

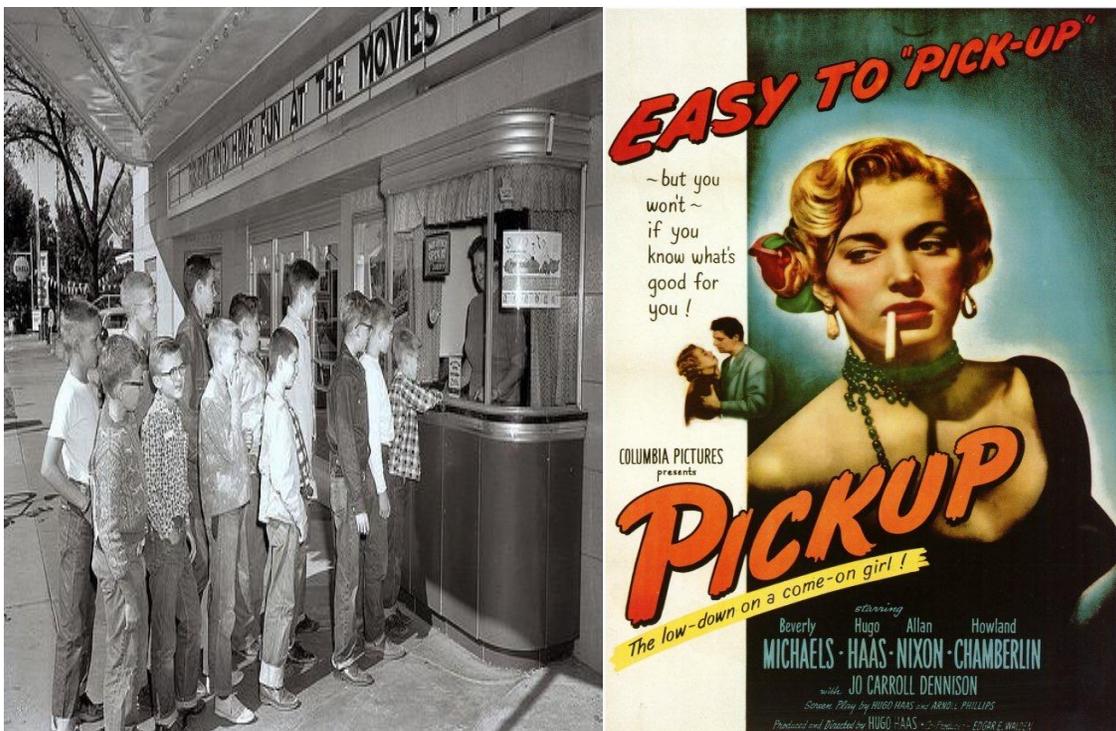
A Day at the Movies in the 50s

I grew up in Massapequa, a small town on the South Shore of Long Island, in the 50s and early 60s, and used to go to the movies with my two best friends, Grandin ("Tom") Milby and Mike Brodsky. Tom came from a working class, Irish Catholic family and Mike from a middle class Jewish family. I was the youngest child of an interfaith marriage, comfortable singing Christmas carols with Tom in church and attending Mike's bar mitzvah. Tom was our unspoken leader – the strong silent type that girls adore, like James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*. He was liked by girls because he was a "bad" boy. Some girls like that.

On Saturdays, we took the bus to the movie theater in Freeport and sat in back where we could crack jokes outside the hearing of the bus driver. We passed through several towns on the road to Freeport, including Seaford, Bellmore and Merrick. I didn't know it at the time, but Freeport was a very old village dating back to Colonial times and, during the 1920s, a popular venue for Vaudeville acts by such stars as Buster Keaton and W.C. Fields. By the late 50s, when we went there for the movies, Freeport was a bustling city with many interesting sights.

We marveled at the shops on our way to the movie theatre. My favorite sold homemade chocolates and a dazzling array of candy, including gold foil chocolate coins that I could not afford. There was always a mob of kids waiting outside the theater but the ticket line moved quickly and the candy counter at the front of the theatre was always our first stop. I bought popcorn and a Turkish Taffy bar for the first picture. If I had the money, I would also buy chocolate Bon Bons, with vanilla ice cream inside, before the second feature, or so-called "B movie." Some of the older boys smoked cigarettes or made out with girls in the balcony until the usher shined his flashlight on them and spoiled the fun.

We kids knew that the gangster films and horror movies told the truth about a world of good and bad guys and dolls who did what they did because of the people they were, saints and sinners. The bad guys were fascinating characters whose criminal schemes usually got them killed or behind bars; the good guys ended up with beautiful women we wished we knew.



A movie ticket booth in the 50s

Film Noir

The round-trip bus fare from Massapequa to Freeport was 25 cents; a movie ticket, 35 cents; and popcorn and candy, under a dollar. So after a fun-filled day at the movies, we came home with change jingling in our pockets.

My older brother and I once went to a movie in Lindenhurst and missed the bus home. He decided we should walk home through 6.9 miles of snow and sleet, which nearly froze my feet off. My mother was worried because we were very late getting home. But, never one to find fault, she welcomed us with open arms and had me soak my feet in warm water until I could feel them again.

We had carefree parents who enjoyed time alone and were happy when we were together. The only hard and fast rules were to stay out of trouble and be home on time for supper.

Even my dog, Lucky, could come and go as she pleased. She was a smart dog and never lost her way. She knew how to tell us what she wanted – including scraps of food from under the table. Lucky reminds me of the words from Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poem, "[t]he dog trots freely through the streets."¹ When I came home, she would lick me from head to toe.

I drifted apart from Tom and Mike when we entered high school. They were girl crazy and had no use for school. I made new friends who shared my interest in books, Fellini and Bergman films, jazz and folk music. Sometimes we took the Long Island Railroad to Greenwich Village and Washington Square Park, where we listened to folk songs and bongo drums, and watched old men huddled over concrete tables playing chess.

I will always remember my movie pals and the good times we had. Tom, by the way, seldom shared his candy, but did have the good manners to say, "No dibs."

New Orleans
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¹ *Dog*, by Lawrence Ferlinghetti