

A Few Moments with “Founder of Wednesday Night Movies”

Free Wednesday Night Movies at the Coliseum are a long standing tradition at Graceland. Staff writer, David Bolton, spoke with Diane Hawkins who was president of the Council of Student Activities (COSA) when it all started.

David Bolton: What years were you COSA president?

Diane Hawkins: I graduated in 1981, I was president my junior year (Fall 1979 to Spring 1980).

DB: What was the motivation for creating Wednesday Night Movies?

DH: We wanted to give students the opportunity to go to the coliseum with no charge. COSA showed movies before, but they didn't have a lot of movies. They mostly showed older ones. This way we could use the theater instead of setting up chairs in the MSC.

DB: Do you remember the first movie you showed?

DH: I don't know, but I remember a movie that caused a controversy. “Coming home” with Jon Voight and Jane Fonda was rated R and pretty risqué for Graceland at the time. Today it probably wouldn't be an issue.

DB: I noticed the controversy was mentioned in the *Tower* from that year. What was the process for starting Wednesday Night Movies?

DH: At that time the theater was privately owned by the Coliseum Trust Company. We rented the space using the COSA budget. We considered charging students but decided that would defeat the purpose. I think we ended up charging for concessions.

Wednesday's were church nights so the movie had to be late at night. I think the theater probably had a seven o'clock movie on Wednesday as well.

Two administrators were very supportive but both are now deceased. Orville Hiles (Father of Barbara Hiles Mesle, current English professor) worked in the MSC and was very supportive through the “Coming Home” incident. Newell Yates, Dean of Students, also supported us.

DB: Wednesday Night Movies are still going 27 years later. Do you have any comments on its significance on Graceland culture?

DH: Part of the motivation was to keep students close to campus. I grew up in a small town. I know it is common for students to drive a lot today, but the theater is close enough to walk to. We had a movie theater—why not use it?

I was surprised when I called my son [Joel Hawkins] on a Wednesday to hear that Graceland still had Wednesday Night Movies. It made me feel old.

DB: Today “screw your roommate” dates are associated with Wednesday Night Movies. When did these start?

DH: We had “screw your roommates” dates when I was at Graceland. They were going on before Wednesday Night Movies. I can't claim that one! The date didn't have to be a movie.

DB: Besides feeling old, how does it make you feel to know that Wednesday Night Movies are still a significant part of Graceland culture?

DH: My time at Graceland was some of the best time of my life. My committee (because it wasn't just me) wanted students to have free movies on Wednesday. It shows you can make a difference if you believe in something.

DB: The *Graceland Book of Knowledge* states that part of the intent was to compete with Wednesday night specials at the nearby bar.

DH: There was a small group of students that went drinking, but I don't think we were really trying to compete with the bar. From an administration stand point, maybe; from a student stand point, I don't know that that was a goal.