

'Magic 101' with Dr. Clyde Cronkhite

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MACOMB - When Dr. Clyde Cronkhite is not teaching in the department of law enforcement and justice administration at Western Illinois University, he is educating guests at his home on the history of magic.

Cronkhite, a former deputy chief for the Los Angeles Police Department, and his wife Patricia made the choice, more than a decade ago, to relocate to Macomb in search of a "better quality of life."

In the past five years, the Cronkhites have played host to hundreds of guests who were invited to their home not only to socialized, but to actively participate in what Clyde calls "Magic 101."

Guests of the Cronkhites receive an elaborately detailed video invitation, complete with clips of WIU, Macomb, the accommodations at the Cronkhite home, as well as some sleight of hand routines, which Clyde mastered at Chavez College of Manual Dexterity and Prestidigitation (where he was a classmate of Johnny Carson).

Also included in the invitation is a tour of "Clyde's" bar, located in the basement of his home, which serves as the venue for his 50-minute routine entitled "Spirits in The House."

However, Clyde's intention is not only to entertain guests, but also to educated them in an area that has become more than a passion in his life since attending Chavez in the 1950s.

"Magic 101" is to show people , as I do in the classroom when I teach, that there's more than just mystery and entertaining, there is a history to it," said Clyde.

A typical evening at "Clyde's" would begin with wine, two bottles of which magically appear in a cabinet, with each guest choosing a unique charm to place on their glass (which comes back into play later in the evening).

Clyde welcomes his guests by showing a video of himself performing a variety of tricks including what he believes to be the lost art of "card fans" ending with a routine called "spiritball" which shows Clyde levitation a silver ball which turns into a talking skull.



When the video cuts out, a flash goes off in the bar and out of the smoke appears the skull, which Clyde fondly calls "Boris." Throughout the entire presentation, "Boris" heckles Clyde, not only during the live routines he performs, but during the video clips as well.

Clyde looked to local public radio personality Jeff Holtz to do the voice of his bony sidekick.

While the guests enjoy their wine and "spirits" they view a slideshow on the history of magic, as well as a brief biography of Clyde himself, who established his roots in entertainment by serving as a Disney Mouseketeer during his childhood.

The rest of Clyde's routine alternates between live sleight of hand tricks to video footage of him performing what he calls "large stage illusions," including an act he recently performed as a members only magic club in Hollywood called The Magic Castle.

The finale of the show comes with Clyde performs a "substitution trunk" effect where "Boris" girlfriend "Bonette" magically appears in a wooden box, sits upright and proceeds to read the minds of the guests (this time it is Patricia adding the voice from another room).



Once again, Clyde sought the assistance of another local community member, George Richbach, to make his character "Bonette" a reality (or at least somewhat of a reality).

It was Richbach who helped Clyde construct the trunk, install a rise and make the entire contraption operational through a remote control.

Just when it seems that all the magic is over, Clyde presents his guest with diplomas for "Magic 101" that bear the same symbols that each have hanging from their glass of wine.

"Some of these people have actually framed these certificates," said Clyde.

In addition to many members of the Macomb community, the list of alumni for "Magic 101" includes renowned magicians Penn and Teller.

Following the presentation of the diplomas, Clyde and his guest retire to the dining room for a meal planned by Patricia, which is prepared by private chefs.

Although the Cronkhites used to host dinner parties of six to eight people almost once a month, Clyde admits that the hour and a half preparation of this routine has made him consider hosting one every few months.

However, Clyde claims that his passion for magic still exists and serves a very vital purpose in his everyday life.

"Magic to me is a hobby. I should say more than a hobby because all of my career I found it very useful...in dealing with people and now as a professor I always tell my students if you are going to go into a profession you love, like criminal justice, you need something to counterbalance," said Cronkhite. "You need something to go home and really allow yourself to be consumed in, so you can refresh and go back to the professional job, and magic has been that for me."

Cronkhite added, "The thing that I believe (magic) has done for me is, it makes you understand that there are things that look impossible that we really can do as human beings if we put our minds to it."

