



Gale Becwar performs his magic trade.

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Becwars carry on 40-year career

Magic a family business

DAVENPORT (AP) — In the Becwar home, one never quite knows what is going to happen. Things disappear and then reappear, sometimes in different places from where they were before.

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 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

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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 when 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 got in it, 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."

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 awhile."