

## Magic Chose Me: My Metamagic Story

Michael Smith

*"It's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course."*

Ollivander: Maker of Fine Wands

I was 11 years old, the same age as Harry Potter, when magic chose me. I remember the moment well. I was on my way home from school when I stopped at a grand opening of a new grocery store in my East Texas town neighborhood because they were giving away free Dr. Peppers. They also had a live magic show on the back of a trailer in the parking lot. I had never seen magic before (we didn't get a TV until two years later!). The magician was a very young Mark Wilson and his wife, Nani Darnell. Magic grabbed me by the throat that spring afternoon. I was overcome by a sense of wonder, awe, and mystery. Of course I wanted to know HOW he did those tricks but I was more captured by my (and the audience's) feelings. I stayed for all three of his scheduled shows that afternoon and was very late getting home. My mother was upset at first but when I told her that I wanted to do magic she began to soften her anger (fear?) at my tardiness.



Shortly after that I found a "Mandrake the Magician" magic kit in a toy store and soon after that I got a larger Royal magic kit for Christmas. I discovered an ad in a magazine for a catalogue from Douglas Magicland in Dallas and began to buy some tricks from it (I still have the first trick I ordered, Kennard's Mystery Box). I also discovered that our public library had one magic book—Ottokar Fischer's *Illustrated Magic* (1923, 1943). In my Junior High School library I found a copy of Beryl Williams and Sam Epstein's *The Great Houdini: Magician Extraordinary* (1950). Later, in high school, when William Lindsay Gresham published his *Houdini: The Man Who Walked through Walls* (1959), I wore out my hardback book reading and re-reading it.

In high school I also discovered theater and was heavily involved in school productions. That love of theater carried me into a theater major for the first two years of my college life (I later switched to a psychology). It was in college that I found my first magic friend, the campus minister. Together we created a magic illusion (a giant Square Circle) to produce a cheerleader in middle of the football field for the half-time show for one of the games. I also did magic shows with the college back-up jazz band (where I played a sax) playing "That Old Black Magic." Later in my senior year of college I worked one summer for our city Parks and recreation Department doing puppet and magic shows in the city's many parks.

Throughout the last two years of college I did not do much magic. In graduate school (seminary) I did pick it up again, doing a number of church banquet shows. The student union had a "booking service" for churches and they booked a number of 30 minute "chicken dinner" banquet shows for me. I could make more money doing these weekend shows than working part-time throughout the weekdays. I joined Ring 15 in Ft. Worth, serving as president in 1971. During this time I attended my first TAOM and first ever magic lectures (Pavel and Charlie Miller). Later when I was on staff of a church in Richmond,

Virginia I consulted with a college opera production teaching the magician character some flashy stage productions. Later, while living in the Washington, DC area I spent a lot of time (and money) at Al's Magic Shop.

Since 1983 I've lived in Texas (Waco, Houston, and Dallas) and have been involved in magic. When we moved to Dallas in 2001 it was Chuck and Joanie Lehr that welcomed me to the DMC. I served as president in 2012 while also dealing with some major health issues. Mark Jensen, vice president, "covered" for me during that difficult time.

During the mid-2000s I met Geoff Grimes and through him Larry Hass and the *McBride Magic & Mystery School*. Geoff and I began doing shows together and teaching psychology of perception classes at Dallas College. It was during this time I also started using magic as a form of "play therapy" with youngsters in my counseling practice. In 2012 I began writing a regular column for the *Wizard's Scroll* which eventually led to my 2020 book, *Make Believe: Discovering and Creating a Magical Experience*. I've been retired since 2014 and magic is a major part of my life. I've got more projects in mind for the future as magic continues to "choose me."

