

## In Defense of Sponge Bunnies: My Disclaimer

I have children who come into the Golden Corral Restaurant just about every week with one high ambition—to see the ‘magic man’ with the sponge bunnies again. Precocious little seven-year old Hanna comes in with her older brother, mother, and father, and waits patiently for me to sidle over finally to her table.



“So, what are we going to do tonight?” she asks, brightly and expectantly, clutching her ragged duck under one arm and, under the other, the Animal Alley bunny we produced at the restaurant before last Christmas. Whatever I do for her nine-year old brother, it all finally comes around to the same retort, “And now for the *bunnies*?”

In my table-hopping routine, I don’t just do “bunnies”; I do *B-U-N-N-I-E-S!!!* All pockets are locked and loaded: a “mega-grip” full of the babies and juniors in my right trousers pocket; the “mamma” and “daddy” bunnies in my left; and “Grandma” and the “PawPaw” bunnies divided between the left cheek and the right cheek pockets at the rear. The remaining magical gadgets occupy my four interior vest pockets and the two outside pockets. Before the routine is finished, sponge bunnies have jumped to life out of one giddy little kid’s fist or another, and the family—along with two or three other tables of patrons around—are

exploding with laughter and delight. Everybody seems to love the sponge bunnies—what has to be America’s favorite trick!

Out in the car, I always carry four or five additional “Animal Alley” realistic grey, white, black, and brown bunnies, always on the ready for production in those special situations. One evening last November, I approached Hanna and her family as they settled in to their dining.

Anna, Hanna’s mother, said, “You know, you really started something with those bunnies! We’ve been hunting all over the place for a really good bunny, but we haven’t found one we really like. Do you have any suggestions?”

“Do you mean a ‘real’ bunny?” I probed.

“Oh, no! Just a toy one—a stuffed one,” she explained.

“Look!” I whispered. “Would it be all right if Christmas came a little early this year? I’ve got the best bunnies in the market out in my car right now!”

“Oh, my gosh!” said Anna. “You have no idea what grief that would save me! We haven’t found one anywhere that she wants. She’s just so particular, but if a bunny comes from you, I’m sure it will be the ‘right one’!”

I retrieved a fine, buxom little white bunny from the back seat of my car, shoved it deep behind my left armpit under my vest, and strolled back into the restaurant. The available food servers gathered around Hanna’s table for the anticipated production. When the bunny tumbled out of my vest and into her arms,



Hanna just beamed, unable to speak behind the shock and surprise that registered in her face and smile. Anna winked, “It’s the ‘right one!’” From that point on, the bunny made a regular appearance each time the family came to dinner.

A couple of weeks ago, I was concerned, however, when the family came in with Hanna clutching only the ragged duck. With a little trepidation, I waited a little later into their meal before I inquired about the missing fixture.

Anna explained that Hanna had “discovered” makeup—some red lipstick, particularly, and had attempted to “brighten the lips” of the bunny which was then at the dry cleaners awaiting restoration.

I am well aware of the notorious reputation of “doing sponge *anything*” in a restaurant, but I won’t qualify my love for the sponge bunnies. If I were reduced to just one trick for the rest of my career in the restaurant, unequivocally, it would be the bunnies. Thumb tip work provides a great opener. Coin transpositions are engaging. Flicking cards is handsome—for the first two minutes *only* (“folly” to pursue any longer). Lonnie Chevie’s gypsy floss is just downright captivating, but *nothing* I have seen other magicians perform or anything else in my magical repertoire comes even close to the sheer joy those bunnies elicit in the youngsters.



I’m entering my eighth year at the “COR-ral” and have worked through easily three to four hundred dollars’ worth of sponge bunnies during that time. I will give away half a box of bunnies every week or two to the really young kids—with the parents’ permission, of course. The remaining I bring, rinse them in the kitchen sink, air dry them, and then “nuke” them in the microwave for about 30 seconds before reloading in my pockets.

From the beginning, I have worked for meal coupons—my meal that evening plus four more that the manager endorses on a little paper billet I print off in my office. At about \$15 and something a meal, that works out to about \$90 for the hour and the little bit I work each evening, and at the end of the month, that adds up to money saved on lunches and dinners.

Each of the “Corral” managers over my tenure there has offered me any and every evening I want to work; they’ve always had positive feedback from the families and appreciate the goodwill the magic seems to have produced overall for the restaurant. Occasionally, they have guests actually calling the restaurant to see if “the magician is in” that evening, as the sign up front proclaims.

Truth be told, I don’t float the bunnies at every table; you have to “read” the guests, their conversations, the mood they elicit, and the occasion of their dining, but the bunnies have seemed to work with different groups of all ages. When appropriate, the bunnies fit my age (70), my grandfatherly persona, and the very

casual style with which I approach each table, introducing myself, not as the entertainer, but as a concerned representative of the restaurant. I greet them. I thank them for selecting the “Golden Corral”—knowing full well that they have “choices,” and I ask them how they are enjoying their food—noting that I hope they haven’t eaten the last steak (“It will be an hour before I get a chance to eat!”—which always gets a chuckle).



Would I introduce the bunnies in a classier restaurant, catering to a more—how shall we say it?—“dignified and refined” clientele? Probably not—it’s a matter of the “context,” you see, as Larry Hass is wont to remind me. And I take them at their word—you’re not likely to see Diamond Jim, Dal Sanders, David Hira, and Derrell Allen groping for *sponge* at established eateries north of the Trinity, but then, they’re all working for real cash, not just for meal coupons and a little pocket change—which I always leave for the servers, anyway!

I’m just sayin . . .

Geoff Grimes