

# *The Tale of Michael the Magnificent*

*Noted Yonkers Conjuror of the 1970s!*



*A Personal History by Michael S. Goldfarb*

*Photographs by **Fried-Louis Studio** – Sidney L. Goldfarb & Teddy Goldfarb*

In a world where you weren't constantly connected to "friends" by devices, and there wasn't an endless universe of available media to be distracted by continually, it was easier to focus and develop skills. In fact, it was actually *necessary* to have diversions.

When I was 14 years old in 1969, I was looking around for a new hobby. (In retrospect, I don't know why *girls* didn't occur to me!) I seriously considered taking up a musical instrument, perhaps the banjo, as I was far too much of a nonconformist to consider the guitar – *everyone* played the guitar. And while I would soon be making Super 8 movies with my friends, that was still a year or two off. No, the thing that grabbed me at that point was becoming a stage magician.

I was already very interested in magic, and had previously done some reading about Houdini, whose life fascinated me. And I already had a breakaway magic wand that my folks had bought me at a Times Square schlock shop, and some kiddie magic books with titles like *Tricks Any Boy Can Do!* And my mentor Irving Levitas had found me a first edition of the first English translation of the

*Memoirs of Robert-Houdin* in his trawling of the used bookshops on Fourth Avenue. (Robert-Houdin being the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Frenchman who was the first stage magician to dress in evening clothes instead of a mountebank's robes. He elevated magical presentation by giving it class, and was a tremendous inspiration to all the conjurers who followed. And yes: it was in his honor that young Erich Weiss took the stage name Harry Houdini.)

### **A Flair for the Theatrical**

It's worth taking a moment at this point to consider the world in which I was growing up. My mom was a larger-than-life *character*, a supremely confident only child and ex-Marine sergeant who had never been held back by traditional roles. Mom could play a variety of musical instruments, perform in amateur musicales, guess with near-certainty where a TV or film plot was going, write and deliver a speech that would bring the house down, and she never missed an opportunity to land a great line. My dad had grown up in Manhattan and fallen strongly under the influence of the movies and theater. Before he joined the Army Air Corps (before Pearl Harbor), he had learned photography while hanging around the New York WPA theater scene – he then ended up having a gallery show of his photographs in New Orleans while he was still in the service. Dad was a big film fan, and he exposed me and Linda to many great films growing up, pushing us on the path to being second-generation film buffs.

Both my parents had interests in theatrical performance, and every day at their photo studio there was a passing parade of bohemian commercial artists, oddball entrepreneurs, ad agency hotshots, and beatnik designers... So it's not really surprising that early on I developed a feel for the theatrical, for art and performance:



*"The Director" at around age 11*

Yet at the same time, I was essentially a pretty shy individual, quite lacking in self-confidence. Having been in some school plays, I realized that being a performer was a chance to become more extroverted within the safety of playing a character. Just maybe, I figured, if I acted more extraverted, I'd eventually become comfortable actually being extraverted. It's worth nothing that playing a musical instrument would have allowed equally well for this kind of performance... But hey, what could be more ego-boosting than appearing to have supernatural skills?!?

Since I was getting paid a little for my afterschool and holiday work at my parents' photo studio, I had some money to throw at this potential new hobby. It started simply enough with a \$15 mail order to the Top Hat Magic Company in Chicago. I'd gotten their catalog by mailing in response to an ad in *Boy's Life* magazine, as this was during my undistinguished career as a boy scout.



*The catalog wherein I bought my first magic equipment*

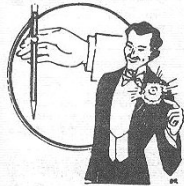


**No. 283 CHINESE EGG BAG**

Here's a NEW trick that every audience will like! The "bag" is a 12" x 18" oriental mat. Performer shows the mat on BOTH sides, then folds it as shown in illustration. He places a solid wooden egg into the bag. When unfolded the egg has vanished! Mat is again shown on both sides. The egg can be made to appear or disappear at any time. For a finish, the spectator takes out the egg, and instead it is a REAL LEMON! Complete with egg, mat and excellent routine .....\$1.00

**PICK-POCKET STUNTS**

Here is a little brochure worth many, many times its weight in gold. It tells you how to do apparent pick-pocket stunts to entertain your audience. None of them require practice since all are 'tricky' methods. Cat. No. 56. PRICE, 75¢



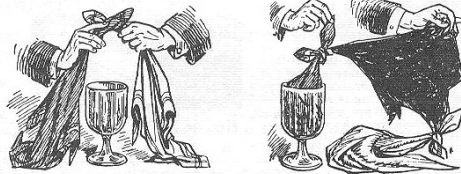
**MINGUS PENCIL TO FLOWER**

It is always good magic when the performer changes one object into an entirely different one.

Showing what seems to be an ordinary lead pencil (it really writes) the performer waves it in the air. Suddenly, it has changed into a large, colorful flower, which the performer places into his coat lapel.

No skill is required to perform this fascinating effect! Flower is made of leathers and will last a life-time. Everything furnished **No. 138** ..... Price \$1.50

**20th CENTURY SILKS**



This is the famous and popular silk effect. The audience is always baffled and delighted with it. Two silks are shown separately and then tied together and placed in breast pocket or glass tumbler. Now a third and different color silk is shown and rolled between the hands and suddenly vanishes. Both hands are shown empty. Magician takes the first two silks and there tied between them is the missing silk. Easy to do. No skill required.

No. 287 with four 18 inch silks ..... \$3.00

*Typical Top Hat Magic catalog page: the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Silks were part of my first order*

This was before I discovered that neighboring New York City boasted a number of magic shops catering to both professionals and amateurs, notably Flosso-Hornmann and Louis Tannen.



*1970 Flosso-Hornmann catalog*

The Flosso-Hornman store was an old-school business on the verge of closing that I visited just once, but Tannen's was very much a going concern. In fact, in between my first and second visit, they moved from the Wurlitzer Building (about to be torn down to be replaced with the big AT&T building on 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue) to a much larger suite in the new office tower in the Loew's State Theater building on the east side of Times Square. Lou Tannen's was a major business: they had a 550-page *hardcover* catalog, and a visit to their store was always entertaining, as it was usually packed, with both sales staff and customers continually demonstrating effects to one another!



*One of my every-show classics, from the Tannen's catalog*

For what now seems like an incredibly tiny amount of money, I was on my way to becoming a magician. I continued buying both apparatus and books, as I was intent on learning coin and card sleight-of-hand as well as larger equipment-based tricks. In fact – not to get too much ahead of things – I plowed virtually all the money that I ever made from performing after I turned pro back into more apparatus and books. I eventually amassed a cabinet full of apparatus and a nearly four-foot shelf of magic books, including some real classics. (By the way, Tannen's is still one of the world's premiere magic dealers! See: <http://www.tannens.com/shop/featured.php> )

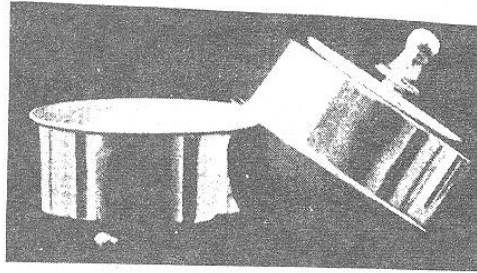
### **Conspirators**

Although it did take an awful lot of time practicing by myself, I didn't learn to do magic all alone. While I had the tremendous encouragement of my parents (especially Mom, who enjoyed the challenges of building my magic equipment) and a partner in Linda, two of my closest school friends, Kenny Bornstein and Tom Wrona, were also involved in amateur conjuring.

We'd soon be making trips into the city to Tannen's together and critiquing each other's performances. Kenny had his own brief kids-party career as "The Great Bornini;" Tom was mostly just fooling around with magic for fun. But I was the only one of us to really work at it, and I did far more paying shows than Kenny did. (But I always coveted his Egyptian Water Box, a very cool piece of equipment.)

• LOU TANNEN'S MAGIC •

DOVE - CHICK - RABBIT - PAN



DOVE PAN

The prop of 1001 uses. Limited only by your imagination. A beautiful piece of equipment you will be proud to own. One of the many effects possible is- Magician shows pan empty, he breaks an egg into the pan, salt, pepper and finally a shot of lighter fluid are added to the contents, a match is dropped into the pan and it is seen to burst into flames, the cover is now placed into position to put out the flames. Immediately removing the cover, the pan is seen to contain, two doves,

or a small rabbit, candy, or a cake that fills the pan, the load is the size of the pan..

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1) Looks small but will hold a large load.             | 5) Size-8" outside dia. 5" high.      |
| 2) Manufactured in high quality aluminum.              | 6) Rests on three ball like supports. |
| 3) Light weight, but sturdy.                           | 7) Priced low.....                    |
| 4) Quick action release.                               | 8) Buffed, polished and lacquered.    |
| (9) AND ABOVE ALL IT IS GUARANTEED! Price.....\$ 15.00 |                                       |

*Another classic device I used at every show, from the Tannen's catalog*

Soon I had acquired enough apparatus – along with a thrift-shop tuxedo – and practiced sufficiently that I could put together a short show. I pressed my younger sister Linda into service as my assistant, and when we were ready, we gave my show a test run at my uncle and aunt's apartment in the Bronx, with the whole family as audience, including my young cousins and grandmother. It was late 1969.



*First show: the old pull the rubber chicken from the top hat opening!*



*First show: note the table, made from a music stand by Mom*



*First show: proud Mom and Grandma*

As far as I recall, the family show went very well. My detailed records (yes, I was always a documentarian!) actually begin with my next performance, which was for Linda's homeroom class:

*Date : 12/19/69*

*Location: Hawthorne Junior High School, Homeroom 7-107 Christmas Party*

*Duration: 13 minutes*

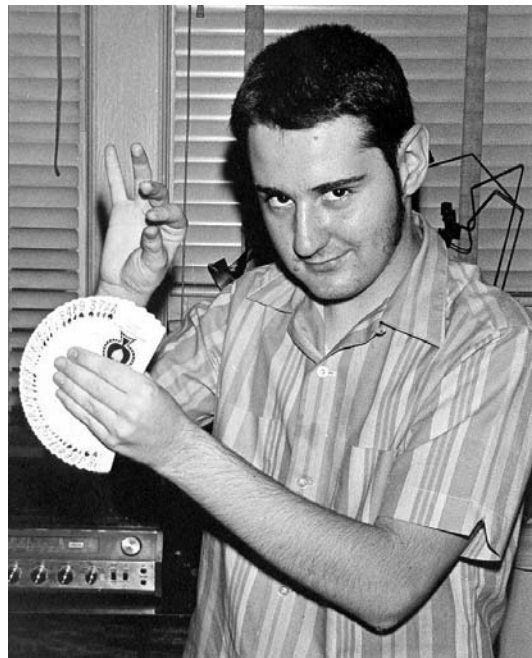
*Payment: none*

*Sequence:*

- 1. Egg Bag*
- 2. Blow Tie*
- 3. Ogre Card Find*
- 4. Rising Card Escape*
- 5. Cups and Balls*
- 6. Metamorpho Spots*

*Comments: Easy to fool, composed, nice kids. Good show.*

It's worth noting that only three of these tricks are completely apparatus-driven. The card tricks were sleight of hand, and the Cups and Balls – while requiring some special equipment, a set of aluminum cups and sponge-rubber balls – was a trick that required extremely skilled misdirection and numerous sleights to pull off. I spent a lot of time practicing in front of a mirror with those, and also with the Chinese Linking Rings, the Multiplying Billiard Balls, several methods of cut-and-restored rope tricks, learning how to make balloon animals, and of course, many card and coin manipulations. It took me close to a year of daily practice just to learn how to properly fan a deck of cards, but one day, after thousands of disappointments, it worked!



*Fanning finally mastered!*

### **Show Biz**

It was at around this point – we're well into 1970 now – that I turned to my Dad, the professional photographer who had trained at the School of Modern Photography and had experience with dramatic portrait lighting, to take some promotional photos at the Studio. The results were, of course, great!





*Promo shot: Dad's film noir lighting*

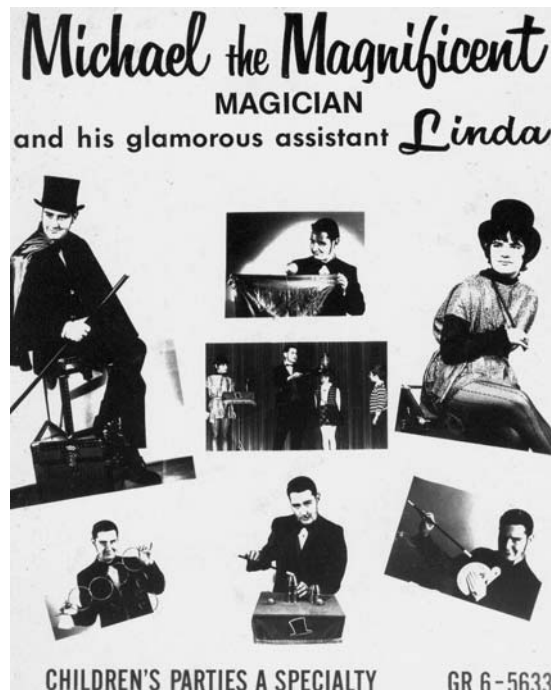


*Promo shot: Cups and Balls*



*Promo shot: with The Glamorous Linda*

Shortly after this, we gave a set of prints to one of our regular Studio customers and good friends, Yonkers commercial artist Shirley Liebers. This being long before desktop publishing, she got a professional type shop to provide her with the needed type by quietly adding it to a job for a paying client, and she soon put together our classic advertising piece. Dad shot a line negative of her paste-up, yielding the many high-contrast 4x5 and 8x10 prints that we distributed for years after:



*The famous ad*

My old friend Mark Meretzky – who had been so impressed with our experiences in graphic arts shop at Hawthorne Junior High School that he'd purchased his own 5x8 letterpress – printed my business cards. A bit later, I upgraded them with an artwork “cut” purchased from Tannen’s.



*My second business card*

### **Going Professional**

Now that I was becoming legit, it was time for my first paying show. The Selikoff family were friends from Temple Emanu-El, scouting, and school – Michael was in my class and Richard was in Linda’s. Their younger sister Susan’s basement rec room birthday party was the site of my first professional performance, and Mom took pictures:



*Selikoff show audience: Richard and Michael standing, Susan is second from left*



*Selikoff show: my cane turns into a silk!*

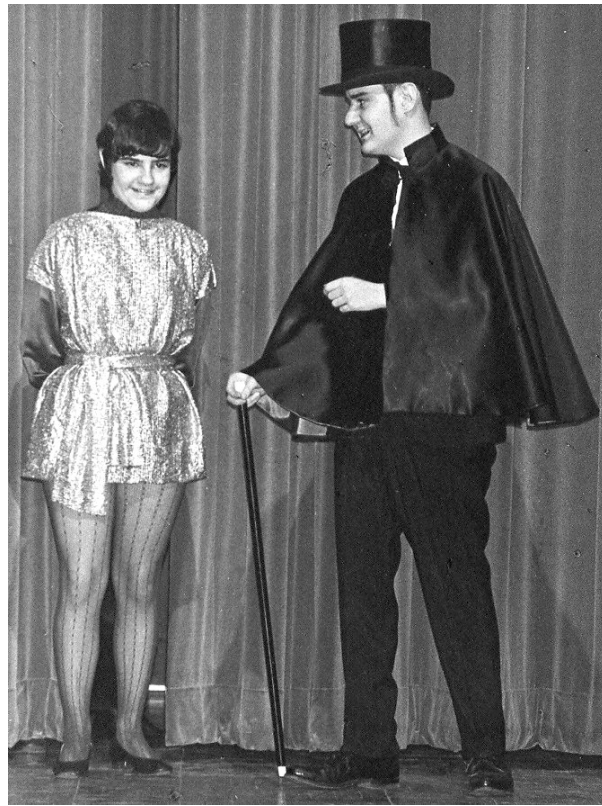
My records for this show indicate that I was paid \$11, which I split 70/30 with Linda. (Eventually, this would be modified to a more fair 55/45 split.) This was a 30-minute performance with 16 different effects. Here's the comment in my records:

*Comment: Fooled them (mostly), excellent audience except for Billy Breakstone. A very triumphant success.*



*Selikoff show: the lit candle is about to be covered with a silk and vanish!*

My records show that my next birthday party show also went well. Emboldened, I agreed to perform for free at the Temple Emanu-El Religious School Purim Party, which took place on an actual stage in the large Social Room. I wish I could report that it was a complete success. It started off well...



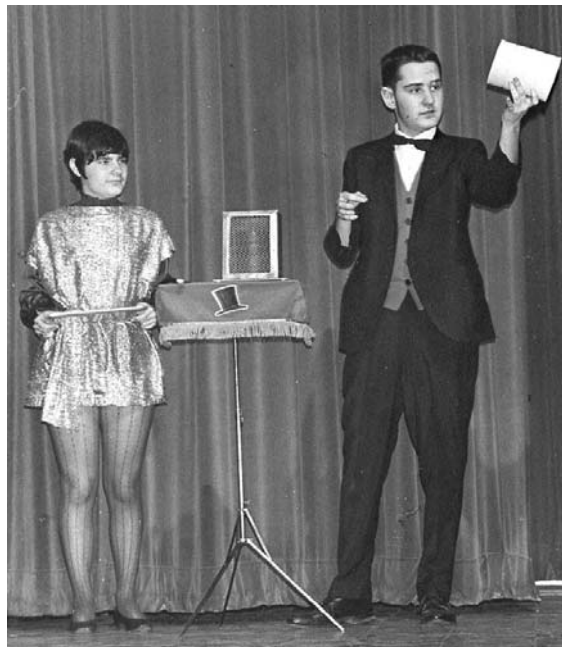
*Temple show: just after our introduction*



*Temple show: after the water in the Ching Ling Foo can (on table) has apparently been passed into her head, the funnel and other volunteer pumping her arm help retrieve it*



*Temple show: the Floating Ball tries to escape from the silk covering it*



*Temple show: the Square Circle (made from cigar boxes and a spray-painted coffee can by Mom!)*

This show began well, but eventually some effects failed, and I wasn't yet a mature enough performer to handle it – I freaked out, I pushed Linda, I stalked offstage:

*Comment: I was great until #6, then EVERYTHING went wrong, and at #11, I ran off the stage crying. A fiasco!*

While most of the audience thought that the failing tricks and my anger were an intended part of the performance, this was a traumatic experience for both me and Linda, as our family were Temple stalwarts, and it was an embarrassing semi-failure. But I learned from the experience and didn't give up. We did a far more successful show on the same stage for the Temple Teacher Parent Association the next year. We also later performed for the Riverdale Temple Couples Club, and did a Chanukah party for the Orthodox Congregation Ohab Tzedek. (Apparently, Jews love magic.)

### **The Busiest Magician in Yonkers**

Over the next two years, I did many more children's parties, a show for Cub Scout Pack 116, a show on Grandchildren's Day at the Daughters of Jacob Nursing Home in the Bronx (where Grandma was now residing), a show for alumni at Seaton College, one for some Hadassah ladies on North Broadway, the Masonic Club on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, and a show for handicapped children in a charity run by the McAnns, a wealthy Yonkers couple who had a daily radio show on WOR. Gradually, I raised my prices, reaching \$35 for an hour show as my performing career climaxed. Here's a typical show from my records:

*Date: 2/20/71*

*Location: Frumkin birthday party, North Broadway, Yonkers*

*Duration: 34 minutes*

*Payment: \$15 (Note: This is the model \$15 show)*

*Sequence:*

- 1. Vanishing Cane*
- 2. Silk Cascade*
- 3. Milk Pitcher -> Blow Tie -> Chen Lee Water Suspension*
- 4. Blondino, Vanishing Candle*
- 5. Ching Ling Foo Can, funnel (2 assistants)*
- 6. Card manipulation, Card in Balloon*
- 7. Blocko, Spikes Thru Balloon (2 assistants)*
- 8. Chinese Linking Rings (1 assistant)*
- 9. Dove Pan*
- 10. Square Circle*
- 11. Floating Ball (no patter, use 2001: A Space Odyssey music)*
- 12. Metamorpho Spots*
- 13. Appearing Cane*

*Comment: Best show so far, only problem: I dropped the Floating Ball! First time wearing full dress suit – huge success. 7 year olds are definitely the best age for magic – kids no problem.*

By this point I had upgraded my costume. (Houdini once said, "A conjurer is an actor playing the part of a conjurer" so *costume* is an accurate term.) No longer wearing a skinny-lapelled tux with a red vest and an ancient beaver top hat, I had acquired a beautiful set of tails and a collapsible silk top hat. Mom and I got this lightly used formalwear amazingly cheaply at the thrift shop in Lawrence Hospital in Bronxville. And Rhoda Royal – who'd earlier made my original short red-lined cape – now made me a gorgeous full-length opera cape, black peau de soie with white satin lining, very elegant. At the same time, Linda got a costume upgrade too.



*White tie and tails – the new full dress suit and hat*

### **One of The IMPS**

In 1970 I joined a New York-based club for young magicians, The International Magical Performers Society, aka The IMPS. While nowhere in the league of the major magical fraternal organizations (the Society of American Magicians and the International Brotherhood of Magicians), this was essentially a social club for trading secrets and constructively critiquing each other's performances, run by a respected NYC magician. It met twice a month on Saturdays in the wonderful Moorish-style YMCA building on West 63<sup>rd</sup> Street. Often a trip to Tannen's would be combined with an IMPS meeting. I even have a record of one of my performances there:

*Comment: I won fourth prize (I should have gotten second) and I was praised by a pro. A success.*

But I never made any permanent friends at The IMPS, and I stopped going after a year or so. Meeting a serious magician friend would have to wait until...

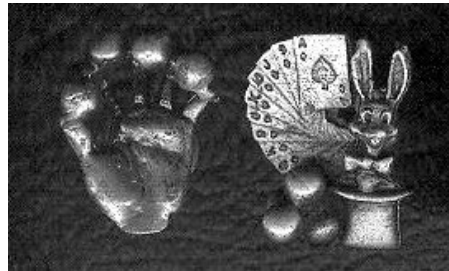
### **A Weekend in the Catskills**

In 1971, the whole family attended Louis Tannen's Ninth Magic Jubilee, a weekend event at Brown's Hotel in Loch Sheldrake, in the then-fading Jewish Catskills. This was a chance to see famous magicians in both intimate tabletop and large theatrical settings, and to meet other magicians... and to enjoy the food at a Borscht Belt hotel!





*Tie clip souvenir from Tannen's Magic Jubilee, made by Yonkers junk-jewelry manufacturer Arnold Gross – coincidentally a longtime customer of Fried-Louis Studio*



*More Tannen's magic jewelry by Arnold Gross: silver-tone billiard balls tie tack and copper-tone rabbit and accouterments cuff link*

The most important person we met was Bruce Kalver, who though still a teenager, was the busiest and most accomplished professional magician in Rhode Island. Linda and I really hit it off with Bruce and his sister Jeanette, and we subsequently wrote letters to one another, and visited with each other in our respective states. And Bruce taught me the best four-ace color-change routine I've ever known: I still practice it when I find I have a deck of cards in my hands.



**The Entertaining Magic of BRUCE**

*Bruce Kalver's 8x10 glossy by famed Broadway theatrical photographer Kriegsmann*

Bruce was from a showbiz family: his grandfather had been a stage technician with Houdini(!), and his mother Eunice – who was a classic stage mother – had been a saloon singer under the stage name Cori Calva. As a very busy professional making real money, Bruce had all kinds of equipment, including large stage illusions that I couldn't dream of ever owning and performing. Things like a many-swords-through-the-head box, which we had a gas trying out on each other.

We remained close with Bruce for a couple of years – Linda even more than me – but we eventually fell out of touch. However, it appears that Bruce is still the busiest professional magician in Rhode Island! (See: [http://tophatprod.com/bruce/Bruce\\_Kalver/About\\_Bruce.html](http://tophatprod.com/bruce/Bruce_Kalver/About_Bruce.html) )

We also went to Tannen's Jubilee the next year, 1972, but Linda had to stay home and care for our dachshund Dukie, who was recovering from an ear infection. Instead, family friend Rhoda Royal came with us. Rhoda was a talented seamstress and effectively our costume mistress: besides my capes, she was responsible for assembling all three of Linda's silver lame costumes.



*Caricature done at the 1972 Tannen's Magic Jubilee*

1971 was a very busy year for us, with the largest number of shows we ever managed. One of the comments in my records:

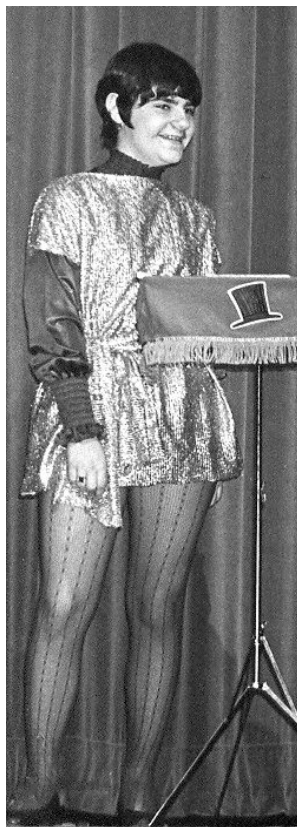
*Get this: four shows in seven days!*

Mom was still driving us to our gigs at this point; I didn't get my driver's license until 1973. So we were really a three-man team: Mom would schmooze with the adults before and after while Linda and I set up and packed to go, and – obviously – sometimes she took pictures.

### **The Glamorous Linda**

While Linda didn't have to go through the enormous amount of practice and rehearsal that I did to master new effects, she still had quite a difficult job. She had to efficiently move equipment on and off stage, keeping it properly set up, and always making sure that any gimmicks remained invisible to the audience. She handled all the choosing of assistants and shepherding them on and off – she'd had some experience babysitting and in the Temple Nursery School, and she was far more attuned to

dealing with little kids than I was. And at points she was valuable for misdirection, keeping the audience distracted when I didn't want them scrutinizing my own actions too carefully.



*Sometimes it was actually fun*

There's no question that our time as performing partners made Linda and I even closer than we already were. (Though we'd never really fought, or been in major competition like same-sex siblings often are.) After this baptism in fire, we would always have each other's backs.



*A late show: note the sturdy new table base – Mom took an old tripod and spray-painted it silver!*

## People of the Book

As I said earlier, I ended up acquiring a whole shelf of magic books. Some were purchased early, as part of the “Arrow Books” cheap-kids-paperback sales we had annually in School 13 and Hawthorne Junior High. Some I discovered in visiting the Fourth Avenue used bookstores – one of the very cool things we did on regular weekend jaunts into Manhattan led by city kids Mom and Dad. Some were books that we photographed in the Studio for customers who were small press/vanity press publishers (e.g., the 19<sup>th</sup>-century classic *Modern Magic by Professor Hoffman*). Some were found by Irving Levitas in his weekly visits to the Fourth Avenue bookstores.

But I bought the most serious books (along with *many* booklets/pamphlets explaining how to do particular specialties or individual tricks) from Tannen’s, who actively published magic books as part of their business. The most prestigious was *The Tarbell Course In Magic*, a famous series by Harlan Tarbell which had originally begun as correspondence course in the 1920s, and which consisted of six hardcover volumes at the time. (Two more volumes by Tarbell’s followers would be published later.)



*My Tarbell Course books*

Most volumes of the Tarbell Course cost me less than \$10 apiece. These books were quite comprehensive, well written, and copiously illustrated: I learned many, many sleights and apparatus routines from them. They are still considered the best set of general magic instruction books out there, and today, in newer editions with different covers, the volumes cost \$30 each.

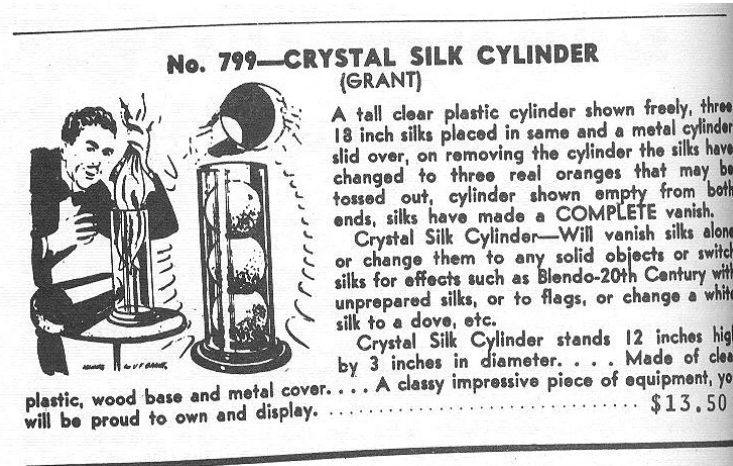
## The Repertoire

I have already mentioned some of the classic effects I performed regularly – the Dove Pan, Metamorpho Spots, Square Circle, Milk Pitcher, Ching Ling Foo water can, Cups and Balls, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Silks, Chinese Linking Rings, Mutiplying Billiard Balls, Vanishing Cane and Appearing Cane, Floating Ball – but a few more deserve a quick review:

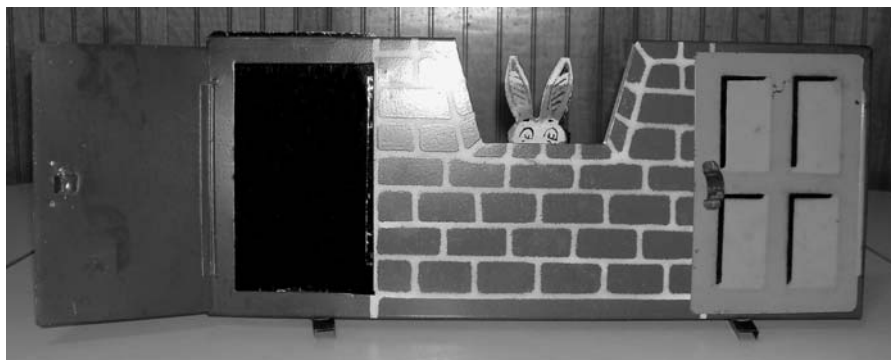
- *Spikes Thru Balloon*: an ordinary balloon is blown up through a metal tube; two spikes are passed all the way through, yet the balloon doesn’t break.
- *Everlit Candle*: each time you blow it out, it relights. A laff riot.
- *Phone-y-Ring*: a realistic looking black plastic telephone receiver wired to a small black box containing a phone bell and battery to power it; typically used to have the phone suddenly ring somewhere that you’d never have a phone. For example, I got big laughs at school having it

ring from within my book bag, answering, and saying angrily, “I thought I told you never to call me here!” (Now that everyone takes phone calls everywhere, it’s hard to imagine how shocking this was in 1971!)

- *Sammy The Seal*: a painted wooden seal “balances” a balloon on his nose; a card is chosen at random... and ends up on Sammy’s nose when the balloon suddenly breaks.
- *Crystal Silk Cylinder*: usually used to turn orange, red, and yellow silks into an orange, apple and lemon.



- *Chen Lee Water Suspension*: a glass of water passed through a metal tube comes out empty; passing it through again refills the glass.
- *Phantom Tube*: a Houdini invention, this large chrome tube is shown to be empty, then paper covers are applied to both ends and the wand is passed over; breaking the paper at one end, a very large amount of silks, paper flowers, and streaming garlands are removed.
- *Blow Tie*: three individual silks are squeezed into a thin, clear plastic tube; when blown out the other end, they are tied together.
- *Rice Bowls*: a classic effect wherein a single bowl of rice doubles and triples in volume. This was the most expensive piece of apparatus I bought – \$35 or \$40 for a really beautiful set of copper bowls... but I never mastered it sufficiently to perform it in public!
- *Run, Rabbit, Run*: a comic effect that always produced tremendous excitement – each time the audience tells me which door the rabbit is behind, he runs across to other one before I open it; at the end, he’s revealed to be behind neither door, but in my top hat!



I also became reasonably adept at making balloon animals – the long, single-balloon kind. I could make about two a minute to hand out to the audience: poodles, mice, dachshunds, giraffes, moose (the trickiest to get right), and a two-balloon crown for the birthday boy or girl.



*Amazing 15-foot colored paper streamers from my mouth*

### **Falling Action**

During the summer of 1971, I spent a couple of days involved with my friends in the creation of a little Super 8 film, a ten-minute, shot-in-sequence, spy flick called “James Corde, Secret Agent.” Though I only acted in it, I was hooked! Growing up around still photography as a second-generation movie buff, it was inevitable that I’d stumble into filmmaking... Soon I had bought myself my own Super 8 camera and projector, and I was experimenting with animation and special effects. In partnership with Jack Roth (whose “film company” was “Funfilmz Productions”) and Kenny Bornstein (“Action Films”), my own “Cerebrum Studios” would soon be making such classic 20-minute features as “The Strange Case of the Poison Pies” and “The Chronicles of Fear.” I even learned how to develop b/w movie film in the basement darkroom.

(In a very odd coincidence, our Saratoga Avenue house actually had a really nice darkroom that had been built along with the rest of house in the late 1940s by a Doctor Manzella, who was apparently an amateur photographer. Dad had two darkrooms in the Studio on South Broadway and didn’t need this darkroom, so it became mine, first for still photography – to prove that I was skilled enough on my own to deserve a Minox “spy camera” for my bar mitzvah gift – and then for my movie projects. I shot, developed, and edited films there for years. It was a great locale for shooting titles and doing tabletop animation with ordinary objects.)



*The dynamic young filmmaker in the basement darkroom in 1972*

Linda and I still did magic shows while I was becoming interested in filmmaking, but my attention was becoming scattered. Ironically, with experience I had become a better magician. From one of my late shows, the December 10, 1972 Ohab Tzedek Chanukah party:

*Comment: Hah! I had them eating out of the palm of my hand! Super Easy! I was in charge! I was funny and witty! Need more like this.*

But after over 25 shows, I more or less retired the Michael the Magnificent act during my senior year of high school. I concentrated on making movies in both Super 8 and 16mm (as writer, director, actor, cameraman, soundman, editor, film processor, etc.) and collecting classic films in Super 8 – plus I was still working in the Studio, and was also an aide in the Temple Religious School alongside director Irving Levitas. Linda was by now very involved with the Temple Youth Group and WEFTY, and once I got my driver's license, ferrying her around Westchester to various Reform congregations and the homes of youth group friends was often my job.

In 1973 I graduated Yonkers High and went off to college – Harpur College, the liberal arts component of SUNY-Binghamton. (Now generally called “Binghamton University”... though that started long after I had graduated.) My final official magic performance was at a dorm talent show on February 22, 1974. My records indicate that I did a 15-minute show with 10 effects, and:

*Comment: Standing ovation before drunken crowd at Endicott Hall Nightclub Nite at 12:30am. Triumphant!*

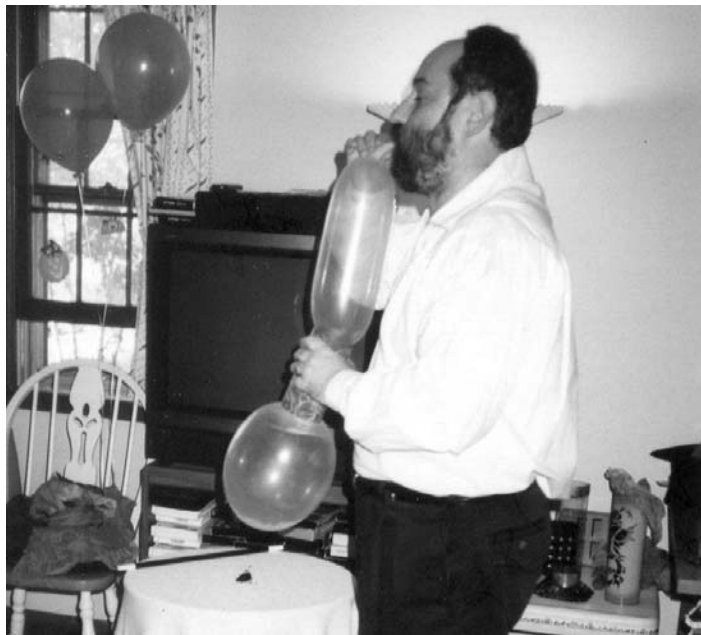
After closing the show and bringing down the house, I proceeded to rapidly drink six or seven screwdrivers, got drunk enough to dance with Sue Smith with wild abandon, and ended the night hugging the porcelain god. Ah, youthful exuberance!

### **Daddy Does Magic!**

But this wasn't really the end. Over twenty years later, when I had children of my own, I briefly revived the act twice. I did a short show at home for David's sixth birthday party in 1996, and another for Sarah's three years later.



*David's sixth birthday: Square Circle (young David at far right)*



*David's sixth birthday: Spikes Thru Balloon*

And long after I had retired as a performer, I still kept up practicing my card sleights. During college, when we moved from Saratoga Avenue to Courter Avenue, I carefully moved all my magic apparatus, most of it now housed in a used furniture piece that Mom (of course!) spray-painted an ugly brown and teal. The magic books were always in my own bookcases from when I lived at Tranquility Base (1979–1982) onwards. Most of the apparatus (apart from a box I always kept at hand) remained in Yonkers until we emptied the house in 2011 in preparation for selling it. The bulk of the apparatus is now in a storage unit I rent up in Fishkill that's filled with stuff from my parents that I can't bear to part with: lots of photo equipment from the old Studio, paintings, LPs, books, furniture, etc.



## The Old Trouper

Yet there's one aspect of this story still untold: Mom's latter-day career as a magician. With "thorough utilization" being a byword of the generation that grew up during the Great Depression, and Mom being a pretty theatrical being herself, it was perhaps inevitable. When Mom and Dad mostly retired by the early 1990s and began attending Elderhostels (which largely seemed a chance for them to have the away-at-college experience they had obviously envied giving me and Linda), they discovered that the final night usually ended with a talent show. Mom soon asked me to check her out on enough of the old magic apparatus to do a fifteen-minute bit.

While she didn't have my sleight-of-hand skills, she managed to learn several of the equipment-based tricks adequately. The Milk Pitcher and Ching Ling Foo can were pressed back into service, as were the Metamorpho Spots and Dove Pan (sometimes used to produce strings of fake gems as I generally did, sometimes an Israeli flag when there as a Jewish connection.) And Mom added her own finale to the act: with her old trumpet mouthpiece, she played the Rosh Hashanah Shofar calls on a length of garden hose! "The Mother of Michael the Magnificent" subsequently became the standard last act of the night at these talent shows for almost a decade, and – until her dementia began making inroads and she forgot how to do the tricks – she always wowed the crowd!



*"The Mother of Michael the Magnificent" brings down the house at the finale of an Elderhostel talent show in the early 2000s (the Dove Pan strikes again!)*



*Big finish: Mom plays the hose*

### **Thinking Back On It Now...**

I am really proud of myself for having gone through the entire magic trip in my teens. It provided focus, discipline, responsibility, and was a powerful bonding experience for me and Linda. And while I don't think it actually helped me evolve into a more extroverted individual as I had initially hoped, it was an invaluable experience. All the acting that I did later in school and camp plays, not to mention our own amateur films, used the performing skills that I'd developed as a magician. In future, when I needed to address a meeting at work... or run my cartoon appreciation course at The Learning Annex in the 1980s... or eulogize my parents at their funerals, I could draw on my inner Michael the Magnificent, and appear to be far more self-confident and in command than I really was.

As I look back on my youth and all of its unique aspects: growing up working in a family-business photo studio, being a pro magician and avid amateur filmmaker, being so involved with Temple Emanu-El and going to the UAHC Eisner Camp, my time in Boy Scouts and summers at Camp Read, publishing our sci-fi fanzine *Cerebrum*, the constant schlepping to revival theaters and classical concerts... it seems a far richer experience than I realized at the time. And apparently, Michael the Magnificent still lives on within me... which is pretty magical in itself.

*Note that I did not break my Magician's Oath anywhere in this article: I have not revealed the secrets or inner workings of any illusion or effect. There are some things about having been a professional magician that you never lose!*

### **More of *The Goldfarb Chronicles*...**

History of Fried-Louis Studio – <http://i5.nyu.edu/~mm64/goldfarb/fried.pdf>

Early Studio Portfolio – <http://i5.nyu.edu/~mm64/goldfarb/FriedLouisPortfolio.pdf>

Mom's Welded Sculpture – <http://i5.nyu.edu/~mm64/goldfarb/recklessmetal.pdf>

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