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MAGIC MAN

S T E V E P R A D E L L

*His biggest trick
is getting people
to have fun*

While most students pay their way through school bussing tables, tossing pizzas or cashing Mom and Dad's checks, second-year law student Steve Pradell simply makes his bills disappear.

Well, not exactly. But making things vanish is part of Pradell's job. Magician, musician and mime, 24-year-old Pradell has been performing for more than 10 years.

It may seem strange that Pradell, an entertainer, is studying law — a profession not known for its levity or laughter. But Pradell feels the two occupations have a common characteristic: helping people.

A cum laude graduate from Brandeis University in Massachusetts, Pradell has been helping fellow law students smile a little more since he arrived on campus. Pradell has done two "shows" in Professor Ralph James Mooney's contracts-law class. He once dressed as an "illusory promise" (a non-binding contract) and centered all his gags around contracts. On Halloween he impersonated Mooney, coming to class wearing an enlarged photocopied picture of the professor.

"I had a 100 law students laughing for 10 minutes," Pradell said. "That's hard to do... everyone is so serious."

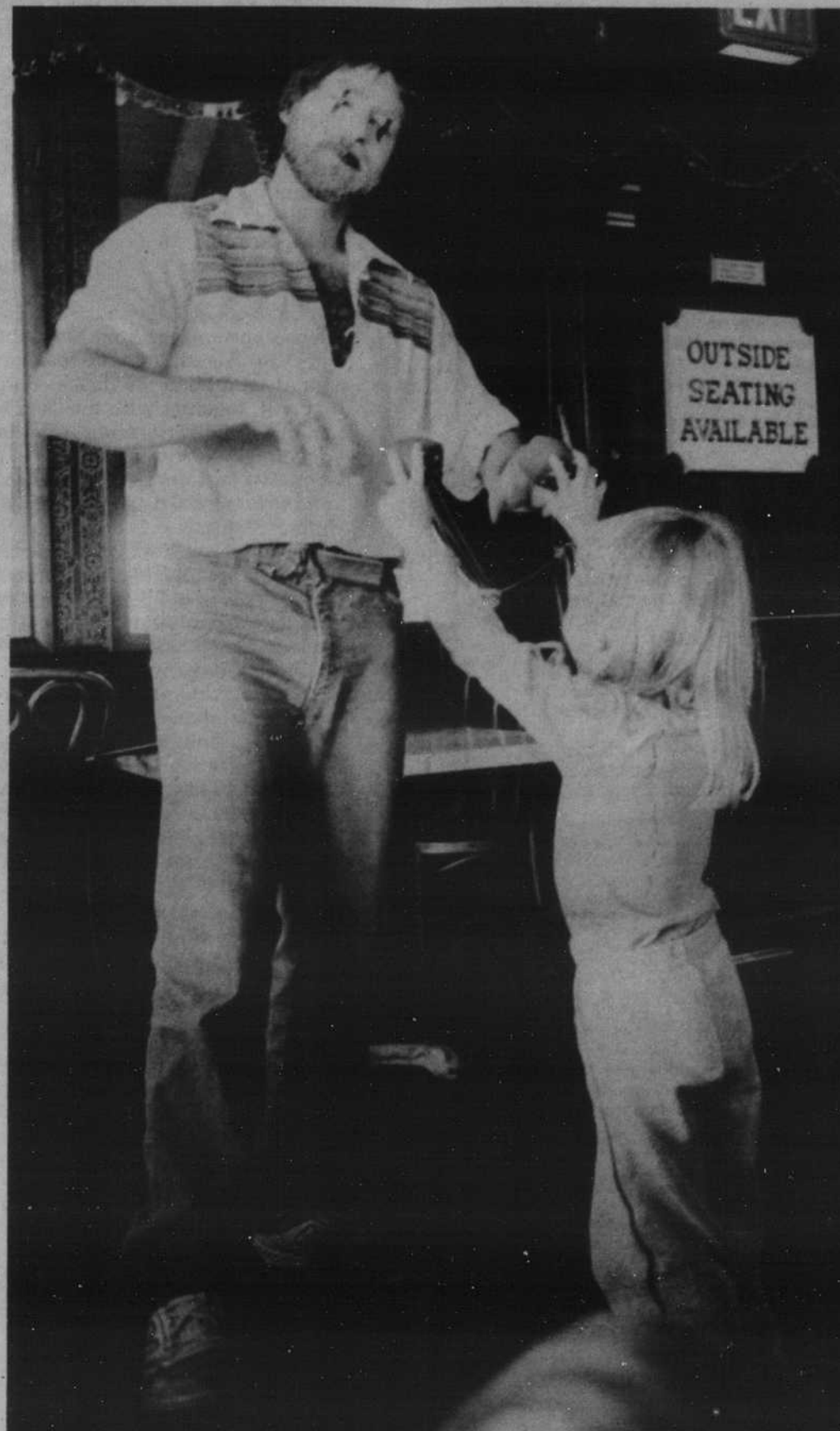
Doesn't he find himself a little overcome with the demands of school, his job and extracurricular activities, such as organizing the law school talent show? "It keeps me sane," Pradell said. "I have to do something every day — workout, play the piano... it's my release."

Pradell's performances provide an emotional release for audiences. He recently gave a benefit for Oregon Games for the Physically Limited at Pietro's Pizza parlor in Glenwood. The show was a fundraiser for the organization, which provides competitive games and sports for people affected by debilitating diseases, such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy.

Pradell started this show as a white-faced mime, but when Leanne, a pixie-ish girl with several teeth missing, whispered "magic words" into his ear, mime became talking musician.

As Pradell went through his repertoire of tricks, laughs and giggles could be heard throughout Pietro's. Wide-eyed looks of amazement and hands clasped over open mouths of disbelief told the magician he was scoring with his audience.

Some youngsters scored with jokes of their own, saying things like "I saw that on TV." But it didn't fluster the



Musician, magician and mime Steve Pradell clowns with one captive audience member. "...the kids are the magic," said the University law student.

veteran Pradell. "Some kids will do things that are more funny than you," he said. "Play it up — you're there to entertain. As long as they're having a good time, that's what's important."

The pizza parlor audience was small compared with the crowds of 200 or more he draws when performing at the Eugene Public Library.

"We have had a few disappointments in the past, but (Pradell) has good qualities that appeal to children," said Donna Hill, head of the library's children's department. "It's been so crowded when Steve performs, none of the staff could even get in to see him."

Clowning is a new venue for Pradell, one he doesn't view as an extra burden. "I get to be silly, have fun, tell dumb jokes and get paid for it," Pradell said. "I leave there happy. There's no better life."

Pradell's life has been varied. After graduating with a B.A. from Brandeis he became an agent for a bluegrass band, hitchhiked around Europe and North America, and most recently worked as a deck hand on a fishing boat in Alaska.

He settled at Oregon because he liked the people and the area, and he felt the University was "less homogeneous than the school I went to."

Pradell is a certified elementary school teacher, who is also running for the presidency of the Student Bar Association. He soon hopes to become a published author; he is working on a book, "Magic for Computerized Kids," which he hopes to finish this summer. It is both a "how-to" magician's manual and a psychology book that teaches the reader how to have fun working with kids.

Pradell laments the fact that too many child entertainers actually hate kids. He feels that the audience, or a specific child in the audience is often the target of an entertainer's jokes. Pradell uses his stage persona to make the crowd laugh at him. He falls down, the snake pops open in his face and his tricks don't work without the help of a child.

"Kids today need more love and affection," Pradell said. "I'm just a tool to do the magic — the kids are the magic."

"Magic is a communicative art," Pradell said. "It requires an audience. It gets me to people; you can't do it in a vacuum. My role as a magician is to help people have fun. Give 'em what they want because the audience is more important than me."

Just another example of Steve Pradell putting people as his top priority.

Pradell will entertain next at the University of Oregon Bookstore Saturday morning, April 20.

Story by Roman McCloskey
Photo by Dean Guernsey

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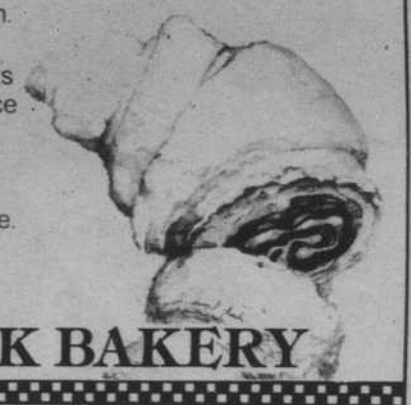
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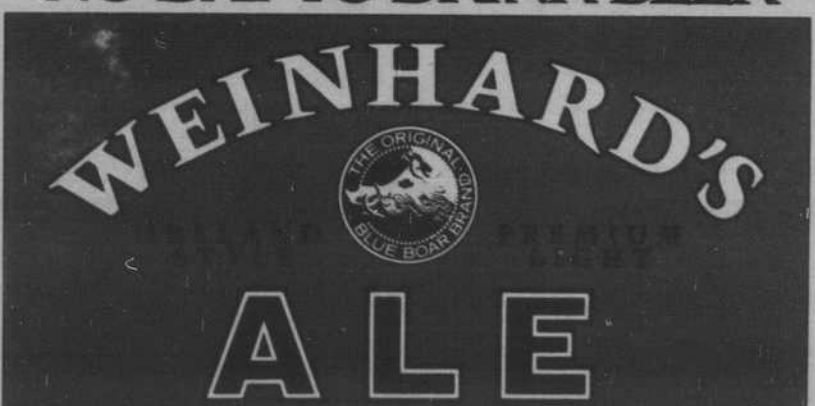
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