David Williamson

He can’t even stay in the lines.

By Mike Caveney

That photograph of David coloring his magic books tells it all. It’s not that he looks like a little kid with his Dr. Seuss books spread out on his bedroom floor. It’s not even that he is defacing the time-honored drawings of the *Tarbell Course*. Look closer. The putz can’t even stay in the lines.
David Williamson was raised in Xenia, Ohio. The nearest magic club was an hour away. There were no magic shops in the area. As a youth, he obtained a copy of Henry Hay's *Amateur Magicians Handbook*. He studied close-up magic very seriously and performed very serious close-up magic.

Guiding light or magical inspiration: none. David insists he wasn't a dork in school, preferring the term "loner."

First job was at age 15 working with a team of belly-dancers in road-side lounges along Interstate 75. David was dressed like a genie and table-hopped while the dancers were on break. His mom drove him each night, then waited around until he got off work at 11:00 PM and drove him home. David earned gas money. His mom met many interesting people.

David followed his high school sweetheart, Marsha Casdorp, to Wright State University in Ohio, where he studied Art. At the age of 20, he married Ms. Casdorp. Marsha stayed in school eventually earning a B.A. degree in English while David quit school to become a magician. For a year he worked seven nights a week in a Greek restaurant washing dishes.

Finally he got a job as the house magician in a dinner theater. For four years he supported his wife by working as a professional magician performing close-up, table-side magic for dinners. He wore a tuxedo and did beautiful sleight of hand for appreciative laymen.

Dave hated it and nearly quit magic.

This guy has been seriously out of line for as long as I have known him. Example: At the IBM convention in Baltimore this summer, Dave was working the comedy club show. Announcing that he needed the assistance of a youngster from the audience, he darted into the crowd looking for just the right volunteer. After an extended search, he snatched from the arms of a stunned mother a new-born baby and carried him (her?) up onto the stage. He carried the baby like you might carry a soggy bag of jello that was about to split open. He set the infant at his feet; his six-foot, six-inch frame towering over it.

After the show I said, "Are you nuts? You can’t grab a baby out of a mother’s arms. What if that lady had been nursing her baby! You could have had no tate people on your hands."

The next day I went back to the show to see if the baby gag was a regular part of David’s act. It wasn’t. On this occasion, he performed his Shorts Changed routine where the underwear on two young boys is signed with a laundry marker and the pants magically change places while the kids are wearing them. During the performance, David lifted the boys up off the floor using his knee, flailed them around behind a Spirit Seance Cloth and finally bounced them off the floor.

After the show I said, "Are you nuts? You were throwing those kids around like they were vent dummies. I’m surprised the parents didn’t come back and pop you one."

David said, "Well, nobody got hurt."

"That’s your definition of a successful show?" I asked. "When no one from the audience is seriously injured or maimed!"

Now it’s a week later and we are at the FISM convention in Lausanne, Switzerland. David will perform his final two close-up shows on this night. He enters with a huge cardboard box overflowing with wadded-up newspaper and plastic bubble-wrap. Digging down into this box, he fishes out his props and manages to scatter packing material all over the hall. At the end of the performance, he throws all of his props and most of the rubbish back into the box. Then, he picks up the little girl who had helped with the Cups and Balls, dumps her into the box and drag it into the wings. The audience was laughing hysterically. I couldn’t tell if the little girl was laughing. Her face was covered by plastic bubble-wrap.

After the show I gave David a look which he knew meant, "Are you nuts?" I told David that the cleaning people at the convention center had asked that he not throw so much trash around. (The previous night he had emptied a trash can during his act.) He muttered something about stifling his artistic freedom and headed off behind the curtain to set up for his last show. I feared the worst as I climbed up into the stands for what would be the final close-up performance at the most prestigious magicians’ convention on earth.

As David was announced, he burst through the curtain wheeling a huge trash dumpster. He climbed up onto the edge of it in an attempt to reach his props and promptly fell in. Bags of garbage were flying out in every direction. His head popped up just long enough for us to see him pour a few drops of warm soda from a discarded Coke can into his mouth. The line of good taste that he had crossed the previous evening was no longer even in sight. The audience was screaming with laughter.

Something happened in that hall in Switzerland. Those people saw some world-class magicians that evening, but it was the image of that man dressed in...
Are you nuts? You can't grab a baby out of a mother's arms.

A business suit crawling around in a garbage bin that they would carry away with them.

Recently, I spoke with David about why he does what he does. I traced his lunacy back to his days as a tuxedo-clad, table-hopping, close-up magician at the Hayloft Dinner Theater in Manassas, Virginia. He was doing the same tricks in the same place to the same reactions every night. The people watching him were suitably amazed and then had another bite of mashed potatoes. David was bored. The customers were enjoying themselves because David is a very skillful magician, but David wasn't having any fun. He decided that he either had to pull the plug and quit, or start having some fun.

The next night, David did a few tricks and then crawled under the table. He collected a few stray shoes and stuffed them into a lady's purse. The people laughed at their shoeless friends and waited to see what this crazy magician would do next as he moved around the room. The people were having a great time and for the first time in a long time, so was David. He now looked at each new table as an adventure. Another chance to do something memorable. It might be a magic trick or it might be pouring a glass of water over his head to cool off.

The dinner theater was empty on Saturday afternoons so the cast decided to write and stage a kiddy show with songs and stories. On Friday nights, David and Marsha could be found in the theater kitchen making 300 sandwiches. On Saturday afternoons, David and a clown were in charge of seating and feeding the kids. With his new outlook on performing, the gags started as soon as the kids entered the theater. Ten kids wearing ten giant chef hats helped distribute the food. Then David and the clown, each armed with a garbage bag, would have a contest to see who could pick up the most trash from the kids. When it became clear that David was losing, he would steal trash out of the clown's bag and the kids were quick to condemn his actions at the top of their lungs. David thrived in this environment where "anything goes." It turned out to be a graduate course in improvisational theater. After the show, all the kids could talk about was the funny clown and the crazy food-guy and the place was packed every Saturday.

The lessons that David learned at that dinner theater, along with the help and encouragement he received from his friend John Eakin, slowly evolved into a personal performing philosophy. Today, David says he can't imagine doing routines the same way, every time. If he were forced to adhere to a script during each performance he would, quite simply, change careers. David's greatest fear, the thing that would depress him most, is boring people. If an audience member were to look at his watch during David's act, it would kill him. He would rather have an audience boo him than have them yawn.

He believes that if a card is chosen, the audience doesn't really care if you find it or not. They hope you do but if you don't, it's no big deal. So in order to command their attention, you need to create conflict. For instance, if you are introduced and it's obvious that you're not ready, the audience is going to watch closely to see how you handle the situation. If you walk out with a big piece of paper stuck to your shoe, the audience wants to see how you react to it. If you pick a spectator who doesn't speak English, they are anxious to see how you handle it, how you resolve the conflict. These are the points of departure; the moment when the audience believes you are leaving your planned show and heading into unexplored territory. At this point, anything is liable to hap-
To enter, contact the office of the Dave Williamson's 3rd Prize - There is no 3rd Prize.

1st Prize - A free copy of Dave Williamson's Slight of Dave video.
2nd Prize - Two free copies of Dave Williamson's Slight of Dave video.

A free copy of Dave Williamson's Slight of Dave video.

There is no 3rd Prize.

For more information about the above situations could spell disaster and my advice is avoid reading about this child's illness. I am certain we will be

David Williamson, in years to

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For example, most magicians carry a deck of cards in their pocket. After the

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Many magicians think that

For example, most magicians carry a deck of cards in their pocket. After the
spending four minutes off on a
tangent, desperately searching
for a laugh, is a sure way for your
performance to end up in the
dumpster next to David's props.
My advice is, rather than trying
to copy David Williamson, we
should all just sit back and enjoy
him whenever we have the
chance and hope he doesn't hurt
anyone.

W
ell, no-
body
got hurt.

David Williamson's

Chilly Willy's Gypsy Thread Repeat

Written & Illustrated
By Richard Kaufman

One of Williamson's working
routines is the Torn and
Restored Thread. He often in-
cludes a quick repeat when he
feels the audience is listening.
He uses a spool of white cot-
ton basting thread. At the end
of Gypsy Thread he stands

thread is stretched horizontally
between them, and is taut. This
naturally doubles over the por-
tion of thread lying in the left
hand. Extend the second, third,
and little fingers of both hands
(fig.1).

Curl the fingers around the
thread and bring your hands to-
gether so the first fingertips and
thumbs touch (fig.2). The hands
must be turned toward each
other in order to do this. Wedge
the left corner of the right first
fingernail beneath the
right corner of the left
thumbnail.

The right thumb presses gently
on the left thumbnail for added
leverage. Simultaneously turn
both hands palm up as if break-
ing the thread, moving them a
few inches apart—the right first
and left thumbs click off each
other, producing a loud snap.
This gives the spectators the
strong impression that the thread
has been broken, however, this
is immediately followed by a vi-
sual convincer to clinch it. As
the hands are brought together
again (fingertips and thumbs
touching as in figure 2), the left
thumb and first finger pinch and
twirl the doubled-over end of
the thread between them so it
resembles a broken end. This
twisted end is then placed be-
tween the right thumb and
first finger beside the genuine
end already there (fig.3).

The left hand, now empty,
drops down the thread and
regrips it as at the beginning,
and the entire pseudo-break-
ning and twisting sequence is
repeated about three more
times. Then, David continues
several more times relying
solely upon the nail-clicking
to create illusion and forgoes
the twisting action—it isn't
necessary after the first four
breaks and it takes too much
time.

There with a goofy grin on his
face hoping the audience will
respond. He is left holding the
three-foot long piece of thread,
just restored. He launches into
some inane chatter (that has
nothing to do with anything
that is going on). While blab-
bering, he nervously breaks
the thread into a dozen or so
pieces—the audience clearly
sees and hears the thread be-
ing broken. With no switches
(and, in fact, no prior prepara-
tion), the thread is instantly
restored.

David holds the thread be-
tween his right thumb and
first finger with about an inch
and a half protruding upward;
the rest of the thread hangs
freely down. His left hand
grapes the thread between
thumb and first finger about
six inches below the right
thumb and first finger. Both
hands turn palm up so the

Once he has reached the
end of the thread, he says,
"Hey, you want to see that last
trick again?" Then he grasps
the dangling genuine (left)
end of the thread and sepa-
rates his hands to show the
thread restored.

The success of this depends
entirely upon the offbeat man-
ner in which David presents
it. The fact that it is a repeat of
a trick they've just seen, com-
bined with the manic hilarity
that is Williamson's trade-
mark, makes this seemingly ob-
vious method fly—and fly it
does, having amazed not only
yours truly, but also many, many
others over the past few years.

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We were pleasantly surprised at the response to our David Williamson Coloring Contest (October 1991). Entries came by mail, by FAX, and one via cellophane bag. The youngest entrant was two years old and we're not quite sure on the oldest.

There were a number of multiple entries: five individual envelopes with return addresses from Jeffery Higgins, Jeff Higgins, J. Higgins, Mr. Higgins, and Sir Higgins. And even one entire family individually entered.

Many modified the entry form by enlarging, reducing, or adding captions and drawings. Some felt Dave needed just "a little more make-up," while others thought a complete change of race was in order.

Uwe Ohlendorf wrote to explain that he had colored with an "invisible magic crayon," that could be seen by only "very good magicians." He was sure our judges would agree. Alan Wassilak added that, like Dave's insistence on "bending the rules," he had deliberately not stayed within the lines and did not use strictly crayon.

Two very clever entries took things "over the line." Craig Greenwood instructs us to hold his entry five to eight inches from our nose and watch the two images join to reveal a secret message. Meanwhile, Nolan Haims, picked off Second Place for his "Visible Painting" entry. (Yes, he does receive two copies of the Sleight of Dave video.)

And First Place goes to Kendall Peterson. (But he only receives one video.) The distinguished panel of judges did have a difficult time with the balance of entries, finally awarding a 74-way tie for Third Place. (Of course, there is no Third Prize.)

Congratulations to all our winners!