

## Morton Marcus: Hunting for movie magic at the Boardwalk

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Every so often I go on a treasure hunt. I'm not talking about pirate treasure. Nothing so grandiose. Just a small adventure that allows me to view my life from a different perspective and thereby provides a kind of continuity to my existence.

A typical instance happened the other day. I had gone to the Museum of Art and History on Front Street to see the 100-year anniversary exhibit of the Beach Boardwalk. The moment I stepped into the room, I saw the badly battered, paint-chipped, chest-high remains of an old machine that made my heart flutter. It was a 1908 Mutoscope, a hand-cranked peep show instrument that gave the viewer the impression of watching a motion picture. Peering through the eyepiece, the viewer turned the mutoscope's handle that revolved 1,500 photo cards inside the machine's lighted interior.

The mutoscope wasn't working nor were the two other models against the farther wall, but I was transported back to the beginning of film history. After I browsed through the other memorabilia, I drove to the Boardwalk in search of a "live" mutoscope.

First I went to the main arcade with its high ceiling, plaster columns and ornate cornices. Despite the noise and ultra-contemporary games, I was enveloped in thoughts of bygone days. It's not by chance that the Boardwalk's motto is "keep nostalgia current" There was an aura of the past everywhere I looked, an atmosphere that pervades the Boardwalk's every nook and cranny. I found many old amusements — fortune-telling machines, strength testers and games from the early 1900s — but no mutoscope.

Next I went to Neptune's Kingdom and searched its cavernous interior. Now a miniature golf course, it still exudes the slight scent of salt, recalling the days when it was a giant indoor, heated saltwater swimming pool popularly known as the "Plunge"

I hunted the corridors and niches around the golf course and eventually found two mutoscopes, both working and showing girlie peep shows made about the time the Beach Boardwalk opened in 1907.

If the mutoscopes had reminded me of the roots of film history, I soon remembered the many films that had been made on the Boardwalk over the years, especially those titles of the past 25 years, which summon up memories we all share.

In 1983, Jackie Gleason and Karl Malden pretended the Boardwalk was Coney Island in "Sting II," a sequel to the Redford-Newman classic. That same year, Clint Eastwood featured the Boardwalk in his fourth Dirty Harry film, "Sudden Impact" The film's elaborate climax starts with a chase through the darkened carousel, cuts to an almost Western showdown with Clint silhouetted on the midway, and ends with a climb up the roller coaster.

Four years later, a young Joel Schumacher — who would go on to direct "Batman and Robin" and "Batman Forever" — shot several scenes on the Boardwalk and the adjacent beach in the tongue-in-cheek horror film "The Lost Boys" In the film's spectacular opening sequence, a nighttime airplane shot slides over Monterey Bay toward a glittering Boardwalk. The roller coaster, like a bejeweled dragon, rises from its midst, and the city of Santa Cruz twinkles in the background. In the next scene, a boyish Kiefer Sutherland, sporting a shocking silver hairdo, creates havoc on the carousel. To mark its 20th anniversary, the film will be shown on the Boardwalk free of charge this July.

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Standing by the mutoscopes, I thought of how those films marked different years of my life and reflected a span of history that gave me a sense of order and meaning — 1983, 1987, and then the 1989 earthquake: We measure our lives by such dates and events. And, I thought, each of us can make similar connections on the Boardwalk where there are reminders of the past everywhere for everyone, treasure hunts waiting to happen.

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