

NEIGHBOURS OF  
*Old Ottawa*

September 2021

AN EXCLUSIVE MAGAZINE FOR THE RESIDENTS OF OLD OTTAWA EAST,  
OLD OTTAWA SOUTH, CANAL AND RIDEAU GARDENS COMMUNITIES



Meet

*Dan Lalonde*

**BVM** Best Version Media 

Photo by GioVanni

# Reminiscing on Ottawa's Movie Theatres

By Rielly Riggs

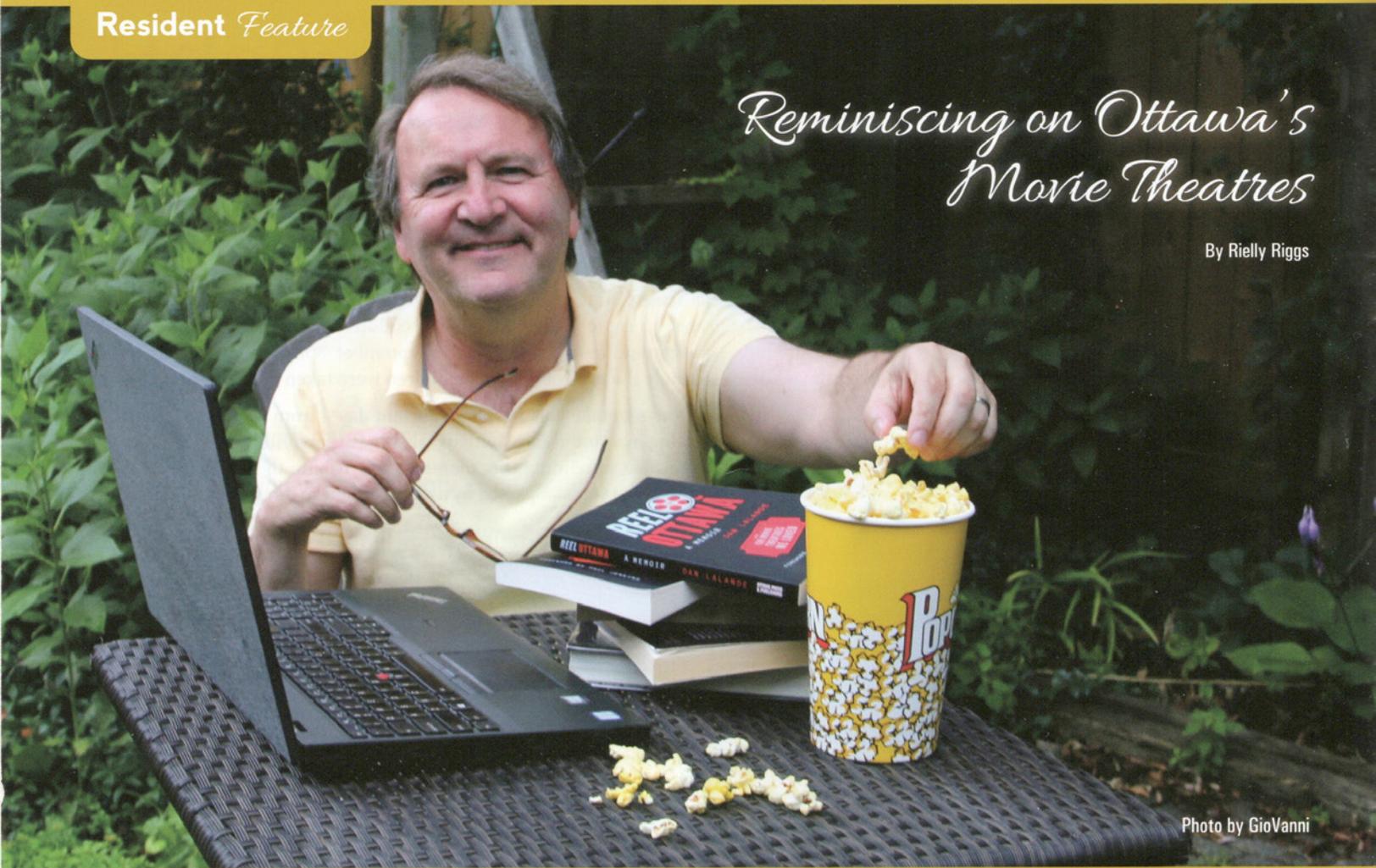


Photo by GioVanni

Growing up in Ottawa in the 1970s and 1980s was a different experience than what today's youth have come to know and love about the city. One of the most obvious changes is the advancement in technology, but according to Old Ottawa South resident Dan Lalonde, one niche and distinguishing difference is the experience of going to the movies.

Movies and films were a big part of Dan's childhood and when asked if any specific memories stick out for him, he reflected on the summer of 1977. His family was heading to the drive-in theatre and he wanted to see the premiere of a new sci-fi movie. Nobody had heard of it or knew what it was, so the rest of the family wasn't keen, but they went regardless. There were only 15 cars there—but the movie was one you may have heard of: *Star Wars*.

"It was the only time in history when *Star Wars* meant nothing," Dan said. "There was only a two-hour period on opening night where the film wasn't a major point of cultural reference, and I was part of that."

Dan explains that the movie theatre experience in Ottawa at the time was much different – there was a local movie theatre on

almost every block. The Elgin Theatre was the city's flagship movie theatre and was also the first movie theatre in North America to move to more than one screen per theatre – starting the multiplex phenomenon in the continent.

Throughout the past year, one element of past movie experiences has re-emerged in popularity due to the COVID-19 pandemic: the drive-in theatre.

"Back in the day, drive-in theatres were tied to summer – kind of like watermelons, cherries and summer romance," Dan said. "It was something to look forward to in the summer and I hope the re-emergence continues."

Dan grew up in his grandfather's house located off of Preston Street in Little Italy. His family then moved to Montreal for a few years but made their way back to his hometown before he entered his teenage years, and settled in his twenties in the Glebe.

In 1995, Dan and his wife, Nancy, made their way to Old Ottawa South. Dan explains that when he was growing up Old Ottawa was a scenic community but it wasn't particularly "hip". In the 1980s, a new generation came in and by the time Dan and Nancy moved to the neighbourhood, it had become more culturally diverse and inclusive.

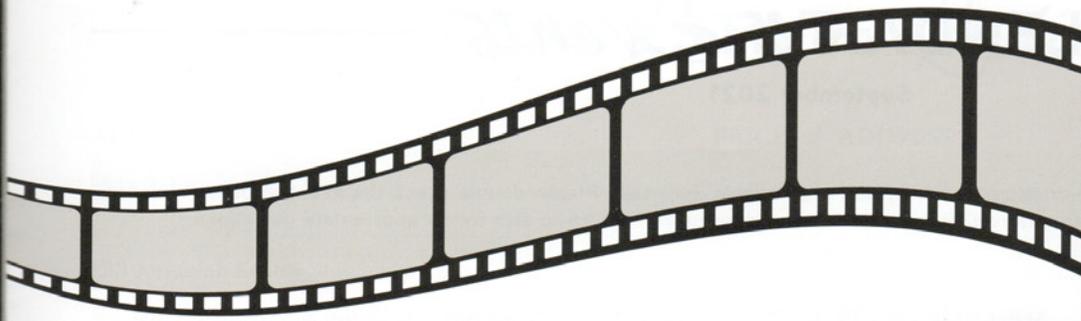
When they first saw their current home they fell in love at first sight. Dan was sold on the house and Nancy was sold on the neighbourhood and the location.

"We feel very thankful to live by the river," Dan said. "It is a place of calm and a source of solace for us, so we are very grateful to have that in our community."

"Outside of physical aspects of the neighbourhood though people in the community have always been welcoming and accommodating – particularly to my daughter, Jessie, who has special needs. Old Ottawa South residents have welcomed her with open arms."

Dan's passion for movies and films inspired his career as a professional writer. His career began at the age of nineteen as a staff writer for Nickelodeon's flagship series *You Can't Do That on Television* and the Canadian animation sensation *The Raccoons*. Dan also contributed to *The Adventure of Teddy Ruxpin*, *Under the Umbrella Tree*, *For Better or For Worse*, *Young Robin Hood*, *White Fang*, and *Mouse Sports*, amongst others.

"Ottawa at the time was a small place and there wasn't much going on in the entertainment industry," he said. "If you



told anyone that you wanted to write for television and movies they would tell you that you couldn't do that here."

Luckily, media technology exploded in the 80s and created a trickle-down effect, which led to desirable projects in Ottawa.

"I was part of all that and the amazing miracle is that it all happened in Ottawa with little effort - I was just standing in the right place, I was eager, and I had the talent they were looking for."

Dan also enjoyed a parallel career in professional communications where he researched, wrote, and co-produced informational and instructional content for government departments, small to medium-sized businesses, national and area charities, and Ottawa's high-tech sector.

Over this time, Dan also penned a variety of TV specials and series, in the comedy, drama and documentary genres, and went on to write (and appear in) five feature films.

Eventually, Dan expanded into producing

and directing and headed the on-air promotions departments at both Rogers TV Ottawa and CPAC, Canada's Political and Public Affairs Channel.

Nowadays, Dan continues to write and has recently published his first book - *Reel Ottawa...With the Movie Theatres We Loved* - a memoir about growing up in Ottawa and the magic of the movies.

"At a certain age, you become nostalgic for your long-lost youth," Dan explained. "Looking back, a lot of the theatres in Ottawa that I grew up with are now long gone. When I was growing up my world revolved around the theatres in this area and that is what inspired the book."

When he is not writing, Dan likes to play tennis at nearby Windsor Park. He also considers himself an urban fisherman.

As a family, they enjoy travelling. While they are sometimes limited due to Jessie's special needs, they have travelled through the eastern United States including Maine, New

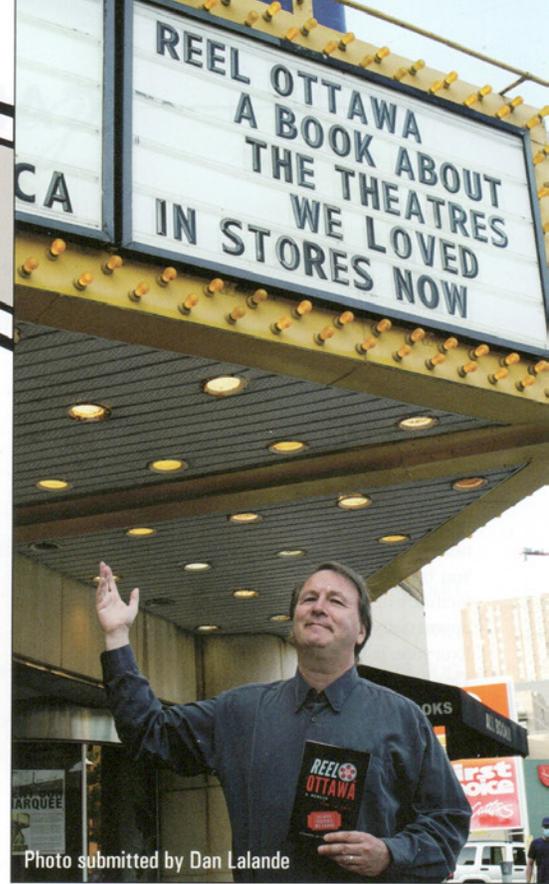


Photo submitted by Dan Lalande

York, Massachusetts, and Vermont.

If you'd like to learn more about Dan's experience growing up in Ottawa and the city's old movie theatres, you can pick up a copy of *Reel Ottawa...With the Movie Theatres We Loved* online through Ottawa Press and Publishing or at stores such as Black Squirrel Books or Chapters.

**D**o you know someone who just moved to the area and would appreciate an introduction, someone involved in charity work, a neighbour with an interesting hobby, someone who won an accomplishment, neighbours who are recently retired, have been living in the neighbourhood for a long time, or a family with a new addition? We are currently looking for feature residents so send an email to [rgriggs@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:rgriggs@bestversionmedia.com) and nominate your neighbours to be featured!

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