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**Bruce
Kalver**

Society of American Magicians Magazine

MAGIC • UNITY • MIGHT

Of Lizzie Borden, Houdini's repairman, a lost voice on the radio...

It's August 4, 1892 in Fall River, Massachusetts, when banker Andrew Jackson Borden and his wife Abby are hacked to death. Daughter Lizzie Borden, tried for the grisly murders, is acquitted.

Move to the early 1920s, as a sheet metal worker by the name of Sam is approached by Houdini's troupe to fix some stage equipment. Because of his admirable work, he's invited to serve as the master showman's hidden assistant in the audience.

Then it's 1942, and with World War II raging, a 15-year-old girl named Eunice is performing on the national radio show, Major Bowes' *Original Amateur Hour*. A transcription recorder captures her voice in a performance that will be lost, rediscovered, and then broadcast again a half century later.

And finally, it's July 21, 2008 in Louisville, Kentucky, and the man formerly called "Rhode Island's Youngest Magician" is about to be installed as president of the Society of American Magicians.

What length of "gypsy thread" links these four moments stretched across time? They're all scenes from the life of Bruce Kalver — a professional magician for over 40 years, a magic inventor, Magic Castle and Magic Circle lecturer, balloon artist, moderator of the SAMtalk Internet newsgroup, dinner theater director, cruise ship performer, flea circus maven, Disney obsessive, Guinness World Record holder, and radio talk show host.

FAMILY SECRETS OF BRUCE KALVER

BY PAUL MACCABEE

He was born into a show business family on July 30, 1956, in Providence, Rhode Island. “At least that’s what my parents told me,” says Bruce Kalver, who’s proud to remind that Providence is also home to horror fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft, humorist S.J. Perelman, and *There’s Something About Mary* film directors, the Farrelly Brothers.

Bruce grew up with a direct connection to the Houdini dynasty, grandfather Samuel Woolf, who’d been a sheet metal worker and magician. Born in London, he had immigrated to America and settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts. He had mastered Erdase’s *Expert at the Card Table* and cherished an original subscription to the *Tarbell System*, which he’d bequeath later to Bruce. Sam’s metallic vocation and magical avocation collided when the Houdini troupe passed through and stopped at Sam’s shop to see if a prop could be mended. He not only fixed Houdini’s effect, he made an improvement to it. From that point on, Houdini, and later, Houdini’s brother, Hardeen, would send Sam other paraphernalia to be repaired. Sam was even enlisted to appear as a stooge in the audience when Houdini performed in New England.

“I was four years old when I begged Grandpa Sam to teach me some magic,” Bruce recalls. “He was hesitant to show me anything, expecting that I wouldn’t practice or keep secrets. He showed me a mini-deck of cards and said, ‘Pay attention, because I’m only going to show you this three times,’ demonstrating three

perfect one-handed cuts. ‘Now go learn that, and I’ll show you more.’” Within a day, when young master Kalver had mastered the Charlier Pass, Sam began the magic lessons.

Bruce’s love of magic was further ignited by Mark Wilson’s 1960 TV series *The Magic Land of Allakazam* and by watching Fantasio and Fred Kaps on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Ironically, Bruce left the room when a rock-and-roll band took Sullivan’s stage (Who cared about a quartet called The Beatles?), returning only when Kaps was on.

Bruce’s mother, Eunice, guided him in stage presence and vocal projection. “My mother and her twin brothers had been tap dancers and singers from the age of three, and my grandmother, Jeanette Zennenberg, had appeared as a dancer in Rudolph Valentino films.”

The conditions of Bruce’s first magic show, a \$5 performance in 1966 for a nursing home’s annual picnic, were brutal. Mounting a stage built from a four by eight piece of plywood, the ten-year-old

Bruce was fried like a chalupa by the 98-degree temperature. His patter for Climax Egg Bag, Zombie, Temple Screen, and E-Z Hat Loader competed with the noise from a trucking depot behind him, an animal shelter with barking dogs to his right, and an accordion player wheezing a squeezebox to his left. “Picture total chaos, yet the little boy magician was unfazed by his surroundings. I couldn’t do it today.”



The S.A.M. entered Bruce's life through the encouragement of barber and Assembly 26 president Anthony DiJulio, who suggested Bruce's grandfather drive the 13-year-old to his first magic convention in New Haven, Connecticut. "I still can't believe what a mecca it was," Kalver says. "In the dealer room, you had Jack Chanin, Abbott's, and Bob Little; in the lecture room, Coe Norton and Duke Stern; and Bernie Trueblood was performing a new handkerchief trick called Glorpy. Unforgettable."

This author hasn't forgotten that convention either. I was a magic-obsessed bar mitzvah boy barely capable of deceiving five-year-olds with Run Rabbit Run. The course of my magic life changed when I stumbled into that dealer room and met Bruce Kalver, performing sleight-of-hand that seemed incomprehensible coming from a boy whose voice hadn't changed yet. I left that convention with a Chinatown Quarter set, memories of assisting Al Flosso with his Miser's Dream, and a lifelong friendship with Bruce. And our relationship survived fierce disagreements over magic dealers: I championed Abbott's and Supreme Magic, Bruce preferred Tannen's and Davenport's.

For years, I would ride the bus to Bruce's home in Providence, descending into a basement stuffed with dove harnesses, Siberian chain escapes, and U.F. Grant props, where we dissected the illustrations in Tannen catalogs like Talmudic scholars. Like so many before him, Kalver immersed himself in the *Tarbell Course* and devoured Robert Harbin and Billy McComb, along with Walter Graham's *How to Become a Magician for Fun and Profit*.

In 1975, while Bruce was appearing as Harry the Horse in a college production of the musical *Guys and Dolls*, his beloved grandfather Sam passed away. "He died on March 15, the Ides of March. Ironically, my mother also passed away in 1987 on March 15. I dread that day every year. But I also learned that even though they're no longer with me, I always ask myself, 'What would Mom or Grandpa do in that situation?' It's nice that they're always around."

As a teenager, Bruce attracted attention performing close-up at restaurants, first at Stanley Greens and the Ground Round, and then in later years at TGI Fridays and Dave & Busters. An invitation to perform at a fundraiser for the Community Organization for Drug Abuse Control at Warwick Mall in Warwick, Rhode Island led to his setting a Guinness World Record.

"I knew most of the tricks in *Scarne on Card Tricks* and Harry Lorayne's *Close-up Card Magic*," Bruce says. "And I always hated when a spectator said, 'I know that take-a-card trick,' so setting a world record for doing the most number of *different* card tricks in one sitting seemed like a good idea." Bruce performed 13 hours of card tricks without a single repeat — from McDonald's Aces to a half-dozen different versions of the Rising Cards. Bruce climaxed his record smashing run at 1 a.m., after going through 24 decks of cards. A security guard took out his handcuffs and locked Kalver to a railing, saying, "Okay, magician, I'm going to keep you here until you do more tricks!" Fortunately, one of Bruce's card effects involved a bobby pin, and when the guard looked away, he nabbed the pin, picked the handcuffs, grabbed his bag, and waved goodbye to the guard, as the media and the audience screamed.

Bruce's sister, Jeanette, had been his assistant for years, duly submitting to his electric Sawing in Half illusion. Bruce remembers strapping his sister in the frame and sawing across, with the effect taking all of 15 seconds to complete. "We didn't pay \$200 so you could do a 15-second trick," admon-



With a hot headshot like this, Bruce's success in the 1970s could do nothing but skyrocket.

ished his father, which led to a typical Kalver-expanded routine involving a rubber chicken, foam rubber heart, and sponge hot dogs.

Photographic evidence suggests that Bruce then worked for two years with a sultry actress and dancer named Zepporah. "She was thin and fit in the boxes. In fact, 'Zippy' was the first girl to be Zig-Zagged in Rhode Island." But on July 25, 1975, that all changed, when Bert Silverberg, a local theater professor, invited 18-year-old Kalver to become magic consultant for a community theater production of *Carnival*. Bert introduced Bruce to the business manager of the Just As We Are Players, Arlene Elboim, whose degree in theater and childhood education dovetailed with Bruce's journalism and magic background. "This is Arlene — she's the person to see when it's time to get paid."

"I was acting in the show and Bruce had to teach me the Appearing Cane," Arlene remembers. "He was very protective of the secret, and I don't think he wanted a layperson in on the magic." Arlene quickly became his magical and romantic partner and the

couple married in May 1977. Arlene laughs about it today. "Hey, at the time, we breathed, ate, and slept magic, so I felt that our wedding should be something... different." When the couple spoke to the rabbi, Arlene insisted, "One rule about the ceremony, no magic!"

Bruce says, "If it were up to me, the ceremony would have been *filled* with magic. But Arlene had other ideas and, as usual, she was right." Still, the rabbi mentioned what a magical moment this was, and then he winked at Bruce. That was the only mention of magic the entire evening.

"I can't express how deeply Bruce cares about magic," says Arlene, who also performs as a magic clown on her own. "The way I met Bruce was through his magic, so I saw magic linked to him from the moment I met him." Asked if there is any part of Bruce's life in which magic *doesn't* figure, Arlene lets out a sultry giggle and says, "Without getting too intimate, there's one place in our life that's a no-discussion-of-magic zone; otherwise, it's a constant with us!"

Shortly after they were married, Bruce and Arlene began touring dinner theaters. Bruce recalls that the duo's performances at Ole Henry's Dinner Theater in



Kalver performing with "Zippy," purportedly the first girl to get Zig-Zagged in the state of Rhode Island.

Albuquerque, New Mexico was structured so that Arlene was sawn apart or cut up one way or another in every effect. “In halves, fourths, fifths and sixths — every time she came out, there was another blade waiting for her.” The Trinity Square Repertory Company approached Bruce to provide magic for their musical *Jack the Ripper*, which led to his magic being incorporated into shows that included *Godspell*, *Pippin*, *Into the Woods*, and Steve Martin’s *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*.

In 1982, Carnival Cruise Lines booked Bruce and Arlene and the duo spent years floating across the Atlantic and the Caribbean. “Many couples who worked on cruise ships did not stay together,” Arlene remembers. “Living in such close quarters, the pressures of the job, and the temptations of the environment provided too much togetherness for some. But Bruce and I were a team, onstage and off.” Shipboard audiences embraced their shows, which included a 1920s prohibition-theme act with *Multiplying Bottles*, and a game show presentation of *Seabrooke’s Burned Bill to Wallet*.

One item that’s never seen in Bruce’s shows is a live rabbit. “I am allergic to rabbits. No joke. I break out in hives and can’t stop sneezing for hours. I can’t tell you how much publicity I got as ‘The Magician who is Allergic to Rabbits.’”

The versatility required of magicians intent on earning 100% of their income from show business led Bruce and Arlene to 13 years of producing and directing dinner theater. Inspired by a *New York Times* article about the growing interest in murder mystery nights, Bruce approached the Marriott hotel about an evening of homicidal entertainment. But they turned him down cold, insisting that no one would buy tickets for a show during which they enjoyed a steak dinner while watching a character being killed. Six months later, the hotel gave the proposal a second thought, agreeing to a single three-day run of Bruce’s murder mystery. The show sold out the Marriott ballroom each night, and Bruce embarked on a new company called *Murder Mystery Evenings*.

Bruce began selling magic out of the family’s garage in 1974, moving to a Providence storefront when he and Arlene got married. The Magic Room supplied touring circus clowns, theater troupes, and magicians from 1976 to 1982. Close-up magician Norm Caron saw ads for the magic store in a local newspaper and wanted to see what Kalver was selling. “Bruce showed me a half-dozen effects,” Caron recalls, “all with enormously entertaining stories, some of which he drew from his own life. I was there for 60 minutes and didn’t buy a darned thing. I figured he was miffed at me, but I love the man. We became lifelong friends. I work for Disney today and see all sorts of imaginative things, but Bruce has an amazing imagination. Not only does he think outside the box, I don’t think Bruce has ever been *inside* the box. He’s the total magic package, a passion for the art and a family man who does it all from close-up to stage. I’d love to clone Bruce and have him as my son.”

In the 1980s Bruce began working comedy clubs. Producers from *America’s Funniest People* caught Bruce’s act at Periwinkles Comedy Club in 1985 and two weeks later, he was on national television, when *America’s Funniest Home Videos* broadcast Bruce’s performance of the Zig-Zag Girl, during which his dissected assistant warbled, “You Do Something To Me.”

In the bizarre magic community, Kalver is best known for co-developing the Lizzie Borden Séance with Larry White, former magic editor for *M-U-M*. “Al Manson, past president of Assembly 9, had brainstormed on the séance idea with me,” White says, “and we were firm about one thing — we wanted the séance to be done by trained actors within the



Shortly after their marriage, Bruce and Arlene began directing, producing, and performing in dinner theater shows across the country.

context of a play, and not a magic show put on by magicians.”

Knowing of Kalver’s success with his *Murder Mystery Evenings* company, White sought him out to direct his séance. “We didn’t want to make this a classic séance, because we knew that would attract believers who wanted to contact dead ancestors,” says White. “So we gravitated toward a séance tied to a famous person, with a location specific to that historical figure.”

The iconic figure they settled on was acquitted murderess Lizzie Borden, who had given her mother forty whacks (“and when she saw what she had done, she gave her father forty-one”) with a hatchet in 1892. The location selected was the grisly site of the Borden family’s demise at 92 Second Street in Fall River, Massachusetts. With the encouragement of the owners of the Victorian house, which had been transformed into a bed and breakfast, White embarked on writing 12 drafts of a script that incorporated psychic demonstrations, a billet test, and PK effects. Bruce became the character of “The Professor,” an expert in paranormal phenomena,

whose relics included a replica of Andrew Borden’s skull, a bottle of poison, and a broken axe. The show, in which the ghost of Lizzie returns, was performed in the very room where Andrew Borden had been hacked to death. A framed police photo of Mr. Borden’s body lying on the couch welcomed the audience of 22 who attended the first public performance of the show on January 28, 2001.

It was a séance that would have made Margery proud. As the guests were leaving, an invited reporter was shaking visibility, admitting, “I’ve never been so frightened in my life.” The *Fall River Herald* front-paged her positive review, and the séance exploded for two years, until new owners took over the Borden house and Lizzie’s ghost was retired.

White and Kalver marketed the standout effect of the séance, the creepy appearance of a bloody red handprint, calling it “In Lizzie’s Hand.” And when the show folded Bruce asked Larry if he could market the entire séance so other magicians could learn from it. “I agreed,” Larry says, “and in a week’s time Bruce had created the *Lizzie Borden Séance Portfolio*, a packet of materials that included the script, prop notes, directors notes, and advertising material. It would have taken me months to do what Bruce did in a week.”

However, Kalver’s most successful marketed effect was developed for an optical illusion assembly program called *Eye Don’t Believe It*. “The basic idea came about when I visited Larry White at his science center,” Bruce recalls. “I saw this huge spiral that I had read about in an old science book, and Larry explained why it worked and how he used it in his school science shows.” The spiral generated an illusion of movement that physicists term the “motion aftereffect.” After staring at the revolving spiral, other objects seem to shrink in an eerie manner. Bruce saw the



Bruce and Arlene enjoyed years of working aboard cruise ships because they were a great team “both onstage and off.”

potential for a science-magic effect and after much experimentation and thanks to Larry he produced his Growing and Shrinking Head Illusion.

Harry Leaman, a member of the Rhode Island Society of Magicians performs Bruce's Growing and Shrinking Head in his shows as a warm-up. "And I do it twice," Harry says. "The first time 50% of the audience sees your head shrink. The second time, the entire audience gets it, and the crowd goes crazy."

But the most powerful illusion Bruce has ever performed was conjuring up the voice of his mother, Eunice, who passed away in 1987. At the age of 15, she had auditioned for Major Bowes' *Original Amateur Hour*, the radio version of *American Idol* for the World War II era. Eunice was selected to perform a series of vocal impersonations evoking Judy Garland, Dinah Shore, and Marlene Dietrich. Eunice won that night's competition, and after USO tours and a recording with Count Basie, she performed in nightclubs and resorts along the East Coast. Bruce began collecting old-time radio shows in the hope of finding the episode of the show that featured his mother.

Eunice died two months before Bruce's son Eric was born and five years before daughter Wendy was born in 1992, so the children had never heard their



Curiosity over the principle of "motion aftereffect" led to the concept of Kalver's Growing and Shrinking Head illusion.

grandmother's voice. After collecting thousands of radio shows, Bruce had all but given up finding the program that featured Eunice. Then in 1998, he stumbled across an Internet newsgroup of old-time radio enthusiasts, and when he asked if anyone had a copy of "Major Bowes" with Eunice Woolf (her maiden name) as a contestant he received a response. Bruce's question was referred to the Library of Congress Recording Division, which informed him that they'd recently received a donation of Major Bowes' show transcriptions. They were not catalogued and Bruce had no idea what date Eunice had performed on the show, but painstakingly, the Library of Congress tracked down the

September 3, 1942 transcription of Eunice on the air.

The day the tape arrived Bruce held it in his hands and stared at it. "And then I played it," he told the *Providence Journal* in an interview, "and I cried. When my wife came home we played it and she cried. I sent a copy to my father, and he cried. When people die, there are a million questions you want to ask. And you can't. They're gone. Just to hear her voice again, she's 15 years old, she has perfect pitch, she's so crisp and clear..."

But there's more to the story. Eleven years after his mother's death, Bruce was able to broadcast her voice over the airwaves again in 1998 on

THE MIRROR TELLS NO LIES

BY BRUCE KALVER

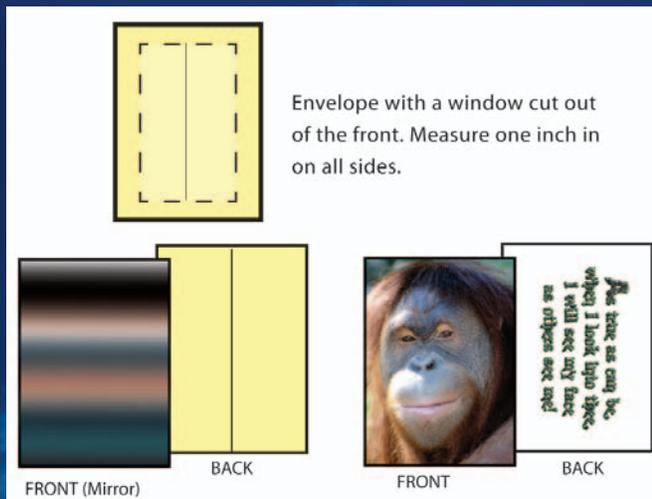
The magician shows a large envelope that contains a mirror, explaining, "The enchanted mirror is a very special one. If you chant the magic spell on the back of the mirror, when you look into the mirror, it will show you what you look like when others see you." The mirror is placed back into the envelope and the spectator chants the spell. The mirror is removed and when the spectator looks into it he sees a monkey!

You will need two 6 x 9 inch Kraft envelopes, two 5 x 7 inch pieces of stiff cardboard, and a 5 x 7 inch piece of adhesive-backed reflective Mylar.

Cut a window in the front of one of the envelopes as shown in the drawing. Turn one of the pieces of cardboard into a mirror by sticking the Mylar on one side. Cut out the back of the second envelope and glue that to the other side of the mirror. Glue the monkey photo on one side of the other piece of cardboard. The magic spell is glued on the back of the monkey cardboard.

The mirror goes on top of the monkey picture and both are placed with the magic spell seen through the window.

To perform pull both cards out, showing them as one and have the spectator look into the mirror. Tell the story of the mirror and place both cards back (as one) into the envelope with the spell showing in the window of the envelope. Have the spectator chant the spell. Now remove just the spell/monkey card from the envelope. The envelope will appear to be empty because of the fake envelope-back on the mirror. Hold the card right up to the spectator's face and he will see that he looks like a monkey.



his own *Nostalgia Times Radio Programme* on New Bedford's WBSM-AM. In addition to his mother's voice, Bruce's radio audience heard interviews with show business greats including Rose Marie from the *Dick Van Dyke Show*, Orson Bean, Eddie Albert, Shari Lewis and, of course, magicians including Christopher Hart (Thing in the Addams Family films), Carl Ballantine, Milt Larsen, Glenn Falkenstein, and Frances Willard.

The last broadcast of Bruce's *Nostalgia Time Radio Programme* occurred on April 20, 2008. Bruce ended the run of the show to devote more time to his pending S.A.M. presidency. He had clocked more than 2,500 hours of broadcasting. "It was show number 865," he tells. "Over that time, I went through 10 newsmen/sidekicks, 16 years and 33 weeks, 2,595 cups of coffee, 1,298 bagels, five awards, and thousands of memories."

Speaking of bagels, of the most bizarre phenomena of our time — including Kirlian auras, killer bees, black holes, David Hasselhoff's career — surely one of the oddest is Bruce's legendary inability to receive what he orders from any restaurant in America. "I will order at a Burger King drive-through asking for no onions," says Bruce, "and once on the highway, realize they gave me a Whopper with *only* onions." At another restaurant, when his roast beef sandwich arrived it was frozen; what's more, Kalver had ordered pastrami. On tour with UK magicians Mandy Davis and Rob Cox, he ordered a mushroom and cheese omelet and received a bacon and sausage omelet. Efforts to circumvent the Kalver Culinary Curse, such as Bruce asking other people to order for him or having waitresses repeat the order back to him word-for-word, are to no avail. These gaffes are Bruce's cross to bear and, maddeningly, it will not affect any food that *you* order, should you have the opportunity to dine with him in Louisville this summer.

Which brings us to Bruce's rise within the S.A.M. Jann Wherry Goodsell, a past national president, marvels at all the work Bruce has done with the Society of Young Magicians. He is part of the team that created the S.Y.M.'s Weekend of Wonder convention [July 4-6 in Providence, Rhode Island] for young members, and he is always thinking of ways to enhance the membership experience.

Another past national president, Andy Dallas, tells of how in 2002, when the National Council was poised to terminate the Occult Investigation Committee, ending a nearly 80-year tradition originally sparked by president and *M-U-M* editor Harry Houdini, "It was Bruce who helped me pull the O.I.C. out of the fire and saved it by bringing it into the digital age." Andy explains, "We realized the best way to preserve the O.I.C. was to open it up to the general membership by getting it online. Bruce got us up on our Web site and the transformation wouldn't have happened without him. Sure, he understands computers, which is a plus, but the best trait Bruce has is he's a genuinely respectful person who puts the S.A.M. first."

The Magic Circle, considered a sister organization to the S.A.M., employs Bruce as its representative in the Northeast region of the U.S., providing feedback on magicians seeking membership in the London based organization. That's the doing of Magic Circle examinations secretary and professional comedy entertainer Rob Cox, whose "almost" wife Mandy Davis, the "Diva of Deception," drafted Bruce for a 12-city lecture tour of England last October. Because Bruce's favorite comedians are British — notably, Peter Sellers and the cast of *The Goon Show*, a BBC radio program of the 1950s — his humor translated well in the U.K. Kalver's tour brought his lecture "Perfectly Practical" to magicians from Surrey to Manchester and ultimately to London.

"When Mandy told me she'd booked me into the Magic Circle," Bruce says, "I went crazy trying to come up with an effect for magicians who'd seen everything." Reaching back in time, Kalver's Magic Circle lecture featured the two-person mindreading code taught to him by his grandfather Samuel Woolf. "I'd already taught it to both of my kids, so combine that with my being a huge fan of the Internet phone service Skype and the fact that the Magic Circle has equipped their headquarters with wireless Internet access, and I just *had* to perform a transatlantic version of this mind reading routine with my daughter, Wendy, in Rhode Island."

THINGS CURIOUS ABOUT KALVER

Bruce interviewed many celebrities on his radio show, including Steve Allen, Orson Bean, Shari Lewis, and Rose Marie, but was afraid to interview one celebrity because he is such a fan and feared he would be too nervous to do a good job. That person is Bernadette Peters.

Bruce is currently reading Ken Emerson's *Always Magic in the Air*, a history of the music composers working from the Brill Building.

Bruce has perfect pitch like his mother Eunice.

Bruce has a photographic memory for facts and trivia. He also has total recall of conversations he's had in his lifetime and will remind you of a discussion or event that you've long forgotten.

Bruce is currently reading Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* for the second time.

Broadway cast recordings of *Wicked* and *Ragtime* can be found on Bruce's iPod.

Bruce and Andy Dallas are writing a magic musical.

Bruce listens to Michel Camillo's jazz music to think by and become inspired ("It's also great for magic," he says).

Bruce is currently reading *Houdini!!!* by Kenneth Silverman for the third time.

Angels' voices that can be found on Bruce's iPod are Nancy LaMott, Susan Egan, and Eunice Woolf on Major Bowes ("Ask me and I'll play it for you," he says).

Bruce says he "learns about puzzles" by listening to the lyrics of the Sondheim CDs on his iPod.

Bruce is currently reading *Footprints on the Ceiling* by Clayton Rawson for the fifth time.

Bruce claims you can tell if someone is a mentalist by looking for Magic Marker stains on their hands. (He also says you can make those marks disappear by spraying them with hairspray... "It works on clothes, too.")

"It's difficult to oversell the impact of Bruce's two-person code telepathy act with his daughter," says Cox. "It was the highlight of the lecture, and the warmth of their interaction endeared Bruce and Wendy to the hearts of Magic Circle members." You can watch Bruce and Wendy perform the routine by going on the Internet and searching for "Kalver" on YouTube.

"That Internet routine was so cool!" exclaims Wendy. "When Dad introduced me to the audience via Skype, it was weird. Some thought I was a recording. Someone in the audience at the Magic Circle held up a 20-pound note and showed it to my dad, as I 'read his mind' and told them the serial number. The magicians had just learned the code in the lecture, and then they got to see me do it with my dad.

"Everybody else's father has a normal job," adds Wendy, "but I get to say my dad is a magician. I'm so proud of him. Everywhere we travel, people know my father as a magician. We'll be in an airport getting boarding passes and the employees will upgrade his tickets because, 'You're Bruce Kalver the magician!'"

Kalver's Magic Circle lecture marked another first for the British club. It was the first lecture in history to be videotaped and streamed off The Magic Circle Web site. "The biggest challenge and opportunity for magic in the next few years is technology," Bruce says. "The Internet is killing other organizations, because you don't have to leave your house or even your chair to meet with people and find information. As S.A.M. president, I hope to bring back the excitement of going to live meetings. Film, video, and the Internet are all great, but live and in person will always win out."

Bruce is a self-confessed computer geek, but he insists, "The S.A.M. has to embrace technology that works for us rather than against us. *M-U-M* online rather than in the mail? Only the future will tell." Not surprisingly, it was Bruce who helped then-S.A.M. president Jann Wherry Goodsell and Larry White implement and moderate the new SAMtalk online newsgroup for S.A.M. members. Kalver, then a regional vice president, also initiated an online program SYMentor, so that members of the S.Y.M. who live far from an assembly can go online for help with a sleight. Bruce's work as editor of the *Magic SYMbol* suggests how important he sees passing on magic knowledge to future magicians.

How will Bruce approach the presidency of the S.A.M.? PNP John Apperson says, "I tell him to just relax and let it flow. I'm impressed that Bruce often calls past presidents for opinions about issues. He's a great listener. Above all, Bruce loves the S.A.M. Our Society is all about the magic, and magic is what Bruce is all about."

"Magic is Bruce's entire life," says his friend Harry Leaman. "I've been in magic for 50 years and have never seen anyone as dedicated to the S.A.M. and the advancement of magic. Think about it. He has never had a job other than magic. Bruce is what every magician in America would like to be."

"Bruce is constantly devising new magic," says Larry White. "We got together to shop at a new Ikea store near where I live. It was a magic carpet ride for Bruce. Practically every item he picked up became a new trick in his mind and was dropped into his shopping bag for further development. I remember him eyeing a collapsible laundry basket, which was simply a canvas bag held open by a metal spring. Bruce imagined sewing some together and then marking the bag on the outside with a pen to create the world's largest spring snake!"

Given his role in co-presiding over the joint I.B.M./S.A.M. convention in Louisville this month, it's not surprising that magicians predict Kalver

will forge closer bonds between the two national organizations. "During the past year, Bruce has gone out of his way to get to know me, and I really appreciate that effort," says Joan Caesar, I.B.M. International President Elect. "Our mutual aim is to enhance the art of magic, and ensure that the S.A.M. and I.B.M. work together for our common goal."

Just four months ago, Bruce's father Ed Kalver passed away after a long, painful battle with leukemia. "I'd so hoped that my dad would be attending the convention in July to see his son become president." Before Ed Kalver's death last March, Bruce and his sister Jeanette flew to Florida to say a final goodbye. "We spent two days 'interviewing' my father, asking every question we never got a chance to ask. It was a way for us to relive our lives together, and reminisce about magic and all that was accomplished, thanks to him having a son. How many people get a chance to do that?"

Just as Bruce's father, mother, and grandfather taught him about show business, Bruce is now mentoring his children: Wendy is intrigued by a career in television writing and Eric is a senior at the Berklee School of Music in Boston. In fact, Eric played a critical role in one of Bruce's emotionally powerful routines, a 15-minute act called "Classical Conjuring." An elderly magician puts his act up for sale and mentors a young boy in his effects, recapturing the old man's lost youth in the process. Bruce cast himself as the older wizard and his then nine-year-old son Eric as the boy. "After the show, people went up to Eric with tears in their eyes, nodding in approval and shaking his hand," Bruce says. "The act hit every magician who was there. Eventually, all of us will reach a point where we won't be able to perform anymore. We have to pass our magic on to the younger generation, to our children."

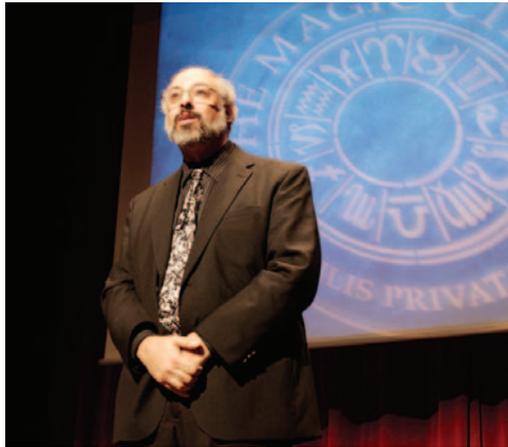
Eric says, "I've been on stage with Dad, assisting him with about 300 birthday parties. When I was five, he had me on the local Bozo show as 'The Amazing Eric.' That's how I learned about professionalism, being prepared, being on time, and showing the audience that you're happy to be onstage." And there are compensations for being raised in a magic household. "My father taught me balloon twisting when I was in high school, so now I make balloon sculptures, such as a rose or two lovebirds kissing, for my girlfriend. And yes, she likes it a lot."

Not surprisingly, given his relationships with his magician grandfather, singer-entertainer mother, percussionist son Eric, wife-clown Arlene, and mind-reading daughter Wendy, Bruce has chosen "The S.A.M. Family" as his theme for the 2008-09 year. "My S.A.M. friends have been there for each other through good and bad, and I want to bring that warm family feeling to the S.A.M. community."

Kalver expects to perform magic for a few more decades. But he admits that his performances are evolving as he ages, as they did for his grandfather. "I used to lug around lots of tables and props for my shows," muses Bruce, his grin framed by a graying beard and mustache. "Amazingly, as you get older, you realize that you don't need so much. Perhaps the motivation is that as you get older, you don't want to carry so much stuff to make great magic."

"What makes great magic? It's clever, it's visual, it's pure, it's entertaining, it's simple. I think what audiences most want is not dancing girls, shiny boxes, and flashy lights, but you — your personality. And in magic, that's all you need. You. Just you." ♦

Paul Maccabee, president of Minneapolis-based public relations agency Maccabee Group Inc, is a close-up magician who has been friends with Bruce Kalver since they were 13 years old.



Bruce's lecture at London's Magic Circle featured a mind-reading routine with his daughter Wendy at home in Rhode Island.