

Yo-yo pro recalls wandering career



Photo by Jimmi Harris

Eugene yo-yo professional Tom McCoy demonstrates a trick of his own invention which he calls "swing on a star." McCoy toured the U.S. and Mexico for seven years promoting Duncan yo-yos.

By BOB WAITE
Of the Emerald

On a sunny spring day a crowd of kids collect at the local shopping center parking lot. The yo-yo man is in town to perform incredible tricks and conduct a contest.

The kids have been practicing "walk the dog," "around the world" and "rock the baby" for weeks with hopes of winning a new yo-yo.

Many people have fond memories of their first yo-yo, of the contests and of the yo-yo man who did seemingly impossible tricks that they knew they could do if they had an official Duncan yo-yo.

Tommy McCoy is a semi-retired Duncan yo-yo professional currently living in Eugene.

As a child, McCoy enjoyed yo-yos but he did not become a professional until after he graduated from college in Wisconsin. As a student he perfected the yo-yo trick "swing on a star" during study breaks.

After he graduated, McCoy moved from Wisconsin to California in search of an accounting job. One day a yo-yo

pro came to town proclaiming his amazing star trick.

The pro made a string star while the yo-yo slept to one side. McCoy showed the pro how to do the trick while rocking the sleeping yo-yo beneath the star. The impressed pro invited McCoy to dinner where he offered McCoy a job.

After some quick soul searching, McCoy, the accountant-to-be, became a yo-yo professional.

From January 1972 until this year McCoy toured the U.S. and Mexico conducting demonstrations, contests and perfecting new tricks to promote Duncan yo-yos.

He traveled and performed, spending two months in each city. "I followed the weather," he remembers. "I'd go to a city and it would be just becoming spring. Then I'd go to another city and it would be just becoming spring there - it was great!"

McCoy regards himself as a true professional. While some yo-yo men learn a few impressive tricks and stop, McCoy spent his off-time learning and devising new tricks.

But even the best professionals make occasional mistakes. McCoy remembers losing control of his yo-yo during a

performance in Mexico and breaking his glasses. As a group of little girls giggled he quickly bowed out and went home to grope for his contact lenses.

He also learned the art of creative covering. "When I came back from Mexico the streaker fad had hit," he says. When the yo-yo would not return McCoy would shout, "Hey, there's a streaker!" and quickly rewind.

"Actually, people like it when even the professional makes a mistake," he says. "It got to the point where it was a mistake when I didn't make a mistake," he adds, explaining that it encouraged his audience and gave them hope.

McCoy says that there are currently two women Duncan yo-yo professionals and he hopes that more women will follow suit. Yo-yos have traditionally been thought of as a boy's toy. Women pros, he says, will help to remove the yo-yo's sexist stereotype.

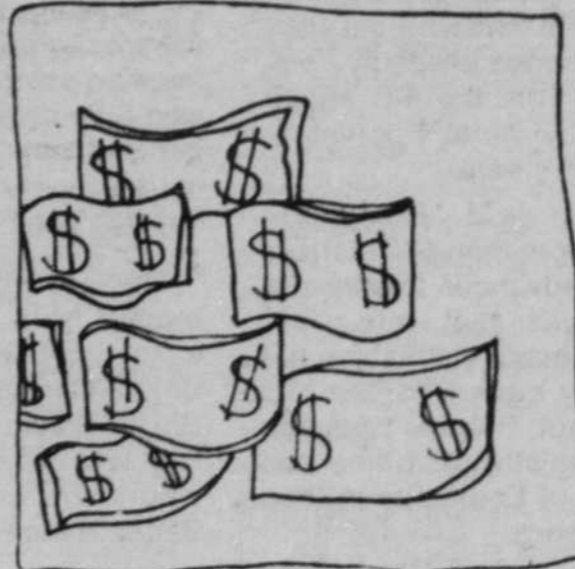
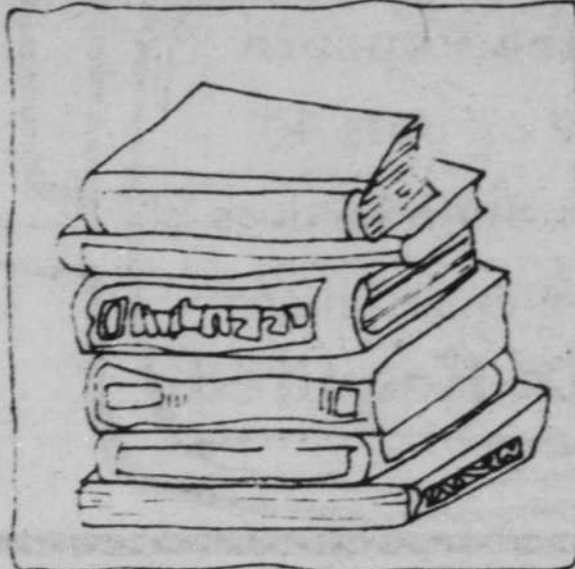
McCoy says that he always cautions kids to master the basic yo-yo tricks before attempting the more difficult ones. He concedes that it can be a dangerous toy, "but any toy can be dangerous," he shrugs.

Yo-yo popularity is currently in a slump, he says, although Duncan continues to promote it. For this reason, combined with the fact that "yo-yoing was just becoming too big a part of my life," McCoy has temporarily retired.

"The yo-yo goes down-up-down rather than up and down," explains McCoy. "The yo-yo is down right now, but like the way it works, it will always come back up again. It always has."

And so, states McCoy, will he.

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