

HORROR-WOOD WEBZINE

Fright film fans generally get their monster movie fixes from video, laserdisk, or DVD. But the hardcore fans prefer celluloid, as you'll see from these...

CONFESSIONS OF A MONSTER-MAD FAN

By "Monster Man" Dan Phillips

It was another "Scary" Saturday night. Darkness had fallen once again on the small community of May's Point, New York. With my parents and sister asleep, I sat alone in our darkened living room staring at the only source of light--a 19" black and white television set. The fire in our wood burning basement furnace was growing dim. While feeling a slight chill around 10 o'clock throughout the household, I grabbed a blanket to keep warm and checked the station I was watching. It was WNYS Colorful Channel 9 in Syracuse. Fighting the chill and struggling to stay awake, 11:15 P.M. finally came. Baron Daemon (my #1 favorite horror host) emceed "The Saturday Hollywood Special". Over many weekends, of this nature, I was introduced to a vast array of spooky films featuring "Scary Monsters".

One of the first monster movies I recalled was *Frankenstein*. I was scared, sympathetic and stirred by this Universal Pictures screen classic. It was during the climax when the angry villagers flaming torches ignited the old windmill that my true interest was set ablaze for monster movies! It was my number one hobby at age nine in 1960. The idolizing of Dracula, The Wolfman, The Gillman and The Mummy followed right along with a love for those rubber-suit monster flicks and sci-fi feature film reruns of the 50's.



Dan meets Frankenstein's Monster on the big screen.

Continuing to tune in and regularly watch week-end Monster Movie Matinees and Midnight Horror Shows was a must. Craving to view these films over and over again plus dying to see the Creature Features that were only read about in the monster magazines was an on-going desire. But let's face it, we young fright fans were at the stations mercy as to guessing when they would play our favorites again. Many times it was a whole year or more between airings of my all-time favorite monster movie, *King Kong*. It was a matter of great importance to creatively devise and undertake a sure plan that would somehow capture the memory of these classic celluloid experiences for future recall in some form. Hey, these monster movies were in, on our TV screen and gone within 90 minutes or less with no promise of return. Viola! Our family reel-to-reel audio tape deck. I started a quest to developing a library of sinister cinema soundtracks. Replaying the tapes while recreating the movie scenes in my mind was the ultimate! A couple of fun ideas to visually capture these showings (yet quickly dismissed, due to expense) were attempted. I remember setting our 8mm home movie camera in front of the tube to start rolling on exciting climatic scenes from *Frankenstein Meets The Wolf Man*. Our 35mm camera loaded with a roll of thirty-six exposure slide film starting clicking its way through my most beloved moments from *King Kong*. Hey, the slide projected big screen still shots were a thrill. This hobby really meant a lot to me and I thank Mom and Dad for never discouraging me from trying. In 1961, Aurora plastic models came out with its first monster figure kit: Frankenstein's Monster. I had to have one. Wow! I could actually build, paint and display my very own monster creation! Frankenstein's Monster is still with me today along with many other Aurora classic model figure build-ups. Could it get any better (or worse, in the opinion of many parents) than this? You bet! Fantastic news came through the ad pages of Famous Monsters Of Filmland. Purchasing condensed versions of 8mm monster and sci-fi movies to show right on the family's home movie projector was a reality. Watching the TV movies, building the kits and collecting digest films became many a kids dream in those days during the nation's "Monster Craze" of the Sixties.



Kong is even more super in Super 8!

Since one of our family hobbies was photography, my film collecting and movie making interest fit in perfectly. My dad (Happy 89th this year) had an in-house darkroom set up for black and white photo negative and print processing. My mom (God bless her) took tons of family pictures, slides and 8mm movies. If my mom was heading out for any camera shops, I was tagging along in hopes of seeking out 8mm digests. Seals Camera Shop in Auburn, New York (12 miles from our home in upstate) stands out clearly in my mind. They carried new films plus had a basement full of 8mm/16mm 200' and 400' sounds and silents to rent. I rented plenty of times. That shop was a winner! One day I was treated to the films of my choice for being good at an Auburn dentist. After he "drilled, I was "thrilled" to make a beeline for Seals. I raced in and spotted a wire counter carousel filled with 50' Castle Films digests. I grabbed two, *Abbott And Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *War Of The Planets* (extracted from *This Island, Earth*). Experiences like this make a kid almost not want to regularly brush his teeth.

All films bought or rented were booked and premiered directly into my bedroom cinema. From the Keystone 8mm silent projector high atop my dresser, weekly (sometimes daily) showings of 200' reels of horror and sci-fi highlights like *Rodan*, *One Million B.C.* and *Son Of Kong* filled the huge 23"x 28" dime store white poster board thumb tacked to the opposite wall. A few cartoons, comedies and westerns crept into my collection. I mention westerns because I started experimenting with "live" sound effects. A Tom Mix silent western short ended with the climax of a single gunshot. Synchronizing the blowing up and popping of a brown lunch sack worked every time. I attempted to improve the effect by using large grocery sacks. Believe me, it produced a much bigger bang, but the procedure was eliminated due to high levels of dizziness. With the neat addition of the Revere Sound Movie Synchro-Tape (reel to reel), a more professional touch was obtained by dubbing in introductory, mood music, noises, finale music, etc., resulting in having a playback in sync for the entire films run. On several occasions, a friend and I had a blast by going crazy to create parody soundtracks filled with funny sound F/X and loony dialogue with such 200' films as *Tarzan And The She-Devil* (Gordon Scott). Oh, what those monkeys and elephants had to say. And with *The Hunchback Of Norte Dame* (Charles Laughton)...Chuck is that a hunch on your back or did you swallow something the wrong way? A little twisted fun to relieve us from fear and fright was in order.



Some samples of Super 8 scare films from the past.

Americom (film w/record) Motion Pictures hit the big screen with an outdoor approach in the summer of 1968. Neighborhood kids were excited! A huge 12' x 8' matte white masonite screen was constructed in the backyard of our country home. *The Birth Of Frankenstein*, *Horror Of Dracula*, *The Three Stooges*, cartoons and home-made productions graced the star-lit screen. Movie title paper banners were home-made and placed out by the roadside. Of course the card table concession stand was filled with bags of popcorn, soft drinks and candy. On a few nights, in addition to the films soundtrack, we were experiencing some added sound effects coming from behind the screen. Pranksters throwing rocks at the back of the screen were the cause. One night it was firecrackers! Wish those trouble makers would have shot them off during a cowboy western showing. No luck, though.

On Saturday nights we held an on-screen horse race game called "Broadway Handicap". It consisted of a set of 50' b/w single race reels. Play cards with lucky winning numbers were obtained at our concession stand. What a summer full of fun. Cinema-Tech Film Productions was formed also in '68. My sister Donna operated the camera as we shot our first 1 and 1/2 minute feature entitled *The Strange Experiment Of Dr. Jekyll*. Set construction of the lab in a large backyard storage building with actual script write and in-cam edit shoot time entailed about 8 hours. Creative "zero budget" ideas included using rolls of pink butcher paper for the walls (unrolled and stapled to framework in background), colored water for chemicals, sticks of black artists charcoal for makeup and a small jagged plastic Clorox bottle cut-out for Mr. Hyde's teeth. Fear, shock and horror preyed upon my little nephew Mark at a family group showing of this epic some years later. The ending scene, when I swing around toward the audience as the hideous Mr. Hyde, he jumped, turned and buried his face into his mom's chest and screamed "Dan hurt! Dan hurt!" His four-year-old mind interpreted the horrible makeup as cuts and bruises. After that, little Mark was quite never the same! As the close of the 60's drew near, the coffin closed on my film collecting and film making efforts received an R.I.P. College began in 1971 and other interests followed. From 1982 to 1986 I





became a theater manager. In the years from 1985 to 1992 I believed that Super 8 was dead. In 1993 I stumbled across a wonderful eye-opening publication, Coming Attractions (now known as The Reel Image) headed up by "America's Mr. Super 8," Steve Osborne. Thanks to Steve, I'm back into film collecting and movie making. This amazing contact put me in touch with camera and projector availability plus offered huge lists of new and used films. Yes, I said new! England is producing Super 8 full length features like *The Abyss*, *Alien*, and *Terminator 2* as well as Hammer horror hits! Full length Universal classic monster features hopefully are set for the near future. I have a set up with an Elmo ST1200 Super 8 Sound Projector being fed into a 65 watt amp. With my home built 6' pull-down (for 'flat' prints) and my 8' pull-down (for 'widescreen' prints) screens I can gain stunning picture quality in true cinema style.

I want to experience my favorite monster movies the way they were meant to be seen--theatrically! No video here! I

admit, I buy and collect video monster classics but the comparison is the difference between a very close 35mm movie on screen quality Vs watching my fright films on that 25' electronic fish aquarium! I do both but highly prefer the on screen film presentation. One of the most prized possessions is my 16mm full length sound print of *Frankenstein*. I can create and bring him to life again and again.

Hey readers, if any of you desire to enter or re-enter film collecting, it can happen. A real must is sending in for a sample copy of The Reel Image (only \$3.50). Address is: The Reel Image. 2520 Blackhawk Road Kettering, Ohio 45420. 24 Hour Phone and Fax line is (937) 296-9036. And if any of you still have equipment or films that you could stand to part with, please contact me. My interests are locating those Castle Films 200' and 400' digests, sound or silent, in those beautiful full color custom movie art "boxes" and anything else you might have in even 16mm monster films. Steve is very serious with his on-going efforts in buying entire film collections in Regular 8, Super 8 and 16mm plus all equipment. I encourage you to contact Steve, and please let him know you found out about him here. Thanks!

For myself and thousands of others, Super 8 is still going great and 16mm is still so keen! Hope to hear from every monster--loving reader in some way.



Thanks, Dan! To think of all the Super 8 gear and films Renfield chucked out years ago...it just proves that you shouldn't throw out anything. Cheers!

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