

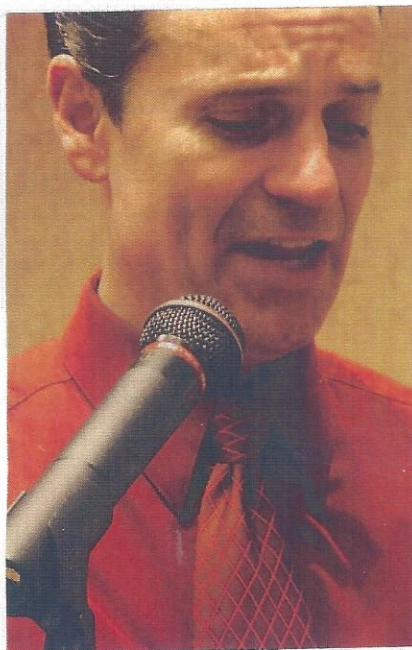


## abracadabra.

**M**ost of us go to work every day and when the whistle blows to call the day to a close, we pack up and head home. We don't hang around finding out how others thought we performed; show someone a skill that we recently earned or hand out business cards to all of our admirers.

But for Lincoln magician/comedian Gayle Becwar that's when a favorite part of his job takes place. I got a chance to see Becwar perform at the Embassy Suites for the NC+ Hybrids party and even though the show itself was funny, the time spent with him afterwards and watching him interact with those at the party was even more enjoyable.

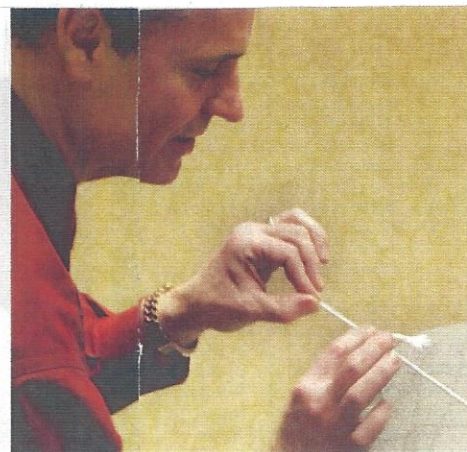
The show lasted a little over an hour with Becwar capping it off with the grand finale around 9:15 p.m. But he continued to crack jokes, do magic tricks and just entertain until the last person left the room. As we walked out the doors of the hotel at the end of the night, some people from the show saw us standing on the sidewalk near 11th and P. They couldn't believe that he was still around. He said he was a street magician and he set down his case and pretended like he was ready to perform. Aah. The case. He carries it with him wherever he goes. It's his rock, the staple of his performance. Once not too long ago, he forgot to get his tricks lined up and had to scurry behind some chairs at a hotel to get the right of entertainment set up before walking into the



room. It's like a writer without a keyboard or Barry Bonds without a bat. In the case alone he has three hours of material. The time was 11:30 p.m.

The times were different for his dad though, who passed away around six years ago. Dad was the guy that got Gayle and other members of the family into the biz. But his dad was more for doing card tricks and introducing himself prior to the performance, like at the cocktail hour. That's not the way it is for Gayle, a UNL graduate with a major in speech and broadcasting with a minor in theater and psychology. Still to this day he likes to get really focused before a show - get 'into the zone'. Sure he might have a meal with a group if it is a corporate show but even then he will wait to show most of himself for the show or post-show.

But once the actual show starts all eyes are on him and his eyes are on the audience. He likes the lights to be turned up bright because a lot of his show centers on his facial expressions; they are very animated. Phyllis Diller gave him this advice when he worked with her in 1991 (also the same time he met his wife, Cindy Lee, at the Funny Bone in Lincoln. They married in 1995). "Never let them see you sweat," he recalls her saying. "Her and I performed together for a couple of weeks and only one time did she not get a standing ovation. I've never thought that I needed a lot of people. I've thought I was funny whether I had 40 people in the audience, or 400 or I did one with Bill Engvall in front of 4,000. I've learned that the more people in the audience, the easier it is because there is more laughter. I travel all over the country and I enjoy performing wherever I go whether it is a large crowd or a small crowd."





On this night (in front of a crowd of around 100 people) he performed seven different tricks, most of them having to do with cards, but he did some with signs and another one with his hands tied up by a rope, a la his favorite magician, Houdini. With each trick he gets members of the audience involved by either bringing something out in the crowd for them to do or getting them up on stage. He always asks their first name, then their middle name, then their last name, wonders what nationality they are and where they live. Always using it to not only remember whom they are but maybe to give a quick jab in some way about the person, but never in a mean way.

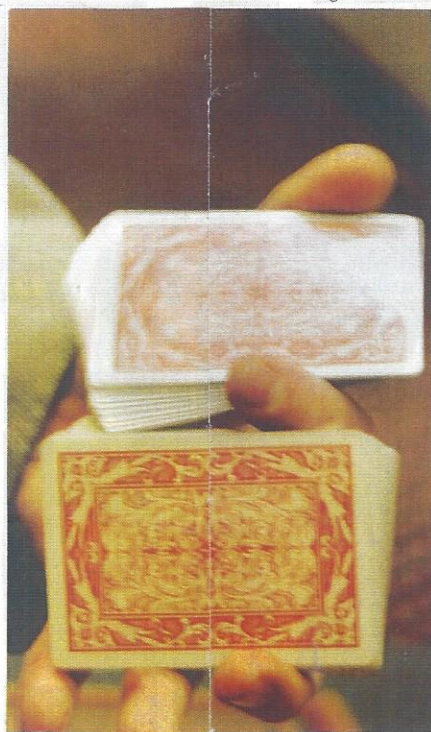
"I used to always think that I was making fun of the other person but I'm really not," Gayle said. "The older I get the more I'm making fun of myself for not hearing the name. You are making the joke on them but you are really making yourself the idiot. That's how I remember their names. You try to put an association with something. That has only evolved in the past seven years or so. Maybe because the magic is so comfortable on stage I just play with it."

He's a natural because he's been around magic all of his life. His dad was a TV repairman by day but a performer the rest of the time. Gayle grew up in Davenport, Nebraska, and his dad would travel to Nuckolls, Clay, Thayer and Fillmore counties for his job. But while there, he would always do card tricks. "Those four counties were the only ones in Nebraska that hoped that their TV would break down so the magician would come," Becwar said. "You don't know how many people my age and older have come up to me and say that we would pray that our TV would break down because we knew Leroy would come and do card tricks for an hour."

When he was young Gayle met David Copperfield, Harry Anderson from Night Court and Amazing Johnathan because his family would go to magic conventions; that's how everyone learned magic. "I used to go with my dad, my mom and my three sisters every year," Becwar said. "That's what we did for vacation. They would have lectures and show you a trick and then show you how to do it. They would do close up magic like card tricks, stage magic and illusion magic. I've always been more of a stage magician."

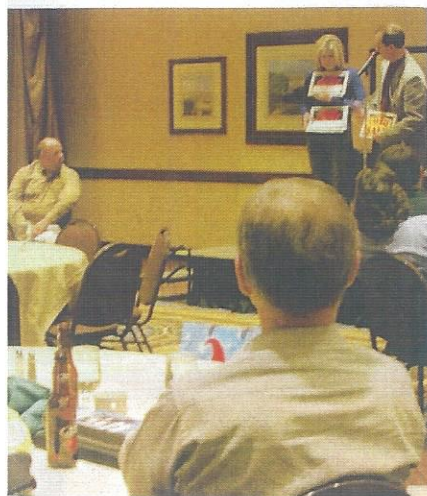
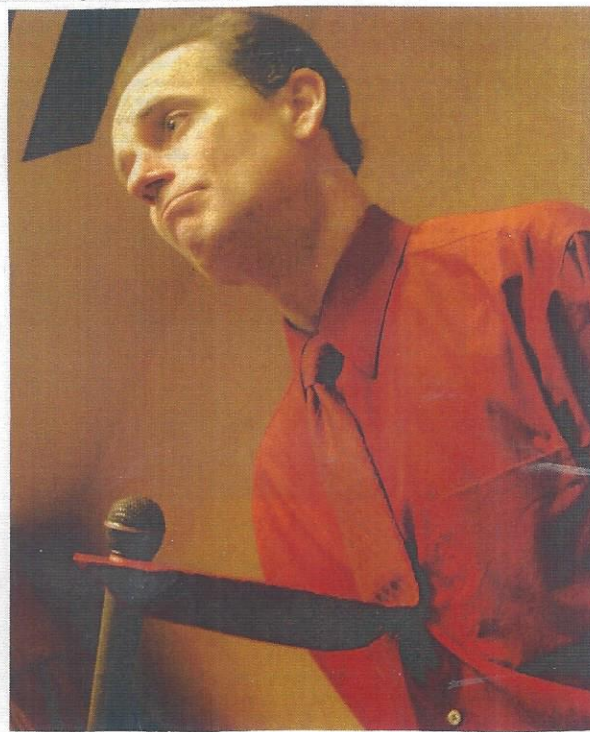
He took to the stage early on when in 1967 he jumped out of a box at his dad's magic show at the Nebraska State Capitol. He was just five years old and he was scared to death. "When I came out of the box at the Nebraska Centennial

Celebration, I saw all of these people," Becwar recalled. "I was supposed to be the shrunken adult. My dad went into the box with a beard and everything and then I came out of the box. The microphone was up at six feet tall and I looked up to say my line and my beard fell off. There were like three or four seven-year-old boys in the front row. They said, 'Wait a minute. That isn't the same guy.' I grabbed the beard and put it on really fast and ran back into the box and everyone died laughing. Dad would pay us one dollar for a performance. I looked at him and said you don't need to pay me. I screwed up the trick. My beard fell off. He looked at me and said Gayle; it's not the trick that the people will remember about the magician. It's the presentation. It's not what you do; it's how you do it. That's true in all forms of life. I think my presentation is different than most magicians out there because I grew up in a magical family and my dad was a jokester



and I try to switch it and I try to be the jokester on stage and try to make myself the idiot. As you can see, I have a tie that pops up, a pen on a chain, sometimes I wear a whole bunch of watches so I kind of come off like Steve Martin, Chevy Chase or Jim Carrey. That likeable idiot. That seems to work for me. Plus I have a quick wit and a great memory on stage."

So, of course, his dad has been a huge influence on him. "When I started being a stand up comic, I started being an influence on him," Becwar said, whose first comedy club performance was in Tulsa, Oklahoma in August of 1986, so 2006 marks 20 years of performing. "I told him that he didn't need to be so serious on stage. Be the same guy that fixes TVs on stage. So he started being funnier and looser. Unfortunately, I booked him at a show in 1999 in Blair. To this day I still feel guilty about it because he had a heart attack at that show and he never performed again. He died a year after that show of congestive heart failure. Sure the doctors reassured me that he probably could have died that night in Davenport because he wouldn't have gotten to a hospital, but at the same time I know how much stress it takes to be an entertainer. We make it look easy but when you are on stage it is a very stressful job. I always tell people it's like an athlete. You are kind of getting focused. When you are a comedian and a magician, you have to do two things: first you have to fool them and second, as a comedian, you have to make them laugh. If they see it coming it is ruined. If you know what is going to happen in a magic trick, it's not amazing. If you know a punch line before a joke comes you don't laugh. So it is very high stress but I love it and I'm pretty good at it I think."



Becwar and his wife of 10 years have five-year-old twin daughters, Payton and Presley. The first year, before they turned one, they were in 22 states and Canada. He played a lot of clubs so they went in the van a lot. "You ask Payton where she would like to go on a vacation and she will say a hotel," Becwar said, whose schedule is a busy one. After we met early in January his schedule picked up with appearances set for Wauneta, North Platte, York, Minnesota, Norfolk, Auburn and then big trips to La Jolla, California as well as Charlotte. "I'm usually put in nice hotels where there is a swimming pool. I've always wanted to get my family involved since my dad got me involved in magic at a young age."

Becwar's show on this night is capped off with the shower cap trick with cards, which lasts for about 20 minutes. The trick used to be longer and people would tell Gayle to shorten it. He says he probably started doing that trick 16 years ago. It wasn't very funny at the beginning but then all of a sudden he added the shower caps and added the paper towel tubes and it evolved over the years. But after the show is Becwar's fun time. "The best place to practice is after a show," he said. "Everyone is loose and even if you mess up you are just in front of two people."

After handing out a number of business cards for potential future acts, Becwar did a cut and restore rope trick after the show as well as a card trick that included him sticking a card on his head (it was the card that the person was searching for in the deck) with just a few people left in attendance but each of them enjoying his style of performing. He also told this story: "I've been on the HBO Comedy Channel and when you are on HBO you don't make a lot of money. I got \$200 is all but I got a nice jacket that said HBO on the back. I was wearing it at a mall here in Lincoln last year and I had an 80-year-old man come up to me and say, HBO, HBO. I didn't think the guy got cable let alone HBO. So I walked over and said what can I do for you? The guy said you need to send someone out to fix my TV. I can't get any reception. He thought I was the cable guy. So I took his name and told him I'd be there the next day at 5 o'clock."

Wouldn't his dad, the TV repairman, be proud!

Gayle and his wife have an entertainment agency in Lincoln. They book acts from all over the country. You can find him at [www.gaylebecwar.com](http://www.gaylebecwar.com) or at [www.becwarandassociates.com](http://www.becwarandassociates.com).