Quinn called "Misunderstood" – this was a tear jerking heartbreaking story of two young brothers whose mother dies and their father favors the younger son. We were all sobbing at the end and when the lights went up the youngsters sitting behind us (about 14 or 15 years old) were so embarrassed. It was here that I also saw "Madame X" with Lana Turner and cried just as much!

I remember going to the Capitol Cinema in Wynberg to see some movie classics: "Cast a Giant Shadow" with Kirk Douglas, "Doctor Zhivago" with Omar Sharif and Julie Christie, "Exodus" with Paul Newman and the Beatles in "A Hard Day's night" which was part of a birthday party for my sister's best friend.

You were either a Cliff or an Elvis fan. All my friends, including me, loved Cliff. The first movie that I saw without the accompaniment of an adult was at the Pinewood Cinema in Pinelands with my friend Lynne and it was "The Young Ones" with Cliff Richards. I had a friend Rene who was different, she worshipped Elvis but no one was prepared to go with her to see all the Elvis films except me (I said that I loved movies) so I got to see all of the Elvis movies. All much the same story, Elvis and pretty girls and his singing, but we loved them.

From the age of about 14 I stopped getting the girlie magazines and would buy any magazine to do with the movies. I would spend hours poring over the pictures and reading up about the stars and the movie industry.

One of my favorite actors was Lee Marvin, an older actor with a gravelly voice and the most gorgeous grey white hair. I saw "The Dirty Dozen" several times besides "Cat Ballou". "Sergeant Ryker" "The Professionals" "Paint your wagon" and many, many more.

I also loved Robert Redford and was thrilled to see him with Paul Newman in "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" and "The Sting", two actors for the price of one!

One evening my parents booked tickets for a double feature at "The 3 Arts" and I decided to go too. I had to sit on my own a few rows away from them. Neither of the movies were those to be watched when you didn't have an arm to clutch, "Deliverance" and Steven Spielberg's "Duel" with Dennis Weaver. I have never been so scared watching a movie.

One lunch hour I went with my dad to the Pigalle Tea Room, a tearoom cinema at the top of Adderley Street, to see the Israeli musical "Kazablan". I think it was just before I went to live in Israel. He was also the most unlikely partner to go and watch "Love Story" with. We both thought it a very cheesy film. He took me to see the musical "Bye Bye Birdie" with Janet Leigh, Dick van Dyke, Ann-Margaret and Bobby Rydell (he was then my current heart throb).

I always enjoyed going to The Metro on the corner of St Georges Street and Waterkant Street. I remember seeing "Ride the Wild Surf" with Fabian there. Also "Kelly's Heroes"

and "M.A.S.H" both starring Donald Sutherland. Many of the movies I would go to see because of the actors in the cast!

I think I must have seen all of the "Carry On" movies. There were South African movies I saw too; Jamie Uys in "Hans en die Rooinek" was one that stands out.

These are but a few of the wonderful movies that I saw whilst growing up and some of the cinemas that added stardust to my life.

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## **The Silver Screen and Me**

**Written by Estelle Lewak Geva in 2026**

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