

THE PRINCIPLES OF MAGIC



RICHARD OSTERLIND

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MYSTERIES
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DEDICATION

Once again, I dedicate this book to my wonderful wife, Lisa. Like my love of magic, my love for her is unchanging and continues. She gave me the following quote for this book:

To affect the quality of the day, that is the art of life.
—Henry David Thoreau

FOREWORD

This book is not an attempt to list all the principles of magic as we usually think of them. There are numerous tomes which have done that job perfectly. *The Tarbell Course in Magic* has more to offer along these lines than any ten other books. It can safely be said that mastering that course would give the reader well over 90% of all the knowledge he needs to succeed in magic.

Rather, this work has two objectives in mind. The first is to strengthen the respect that magic deserves as an art and the second is to add to the above principles of magic. It is hoped that these ideas will be approached with an open mind and the belief that we can all improve and should always be trying to.

Richard Osterlind
Falmouth, KY
July 2005

I'll tell you what the problem with the...power you're using here. It didn't require any discipline to attain it. You read what others had done and you took the next step. You didn't earn the knowledge for yourselves so you didn't take any responsibility for it. You stood on the shoulders of geniuses to accomplish something as fast as you could and before you even knew what you had, you patented it and packaged it and slapped it on lunchboxes and now you're selling it.

— Jeff Goldblum, from the film *Jurassic Park*

PART ONE



THE NATURE OF ART

Our lives are filled with many different types of art. Although, as magicians, we would want to be concerned with performing art, a study of all art in general, and what makes it so special, is in order first. A full understanding of this subject will clarify many misconceptions about magic.

Art, to be truly called that, must inspire our emotions. A famous painting is nothing more than colors on a canvas if it doesn't make us react. A masterpiece of music is just sound, unless it reaches into our very souls and ignites our innermost feelings. Depending on the kind of art being experienced, these feelings can be totally diversified. We might experience joy, sorrow, elation, judgment, energy, patriotism or others of the same nature we experience in actual life. True art, in fact, can take us into new emotional territory surpassing even that of this physical world. Throughout time, a civilization's art has been one of its biggest contributions to history. Ruins and remains of ancient empires always contain an abundance of their art and whole periods of the past have been inspired by art. Next to religion, there is hardly a human endeavor of higher moral consequence than the making of art.

To try to define art is a monumental task. It is far easier to talk about what it does to us than try to explain what it is. We must, however, keep our examination on a practical level even though our subject deals with things of a higher plane. The nature of art affects different people in different ways. Some are moved more than others and a few, unfortunately, not at all. One group may argue that a particular painting is legitimate art while others might disagree. To examine art at this level is non-productive and detracts from where we need to go. Rather than becoming bogged down with these discrepancies and differences of personal opinions, we should concern

ourselves with what we know has been accepted as art by most authorities down through the ages. Only then can we progress with our study. Along with that thought, if you are one of those unfortunate of God's creatures that cannot understand or feel what fine art is about, these words will be lost to you and my goal is hopeless. You cannot hope to be an artist if you cannot experience what art does.

Imagine two portraits of an elderly woman. One may actually look more like a human face than the other. It may be so realistic it resembles a photograph. All the details are perfect and nothing in it can be faulted. And yet, when you see it, it does nothing for you and its viewing is like a passing breeze, pleasant enough, but leaving nothing behind of lasting value. The second, however, seems to grab your very soul the moment your gaze falls on it. In her eyes you see the maturity of life, the innocence of childhood still lingering, but it has given way to the wisdom of old age. You can feel the wrinkles in her face as though your fingers were running over it. Memories of a loved one might be rending your heart, or you may get a strange, prophetic look into the future of things to come for yourself or someone close to you. The portrait holds you spellbound as you examine every brushstroke and wonder what magic the artist wielded to put such life into his work. This is the nature of art.

A melody plays on the radio and it is pleasant enough. There is no disharmony and no reason not to like it. As it continues, you go about your business, giving it little thought as you work. When it is over, you continue on with your life, unaffected. Then a symphony begins to play. From the opening phrase, your attention is captured. As you sit back and listen, the music seems to grow in importance. It seems to cry out that its very nature is far removed from the ordinary. Something inside tells you that beyond the musical excellence of the piece, part of the composer himself is alive within its fabric and you are actually listening to the very voice of his soul. As you close your eyes and the rhythm overtakes you, you become lost in the mystery that such feelings of glorious wonder could be captured with just the twelve simple notes of the scale. Finally, the music swells to a conclusion and a tremendous feeling of completeness assures you something has been added to your heart that wasn't

there before. Again, this is the nature of art.

In the above examples, an outward appearance would say that each painting and each piece of music is of the same essence, but they are not. It should be obvious, *from your very own perception*, that true art is not simply a thing, but how that thing affects *you* as a representative of humankind. It should also be noted that we are not trying to rate art on a bad to good scale. If it affects you in an artistic way, even if it might be of lower significance than some other art, it is still art.

Art needs humanity to exist. The greatest piece of sculpture, without human interface, is a rock and nothing more. Yet, the humanity itself is not the art nor is it just a part of the art. The two are connected in a unity that is a basic part of human nature but, either one without the other does not fall into our definition of art. This abstract idea may seem fruitless to pursue, but in actual practice, it is imperative. Without it, you can never hope to create art.



THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF ART

The previous chapter contained examples of two entirely different forms of art. The portrait in the first was static; it exists to be viewed and appreciated and is completed. The symphony, on the other hand, is moving. Although a musical expert might look at the manuscripts of the composition and know what it will sound like when played, a true appreciation can only come from its performance. That performance will determine how well the piece is presented and how it influences us. It is interesting to note that although many would consider a concert to be an expression of art, a poor performance will not lessen the artistic value of a piece of music that is recognized to be great. So the artistic nature of music is determined by the composition itself, the performance of the piece, and how the music affects our senses. As we progress in our study of magic, it will be important to keep this in mind.

Art can also take many forms and the emotions it generates can be few or many. Whereas a fine painting might stimulate almost any, a fine piece of jewelry, which can still be considered true art, will usually portray only beauty. True, that antique necklace might remind you of one your beloved grandmother wore, but that is personal and not representative of the necklace for most others. But just because the art only aims toward one emotion doesn't make it a lesser art. It is simply art of a different kind. There are many types of art which lie somewhere between these two extremes. The works of Shakespeare, for instance, are commonly divided into tragedies and comedies. Although there is some crossover within these plays, the main thrust of each type is clear.

The works of Shakespeare also pose an interesting situation. They may be read as literary art or experienced as performance art. This can lead to a discussion as to which is better, more pure, what

is the original intent, etc. Part of that debate might be slanted by the quality of the acting troupe presenting the performance or the preference and reading ability of the individual. Art is always a complex subject in all its variations and presentations.

Our concern is magic. Magic is obviously a performance art and that has to be our approach to it. Although magic may touch upon many different emotions dependent on the style of each individual artist, its underlying theme is one of mystery. In that regard, it is most unique. No other art form seeks to do this. No other art form attempts to create the impossible. Other arts often share their goals, but only magic strives to create the wonder and awe of seeing something that simply cannot exist. Because of this, there are many misconceptions of its very nature. Understanding what all art accomplishes is the first step in understanding the fine art of magic.



THE BIGGEST LIE IN MAGIC

There is a huge lie about the art of magic that is held not just by some non-magicians, but (and this is an incredibly unfortunate development of recent times) by some magicians themselves. It is the belief that magic is the art of *deception*. Or, to put it in even a more derogatory way, magic is the art of *lies*. It is easy to understand how the poor performances of some would-be magicians would cause the lay public to think this way, but it is only in the modern, dogmatic world of shallow perceptions and lack of any artistic appreciation by some of magic's actual participants that this atrocity can even exist. It is an incredible shame and, if it were true, would put the art of magic just one step above the actions of the criminal with the only difference being that no thievery or harm was done to the spectator. If this were truly the case, we should all put away our wands and bury the art of magic forever. This is an unacceptable viewpoint.

Perhaps this deranged perspective is a natural consequence of magicians having called what they do "illusion" for so long. Although never really an accurate term, in light of today's widespread contempt for the finer and more delicate approach to life, it is a natural evolution. You can almost hear the young, arrogant newcomer in magic saying, "Don't give me that *illusion* crap! It's really just *lying*!" Part of this attitude, in all honesty, has to be attributed to some belonging to the new generation of magical writing and performing "stars." Youngsters follow what they see and, at the moment, they are led to believe this is the way to act.

Nonetheless, magic never was the art of illusion, deception or lying. Yes, illusion plays a part in the construction of magic, but it is not the goal of the art. If that were true, then *all* art must be considered in the same light. Paint on a canvas is not the object itself that

the painting portrays, but simply a representation of that object. The physical substance of the painting, i.e. the actual paint and canvas, has nothing to do with anyone's real life or feelings. It is just pigment on some animal skin, even if it were Rembrandt who put it there. If it somehow moves you or affects your emotions, in holding with the above mindset, it is a type of illusion.

Likewise, words written over one hundred years ago in a form of English that no one speaks today and whose stories are only fabrications, are not real life. The characters and plots never existed and should have no power to control your emotions or give rise to inner searching. As a matter of fact, to be completely consistent in our thinking, any fiction is only illusion if you view art in this limited fashion.

Finally, when you hear the great symphonies of Beethoven on a CD, you are really hearing an electronic reenactment of an orchestra playing music written by a composer who has been dead for many, many years. The vibrations of your speakers are not the actual vibrations of the instruments themselves and represent only an illusion of what you would hear at an actual concert. Even if you were at the actual concert, what you would hear are noises made by wind blowing across reeds, catgut scraping against wire and more wind blowing through pipes. These physical manifestations have no connection to the great themes of life and any resemblance is, again, an illusion.

This is all, of course, simply facetious. It is not necessary to even argue the point. Art itself is not a type of illusion; it is a moving force. Whatever the form it takes, it does not trick you into feeling; it actually causes you to react by its wonderful nature. You must look beyond the physical part of art to the spiritual. The corporeal aspect of art is no more the art itself than your body is your own spiritual self. Magic is no different. Magic's intended destiny is the creation of mystery. Its practitioners should do this on the highest artistic and moral levels.



THE ELEMENTS OF ART

We can study the makeup of art by studying its creational and presentational process. Let us divide this progression into four elements or steps. We shall call them, the *tools*, the *skills*, the *creation* and the *effect*. Each one of these elements will be examined individually and applied to our own art of magic.

The *tools* are the easiest to grasp. Each art form has its own working utensils and they are the physical essentials that make possible the reaching up to higher levels in order to bring artistic ideals down to earth. These tools are simply that which is used to produce the creation. On a very simplistic level, the painter needs his brushes, paints and canvas, the writer needs his pen and paper and the musician needs his instruments (including his voice). The significance of these tools is only important in that they allow the artist to do a good job when making his creation. The brushes should be in good shape, the pen and paper of decent quality and the instruments good ones and in tune. They are all, by definition, no more than tools and it would be absurd to suggest they are the art itself. This issue is only addressed because of some very few magicians who do act as if their boxes and chrome tubes were part of their art. Although pride in one's tools is to be understood, they should never be given more importance than that of just tools.

Artists must have certain *skills* to create their art. The painter must have the necessary dexterity in his hands to give him the ability to paint what he sees in his mind. He also must possess knowledge of colors, layout, perspective and other rudiments of his craft. But all these skills are not the art, of course, and a person with these abilities is not an artist until he uses them to create a painting that is recognized as being wonderful.

A novelist, in addition to be able to physically write, must have

great command of his language and the skills necessary to compose intelligent literature. He must know how to use proper syntax, spelling, grammar, etc. But again, this is not art itself and even an expert in all of the above is not an artist until he actually creates a novel that moves others in an artistic way.

A musician might be a great virtuoso with total command of his instrument and the ability to play the most difficult scales and exercises. Yet those abilities are certainly not art. It is only when he uses his skills to create a moving piece of music that he is considered an artist.

As shown above, skills are only part of the production process of art and, although they must be honed and refined to perfection, they are not to be compared in stature with the art itself. Unfortunately, in our art of magic, we find that is not always the case. There are some who consider their sleights and fancy flourishes to be the actual art. These technicians all too often suffer from the most basic of human shortcomings. Having spent so much time and effort trying to master their sleights, they feel compelled to show them off. In an art where such procedures are meant to be hidden, this is clearly not to be desired.

The *creation* is that which the artist makes with his tools and which aspires to be art. It is the painting, the musical performance or the finished poem. Many will automatically call the creation art, but that is not the case and that concept will lead to a total misunderstanding of what we are trying to achieve. Anyone can create anything and to assume that a creation is art just because an artist created it is foolish. As we saw in the first chapter, two almost identical paintings can have a profoundly different effect on us. Beyond what we each might feel as an individual about a particular painting, we can also trust the collective impressions of others to decide on whether that painting is art. Our conclusion would therefore be, when a particular creation affects the majority of viewers in a positive and artistic way, then that creation can be considered art.

You might be thinking that this viewpoint is limited and subjective to who is viewing the art. If so, you would be absolutely right. Great art can be unappreciated by some who do not have an adequate understanding of what art is or who are too unsophisticated

to know what is good. But we must make our rules on a *general* level and the fact remains that any creation must affect humanity in an emotional way before it can be called art.

Your next comment might be, “But who cares about all this? It is just an intellectual and philosophical argument!” The value of the argument is where we *aim*! Having an understanding of the nature of art gives us direction and a comprehension of what we are trying to do.

Too many magicians stop at this level of the artistic pursuit. Their belief is that if a magical routine is completed successfully, they have achieved their objective. We have to address this point. The magician must go beyond this state and understand the *effect*.

The *effect* is perhaps the most important part of the process. It defines to what extent the creation stirs the emotions of the viewer or listener. It measures to what heights the creation can soar and affect the human soul. It determines whether or not the creation itself is art and how great that art is. And yet, the incredible mystery of the effect is that it is *not* the result of creation.

The effect was there from the beginning. The effect was in the artist’s mind and soul long before a paintbrush was ever touched or a note played. The effect, in any art we are studying, flowed from the humanity of the artist into the very fabric of the creation. Like the spiritual side of man, it can not be seen or measured, but lays there dormant, waiting to effect another human soul. And, when that happens, the effect is far more than could ever be measured by the physical attributes of the creation. It is why one *just knows* when one is experiencing true art. It is why even a slur of paint by Picasso can hold you breathless. It is why a simple melody from the mind of Mozart can haunt your awareness for days. The effect is the very *substance* of art. By definition, that substance must be of the same *stuff* as the whole and that *stuff* is what we must try to find.



THE TRUE NATURE OF THE ART OF MAGIC

Magic is the art of the creation of mystery. Mystery does not equate with miracle. A mystery is something that baffles understanding and cannot be explained whereas a miracle is a marvelous event manifesting a supernatural act. To apply the second definition to our art causes us to be charlatans and deceivers unless we really do have supernatural powers, but to apply the first definition creates an art form that is wonderful, awe-inspiring and unique. Magic is the art of the impossible.

The great human endeavor is to stride forth in our world and make progress. Constant obstacles and setbacks need to be overcome. Often, these quandaries seem impossible to solve. Magic, as the art of the impossible, addresses this continuing human dilemma in an artistic way. Magic demonstrates that the human soul has within it the power to rise above the world's forces and to conquer. Because the magician operates within the same constraints and boundaries as the rest of humankind, his accomplishments represent a hope for everyone. Within the brotherhood of humanity, the magician becomes an artistic example who symbolizes that nothing is impossible.

This is the *effect* we must keep in mind as we create our magic. This is that part of us that we must somehow put into our art when we create it. This is what we should want to pass on. Our *aim* should be towards the hearts and souls of our audience; to give them something good and wonderful. We should treat our brothers and sisters with respect and want only the best for them. We should be flattered and humbled that we have been given the means to do this if even in a very small way. This is the highest ideal of magic and if this goal is adhered to, only good can come of it.

When an artist first takes his brush in hand, he foresees the

culmination of his art. He already knows the fate of his work and selflessly snatches from his own being that which he wishes to offer. When a composer begins to jot down the first notes of a symphony, he already hears the majestic harmonies composed out of his existence and then gives up that which is most dear so that others may enjoy and experience it.

The magician must first know wonder himself. He must see the glory of victory over the impossible and the ecstasy of creating it. He must understand the conquest of the unfeasible and put the essence of that triumph into his art. He must be willing to let go of what was so difficult to earn and share it unreservedly. He must release his own joy so that others might have it. This is what the magician must aspire to and what his art must become. This is the goal of magic.

PART TWO



MAGIC AND GUILT

This chapter was chosen as the opener for Part Two of this book because of its practical application of the previous discussions.

It would be unreasonable to suggest that a newcomer to magic wouldn't first be attracted to its secrets and, once a new *trick* were learned, to want to run out and show his friends. We probably all started that way and we all got caught somewhere along the road to learning. If we were to examine all the problems and questions that magicians ask, the one that would probably be the first on the list would be, "*How do I not get caught?*" Let's examine this topic in detail.

All magic starts at point A, where everything is normal, and arrives at point B, where something impossible has taken place. Somewhere in between, the magician has taken a detour which the audience is unaware of. As long as the audience thinks the magician has traveled *as the birds fly*, he is alright, but the moment the audience learns about that side trip, the jig is up. The magician is exposed and there is no mystery.

It should go without saying that to compose and perform an effective mystery, the basic magic fundamentals of that routine must be sound. Again, *The Tarbell Course in Magic* is filled with such fundamentals. Principles such as angles, misdirection, subterfuges and others are all there and are proven from experience. It should also be apparent that the magician must practice his routine time and time again until it is perfect. There can be no hesitations or sudden moves to attract the audience's attention or suspicion. But there still remains a factor that is little understood and is a constant cause of concern. How can one magician do a routine and be completely successful while another gets caught? What is the magic formula that will make it always work?

The answer is simple. No matter how perfectly the magician performs, he still projects an *attitude*. This attitude operates on a level that is akin to telepathic communication. It is almost impossible to see or measure, but it is there in force. If the magician is worried or concerned about getting caught, the audience just knows it. The word *trick* might as well be written across his forehead. He *projects* his deceit and gets caught every time.

So now we are beginning to nail down the cause of the problem. If the magician feels as though he is deceiving his audience and is afraid of being caught *doing something unethical*, he projects it. That inborn part of humanity that C. S. Lewis calls the *natural law* is at work. He feels *guilty*. If, however, the magician has his *aim* set to creating an artistic event of true wonder, something good and desirable, he simply won't have those feelings. If the magician wants only to create a mystery that will bring happiness, fun and excitement to his audience, he is doing something *honorable* and has nothing to hide. Because his heart is in the right place, he will not project deceit and he will never be caught. His magical routines will flow smoothly and his audiences will be thrilled and entertained.

You may think this logic is quite a jump, but the theory can be proven by your own experience. In your repertoire, you must assuredly have one effect that is your best. That effect always works and always gets a stunned reaction. When you perform it, you look towards the end when the card is turned over, the coin vanishes or the spectator's ring is produced. You anticipate the stunned reaction of your audience and can't wait to see their faces light up. You are so sure your routine will work and so sure of the positive reaction it will get that you never worry while performing and never give a second thought about the actual method. Why? When you do that routine, do you feel dishonorable? I suspect not. I suspect that you know what you are trying to achieve is a good thing and you can feel proud of yourself for having done it.

Please examine all of your magic in the above light. Please read Part One of this book again if you have any doubts. We are in the business of creating extraordinary events that will be remembered for years.



THE MAGICIAN'S EGO

This is a discussion that will make many readers uneasy. The magician's ego is a topic that plays a huge role in how we are accepted as entertainers. An egotistical nature is an undesirable trait in any culture and those who have an inflated one will never be popular. And yet, the magician's very job is to do the impossible. Who should be idolized more than a person who does the impossible? Since magic is really the only art form that creates mystery, the reactions it inspires are of an entirely different nature. A moment of stunned silence followed by thunderous applause and shouts of surprise and admiration is not an uncommon response to a magical entertainment properly presented. It is easy to understand how the practitioner might soon become overly filled with himself.

Fortunately, the cure for the above is an easy one and, once again, it pertains to our conclusions from Part One. The *aim* of the performer should be towards the creation of mystery. He should want to create real magic for the pure joy of his audience and not for self-gratification or praise. He must also *feel* that mystery in the same manner as the audience. In show business, this is called *the illusion of the first time*. The performer must experience the same level of excitement and surprise as they do even if he has performed the effect one thousand times before. He must be *on their level* when the magic happens and be *en rapport* with them. Only in that way will he not come across as high and mighty.

To understand this better, let's compare a magical performance to that of a great singer. A true artist sings his song and makes the lyrics come alive. If it is a sad love song, you feel as though he is singing to a real person, perhaps his own personal love. As he continues, you can see the tears in his eyes and the anguish in his face. You have no doubt he is actually *feeling* the words he sings. When

he is finished, you jump to your feet to applaud, but he does not stand there with a tremendous ego. He is exhausted and shares this moment with you. You are on the same plane and he is a real person like yourself. Yes, later he bows and takes his well-deserved applause, but again, it is a gracious act and not one of a narcissistic person.

Let us try to be like that when we perform our magic. Instead of standing in front of our audience demonstrating how clever we are and how much more we know than they do, instead, try to feel what they are experiencing. Try to sense the *wonder* of it all as though you were seeing this for the first time also. Take an example from Doug Henning, who, rather than just performing tricks, always seemed to genuinely want to *share* his magic with the audience. Doug always projected a sense of enthusiasm that told people that he was enjoying the show, and the magic, as much as the audience.

You have to likewise learn to share the magic with your spectators. You have to be on both sides of the curtain at the same time. It may seem hackneyed or old-fashioned, but you must learn to love your audience and want to thrill them for that sake alone.



MAGIC AND FAITH

There seems to be a concern that is more widespread than one would think. Many magicians who also have a deep religious conviction question the ethics of magic and how it relates to their beliefs. This problem is especially troubling to some in regards to mentalism and its related fields. Whatever our particular field of magic, a close examination of our art, especially in light of Part One of this book, should go a long way in clearing up any such doubts.

A study of the word *magician* in the Holy Bible quickly reveals a type of individual quite different from the present-day magician. Whereas the latter's purpose is to present his wonders as a form of entertainment, the former perpetuated the belief he did real magic and his purpose was to be idolized.

In the Old Testament the *sorcerers* were priests in Pharaoh's court who interpreted dreams, predicted the future and who used their magic to try to defeat the God of Moses. In the New Testament the magician named Simon wanted to buy the powers of the Holy Spirit from the disciples for his own use and prestige. Obviously, when the Bible talks about such *magicians*, it is referring to those who claimed to have real supernatural powers that enabled them to create actual miracles. They were treated as gods themselves and were a direct adversary of the Judeo/Christian God. The Bible clearly condemns those practices and it is little wonder that many fundamentalist religions frown upon our art given that background of the word "magician."

It should be noted there has always been debate among scholars as to whether these ancient magicians really did have supernatural powers or whether they simply used conjuring principles in much the same way that we do today to create their wonders. Whatever the answer, it is apparent that the purpose of their magic was not an

admirable one. And therein lies our argument against the condemnation of magic.

As long as the goal of the magician is to create mystery, as mystery was defined in Part One, there can be no wrongdoing. Because mystery is the creation of the impossible, which by definition means that no supernatural forces are involved, the magician never claims that which he has no claim to. He is only a man doing something that appears to have no solution. The marvels that happen at his fingertips have as their explanation nothing beyond the physical limits of our existence and that is what makes it all so extraordinary. The wonder he creates is legitimate as he is truthfully doing exactly what he claims to be.

If, on the other hand, the magician has, as his goal, the adulation of himself as his priority, his concentration will be there and he may very well be tempted to claim abilities he does not possess. Clearly this is wrong and no excuses can be made for this behavior. At this point, he is falling back into the biblical definition of magic and deserves whatever condemnation he evokes. There are few places in magic where this is even possible, with the exception of mentalism. That subject will be dealt with separately.



MENTALISM

With the recent upsurge in the popularity of mentalism, a discussion of this branch of magic is most certainly in order. Mentalism represents a remarkable type of magic that has an appeal all its own. We, as humans, instinctively assume what goes on in our heads, our innermost thoughts, is totally private and almost sacred. When that barrier is breached and someone seems to enter into that innermost region, the mystery created is of a different one entirely. Unlike a physical occurrence which affects objects we can touch or might even own, mentalism goes further, entering into the deepest regions of our mind and touches our thoughts, our decisions and even our future. This has a remarkable effect on the human psyche and is not to be taken lightly.

Most mentalists start as magicians who decide to move into this field for one reason or another. Some believe it will bring greater monetary gain while others view it as a more *grown-up* type of magic. Whatever the reason, it is not uncommon for such a newcomer to be struck by how much the audience is willing to believe in his “psychic” abilities. This has the effect of scaring some magicians away while others realize the potential power of this art. As long as the magician understands that his duty is to supply a good and wholesome entertainment, he is generally on safe ground. It is when a performer succumbs to the effects of this instant adulation and turns his attention towards promoting his supposed *powers*, instead of his art, that problems begin to arise. By promoting his *powers*, he is, in actuality, promoting *himself*. This ego-driven attitude is very destructive. Unfortunately, many of the newer mentalism instructional books and videos teach an approach which fosters this misguided attitude.

The predominant advice given in such materials is to explain

what *supposed ability* you are using to accomplish your effects. In times past you were instructed to discuss telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and the like. These days many pretend they are using NLP, body language and similar ideas.

The truth is the same methodology is at work and a lie is a lie no matter where on the scale of believability it abides. This author sees no reason to explain *how* the effect is apparently accomplished. To do so is to imply a power one does not have. It destroys the mystery. It also reduces the richness of the effect and causes a challenge attitude to be adopted by the audience.

Here is a practical example: You have just performed a book test where you compellingly claimed to be reading the spectator's mind with telepathy. After the conclusion, the spectator is very likely to say, "Well, if you really can read my mind, what am I thinking now?" There is no need to create a situation such as this. Besides limiting the perception of what the audience is likely to imagine is the cause of your mystery, you also, in so doing, take away from the wonder element and entertainment value. The episode becomes more of a scientific workshop than a pleasurable and artistic event. But the greater danger is if one is successful! Falsehood can only foster more falsehood. Taken to extremes it can lead to a scenario reminiscent of William Gresham's *Nightmare Alley*. What should always be kept in mind is this: *Any endeavor which seeks to build up the artist's abilities rather than the artistic event will eventually lead to failure.*

It really is all nonsense. ESP is not a recognized science. Work has been done over the years to test individuals for telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, telekinesis, etc., but no real conclusions have been reached. The study is still considered a pseudo-science and you would be hard pressed to find much scientific agreement on even definitions let alone explanations. And yet, you will find mentalists who not only accept certain definitions of the above terms, but then actually restrict their own performances by the very limitations and boundaries they have created with these false definitions.

Let us treat all magic, regardless of what type, as an art and abide by artistic principles.



HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

There is a recent development in the magic community that should be of great concern to anyone who considers our craft a true art. There seems to be a growing belief among some members of our profession that, for the sake of the final effect, anything goes. According to this standard, there are no boundaries on what methods can be used to accomplish the magic and the end result justifies any means. This has become especially evident in the production of magic and mentalism performances for television.

Unashamed uses of stooges, pre-show work and production editing have become standard fare for some of these shows. Because a televised program may reach more people in a single airing than many magicians will perform for in a lifetime, this has a direct bearing on the art of magic for all of us. There are two points that need serious addressing. The first is obvious, but the second is much more far reaching.

From the earliest days of television, producers were leery of how magic would be accepted in that media. Many were positive that home viewers would consider everything they saw as some type of camera trick. It took the hard work of magicians like Mark Wilson to convince them otherwise. The obvious solution of using unbroken camera shots was only half the battle. What was far more important was the *trust* the magician had to build with the home audience to convince them that the art of magic would not rely and *did not need to rely* on barefaced tactics as camera tricks and editing. This sincere approach worked and for many years all magic programs began with a disclaimer about using camera tricks and home viewers were able to have confidence in the integrity of the magic programs they were viewing.

Even if some did suspect camera tricks, it was still a fact that

television magicians *did not* use these devices and there *is* something to be said for *truth*.

As of late, however, that trust has been breached. In some televised shows, any method considered necessary to produce a desired result is being used. All limitations as to what can be done by way of editing and behind-the-scenes set-ups have been abandoned. Some of these magicians have effectively undone the hard and good work of the early artists – and all to no avail. The very fear that early producers had the good sense to instinctively know and realize, that viewers would suspect television trickery, is exactly the result of these shows. These offending programs always come across as rigged. Not one of them has that *air* about them that tells the home viewer that what they see is what they would get if they were really there. Gone even are the stations' disclaimers that nothing was accomplished using camera tricks, stooges or other behind-the-scenes means. Worse of all, these magicians have gone exactly where the home audience has suspected from the very beginning that they might be going.

The movie *Jurassic Park* was the first to use computer animation that was so realistic, it was virtually impossible to differentiate between it and reality. Since then, the art of movie making has advanced much further. *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* films demonstrate clearly what movie makers can do with the subject of magic. If certain present-day magicians wish to continue on their course of *anything goes*, why not just forget about the magicians entirely and turn the job of television magic specials over to these specialists? Wouldn't it make more sense to have the best in the business do it?

The illogical nature of this trend could be argued for hours, but that is not the main concern. What is far more important is the question of *integrity*. Since no one likes to admit they are lacking in integrity, they must offer a *justification*. The justification is, "Since magic is the art of deception and trickery, these methods are justified as they are only another form of such trickery." Do you now see the importance of the rather lengthy discussion of this question in Part One of this book? Isn't it obvious where the road will lead if we, in fact, think of magic in that light? The end

does *not* justify the means.

As an experiment, your author presented a noted orchestral player with the following hypothetical situation. Suppose you were approached by a television producer who wanted to feature you on a special. You will be playing a newly-written piece that, in reality, is theoretically impossible to play. But, don't worry. They are going to create the piece electronically in the studio and you will just appear to play it. They will dub in the pre-recorded music so perfectly that it will be impossible to tell it wasn't you and you will be famous for your abilities. Would you agree to do that? The answer, as I'm sure you will already have guessed, was a resounding, "No! Of course I wouldn't do it!" When asked why, the response was, "A television performance ought to be a true representation of what the artist can do."

Notice how this person used the term *artist* without hesitation. Notice how the response did not even address the statement, "You will be famous for your abilities." It is gratifying to know that a person who spent the greater part of their life in the pursuit of artistic excellence would be repulsed by the idea that their talents be augmented by artificial means. What is the point?

Recently a very noted mentalist was asked if he ever used stooges. His reply was that he did once and then realized, "Anyone can do that."

And that is the point exactly. Using these tactics, anyone can do it. There is no art, no discipline and no pride. Most importantly, the end result does not even approximate a true demonstration of our art.

It is true that television does present some handicaps that are not present in a live performance. Yes, the viewer can record and rewind the video to see it over and over again. Yes, the cameras can be placed in positions and catch sight of things that the live viewing audience would never see. In those circumstances, judicious camera editing to *put things on even ground* is acceptable. Bad camera angles should be avoided. The camera should record what the audience is witnessing and should even react the way the live spectators do in regard to misdirection and limited angles. What is wrong, in the author's opinion, is to *artificially create* an effect using such

means. To make the magic using editing and behind-the-scenes work is where the line is crossed.

There is a simple litmus test which can be applied. The televised production should simply represent exactly what anyone attending a live performance of that effect would see if they were sitting in the best seating position in the audience. Anything less is cheating.

Such things as integrity and honor in magic do exist. Please apply them to our art.

PART THREE



ON STAGE – THE FIRST FUNDAMENTAL

Magicians spend countless hours practicing their effects, sleights, routines and handlings of props. They do their best to perfect their presentations, working out moves, buying the best equipment and choosing dramatic and artistic effects, all in an attempt to make their magic as effective as possible. This is as it should be but, there is much more that must be considered for a successful magical performance.

Before the audience sees any magic, they see the performer. From the moment the magician walks out on stage, he must come across as a consummate professional. He must *own the stage*. His clothing should be of the highest quality and fit perfectly. His personal grooming must be impeccable and his posture and stance should be upright and confident. He must look like he belongs there and has something worthwhile to show his audience.

As a magician, you should not hesitate to have full dress rehearsals in front of a mirror. Be totally honest in assessing how you look, stand and move. Take notes and make adjustments until you are happy with your presence and your appearance. Your stage bearing is as important as your magic and must be thoroughly practiced. Do not settle for second best with any part of your looks or demeanor.

Along with this, the proper placement of props is vital. You don't want to stop your act midstream to look for an item or turn your back to the audience while diving into a case to find something. Those props should be right where you need them and you should know exactly how you will dispose of them once you are finished. Do not leave yourself with your hands filled with paraphernalia at the end of your routine which restricts a gracious applause posture. Your confidence and the audience's confidence in

you depend on your smooth handling of the items you require.

Unless you do a silent act, speaking is *vital* to your artistic success. Your opening lines will immediately set the tone of your show and there must never be one moment when you are at a loss for words. Your speech must be clear and concise and you must know at all times exactly what you are going to say. This script must be carefully thought out and written down. Recording your dress rehearsals can be of immense value and you will often think of improvements to lines it as you listen to these recordings. Put in as much thought and practice to your speaking as you do for the rest of your magic.

Now we come to a vital secret that even many professionals overlook and that is the proper use of the stage. It is imperative to use *all* of your stage when you perform. Magicians often worry about the size and visibility of their props. They forget that their biggest prop is *themselves*. You must use your own body and its movements to create interest and hold the attention of your audience.

By way of illustration, let's consider one of the biggest types of shows possible. Rock concerts are held in huge arenas with audiences numbering in the many thousands. The artists' *props* are musical instruments which, with the exception of the drummer's cymbals, have little movement or visual appeal. Yet, because of the actions of the players, the performance becomes huge. It is the strutting and prancing of the artists covering every conceivable inch of space on the stage that makes the show so visually appealing. Take your clue from them.

When you are performing, do not stay glued to one spot. Move around and use all the area you have available. Walk forward and backward and to the sides as you work. This movement is attention getting and makes your show interesting. It is a direct contrast to the stationary condition of the audience and makes you look larger than life. Do not overlook going directly *into* the audience. Many artists think there is a boundary between the stage and the audience that cannot be violated. That is not so. Crossing over into *their* territory is very effective and somewhat thrilling for the spectators. David Copperfield uses this technique quite often and even presents a few effects right in their midst.

All of the above advice, regardless of the type of magic you may specialize in, is sound. Magic is a performing art and the rules governing any such art apply to ours. Let us keep them in mind and remember the best magic in the world will be either augmented or diminished by these other factors.



VOLUNTEERS

It is this author's contention that you are far better off choosing someone from the audience to help you rather than asking for volunteers. Most people watching a show do not want to go up on stage and be a participant. They would rather sit in their seats and enjoy the performance from there. Anyone who eagerly wants to be part of the action is very likely to either be a show off or a skeptic out to try to ruin the mystery the magician is seeking to create. If chosen, there is a good possibility they will be boisterous, obnoxious or do everything possible to mess you up. Their reasons may be varied, but the result is the same. You will not have a successful performance. This does not apply to children, of course. Most children will willingly volunteer with nothing but good intentions in mind. Adults, on the other hand, are a different matter. It is far better to just seek out a suitable participant and ask them nicely to join you on stage. If the person is a bit nervous, that is fine. Just reassure them they will not be embarrassed and treat them with respect. They will be far less likely to do anything wrong and you can count on them to follow instructions.

There is a very simple trick for finding the best person to choose. Walk into the audience announcing that you intend to select a helper. Look at their faces. Little smiles or clever smirks should be taken as a warning sign. Avoid them. Instead, seek out those who tend to look away and not make eye contact. Begin a conversation with them and then gently guide them to the stage. Call for a round of applause as you do this. Just make sure you choose someone who does not have a mortal fear of being in front of a group. They are as easy to spot as the troublemakers.

There are also different techniques when it comes to choosing men or women. Men tend to be a bit more outgoing in such a pub-

lic situation, where women tend to be quieter. You must understand the dynamics of a typical audience. Men are often out to impress the other men in the room. They look for opportunities to make jokes or say clever things. Women are usually more concerned with their outfits and how they look. In all probability they have been planning the occasion for weeks and have carefully chosen what they will wear and visited the hairdresser.

It is a good plan to walk over to a table and start a conversation with everyone. It only takes a minute or two to determine from the feedback what the different personalities of the group are and decide who will fit in the best with the effect you have in mind. This also gives you the opportunity to walk to a different group if you do not feel anyone is suitable to be your assistant. It is far better to take a little longer to get the right person to help you than dealing with a problem spectator that you already have on stage. Choose them carefully.

Once you have the person on stage, immediately ask a question or two to relax them and get them used to following your lead. Always treat your assistant with the utmost courtesy and never use them as the butt of a joke. You should, of course, have a microphone on stage for anyone who assists you. Make sure this is placed in such a way that you can bring them over to it when they need to speak, but is not constantly right in front of them as you work. This will greatly reduce the chance of that person saying something at an inopportune time.

Also, make sure that whenever you speak to your assistant, *look them right in the eye*, causing them to look right back *at you* instead of into the audience where the large crowd may make them nervous or some friend might edge them on to do something mischievous. Give very straightforward directions for them to follow and make sure whatever you ask them to do is uncomplicated and easy with only one result possible. Finally, when the effect is over, always dismiss the assistant with a huge round of applause. This not only makes them feel good, but sets a good-natured tone for any future spectators you may ask up.

If you follow the above advice you will eliminate problem spectators by over 90%.



CONTROLLING SPECTATORS

Spectator problems are not only caused by problem spectators. Often, bad instructions, bad management or lack of control are responsible for a spectator not doing what he or she is supposed to do. Magicians commonly ask questions such as, “How do I stop the spectator from shuffling the cards when I just told him to cut the cards?” or “Why does the spectator always mess up when I ask him to read the prediction?” This and a thousand other such questions haunt magicians constantly. The quandary is only magnified when they see other magicians do the same routines without experiencing those troubles.

All problems will disappear if the performer’s instructions are carried out to the letter. The magician must develop the ability to give firm directions to his assistants without appearing aggressive or bossy. There are techniques to accomplish this. From the moment you ask a person to help, you should begin to subtly control them. Use innocent commands, politely given, such as, “Please stand right here and face the audience.” If you need to use one of his pockets, you might say, “Please unbutton your jacket and empty out your inner coat pocket.” If you are using playing cards, you might uncase them and then give him the case saying, “Put this box on that table.” All these instructions are unimportant to the working of your effect, but they get the assistant used to following your orders.

Once a precedent has been set, most spectators will continue doing what you ask without question. Do not give them an opening for improvising but be firm and exact. If you get someone who purposely refuses to do what you want, you probably have a troublemaker on your hands. Using this technique will allow you to find this out early on before any damage is done and will give you a

chance to dismiss them and get someone else to work with.

The second technique to controlling volunteers is to spell out exactly what you want them to do in *steps*. If you want the person to simply cut a deck of cards, do not say, "Please cut the deck." If you do, chances are he might shuffle the cards, draw out a bunch from the center or anything else instead of a straight cut. Instead, you should say, "Please take these cards in your left hand like this." Demonstrate how he should hold the cards by doing it yourself. After he has them you say, "Now lift off about half the deck with your other hand. Good. Now place them under the other cards. Good." Then you continue with, "Now do that again, lift some off the top and cut them to the bottom. That's great. Now cut them again."

You see, if you follow these instructions, you give the helper virtually no room to mess up. If you see him begin to do something wrong, simply stop and correct him. This method can be used with almost any prop you need the spectator to handle. Break each action you want them to take into steps and be firm with your commands with each of those steps. You are, after all, the entertainer and you have a right to expect your helper to do what you ask. Again, we are simply looking at a method to stop any accidental mistakes or misunderstanding by the assistant.

Another problem that can arise for many magicians and mentalists is when a spectator is required to read a prediction or say something that is the climax of the effect. Often, a whole routine can be ruined if the spectator doesn't do a good job with his task. This can be avoided by using a slight variation of the above techniques. When you first choose your spectator, immediately begin asking him questions requiring him to talk. Elaborate on what he says and strike up a mini-conversation so that he becomes used to speaking into the microphone. If he doesn't talk loud enough, simply ask him to speak louder and get closer to the microphone. Now you can continue with your effect with some degree of confidence they will not ruin the ending. You can almost guarantee success by getting the person to talk again just before the climax. You might say something like, "Has this envelope been touched by anyone else since I gave it to you? Where were you holding it? Can you tell

the audience if it is entirely sealed and what it says on the outside?” Finally, at the end you say, “Now open the envelope, take out the paper and read what it says *slowly* in a *loud* and *clear* voice!” Again, break it down into steps and get the spectator used to doing things *exactly* as you say.

It must be mentioned here that there are, unfortunately, some magicians who misuse volunteers. Many people may have been the victim of such a magician or were present when someone else was. Recall, if you will, how many times a spectator has said to you, “Are you going to embarrass me?” It is a shame, but that is the present state of affairs. You must overcome this perception by being on your best behavior at all times. Please, never embarrass anyone and always treat your audience with courtesy and respect.



NERVES

Nerves are a problem very few magicians like to discuss or deal with. Is it possible that each performer thinks he is the only one who, moments before walking out on stage, has a feeling in the pit of his stomach that makes him want to run off and abandon magic forever?

Stage fright affects all of us and there is nothing wrong with having a certain amount of it. Most successful entertainers know that if you aren't feeling some apprehension, you are on shaky ground. It is the nerves that give us our edge and make us attune to the audience's reactions and performing situation. Let's examine exactly what we are talking about to see how it is a blessing and not a curse.

You have probably performed your routines countless times in front of many different types of audiences in all kinds of venues. You are confident in your magic and personality and look forward to doing a good and rewarding job. And yet, each show is new and different and you never know just what will happen. Nerves are really just another word for *fear*. The fear is that you will not be accepted by the audience and that you will be disgraced. This might happen because you blunder, expose a method, have a difficult spectator or even that your audience thinks you look silly and that your magic is awful. Stage fright robs you of your confidence and makes you feel inadequate before you even begin.

To deal with the problem, you should first realize that it is your desire to succeed that is driving the fear. The fear stems from the fact that you are sincerely yearning to do a wonderful job and are afraid you won't. There is nothing wrong with that. You must turn that *fear* into *energy* and use it to monitor all the dynamics of the show. Let it be the driving force that causes you to stay on your

toes and make whatever necessary adjustments for any particular situations that arise. Remember that the greater the fear, the greater the capacity for you to shine as you are creating it all. Stage fright is just another word for *inspiration*.

It is easy to analyze this fear, but what do you do about it? The only answer is to *gird up your loins* and walk right out on stage. If you are well prepared, the stage fright will vanish within just a few minutes. The successful person is the one who just *does it*, regardless of how he feels inside. Like anything else in life worth achieving, you must be prepared to put yourself at risk for the sake of the job at hand. You should, however, remind yourself of all the hard work you have put into your art. You should think about how many hundreds if not thousands of people you have entertained and who have had their lives enriched by your performances. Do not sell yourself and your abilities short. Remember that you are a professional and have as much right to be on stage as anyone!

As you wait backstage, it is a good idea to mentally rehearse your opening lines. Saying them over and over again to yourself will give you something to do and build your confidence. One of the biggest causes of backstage jitters is that you will forget your lines. This will overcome that.

Deep breathing is also a tried and tested method for reducing nerves. Breathe out deeply through your mouth and then in through your nose over and over again. This will fill your lungs with oxygen-rich air which gives you a feeling of euphoria and light-headedness. Many pros use these deep breathing exercises just before going on to reduce stress. Walking around and pacing also is fine and helps to work off some of the excess energy. So, do deep knee bends and jumping in place. Never be afraid of what someone may think of your backstage antics. Do not get stage fright about your anti-stage fright exercises.

When it is time for you to begin, march proudly out in front of your audience. Smile and act like this is your home and where you belong! Speak your opening lines with power and authority even if you have a microphone. Make your gestures slightly larger than normal and do not be afraid to use plenty of body movement. You are on stage and you are expected to have stage presence. This means

making your own body the object of attention in an unabashed way.

Finally, the sound of laughter or applause is the best antidote for stage fright. Your opening effect should be one you are dead sure of and know is an audience pleaser. If you can do a quick and startling effect right in the beginning of your act, so much the better. The sooner you get some type of audience response, the sooner you will feel at home on stage.

Stage fright can be almost debilitating to some performers. Try to keep perspective and see things through sane reasoning. Do not make the mistake of assuming the audience is making fun of you when there is no reason to think that. Do not let terrible ideas build up in your head about what might happen in the worse case scenario. Think of only good and positive thoughts about your performance and let that become the self-fulfilling prophecy.



THE SHOW

There are about as many different types of magic performances as there are magicians. The diversity of our art is truly staggering and it is wonderful to see so many different approaches. Given this variety, it would seem presumptuous to give advice as to how these shows should be presented. There is one golden rule, however, that will truly apply to any magical entertainment.

The magical performance, from beginning to end, must have no one spot in it that is less important than any other. Good theater demands that your show consists of many different types of effects that inspire different emotions, but all are equally important and even the lesser ones demand the same detail of planning and execution as the most thrilling moments. There should not be one second on stage where the magician is thinking that he doesn't have to give it his best as this is a minor part of the show. In truth, sometimes a period of light humor or casualness requires even more thought to handle correctly in order to create the necessary contrast to make some later effect really shine.

It is this attention to detail that makes a magical performance into a piece of art. Even the casual handling of props must be rehearsed scrupulously so that nothing is left to chance. Every move the performer makes and every word he says must be perfect. There can be no such thing as a *dead spot*.

Let us examine an exaggerated example. Suppose you were looking at a painting featuring a portrait of an old man. Imagine the artist painted every detail of the face to such perfection that you were almost moved to tears. The look of the eyes, the character of the mouth and other features were flawless. Then suppose the artist slacked off on the background assuming it was not nearly as important as the face and painted it almost the way a child would,

using stick figures and sloppy colors. Would you be impressed by the painting? If you had any response, you probably would be stunned that someone could create one part of the painting with such artistic ability and not care at all about the rest. In truth, the lesser would destroy the better.

This is the same way a magic performance comes across if all the little details are not in place. The audience must think how can a man create such wonder one moment and then act so unprofessionally the next? More importantly, they will reject the greatness he might achieve because of the poorness of the rest. This does not even have to be a glaring example of some ineptness, but rather just a lessening of the dynamics of the show. That is far more common.

The performer, for instance, might have a number of effects in his performance that he considers *throwaway* items. These are filler numbers meant to take up a little time and give him a chance to set up the really big productions. There is nothing wrong with having some quick, smaller effects in your show, but even these must be practiced to perfection and presented with all the professionalism the entertainer is capable of. Even if these effects are not meant to create great mystery, they must be there for *some* reason. It might be a bit of comedy or a little oddity the magician feels has a place in his performance. Whatever it is, they should not be treated with disdain just because it is not a huge production piece. If they cannot be given the attention they deserve, they should be left out.

Another even more glaring offense is a magical number the magician doesn't get quite the reaction from or has trouble performing, and so, runs through it as though to get it out of the way. This is disastrous and must be corrected. Nothing will make your show look more mundane or make you look like an amateur than this approach. If you cannot perform an effect the way it needs to be performed, or if you cannot get the kind of reaction from it that you know you should get, please *leave it out* until you can fix it! Yes, you have to break in certain effects and that is not what is being discussed here. Whenever a new item is added to your show, carefully examine your performance and the reaction it gets and then make whatever changes are necessary before performing it

again. To continue to just do the effect without making this effort will only prolong the problem and make it a permanent fixture in your show.

It is also common for a magician to start out strong and then fall back into a relaxed and uneventful continuation of the performance with a just few highlights that shine. This usually happens because the magician has two or three real specialty items he is very proud of and has worked hard on, but has not given the rest of the show the same attention. That part is ordinary and commonplace. Again, this is courting disaster. The *special stuff* will pale in relation to the rest of the show instead of vice versa. It will be wasted.

The magician must consider his entire performance, from beginning to end, to be equally important and must give every item in it the greatest attention and effort. A great way to get into the proper frame of mind is to treat each effect as though it was a separate show unto itself. Pretend this is the only magic you can do and you must base your whole reputation on this one number. Given that mental state, you will be guaranteed to perfect each piece and give it the best you have. Even small segues from one effect to the next must be viewed with the same enthusiasm. You should work on what you will say, how you will move, where you will put your stuff, etc. Everything must flow and be professional.

Finally, you must consider your present show to be your *final* show. Many magicians make the mistake of considering their current act to be only a temporary one and have a vision of building it up with larger and more elaborate pieces. They are always working towards some imaginary, future show. Please do not think that way. Make up your mind that whatever you have to work with now is what you should put all your energies into. In all probability, you will always be looking for something better, but you cannot treat what you are currently doing as inferior to those expectations. You must come to realize that the routines and props are secondary compared to your own professional ability and knowledge. *You* are the show and not the gadgets you cart around.

PART FOUR



NEVER TELL THEM WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO

This advice is almost always given in beginner's magic books. The general idea is if the audience does not know what is going to happen, they won't know what or where to watch. For a beginner, this is probably good advice as it teaches misdirection and shows the newcomer that he must make his *secret moves* without the audience's knowledge. The problem with this first *golden rule* is that many magicians come to believe it is gospel and continue trying to adhere to it throughout their career. They attempt to make everything they do come as a surprise and don't consider a magical routine to be worthwhile if the ending isn't some kind of shocker.

The surprise element in magic can be effective if used sparingly, but much of the power of the art depends on the audience knowing beforehand what is going to happen and knowing that it is impossible. Surprise is like a strong spice in cooking. It can add incredible flavor, but if too much is used, it will ruin the dish. Likewise, if every effect you perform ends in a surprise, the audience will soon grow weary of that stratagem. Also bear in mind that many surprise endings are almost a mild form of a *sucker* effect and those types of routines often insult the audience and tarnish magic.

There have been many effects ruined because the magician wanted to add that *surprise* ending. They will take a classic and strong routine and change it in an attempt to get that *kicker* ending. What they usually wind up doing is to destroy the inherent magic and turn the whole procedure into a non-magical event.

There are countless magical effects that don't rely on surprise and are, in fact, enhanced by the audience's expectations. By informing them of what you intend to do and then by setting up

conditions that make it impossible for you to do it, you create a wonderful magical experience when you are successful. Most people consider Houdini to have been the greatest magician who ever lived. Houdini's escapes were performed with the audience knowing exactly what was going to happen. That was the basic appeal. The Amazing Dunninger did not surprise his audiences by doing something unexpected, but rather did exactly what he told them he was going to do. They knew what he was famous for and came to see that. Even today, modern magicians advertise their latest illusions on television, telling the viewers exactly what is going to happen in their specials.

More importantly, if you are looking at the surprise element to get you by whatever means you need to accomplish your effect, you are really in trouble. If your magic is not strong enough to withstand the audience knowing what is going to happen beforehand, your magic is weak. Often when the question is heard, "*Can you do that again?*" it does not mean the audience was so impressed that they want to see it one more time. Instead it means, "*OK, you fooled me into not looking at the right thing the first time. Do it again and I will catch you!*" That is not the sign of good magic.

If, on the other hand, your magic is so good that you do impress someone using the above methodology, they are bound to want to bring someone else over to see it. If the routine is not strong enough to stand up without that surprise element to supply your misdirection, you will have to beg off or ask the first person to leave! Taking this logic to its own ridiculous conclusion, you would never be able to repeat any effect for the same person, either immediately or at any other later date if the surprise is necessary to create the mystery. That, of course, is nonsense.

Please do not misunderstand; surprise has a definite place in magic, but it has to be used in the right way. Compare its use in legerdemain to its use in a horror movie. If the man with the axe keeps jumping out every two minutes, we get quickly bored and consider it to be a terrible movie. If, on the other hand, the movie holds back with the moments of shock, with the axe guy only jumping out once or twice and at a time when we least expect it, then we are scared out of our minds and the surprise element has been ef-

fective. That is exactly how this strategy needs to be used in magic.

To sum it up, surprise is a method to add a dimension to magic. It is extremely effective, but cannot be overused. Take the time to analyze your magic to make sure you are not blindly following advice that you have never thought through. Consider your act with the mind of a playwright and use the tools of good drama wisely. Never use a strategy such as surprise to cover for bad magic.



NEVER REPEAT A TRICK

Notice we purposely used the word *trick* in the above title as this *golden rule* is as wrong as the language. Again, this advice comes from the beginner's book of magic and is meant to help the novice magician when first learning magic. Because many of the simple effects in these books rely on very transparent or self-working methods, the newcomer is cautioned against ever repeating a trick for the same person. This may be good advice for the novice, but certainly not for the advanced magician. Still, many performers carry that belief in their minds and never question it. Like the previous chapter, this *golden rule* needs some careful examination.

Hopefully, it is our goal to create such strong magic that the normal person is completely taken aback and is overwhelmed by the enormity of our deeds. Is it any wonder that, if this should happen, that person would want to see it again or have someone else see it with him? In this case, the request is a legitimate compliment and is not meant to be malicious. So where does the magician go if he cannot repeat his effect? Does he claim his powers have worn off or the moon has moved from the position he needs to do it again? It is not acceptable to decline someone's sincere request because you don't feel you have the ability to do it again without being caught. Your magic needs to be stronger than that and should be able to hold up to repeat performances.

All the great magicians who ever lived had a few favorite effects they made their reputations with. They repeated these routines over and over again and often for the same people. Their magic was *good enough* to allow them to do that! That is the problem with this rule. It assumes that the average person will catch onto the magician if he sees the same effect more than once. If magicians buy into that and believe they only need to be good enough to mystify a person

once, they and their magic will never move further on. Here is the new rule: *The magic you do must be good enough to be repeated!*

This problem may be the reason many magicians feel the need to have so much material at their disposal. Since they cannot repeat themselves, they must have a huge repertoire of effects to get them by. The problem is, or course, they do not *perfect* that many effects and none will really shine. They do not practice and think through the routines with enough vivacity to get them to the point they can bear repeating. This may also be why so much TV magic has to be doctored to withstand the replay button. In contrast, if you were to study videos of some of earliest television performers, you would see their magic was strong enough to stand up to that kind of scrutiny.

The only logical solution is to make your magic *that good*. Do not be satisfied with anything less than perfection and choose only those effects that can be repeated if they are flawlessly performed. Remember, if they really can bear repeating, you will only need five or six routines to get you by the whole night. Many, many professionals have had whole careers with little more than that. With the thousands of books available, there is plenty of material to choose from.

Along these same lines we should also mention those effects that are accomplished by a supposed *mistake*. The simplest might be where the magician purposely drops a coin, goes south with it during the pickup and then vanishes it. This may work fine, but if he is going to repeat the effect, the audience may begin to think of him as a very clumsy magician, indeed.

Another ruse that has seen some print and that has received popularity is a Center Tear routine based on having the spectator *print* a name in the circle of the paper. When he is done and the paper is refolded, the magician asks if he wrote the name in *curative*. When he says he didn't, the magician takes back the paper, rips it up (doing the Center Tear) and gives him a fresh piece to write the name again. It is during his second writing that the magician unfolds the stolen center and reads it. Now this may sound like a very clever way to do the move and it certainly is. The problem comes with repeating the routine. If the climax has the desired effect on

the spectator, that person will certainly come back with a friend for you to do it to. (The author does his own Center Tear over fifty times a night!) What does the magician do then? Does he repeat the *mistake* or use a different method? Doesn't it just make more sense to have a technique which doesn't require such a ruse?

The bottom line is to choose your effects carefully and spare no time or effort to make them into real magic. In addition to being practical, you will get an enormous feeling of accomplishment by achieving that highest goal.



IN THEIR HANDS

Another *golden rule* magicians love to quote is that the strongest magic you can do is magic that happens in the spectator's hands. This wouldn't bother the author so much if it wasn't responsible for the over-abundance of magicians doing sponge ball routines!

On a more serious note, the logic of the statement is what is most troublesome. Obviously, if we consider what is recognized as the greatest magic feats of all time, only a small portion would be those that happen in the spectator's hands. All the great stage acts of the ages, the manipulative acts, the illusion shows, the escape acts, the mind reading shows and even the close-up acts have and had most of the magic happening in the *magician's* hands. That is the way it is supposed to be because he is the one who is the magician. We are not saying that magic in the spectator's hands is not good – there are some wonderful routines – but to say it is the strongest is just not true. Like the *surprise factor* mentioned earlier, magic in the spectator's hands should be used sparingly and carefully to achieve the maximum benefit of the strategy.

You may be wondering why this seems so important as to devote a whole chapter to. The answer is it demonstrates how a magician can get an idea in his head and base all his thinking around it. Some magicians go out of their way to do as much magic as possible in the hands of the spectator thinking it will increase the mystery value and their prestige as an entertainer. Such is not the case. First, it is very dangerous as it opens too many possibilities for people to do the wrong thing, purposely or not, that will destroy the outcome of the performance. But even more dangerous is the idea that you divert what is supposed to be the *cause* of the magic, i.e. the magician, to somewhere or something else. By redirecting the climax to someone else's hands, you redirect and lesson the

power of the magician.

Along these same lines, some mentalists make a similar mistake. In an effort to be clever, they rework mentalism effects so that the spectator seems to read minds. Again, on a very basic level, this shifts the origin of the mystery from the mentalist to the spectator. The basic effect becomes diluted and weakened.

Both of these situations can be easily altered to remedy the problem. In the former case, the magician can place his hands on those of the assistant holding the article and appear to work his magic *through* his hands. Likewise, the mentalist can stare into the eyes of the spectator and appear to project the thought into his brain rather than give him some type of temporary power to read someone else's mind. In both cases, through a minor change, the magic is strengthened and there is clarity of purpose.

The whole point of this argument is to show that often, in an attempt to follow what is supposed to be some kind of magic law, magicians weaken their acts in the process. Yes, on the surface it would appear that magic that happens in the hands of the audience with the magician nowhere around would seem a lot more impossible. If, however, the source of the effect becomes hazy and the magician has less of a hand in it, there is a reduction of his magical significance even though the audience knows he is ultimately responsible. We must learn to concentrate on theatrical excellence rather than the difficulty of puzzles. Just like making bigger things disappear on television eventually proved disastrous, magnitude of effect doesn't equate with quality of effect.



THEY WILL FORGET THEY WROTE IT DOWN

Although this *golden rule* applies to mentalism, you can adapt the argument to other areas of magic.

It is often advised in mentalism that, after a person has written something down, to not refer to the writing anymore. Supposedly, they will forget they wrote it and you will appear to be just working with their thoughts. Carried to the extreme, spectators are often approached before the mentalism performance and asked to record their thoughts on paper clamped to clipboards and then to retain the paper. These boards, of course, allow the mentalist to secretly find out the information and use it during the show. We often wonder how many of these mentalists get up on stage and start *reading minds* only to have someone stand up and say, “*Yes, that’s the name I wrote down earlier!*” The idea that people will forget they wrote something down is just absurd. Not only will they remember it, but they will later talk about it extensively, especially if they feel they were *used* during the show to lead the audience to believe that nothing was written.

The best way to handle the writing aspect of mentalism is not to try to hide it. From the audience’s viewpoint, there is nothing wrong with writing it down as you apparently don’t see it. There are many logical reasons that can be given for such writing such as for verification, helping concentration, etc. You can even pick up the paper as a supposed demonstration of clairvoyance. All of these are better than the *hope they don’t talk* tactic.

This same philosophy can be applied to an area of general magic that gives many magicians problems and hours of worry. This is one golden rule we won’t dispute. It is this – *if you can’t hide it, do it*

right out in the open. It is far better to do something right in front of the audience than to furtively fumble with it. If you need something from your pocket such as a thumb tip, simply put both hands into your pockets, talk for a few seconds, then come out wearing it. If you need to vanish a silk in a pull hanging behind your back, rather than struggling to get it, simply place your hand on your hip as you hold up the silk with your other hand. Stare at it for a moment and then come forward with the pull. If you have a coin palmed that must be ditched, don't try to make a turn and secretly drop it into your pocket. Your elbow with stick out and it will be obvious you are doing something. Instead, reach into your pocket to take out something and drop the coin in then.

One very famous mentalist uses a tried and proven technique for his act where audience members write down information on slips of paper and then seal them into envelopes. The mentalist steals some of these slips as the envelopes are being passed out. Rather than try any clever moves, he just sticks the papers into his pocket as he walks along. He does it with such a *matter of fact* attitude that he is never questioned. He has been using this procedure for his entire career.

This subject brings us back around to TV magic and the use of camera tricks. Often, such editing is used to cover a secret move in an effort to make an effect appear more impossible. The end result usually looks *rigged* even if the secret is not exposed. It would be far better to go for a lesser effect that didn't require such editing. Not only would the production look more mysterious, but it would be more honest.



MAGIC VS. MENTALISM

There has always been a certain rivalry between magicians and mentalists. Magicians tend to frown upon mentalism because many proponents of the art portray themselves as *real* and their performances are often accepted as such. They consider this to be dishonest. Mentalists, on the other hand, tend to look down upon magicians as mere *tricksters* who are far removed from what they do. They see what they do as child's play and not serious entertainment. Both viewpoints are entirely erroneous.

It has been the author's contention for over 35 years that mentalism isn't too strong, but rather a lot of magic is not strong enough. This has been proven over the last few years by the idiosyncrasy that when a magic effect becomes too strong, it is usually moved into a different category. Metal bending is considered telekinesis rather than legerdemain. Moving an object on the table is the work of a psychic, not a magician. Even when a mentalist does an effect that is clearly a magical one, such as linking together three wedding rings, it is considered in a different light. David Blaine's levitation stunt was considered to be something far removed from standard magic.

Magic must have meaning. It has to accomplish something desirable. When a mentalist stands on stage and apparently reads someone's mind, he is demonstrating an enviable trait. Adult audiences can visualize a power that could be immensely beneficial in their own lives. In contrast, when a magician turns a red silk handkerchief into a blue one, although it may represent skill, it does not characterize a power that the average adult would desire. This is what is lacking in a lot of magic and this is where the magician should concentrate his efforts when creating new material. He must touch upon themes that have real meaning in life. He must demonstrate

abilities the average person can understand and would want for themselves. When this is accomplished, magic moves up one gigantic notch.

There are all types of magic in the world. We expect a children's magician to use brightly colored props and themes that are appropriate for younger audiences. We know that a manipulative act is the result of great skill and appreciate it for that reason and the beauty it creates. We understand the dangers of the escape artist and thrill at the stunts he does. We appreciate the skills of the close-up card and coin worker and the brilliance of his moves. There are hundreds of different styles of magic for different audiences and purposes.

The same can be said about mentalism. There are hundreds of performers who excel at many different types of the art. They work in different ways for different audiences to achieve different results. They dress differently, act differently and claim different things. Some tell stories, some are comedians and some play the part of a professor.

The author sees a trend where more and more magicians are studying mentalism. As this happens, the dividing line between the two branches will fade. Already we see this happening on magic specials. The merging of the two will not lower the impact of mentalism, but will raise that of magic. More and more entertainers will understand what makes mentalism appealing and will apply it to other areas of magic. Likewise, mentalists should appreciate these efforts and understand that our art is not stagnant and must change.

There is always good and bad in the world. Our outlook and attitude is determined by what we dwell on. By keeping a positive approach to magic and keeping our sights on its ethical and continuing evolution, the future can only be bright.

Good luck to all of you.

PART FIVE



INSIDE THE FOLD

Effect: The magician walks out on stage holding a folded index card. He asks a person to stand and name a number between 1 and 1000. The spectator responds with the number 345. The mentalist walks to the spectator, holding the folded card at his fingertips. He hands the person the card and his hands are both seen to be absolutely empty. The spectator opens the card and inside is written “You will say number 345.” The card may be kept by the spectator.

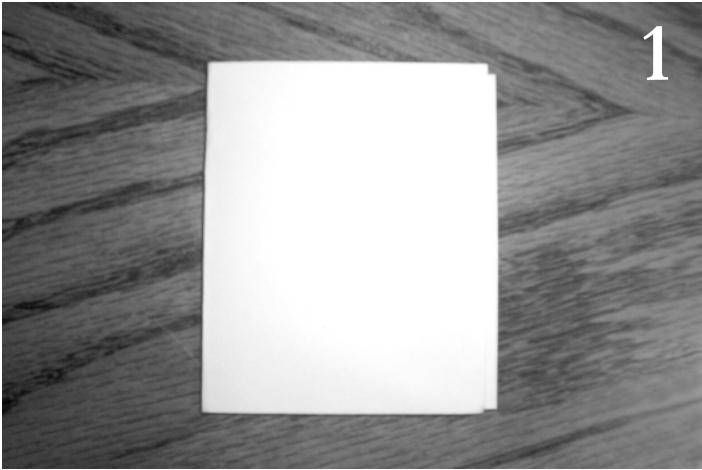
Although this is a mentalism effect, it is my sincere belief any magician can use it and, given the information in the previous chapter, hopefully they will!

Background: This effect is one of the most powerful I have invented in recent years. I use it constantly and it kills any audience! It is accomplished in as simple a manner as possible using standard principles and yet it is light years ahead of anything like it. You can adapt it for any kind of presentation and you can use a business card, an index card or even a folded piece of paper.

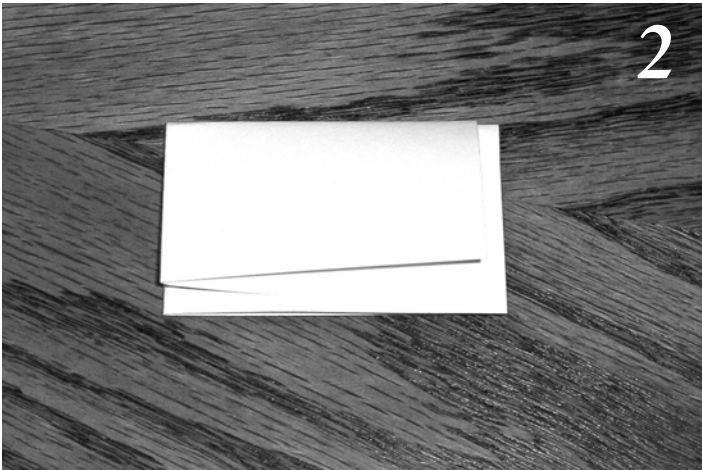
Method: The secret is the use of a nail writer or Swami gimmick. Do not be put off by this information. The moves and handling will give you an effect like no other. With this knowledge, you can do one of the most devastating effects possible.

The nail writer I prefer is the Sam Dalal brand. It is an under nail writer that is rather large and easy to handle. In truth, the moves of the routine require the use of such a writer. Rest assured they are incredibly priced and are the most practical writer you can use. The lead can be replaced from a standard lead pencil and it can be worn on nails that are very short. You will have to bend the wings to fit your own nail, but it is only a few minutes work to get a good fit.

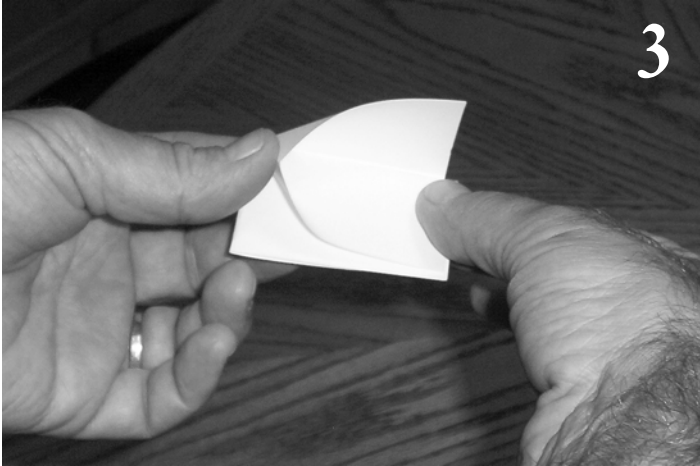
Handling: We will suppose you are using a 3-inch by 5-inch index card. Fold the card in half the long way, but offset the fold so that you have a small ledge (*Photo 1*).



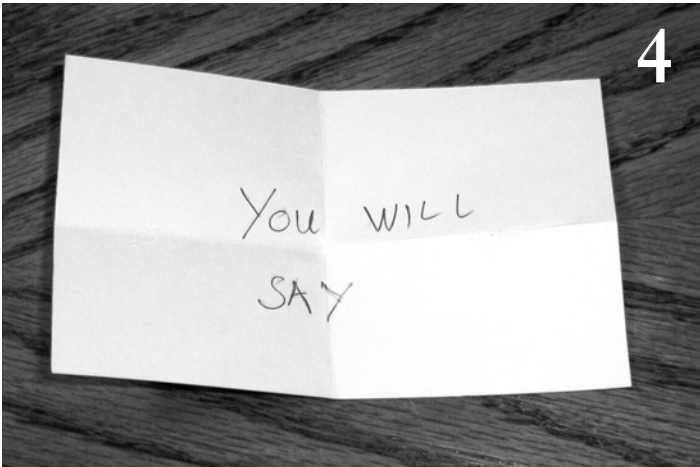
Fold the card in half the other way, also offsetting the fold and leaving a second ledge (*Photo 2*).



Push in at the corner of the card so that it bulges open as shown in *Photo 3*.



Now write in your prediction with a lead pencil to match your gimmick (*Photo 4*).

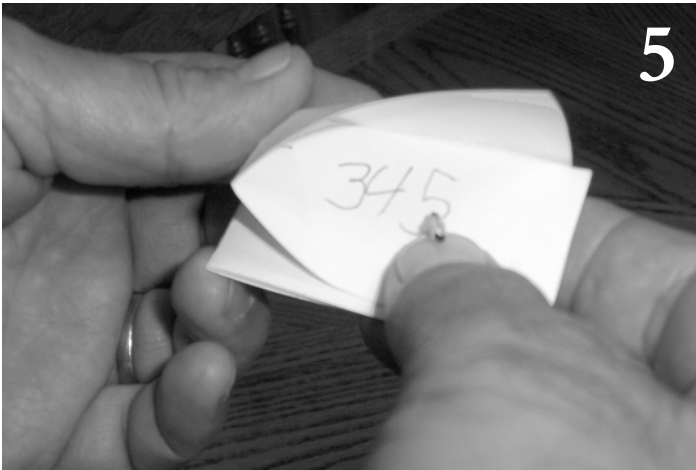


Notice that with the card thus prepared, you can insert your right thumb into the card and fill in the chosen number. You can do this while holding the card with just the right hand although I see no problem with holding the card between both hands.

With the card thus prepared and the nail writer on, you are ready.

Walk out on stage with the folded card held in your right hand. As you talk, flash both sides of the card so that it is seen to be folded. Don't worry about the gimmick. It is too small to be seen and your hand is in motion.

Have someone stand and ask them to call out a number between 1 and 1000. As you are doing this, hold the card in front of you with both hands. Use your left thumb to press in at the fold of the card causing it to bow open (*Photo 5*).



When the person calls out the number, repeat it out loud and write it on the card at the same time. The folded card conceals all finger movement and the whole process is very clean.

As soon as you have written the number, take the card in your left hand and allow the right to drop down somewhat. The opening in the card will close up. Show the card at your fingertips as you remind the audience that you walked out holding this folded card.

As you do this, use the tips of your first and second fingers to

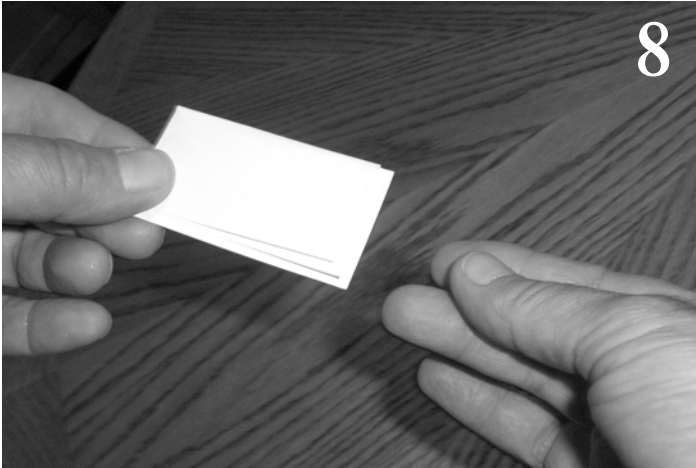
steal the nail writer off. It is held clipped between these two fingers at the pads (*Photo 6*).



Lay the card right on top of the fingers and hold it with your right thumb (*Photo 7*).



You can now offer the folded card to the spectator with the right hand, thumb on top. As they take it, simply let the card slide out of your fingers, keeping the right thumb over the gimmick (*Photo 8*).



Your hands are clean and you can let your right hand drop to your side as you walk back to center stage. Dispose of the Swami at your next opportunity.

Rehearse the routine in front of a mirror and you will see how perfect the moves are.

A PARTING THOUGHT

Every culture gets the magic it deserves.
— Dudley Young, from *Origins of the Sacred*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Osterlind has been a prolific performer and creator of mentalism and magic for his entire life. Besides doing scores of shows yearly for Fortune 500 companies, he's found time to create some of mentalism and magic's most original effects. Besides the Osterlind Breakthrough Card System, he's the originator of the Slow-Motion Surrounded Center Tear, the Radar Deck, Industrial Strength Link, ThoughtScan, the Osterlind Stainless Steel Blindfold, the Epitome and Ultra Boards, and many other marketed magic and mentalism effects.



His published works include *Dynamic Mysteries*, *Three Miracle Routines*, *Two Perfected Routines*, *The Very Modern Mindreader*, *The Perfected Center Tear*, and the best-selling e-book trilogy which consists of *Making Magic Real*, *Making Real Magic* and *Essays*. He also appeared in the *Challenge Magic* video in addition to the best-selling *Mind Mysteries* and *Easy to Master Mental Miracles* video series from L&L Publishing.

He lives in Kentucky with his wife, Lisa, and their two daughters.