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COLIN REES DEVELOPED A PASSION FOR MAGIC AT THE AGE OF TWO WHEN HIS MOM MADE A ROCK 'DISAPPEAR'

Abracadabra

BY CINDY WHITE
Correspondent

At the ripe age of 12, Colin Rees can create illusions, perform tricks of sleight of hand and even pull a live rabbit from a hat — well, actually a box.

A Grade 6 student at Dickson Hill Public School, Colin has performed his magic act at the Strawberry Festival, the Stouffville library, his own school's variety show and many birthday parties. And he says he's never nervous.

"I just do the show. I do it because I like it and I like kids."

The Stouffville youngster has even developed some crowd control techniques and keeps a few jokes up his sleeve for those awkward moments.

"I try to include a bit of comedy and I work well under pressure."

He proved that when he filled in at the last minute for a cancelled show at the library over March break.

"There were 150 people here and he carried on like a real professional. He's an excellent entertainer," chief librarian Marilyn Ferguson said.

Colin's interest in magic was sparked by his mother, Robin Rees, when he was about two years old. He says he can remember being in awe of her ability to make a rock "disappear" from her hand.

"I can't believe he remembers that. It was the French drop," she said, demonstrating.

"I don't know why it's called that."

Colin also got his first taste of performing when he was young at a firemen's magic show in Markham.

"They picked me out of the crowd to be an assistant and I made everyone laugh."

When the Rees family moved to Stouffville seven years ago, Colin made himself a stage in the driveway of their Blake Street home and posted a cardboard sign at the end of the street advertising his magic show.

"I think he charged 17 cents. It was some odd number," said his father, Rick.

So how did he get from there to doing magic shows at birthday parties?

"The first birthday party I did was my brother's. I think he was three," said Colin.

From there he improved his act with the aid of books and videos on magic.

Now he has his own business card. "I do the library show and I perform at the variety show at my school at the end of the year and that's when I pass out my card. That's about the only advertising I do."

His act is usually 30 to 45 minutes long and he says he tries to make each show a little different. He has a magic bag, magic colouring book, rings and scarves.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Colin Rees of Stouffville waves his wand as he prepares to do some bunny magic.

He does a sleight of hand trick called elastic penetration, and for the grand finale he can make a live rabbit magically appear.

For each show Colin dresses in a silver shirt and black vest and pants. But no hat.

"Top hats are old fashioned," he said.

He has theme music, too. Either the *Phantom of the Opera* soundtrack or thunder storm music. For all this he charges \$25. Any parent who's tried hiring a magician for their child's party knows it's going to cost them at least \$100. Colin says he wouldn't mind charging a bit more but his parents won't let him. "It's a fair deal

for everyone," said Robin Rees.

"He gets more business this way and he's still a kid, still learning. Twenty-five dollars is a lot of money for a kid."

For a kid, he's smart with his money.

"I invest it. Some in a mutual fund and some in my magic," said Colin.

Other than his unusual part-time job, Colin is a pretty typical kid. In his room are baseball trophies, a Scout's uniform, an aquarium full of fish, a stereo and a photo of his idol, David Copperfield.

See **LIKE**, page 29.

Stouffville was once Magic Town

Town's collection of rare books include some by Houdini

Little did Colin Rees know when he put on his first magic show he was carrying on a lost Stouffville tradition.

For most of the 1980s, Stouffville was host to Canada's only Magic Festival, attracting professional magicians from all over North America.

It all started with an ambitious chief librarian, George Schlukbier, who was inspired by author Robertson Davies' *Deepford Trilogy* and by local personality Arthur Latham.

A Stouffville resident, self-made millionaire and talented magician, Latham made many contributions of funds and land in the area. He frequently was seen around town entertaining children with coin and card tricks.

When Latham died in 1979, the Latham Foundation was created. It was there Schlukbier found funding for the library's collection of more than 300 rare books on magic.

It's the only collection of its kind in Canada, with books authored by Houdini himself.

"They're here under lock and key," the library's Catherine Sword says. "Not many people seem to know about them."

The books were acquired in New York and England with advice from local magician Dan Laffey.

Laffey then became chief organizer for the Magic Festival. Posters promised street conjurers, illusionists, jugglers, mimes, escape artists, clowns and up-close magicians to perform on Main Street, in restaurants, Memorial Park and halls around town. Merchants dressed up and decorated their windows for the event.

'May the dark forces brood benignly over you'

Robertson Davies
Canadian author

A newspaper account of the day said more than 1,000 dazzled spectators gave a standing ovation for the gala show.

While the festival was endorsed by town council, the chamber of commerce and the Ministry of Tourism and received funding from government and local business, it was not without opposition.

Letters to council insisted magic was the work of Satan and not something to associate with the town's name.

The library's collection of articles show *The Tribune* endorsed the festival, while the paper published many letters to the editor opposing it. "The festival could someday result in drawing spiritists and mediums who derive their power from the occult," wrote Teresa Ninkovic.

But the four-day event went ahead. Robertson Davies himself sent a telegram.

"All good wishes for your festival. May the dark forces brood benignly over you," he wrote.

The magic festival won rave reviews and was declared a tremendous success. It continued for seven more years until it later became incorporated into the Strawberry Festival.

—Cindy White

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