

Wake Up!

by Tony Beckwith © 2007

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SOON AFTER I ARRIVED in Austin, in the early eighties, Lillian took me to a drive-in movie. As we watched the screen, holding hands, with the speakers hooked onto the side of the car, I experienced an epiphany. These days we call it an "ah-ha!" moment, but it's the same thing.

Until I settled in Austin, my movie-going experience was limited to the traditional indoor theater. There were no drive-in movies in Montevideo in the fifties. But there were radios and records, and the music of the Everly Brothers who sang the memorable hit, "Wake up, little Suzy." The action in this musical story takes place at the movies, as explained in the lyrics:

*We've both been sound asleep
wake up little Suzy and weep
the movie's over, it's four o'clock
and we're in trouble deep.*

As a teenager I memorized the lyrics of virtually every song I listened to. I always assumed that everyone did, and didn't discover until many years later that I was wrong. But then, perhaps not everyone listened to a favorite song, or all the tracks on a favorite album, over and over and over and over and over and over again. After a while those lyrics are burned into one's mental hard drive, never to be forgotten. Anyway, after listening to "Wake up, little Suzy" a few million times, I still couldn't understand how someone could fall asleep at the movies and not wake up until four o'clock in the morning.

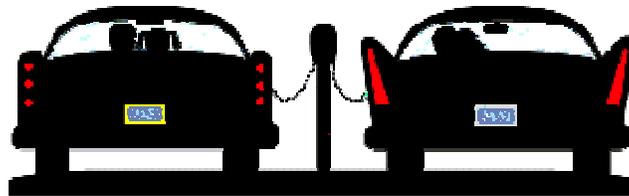
*Well, we told your mama that we'd
be in by ten
Suzy, baby, looks like we goofed
again!*

That just couldn't happen in any movie theater I'd ever been to because the ushers would usher

everyone out of their seats after each performance. It would have been impossible to snooze on uninterrupted until the wee small hours of the morning. What was the song talking about? Unable to solve the riddle, I put it aside and forgot about it. Decades went by and then, that night at the drive-in movie in Austin, the answer suddenly hit me like a thunderbolt and I cried out, "Ah-ha!"

It had suddenly dawned on me that Don and Phil Everly were telling a story set in a drive-in movie! At a drive-in, Suzy and I could indeed have fallen asleep and slumbered on into the night. Every time I thought about it, the Suzy in my mind's eye looked like someone else, and more details of the incident emerged, as from a fog. Or steam.

*Whatta we gonna tell your mama?
Whatta we gonna tell your pop?
Whatta we gonna tell our friends
when they say, "ooh-la-la!"*



Now, at last, my ancient quest was at an end; I had finally found the solution to a puzzle that had long challenged my reason, and the answer had provided a most satisfying cultural insight as well. I had been unable to solve the riddle of the song because there were no drive-in movies in Montevideo at that time. But there were plenty of regular ones.

During my teenage years I would often join my pack to attend marathon Saturday or Sunday movie sessions that were cleverly scheduled to begin just before lunch at 1 p.m.

and end at about nine o'clock at night. We'd go to the Casablanca, the Biarritz, or the Cine Carrasco. We'd see four full-length movies, interspersed with cartoons and newsreels and advertisements. There were concession stands of the old, entrepreneurial variety: vendors with trays on stands or carts on wheels, offering gum (*¡chicle!*), cold soft drinks (*¡Pessi Cola bien helada!*), hot dogs (*¡frrraaanfrrruteee!*), sweet and salty popcorn (*¡el pó, el pó acaramelado!*), hot roasted peanuts in a newspaper cone (*¡calentito el maníí!*), cigarettes (*¡cigarrillos!*), sandwiches (*¡sánguches!*), and ice cream (*¡vasito, barrita, bombón helado!*). Oh, did I say cigarettes? Don't tell my parents!

My favorite place to be on a cold and rainy Saturday afternoon was the Casablanca. For one thing, most people in the audience were about my age. It wasn't until years later, when I went to the movies at night as an adult, that I understood just how totally those weekend matinees were geared to the kids. And I appreciated them enormously. They were a snug, exciting, safe place to be away from home and surrounded by friends and peers. Not that there was anything wrong with life at home; on the contrary, I was lucky enough to grow up in a very loving and easy-going family.

But when the boys and girls in my gang were at the Casablanca, that's where I absolutely had to be. Which movies were actually being shown was of no importance whatsoever. I doubt I ever even looked it up in the paper. That certainly wasn't why I was there. Not by a long shot.

*The movie wasn't so hot
it didn't have much of a plot
we fell asleep, our goose is cooked
our reputation is shot
wake up, little Suzy
wake up, little Suzy
we gotta go home. ★*