

John Houghtaling, 92, recently passed away. In case you don't recognize the name, John invented the motel miracle called Magic Fingers. Remember when you drove cross-country in the 1950s and 1960s, and needed to bed down for the night? When you checked in, tired and achy from hours on the road, that's when John's invention offered solace.

Next to your motel bed was a metal box with a 25-cent coin slot on top. That coin would make your bed shake for about 15 minutes, presumably to help lull you to sleep. Of course, stand-up comics made jokes about how the devices could be used for more devious means at so-called no-tell motels.



At the peak of their popularity, Magic Fingers machines were in a quarter of a million motel rooms. They were lauded in a 1970s Jimmy Buffet song, "The Motel Room". The lyrics included: "put in a quarter, turn out the light; Magic Fingers makes you feel all right." But by that time, the devices were past their prime, and motels were abandoning them. Too many of the coin boxes were regularly broken into or stolen by thieves.

So, these days, when you check into your motel room, all tired and achy from a day on the highways, you'll have to do your own whole lot of shakin' or just rest peacefully in a quiet bed.