



The Magical Becwars consist of (back row, left to right) Joyce and Jennifer Lynn Chleboun of Clarkson, Gayle Becwar of Lincoln, Irene and Leroy Becwar of Davenport and (front row) Janis Becwar of Lincoln and Janene Harris of Central City.

Common interest in magic strengthens family bonds

DAVENPORT — In the Becwar home, one never quite knows what's going to happen. Things disappear and then reappear, sometimes in entirely different places. Money seems to multiply, or in other instances, diminish right before the eyes.

By putting on a black top hat, Leroy Becwar transforms himself from the owner of Davenport's TV repair shop to Leroy the Great, a magician.

Becwar's fascination with magic began in 1944 when he was in eighth grade and saw Geneva resident Paul W. Curtis performing pocket tricks. "I was so fascinated by what he could do that I was inspired to try my hand at magic."

Magic did create its problems at one time, according to his wife, Irene, who is his assistant on stage. "When we started seeing each other, a neighbor lady kept telling my mother she shouldn't let us date. She was afraid he would hypnotize me."

An assistant is instrumental in keeping the show running smoothly, Becwar said, adding that his wife does a superb job. "I think she should get more credit than she does. She has always been there, ready with any help or encouragement that is needed."

In fact, it was Mrs. Becwar who encouraged her husband to let their four children — Joyce, Janene, Gayle and Janis — get involved in the act. "It had to be mom who convinced dad to let us do magic tricks," Gayle Becwar of Lincoln said. "Dad was always afraid we would ruin the trick because we were too young to know better."

But Mrs. Becwar and the children persisted and soon the act became known as Leroy the Great and the Magical Becwars.

Janene Harris of Central City, who assisted her father from the time she was 4 years old, said it was a big step for her when she was allowed to do her own tricks. "When we were old enough to do our own tricks, dad would pay us to do them on stage. It was kind of like an allowance. I remember once getting the mumps or measles and I cried and cried because I couldn't go to the show with everyone else."

The more the children performed magic on stage, the more interested they became, Becwar said. They eventually began attending magic conventions with their dad, who is a member of the Society of American Magicians.

Mrs. Harris remembers the first time her father gave the family a choice of camping or attending a magic convention. "We all voted to go to the convention, and we went every year after that. Any money we made from

magic during the year paid our way to the conventions. It was really interesting to go around to the booths and see the different magicians showing their magic tricks. Sometimes we could figure out how they were doing the tricks, but if we couldn't, we had to buy the trick to find out how it worked."

"Dad would always let us pick out a trick for ourselves," Janis Becwar of Lincoln said. "Of course, he would check to make sure we were capable of doing it before he bought it."

In addition to the booths, there were lectures on various aspects of performing magic and an evening show that featured amateur and professional magicians alike.

The Magical Becwars performed for a variety of groups and events as they continue to do today. At each show, the Becwars follow one important guideline. "I've always tried to emphasize that I'm just here to entertain and apologize if I've embarrassed anyone during the course of the show," Becwar said. "My main interest is to entertain people with my magic, make them forget their problems for a while."

Although the four children have grown up and moved away from home, they all remain actively involved in magic. Even Miss Becwar, a junior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, finds time for magic. "Right now, I'm working at a day care center so sometimes I'll dress up as a clown and do some magic for the kids there," she said.

Miss Becwar believes magic has helped her learn how to communicate with people. "Even when I get out of school, I'll continue to perform magic wherever I am. If I ever have children, I'll pass the magic tricks onto them because I know it has helped me and that it will help them."

One of the Becwar children is already continuing the family tradition of passing on magic tricks. Joyce Chleboun of Clarkson became a part of her dad's act when she was in first or second grade. Her daughter, however, had a much earlier debut. Mrs. Chleboun was making her daughter magically appear before astonished eyes when Jennifer Lynn was only 3 months old. Now, at age 4, Jennifer is becoming more actively involved in her mom's shows.

"I think what I enjoyed the most about magic is that it was something the whole family did together and it was something that has kept us together, even now, when we have gone our separate ways," Mrs. Chleboun said. "For me, personally, magic has helped me be more outgoing. It didn't bother me to get up in front of people in 4-H or public speaking. It doesn't bother me now when I'm

working in sales. I'm more poised and relaxed, and I think my daughter can get the same benefits out of it."

Even Mrs. Chleboun's husband, Jeff, has learned magic tricks, which he sometimes performs at a bar he owns with his father.

Mrs. Harris also is excited about teaching magic to her five-month-old daughter, Emmylou, when she's a little older. "Magic was such a neat thing because it kept our family real close and I want my family to have that same closeness. My husband, Mark, is learning some of the tricks and has been assisting me."

For Mrs. Harris, the biggest reward of performing magic is making people happy. "I often dress up as a clown for birthday parties, and when my brother and I were students at UNL, we would often wear tuxes to do our shows. I think when you successfully entertain people, they forget about their problems for a while. When people get excited about what you're doing, that's what makes me happy."

Mrs. Harris believes magic helped her develop self-confidence as a youngster and has continued to be a valuable experience in her career as a teacher.

Although the three sisters perform from time to time, the serious magician in the family is Gayle. He has been so influenced by his father's interest in magic that he wants to become a professional entertainer himself, combining comedy, mind-reading, music and magic in his act.

One of his first times he worked with his father was in 1967, Nebraska's centennial, at the age of 8. They performed tricks on the steps of the state capitol in Lincoln. He did his first solo tricks as a Cub Scout.

Gayle said he did very little magic during his freshman year at UNL. Toward the end of the year, however, he gave a demonstration of his abilities to a friend and once word got around that he was a magician, he was in demand for a variety of events.

"What I like the most about magic is the interaction with the audience. My father always emphasizes in his shows that he wants to entertain, not embarrass, the audience. I feel that way, too. I love the closeness you can get through magic. People like to dream, they like to believe in things like "Bewitched" or magic wands," Gayle said.

Becwar agrees with his son. "Because magic has something for everyone, it knows no age limits. People can find a sense of wonder in it, but I always make it a point to tell them that the magic isn't just in me, but that it's within each and every one of them."