

By: Tina Baiter

Mementos from his signature move can be seen on ceilings throughout Texarkana, on cruise ships, and even on numerous buildings across Manhattan, New York. His unique career has been magical to say the least and has afforded him the opportunity to bring happiness to hundreds of people throughout the world. His talents have sparked new levels of romance for couples and have inspired salesman to open new doors. His name is Roger Sheppard, and magic is simply a part of everything he does.

“Magic has been such an obsession of mine, ever since I can remember,” Sheppard said as he recalled how, as a young boy, he idolized magicians like Dai Vernon, Mark Wilson and Jimmy Grippo.

It was an ad for a 25-cent vanishing key trick in *Popular Mechanics* magazine, however, that Sheppard truly credits for jump starting his interest in magic at the young age of 13.

“I thought, ‘Man, that would be awesome to be able to make something vanish out of your hand.’ I thought for some reason magic was real somewhere down the line, so I wondered how this was going to work. I put it in my hand, and I held it there. And I held it there. And I held it there, and it wouldn’t vanish,” Sheppard said with a deep chuckle, holding up a key similar to the one he had purchased from the ad. “So I thought, ‘Okay this is going to take some work.’”

Sheppard said he reread and studied the instructions for mastering the trick, and then it finally happened.

“I took the key and put it in my hand just like they said,” he continued, pausing briefly to demonstrate an open palm slowly wrapping around the key. “And then when you think about it, it really does just vanish,” he added, opening his palm again to reveal total emptiness.

While it’s been said a good magician never reveals his tricks, Sheppard is more than willing to teach some of the basic concepts behind magic to those willing to learn.

“There’s a sense called delayed misdirection. If I put (the key) in my hand, your eyes first will look at my hand and think, ‘Okay it’s in there.’ And then your eyes will begin to over analyze what’s in my hand,” Sheppard said, as he went on to demonstrate how waving his other hand, which actually contains the key, provides a time delay to confuse the brain even more.

“Magic was more than just show. It had a lot of technical challenges to it,” he said. “The technical challenge in magic is conditioning your brain to work opposite the way it’s supposed to work. The true master magician has spent hours and hours as well as years perfecting the concept between the connection of the mind and the body.”

Over the last 30 years, Sheppard has put in his fair share of hours studying and perfecting his ability to entertain others through the art of magic. Often sought after to speak at trainings and banquets for

large corporations and to help host events, Sheppard has learned it can be fun, and often surprising, to involve members of the audience in his routine.

“I do a simulated pulling a bra off of a woman,” Sheppard said. “It’s a little gimmick that’s got a bra stuffed down into a silk.”

Sheppard has the woman randomly picked from the audience stuff the silk down into her shirt, and then he shows her a red scarf. He explains that after he makes the scarf disappear, he will remove the silk from her blouse, and magically the scarf will be tied in the middle of it. The shock, however, comes when the silk is pulled out to reveal a bra hanging in the middle. The natural reaction for most women is to immediately check for their bra, while the audience erupts with laughter.

“I did the entertainment for a beauty pageant one time, and I picked a lady with a red dress,” Sheppard said. “She came up on stage, and I did the trick, and the crowd laughed for I want to say five minutes. I couldn’t get them to quit. It turned out to be the Baptist preacher’s wife. When I pulled the bra off of her, it turned into the funniest thing.”

Sheppard’s magic career is something he has done as a side job since 1986, when he and his wife, Debbie, opened their business, Sports Magic, in Texarkana. But at the height of his magical stardom, Sheppard spent a great deal of time on the road, thanks in part to his signature trick and a very inquisitive CEO.

“I did a local deal for GE Railcar out at the fairgrounds, and the CEO of GE Railcar was from Chicago. It came a thunderstorm that night, and I thought the roof was coming off that building. So they all gathered up in a circle right in the middle, and I did the card on the ceiling, which is my marquee trick. This small short guy saw me do that, and he came over to me and said ‘How did you do that?’” Sheppard said, adding he told the man, who unbeknownst to him at the time was the CEO of the company, that he could not share his secret.

The CEO, Bob Speedson, asked Sheppard to repeat the trick, and then he invited Sheppard to travel with him to entertain customers. In July of 1986, Bob sent Sheppard to Manhattan to do a two day show for GE Railcar customers.

“I did the show, and at the end I stuck a card on the ceiling of this two story restaurant about three times, and Bob kept watching and watching,” Sheppard said. “After the show he put me in a limo with other head guys from the company, and they would drive to these little dives like Fat Jacks, and he’d say, ‘Y’all gather around, I want to show you this guy. He’s going to do this trick on the ceiling.’”

All-in-all that night, Sheppard visited five different little clubs across Manhattan repeating the card trick, and Bob never could figure out how it was done. But he knew observing the trick would be the only way he could ever figure it out because Sheppard’s lips were sealed. Bob invited Sheppard to a few other customer events in other states over the next year, but he never did figure out the trick’s secret.

Following his adventures with GE Railcar, Sheppard was invited to perform aboard a Royal Caribbean Cruise ship, but the daily pace of doing the same show over and over took the fun out of the magic for him. Plus, he had a new business back in Texarkana to take care of and a young family that now included two girls, Kristin and Lindsey.

When the Amway Corporation invited Sheppard to perform at their Freedom Rally in Nashville, Tennessee, Sheppard was eager to perform at the Opryland Hotel. Little did he know he would be performing for an audience of over 2,500 people. Sitting in the audience that night was a director for the Ralph Emery Show, who wanted to book Sheppard to appear on the show. That was the turning point for Sheppard's career.

"I got to thinking. I had two daughters that were just little bitty tikes, and I had already experienced New York and how much time it took. I had experienced the travel, and I was really beginning to experience what I had always wanted to do," Sheppard said. "I thought, if I go and do this on the Ralph Emery Show, then I'm going to want to go and do more stuff, and agents are going to start calling. At that point I said I cannot leave my family and be what I thought I wanted to be. I thought the influence of a father on his kids was much more important than my own particular career."

So Sheppard gave up his dream of being a famous magician and decided to focus on building a successful business and wonderful family with his high school sweetheart. In return, Debbie became Sheppard's booking agent, encouraging him to still do his magic locally. His friend, Jack Mills, gave Sheppard an outlet as the house magician at Fat Jack's, where he has performed and tested out new magic tricks for the last 25 years.

Sheppard is currently working on producing a DVD, *The CEO of Business Magic*, designed to help salesman learn how to get in the door. He also recently helped a local couple, Dustin and Kim, get engaged at Timothy's Restaurant, using a magic trick to unveil a ring. Sheppard is available for adult-aged parties, nursing homes, civic groups, banquets, business functions and more. He can tailor his magic show to different messages and audiences. To book Sheppard for your next event, call 903-832-1975. You can also view his talents at that magical proposal on-line by googeling "youtube magicalsurprise.dv".

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrwXJa6a8c8>