

The Testimony of **ILLUSIONIST: STEVEN RYAN**

God speaks to us through a small, still voice, but every once in a while needs a loud roar. He first whispered to me at a young age, but had to capture my attention when I entered high school. At the age of seven, two years after my parents made decisions for Christ, I attended Vacation Bible School. Keith, the leader of our group, shared with us how to have a relationship with God and lead those who wanted to receive Christ in a prayer. I felt I just wasn't ready yet; my heart was, but my mind wasn't. I remember lying in bed later that night recalling what Keith said, "No greater love has a man than this: that a man would lay down his life for his friend," and that Jesus would "never leave us nor forsake us." In the previous three years, three of my closest friends moved away and I became a "loner," afraid that if I got close to anyone, they would leave. Then it struck me. Jesus promised He would never leave me and His love for me was demonstrated when He died for my sin.



I couldn't get to sleep that night because of all of these thoughts going around in my head. Finally I made a decision. I leapt up and knelt beside my bed asking God to forgive me and to come into my life. Since that time my relationship to God has meant more to me than anything. I soon found a new group of friends and became very active in the church.

At that time I was interested in puppetry, mainly marionettes (stringed puppets). My parents, who always supported my sister's and my endeavors, built a puppet theater and gave me some puppets. Although at that young age I may not have had much talent. Creating the stories and finding the subject matter became my emotional outlet and proved a positive way to work out my childhood frustrations.

Around third grade one of my uncle's friends took me to see Doug Henning (a popular magician in the 70's) live on stage. Later that year I saw David Copperfield's first TV special, a magician performed at my church, and my parents gave me my first magic set for Christmas (My dad always wonders what would've happened if they bought me a chemistry set. I always tell him I'd have blown up the house). Over the next couple of years I learned that magic tricks were a great way to establish social interaction.

Later in my junior high school years, my social life took a turn for the worst. In an effort to be "more spiritual" I thought that I needed to look, act, and talk like a Christian. I would always wear a silver cross around my neck, carry my Bible with me everywhere I went, and refused to say anything if it didn't have to do with God. I became disinterested in people and soon found my friends abandoning me and others keeping away. At that point, I started to become depressed and distant.

It was then that I met Wes Bell, a Gospel magician who gave me a few minutes of his show to get me accustomed to being onstage. After just a year, I started my own full length program starting with a show for my uncle's friend, the same person who took me to see Doug Henning years ago.

Despite what was happening in the magic world, I was still friendless, my parents were threatening a divorce, and suicide became almost a daily thought. Barely making through my freshman year in high school, my pastor gave two sermons I clearly remember to this day. The first one was taken from Matthew 7:24-27 about the wise man who built his house on the rock and the foolish who built on the sand. I discovered that I was like the foolish man: my "house " looked great on the outside, but my foundation was weak. Instead of fighting against the world as I had been, I now chose to continue *in* the world, but simply not *of* it. At that moment my faith was no longer built on what I thought God should be, but on what He truly is. In other words, I stopped *acting* like a Christian and started *being* a Christian.

The following four years I got involved in theater, showcased my magic at the Free Church Youth Fellowship national conventions (receiving ratings of "Excellence" all three years), won the John J. DeVries Memorial Award for "Outstanding Young Magician" at the Fellowship of Christian Magicians International Convention, and enrolled at Greenville College. At college I grew quite a bit spiritually and became involved in the a cappella Choir, emceed the clown ministry, created a magic ministry, and lead the drama team.

After I graduated with degrees in Business-Management and Theater, I put my magic aside, joined staff with Campus Crusade for Christ, and was assigned to the André Kole Ministry. André Kole was the world's leading Christian illusionist and received the award for magical inventor of the decade. I traveled to over a dozen countries with André Kole for 14 years as his road manager and guest performer.

In 2005 I left André's staff, married and became president of MoezArt Productions, Inc. My wife and I taught home-schoolers the theatre arts from a Christian perspective. Fifteen years later, we began a new ministry called Arizona Christian Arts Ministries (AzCAM). We now have a much broader reach to nurturing the talents and abilities of people of all ages as well as helping to build up artists spiritually and to incorporate their beliefs in their talents. With my wife and sons by my side, we are able to nurture and grow many people spiritually through their talents.

By now you may be wondering what the other sermon was that my pastor gave. It was a motivational talk to get us up out of the pews and into the world to share Christ's love. It motivated me to get involved and it continues to remind me of our responsibility to God. Through my years with Campus Crusade for Christ and now with AzCAM, several people have been asking about my own program and after encouragement from numerous people, I now have it available again. The Lord has surely blessed me and I look forward to all the trials and blessings He has for my family in the future. He continually encourages us to grow spiritually as we share with others how they can begin and grow in a relationship with Christ!



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