



Confessions of a

The truth is:

what goes on during a show

often amazes Mr. Magic as much

as it does his audience!

By JOHN MULHOLLAND

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BUD SIMPSON

Magician



To the magician's amazement, his shirttail came out along with the varicolored handkerchiefs.

AUDIENCES never forgive a magician who fails. So, even when something goes drastically wrong, he must keep the spectators from being aware of his difficulties.

Years ago, one of my feats was to produce 100 varicolored silk handkerchiefs seemingly from nowhere. Since the method I used is no longer in vogue, I can tell you that I did the trick by hiding the silks in the waistband of my trousers.

At this particular show, I was amazing the audience by pulling out silk after silk when—to my amazement—a heavy white linen cloth appeared. You're right, it was my shirttail! Thinking quickly, I turned my back to the audience, waved the colored silks above my head, and feverishly crammed my shirttail back in place. I am sure no one knew what was going on. But I am equally certain that, when I was sticking the shirttail back in, many people believed I had an uncontrollable itch.

Luckily for us magicians, audiences tend to think that anything we do and anything that happens to us on stage is intentional. Before a performance at a New England university, I started down the stairs from the stage and stepped on a pencil someone had dropped by accident. The pencil rolled—and I shot up in the air and down the stairs. Oddly, I landed upright and bounced down several steps on my heels. After the show, the university's director of athletics rushed backstage and burst out: "The way you went down those steps was one of the best acrobatic feats I've ever seen!"

Also, audiences usually believe that whatever anyone does during a magic show is at the request of the performer. At a party in a private home, I did a trick in which a piece of cloth was consumed by flames. In previous shows, I had scorched my fingers in burning all the cloth, so I decided to squeeze out the flame when there was only a tiny piece of it left and sneak the remainder into my jacket pocket.

But unfortunately I had not done a thorough

able to finish my performance. But it took twice the scheduled time, and I fear it completely disorganized the to-the-second programming customarily followed at the Music Hall.

The most fantastic occurrences during magic shows often come about through coincidence. Once, in Chicago, I did a trick that ended up bewildering me quite as much as it did the spectators.

The trick involved having a member of the audience choose a name from the telephone directory by several chance steps. After that was done, I had someone open a sealed envelope that had been in plain sight all during the show. Inside the envelope was a card on which was written the name chosen from the book. I can't reveal how the trick is done, but I can assure you that it is quite immaterial to me what name is picked from the telephone book.

At any rate, all I knew about the man from the audience on this occasion was that he had said he came from a distant city and knew little about Chicago. After he had selected a name from the phone book, I asked him to read it aloud. But instead of reading it, he yelled, "That's the darndest trick I've ever seen!" I had no idea what he meant until he told the audience that the name he had chosen was that of a person having the identical first name, initial, and last name as his own!

I stopped the trick at that point and left the envelope where it was. My planned feat of magic could never top the unplanned one.

Another coincidence occurred during a press interview. A newspaperman contended that magicians need special, tricky objects for everything they do. He then challenged me to do some tricks with a coin he took from his pocket. Although any magician is able to do tricks with any coin, the coin the newsman produced permitted me to do several minor miracles. This was because the coin was an 1892 Chicago World's Fair commemorative half dollar—and, strictly by chance, I had in my pocket a duplicate of that rare coin. It was uncanny the way that "one" coin traveled around the room from here to there and back again!

Which reminds me of a \$1 bill I once borrowed from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. during a show. Before I accepted the money, I asked Mr. Rockefeller to initial the dollar. I then held up the bill and asked, "These are the initials you wrote?" After he agreed that they were, I asked, "And therefore this is the dollar you gave to me?"

"No it is not," Mr. Rockefeller answered. "That is the dollar I permitted you to borrow."

FROM EARLIEST CHILDHOOD, I have had pets; so, when I got into magic, I naturally used animals in my shows. I found that people like to see tricks performed with rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, and any breed of dog. However, dogs seldom are used because they are apt to bark when excited by audience approval. We magicians want quiet creatures; I even retired my pet canary because of its inclination to sing once the spotlight was focused on it.

People frequently ask me how I pull a rabbit out of a hat. The answer is: put one hand inside the hat, grasp the rabbit by the loose skin at the back of its neck (never by the ears), and lift it straight up and out of the hat. How do I sneak the rabbit into the hat in the first place? That requires a rather lengthy explanation—and the Editor tells me that he will give me no more space.

job of putting out the fire. Several tricks later, the smoldering cloth in my pocket burst into flame. However, I was unaware of it until my host's butler walked up to me, bowed, and with a "Pardon me, sir," poured a pitcherful of ice water into my pocket! Since I had been standing in such a way that only the butler could see the flame burst from my pocket, the audience did not connect the liquid with the earlier burning trick. Possibly, they thought a magician had to be refueled in the middle of every show.

At another show—this time in New York's huge Music Hall, two stagehands stumbled and spilled my paraphernalia all over the acres of stage just as the curtain was going up. Fortunately, during that performance, I was appearing as a Chinese magician and was wearing an Imperial Manchu gown and was carrying a gong. At this show, however, I didn't merely strike the gong a few times—I played a lengthy gong solo! And to kill more time, the gong playing was interspersed with a great deal of oriental bowing that was not in the original "script."

While the gong playing and bowing were going on, my excellent assistant was able to sight and pick up my first trick. While I performed that feat, he scurried about like a frightened cat and found the next piece of equipment that I needed for my act.

Since everything eventually was found, I was

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