

Ring #170 “The Bev and Alouise Bergeron Ring” SAM #99

February 27, 2022 | Archived Famulus



Ring Report Ring #170 “The Bev and Alouise Bergeron Ring” SAM Assembly #99

We have live meetings again.

Be kind and courteous. Masks are suggested. but not required.

President Mike Matson called our meeting to order, and we had 16 attending. Our two guests were Travis Bryant who just moved from Houston and John Schutte, from Ireland, a guest of Dan Stapleton who has lectured in Ireland.

After announcements about the regular magic shows in the Orlando area attractions and the visiting stage shows, President Matson did another installment of his continuing talks called, “Theory and Thaumaturgy”.

This month’s theme was using accepted dramatic structure and a storyline for any magic effect or show. He drew from the 5 stages of Gustav Freytag’s dramatic structure, which is pyramid shaped and what most of us learn to recognize from theater classes. Matson took it a step further and gave a strategy for creating storylines using suggestion cards as idea prompts.

He then went into the show portion of the meeting and presented an intriguing effect with 4 cards where the spectator had a free choice but once the choice is made, he showed that it was the only possible choice. Dan Stapleton then did an effect that is excellent for any banquet show. He had 4 volunteers, each with a knife, fork, and spoon. He turned around and had them each arrange their items in any order and he had them choose where to move the order of the items and then they each secretly choose one. Dramatically he showed that everyone ended with the same item and he had a large replica!

Dennis Phillips asked the audience to pretend that he was a TV game show and he had 2 volunteers call out two sets of two numbers off the tops of their heads. When he opened his suit jacket , a sale tag with the price, using those exact numbers was hanging off a security tag in his coat. They had predicted what he paid for the coat. He then performed Alan Wakeling's "Liquid Sands". Three colored liquids are pouring into a champaign bucket and when 3 glasses are put inside, each is pulled back out with one color of liquid. This is like the classic Sands of Egypt effect where dry colored sands are removed individually from water in a bowl.

Ravelli did a great Okito coin box routine and then a series of mysterious rope effects with colored and white ropes. Linked and unlinked knots appeared, and lengths changed.

Finally, Jeremy Michaelson showed some clever and dexterous finger manipulation and skilled coin sleights. He concluded with tips on costuming and wardrobing for the entertainer. He said the entertainer should be dressed better than anyone in the audience or room. Clothes should be clean and well fitting. Shoes should be shinned. He said, the performer should "own" his or her personal look and it should be unique and identifying to the personality of the performer and their style. He opened the discussion and it expanded to footwear and foot health (especially for walk around and stage performers) and proper shoes to use for stage work as well as tips on a modern look and alternatives to the classic full-evening dress tails. Our group has professionals and semi-professionals, and the discussion became a valuable lesson filled with practical insights.

Dennis Phillips



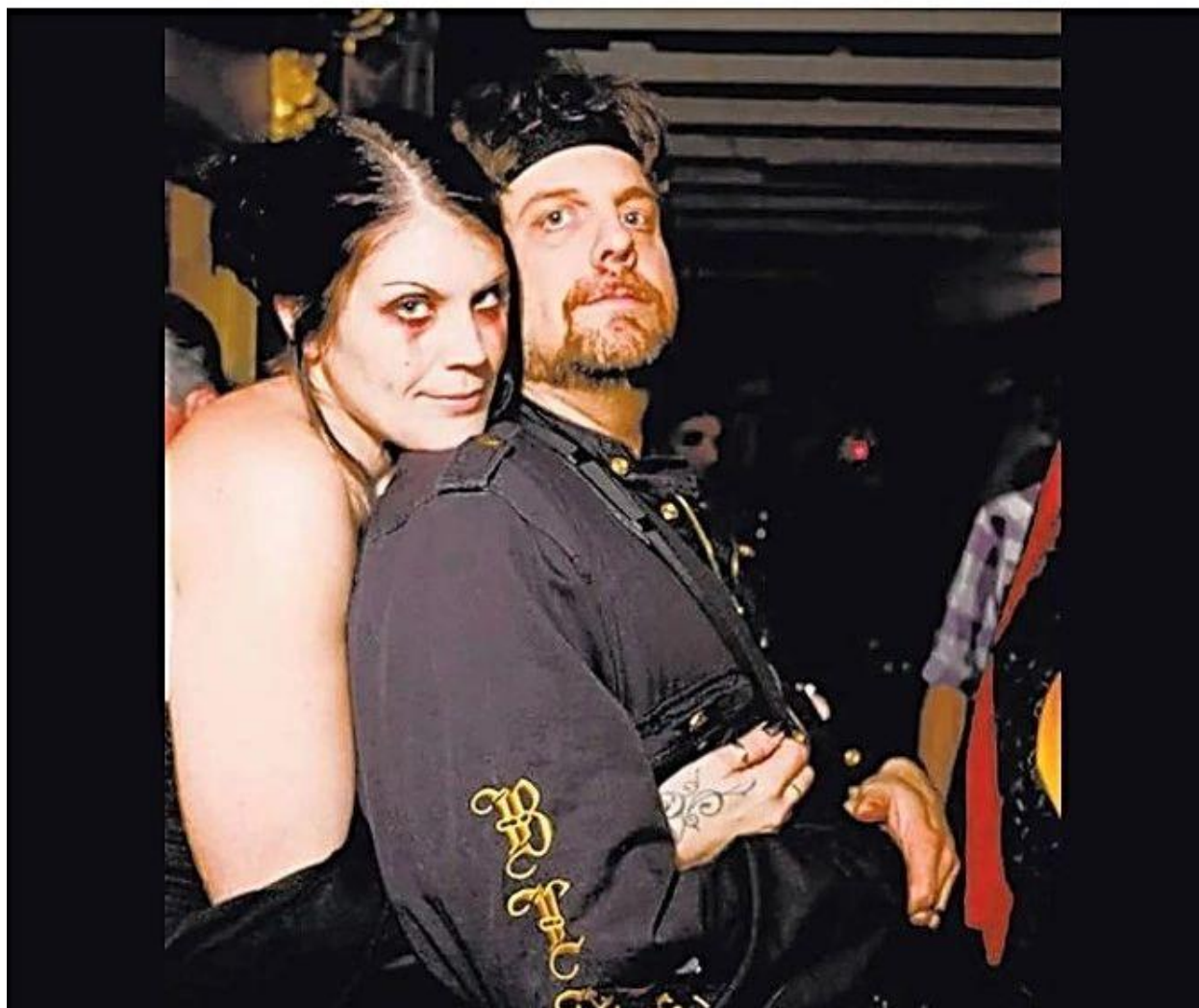
Dennis Deliberations ... Ring # 170, Assembly #99

"The Bev and Alouise Bergeron Ring"

"If I don't fool you, I'm not doing my job as a magician. If I make you feel foolish, I am not doing my job as a human being."

-Jerry Andrus-

We just lost one of the best comedy magicians ever! (The Amazing Johnathan) Johnathan Szeles passed away on 2/22/22 at 11:30pm according to his long time assistant Penny Wiggins.



The Day we Lost Doug Henning

February 2, 2000

Take a moment to say thank you to the man responsible for bringing magic to where it is today.



22 years ago today, the world lost one of the greatest magicians of the past 100 years. Doug Henning was such an inspiration! He revitalized magic and he brought it from birthday parties to major television and Broadway spectacles. He was a true superstar.

An interesting act

Thom Parkin wants more information on the common word we use to describe an orderly group of playing cards:

Origin of the word 'Deck' in English

I am reading Hugard's Magic Monthly Vol 4 (1946) page 245

In an article by Victor Farelli, he makes a comment about

The Origin of the Word Deck: "I often wonder what the origin of this term can be. The French, Flemish, Spanish, Italian and German equivalents are: Jeu, spel, baraja, m a z o and Spiel, respectively, and it appears obvious that the word "deck" cannot be de- rived from any of them."

As a 'card man' and very interested in etymology in general I searched the archives of Google and found this:

A pack or pile of things, and related uses.

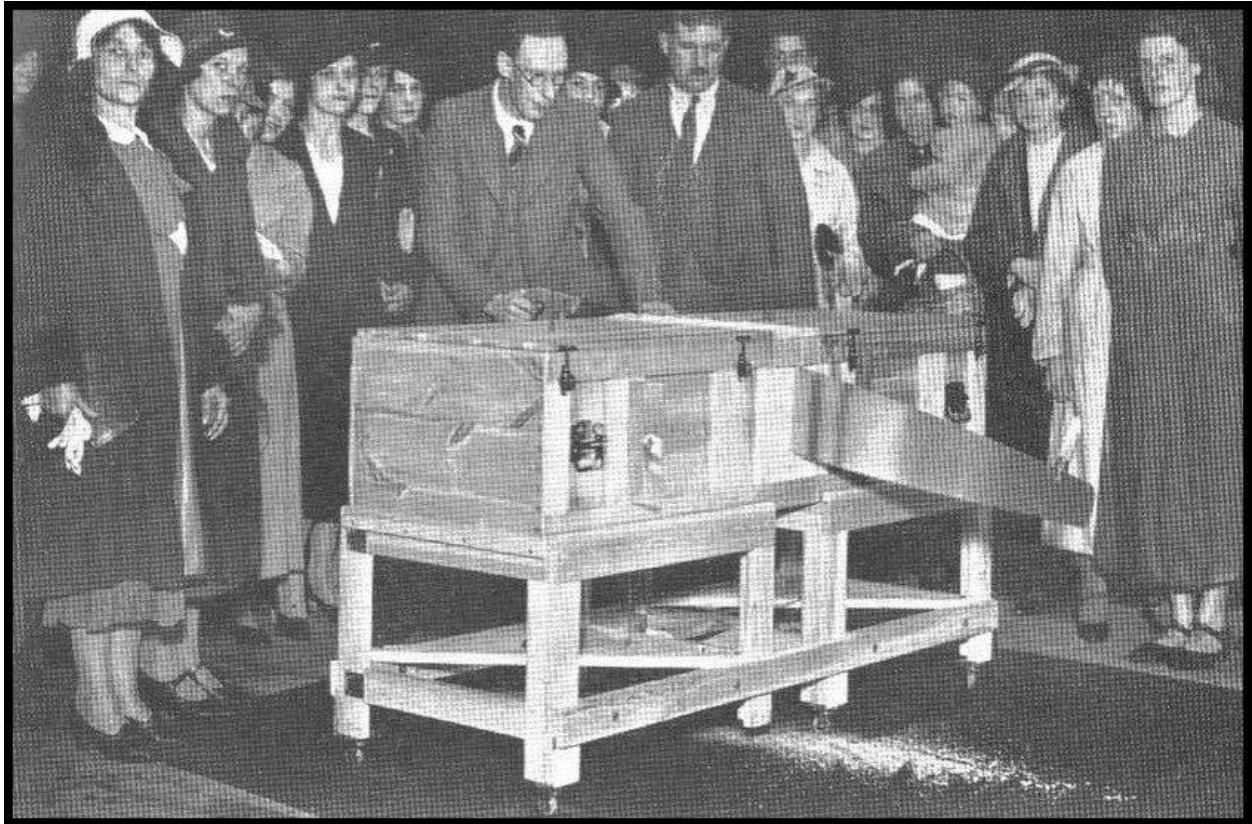
You can read more here

<https://english.stackexchange.com/questions/562877/whats-the-etymology-of-deck-with-a-pack-of-cards>

Did you know that this year we celebrate the 101st anniversary of the "Sawing a Woman in Half"? A Century ago, the illusion was all the rage in declining Vaudeville.

Well, "celebrate" may sound a little exaggerated, but it is pretty cool that some popular media (Reuters or The Guardian) paid attention to this fact this year.

This illusion was first performed in January 1921 by an English magician P.T.Selbit (who invented a lot of other cool illusions, e.g. "The Mighty Cheese") and soon was copied by an American performer Horace Goldin. Goldin did everything that he could to make sure the in the US he was known as the originator of this trick.



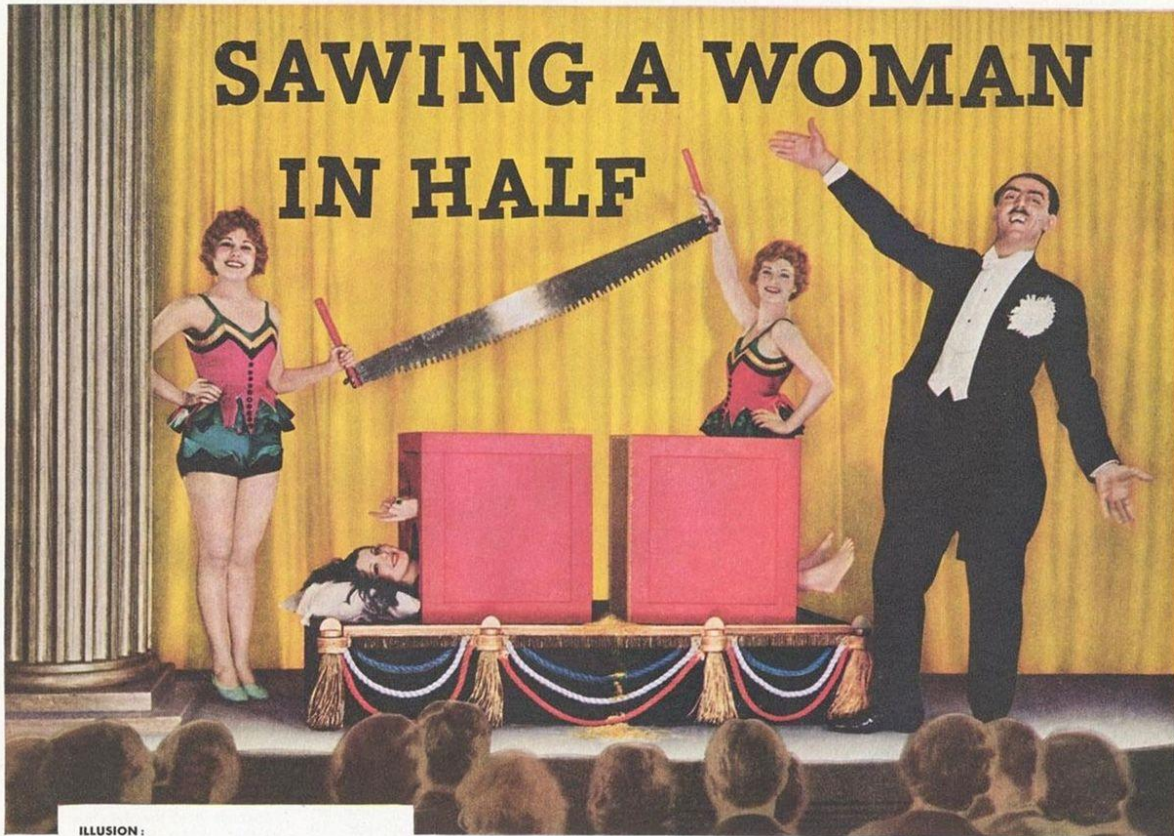
P.T.Selbit performs "Sawing through a woman"

Selbit's original version was done with a regular (ungimmicked) wooden box, which I think is pretty cool. This illusion fit well in the trend of "naturalistic horror": audiences of the time loved performances that involved violence, blood and gore (google "Le Théâtre du Grand-Guignol" for another example of this trend). Fun fact: there were ambulances waiting near the theatre (if the saw slips) and Selbit's assistants took buckets with fake blood out of the theatre after each show and poured it into the gutter.

Introducing a woman as a passive victim (which was also quite a new idea) added a controversial element (it was the time of women actively fighting for their rights) + created the image of a "sensual female assistant" which became one of the key elements of magic shows in the 20th century.

This trick became extremely popular and soon was associated with magic. Here is an ad by Camel cigarettes using it in their ad campaign in 1933

SAWING A WOMAN IN HALF



ILLUSION:

A large packing case is exhibited on a raised platform. A young woman climbs into the box. Head, hands and feet protrude, and are held by spectators while the magician takes a crosscut saw and, with the help of an assistant, saws through the center of the box and apparently through the woman.

EXPLANATION:

One method of performing this illusion requires the presence of *two* girls in the box. One girl curls up in the left half of the box with her head and hands protruding. The other girl is doubled up in the right half of the box with only her feet showing. Nobody is sawed in half.

IT'S FUN TO BE FOOLED ... IT'S MORE FUN TO KNOW

Cigarette advertising, too, has its tricks. Consider the illusion that "Flavor" can be achieved by some kind of magical hocus-pocus in manufacturing cigarettes.

EXPLANATION: Just three factors control the flavor of a cigarette. The addition of artificial flavoring. The blending of various tobaccos. And the *quality* of the tobaccos themselves. Quality is by far the most important.

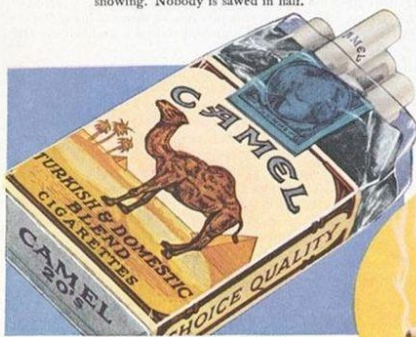
Domestic cigarette tobaccos vary in price from 5¢ a pound up to 40¢ a pound. Imported tobaccos vary from 50¢ a pound to \$1.15.

Distinctive, *pleasing* flavor depends largely upon the blending of the *costlier* tobaccos.

It is a fact, well known by leaf tobacco experts, that Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE tobaccos than any other popular brand.

Try Camels. Give your taste a chance to sense the subtle difference that lies in costlier tobaccos.

Camels are always fresh, cool, in prime condition in the seamless, *welded* Humidor Pack.



Copyright, 1933, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company

KEPT FRESH IN THE
WELDED HUMIDOR PACK



NO TRICKS...
—JUST COSTLIER
TOBACCOS

IN A MATCHLESS BLEND

And here are some links for you to enjoy different versions of "The Sawing"

The original Selbit version - recreated by the great Paul Daniels

Harry Blackstone, "The Buzz Saw" - this one was created by Horace Goldin

Doug Henning and his "Double Sawing" - a variation on the classics

David Copperfield - Death Saw - I think this is one of the greatest versions ever performed because in this act everything makes sense and there is an actual story (unlike in many other versions which are just about a magician showing his cool magic box)

This is a hilarious medicine show type act.

Try it! Easy to make.

Julius Frack FISM illusion act

Pretty interesting additions to the Blaney Ladder levitation with him first passing his body through here. I believe that I first say Greg Frewin do that bit.

He also eliminates the board underneath also floating and the cloth cover which was a weakness with the Blaney Ladder Suspension, and he has a

Gamola type linear actuator, so she floats up and down a bit!

I like his other personal touches.

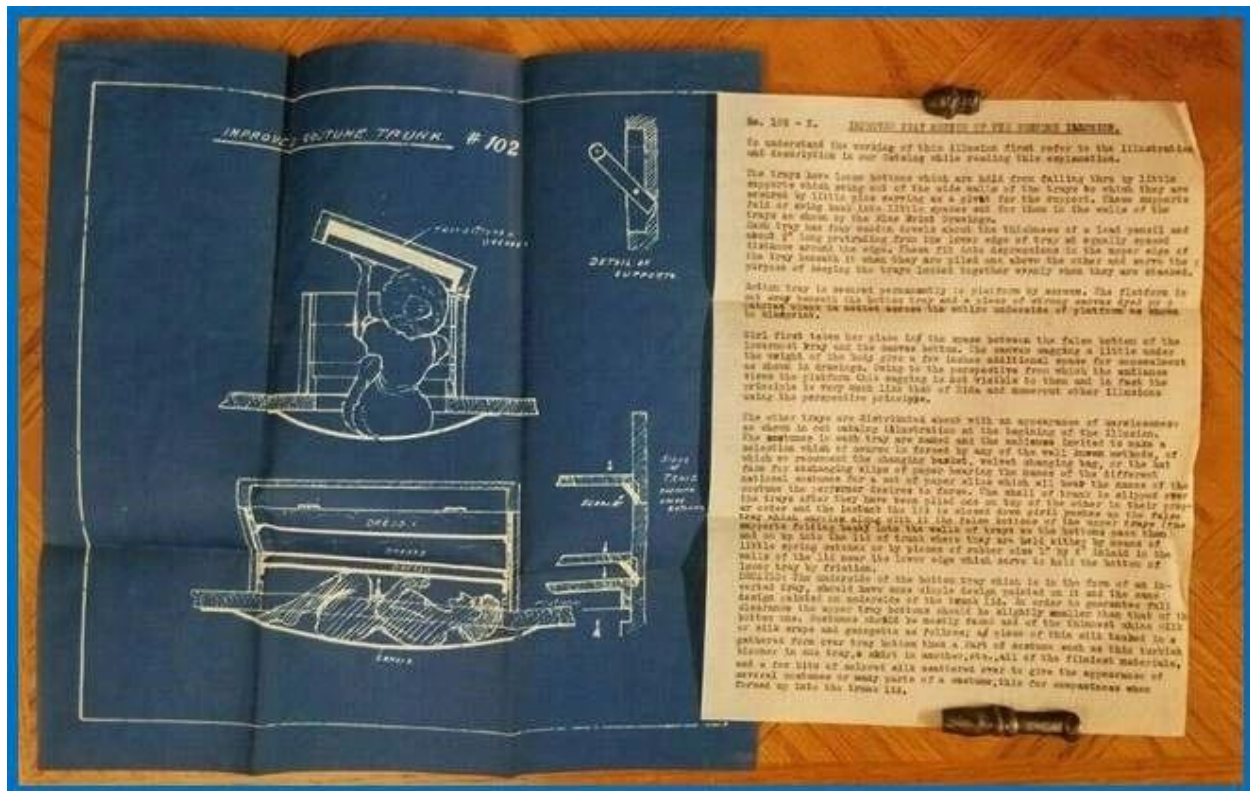
More from my: "Illusions that I have made", Department

Costume Trunk

The magician displays a costume trunk complete with three drawers. The drawers are each shown separately to contain various costumes which are displayed by the magician. The costumes are put back in the drawers and the removed drawers back into the trunk and the entire trunk closed and locked.

One of the costumes is chosen by the audience. When the magician opens the trunk lid, the trunk is filled with a lovely assistant dressed in the chosen costume and she steps out.

This illusion is said to be a creation of Servais LeRoy, a prolific creator in his time at the beginning of the 20th Century. We owe the Asrah levitation to Leroy also.



The method is that the costume girl is hidden in the base and part of the bottom drawer, which is hollow except for the thin bits of costumes on the top of the bottom drawer.

The selection of a costume by the audience member is a force. Blackstone Sr., Aubrey, Kramien and others used costume dolls hanging above targets, on a rack, which the spectator had a chance to take a pot shot at and one would fall as the selected one.

Paul Osborne used large picture cards and one was forced.

I used Osborne's plans to build mine but with a few artistic modifications. I made it with a curved top and leather straps.



Once unique feature was the folding tray bottoms that would slide to one side. I had some fake costume parts attached to them with the samples of the potential predicted costumes loose laying on top, so I could show them when the trays were apart and outside the trunk. All the one assistant inside had to do was push the folding bottoms to the side, giving her room to appear.



My version of the Costume Trunk and other illusions was featured in Paul Osborne's Book, "Classic Two"

Dennis Phillips returns from our second Classic Book. On many occasions he has been a life saver for me. If he was on the Jersey Shores show he would be known as "The Solution". Again I turn to him for his comments which are always spot on, although you might not agree, I think you will find his comments valuable and backed with experience in building and performing the Classic Illusions. Dennis has been a great friend to Michelle and myself as well as a marvelous resource to bounce ideas off of. I value his friendship and Classic Illusion knowledge!

Vince Carmen was kind enough to foreword this publication. He is a magical class act that has performed many of the classic illusions world wide. Senior Rai has earned the dedication for his many years as the most colorful icon of our art.

The three series now of Classic Illusions cover the majority of illusions that formed the basics from which all other illusions will be created. There really are no new ideas, only adaptations and improvements of old ones. When a new idea is claimed, if you do your research you will find it existed first in the magical history books.

I hope that the Classic Illusion series of 3 books will enlighten, inspire and encourage.



5/10

Some Dennis Phillips creations that you will find in this book.



His costume trunk is based on our design in this book. However, he added leather straps and curved the top. His "folding floors" are made from dowel rods and cloth. The French Guillotine has a creative Phillips modification: To keep the bottom blade up he drilled a hole and used a toothpick. His Cremation was based on an Abbott's plan but he did away with the pipe legs and added a flip open top with a long wick so some flames would dart out of the top.

This illusion, that I built, was used on one of Drew Thomas' appearances on "Americas Got Talent". Rex Todd Alexander was the prop coordinator.

You can see it in this show clip

I have often sadly recounted magicians I knew who have died young due to alcoholism, tobacco, drugs, and suicide. I am sure that stress was always a big factor.

But there is good news. When you do something that you love, you tend to be mentally and physically healthy.

I was thinking about magicians, who I have known who have lived long lives. Many lived to 90 and above.

Dai Vernon 1894 – 1992

Burling Hull 1889 – 1982

Bev Bergeron was just a few days away from being 90. 1930-2020

Mark Wilson 1929-2021 was 91

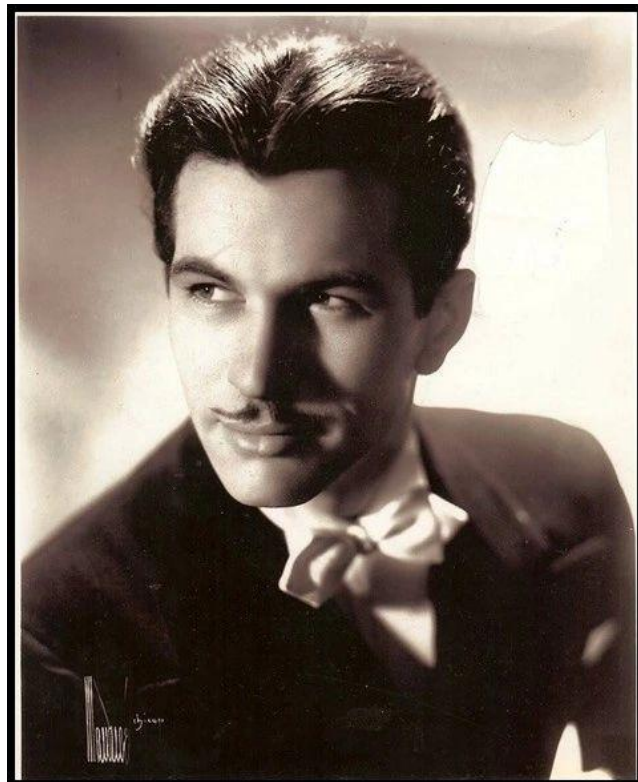
Harmon Baker 1887-1993 lived to be 106. He performed the Sub Trunk (Metamorphosis) until the age of 99.

If I do not sell mine first, I plan to do it on my 80th birthday in 6 years and my 90th birthday in 16 years. Finding an age-appropriate female assistant may be my biggest problem. My wife of 50 years says that “doing that trick will remain a memory for me”.

John Calvert performed for Ring 190 his 90s. Calvert was over 100, when performed at the Abbotts Get Together and the London Palladium.

Born: Saturday, August 5, 1911

Died: Friday, September 27, 2013



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in
he

It really is the end of a magic era, the classic style illusion show. Maybe. Maybe not.

The end of the current wave of big illusions shows was brought about by several factors:

- *The Internet and instant ubiquitous secrets, as well as unlimited handheld amusement and shorter attention spans.

- *The Mega destination resort where the audience moves and the complex show venues. These killed the smaller amusement attractions.

- *The economic and social collapse of small towns and rural areas along with the dissolution of “community” which destroyed the marketing base for traveling small town shows.

- *Competitiveness in business without regard for local culture and art. Also seen in the end of local non-news TV programming and local radio.

- *Complex Theatrical technology which makes everything else obsolete and mundane.

- *The rise of the only economically viable magic market: Walk around and street magic.

And now the pandemic.

I watched most of this happen during the 1980s to 2020.

In my show markets, as local factories closed in small towns, the economic base evaporated, downtowns died and only the regional Walmart survived.

The pace quickened with the 2008 Great Recession and Malls began to die. Middle class and small-town America have not reversed the downward trend since the 1980s
Deregulation and economic advantages of big business.

In the meantime, more jobs are still headed offshore, more social division, more malls and stores close and less stage magic shows....

Sadly, for stage illusion magicians, *America may never have great stage magic again*. It may come back but in a different form and with a different economic driver.

Dick and Phyllis Berry were long time members of Ring 170 here in Orlando, where he loved from the late 1970s until now. He was an architectural engineer and maintained a lifelong interest in magic.

He had a large collection of illusions and , as a young man, had assisted Blackstone Senior in the late 1940s and later performed summers at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Phyllis died a few years ago and Dick now lives in a residential retirement home.



This is a design duplication of a drawing done by a spectator.



Reveal

Trick by Christopher Rawlins - \$45.00

VANISHING^{INC.}
exclusive

At the last Blackpool convention we gave people a limited run, sneak-peek of "Reveal," Chris Rawlins' FLAWLESS clipboard utility. It sold out. On the first day. "Reveal" is a clipboard that is specially gaffed yet undetectable even when the spectator is holding it. ABSOLUTELY NO...

[More Info](#)

[Add to Cart](#)

See the Demonstration:

I am not sure if you are aware of this clever peek system, but Chris Rawlins showed it during his Ring 170 lecture about 3 years ago.

I made one and then bought one. If you like the idea, buy it and get the DVD with all the handling tips and reward the creator.

You need a translucent dark clear plastic mini clip board. You can find them at Walmart and other places. I bought a bigger one at Office Depot and cut off the sides.

The secret is that there is a flap between the paper (which is almost the size of the board) and the translucent plastic. It is dropped away into the bag during the action of putting the board in the bag. That is why he says, "Get a last look". That is when he is looking through the plastic, with no flap, and can see the image!

The volunteer is never aware that the flap exists, and you freely flash the back of the clipboard when the flap is in place, and it looks opaque.

Without a doubt, this is very simple, but a real fooler. It is similar to George Anderson's picture frame duplication (in "You too Can Read Minds") but with less suspicious props.



The clipboard with the spectator's drawing in place



Here you can see the flap sitting askew to the clipboard and the translucency of the clipboard



Here is the flap by itself. Notice that I epoxied on some metal flashing clips that I painted black. These stabilize



The clipboard with the flap clipped on for opaqueness.



This is what you see when you lift the clipboard out of the envelope to give the volunteer a final glance.
The drawing can be seen through the board.
Of course, the flap drops, by gravity and is left in the envelope.

At a recent Ring meeting, I brought my Himber Linking Finger Ring and while most had heard of the effect, few were had ever seen it.

That surprised me because, it had been used by great effect for years. Packs very small and plays big, even on a big stage.

Here is a very good presentation

David Goldrake - Linking Finger Rings - Magic Castle

Reviving magic?

It seems that rapidly changing times, the pandemic, and age demographics have now caused magic and its relatively insular world to wind down. Its yearly conventions, after many decades of stability and success, are now struggling to survive.

One long-time annual conference, a virtual institution among the magicians in its area, has recently had to call it a day. Young blood is no longer infusing the magic community at a rate that can "stabilize" its population, let alone keep it expanding, as older magicians and magic enthusiasts retire from the scene. Are there other reasons for magic's malaise? An attempt to answer this question leads us to some disturbing conclusions.

Revolutionary advances in science and technology, especially during the last dozen or so years, has been instrumental in altering the cultural landscape and attracting the rapt attention of the masses. Computers, video gaming, and mobile communications devices are now ubiquitous, and as a consequence, magic as we know and love it has been shunted off to the side, and so very far away from public awareness that for all intents and purposes it has become pretty-much *invisible* to the world. Today, millions of people are immersed in video games, texting, and online socializing through Twitter and Facebook. The video game industry alone has blossomed into a multi-billion-dollar enterprise, exceeding the combined revenues of the entire movie industry. And this is all in addition to the traditional offline activities that flourished well before the Internet and dozens of electronic distractions burst on the scene: sports, rock music, television, and movies exploding on the silver screen with ever-escalating special effects and in glorious 3D. Magicians everywhere are sinking into a mental funk with the realization that their talents are no longer at the forefront of the public's consciousness -- if indeed, they ever were.

But many magicians beg to differ. Some of the elder stalwarts of magic like to tell us magic has always been *cyclical*. That is to say, the art of magic always keeps renewing itself every twenty, thirty, or even fifty years. To back-up such assertions, they cite the big touring shows of the first half of the 20th century by the likes of Blackstone, Thurston, and Dante; and the rise of television magic stars Doug Henning and David Copperfield in a post-hippy era; and the decades-long popularity of eclectic magic shows in Las Vegas. Even the ragamuffin child, called *Street Magic*, is cited as still another "wonderful" indication that magic is constantly re-inventing itself anew. ... So what's the worry? We're only in a temporary *down cycle* right now!

But dare we ask: Will we ever see discussions of this situation in magic's club journals, or in its major magazines? It is doubtful. When a particular kind of entertainment begins its to falter, whether by imploding from within or simply dwindling away for lack of adequate public support, it rarely becomes a serious topic of internal dialogue among its practitioners. Magic today, as exemplified by its monthly magazines and its organization's journals, seem to be blissfully living in a fuzzy-warm state of perpetual denial.

Perhaps we could suggest that one arguable reason for the alleged "silence" on this matter, stems from the very nature of the magic journals themselves: funding comes from dealer advertisements aimed at selling magic apparatus, books, and DVDs. What magic publications need, are a few more voices of positive *self-criticism and balance*. One thoughtful voice from the past was "Senator" Clarke Crandall (1906-1975). Crandall was an Abbotts' and Magic Castle legend with his long-curved moustache and cowboy hat and boots. He had a way of cutting to the chase in his observations of magic and magicians. It is best not to abuse the art of magic, because he was open with his rebukes. (Often Mark Kornhauser's column in the defunct Magic Magazine was reflectively "Crandall-like" in its honesty. But was is among a minority those days.) Many young magicians used to think that the curmudgeonly "Senator" was just an angry old man, but as those same magicians grew older and wiser themselves, they realized it was honesty shaped by experiential insight and wisdom. Crandall risked offending some for the sake of truth and in support of the magical art in general.

Much of the credit for the revival of magic, which was on life-support in the early 60s, was *The Magic Castle*. (Mark Wilson and Bev's weekly show also helped) The Castle was a venue that was far more than a private night club. It became the focal point for magic celebrities and the best of the art. If the Castle's concept could extend to other major cities, it could keep the art alive. We recall the Comedy Clubs that formed to keep the art of comedy alive, and they were successful. Magic certainly isn't likely to die completely, but it can and *should* remain a vital and continuing niche in the performing arts.

There is also one other controversial monkey wrench in the gears that we consider axiomatic, and you've heard it before: Magic dealers on the Internet. An explosion of online commerce by virtually every business on the planet has resulted in this formerly "niche" business jumping online as well. Magic is a great performing art, but the business of selling its props is a peculiar one. The typical magic shop used to exist (and "exist" is the proper term) almost exclusively as a low-profile business not given to advertising to the general public. In an effort to make our point, just try to imagine the following bizarre scenario: A citizen opens up his morning newspaper and sees the following advertisement: "SLICKO'S

TRICK-AND-JOKE SHOP is having the SALE OF THE CENTURY! Come on down today! Slicko's is featuring ZIG ZAGS, SUB TRUNKS and LEVITATIONS at *ROCK BOTTOM PRICES!* "The traditional paradigm of the commercial magic dealer, once relegated to quaint little street magic shops and discrete "backroom" emporiums that only the serious magic aficionado was aware of -- *is now dead*. Sure, many dealers eventually developed a thriving business through mail-order too, but that was still well under the radar compared to the gigantic visibility potential of the World Wide Web. When the dealers took the economic 'high road' online, they inadvertently threw the ethical 'low road' to the wolves when they started advertising magic's wares indiscriminately to *all the world*. It represented nothing less than that newspaper metaphor, writ large. The result is that in going online, the magic shops underwent an almost Frankensteinian transformation as they exploded into the public's consciousness. Irrespective of the fact it may have been good for the economic health of many of the magic companies, was this, in the long run, really good for magic?

Before the personal computer and the worldwide web became ubiquitous, there were people who would be so amazed by a magic effect that some of them would feel compelled to ask in astonishment, "*Where did you ever learn to do **that**?*" Such an odd question may seem naive, but it told the tale: that people half-believed (or *wanted to believe*) that magicians were "privy to an exclusive art", and that such an art seemed all the more exotic and mysterious for its apparent *lack of origins*. What the viewer didn't know, he didn't *need* to know: that magic books are available in every public library; that there are monthly magic clubs for amateur magicians who talk shop and perform for each other; and that there are some exclusive magic fraternities (like London's Magic Circle) that are almost pathologically secretive, while other, much larger international magic organizations are so "open" that they will seemingly admit just about anyone with the mildest interest in magic.

In spite of the many symptoms that we've outlined here that suggests magic may be on the ropes for good, my diagnosis may not be all that convincing. Perhaps the old guard are right after all: that magic will still recycle itself once again. Through the creative efforts of progressive thinkers like Marco Tempest, we might see a "new renaissance" in magic that could conceivably blow-off the barnacles of a bygone era and steer a refurbished conjuring "ship" majestically into a world of ever-advancing technological wonders. In his day, the great 19th century French conjuror *Robert Houdin* did much the same thing by updating his attire and streamlining his tables and props. He employed clockwork automation in his performances, and disguised the then-novel discoveries of electromagnetism, anesthetics, and chemistry to look like *pure magic*. And a century or so later, a progressive *David Copperfield* revitalized magic in the latter half of the 20th century by jettisoning the arcane

boxes and outdated theatrics and costuming, and in so doing, totally retrofitted the art of magic for modern times. The pre-internet times, that is.

But now, after some 20 to 30 years of creative paralysis, we find ourselves immersed in a hyper-technological new century, and so we see the need for a major magic transformation once again. The world is changing at a seemingly breakneck pace, and along with it, the ways and means with which we entertain ourselves.

If the first part of this essay seems overly pessimistic, it was not meant to be anything other than constructive. We all know that "something" is seriously amiss in the world of magic, but rather than fall into a state of denial, we felt it would be more productive to look the patient squarely in the eye and try to determine some of the principle causes for magic's "cyclic malaise". It is only *then* that we all will be able to examine the possible future directions magic should take in order to keep it not only alive, but *vibrantly healthy*. The magic world sorely needs more forward-thinking geniuses the likes which we mentioned above. We need the creative dreamers who will stay ahead of the curve by exercising the foresight and courage to redefine one of the greatest of the performing arts. It will be through their efforts, and *your* efforts, that magic will again be able to dazzle the world, and thereby propel it deeply into the 21st century -- *and beyond*.

Dennis