



# MAGI-GRAM



Official Newsletter of IBM Ring 50 -- The National Capital Ring -- Volume 74 No. 12 December 2020

## FizzWizzPop Kids' Show and Lecture on January 13

### In This Issue

Virtual Contest	Page 2
Holiday Show	Page 4
President's Message	Page 5
Year in Pictures	Page 7
Who's Who	Page 8
Magic Quickie	Page 10
Birthdays	Page 10
Chris Bowers	Page 11
Al Cohen	Page 12



Al  
Cohen

### International Brotherhood of Magicians Ring 50 The National Capital Ring

#### President

Craig Fifer  
president@ibmring50.org

#### Vice President

Danny Selnick  
vp@ibmring50.org

#### Secretary

Drew Owen  
secretary@ibmring50.org

#### Treasurer

Bob Patterson  
treasurer@ibmring50.org

#### Sergeant-at-Arms

Reggie Rice  
sgtarms@ibmring50.org

#### Magi-Gram Editor

Larry Lipman  
magi-gram@ibmring50.org

#### Youth Activities Director

Louis Meyer  
youth@ibmring50.org

**Nikola Arcane**, a professional magician from Northern Ireland, will present a kids' magic show for the Ring 50 Zoom meeting at **7 p.m., Jan.13**, and then lecture about how to perform for children.

Watch your email for details.

Nikola will perform her FizzWizzPop show for Ring 50 members' friends and children and then completely dissect the show.

This lecture should appeal to anyone who performs for children--professionally or for friends and family.

Magicians interested in close-up will enjoy hearing Nikola discuss having extra magic in your pockets to perform an encore after your shows. Nikola will perform some packet tricks she has made and make suggestions on material she usually has in her pockets on standby for every show.

Nikola is a member of the Ulster Society of Magicians in Belfast and was their first female Chair from 2012-2013.

In 2016 she organized Belfast MagiCon, bringing magicians from all over the world to Belfast for a weekend of lectures and performances



*Nikola Arcane*

showcasing great magic acts.

She has performed children's magic across the United States and Sweden and in 2019 she won the International Brotherhood of Magicians British Ring 25 Close Up Competition and took first place in the Ali Bongo Micro Marathon.



# The Big Winner on the Small Screen is...

## Six Members Compete Virtually

By Drew Owen

During the pandemic, many of us have been learning how to present magic online, so Ring 50's November 17th meeting was a virtual magic contest. Six members took the challenge, competing only for the love of magic and the adoration of their fellow magicians.

First up was **Chuck Jones**. Chuck told us about a magician from the Ozarks he'd once seen named Cletus. Donning a funny hat and Southern accent, Chuck claimed that his routine was a recreation of the act he saw Cletus perform years ago. He started with two cylindrical covers. Under one

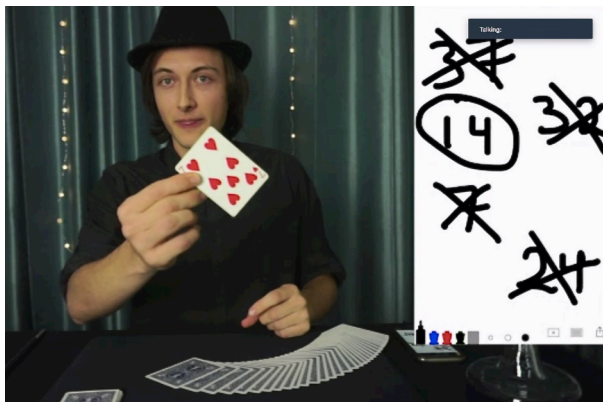


*Chuck Jones as "Cletus"*

was a mug, under the other was a jug. He could make the mug and the jug magically trade places until "Cletus" accidentally revealed an extra jug under one of the covers. He continued on and suddenly there was extra jug, then another and another until the table was covered with jugs! Finally, he lifted both covers to show us there were now two mugs. That meant: "time to Partee!"

**Krishan Mathur**, a retired doctor, performed his medical-

themed routine in a white coat. He used a stethoscope as a magic wand and started by



*Christophe Jelinski found the selected card in a display of mentalism to win the virtual magic contest by one vote.*

cutting and restoring it. Marc Carrion volunteered to be the patient. Krishan shined a light into Marc's eyes through the computer screen and then made a diagnosis, which he wrote down on a large card. He asked Marc to name a number between 1 and 30 and Marc chose the number 12. Krishan showed us a



*Krishan Mathur offers a diagnosis to Marc Carrion.*

stack of cards with different diseases written on them: Heart Attack, Hepatitis, etc. Counting to the 12th card, he arrived at "pink eye." This matched the diagnosis he had made and written down earlier.

**Dwight Redman** told us about a friend from a foreign country who was sometimes confused about written English. He used the words "hole" and "whole" as an example. He showed us two cards, each with a large round hole cut out



*Dwight Redman explains the words 'hole' and 'whole' and 'spot.'*

of the center making them "hole cards." Then he showed us two more cards that were all white with no hole, in other words, "whole cards." Now things started to get strange. The "whole" cards had red backs and, by holding the back in front of a "hole" card, it looked like a spot card--a white card with a large red spot in the middle. This turned out to be more than an illusion as now the red spot was actually printed on the card! Then, the other "hole" card transformed as well. The spots began to multiply so instead of one, the cards had five red spots printed on them. He showed us both sides of all the



cards and, printed on the back of the last card was the word: HOLE.

**Arnold Fuoco** was up next with a routine he called “Easy come, easy go.” A silver dollar appeared and then disappeared from his hand. Arnie grabbed a handful of coins and made them transform into a \$100 bill. He

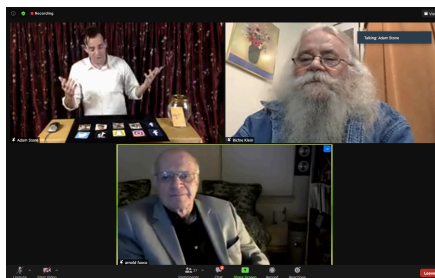


*Arnold Fuoco—Easy come, easy go,*

asked Ring 50 President Craig Fifer to name a three digit number which he wrote on the bill before tearing it into four pieces. Arnie was able to restore the bill into one piece again and Craig's number was clearly visible. But wait... the pieces were now mixed up, leaving Arnie with a mismade bill.

Next, Arnie showed us a soup can which contained a bolt, a nut, and a washer. Arnie transformed each object into a half dollar before dropping it back into the can. Once in the can, all the coins transformed back into hardware. To end the routine, Arnie took out a blank white rectangle of paper. Slowly, some images began to appear on the paper until it became a real \$10 bill.

As **Adam Stone** began his routine, he was just finishing up sealing a card in an envelope. He placed the envelope in a glass container which remained visible



*Adam Stone gets social media advice from Richie Klein and Arnold Fuoco.*

throughout. He told us he'd been working on his social networking skills but needed a better handle. He asked Craig Fifer to help him out by naming an animal, a food, and a two digit number. Craig responded with: tiger, kumquat, and 84. Then Adam laid out five cards in a row on the table. Each card had the symbol for a different social media network (Twitter, Instagram, etc.) printed on it. Next, he showed us five pictures of people. Richie Klein was asked to pair each picture with a social media symbol. He was even given the option to switch two of his choices, which he did. When Adam turned over the pictures, printed on the backs were the exact social media icons as the ones Richie paired them with! Finally, Adam opened the envelope that had been in plain sight from the start of the routine. Written inside were the words: tiger, kumquat, and the number 84!

The last performer was **Christophe Jelinski**. On his table sat a blue backed deck of cards, face down under an upside down martini glass. Christophe asked us to imagine taking a red backed playing card and placing it into the blue backed cards under the glass. Then, he used an app on his phone to spin to a random card. Asking a member to call stop at any time, he arrived at the seven of hearts. Next, he asked various members to call out numbers, collecting

seven different numbers. With Craig Fifer's help, they eliminated numbers one at a time until he was left with the number 14.



*Christophe Jelinski shows the cards are under a glass.*

Christophe removed the glass, spread the cards, and revealed that there was one red backed card among the blues. Counting from the end, that red card turned out to be exactly the 14th card in the spread. Not only that, the card was the seven of hearts! Turning over the blue backed cards, Christophe finally revealed that they were all blank.

Craig used the “poll” feature on Zoom to allow all the members to vote. The highest



*President Craig Fifer conducts the meeting and counts the ballots.*

vote went to Christophe Jelinski. It's worth noting that Dwight Redman was just one vote behind him. All of the performers did a great job making their magic amazing and entertaining.



# It's beginning to Look Like Magic...

## Holiday Magic Show Goes Virtual on Snowy Day



By Drew Owen

Every year, IBM Ring 50 presents a Holiday benefit magic show featuring performances by some of our members. We didn't want to let a pandemic stop us this year so we put together a virtual show featuring six Ring 50 members which took place via Zoom on December 16th at 7 p.m. It was free to register and watch the show, but participants were encouraged to make a donation to Save the Children's COVID-19 relief efforts for children in the United States and around the world.

The MC for the show was Reggie Rice. When President Craig Fifer spotlighted Reggie, he appeared to have forgotten



MC Reggie Rice

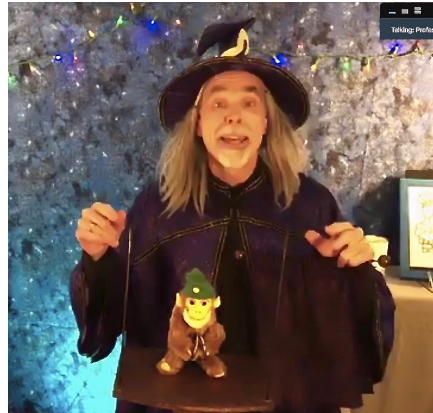
about the event and was seen lounging in his pajamas and robe. He stepped offscreen for just a second and came back into view completely dressed in his signature red suite. Reggie made a silk printed with a \$100 bill quadruple in size before introducing the first performer, the wizard Professor Fizzwiffle (AKA yours truly, Drew Owen).

Fizzwiffle demonstrated different ways wizards make magic, making a rose bloom with



A large virtual crowd enjoyed the show.

a growing potion for example. Next he used music from the Nutcracker to make a rope stand up, then turn into a red handkerchief which danced to the music. Fizzwiffle had some



Professor Fizzwiffle and Mickey problems with his special guest, Mickey the musical, mechanical monkey. Mickey was supposed to make the red handkerchief disappear and reappear in a nearby cauldron by banging his magical cymbals. Unfortunately, Mickey confounded Fizzwiffle by repeatedly banging at the wrong times. Eventually, Mickey himself vanished and reappeared inside the cauldron, which seemed to impress even Professor Fizzwiffle. To end his act, Fizzwiffle got the kids in the

audience to help color in a picture of Santa by throwing imaginary paint through their computers and into his magical paint can.

Before introducing the next performer, Reggie showed us three orange balls. He put two in his hand, one in his pocket, and offered a \$100 bill to a child from the audience if he could

figure out how many balls he had in his hand. Of course, the child could never get it right. Twice in a row, Reggie ended up with three balls in his hand and the third time, all the balls had vanished.

Next up was Adam Stone, who started by introducing his guest: the Ghost of Christmas Future. He used a white cloth to dress the ghost before having the audience say some incantations. The ghost then came to life and began floating around in a very eerie and entertaining manner. Adam put the ghost into a jar and covered it with a lid to keep it under control but it popped right back out, pushing the lid off easily. Adam invited some of the



Adam Stone and Lego characters participants to ask the ghost questions such as: "Will 2021 be better than 2020?" The ghost's answer: "It couldn't be worse." The ghost wrote his answers with



a marker, which seemed to move along the pad of paper on its own accord. Next, Adam opened a box of Legos and poured them into a paper bag. Two children from the audience helped by yelling "BANG!" which caused the pieces to magically assemble themselves into a train inside the bag. Adam covered the camera for a few seconds and when we saw him again, he was behind a Lego Hogwarts Castle. He put two little Lego men on the castle grounds and they began moving around the garden and even did a miniature illusion. One of the men cut the other in two and then put him back again!

Reggie was back to show the kids a magic trick with two cards. He told them that if they send a message to Ring 50, they could get the instructions for this trick. He showed another trick with a card that seemed to have four sides. This was a good time to let the young people in the audience know about the Counts of Conjuring, the youth program of Ring 50 taught by the next performer of the evening, Louis Meyer.

Louis claimed he had figured out how Santa can deliver all those presents: "He's a magician!" Louis pulled a cutout of Santa from a gift bag and



*Louis the Magician and Santa*

showed the bag to be empty. But then he pulled out another Santa and another and another until he had six Santa's. He put them all back into the bag where they merged into one Santa again.

December 2020

Louis told us he likes to take pictures of his favorite Christmas trees. He showed us a picture of what he thought was the best looking tree. What he showed us did not look so good; it had no decorations at all! Louis said everyone could help him decorate the tree. He also had pictures of some other helpers who could assist in decorating the tree: Frosty had a garland, a polar bear had ornaments, Rudolph had lights, an angel for the top, and Santa, who could put all the ornaments onto the tree. Santa disappeared, then began peeking mischievously out from behind the picture before decorating the tree in the picture.

Reggie showed us a magical piece of plumbing he'd gotten when working on a cruise ship before introducing Chuck Thomas. Chuck told us that, when he was a child, he saw a magician turn a white handkerchief to red. He begged the magician to show him how it was done, which turned out to be to have another handkerchief hidden in your hand. He asked the magician what to do if someone wants another color and the answer was to be ready with any color.

As he said this, Chuck pulled a long string of colored handkerchiefs from his hand. After putting them back into his fist, the colored handkerchiefs vanished.

Along the way, Chuck teased the audience several times by leading us to believe he was concealing one or more handkerchiefs in his closed hand, then showing it empty. Chuck

brought out three pieces of ropes, one short, one medium, and one long. He asked for a participant to unmute and help



*Chuck Thomas and color-changing silks* him make all the ropes become equal lengths. Then two of the ropes became one and the ends seemed to move from one place to another until they came off the rope altogether, leaving him with an endless loop of rope. In the end, all the ropes again became long, medium, and short.

After Chuck's performance, the camera caught Reggie munching on some fast food. He took the drinking straw and pushed it into his ear, out his nose, into his eye, and out of his mouth. He put the normal sized straw into the empty fast food bag and when he pulled it out, it was a giant straw, at least ten feet long.

The last performer was Lorenzo the Great (AKA Larry Lipman).



*Lorenzo the Great and Penny the Penguin*

Lorenzo tried to make a snowman appear from behind a small three fold screen but kept getting only parts of the snowman, printed on silk cloths. Lorenzo put the parts into a bag

## Ring 50 Holiday Show

and tried to get them to come out as a complete snowman with the help of the kids. After a few mistakes, like an upside down or melted snowman, Lorenzo finally ended up with a perfect snowman. Not only that, a stuffed Frosty the snowman appeared from behind the screen. He put Frosty into a small refrigerator to make sure he didn't melt. Next, Lorenzo showed us two large gift bags. He had the kids help choose two animals from a pile of animal cards. He ended up with Penny the Penguin and Pete the Polar Bear, the pictures that exactly matched the stuffed animals in the gift bags. But then, Pete and Penny kept magically switching places. At this point, Lorenzo realized his Frosty had vanished from the refrigerator. He didn't notice until the audience pointed it out that a giant Frosty was now growing from out of a gift box that was sitting behind him!

Reggie ended by handing out toilet paper. He put some in his mouth and then pulled out a huge colorful paper streamer. From behind the crumpled paper, Reggie made a full bottle of champagne appear!

It was a great evening that brought magic and fun to the Holidays!



# The Magic of 2020

At first glance, it's hard to see much magic in 2020. This year has been plagued by sickness, fear, loneliness, and domestic strife. Many have lost their livelihoods, and working magicians without live audiences have been hit especially hard. We had to cancel Magi-Whirl in March, and we haven't been able to meet in person since. Worst of all, we have lost many loved ones, including our own Ring 50 members Al Cohen, John Roberts, and Scotty Scafidi.

And yet, we persevered. We fought back against COVID-19 through science. We used technology to connect to each other virtually. We talked, marched, and voted together to try to make our country better. We pooled our financial resources to save many families, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

Ring 50 rallied. In the last nine months, we've hosted more than a dozen virtual meetings, including lectures by Patrick Redford, Dirk Losander, Marc DeSouza, Jay Sankey, Max Maven, Ice McDonald, Woody Aragon, and Carisa Hendrix; and programming such as a Member Teach-In, Mystery Prop Challenge, Past President Performances, Virtual Challenge, Past President

## President's Column

President  
Craig Fifer



Performances, Virtual Performance Contest, and our annual public holiday show. As the largest local chapter of the largest organization of magicians in the world, we didn't let circumstance keep us apart.

The invisible thread that runs through 2020 is our shared humanity, and that's what allows us to experience magic. William Hazlitt said we are "the only animal that laughs and weeps, for [we are] the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they ought to be."

As I write this message on December 21 -- the darkest day of a year filled with darkness -- the contrast between what things are and what they ought to be has never been greater. We have faced many challenges this year, but we are up to the task. After all, our privilege as magicians is to turn seemingly impossible situations into moments of wonder and joy.

I wish you and your family all the best for a happy and healthy holiday season, and a magical new year.

## Dues Due for 2021

Ring 50 annual dues of \$20 for 2021 are due by Feb. 28. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic suspension of group meetings, you may begin paying your dues now by mail or PayPal. Ring 50 Treasurer Bob Patterson requests that you pay by check, as this eases the record keeping. Make checks payable to **IBM Ring 50**. Please send your check to:

Bob Patterson, 3450 Wainscott Place, Lake Ridge, VA 22192-5362.

Or you may pay by PayPal at [Payments@IBMRing50.Org](mailto:Payments@IBMRing50.Org). Your 2021 Ring 50 membership card will be sent upon receipt of payment.



# Ring 50 Year in Pictures

## JANUARY



*Hugh Turley lectures on close-up magic for children.*

## FEBRUARY



*Bob Patterson, past international president, presents John Roberts with a copy of the cover of The Linking Ring, which featured John.*

## APRIL



*Krishan Mathur was one of the participants in a virtual lecture with Patrick Redford.*

## JUNE



*Augie Arnstein, Theo Rushin Jr. and Sam Brothers at Teach-in.*

## JULY



*John Cloninger at the Mystery Prop Challenge.*

## AUGUST



*Reggie Rice, Phil Thomas, Mike Wolfson and Drew Owen join Ice McDonald in a discussion about Black magicians.*

## SEPTEMBER



*Stu Finley was one of the past presidents performing.*

## OCTOBER



*Youth Activities Director Louis Meyer discusses magic theory with members of the Conjurers.*

## NOVEMBER



*Christophe Jelinski wins the virtual magic contes*

# Who's Who in Ring 50

## **Joe Mielnicki: Street Performer** ***His Silent Act Has a Loud Impact***

Even during the pandemic, you can usually find Joe Mielnicki—who performs under the name JT the Unstoppable—drawing large crowds while busking his magic behind the Torpedo Factory along the Alexandria waterfront.

Joe, who holds a degree in biology from Liberty University, has worked as a zookeeper and respite care provider and community integration specialist for

individuals with disabilities. But magic has been a recurring interest throughout his career.

His sharp and memorable magic style has crowned him the winner of Ring 50's Dan Lacey Contest for Magician of the Year in 2017.

Joe's interest in magic was ignited when he was around 14 and his family stayed at a resort in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania.

"We were celebrating my older sister's birthday in a party room that we rented out at the resort. It just so happened that there was a magic show that was about to occur in the room across from our party room, so we decided to go next door and watch the show. Up to that point, I had always been fascinated with magic but I had



never seen a live magic show. The magician asked a couple of my siblings on stage, which made me a little jealous.

After the show was over, I verbalized my frustration of not being asked on stage. The magician overheard me and invited me up to do a trick specifically for me. He took three different rings and asked me to tap each one with a magic wand. When I tapped the first one, it immediately changed shape into a diamond. My breath was immediately taken away from me. He then took out a second ring and when I tapped it, it changed into a triangle. I was equally surprised. Finally he took a third one and when I tapped it, it began

to shake violently in his hands until it grew three times its size.

"I had never seen anything quite like it in my life. It was from that point on that I wanted to study the art of magic."

While in college, Joe began to take magic more seriously and began visiting magic shops along the East coast including Barry's Magic Shop in Rockville (run by Ring 50 member Barry Taylor), Divine Magic and Novelties in Richmond, Smith Mountain Lake Magic and Science Shop in Moreta and the famous Denny and Lee's Magic Studio in Baltimore.

"I immersed myself in books and many of the classic tricks, with a concentration mostly in



# Joe Mielnicki: Street Performer

cards, rope, and coins. I performed very poorly as an amateur, practicing each trick with mediocre attention.”

That began to change in 2009 when his family went to Ocean City for their yearly summer vacation and he saw a crowd of about 200 people under the archway on North Division Street.

“When my family and I went to get a closer look, we saw that it was a magician with a table in front of him, performing a trick with a single cup and a single ball. He finished his routine by producing two large apples from underneath the cup and a large pineapple from underneath his hat.

“I had always thought that street magic was performed in the style of David Blaine--where you walk up to random people and perform small feats of wonder. I never thought that you could get this many people around you by enticing their interests to approach you instead of the other way around. At the end of the show, he held out his hat for tips and donations from his audience. It was then that I decided that the following summer I would try my luck in street performing.”

During his final two years of college at Liberty University, Joe began performing at a student lounge “doing sleight of hand with cards and coins to help prep myself for the following summer. I went around campus performing for different types of spectators and even performed on my roommates regularly to get myself prepared and polished.”

The next summer, 2010, Joe had an internship in Berlin, Md., just south of Ocean City. On a free day, he went to the Ocean City boardwalk with a briefcase filled with tricks and began busking.

“I did not have a set show. I had no idea of how to entice an audience, nor did I know how to get them to stay, and how to get them to pay. I was getting frustrated because I wasn't even making so much as a quarter for my efforts. So I decided  
December 2020

to watch some street performers to get an idea of what to do.”

That's how he met Kris Bentz, from San Diego, California. “I told him that this was my first summer of street performing and he was intrigued. He decided to watch me attempt at starting a show. He watched me stand around for

five minutes asking people if they wanted to see a trick and pretending like I knew what I was doing. After that time went by, Kris approached me and said that there was a lot that needed work. He decided to take me under his wing for that whole summer and teach me the basics.”

Kris taught Joe how to make a set show and earn a living performing on the streets. He told him about Jim Cellini and Cellini's teacher, Tony Slydini

(Joe's favorite magician), and the lineage of street performers who followed Slydini.

Kris also introduced Joe to George Gilbert, the Baltimore magician Joe had seen the summer before in Ocean City. Two years later, George became Joe's second magic teacher.

“I became a better performer because of street performing.” During his 10 years as a busker, Joe has met and worked with hundreds of magicians, including Gazzo, Eric Evans, Bob Sheets, Tom Frank, Keith Wilson, and Chastain Criswell.

Over the years, Joe's interest in magic evolved. At first focused primarily on close-up with cards, coins, rope and the cups and balls. But as his street-performing career progressed, he began expanding to parlor and stage-oriented magic including mentalism and escape art.

He has performed as different characters on the street including a newspaper boy act involving newspaper magic, a silent comedy act which incorporated pantomime and balancing acts, and a nerdy superhero with an affinity for escapes and juggling. “Silent acts involving magic, juggling, and balancing are recurring favorites of mine.”

*Continued next page*



*Joe performs in pre-pandemic days along the Alexandria waterfront.*

## Joe Mielnicki

Joe lists Slydini, Gregory Wilson, Michael Kaminskis and Michael Ammar among his favorite magicians. His favorite tricks include cups and balls, UF Grant's Ring on Shoelace, and the flip stick vanish.

In addition to street busking, Joe has done part-time work as a corporate and festival entertainer along with jobs in other fields. Joe remembers the help he has received over the years from other magicians and, in turn, he has encouraged others. He can be counted on to offer tips to Ring 50 Conjurors and others who approach him for advice about magic and he was one of the instructors last year in the Ring 50 members Teach-In.



Con Ward	Dec. 29
Barney Sperlin	Jan. 1
Joe Meilnicki	Jan. 11
Tom Bohacek	Jan. 15
Jim Flanigan	Jan. 20



## Dollar-Bill Poker

by Karl Fulves (Self-Working  
Number Magic)

**Effect:** Spectator reads a bill serial number, and leaves one number out.

**Method:** Ask the spectator to take out a dollar bill and read the serial number. While he reads it, add all the numbers in your head.

Let's say the # is 01493980. You would add  $0+1+4+9+3+9+8+0 = 34$ . They don't know you have added the numbers.

Next ask him to pick one of the numbers and focus on that one. Read all other numbers in a random order, but not repeating any, and skipping the selected number.

Let's say they are thinking about the number 4, and they read 1, 0, 8, 9, 0, 9 and 3. You add these numbers again in your head. The total is 30, which tells you that the missing number they are thinking off is 4 (34-30).

**Variations:** There are a couple of things you can do to make it more impressive.



First you could switch the bill for one that you have ready and know the total. If you do that they don't have to read the numbers the first time.

You can also remember the whole serial number, so after revealing the number they are thinking of, you can also reveal the real order of the numbers they gave you in random order.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Matt Baker version:** Matt Baker shared a version 'the missing digit' on his blog at Vanishing Inc. His version uses a slightly different method, it's worth checking it out at: <https://www.vanishingincmagic.com/blog/missing-digit>



### ***In case you missed it:***

Ring 50 member Chris McCauley Bowers appeared in the November issue of *The Linking Ring* and a recent episode of *Inside the Ring* with host Ryan Pilling.

## **Chris McCauley Bowers**

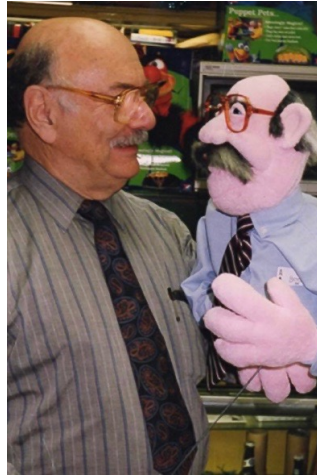
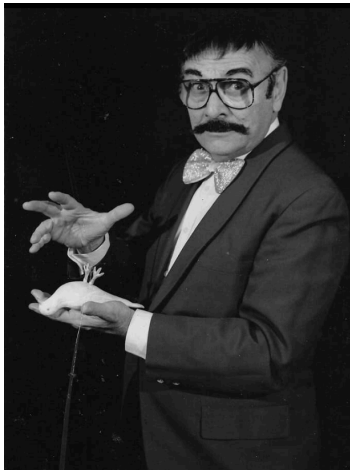
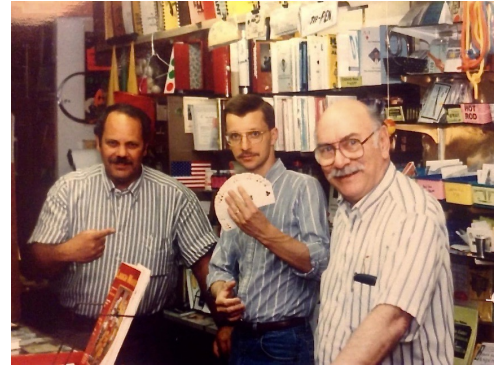
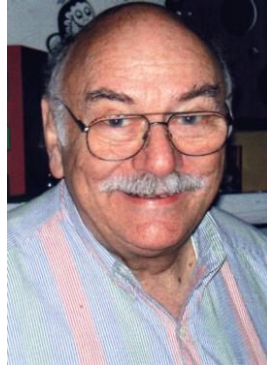
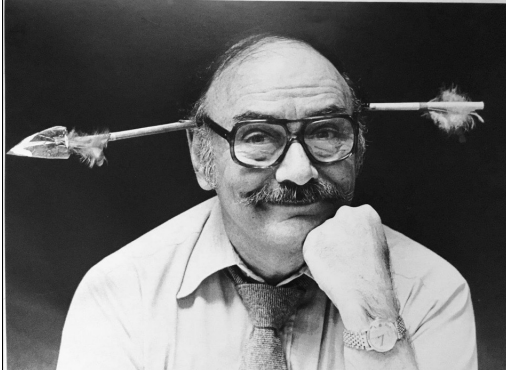
### **One-Man Parade**

Edited by Dr. Lynn Miner • Illustrated by Tony Dunn

Chris McCauley (Bowers) is a magician who goes by his middle name when performing. He has taught magic in more than two hundred different schools as part of after-school programs and magic summer camps over the last decade. More than four thousand children have studied in his basic magic course. He also teaches martial arts, circus arts, juggling, and puppetry through the Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. school and recreation systems. Chris continues to pursue his lifelong goal of becoming a top-flite magic creator and writer. He specializes in developing simpler methods and sleights coming from his background in simplifying effects for children. Currently, he does Zoom shows and online camps for kids and seminars for adults and magic clubs. Many of these effects will work both on Zoom and in person.



# Al Cohen: A Legend in His Time



December 2020



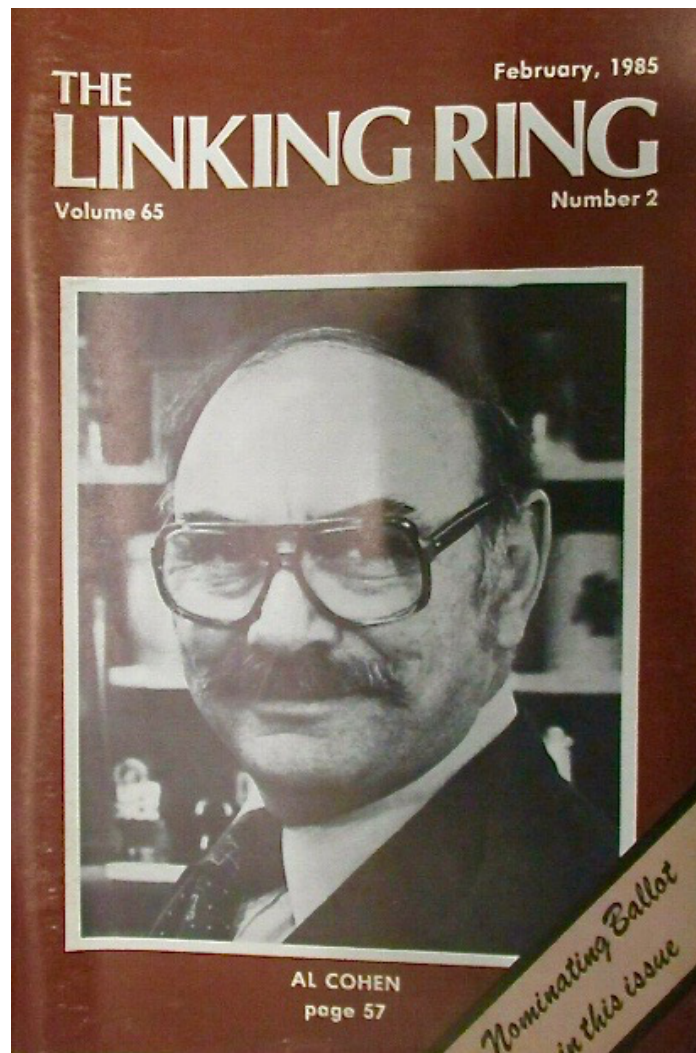
# ‘The World’s Greatest Magic Demonstrator’

*Famous Magicians and Local Hobbyists Beat a Path to His Store*

How often does the owner of a small retail store rate an entry in Wikipedia? Al Cohen, who died in Florida on Dec. 13, was the exception. Because Al Cohen was exceptional.

He was known not only in the magic community in Washington, D.C., but around the nation and around the world. Famous magicians from around the globe made their way to Al’s Magic Shop—first on Pennsylvania Avenue, later on Vermont Avenue—to spend time with the man referred to a “the world’s greatest magic demonstrator.”

More importantly, Al Cohen took an interest in the rankest newbie amateur as much as the world-famous headliners. He delighted in demonstrating magic tricks such as a simple Scotch & Soda coin effect.



For Ring 50, Al Cohen was a pillar of the club.

He served as Ring president from 1957 to 1958. He received the rare SABAR Award for special contributions to the Ring and he was awarded a lifetime membership.

He was active not only in Ring 50 but also in the International Brotherhood of Magicians, serving as territorial vice president for many years. He graced the cover of The Linking Ring magazine in February 1985 and his retirement was reported in the magazine in February 2002.

While there are many members of Ring 50 who remember Al Cohen, many others have joined the Ring in

the years since his retirement. For those who only knew of the Al Cohen legend, and for those who knew him well, here are reprints of those two Linking Ring articles.

# AL COHEN

Truly magic's "Mr. Nice Guy"; you will find it practically impossible to mention Al Cohen's name without someone saying something complimentary.

Al Cohen has the reputation of being one of the best demonstrators in the magic business. No matter how good or bad the trick, it is always enhanced by that special Al Cohen touch, making it an entertaining effect. Upon seeing Al perform, you know that he enjoys magic and derives joy from the performance of magic. The whole process is infectious and the spectator becomes the happy recipient when Al works his special magic.

Al was born in Wilmington, Delaware, on January 11, 1928. His family moved to Washington, D.C. when Al was nine years of age. After attending Central High School, he went to the University of Maryland to study Entomology. It took him three years to decide that "bugs" were of greater importance than "bugs" and after his Junior year, he transferred to the Ben Franklin School of Business and graduated two years later. His first job was as an accountant with the New York Jewelry Company, located in downtown Washington.

In 1936, Al's father, Macey, opened a retail store featuring souvenirs, china, and Japanese imports called the "Oriental Bazaar." During World War II, it was renamed the "National Gift Shop," since things oriental were regarded with suspicion during that period. In 1947, Al came into the family business.

The shop had always carried novelties and some S.S. Adams magic, but during Al's college years, he was fooled by a roommate's use of a thumb tip. In Al's words, "that was my downfall."

February, 1985

In 1950, a magic section was added to the business and slowly the "National Gift Shop" became "Al's Magic Shop."

Al married Alice Dubow in 1945. They have two sons; Gary, who is single and lives in Oregon; and Stan, who is married and lives in Maryland. Stan joined the business in 1973 thus becoming the third Cohen generation to be a part of the magic business.

The location of the shop on Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue for 37 years made Al's Magic Shop a visiting spot for many of magic's famous people as well as the Capitol's better known inhabitants. Doug Henning, Harry Blackstone, Jr., Steve Martin, Joan Rivers, Henny Youngman, Muhammad Ali, Harry Truman, and many other famous personalities have visited the shop over the years. Exclusive with the shop are over 40 items sold under the name, Alco Products. Al's latest is a one hand vanisher called "Incredi-Go" which has just produced sales in excess of 1500 items.

With the renovation of the Avenue of Pennsylvania, Al was forced to move from Pennsylvania Avenue to H Street, NW and then one year later, to the present 1012 Vermont Avenue location. The building front of the original location was preserved as a historical structure to be used in later phases of the renovation. Al's Magic Shop is today a modern, complete magic emporium with a line ranging from pocket effects to stage illusions, and all come with the Cohen special touch.

As a performer, Al has played the White House, early Washington TV, and more than his share of birthday parties, company picnics, church basements, and Blue-Gold banquets. Semi-

retired as a performer (so he says), Al does appear in the guise of Pennell Zorch at many magic conventions. Pennell represents the more urban sophisticated side of Al Cohen and leaves the spectator with a totally new perspective on magic.

Outside of magic, Al's interests include: photography, the newest pocket calculator, trips to foreign countries, going to the beach, and playing with his two grandsons. Al joined the International Brotherhood of Magicians in 1950 and is a member of the Order of Merlin. He is the Territorial Vice President for the District of Columbia and is a past president of National Capital Ring 50. Al's active support of magic in the Washington area and his keen abilities as a teacher of magic have produced many a magical follower over the years.

Through the years of old and new magic, old and new customers, conventions, changes of locations, riots, etc., one thing is certain. Al Cohen will remain one of magic's best liked and honest, sincere personalities, and there will always be something new at Al's Magic Shop.





## Al and Alice Cohen to Close Al's Magic

by Larry Lipman

It's a Washington institution that has been a gathering point for magicians from around the capital and the nation for decades. Soon it's going to change; maybe close.

After more than a half century regaling customers, performing at conventions, parties, trade shows and even the White House, Al Cohen, owner and proprietor of Al's Magic Shop is retiring. His son, Stan, who has worked side-by-side with his father for more than a quarter century, is pursuing another business venture.

As this article was being written in late-December Al and Stan were looking for someone to purchase the business. Failing that, they planned to close the doors on Al's Magic in early 2002. Whether they sell it or close it, the result will be the end of one of the longest runs

in magic and the end of an era in the nation's capital.

"We're going to miss him. He's an icon in magic and there are not many icons in the world of magic," said Joe Stevens, owner of Stevens Magic Emporium in Wichita, Kansas. "I say that because he has dedicated his life to magic. His passion was magic and he loved it. It showed in his business, it showed in his friendships and it showed in his magic."

James Flanigan, I.B.M. Territorial Vice President for the District of Columbia, and an occasional demonstrator at Al's, said, "Al Cohen is known as the world's greatest magic demonstrator."

One reason, Flanigan said, is that Al knows magic intimately and is always searching for better ways to make an effect work.

February, 2002

41

"Al was one of a kind," said Barry Taylor, owner of Barry's Magic in Wheaton, Md., a suburb of Washington. Although they may have competed for the same customers, Taylor said he never felt he was in competition with Al. "If anything, we played off each other. He had his store and I had mine and each had its own ambience," Taylor said.

Taylor even wrote a poem about Al titled: "Al Cohen, King of the Magic Demonstrators." These are the first two stanzas:

Hear ye, hear ye, have you met the man?

He's Washington, D.C.'s ambassador of sleight of hand.

Mr. Al Cohen is his name  
and he's the king of the magic demonstrating game.

He'll show you all the latest tricks and the newest magic prop

Making you feel quite at home while you're a guest in his famous magic shop

In the beginning it was far different. The year was 1936. Alfred L. Cohen, born Jan. 11, 1926 in Wilmington, Del., was 9-years-old. His father, Mace Cohen, who had lived in Washington, D.C. since he was an infant, had moved the family back to the city he called home a year earlier. It was the depth of the Great Depression and Mace, a jeweler, was looking for a new start. With another fellow, Mace purchased the Oriental Bazaar, a novelty shop on Pennsylvania Avenue owned by a Japanese couple who were retiring. The store sold novelty items, souvenirs, oriental knick-knacks, antiques and jewelry.

By the outbreak of World War II, the store had changed its name to the National Gift Shop and Mace's partner had retired. Al attended public schools in Washington, D.C. and the University of Maryland. An illness kept him out of the service during the war. Afterwards, he received an accounting degree from Benjamin Franklin University, a busi-

ness school in Washington.

Al married his junior high school sweetheart, Alice, in 1943 and they had two sons: Gary, who now lives in Oregon; and Stan, who even as a boy joined his father in magic endeavors.

Al started off as an accountant, but his heart wasn't in it. Shortly after the war, Al joined his father in the business, much as Stan would three decades later. Magic started out as a sideline, one of the many product lines they carried in addition to film, photo developing, souvenirs, incense, fireworks and other items. Neither Mace nor Al had any background in magic, but as more and more magic items were added to the inventory, Al became more and more knowledgeable.

"I just started playing with it and found it to be a lot of fun," Al said, a twinkle in his eye and a big smile under his trademark mustache.

He learned as much from customers as from sales reps. There was only one other magic dealer in town then, Harry Baker's Fun Shop. Slowly, Al built a following among area magicians and hobbyists.

In the early 1950s, Al went to his first magic convention. It was in York, Pa., and Al says that for him it was a "disaster." His booth was next to Irv "Mr. Fingers" Weiner and "he was a terrific pitchman. Unbelievable," said Al, who is renowned for his skills as a magic dealer.

He began meeting more and more top magicians: Jack Chanin and the legendary Larry West were two who had a large influence on Al. He was an early member of I.B.M. Ring 50 and its president in 1957-58. He's a member of the Order of Merlin and Excalibur. He also has been a member of the Society of American Magicians for more than 35 years.

The 1950s, 60s, and 70s were Al's performing heydays. The store at 1203 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. was close by

*The Linking Ring*



television station WTTG, now Fox Channel 5. In those early days of independently produced local programming, performers were in high demand. Al appeared frequently on a show called "Ask It Basket," a sort of local "You Asked For It," program. Another regular performer on WTTG was future Bozo the Clown and "Today Show" weatherman Willard Scott with whom Al did some shows. He also appeared on the locally produced Pick Temple show, entertaining kids in the live audience peanut gallery.

Back at the shop, Al organized the Junior Mystics of Washington, a club for young magician wannabes, which met in the back of the store. Al also devised a regular customer discount program for preferred customers. Such customers carried cards in their wallets identifying them as "Washington Wizards." That was decades before the city's NBA basketball team took the same name.

It was during this time that Al also began going into the magic manufacturing business. He was one of the early dealers who bought the rights to Professor's Nightmare. He manufactured utility pulls, card tricks. Stan even recalls his father carving handmade sponge balls out of cellulite because today's featherweight balls did not exist.

At one time, Al had an inventory of about 50 items, many under the brand name Alco; now it's about half that number.

Al and Alice were regular fixtures at magic conventions around the United States and they traveled extensively in Europe, where Al had numerous magic gigs. Alice handled the business end of the conventions while Al showed the store's wares and performed at the convention shows.

The customers loved Alice and Al would come away amazed at the wealth of personal information she would glean about them.

"We met a lot of couples we're still friends with. She was a big help to me and a lot of fun and good company," Al said of his wife of 56 years. Alice's declining health is a big factor in his decision to retire.

Sam McGahan of Punta Gorda, Fla., was one of the magicians Al and Alice socialized with at conventions. A former Washington resident, McGahan said, "Alice was just a wonderful person. She'd always be behind the booth and she had such a nice personality and was an easy person to talk to."

If anyone was upset with Al at the conventions, it might have been people who had booths located next to his, said Keena Thompson, owner of KT Magic Inc., in Hebron, Ky. That's because the crowd surrounding Al often spilled over in front of other dealers' booths. But after a short while, the other dealers would sit back and enjoy Al's demonstrations as much as anyone else, Thompson said.

"He was always there with a kind word. He was always there with advice," particularly about specialty and collectable items, Thompson said.

It was for the conventions that Al created one of his most endearing characters, bumbling magician Pernell Zorch. It was a good-natured spoof of the magician performers at conventions with plenty of inside gags that only magicians and particularly those who regularly went to conventions would get. Like when he spoofed a Zombie routine going through all the moves while the ball remained on the table; or cracked it open to reveal a bunch of flowers still banded together. Or the Chinese sticks routine where, when he cut the string, the weighted ends promptly dropped to the floor. Then there was his famous needle-through-the-balloon trick, only in Zorch's hands the needle wouldn't penetrate the balloon.

By the 1960s, Al was losing his hair.

He briefly wore a toupee and hated it. Then he started wearing a fez and grew a thick black mustache to go with it. A customer, Roger Lindsay, a commercial artist by trade, drew a cartoon of fez-wearing, mustachioed Cohen standing at a long counter of magical items. That cartoon became Al's logo.

Stan joined his father and grandfather in the shop around 1973 and promptly also got into the magic performing business. By 1979, the lease on the Pennsylvania Avenue building had run out. Mace had retired from the business by then, so Al and Stan moved to their present location at 1012 Vermont Avenue N.W. and formally changed the name to just Al's Magic.

Up front, Al still sells novelty items such as gag gifts, stage make up, costumes and full face masks. It's toward the back of the store where the real magicians and hobbyists gather. The walls are festooned with framed pictures of

famous magicians and celebrities. Many of the pictures, such as those of Harry Anderson and Patch Adams, are glowingly inscribed to Al.

Over the years the list of visitors reads like a who's who of magic and entertainment: David Copperfield, Harry Blackstone (senior and junior), Doug Henning, Harry Lorayne, Mark Wilson, Slydini, Dai Vernon, President George Bush (the elder), former senators Howard Baker, Charles Percy and Al Simpson, former Education Secretary William Bennett, and Muhammad Ali. Then there were Joan Rivers, Hugh O'Brian, Henny Youngman and, of course, old friend Willard Scott. Just to name a few.

"I can't imagine anybody enjoying what they do more than I have," Al said, leaning across the counter. "It's been a fantastic experience. The time flew, I've been working for more than 50 years and it's hard to believe."

### *A Letter from Al Cohen*

Hello again:

This has to be one of the toughest letters I've ever had to write. Stan & I have decided to call it quits. We've been in business for over 60 years. My Dad, Mace, started the business in 1936. It was then called the National Gift Shop. I put the magic in the shop in 1945 and it slowly became known as "Al's" magic shop.... we eventually changed the name to AL'S MAGIC SHOP. Stan came into the business in 1973. So, you see it's been a family affair for a very long time.

Why is all this happening ??? I'm getting up in years (I'm actually 112 but I tell people I'm only 75). It's gotten pretty tough for me. My wife, Alice, is very ill and demands more and more of my time. She's been my partner in life for over 55 years. I can't tell you how many conventions we did together, all over the World. Everybody knows Alice. Guys would confide in her and tell her things about themselves that I never knew. She was a huge help to me. Now I have to take care of her. It's my first priority. Stan has an opportunity to go into another venture and he wants to pursue that.

So what's going to happen to AL'S MAGIC SHOP ??? Well, first we are going to try to sell it. It is a wonderful opportunity for someone. As you must know, we have a huge customer base of magicians from all over the World.



You cannot mention "magic" and Washington DC without someone saying "hey, there's a great shop there called "Al's Magic Shop." We have through the years built up a dedicated following, including Presidents, Congressman, actors, famous magicians, etc. etc. People from every walk of life. We are truly World famous ...a "landmark."

If you, or someone you know, might be interested, please give me a call or Email me. This could be one the best opportunities you'll ever have. AND the price is negotiable. We would like to have this happen in the next couple of months.

What if we don't sell it ??? Then Al's Magic Shop will truly disappear never to return. What a sad thing this would be. I surely hope it doesn't end this way.

This has been my whole life. I'm a very very fortunate person. I have always loved what I do for a living, the people I've met, the friends I've made, and the wonderful customers that come in and enjoy our demos. I never get tired of it. Everyday is a fun day. What more can you ask from life.

Buy the shop....you won't be sorry !! I'll even stick around when I can and teach you all the "good stuff."

So in closing let me say... "Nothing is Forever"... "Things change." I'll still be sending you Emails...so keep in touch. My very best to you and "Thanks" for the wonderful ride.

Al

