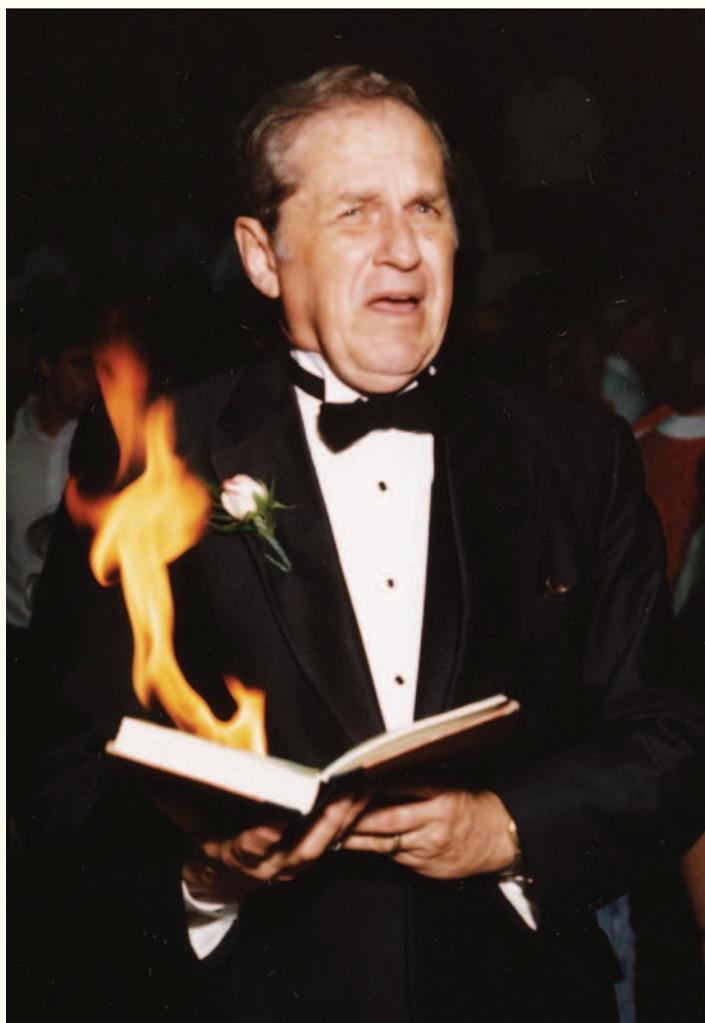


Earl Reum bounds onto the stage with unbridled enthusiasm. Even before the introduction is finished, he is racing center stage with his *Hot Book* blazing. “Today I have a *burning* desire to remind you of the incredible importance you have to other human beings on this planet.” Over the next hour, 2,500 students and teachers are laughing, learning, and hanging on his every word.

He always speaks from the heart — and sometimes from farm implements. At an outdoor commencement in northern Colorado, Earl found himself on a tractor trailer that provided his speaking platform. He thought it was hilarious when he later learned that he was speaking from a manure spreader.

When he’s not in the pasture, Earl Reum has been sharing the podium with numerous celebrities, including Mary Lou Retton, Carol Channing, former president Gerald Ford, Robin Williams (who, like Earl, is always “on”), Bob Hope, and former con artist and current fraud-prevention lecturer, Frank Abagnale.



SPEAKING and *By Lindsay Smith* LAUGHING MATTERS

Who would have guessed that it was a stuttering start that would lead Earl Reum (pronounced “room”) to a lifelong career as a magician, educator, National Student Council Work-shop leader, and motivational speaker?

As a fourth-grade student in Denver’s Lincoln Elementary School, he stuttered badly. Mrs. Nystrom, his remarkable teacher (an “angel,” Earl calls her), was committed to helping him overcome his speaking problem. One day she bundled him into the car and took him to Pratt’s Magic Shop & Book Store downtown, where she purchased \$20 (a fortune at the time) worth of magic effects, along with a 78-rpm record from a nearby music store. She encouraged Earl to do a one-trick presentation every Friday, reciting patter with music. That simple kindness helped Earl overcome his stuttering and changed his life. It was the beginning of extraordinary things to come.

Fast forward eight years. After becoming student body president at Lincoln Elementary and Byers Junior High, Earl is now a senior in high school and (surprise!) president of the student body. That year, his life changed again when *LIFE* devoted a two-page spread to his accomplishments, as part of a report on teenage happenings across the country. In the December 20, 1948 issue, the prestigious national magazine noted: “Earl, a senior at South High School, is at once an accomplished magician, an honor student, an Eagle Scout; he is also the president of the student council, a member of the literary, dramatic, and speaking societies, a participant in 18 other extracurricular activities, and manager of the swimming team.”

The timing couldn’t have been better. Earl, who wasn’t sure how he could afford college, received several scholarship offers as a result of the national notoriety and accepted a full scholarship from the J.K. Mullen Foundation. At the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., Earl immersed himself in a heavy academic schedule that cut into his conjuring activities, but he still managed to regularly visit Harry Baker and Dolly, who managed the D.C. magic shop at the time. Purchases there enabled him to work fraternity and sorority parties, providing him with needed “pocket change.”

After graduation he came home to Denver and enrolled at Denver University. He was

awarded a Master’s degree in Speech (is this the same guy who had the stuttering problem?) and, later, a Doctorate in Education, focused by a dissertation on “The Curriculum of Leadership.”

After teaching for five years, administration beckoned and Earl became the 29-year-old Coordinator of Student Activities for the Denver Public School System, responsible for the extracurricular activities of 125,000 students. The assignment involved organizing and presenting leadership conferences, working the assembly circuit, giving PR speeches. During this busy period, Earl spoke in every state and all the Canadian provinces. In 1967, both the Denver and Colorado Jaycees chose Earl as “Man of the Year.”

After 19 years, when budget cuts mandated closing several departments, he left for the newly created Student Activities Coordinator’s job in nearby Jefferson County, Colorado’s largest county and the largest school district in the state. The job was essentially the same one he left — leadership conferences, advisor support, program development, and lots of “magic with a message,” delivered to represent the district throughout the nation. It kept him happily engaged for 15 years.

Can I show you my belly button?

In 1985, when budget constraints developed there as well, Earl left to become a consultant. With the magic trunk packed he covered the United States and Canada, doing assemblies, conventions, and educational conferences.

Although he jokes about return engagements — “What’s a repeat show?” he asks — the facts speak otherwise. For 35 consecutive years, he was the director at the National Student Council Leadership Conference at Camp Cheley in Estes Park, Colorado. Since 1962, he similarly directed the Wyoming State Student Council workshop. He explains his return gigs this way: “They didn’t quite get my message the first time, so they thought if they brought me back the next year, they’d understand it.”



The Wizard of Earl was one of six TV shows featuring Earl or his wife, M’El, which aired on Denver’s first educational TV channel in the late ’50s and early ’60s.

His largest audience? Nearly 84,000 young people attending a Catholic Youth Rally in the New Orleans Superdome.

His smallest audience? Two high school graduates in Agate, Colorado. Later, one of them told Earl, “You weren’t as funny as the guy last year. It isn’t what he said, but a

June bug flew in his mouth and with the coughing and spitting it was as funny as anything that ever happened in Agate.”

Earl’s penchant for finding the humor in everything started early. *LIFE* noted that he would wear false rubber thumbs to class or put on fake glasses, “sometimes even amusing the teachers.” Today, those who know him will tell you that he’s never without a Squeaker, a Watch Winder, and a slip-on red clown nose. That’s a bare minimum.

No waitress who has taken his order has ever been able to leave the table without being asked, “Can I show you my belly button?” Whereupon he quickly flashes the bright yellow Belly Button pin hidden behind the lapel of his suit coat. After the laugh, he adds: “I’ve got two belly buttons,” and he flashes the pin



Earl entertaining one-on-one at a youth conference in El Paso, Texas.

behind his other lapel. Another laugh. Always current with contemporary trends, these days his second Belly Button is pierced with a small gold ring. Occasion-ally, a young waitress will show Earl *her* belly button, a scene I've been privileged to witness.

Performing on stage, it's more humor, just at a faster pace. If you have seen his magic act, you may have trouble recounting what he did but no trouble remembering that you laughed from the minute he bounded onto the stage. His high energy level (think of the Energizer Bunny on speed) ignites a rapid-fire presentation that quickly positions Earl about two tricks and three one-liners ahead of most of the audience. Some members eventually catch up; others just hold their sides. Because of his ability to quickly engage and entertain an audience, he's usually the Mile High Magicians Society's first choice for handling emcee duties at the club's annual public show.

Magic has always been a special part of Earl's life, which he has enthusiastically repaid over the years by devoting enormous amounts of time, energy, and ideas to the Mile High Magicians Society. He is currently the vice president, an office he's filled two

other times, he's served as president for two terms, and as secretary once.

Earl's wife, Mary (professionally, M'El for Mary Ellen), is a knowledgeable and accomplished puppet and marionette performer. She has traveled throughout the United States and Europe performing, makes many of her own figures and has an extensive collection of books on the subject. An active member of the Puppeteers of America, she served as its national president in 1982.

When Denver's first educational television station went on the air in 1955 (the year before Earl and Mary were married), *Earl's House*, a 15-minute kid show with magic and puppets, was the first show aired. It ran three times a week for three years. That success was followed by five other TV shows over the years, all featuring Earl or M'El or both, with magic or puppets or both.

Earl and Mary's four remarkable children, Josef, Darelyn, Tracy, and Margaret, are grown, married, and out of the house. Incredibly, and with complete disregard for Earl's cash flow, all three daughters were married the same year (1988), within two months of each other. After they left home, their vacated bedrooms were quickly filled

with magic, books, puppets, and marionette figures. With two avid collectors living under one roof, space is at a premium.

Over the years and one book at a time (okay, occasionally more than that), Earl has accumulated an extensive conjuring library that has expanded off the basement shelves, onto the main level, and beyond. He admits that he may have a duplicate or two in his collection, a fact many magic book dealers in the country can confirm.

Although Earl performs standard tricks, his presentations go far beyond catalog descriptions and what the instructions suggest. The often-heard advice: "It isn't what you do, it's how you do it," takes on new meaning in Earl's hands." He is the essence of presentation. His routine with the Chinese Sticks starts as a somewhat standard routine, then one tassel becomes longer and longer until one is about six inches long, the other about six feet. Earl never notices. Other standards include Stratospheres, the Square Circle, Bob Haskell's X-Salted Shaker from the '50s, and Multum in Parvo from even further back, and the Professor's Nightmare. When Earl's doing liquid tricks, you're glad you're not front row, center. When he pro

duces silk scarves, you don't recall if he showed the Square Circle empty or not. Strangely enough, it's not a concern. When he does a brief but amusing Zombie routine with root beer, he concludes with a line about a "Root Beer Float." Even Neil Foster might have been amused. Or not.

Local club members who have seen Earl work love to listen for the many inside jokes, which he mutters just loud enough for the cognoscenti to understand and appreciate, e.g., "Boy, I hope that plastic thingy doesn't talk this time!" Amazingly, his humor works on several levels simultaneously.

As audiences continue to look for messages along with miracles, combining speaking with magic has been fashionable and in demand for decades. Credit Earl for pioneering a great idea. In the '60s, he was helping Denver's civic club members believe in "The Magic of Miracles," a performance speech Earl developed and performed hundreds of times. He recalls some memorable comments from those days:

"You said what the guy said last week."

"Don't talk about goals — everybody does, and the goal is to be a member of this club."

"Your half an hour looks like ten minutes what with all the business we have to handle."

"We'll eat while you talk. I know we invited you to eat, but it is better that you do that somewhere else later."

Thus encouraged, Earl was well ahead of the curve when he wrote *Magic for the Civic Club* based on his experiences. He sold the manuscript to Jay and Frances Marshall at Magic, Inc., who published the booklet in 1968. It sold for \$2. Earl recalls that Frances offered him \$50 in cash or \$75 in tricks. Always the shrewd negotiator, Earl quickly said, "I'll take the tricks." To the best of his knowledge and in the opinion of other well-posted magicians and collectors, this long out-of-print book was the first completely devoted to speaking with magic.

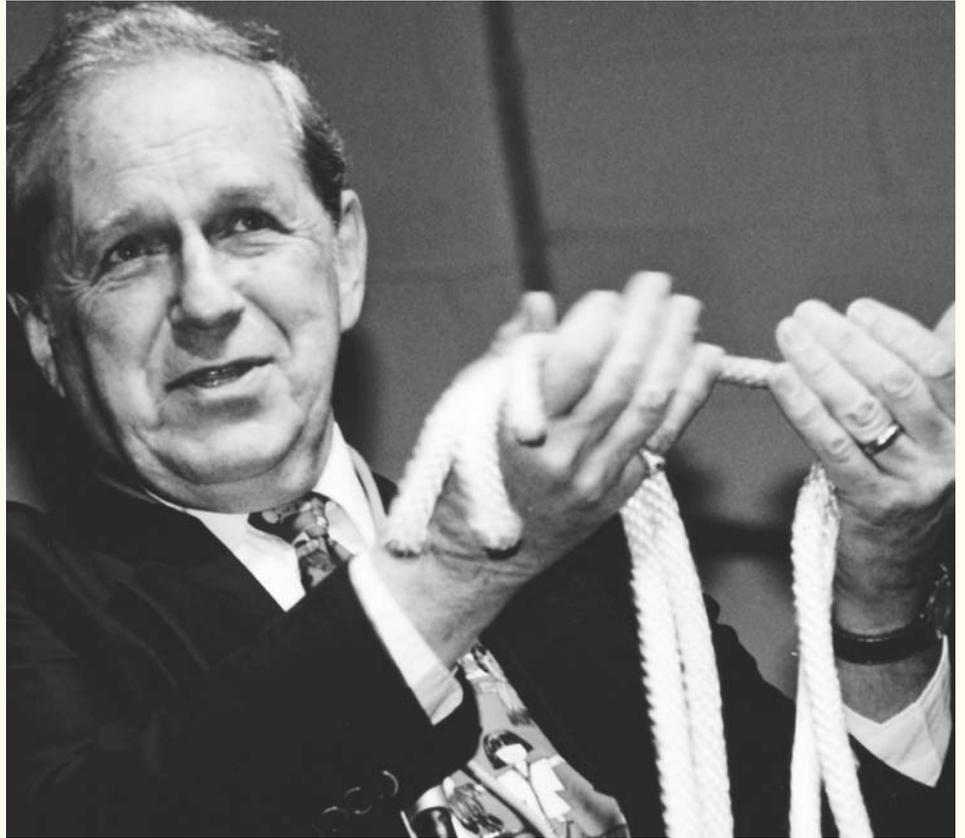
In 2002, Earl co-authored and published *Communicating with Magic*, subtitled *The Speaker's Guide to Magic, The Magician's Guide to Speaking*. The book includes a complete reprint of *Magic for the Civic Club*. The book is now in its second printing.

Earl delights in seeing people succeed, and delights in helping them get there. He is incredibly generous with his time, offering ideas, suggestions, encouragement, and solutions for whatever question or problem you bring to him. Ask him for help and the ideas pour forth in a constant stream, kind of like taking a drink of water from a fire hose.

Doc Eason knows. Until the Tower Bar in Snowmass, Colorado closed in April this year, Doc entertained the rich and famous there for 27 years. "I recently was asked to do a high school commencement speech and the first person I turned to was Earl," Doc says. "Besides supplying me with enough

raw material to write ten speeches, he also offered copious amounts of encouragement. Earl Reum is a national treasure."

One Denver magician who readily acknowledges Earl's early help and encouragement in developing his own unique talents is Brad Montgomery, now a Certified Speaking Professional (CSF) with the National Speakers Association. Brad says, "What is so amazing to me is not only that Earl has taught and guided me in so many important ways, but



The Professor's Nightmare is one of Earl's favorite tricks for illustrating a key point when he's speaking with magic.

that he has done the same thing for so many other speakers, teachers, and entertainers who are out there. I love that I'm just one of many people trying to spread the messages that we all got from Earl."

Steve Spangler is a nationally recognized and in-demand speaker who still utilizes magic, but at a higher (read, more lucrative) level. Steve credits Earl with helping him make the transition from magician to motivational speaker and workshop leader who specializes in applications for science teachers and students. He says, "Earl created more than just another show — it was truly an experience. His closing words were always punctuated with the appearance of a giant American flag on the monster of all flagpoles. As the music built to a crescendo, we all jumped to our feet for a well-deserved standing ovation." In 1997, Steve had the honor of sharing the stage with Earl as the keynote speakers at the National Student Council

Conference. "When we walked off stage, Earl handed me that giant American flag he had used in over 3,000 shows and said, 'I want you to have this... now it's your turn to wave the banner for the next 50 years.'"

Today, Earl is a young 73 with twice the energy level of someone half his age. Although he hasn't slowed down, some of the corporate magic shows are "better served," he says, "by younger presenters in the new styles of magic." Earl says he looks

funny in leather. We won't even go there.

He doesn't travel as much these days, although you wouldn't notice. He's still a frequent flyer, and he's well aware of the stepped-up changes in airport security. Earl knows not to carry lighter fluid for his Fire Wallet, for example, or attempt to board with many of the other strange things he's never without. Curiously, airport security people seem to be greatly concerned with Watch Winders, and he's had more than a few confiscated.

Typical of his approach to life, Earl looks on the bright side. "If it wasn't for increased airport security screening," he says, "I wouldn't have any sex life at all." ♦

Earl Reum and Lindsay Smith's book, Communicating with Magic, published by Reum & Smith Books, was reviewed by Michael Close in "Marketplace" in October 2002.