

HEARTWARMING HOLIDAY SURPRISE

by Ric Ewing

WHEN the *Share the Magic* show was canceled this year, **Wayne Pernell** suggested members share the magic at such places as the Vet's Home on their own for the holiday season. **Doug Kovacich** ran with the idea and organized a series of shows at the Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall facilities where he works. Some of these kids were going to be behind bars and away from their families for the Holiday Season. He thought it would be a great idea to bring some Holiday cheer to them.



Ric Ewing fiendishly attempts to cut off the hand of a Juvenile Hall worker. Luckily, he is foiled.

When Doug first approached Kara and me with the idea, we had much trepidation about performing for a group of Juvenile delinquent teenagers. I mean really, it's hard enough, for me at least, to perform for normal teenagers, if you can call teenagers normal. I could just image the horrors of performing for the "social outcasts" locked behind bars for murders, burglary, and gang fights, oh my. We reluctantly agreed to perform for all the nights he wanted to schedule, thinking we would not be alone and other members of S.A.M. #112 would be performing with us. I was a little disappointed to learn later that Kara and I would be the only performers for all eleven shows, as no one else volunteered. What had I gotten myself into? I could just see disaster looming on the horizon.

Before we would be allowed to enter the facility to perform

our show we had to undergo a background check and get finger printed prior to the show dates. The whole process took less than an hour and was painless. We read a few short forms, displayed our drivers licenses, sign our names on duplicate forms and interact with a cool computer for taking our finger prints; no black ink to try to wash off. The staff was friendly and Doug escorted us thought he whole process and made all the arrangements. In the back of my mind I was hoping they would say, "Sorry, remember that parking ticket ten years ago? We just can't let someone like you be an influence on these kids." It took only three days for the background check to clear, and we passed with flying colors. Now what?

Well, Kara and I went into brain-storm mode to create a forty-five-minute show we hoped these teens would at least watch and not try to heckle us too much. The day arrived, and I called Doug to confirm the shows—secretly hoping something had happened to cancel the events. No such luck. We loaded the car with our backdrops, sound system, and props and hoped for the best. On Monday night, December 17, we were scheduled for three shows in three different wards. Apparently they don't mix the really bad offenders with those who just made a bad decision and got caught. We signed in and clipped on visitor badges, and Doug escorted us into the bowels of Juvenile Hall. We were cleared through several sets of security doors before we arrived at the first ward. No one was getting out of this place on purpose.

We arrived in a large room with many



Ric Ewing, with Kara's help, attempts to instruct a Juvenile Hall worker how to turn over a bottle inside a container.

locked doors around the perimeter. These were the doors to the individual cells. The staff called them rooms but looked no bigger than walk-in closets. The doors had small narrow reinforced windows, and most had faces of male teenagers peering out at us. There were mostly African-Americans and Hispanics with a few Caucasians—mostly big guys with a lot of hair. They were watching every moved we made. I had to ask myself, "What am I doing here!?"

We setup the backdrops and the sound system and prepared for the show. The room doors were opened a few at a time, and the boys filed out and sat on the rubber couches that had been set up for the show. Doug gave them a short lecture about not talking among themselves during the show and staying in their seats unless called upon and then added the admonition that if they didn't want to watch show, they could go back to their rooms.

"Oh, a good idea!" I said to myself. Maybe they will think magic is for kids and will not want any part of it. Show canceled due to lack of audience? No chance. I suppose sitting and watching a magic show, no matter how lame they think it will be, is better than sitting alone in the small locked room counting the bricks on the wall.

Then it happened. Doug introduced us, and the show was on. Kara and I came through the curtain and took our bow to a less than enthusiastic applause. We were facing a stern looking group of teenage boys. Few smiled; most slouched in their chairs with a look that said, "Go ahead. Make me laugh."

I looked at Kara; we each took a deep breath and started our first musical opening routine—a silk blendo effect that got a little response. Then a quick rope-blending effect got some faint "oohs," and a diminishing-card effect got all of them sitting up straight and saying, "No way!"

The music ended to a much better applause than we had hoped for. Following

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Ric Ewing prepares hand cutter as unsuspecting Juvenile Hall worker and Kara laugh.

a sponge ball effect that does not use a volunteer, the boys were starting to get into the whole magic show excitement. By the time we had concluded the next routine, which was Ring on Rope, most all the boys wanted to be a part of the show.

There were actually (no kidding) sitting on the edges of their rubber couches, opening their eyes wide, and laughing. Laughing! With smiles so big it was like a sea of white teeth.

My trepidation faded away, and we interacted with the boys, presenting mind-reading effects, card tricks, and more. The laughter hit an all-time high when we ended up putting a staff member's arm into an arm chopper and ending the show with our comedy straight-jacket escape, allowing a staff member to lock me in.

Every show, in every ward, no matter how tough the offenders were, with the exception of the girls units, started off the same way—with stern, I-don't-care looks—and ended with howls of laughter. We heard lots of "Thank you. Great show," and saw handshakes, fist bumps, and smiles as they made their way back to their small rooms. Some the boys had questions for us on how to learn some magic, and would I teach them some.

The girls units were totally different. They were excited from the start of the show, getting into the experience right away. It felt as though we were performing for a teenage slumber party.

I have to admit that I had a wrong outlook on the whole experience prior to the first

show. All the kids were well behaved, appreciative, and excited to participate once they saw it was not a kiddie show and no one was being embarrassed, talked down to, or made fun of. The staff was good natured and took part in the shows as well.

We heard that word had gotten around to the staff at the next morning staff meeting about the show, and we also heard about staff members' arranging their breaks and coming in on their off times to watch.

I have performed a lot of shows in the pasted thirty-three years, and I have to say these shows at the Juvenile Hall Facilities have been some of the most fun shows Kara and I have ever experienced. I hate to admit it, but they were more fun than the *Share the*

Magic shows.

Kara and I look forward to returning next season and truly hope that some of you will join us even if you can't perform all the nights. It's not as scary as you think—and a lot more fun and rewarding than we had ever imaged.

Here hoping you have a great New Year!



Ric Ewing gives another lesson in topsy-turvy bottles to Juvenile Hall worker while Kara explains things to the audience.

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