

THE COMEDY MAGIC OF BRYAN GILLES

Magic. When you hear the term, you may think of Harry Houdini tied up in chains. Or you might think of David Copperfield's disappearing acts, or Siegfried and Roy with white tigers. Or maybe something more modern, like David Blaine or Criss Angel. Through many generations, we've seen many faces of magic. But has it lost its cool? Maybe to some, but local magician Bryan Gilles has something up his sleeve.

"Magic just isn't cool anymore. It's a mixed art, and the image of it is being tainted," Gilles said. In the flashiness of today's popular magicians, like Blaine and Angel, Gilles argues that the meaning of magic is lost in an abundance of pre-designed, boxed tricks.

In a seven-month period, Bryan's family toured 27 states presenting a combination of Gospel and magic in churches, schools, community theaters, auditoriums and civic centers. During the trip, in Wynona Lake, Ind., Bryan and his older sister, Lynda, entered a magic contest and took first place.

Their father, Dave, was a magician himself who performed in places including Knott's Berry Farm and Disneyland. As a pastor, he worked magic into his sermons to draw in the audience.

"I hated magic when I was young. I was always his guinea pig," Bryan says. He remembers his father handing him a book by Harry Houdini and asking, "Do you want to learn magic? If you do, it's in this book."

By high school, Bryan was using his fast hands to draw the attention of his classmates, often at inopportune times. Continual practice of his sleight of hand brought detention sentences, which he considered to be "merely another practice venue."

But as his skills grew, so too did his curiosity. "I like to learn the history of the tricks. Each one has a background of when and why it was designed," something he feels isn't encouraged in aspiring magicians today. Magic used to be politically motivated, he says – in the 1700s, some top French magicians were ambassadors and politicians; even Harry Houdini was known to bring politics into his performances.

Gilles studied fire science at Northern Idaho College and found a job performing at a local magic shop. It wasn't long before he was booking gigs at small parties.

And he's taken to carrying that generational torch as a career, which to date is highlighted by six months in Las Vegas in 2007. While there, he worked as a primary illusion technician, helping design and set up show sets in the Tropicana – the only magic show that features white tigers (he fed and cared for a number of tigers belonging to Siegfried and Roy). He also studied the construction of illusion trick pieces, and he wrote a book, *Weekend Warriors Woodshop Guide to the Sub-trunk*, which explains construction of the sets.

Gilles has designed a few tricks that are being used in Las Vegas acts. "He's taken off with ideas that seem to be pretty good. He's got some good stuff goin' on," his father says.

Bryan's goal is to preserve the magic of the art of magic. He owns Elegant Illusion Entertainment and teaches a handful of students in Redding. He is also the founder and president of Redding Magicians' Society, a club that meets the last Tuesday of each month. The goal: Preservation and promotion of the art. "I just get to meet with others who are geeks like me," he says. •

See him perform:

Feb. 13 at the Ladies' Logging Conference
at Win-River Casino in Redding

For more information:
www.bryangilles.com