

June 2017 Meeting and stories of Dr. Elliott and The Smileys

Posted on [June 29, 2017](#) by [Dennis Phillips](#)

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

June 2017 Meeting

President Craig Schwarz called the meeting to order with 30 present. Tom Parking was with us again and we welcomed Don Arthur, one of the founding members. Don had a long career as a magician with the Ringling show and wrote, “Illusions in the Round” and worked with Night Club great Tony Marks.

Our Day of Magic, a mini convention is coming up the first week of September. Craig also showed the logo and T-Shirt design he came up with for the combined IBM-SAM Convention.

Bev Bergeron’s Teach-in featured all the fun you can have with the uncommon Two Dollar bill on waitresses.

Phil Schwartz presented Magic History Moment #85. He spotlighted Dr. James William Elliott who was called the “Card Wonder of the 19th Century” by The Mahatma. Born in 1874 he trained at Harvard and became a medical doctor. He preferred magic and worked for Servais LeRoy as Bosco and later for Felix Herrmann. He left touring to perfect card manipulation and sold secrets to his effects for high prices. In September of 1898, he published a challenge in which any man in the world could dispute his claim to the title “Champion Card Manipulator of the World.” He offered big money prize, a challenge which was never accepted. The 1923 book “Elliott’s Last Legacy” was edited by Houdini three years after Elliott died of kidney disease. Phil showed a nice original LeRoy Talma Bosco poster and drew a connection between Thayer and Elliott. He also brought and demonstrated the original 1933 Thayer Silk Cabby.

Dennis Phillips opened up the meeting show by showing the props in the Joe and Georgi Smiley Dove Act, Dove Catching, a fall apart box vanish and a paper frames reappearance. Joe and Georgie performed up until 1995 Dan Stapleton did one of his signature effects, Miraskill. Dan has taken the Stewart James card effect to greater heights. Dan apparently can weigh cards and know how many of each color are in the pack. Greg Solomon, ever in the lookout for inexpensive effects showed a clever math effect using cards with numbers and cut outs on them. He was able to know a selected number. Jams Bailey III showed a dollar bill mysteriously penetrating through rubber bands held by a spectator.

John Arroyo had a very polished Okito /Boston Box routine with coins vanishing out of the box and into the box. Jimmy Ichinana , card wiz, shuffled a deck of cards and somehow quickly got his fingers where each kind was in the deck. He then made the kings migrate through the deck and finish on top.

Dennis Phillips



Dennis Deliberations ... Ring # 170

“The Bev Bergeron Ring”

July 2017

The Smileys

“Joe, Joe! the birds are out.”

“The birds are out? Well, let’s find them!”

-Joe and Georgi Smiley introducing their Dove Act with Dove Catching-



In the photo with Kenny and me is Joe and Georgi Smiley. I was 12 years old.

The above photo was made in July of 1961 at Seaside Park at Virginia Beach, Virginia. My late brother, Kenneth, is on the left.

In the back ,on stage, you can see The Chinese Chopper, Houdini Pillory and on the floor is the duck cage for "Where do the Ducks Go"

This is a blast from the past! My adventures from 56 years ago. Relive them with me.

My Dad was in the Navy and stationed at Dam Neck, Virginia and my family lived in Virginia Beach. I went to Linkhorn Park Elementary in Virginia Beach where one classmate was Julie Shepard, the daughter of Alan Shepard, our first man in space.

Langley Air Force Base in Virginia was the astronaut's headquarters before Johnson Space Flight Center in Houston was built. The day of Shepard's flight, she stayed home from school. The whole school watched the short flight on a TV in the cafeteria.

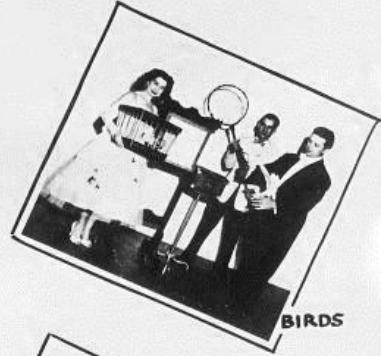
Most weekends I begged my mother to take me to downtown Norfolk to Earl Edwards Magic Shop where I might see Bob McAllister behind the counter. Bob went on to star in Wonderama, the New York based kid's TV show,. In 1961 he worked for WTAR TV.

Also familiar during those years was Charles "Chuck" Windley who had been at the local Western Theme town "Frontier City". By 1961 he moved to New York. We magically connected again in the late 60s when Charles lived near me in Bowie, Maryland.

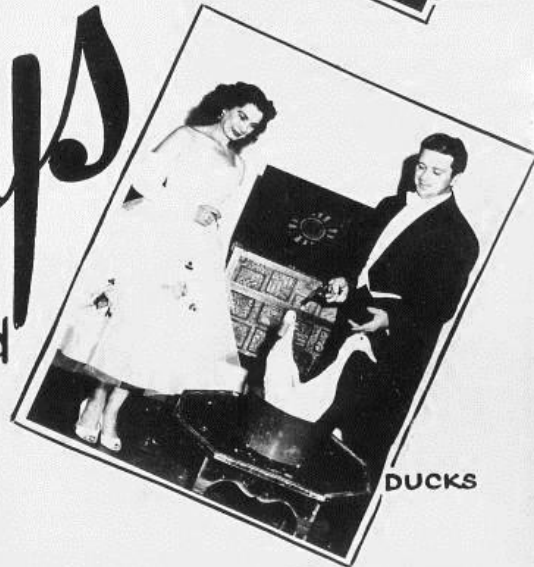
Years earlier, I had seen Harry Blackstone Sr. at the Center Theater in Norfolk. He did a very slimmed down routine and I think that it he was just an act in a variety show. He was no longer touring the big show.

You can imagine the thrill that I got on hearing that Joe Smiley was bringing his illusion show to Seaside Park for two weeks.

IF YOU LIKE **MAGIC**..
..YOU'LL
LOVE



the
Smileys
Joe and
Georgi



In those days, Dudley Cooper owned Seaside Park and Oceanview, both were seaside boardwalks and amusement parks. Each has an outdoor stage and Cooper would book in variety acts. He also used magician Frank Scalzo.

The Smileys were regulars playing there every year. Joe and Georgi were from Lewistown, Pennsylvania and Joe's brother was a circus clown and Joe also worked in little theater and at the local radio station. He had a very deep mellow voice such as David Seebach, Harry Blackstone and David Chauvet's. His diction was perfect and elegant.



APPEARS FROM *Nowhere!*



NEON SWORD *through* THE LADY



WHERE DO THE DUCKS *go?*

Sensational

THEATRE * SIZE
MAGIC



FLOWERS FROM *Allah's* GARDEN

Josef
Smiley
and Company
AMERICA'S MASTER *Illusionist*

Many of his props were Abbotts, but he used a Marshall Botania and Plumes. Joe had made several of the props himself: The Buzz Saw was made from an A.B. Brill Carnival equipment plan, The Woman from TV (combination mirror and shadow box) was his design as was the Dog House (Tip over box).

He used a P&L bowl of water vanish and a Thayer Houdini Pillory Escape and Devil's Mailbox.

The day came for Joe to show up on the last week of June and I had to be there. My mother refused to drive me the 3 miles to the beach so I told her I would walk. Mind you this is before cell phones, so she gave me a pocket full of coins. She allowed me to do it because my elementary school was at the half way point but she was not really comfortable with me walking. I got to the grandstand and Joe had pulled his step van up to the stage to unload props and was nearing completion. I walked up and said, "Wow, All that stuff is in the Abbott's Catalog!" He said, "Well young man, I can see you like magic and are probably good at it." I said, "Yes and I even built a Dagger Head Chest, Square Circle and Chink Cans." He said, "Very good! Meet Georgi." Suddenly he treated me like his Grandson. "Is your Mom or Dad here?", "No, why don't you call your Mom and tell her where you are and you met the magician and he gave you a job". "Make sure you drink lots of water, it is hot outside". I rode with him to park the van next to his travel trailer in a lot across the street. He had me sit in the back of the van (we used to call them a bread truck) and assemble the Chinese Chopper with all the screws, washers and wing nuts. He emerged in a few minutes from the trailer in a full-evening cutaway Tailcoat suit. We walked back over to the grandstand. I carried the chopper. Georgi had used the office dressing room and was now in a stylish cocktail dress.



Joe had a reel to reel tape recorder and he explained that he recorded the tapes at his radio station. He started the pre-show music and the park secretary came over to the side of the stage and took a microphone and did the introduction. "Ladies and Gentlemen, it's show time! The Marvels of Mystery, Joe and Georgi Smiley...."

Joe came out and took total command of the stage. “ Welcome Ladies and Gentleman. This afternoon we are going to make things appear and make things disappear and the boy sitting right over there (he pointed to a random kid) may disappear just like that (He snapped his fingers).

But let’s get started. I have some amazing magic. Let me show you!” A Walsh cane transformed into a silk and he went into an Abbotts Round-Circle production (method like the Square Circle) silks appeared and then he did a clever steal and produced two large feather flower bouquets, a long streamer and ended with two giant flag staffs. Next was his Dove routine with Dove Catching, vanishing from a breakaway box and reappear in the paper frames. His first audience participation was 20th Century Silks. Followed by a sucker version of the Twin Die Boxes and then his Chinese Death board with 3 volunteers. He then went into his finale with the haunted parasol, color changing plumes, blooming bouquet and finally the giant Marshall botania.

Well that did it! I was at every show that he did for the next two weeks. The following week my Mother and Father invited Joe and Georgie to come to the house for a home cooked spaghetti dinner. Joe was more than kind to look at all my creations which included a fair number of oatmeal boxes covered with contact paper and painted tin cans. He also loaded me up with samples of his advertising materials and brochures.

That began my friendship with Joe and the next summer of 1962, he was back for a repeat.

Between knowing Joe and being mentored by Bob McAllister and Troy Strait and regularly watching The Magic Land of Allakazam with Mark, Nani and Bev, I had a good start toward my own magic career. A little later in the 60s Charles Windley and I reconnected .

In this photo below I am on stage at Seaside Park at Virginia Beach in July of 1961. I am on the left of the photo with the two 20th century silks in my T-shirt. Joe is vanishing one in his P&L Change Bag. In the photo behind Joe you can see his Dove Frame production, The Dog House to produce Sir Chumley , the St. Bernard and the TV set that Joe produced Georgi from. The color changing plumes are on top of the TV.



In this photo, Joe is doing his Chinese Death Board (Grandma's Neckless) with three audience volunteers. The blue draped table used for his silk production is seen along with The very edge of the top frame of his Buzz Saw (Goldin Style open sawing a woman through)



**Joe with his Abbots Dove Catching.
"The birds are no longer out"**



Joe died in 1995. Georgi died November 18, 2005 in Lewistown, Pennsylvania. She was 96 years old.

Ohesson magician toured with Hope

Leading a magical life is something Georgiana Smiley, 94, knows all about. As the wife and stage assistant of the late Josef W. Smiley, a well-known magician and illusionist, Georgiana entertained audiences all over the world for over 65 years.

Assisting with Houdini-caliber magic tricks, disappearing acts, and illusions such as being "sawed in half," Georgiana still smiles when she reminisces about her show business days.

"You know why my husband sawed me in half?" she laughs. "He didn't like me whole."

As a resident of *Ohesson Manor*, Lewistown, Mrs. Smiley still captures the attention of an audience when she speaks of days gone by.

"She always entertains us," says Wendy Knouse, admissions director.

"My parents, they always wanted to be entertainers. They ran away to get married, and you know what their marriage certificate said?" asks Josef E. Smiley, the couple's only child. "It named my mother as a dancer and my father as an actor. My

father actually was an actor on Broadway for a short time, but he gave it up because my mother didn't want to go to New York City to live."

Instead of hitting it big on Broadway, the Smileys hit it big in the world of magic, but not before they got through humble beginnings in Lewistown, where they both grew up.

As Georgiana fingers her pearl necklace, she says she doesn't quite remember where or when she first met her husband. "I don't know when I didn't know him. We did shows wherever we could when we were kids. We would lock people inside until we were done performing. Now that is one way to get an audience," she laughs.

Over the years, they grew from performing to "captured" audiences to captive audiences.

"Their acts were really good," says Georgiana's son. "So good in fact, their agent found them."

Before long, they were performing with shows that included Bob Hope, Mae West, and George Jessel. Georgiana says she had a "nice time" touring with great entertainers.

One of her more memorable tours came through efforts with the United Service Organizations—or USO—during World War II.

"At the height of the war, we went to every Army camp and toured with Bob Hope," says Georgiana. "That Bob, he was a peach, and that Mae West, she was in a troop of her own. What I remember the most about the tour was the food. There was a smorgasbord of food wherever Bob went."

Her son says that in addition to entertaining with famous people, his parents also entertained for famous people—including President Eisenhower.

"They performed at the Press Club in Washington, D.C., for President Eisenhower," says Josef. "I was still small then, so I can't remember much of it."

Although Georgiana has performed with and for famous people, there is one performance she will never forget. The audience that time included a boy with only one arm.

"Since I was born with only one arm, I showed him how I could perform in front of

large audiences without reservation. This was a turning point in his life, and it sure made me feel good to help him."

Josef said that sometimes his mother would perform using a prosthetic arm, which she didn't enjoy wearing.

"As soon as I would get off stage, I put it right back in the box," says Georgiana. "Occasionally," Josef adds, "we'd leave it behind. Do you know how difficult it was trying to explain to someone that you needed to have your mother's arm sent to you," he chuckles.

Humor is something that comes naturally to the aptly named Smileys. Perhaps it is because they gave audiences a chance to smile for more than half a century. Yet, even though Mrs. Smiley stopped touring after the death of her husband in 1995, smiles still adorn all who listen to her show-biz stories.

"She makes us all laugh," says Knouse. "Ohesson wouldn't be the same without her."



Josef E. Smiley, with his mother, Mrs. Georgiana Smiley, at *Ohesson Manor*.

SERVICE-TO-DATE

Each year, Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries touches the lives of thousands of persons throughout central and north-central Pennsylvania. From Jan. 1 through Sept. 30, the number served regionally totaled more than 5,500 persons.

Adoption Services, York
211 families*

Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village
357 persons

Congregational Health Ministries – Upper Susquehanna
704 persons

Family Life Services – Upper Susquehanna
3,569 persons

Locust Grove Retirement Village
194 persons

Ohesson Manor
228 persons

Penn Lutheran Village
373 persons

TresslerCare continuum of services for adjudicated youths, 18 youths
*all of central Pa.

JOSEF W. SMILEY

Josef W. Smiley, 81, of 613 S. Grand Street Lewiston, PA 17044, died January 8, 1995. He held I.B.M. number 07941.

Born January 10, 1914 to Dr. Howard and Mary Smiley, Joe grew up in a musical, magical family. As a young boy, Joe and his brothers, Robert and Walter, turned a big room in their Lewiston home into a theater where they would invite the local neighborhood for a show. The boys later expanded their vaudeville show to perform at local Lewiston theaters. Robert later became master clown Bobby Kaye of Ringling fame and Walter played organ on the fair circuit for many years.

As a knicker-wearing lad in the early 20's, Joe witnessed a man handcuffed and placed into a wooden crate. The crate was padlocked and chained and lowered into the Juniata River, but after what seemed like a dangerously long time, the legendary Harry Houdini bobbed to the surface. Joe, his curiosity peaked, was a member of the theater audience that night and several years later was in the same theater when Howard Thurston asked for a volunteer from the audience. Joe dashed on stage to hold the young lady's hand while Thurston sawed her in half.

In 1935, Joe took another young lady's hand and Georgiana Ermin became his wife and assistant. Over the next 60 years, Joe and Georgi took their illusion show, "Marvels of Mystery," all over the U.S. entertaining millions of

people, Joe and Georgi left a lasting magical memory appearing a St. Bernard dog from an empty dog house and vanishing ducks and doves. Their show business tours crossed paths with many greats, including Elvis, George Jessel, Red Buttons, The Mills Brothers, and many more. Their longest standing engagement has been at Knoebel's Grove Park in Central Pennsylvania where they have performed during the summer months for 48 years.

In the interim times between shows, Joe became Lewiston's first radio announcer on WMRF where he worked for several years. He also wrote, directed and produced minstrel and variety shows in the Juniata County area.

But magic was always his first love and Joe did it all with a flair. An agent who Joe had worked with for many years once told me that Joe could MC a kid's talent show and introduce each little dancer with the same pizzazz as he would a headline singing star. It was this great quality of Joe's that endeared him to so many. In my years as a performer, I have had the privilege of working with many acts who had worked with Joe and Georgi and it has been a real pleasure to hear the many stories they relate about them.

In June of 1994, Joe learned he had inoperable prostate cancer. In spite of this news, Joe performed at Knoebel's this past summer and his final show was on the banshell in the park on August 27th. The park held a special Joe and Georgi Smiley Appreciation Day and the duo placed their handprints in a block of wet cement which will eventually become part of a "walkway of stars" at the park.

Joe is survived by his wife, Georgi, and a son, Josef E. Do drop Georgi a card at the address above.

Rick Smiley (Joe's nephew)

MARCH 95

Georgi sawed through with a visible sawing that Joe made from an A.B. Brill Plan.

Loudonville Free Fair

Oct. 1 - 2 - 3 - 4

1956 Program Loudonville

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THE
FAIR!**



Sensational Theatre-Size Magic, Marvels of Mystery