

**THIS EDITORIAL ORIGINALLY RAN IN THE MARKETPLACE GAZETTE ON
1/20/12, THE ORIGINAL COPY OF WHICH WAS LOST.**

Rewinding the Dream

There's an old test that high school guidance counselors give (or perhaps used to? I don't keep up to date on guidance counselors or their practices). It consists of one simple question: If you suddenly became wealthy to the point where you no longer had to work to sustain a livable income, what would you do with your free time? The point to this is that whatever you answer is what you should explore as a potential career. Like most of my peers, my answer led to a career that leaned heavily on slothiness and offered little to society – I would've worked at a video rental store.

The only real lesson learned from this flawed "test" is the moment you realize your dreams are as outdated as the VHS tapes they are forged upon is a very sad one you won't soon heal from.

I found myself in a very poignant place this week. I was standing in the sole remaining Blockbuster Video in Erie (in the Liberty Plaza), rifling through its massive selection of movies up for grabs in its going-out-of-business sale. This was a position all too familiar to me as video stores have been dropping like flies around here for the past couple years. I consider Blockbuster shuttering its doors Schadenfreude at its finest – it's wholly depressing to see yet another relic of my long-ago dream decimated (particularly since Blockbuster was once considered the juggernaut of this industry), but at the same time I revel in purchasing dozens of DVDs for a fraction of their retail price (and I'd be lying if I said my home video collection hasn't benefitted immensely from this unfortunate state of affairs).

It should also be noted that this week I finally signed up for Netflix on my PlayStation 3 – a move that is both strangely coincidental and wholly ironic, like that moment you first came across the vacant Tower Records store while strolling through the mall listening to your iPod loaded with music you downloaded at home (awkward, no?). And I hate that it's come to this; that I am now playing a part in the end of something I hold so dear, but a film buff like myself can only delay the inevitable for so long. And the option of having a seemingly endless supply of movies at my beck and call has finally become too tempting to resist.

But my dreams aside, what really worries me about the abandonment of video stores is my fear that we are robbing future generations of cinephiles of something special. My friends and I spent a great deal of our teen years roaming around the local video store, scouring the rows of shelves for movies that would pop out at us with their fantastical box art and clever titles and tags (back then it was okay to judge a book, or in this case a movie, by its cover). To use an old adage, the thrill of the hunt was in the chase.

This was where I was introduced to some of my favorite films that would go on to shape the very nature of my character. Modern films like *Clerks*, *Trainspotting*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Suburbia*, and *Kids*. Classics like *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*, and Todd Browning's criminally underrated *Freaks*. Some of my favorite memories of adolescence involved late nights at my friend's house, having our minds blown viewing these cinematic treasures. This was usually followed by an early morning trip to Perkins to discuss what we had just watched...usually over lots of coffee and cigarettes.

And therein lies the problem with modern technology. Streaming services have become the Uncanny Valley of video rental stores, soullessly putting everything right on your

computer/television while voiding the user of any sort of warm, fuzzy moments that would arise from actually hunting for a title in a physical space then planning a set-time to view said acquisition. Technology has changed the entire context of home entertainment, taking away the epic, event feeling of watching a movie or television program. Now it is something we do at our convenience, and often alone. Don't get me wrong, I will abuse the crap out of my newly-created Netflix account, but not without wondering how the next generation will foster/grow their film obsessions without such a unique outlet as the local video store.

With that being said, I'm off to find another dream to pursue...just in case I ever become rich beyond my means.

Mark Toriski may not have always been kind to rewind, but he estimates that in the '90s alone he contributed approximately \$2,600 to the home video market. He can be reached at mtoriski@gmail.com.